

Message on the Observance of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception
December 8, 2025

Today I recognize every American celebrating December 8 as a Holy Day honoring the faith, humility, and love of Mary, mother of Jesus and one of the greatest figures in the Bible.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Catholics celebrate what they believe to be Mary's freedom from original sin as the mother of God. She first entered recorded history as a young woman when, according to Holy Scripture, the Angel Gabriel greeted her in the village of Nazareth with news of a miracle: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you," announcing that "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus."

In one of the most profound and consequential acts of history, Mary heroically accepted God's will with trust and humility: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Mary's decision forever altered the course of humanity. Nine months later, God became man when Mary gave birth to a son, Jesus, who would go on to offer his life on the Cross for the redemption of sins and the salvation of the world.

For nearly 250 years, Mary has played a distinct role in our great American story. In 1792, less than a decade after the end of the Revolutionary War, Bishop John Carroll—the first Catholic bishop in the United States and cousin of signer of the Declaration of Independence Charles Carroll—consecrated our young Nation to the mother of Christ. Less than a quarter-century later, Catholics attributed General Andrew Jackson's stunning victory over the British in the climactic Battle of New Orleans to Mary. Every year, Catholics celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving in New Orleans on January 8 in memory of Mary's assistance in saving the city.

Over the ages, American legends like Elizabeth Ann Seton, Frances Xavier Cabrini, and Fulton Sheen, who spent their lives glorifying God in service to others, have held a deep devotion to Mary. The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, located in the heart of our Nation's Capital, honors Mary as the largest church in North America. The timeless hymn "Ave Maria" remains beloved by countless citizens. She has inspired the establishment of countless churches, hospitals, and schools. Nearly 50 American colleges and universities bear Mary's name. And, just days from now, on December 12, Catholics in the United States and Mexico will celebrate the steadfast devotion to Mary that originated in the heart of Mexico—a place now home to the beautiful Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe—in 1531. As we approach 250 years of glorious American Independence, we acknowledge and give thanks, with total gratitude, for Mary's role in advancing peace, hope, and love in America and beyond our shores.

More than a century ago, in the midst of World War I, Pope Benedict XV, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, commissioned and dedicated a majestic statue of Mary, Queen of Peace, bearing the infant Christ with an olive branch so that the Christian faithful would be encouraged to look to her example of peace by praying for a stop to the horrific slaughter. Just a few months later, World War I ended. Today we look to Mary once again for inspiration and encouragement as we pray for an end to war and for a new and lasting era of peace, prosperity, and harmony in Europe and throughout the world.

In her honor, and on a day so special to our Catholic citizens, we remember the sacred words that have brought aid, comfort, and support to generations of American believers in times of need:

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

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