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Pope Benedict XVI

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December 2011



Dec. 2 - Address to the International Theological Commission: "A Truly Catholic Theology ... Is Necessary Today More Than Ever" - Translated conclusion (Dec. 6, 2011, Zenit.org).

“.... I invoke for you the intercession of Mary, the Woman of Advent and the Mother of the Incarnate Word, who is for us, in her carrying of the Word in her heart, the paradigm of proper theologizing, the sublime model of the true knowledge of the Son of God. May she, the Star of Hope, guide and protect the precious work that you undertake for the Church and in the name of the Church. ...”

Dec. 4 - On Preparing for Christmas: "We Must Let Ourselves Be Illumined by the Ray of Light That

Comes From Bethlehem" - Translated excerpt of the Angelus address. (Dec. 5, 2011, Zenit.org).

... This period of the liturgical year highlights two figures who had a pre-eminent role in the preparation of Jesus Christ's entering into history: the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist. ...

To the maternal intercession of Mary, the Virgin of expectation, let us entrust our path toward the Lord, while we continue our Advent itinerary of making our heart and our life ready for the coming of Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Dec. 7 - On Jesus' Cry of Exultation - Translated Italian greetings after the General Audience. (Dec. 7, 2011, Zenit.org).

"...The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which we will celebrate tomorrow, reminds us of Mary's singular adherence to God's saving plan. Preserved from every shadow of sin, in order to be the all holy dwelling place of the Word Incarnate, she always entrusted herself wholly to the Lord. Dear young people, strive to imitate her with pure and limpid hearts, allowing yourselves to be molded by God who also intends "to do great things" in you (cf. Luke 1:49). Dear sick, with Mary's help trust always in the Lord, who knows your sufferings and who, by uniting them to His own, offers them for the salvation of the world. And you, dear newlyweds, who wish to build your homes on the grace of God, make your homes, in imitation of the home of Nazareth, a hearth of love and piety. ..."

Dec. 8 - On Mary, Full of Grace: "With Her 'Yes,' She Brought Heaven Near to Earth" (Zenit.org).- Translation of Angelus address for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Dec. 8, 2011.

Dear Brothers and Sisters! Today the Church solemnly celebrates the immaculate conception of

Mary. As Pope Pius IX declared in his apostolic letter *Ineffabilis Deus* of 1854, she "was preserved from every stain of original sin by a special grace and privilege of almighty God in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the Savior of the human race." This truth of faith is contained in the Archangel Gabriel's words of greeting: "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with thee! (Luke 1:28). The expression "full of grace" indicates the marvelous deed of the love of God, who desired to give back to us -- through his only-begotten incarnate Son, who died and rose again -- the life and freedom that we lost with sin. It was this that led the Church in the East and West to invoke and celebrate the Virgin who, with her "yes," brought heaven near to earth, becoming "the Mother of God and the nurse of our life," as St. Romanos the Melodist writes in an ancient song (Canticum XXV in Nativitatem B. Mariae Virginis, in J.B. Pitra, *Analecta Sacra t. I*, Parigi 1876, 198). In the seventh century St. Sophronius of Jerusalem praises the greatness of Mary since in her the Holy Spirit came to dwell: "You surpass all the gifts that God's magnificence ever bestowed on any human being. More than anyone you are made rich by God dwelling in you" (Oratio II, 25 in SS. Deiparæ Annuntiationem: PG 87, 3, 3248 AB). And St. Bede the Venerable explains: "Mary is blessed among women because with her virginity she enjoyed the grace of being the mother of a son who is God" (Hom I, 3: CCL 122, 16).

