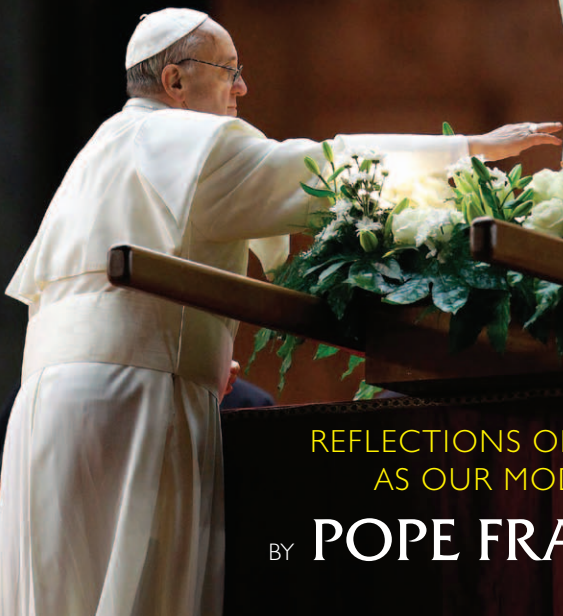


# Advent

WITH **Mary**



REFLECTIONS ON MARY  
AS OUR MODEL

BY **POPE FRANCIS**

**A**dvent is filled with reminders of Mary and Pope Francis invites us to use Mary as our model for how to grow spiritually during Advent.

On **December 8, Mary's Immaculate Conception**, we celebrate God's gift to her of the grace to be conceived without sin. But we are also called to holiness and during Advent we try to live more holy (and hence more human) lives. So Mary can be a model of how to prepare for Christmas.

On **December 12, Our Lady of Guadalupe**, we celebrate her appearance to Juan Diego near Mexico City in 1531. Her message, "Build me a church," meant more than the basilica constructed on the site. She really wanted us to go forth and build a community beyond ethnic, social and gender differences, characterized by justice and charity. Mary is our model for how to be a missionary today.

On **December 25, Christmas**, we celebrate when God became human because of Mary's "yes" to God's invitation to be Jesus' mother. Mary is our model for how to welcome Jesus into our hearts and our lives this Advent.

Mary sustains our Advent journey toward Christmas, for she teaches us how to live in expectation of the Lord, who will not only visit us all on the feast of Christmas, but also, each one, in our own hearts. The Lord is coming! Let us wait for him!

Let us ask the Lord to grant us his grace so that Mary's example may be reflected in our lives and in the life of our families and parishes.

*Steve Mueller, editor*

# THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

## Mary as Our Model for How to Prepare for Christmas



Let us fix our gaze on this simple girl from Nazareth, at the moment she offers herself to the divine message with her “yes.” Let us consider three essential aspects of her attitude, which is for us the model of how to prepare for Christmas.

First we must imitate her *faith*, which consists in listening to God’s Word to abandon herself to this Word with full willingness of mind and heart. Re-

sponding to the angel, Mary said: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Filled with faith, she does not know by what road she must venture, what pains she must suffer, what risks she must face. But she is aware that the Lord is asking and she entrusts herself totally to him. She abandons herself to God’s love. This is Mary’s faith!

How did Mary live this faith? She lived it out in the simplicity of the thousand daily tasks and worries of every mother, such as providing food, clothing and caring for the family. Her normal life served as the basis for the unique relationship and profound dialogue that unfolded between her and God, between her and her son. Her “yes” grew until at the cross her motherhood opened to embrace every one of us and our lives, so as to guide us to her son. She lived perpetually immersed in the mystery of God-made-human, as his first and perfect disciple, by contemplating all things in her heart in the light of the Holy Spirit, in order to understand and live out God’s will.

Second we must imitate her capacity to *recognize God’s time*. Mary made possible the incarnation of God’s son thanks to her humble and brave “yes.” She teaches us to seize the right moment when Jesus comes into our life and asks for a ready and generous answer. And Jesus is coming!

