



# The Holy See

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***PRAYER OF THE HOLY FATHER  
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY***

*Wednesday 8 December 1999*

As we do every year on this day  
so dear to the Christian people,  
we are gathered here, in the heart of the city,  
to offer once again our traditional floral tribute  
to the Blessed Virgin, at the foot of the column  
which Romans raised in honour  
of her Immaculate Conception.

Today's celebration, on the eve of the Great Jubilee,  
is a special preparation for our encounter  
with Christ, "*who abolished death  
and brought life and immortality to light  
through the Gospel*" (2 Tm 1: 10).

This is how Scripture presents the saving mission  
of the Son of God.

The Blessed Virgin, whom we contemplate  
today in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception,  
invites us to turn our gaze to the Redeemer,  
born in the poverty of Bethlehem for our salvation.

Let us contemplate with her the gift

of the incarnation of God's Son, who  
came among us to give meaning to human history.

May the prophet Isaiah's words echo in our hearts:  
"The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light" (9: 2).

Mary is the radiant dawn of this day of sure hope.  
Mary is the Mother of Christ, who became man  
to inaugurate the new times foretold by the prophets.  
With Mary, the "dawn of Redemption",  
we are observing Advent, a time of joyous  
expectation, contemplation and hope.

Just as the rising of the sun is foretold  
in the heavens by the morning star,  
so the *incarnation of the Son of God*,  
"the Dayspring" (*Lk 1: 78*), *is preceded*  
*by the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary.*

It is a sublime mystery of grace,  
which we sense even more deeply this year,  
at the end of a millennium  
and the imminent beginning of the Jubilee Year.

Today we have hastened with deeper trust  
to the Blessed Virgin's feet, asking her to help us  
cross, with renewed commitment, the threshold  
of the Holy Door, which will lead us  
into the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

He will cross this threshold  
with full awareness, supported and encouraged  
by your help, O Immaculate Virgin.

Two thousand years ago in Bethlehem of Judea,  
you gave birth to the Conqueror of death  
and the Author of life, who through the Gospel  
made all human life resplendent.

Christ came among us to restore full dignity

to man created in God's image.

Yes, human beings cannot remain in darkness;  
they yearn for the true Light to illumine  
their steps on this earthly pilgrimage.

Man does not love death:

endowed with a spiritual nature, he yearns  
for the immortality of his whole being.

Jesus destroyed the power of death by his blood  
and made it possible for this deep longing  
of the human heart to be satisfied.

As we look to you, Virgin chosen  
and full of grace, we pilgrims on earth  
see the promise of immortality fulfilled  
in complete communion with God.

The Apostle's words are fulfilled in you,  
Mother of the living, as the first-fruits of glory:  
the Lord Jesus "*abolished death  
and brought life and immortality to light*".

This year too, on the threshold  
of a new millennium, the Church  
repeats this joyful message.

This is why today we come once again  
to your feet, Immaculate Virgin full of Grace,  
to implore you, who have become the voice  
of the entire Christian people, to accept our tribute,  
the expression of our faith and devotion,  
as, with deep gratitude, we pass on  
to the next millennium the beautiful tradition  
of this devout meeting with you  
at the column in Piazza di Spagna.

And you, Immaculate Virgin Mary, pray for us!

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