Upon us too is bestowed the "fullness of grace" that we must make shine in our life, because "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," St. Paul writes, "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing ... and has chosen us before the creation of the world to be holy and immaculate ... predestining us to be his adopted sons" (Ephesians 1:3- 5). We receive this filiation through the Church on the day of baptism. In this regard St. Hildegard writes: "The Church is, therefore, the virgin mother of all Christians. By the secret power of the Holy Spirit she conceives them and gives them birth, offering

them to God is such a way that they are also called sons of God" (Scivias, visio III, 12: CCL *Continuatio Mediævalis* XLIII, 1978, 142). And, finally, among the many who have sung of the spiritual beauty of the Mother of God, there stands out St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who says that the invocation "Hail, Mary, full of grace" is "pleasing to God, the angels and men. To men because of her maternity, to Angels because of her virginity and to God because of her humility" (Sermo XLVII, De Annuntiatione Dominica: SBO VI, 1, Roma 1970, 266)...

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Dec. 11 - On True Joy: "Not a Mere Passing State of Soul" - Translated excerpt of Angelus address (Dec. 12, 2011, Zenit.org).

...Let us entrust our journey to the Immaculate Virgin, whose spirit exulted in God the Savior. May she be the one to guide our hearts in the joyous expectation of the coming of Jesus, an expectation that is rich in prayer and good works.

...

Dec. 12 – Eucharistic Celebration on the Occasion of the Bicentenary of Independence of Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean – Translated extracts of the homily (Dec. 12, 2011, Vatican.va).

"The earth has yielded its increase" (Ps 67 [66]:6). The Fathers of the Church recognized in this image, taken from the Psalm we just heard and which invites all the peoples and nations to praise the Lord with joy, the Virgin Mary and of Christ, her Son: "The earth is Mary Most Holy, who comes from our earth, our lineage, from this clay, from this mud, from Adam. The earth has yielded its fruit: it first produced a flower ... this flower then became a fruit so that we might eat it so that we might eat its flesh. Would you like to know what this fruit is? It is the Virgin Son who proceeds from

the Virgin Mother; the Lord from the handmaid; God from man; the Son from the Mother; the fruit from the earth” (St Jerome, *Breviarum* in Psalm. 66: PL, 1010- 1011)

...I greet fraternally the Cardinals and Bishops who are with us, the various diplomatic representatives, the priests and men and women religious, as well as the faithful gathered here in St Peter’s Basilica to celebrate with joy the Solemnity of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Star of the Evangelization of America....

...The Successor of Peter could not let this occasion pass without expressing the Church’s joy in the many gifts which God, in his infinite kindness, has in these years poured out upon these beloved nations, who so affectionately invoke Mary Most Holy.

The venerated image of the Black Madonna of Tepeyac, with her sweet and peaceful countenance, imprinted on the tilma of the indio St. Juan Diego, shows her as “the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God from whom she lives” (From the Office of Readings. Nicán Mopohua, twelfth ed., Mexico City, D.F., 1971, 3-19). She reminds us of the “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child” (Rev 12:1-2). She signals the presence of the Saviour to the indigenous and mestizo population. She always leads us to her divine Son, who is revealed as the foundation of the dignity of every human being, as a love that is stronger than the powers of evil and death, and the fountain of joy, filial trust, consolation and hope.

The Magnificat that we proclaimed in the Gospel “is the song both of the Mother of God and of the Church; the song of the Daughter of Zion and of the new People of God; the song of thanksgiving for the fullness of graces poured out in the economy of salvation and the song of the ‘poor’

whose hope is met by the fulfillment of the promises made to our ancestors” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2619). In an act of gratitude to her Lord and of the humility of his handmaid the Virgin Mary praises God for all that he is doing on behalf of his people Israel. God is the One who deserves all honour and glory, the Mighty One who does marvels for his faithful servant and today continues to show his love to all men and women, especially those who are facing difficult trials. ...

...Since the Incarnation of the Word, the divine Mystery is revealed in Jesus Christ, who is the contemporary of every human person in every time and place through the Church, whose Mother and model is Mary. ...

