

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception; Vigil Mass

*Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*

*Vigil Mass*

*Cathedral of Mary Our Queen*

*December 7, 2017*

To tell you the truth, I'm less than pleased when daylight savings time ends for the simple reason that it gets dark so quickly in the evening. But tonight the darkness outside serves a purpose for it is as a point of departure for reflecting on today's feast, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

As night descends we are reminded of another kind of night that night which descended upon the earth even before recorded history – a darkness that casts its shadow on every age of human history, a darkness that casts its shadow on the soul of every person born into the world, a darkness which the Church's teaching calls "original sin". It stems from a mysterious event described in the Book of Genesis when first the human heart was beguiled by evil – when first the day of God's glory was exchanged for the night of sin.

And how often the tragic scene depicted in Genesis recurs as the human heart is mesmerized and enticed by sin which promises enlightenment and joy but produces only darkness and grief. How often that same mystery unfolds in our lives. We are warned against the cunning ways of the evil one yet the attraction to sin that lies deep in our hearts as the result of original sin, that shadow cast upon our souls in the opening chapters of human history. Thus did Isaiah the prophet speak of "a people that walked in darkness..." (Is. 9:2).

Let us think about the darkness outside once more. We are rapidly heading toward the shortest day in the year, a day in which darkness seems to dominate the light. Yet, as the shadows lengthen and the nights grow longer, is not the darkness broken

by glints of light, by the moon, by the stars, by the festive lights of the season – lights that seem to defy the prevailing darkness, lights that seem to promise the hope of a better, a longer, a more enduring day?

Perhaps that is how we should think of tonight's feast of the Immaculate Conception, that unique privilege bestowed upon Mary by which she was preserved whole and entire from original sin and its effects upon the human nature. Perhaps this is how we are to understand the way the angel greeted Mary and the way we greet Mary every day of our lives – “Hail, full of grace!” For from the first moment of her existence, Mary's heart was not only kept free from the stain of sin but recreated by the grace of the Holy Spirit in a new and wonderful way such that she could freely, lovingly, and completely embrace the will of God and thus cooperate with his plan to us “the light of the world”, the Word made flesh. Mary's response to the angel, “Be it done to me according Thy Word” ...arguably were the most pivotal words in all of human history! In those words we see Mary's sinless heart shining as a light in the darkness, prepared to receive the One whom St. John refers to as ‘the true light’ sent ‘to enlighten every’ human heart (see John 1:9).

Because there was no shadow of sin in Mary's heart, the Holy Spirit, “the power of the Most High” would overshadow her and thus the child born to Mary was the Son of God, the splendor of the Father and the light of the world. In the depth of darkness, a new and radiant light was sparked in Mary's humble heart, a light which cannot be overcome by even deepest night of sin and death. It is this light we await in Advent and it is this divine light in the depths of Mary's being that gives us the greatest hope and joy as we await the coming of Christ at Christmas and at the end of time.

This is why St. Paul can say to us that in Christ, born of the sinless Virgin Mary, you and I were chosen, to be holy and blameless in God's sight. This is why St. Paul tells us that we are destined by baptism into Christ to be the adopted sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father (See Eph. 3:1-6). How we should rejoice! How we should take heart!

Mary is unique in her vocation as the Mother of the Savior yet as we celebrate the feast by which she was prepared to become the Mother of our Savior, do we not

perceive by faith the light of God's goodness dawning in our hearts? Do we not rejoice in the very thought that, imperfect as we are, Christ now dwells in us and that through us the light of Christ can shine upon a suffering world?

Long ago, Mary's sinless heart could say, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word." With Mary's prayers, may our hearts, redeemed by the blood of her Son, say, "Thy Kingdom, Thy will be done, on earth as it is heaven." Then will darkness give way to light, then will night give way to dawn.

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!