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# FROM THE CHAPLAINCY

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## Dear Woodrose Parents

We are in the time of the year when we, the Christian faithful, celebrate very important dates related to the history of our salvation. We look forward to these dates and prepare ourselves to celebrate them meaningfully. The Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of these days by declaring them as **Holy days of Obligation**. These are feast days in which we, the faithful, are obliged to hear mass and abstain from servile work.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains holy days of obligation this way: *“On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body. Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest.*

*The faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life, and health [CCC 2185].*

The Code of Canon Law spells out when the holy days of obligation are on the Church's universal calendar:

Can. 1246 §1. Sunday, on which by apostolic tradition the paschal mystery is celebrated, must be observed in the universal Church as the primordial holy day of obligation. The following days must also be observed: the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Mary the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, Saint Joseph, Saint Peter and Saint Paul the Apostles, and All Saints.

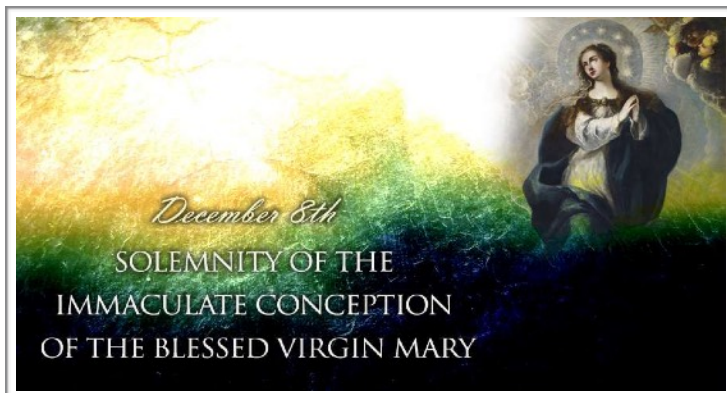
Can. 1246 §2. With the prior approval of the Apostolic See, however, the conference of bishops can suppress some of the holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday.

Thus different countries celebrate different holy days of obligation (apart from Sunday, which they all celebrate).

The official holy days of obligation for the Philippines are three: 1) December 8 – the Feast of the Immaculate Conception; 2) December 25 – Christmas Day; 3) January 1 – the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

## A. December 8, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

The Catholic Church teaches that from the very moment of her conception, the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from all stain of original sin. This simply means that from the beginning, she was in a state of grace, sharing in God's own life, and that she was free from the sinful inclinations which have beset human nature after the fall.



The two passages in the Bible which point us to this truth are:

Genesis 3.15, in which we see the parallel between Mary and Eve of which the early Church Fathers already spoke: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

The Jews saw this passage as referring to the struggle between Christ and Satan, and so the Church see in "the woman" a prophetic

foreshadowing of the Virgin Mary (Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, # 55). If there is to be complete enmity between the woman and the serpent, then she never should have been in any way subject to him even briefly. This implies an immaculate conception.

Luke 1:28, in which the angel calls her "full of grace". In this verse we can see the complete enmity with the serpent--for God's grace is completely opposed to Satan's reign. But if Mary was "full of grace," it seems that she must have been conceived immaculate.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrates the solemn belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is universally celebrated on December 8, nine months before the feast of the Nativity of Mary, which is celebrated on September 8. It is one of the most important Marian feasts in the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, celebrated worldwide.

In 1854, Pius IX made the infallible statement in the encyclical letter *Ineffabilis Deus*: "*The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin.*" This statement stands as the official definition of that teaching.

On 29 March 2017, the Philippine government through the House of Representatives approved Bill # 5241 and declared December 8 as a non-working public holiday in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary who is the patroness of the Philippines.

## B. December 25, The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ



The birth of Jesus is described in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke.

1) Matthew 1:18-25, in which Joseph learns of Mary's pregnancy by means of a dream and is told to name the child Jesus (God saves). A second name is applied to Jesus— Emmanuel—or God is with us.

2) Luke 2:1-7, in which we learn the familiar story of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem during the time of census. It shows Mary and Joseph as a peaceful and law abiding young couple.

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles.

In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, "*Brethren, observe the feast days; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month.*"

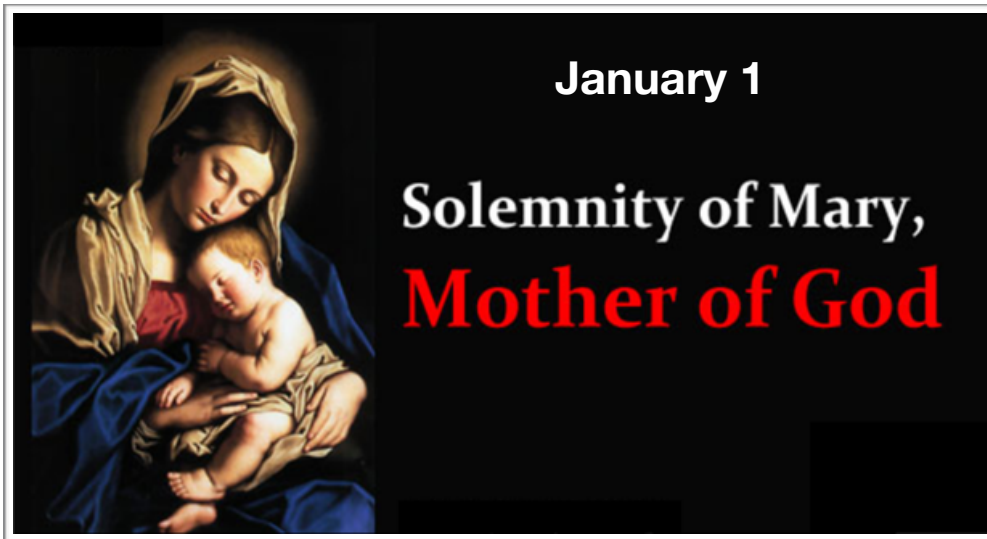
In another place it also says, "*Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world.*"

In the second century St Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25.

In the third century St Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of St Matthew.

### C. January 1, Mary, Mother of God

From antiquity, Mary has been called "Theotokos", or "God-Bearer" (Mother of God). The word in Greek is "Theotokos". This title was a response to early threats to 'orthodoxy', the preservation of authentic Christian teaching. A pronouncement of an early Church Council, The Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., insisted "If



anyone does not confess that God is truly Emmanuel, and that on this account the holy virgin is the "Theotokos" (for according to the flesh she gave birth to the word of God become flesh by birth) let him be anathema." (The Council of Ephesus, 431 AD).

As Catholics, we firmly believe in the

incarnation of our Lord: Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Lk 1:26-38 and Mt 1:18-25)

Through Mary, Jesus Christ--Second Person of the Holy Trinity, entered this world, taking on human flesh and a human soul. Jesus is true God and true man. In His person are united both a divine nature and a human nature.

Mary did not create the divine person of Jesus, who existed with the Father from all eternity. *"In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly 'Mother of God' (Theotokos)"* (CCC, No. 495).

As St. John wrote, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love" (Jn 1:14).

In 1970, Pope Paul VI instituted the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. In his encyclical on devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Marialis Cultus*, he wrote, *"This celebration, assigned to Jan. 1 in conformity with the ancient liturgy of the city of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of*

*salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the holy Mother ... through whom we were found worthy ... to receive the Author of life."*

The solemnity shows the relationship of Jesus to Mary. It's a perfect example of how we should venerate Mary under all of her titles and is a good foundation for our understanding of Mary's place in Christology. The Church puts the feast of this solemnity on the first day of the New Year to emphasize the importance of Mary's role in the life of Christ and of the Church.

