

In 1792 a baby boy was born to the Ferretti family who lived in a small village in Italy. He was named John. As he grew into manhood, John realized and appreciated the many unique blessings which had been given to him. He was intelligent, very handsome and belonged to a noble family. Besides these many gifts, however, there was one particularly bitter sorrow in his young life. He had epilepsy.

He prayed fervently to be cured of his illness and miraculously the disease disappeared entirely. John attributed this to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and with deep gratitude he vowed to spread her tender devotion and motherly love to all people. He even officially took for himself the middle name of Mary.

On December 8, 1854, the Pope proclaimed the **Immaculate Conception** to be defined as doctrine of the Catholic Church. Let us be clear that what he was proposing concerned *Mary's conception* in the womb of her mother, Ann by her father, Joachim. (It was Jesus, of course, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb.)

The doctrine stated that Mary's conception was brought about in the normal way (just like all of us), but with *one major qualification*: she was conceived without sin. She was from the moment conceived free of the corrupt nature original sin brings.

How do you suppose John reacted to this honor conferred upon Mary by the Pope? He was deeply pleased, for, you see, John Ferretti was the Pope. He had been elected in 1846 and took the title of **Pius IX**. One of his first acts was to send letters to all the bishops of the world, soliciting their views about defining the Immaculate Conception as an article of faith.

Three bishops replied negatively but over 600 answered with an enthusiastic yes. The teaching therefore which he proclaimed to the world was that Mary was preserved from all sin before and during her entire life. She was preserved both from sin itself and also the effects of it. She inherited the best of the old (meaning prior to the forbidden fruit fiasco) with none of its weaknesses; concerning sin, she never had to say she was sorry.

We can certainly say that young John was given a **second chance** in life through his healing from epilepsy. But we can also say that in Mary being healed of all sin, all of humanity was given a second chance. We see Mary as the new Eve and through her the beginning of a renewed creation.

Mary, of course, like us, **required a Savior**. She was redeemed by the grace of Christ, the Word, which "was with God and was God" and that "all things were made through him." She was redeemed by grace of the 2nd Person of the Trinity by anticipation.

To understand this, look at the various gospels as they written over many years. Mark's gospel was the first and it starts out with Jesus being baptized by John. Luke and Matthew, written later, would say collectively, "But that is not when he became God –

No, he has been God since birth” and so they include the infancy narratives. John, written last, would say, not since birth has he been God, but God forever.

Consider an analogy: Suppose a man falls into a deep pit, and someone reaches down to pull him out, though he bruised and dirty. The man has been "saved" from the pit. Now imagine a woman walking along, and she too is about to topple into the pit, but at the very moment that she is to fall in, someone holds her back and prevents her. She too has been saved from the pit, but in an even better way. She was not simply taken out of the pit, she was prevented from getting stained by the mud in the first place. Both were saved and both have a savior

By receiving Christ's grace at her conception, she had his grace applied to her before she was able to become mired in original sin and its stain.

She was the **1st Christian** and allowed all of us the opportunity to be counted as children of God.

In Mary, we see what it is to be truly human and what God hopes for all of us born again in baptism. Holy Mary preserved from sin, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our deaths. Amen