



Ballyhea Parish Newsletter
The Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M
8th December 2021



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

From The Catechism of the Catholic Church # 490

To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary *"was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role."* The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as *"full of grace"*. In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, *"full of grace"* through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: ***The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.***

The *"splendour of an entirely unique holiness"* by which Mary is *"enriched from the first instant of her conception"* comes wholly from Christ: she is *"redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son"*. The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person *"in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"* and chose her *"in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love"*.

The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God *"the All-Holy"* (Panagia), and celebrate her as *"free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature"*.

By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.

OUR LADY OF LORETO

Tradition holds that a small house in Loreto, Italy originated in Nazareth and is the actual home of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The dimensions are very small, one-room measuring 30 x 13 feet. It is composed simply of stones and mortar found in Palestine and hand-chiseled in a style consistent of the time of Jesus. This was thought to be the home of Saints Anne and Joachim, Mary's parents. The Immaculate Conception occurred in this house. It is here that the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, and with her *"Fiat"* the Incarnation happened in this very house. This was also the house that the Holy Family lived in Nazareth after returning from their time in Egypt. Jesus lived here until he was 30 and began his public ministry. Here also is where St. Joseph died.

Since apostolic times this house was a place of pilgrimage and worship. In 313 AD Constantine built a basilica around the Holy House of Nazareth to protect it. The basilica was destroyed by the Saracens in 1090, but the Holy House was untouched. Another basilica was built during the twelfth century but this was destroyed by Moslems in 1263 during the Crusades. The Holy House was again unharmed. When the Christians were driven completely out of the Holy Land in 1291, the Holy House disappeared from Nazareth and suddenly appeared in modern day Croatia. It is said that angels transported it. The house was again moved (by angels) on December 10, 1294, (hence the date of the new Optional Memorial), due to the Muslim invasion of Albania. The house landed first in Recanti, Italy, but soon after moved for a third time to its present location in Loreto, Italy.

Loreto is the final home for this Holy House. There is a large basilica containing the house. The Holy House is covered by marble on the outside facade, but on the inside is the original humble stone and mortar walls. The East wall contains an altar with the inscription: *"Hic Verbum Caro Factum Est"* (Here the Word was made flesh). Above the altar is a statue of Our Lady of Loreto. The current statue is a replica of an ancient one made from cedar of Lebanon, one of the so-called *"Black Madonnas"* due to the burning of candles and incense for hundreds of years. The original statue was destroyed by fire and replaced by another similar statue made from cedar from the Vatican in the 1920s.