



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* *Knights of Malta* *

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Chancellor's Update

I am the Immaculate Conception

February 11 is the feast day that commemorates a series of apparitions of Our Lady to a young peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in Lourdes, France. During one of the apparitions Our Lady identified herself by saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

This title of Our Lady is especially important this year because in 1854 Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Skeptics and non-believers usually discount dogmas by saying that the Church is defining something new. This is not so because many Christians have held this belief throughout the centuries.

In the fourth century Saint Ephrem the Syrian composed a beautiful prayer about Our Lady. "We praise thee, O pure, immaculate and blessed Virgin, who art the sinless Mother of the mighty Lord of the universe, and who art inviolate, altogether holy, and the hope of the hopeless and sinful. We bless thee who didst bear the God-Man, for thou art full of grace; we all bow low before thee, invoke thee and implore thine aid; rescue us, O holy and inviolate Virgin, from every necessity that presses upon us and from all the temptations of the devil. Be our intercessor and our advocate in the hour of our death and judgment; deliver us from the fire that is never extinguished and from outer darkness; make us worthy of the glory of thy Son, O dearest and most clement Virgin Mother. Thou art our only certain and sacred hope in the sight of God, to whom be honor and glory, majesty and dominion for ever and ever world without end. Amen."

According to the ceremonial of Saint Sabas, the Greek Church kept a feast honoring the Immaculate Conception from the sixth century, while the Gothic Church of Spain established this feast in the eighth century. In the eleventh century Saint Anselm wrote, "*It was just that this holy Virgin should be adorned with the greatest purity which can be conceived after that of God Himself.*" For four hundred years John Duns Scotus and his fellow Franciscans, defended Mary's Immaculate Conception.

In 1476 Pope Sixtus IV confirmed an Office in honor of the Immaculate Conception and extended it to the universal Church. In 1661 Pope Alexander VII solemnized the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and noted that this ancient devotion of the faithful was based on the belief that from the first instant of her soul by a special privilege of God Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin.

Pope Pius IX noted that even the Council of Trent "decreed and defined that all men are born infected by original sin; nevertheless, it solemnly declared that it had no intention of including the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, in this decree and in the general extension of its definition."

Would the eternal Father do any less for the second Eve than He had done for the first Eve, who like Adam was created in the state of original justice, which afterwards was forfeited by sin? Would Jesus permit His Mother, from whom He was to take the nature of Man, to be deprived of that gift which He had given even to the woman who was the mother of sin? Although all men were to

receive the sin of Adam and its effects, [God could exempt His Mother, and He did.](#)

So, with the support of Church Fathers and tradition, Pope Pius IX issued an Apostolic Constitution, *Ineffabilis Deus*, on December 8, 1854. “God ineffable...having foreseen from all eternity the lamentable wretchedness of the entire human race which would result from the sin of Adam, decreed, by a plan hidden from the centuries, to complete the first work of his goodness by a mystery yet more wondrously sublime through the Incarnation of the Word. This he decreed in order that man who, contrary to the plan of Divine Mercy had been led into sin by the cunning malice of Satan, should not perish; and in order that what had been lost in the first Adam would be gloriously restored in the Second Adam. [From the very beginning, and before time began, the eternal Father chose and prepared for his only-begotten Son a Mother in whom the Son of God would become incarnate and from whom, in the blessed fullness of time, he would be born into this world...](#)

“The Fathers and writers of the Church, well versed in the heavenly scriptures...wrote to explain the Scriptures, to vindicate the dogmas, and to instruct the faithful...At the beginning of the world God announced his merciful remedies prepared for the regeneration of mankind--[I will put enmities between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed \(Genesis 1:15\)](#)...By this divine prophecy the merciful Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was clearly foretold...

[“We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.”](#)

So, during the 150th anniversary of this declaration, we join in the hope of Pope Pius IX and thank Jesus, our Lord, for this great gift of His Mother. “All our hope do we repose in the...immaculate one who has crushed the poisonous head of the most cruel serpent and brought salvation to the world...in her...is the safest refuge and the most trustworthy helper of all who are in danger; in her who, with her only-begotten Son, is the most powerful Mediatrix and Conciliatrix in the whole world...in her who has destroyed all heresies and snatched the faithful people and nations from all kinds of direst calamities; in her do we hope who has delivered us from so many threatening dangers... The most Blessed Virgin will ensure by her most powerful patronage that all difficulties be removed and all errors dissipated...We are firm in our confidence that she will obtain pardon for the sinner, health for the sick, strength of heart for the weak, consolation for the afflicted, help for those in danger; that she will remove spiritual blindness from all who are in error, so that they may return to the path of truth and justice, and that here may be one flock and one shepherd...

“Nothing is to be feared; nothing is hopeless...She is solicitous about the whole human race. And since she has been appointed by God to be the Queen of heaven and earth, and is exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints, and even stands at the right hand of her only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, she presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard.”

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Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-