

Homily on Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
St. John Paul II Parish, Cedar Springs, Michigan
Mary Queen of Apostles Parish, Sand Lake, Michigan
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December 8, 2018

**"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel."
(Gen1:15)**

From the beginning days of the Church, Mary has held a unique role in God's plan of redemption. In 1885, the dogma proclaimed that from the first moment of her conception, Mary--by the singular grace of God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ--was preserved from original sin. Original sin is "the personal sin of disobedience committed by the first human beings, resulting in the deprivation of original holiness and justice and the experience of suffering and death. It also describes the fallen state of all human beings, including the experience of concupiscence, ignorance of God, and suffering and death" (Taken from the Glossary of the *U.S. Catechism for the Adults*).

The first reading during this liturgy describes the condition of the human family after our first parents sinned against God. Despite the fall of our first parents, we see the hope of salvation promised by God.

After the Lord delivered his punishment on the serpent, God said this "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." (Gen 3:15). He will strike...at his heel: the antecedent for "he" and "his" is the collective noun "offspring," i.e., all the descendants of the woman. Christian tradition has seen in this passage, however, more than unending hostility between snakes and human beings. The snake was identified with the devil (*Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9; 20:2*), whose eventual defeat seemed implied in the verse. Because "the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil" ([1 Jn 3:8](#)), the passage was understood as the first promise of a redeemer for fallen humankind, the *protoevangelium*. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. A.D. 130–200), in his *Against Heresies* 5.21.1, followed by several other Fathers of the Church, interpreted the verse as referring to Christ, and cited [Gal 3:19](#) and [4:4](#) to support the reference. Another interpretive translation is *ipsa*, "she," and is reflected in Jerome's Vulgate. "She" was thought to refer to Mary, the mother of the Messiah. This is the reason Mary is sometimes depicted, in Christian art, with her foot on the head of a serpent.

To celebrate Mary conceived without the trace of original sin is the proclamation of God's infinite mercy to the human family: when the destructive forces of sin entered the world, God had a plan to save us all. In this plan, God preserved Mary from the stain of sin, to prepare her womb to be the dwelling place of the Eternal Son of the Father. The Archangel Gabriel proclaimed this truth in his greeting to her, that we hear in today's Gospel reading: "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you . . . You have found favor with God" (Lk 28-30). The Immaculate Conception is an expression of why Mary is "full of grace" and "found favor with God."

Our Savior Jesus Christ, whose very name means: "He will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:24), destroyed the reign of sin and ushered in a new era of grace and holiness. "In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:11-12).

In Christ our Savior, God fulfilled the promise of salvation in Genesis: "He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." As we celebrate the Mary, conceived without the trace of original sin, may we keep the image of Mary with her foot on the head of serpent, forever in our hearts! Her womb is the dwelling place of our Lord, who strikes the serpent right on the head.

Scripture Readings

Reading 1 [GN 3:9-15, 20](#); Responsorial Psalm [PS 98:1, 2-3AB, 3CD-4](#); Reading 2 [EPH 1:3-6, 11-12](#);
Alleluia [SEE LK 1:28](#); Gospel [LK 1:26-38](#)