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8 WEDNESDAY

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF B.V.M.

Gen.3: 9-15,20

Ps 97: 1-4

Eph.: 1:3-6,11-12

Luke 1:26-38

On this day 150 years ago, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This 8<sup>th</sup> December feastday is much older than that solemn proclamation, for the belief in Mary being preserved free from original sin goes back very far in the tradition of Christian faith. From early times, those lines in chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis (1<sup>st</sup> reading), about God putting enmity between the serpent and human beings, and the serpent's head being crushed by Eve's offspring.... those lines were thought of as being the very first "good news", the most original 'gospel'. Similarly, the first word of the angel Gabriel to Mary, "full of grace" (or 'so highly favoured') has been taken to mean that she had a very special privilege of blessing.... understood as freedom from any taint of original sin, by virtue of Jesus' redeeming Passover. Early Christian writers liked to call Mary "the second Eve", because of her 'original innocence' and her purity, like Eve before the Fall; and also because she too is the 'mother of all the living', the mother of all Christians which she became by accepting to be the mother of Jesus, and by standing at the foot of His cross. We honour Mary, call her 'blessed among women', not for her physical motherhood as such but for her listening to and accepting the word of God, His invitation and destiny for her: "let what you have said be done to me".

All honour to you, Mary! From you arose the sun of justice, Christ our Lord.

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