



The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"From all eternity God chose with infinite wisdom the woman who would be the Mother of His divine Son. To prepare for the Word Incarnate a spotless and holy tabernacle, God created Mary in grace and endowed her from the moment of her conception with all the perfections suited to her exalted dignity.

St. Thomas teaches that through her intimacy with Christ, the principle of grace, she possessed beyond all creatures a fullness of divine life." — *Liturgical Meditations*, The Sisters of St. Dominic

This feast invites us to meditate on the virtue of purity. "Mary alone — 'our tainted nature's solitary boast'— never saw her soul's purity darkened with the dust of any stain, nor did she see in any part of her triumphal course toward heaven any sin or trace of worldliness. By a unique and singular privilege from God she was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception; by another privilege derived from the first, the Lord did not permit her ever to be stained even with those unavoidable failings of human weakness." — Luis M. Martinez

HISTORY OF THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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.

Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (8.12.1854): DS 2803

Credit must be given to the Oriental Church for having been the first to institute the feast of Mary's Conception. St. Andrew of Crete (660-740), in his canon *In conceptionem Sanctae ac Dei aviae Annae*, provides us with the first historical document bearing testimony to the existence of the present feast. It was only many years later that the West accepted it, and not without strong opposition. The very first testimony to the existence of the feast in the West is had from a celebrated marble kalendarium found in Naples dating as far back as the ninth century. It is England, in fact, that first introduced this Marian feast into the Latin liturgy.

In a precious document, Leofric's *kalendarium* (eleventh century), in which is found the present feast, the collect states: "Deus qui beatae Mariae Virginis conceptionem angelico vaticinio parentibus praedixisti." We note from this that in England, as in the Orient, traces remained of the *Protoevangelium* narrative establishing a parallel between Mary's Conception and that of St. John the Baptist. Judging also from other *kalendaria* of that same period wherein no mention is made of this feast, it would seem that at the outset this feast was limited to Winchester, Worcester, Exeter, Canterbury, and the surrounding localities.

Shortly thereafter it passed into Normandy and the northern part of France. But, "in general, the introduction of this feast and the enthusiasm for its purport seem to have been lacking in theological guidance. Childlike piety, incited by accounts of miracles and revelations, had the upper hand. In favor of the doctrine and the feast these miracles were advanced together with the appreciation of its eminent appropriateness, but positive theological reasons were not stressed. Further, a clear exposition of the idea of the feast was also lacking."

In the closing years of the twelfth century it had penetrated into many regions of Germany and Belgium, and also into Navarre, in Spain. In summing it up, Roschini states that, notwithstanding strong opposition on the part of such great men as St. Bernard and St. Thomas, it may be safely said that in the middle of the fourteenth century the feast of Mary's Conception, in the sense of a preservation from original sin, had found its way into every single diocese of the world and in every monastery of some importance, with the exception of Cistercian and Dominican monasteries.

The attitude adopted by the Roman Pontiffs during the many years of controversy about the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, to which was intimately linked, in the West, the very existence of the feast itself, may best be described as that of tolerance first, of assent next, and finally of approbation. In 1477 Sixtus IV approved the Mass and Office and four years later gave his approval to another office for Mary's feast. He also issued a papal bull, *Grave nimis*, forbidding censure of those who believed in the Immaculate Conception because of the attacks of the opposition. Years later, Alexander VII declared in his famous bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum* (1661) : "The devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is of long standing among the faithful followers of Christ who feel that her soul, from the very first instant of its creation and infusion into her body, was preserved immune from the stain of original sin by a special grace and privilege of God, through the merits of her Son Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race, and who in this sense esteem and solemnly celebrate the festivity of her conception."

In 1693, Innocent XII proclaimed that the octave of the feast of Mary's Conception be universally celebrated, elevating it at the same time to the rank of double of second class. Pius IX in 1863 (having defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854) promulgated a new Mass and Office. — Excerpted from *Mariology* by Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M.

CHRISTMAS

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

JESUS CHRIST WAS REALLY BORN ON THE 25TH OF DECEMBER

The famous Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran scrolls or scrolls are historical documents, also containing the official list of priests, who were in service in the Temple in the Qumran calendar. Duties in the Jerusalem Temple were divided among 24 families descended from Aaron, Moses' brother (1 Chron. 24: 1-18). One priest from each family presided at the temple for a week, beginning around noon on Saturdays. Their names and the order in which they presided are given on the Qumran scrolls.

Each class served one week in the temple, twice a year.

The holy Gospel says that Zacharias was serving in the Temple "and all the multitude of the people were praying outside" (Lk 1:10), this was the greatest Jewish festival of Tabernacles, which occurs in late September or early October. In fact, Abijah's priestly class would have been on duty during the second week of the Jewish month of Tishri, the week of the Day of Atonement or on our calendar, between September 22 and 30. While in service, the Archangel

Gabriel informed Zacharias that he and Elizabeth would have a son (Lk 1: 5-24). Then they conceived Juan. For this reason, we celebrate the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist on June 24.

Saint Luke also records how the Archangel Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John (Lk 1:36) (not after six months) which means the Annunciation took place on March 25, in which we celebrate. Nine months of March 25, or six months of June 24, makes the birth of Christ on December 25, our Christmas. So Christmas doesn't have to be a feast co-opted from a pagan feast.

Now if this date is true, then the early church must have celebrated Christmas December 25. Is there evidence? It is true. Saint Irenaeus (c.130-202) of Lyon considers the conception of Jesus as the March 25 coinciding with the Passion.

But, already before him, according to the Liber Pontificalis, Pope Saint Telesphorus (125-136) instituted the tradition of celebrating Midnight Mass, which means Christmas was already being celebrated. Saint Theophilus (115-181), Bishop of Caesarea, declared: "We have to celebrate the birthday of Our Lord on December 25th." Saint Hippolytus (170-240) mentions in his Commentary on Daniel, that the birth of Christ occurred on December 25. As you can see, Constantine (272-337) had nothing to do with Christmas.



This is a painting in the catacombs of Saint Priscilla, in Rome, depicting the nativity scene of the birth of Jesus Christ. This painting was done in the late 2nd century.