



CHAPTER 11

In the Fullness of Time

As we have seen, God kept his people waiting for the Savior for many centuries. In every generation he sent prophets and leaders to remind them of his promise and call them to reform their lives. We may wonder why God allowed so many people to live and die without seeing the Savior for whom they longed. We do not know why God chooses as he does. All we know is that in the fullness of time the Savior came.

During the days when Herod was king, a priest named Zachariah lived with his wife Elizabeth in the countryside of Judea. Like typical Jewish married couples, they wanted to have children. But sadly, they were unable to have any. Now they were so old they could no longer even hope for such a thing.

One day it was Zachariah's turn to offer incense to God in the Holy of Holies, the very holiest part of the Temple of Jerusalem. As he entered, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him, saying: "Do not be afraid, Zachariah, your prayer has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, shall bear a son, whom you shall name John" (Lk 1:13). The angel explained that John would be no ordinary child but would grow up to be a great prophet and turn the hearts of many back to God.

But all this was too much for Zachariah. All he could think of was how impossible this seemed. "How am I to know this," he

demanded. "I am an old man, my wife, too, is advanced in years." Since Zachariah answered without faith, the angel gave him a greater proof of God's power than he had bargained for: Zachariah would be unable to speak until the child was born! And so it was. When Zachariah staggered out from the Temple, he had to use signs and handwriting to tell people what had happened.

Six months passed by. As Elizabeth waited for the birth of her baby, Gabriel visited the earth again. This time he came to see Mary, the daughter of Anne and Joachim. Mary lived with her parents in the small town of Nazareth. "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you! Blessed are you among women!" Mary did not know what to make of the angel's words. The angel assured Mary that she had found great favor with God. "You will bear a son and call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

Mary was ready to do what God wanted, but she was not sure how. At the time she was not married, although she was engaged to a man named Joseph. Then the angel explained. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, hence the holy offspring to be born shall be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

Mary answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your

word.” Before the angel left, he told her about the baby that would soon be born to Elizabeth, her cousin. “Nothing is impossible with God”, he said.

The angel left, and Mary immediately went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The moment Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting the unborn child within her gave a tremendous leap. He seemed to be dancing with happiness! Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to Mary, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:41–42).

Mary, in turn, was glad that Elizabeth shared her secret, and filled with joy at God’s goodness. She burst into song:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly
servant.

From this day all generations will call me
blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm;
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and
the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

(Lk 1:46–55)

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months. When the baby was born, the relatives of Elizabeth and Zachariah came. They talked about a name for the baby. Elizabeth, knowing the message of the angel, insisted that the name John be given. Her relatives could not understand why. “You should name him Zachariah, after his father”, they said. Finally they asked Zachariah for his decision. Taking a pen, he wrote, “His name is John.” At that very moment, Zachariah had the power to speak again. He began to praise God and prophesy about little John’s future:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people and set them
free. . . . (Lk 1:68)

The son of Elizabeth and Zachariah grew up to be Saint John the Baptist, last of the prophets and herald of Jesus Christ.

Immaculate Conception

From the day the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she knew her life would never be the same again. One day she was an unknown girl in the country village; the next day she was the Mother of the Savior her people had awaited for ages! And what is more, Mother of God’s own Son!

The average girl might have been unable to handle so great a role. But Mary was no ordinary girl. God had prepared her to be the Mother of the Savior even before she was born. He had given her a great gift which we call Mary’s Immaculate Conception.

As you have learned, we have all inherited original sin from our first parents. When Adam and Eve sinned they lost for themselves and for us the gift of sanctifying grace, God’s life within the soul. Because of original sin we are weak and are easily tempted to sin. But God

preserved Mary from original sin. Her soul was filled with sanctifying grace from the moment of her conception. Mary had the power to do always what God wanted and never offend him by sin. Because God created Mary free from sin, she was worthy to become the Mother of Jesus.

The belief in the Immaculate Conception was held by the Church from its earliest days, but it was not proclaimed an official doctrine

of the Church until December 8, 1854. Now we have a special Holy Day every year on December 8 to celebrate the gift of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

Words to Know:

Immaculate Conception
Annunciation Magnificat

Father, we rejoice in the privilege of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, which preserved her from the stain of sin by the power of Christ's redeeming death and prepared her to be the Mother of God. Grant that through her prayers we ourselves may come to you, cleansed from all sin. Through Christ Our Lord. *Amen.*

Q. 44 *Was anyone among the descendants of Adam ever preserved from original sin?*

Mary alone among the descendants of Adam has been preserved from original sin. Because she was chosen to be the Mother of God, she was "full of grace" (Lk 1:28), and hence free of sin from the first instant of her existence. For this reason the Church celebrates her *Immaculate Conception*.