The message of today's feast can be summed up in these words: everything is a free gift from God, everything is grace, everything is a gift out of God's love for us. The angel Gabriel calls Mary "full of grace" (Luke 1:28). In her there is no room for sin, because God chose her from eternity to be the mother of Jesus and preserved her from original sin. She yields to the grace and abandons herself with no reservations and the Word was made flesh in her womb. We too are asked to listen to God who speaks to us, and accept God's will. Nothing is more productive and fruitful than listening to and accepting God's Word, which comes from the Gospel, from the Bible. The Lord is always speaking to us!



Third we must imitate her awareness that *being* comes before *doing*, and *to leave the doing* to God in order *to be* truly as God wants us. God works so many marvels in us. Mary is receptive, but not passive. On the spiritual level, she accepts God's grace and yields to it with faith. On the physical level, she receives the

power of the Holy Spirit and then gives flesh and blood to God's son who forms within her. She conceived first in faith and then in her womb. This mystery of the acceptance of grace, which in Mary, as a unique privilege, was without the obstacle of sin, is a possibility for us all.

Regarding this divine grace poured into our hearts, one single thing is asked in return: unreserved giving. Salvation is God's free gift that comes within us and dwells in us. As we have received freely, so are we called to give freely (Matthew 10:8) as did Mary, who, immediately upon receiving the angel's announcement, went to share the gift of her fruitfulness with her relative Elizabeth.

If everything has been given to us, then everything must be passed on. How? By allowing the Holy Spirit to make of us a gift for others. The Holy Spirit is a gift for us and we, by the power of the same Spirit, must become a gift for others by allowing the Holy Spirit to turn us into instruments of acceptance, reconciliation and forgiveness. If our life is allowed to be transformed by God's grace, we will not be able to keep our light to ourselves, but we will pass it on to enlighten others.

Let us ask Mary, the mother of listening and of service, to teach us to meditate in our hearts on the Word of her son, to pray faithfully and to be ever more attentive in practical ways to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

# OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

## Mary Our Model for How to Be a Missionary



When Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego at Tepeyac, her face was that of a woman of mixed blood, a *mestiza*, and her garments bore many symbols of the native culture. Like Jesus, Mary is close to all her sons and daughters. As a concerned mother, she accompanies them on their way through life. She shares all the joys and hopes, the sorrows and troubles of God's people, which is made up of men and women of every race and nation.

She identified herself as Mary, mother of the true God and so made a new "visitation." She also hastened

attentively to embrace the new American peoples, at their dramatic birth. Taking upon herself the cultural and religious symbolism of the indigenous peoples, she proclaimed and gave her son to all these new peoples lacerated by their mixed origin.

Thus many jumped for joy and hope at her visit and at the gift of her son, and the perfect disciple of the Lord became the “great missionary who brought the gospel to our Americas” (see the *Aparecida Document*, #269). The son of Mary has thus revealed himself from the beginning of the history of the new peoples as “the most true God, giver of life,” the good news of the filial dignity of all the inhabitants of the Americas. Now, no one is only a servant, but we all are children of one and the same Father and servants in the servant Jesus.

The holy mother of God visited these peoples and has wished to remain with them. She mysteriously left her sacred image imprinted on the *tilma* [cloak] of her messenger so we would feel her constant presence, thereby becoming a symbol of Mary’s covenant with these peoples, to whom she imparts her soul and tenderness. Through her intercession, the Christian faith began to grow into the most precious treasure of the soul of the American peoples, whose pearl of great value is Jesus Christ: a patrimony that has been passed on and is manifest still today in the baptism of multitudes of people, in the faith, in hope and charity



of many, in the preciousness of popular piety and also in the American ethos which is shown in the awareness of human dignity, in the passion for justice, in solidarity with the poorest and the suffering and in the hope, at times, against all hope.



Today, we can continue to praise God for the wonders God has worked in the life of the Latin American peoples. God, in his way, “has hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the lowly and humble, to the lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:25). In the wonders that the Lord has fulfilled in Mary, she recognizes her son’s manner and mode of conduct in salvation history. Overturning worldly judgments, destroying at all costs the idols of power, wealth and success, denouncing self-sufficiency, arrogance and secular messianism that distance people from God. Her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) professes

that God takes pleasure in overturning ideologies and worldly hierarchies. God lifts up the humble, comes to the aid of the poor and the lowly, fills with goodness, with blessings and hope those who trust in his mercy from generation to generation, while He puts down from their thrones the wealthy, the powerful and the overbearing.

