

Rev. Derek Fairman

Immaculate Conception (Chosen Place)

This day we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We celebrate the way in which God the Father chose Mary to be the Mother of His Son. Mary's being chosen was not something that happened in a random or haphazard way, but Mary was chosen from all eternity, and this was something that had received preparation among her own people. Mary was chosen to fulfill the promises to Virgin Daughter Zion even from the first moment of her existence.

In his day, King David chose to make the city of Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom and placed the Ark of the Covenant there. He likely chose the city, located in the territory of his own clan Judah, to cement the tribe of Judah as the ruling tribe. He chose the city of Jerusalem for its strategic value. None of this should take away from the Lord's own choosing of Jerusalem as the capital of the kingdom of David. Even though David had his own reasons, the Lord had even higher reasons to do so, and the Lord established His will through David's decisions.

The Lord chose the city of Jerusalem to not just be the center of political power in David's kingdom, but in time the center of religious worship. King David wanted to build the Temple for the Lord, but the Lord would not allow David to do so because he shed too much blood. David did accumulate materials for his son Solomon, who oversaw the construction of the Temple. Because some of the worship sites outside of Jerusalem were corrupted by idolatry, King Hezekiah and King Josiah consolidated all the ritual worship of the Lord in the Temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem became the religious capital of the kingdom of Judah.

Jerusalem as the place God chose to dwell was emblematic of the entire people. The Lord chose the Israelites, not because they were the mightiest and most renowned of all people, but because they were the lowliest of all people (Deuteronomy 7:6-7). Since they were the lowliest of all, the Lord could perform wonderful deeds and people would realize that it was not because of Israel's own power, but because of what the Lord was doing, that would explain these wonderful things that were happening.

The Israelites were chosen to be a holy nation, to be a light to the other nations. The people did not always live up to being that chosen nation. They were not always faithful to the covenant, which God made with them. Yet even among the Chosen People, there were those who received a special favor, because they were faithful to the Lord.

Although the Promised Land was chosen by the Lord to be given to Abraham, Jerusalem was especially chosen. The entire land was supposed to be holy, but Jerusalem was especially holy. In the same way, the entire nation of Israel was chosen to be holy, although a small remnant responded to that invitation. This favor rested then on one woman: the woman chosen from all ages to be the Mother of the Messiah. The Virgin Mary is especially chosen, just as the city of Jerusalem was chosen and specially favored.

This favor is heard in the angel's words, which we heard: "Hail, full of grace!" and "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." Mary above all other creatures was favored, because of the way in which she was chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of God, and because of the grace which she received at the very moment of her conception. She was chosen and she responded to that favor by accepting God's plan and choosing God's will. Mary's virginity signifies her choosing the Lord, as the Lord chose her.

We might be tempted to think that it was easy for Mary, since she was favored and chosen by God. However, she was associated with the Lord Jesus in everything, and that meant that there would be trouble. Her Immaculate Conception did not mean that there would never be anything for her to worry about. The good remnant of the people suffered because of the sins of the other Israelites. Mary suffered, not because she was being punished for her own sins, but because her Son took on the sin of the world.

Mary's Immaculate Conception should not be looked upon as something that distances her away from us. Yes, Mary was favored, but she faced trouble in her life just as we do. The favor Mary received from God did not protect her from suffering, but gave her the necessary strength to face suffering in her life and conquer it. We too receive God's grace, not to shield us from trouble in this world, but to strengthen us to face evil, confront evil, and conquer evil, sharing in Christ's own victory as Mary did. We may be tempted to think that the problems that we have in our lives are a sign of God's disfavor with us. Whenever we look at the Virgin Mary, we can see that all that she suffered was not a sign of God's disfavor.

As we approach the altar, we recognize that Mary is chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of God, and her Immaculate Conception prepared her for this great vocation. Her Immaculate Conception helped her to face the opposition that she would have to face with her Son. The Lord has a particular vocation in store for each of us, and the Lord has chosen us for a particular task. We ask the Lord for the graces we need to carry out what God asks of us.