

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Patronal Feast Diocese of Clifton

Wednesday, 8 December 2021



In England and Wales – openness to the word of God

Keynote: God's promise of salvation through the offspring of a woman

Genesis 3: 9-15, 20

'After Adam had eaten of the tree, the Lord God called to him. "Where are you?" he asked, "I heard the sound of you in the garden," Adam replied: 'I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.' Man tries to hide his sin and blames the woman, 'It was the woman you put with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate it... Then the Lord God asked the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman for her part then blames the serpent, 'The serpent tempted me and I ate.' Yet the Lord God shows such love for the man and woman made in his likeness that cursing the evil serpent of the story, God announces, *'I will make you enemies of each other: you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head and you will strike its heel.'* God's promise to the woman that her offspring will in the end bring victory against evil is seen by believers to be fulfilled in the person of Mary and her son Jesus.

Responsorial Psalm: 97 (98) – a song of wonder in praise of the Lord

Letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12

This text takes the form of a Jewish blessing of thanksgiving – a thanksgiving that recognises what God has given to us without our need even to ask, let alone deserve such a gift. *'Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.'*

Each one of us uniquely chosen by God, *'Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence.'* So, *'we were claimed as God's own... chosen to be for his greater glory, the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he came.'*

Gospel according to Luke 1: 26-38

In this account of the call of a young Jewish woman to greatness, Luke recalls for us the greeting of God's messenger, who says to Mary, *'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'* We are told that Mary was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting might mean.

In our liturgy today, the faithful are addressed by the words: *"The Lord be with you."* We, like Mary before us, might be a bit more 'disturbed' and ask ourselves what that greeting might mean for us. If we were to follow the example of Mary, we might respond in humility and with faith, *'I am the handmaid (servant) of the Lord.'*

We recognise that Mary was being called to greatness – to bear the divine child. Thus she would be known as *Theotokos* – Bearer of God. It may also be time for us to recognise our own call to greatness and to consider how best to respond for in our own lives we also bear God with us. So may *"The Lord be with you – Dominus vobiscum!"*