When the image of Mary appeared on the *tilma* of Juan Diego, it was the prophecy of an embrace: her embrace of all the peoples of the vast expanses of America—the peoples who already lived there and those who were yet to come. Mary's embrace showed what America—North and South—is called to be: a land where different peoples come together; a land prepared to accept human life at every stage, from the mother's womb to old age; a land that welcomes immigrants, the poor and the marginalized in every age. A land of generosity.

That is the message of our lady of Guadalupe, and it is also my message, the message of the Church. I ask all the people of the Americas to gratefully remember her visit and maternal closeness and to open wide their arms, like her, with love and tenderness. Let us fervently call upon Mary most holy, the mother of Jesus and our mother, to enlighten, comfort and guide us, so that we may fulfill with dignity and peace the mission which God has entrusted to us.

# CHRISTMAS

## Mary Our Model for How to Accept Jesus into Our Lives



Christmas invites us to fix our gaze of faith and of love on the mother of Jesus. Mary, a girl from Nazareth, a small village in Galilee, in the outskirts of the Roman Empire and on the outskirts of Israel as well. Yet the Lord's gaze rested on her, on this little girl from that distant village, on the one he had chosen to be the mother of his son.

In her, the humble woman of Nazareth, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John

1:14). Because of this it is impossible to separate contemplating Jesus, the Word of life who has become visible and tangible, from contemplating Mary, who has given him her love and his human flesh.

The mystery of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem took place historically more than 2,000 years ago but occurs as a spiritual event in the "today" of the liturgy. The Word, who found a home in the virgin womb of Mary, comes in the celebration of Christmas to knock once again at the heart of every Christian. He comes and knocks. Each of us is called to respond, like Mary, with a personal and sincere "yes," placing oneself fully at the disposal of God and of his mercy and love. How many times Jesus comes into our lives, and how many times he sends us an angel, and how many times we don't notice because we are so busy, immersed in our own thoughts, in our own affairs and even, in these days, in our Christmas preparations, so as not to welcome him who comes and knocks at the door of our hearts, asking for acceptance, asking for a "yes" like Mary's.

The mystery of this girl from Nazareth, who is in God's heart, is not estranged from us. She is not there and we over here. No, we are connected. Indeed, God also rests his loving gaze on every man and every woman! We too, from all time, were chosen by God to live a holy life, free of sin. In reflecting on Mary, let us also recognize our truest destiny, our deepest vocation: to

be loved, to be transformed by love, to be transformed by the beauty of God. Let us look to her, our mother, and allow her to look upon us, for she is our mother and she loves us so much. Let us allow ourselves to be watched over by her so that we may learn how to be more humble, to be more courageous in following God's Word and to welcome the tender embrace of her son Jesus, an embrace that gives us life, hope and peace.



We all have been moved by the wonder of God made child in the grotto of Bethlehem, by the amazement that God's son became, for love of us, Mary's son, making himself small and fragile. We should be vigilant and pray that this insight does not fade and that we can carry in our daily life, in the family and at work, the joy of the faith, which is expressed in charity, in benevolence and in tenderness.

Jesus no longer belongs to the past, but lives in the present and is projected towards the future. God's newness appears to us as victory over sin, evil and death, over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. Let Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk. You won't be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don't be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you. He is with you and will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.

I entrust all of you and your families to Mary, the mother of God and our mother too, that she may accompany and sustain you. I bless you and I wish you a peaceful and prosperous new year. And let us pray for one another!



## OUR PRAYER TO MARY

Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith:  
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own “yes”  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.  
Filled with Christ’s presence,  
you brought joy to John the Baptist,  
making him exult in the womb of his mother.  
Brimming over with joy,  
you sang of the great things done by God.  
Standing at the foot of the cross  
with unyielding faith,  
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,  
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit  
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

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# OUR PRAYER TO MARY

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Obtain for us now a new ardor born of the resurrection,  
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life  
which triumphs over death.

Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,  
that the gift of unfading beauty  
may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation,  
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,  
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,  
that she may never be closed in on herself  
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.

Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,  
pray for us.

Amen. Alleluia!

—*Pope Francis*