... By her “yes” to God’s call, the Virgin Mary manifested divine love among men. In this sense she, with her simplicity and maternal heart, continues to indicate the one Light and the one Truth: her Son, Jesus Christ, who is “the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of life, and to those fundamental questions which still trouble so many men and women on the American continent” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Ecclesia in America*,” n. 10). Similarly, “by her manifold intercession (she) continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 62). ...

...I commend to the loving mediation of Our Lady of Guadalupe, our heavenly Mother all these intentions and the present situation of the Latin American and Caribbean nations and their progress towards a better future ...

Dec. 15 - Address to University Students: "In the Stable of Bethlehem Man's Solitude Is Overcome" - Translated excerpts (Dec. 15,

2011, Zenit.org).

...Dear friends, we run with joy to Bethlehem, we embrace the Child that Mary and Joseph present to us.

...

...At the conclusion of this liturgy, the image of the "Sedes Sapientiae" will be handed over by the Spanish university delegation to the delegation from La Sapienza University of Rome. A Marian pilgrimage will begin among the chaplaincies, which I will accompany with prayer. ...

Dec. 16 - Video message for closure of Naples' Jubilee Year. Translated extract. (Dec. 17, 2011, VIS).

...May Our Lady of Mount Carmel, protectress of the city of Naples, and St. Genuarius, watch over you and help you to maintain, with perseverance and faithfulness the commitments you have taken on in this Jubilee Year.

Dec. 17 - Papal Address to New Zealand, Pacific Bishops on 'Ad Limina' Visit - Translated conclusion (Dec. 19, 2011, Zenit.org).

...Commending you to the intercession of Our Lady, Star of the Sea,

Dec. 18 - "Who trusts in God Accepts Jesus Through the Holy Spirit:" Translated excerpt of the Angelus address (Dec. 18, 2011, VIS).

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel", ... this ancient promise was abundantly fulfilled in the incarnation of the Son of God. Not only did the Virgin Mary conceive, but she did so by the Holy Spirit; that is, by God Himself. The human being Who began life in her womb took Mary's flesh, but His existence derived entirely from God.

The fact that Mary conceived while remaining a virgin is, then, essential for an understanding of Jesus and of our faith. It is a testament to the fact that the initiative was God's and, above all, it reveals Who the person conceived is. As the Gospel says, "the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the son of God." In this perspective, Mary's virginity and Jesus' divinity are warranties of one another."

God awaited the "yes" of this young girl in order to achieve His plan. He respected her dignity and her freedom. ... Mary's virginity is unique and unrepeatable, but its spiritual significance concerns all Christians, ... because those who have profound trust in the love of God welcome Jesus and His divine life into their own lives, by the action of the Holy Spirit."

Dec. 18 - On Our Lady's Question to Gabriel: "The Virginity of Mary and the Divinity of Jesus are Reciprocally Guaranteed"- Translation of the Angelus address (Dec. 18, 2011, Zenit.org).

.... On this Fourth and last Sunday of Advent this year the liturgy presents us with the account of the angel's announcement to Mary. Contemplating the wondrous image of the Holy Virgin in the moment in which she receives the divine message and gives her answer, we are enlightened within by the always-new light of truth that shines forth from that mystery. For a brief moment I would like to reflect in particular on the importance of Mary's virginity, of the fact that she conceived Jesus remaining a virgin.

In the background of the event of Nazareth there is the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, who will be called Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). This ancient promise found an overflowing fulfillment in the Incarnation of the Son of God. In fact, not only did the virgin conceive but she did so by the power of the Holy Spirit, that is, by the power of God himself. The

human being who begins to live in her womb takes flesh from Mary, but his existence comes totally from God. He is fully man, made from the earth -- to use a biblical symbol -- but comes from above, from heaven. That Mary conceives while remaining a virgin is essential for knowing Jesus and for our faith, because it shows that the initiative is God's and above all it reveals who it is that is conceived. As the Gospel says: "For this reason he who will be born will be holy and will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35). In this sense, the virginity of Mary and the divinity of Jesus are reciprocally guaranteed.

This is why the one question that Mary, "greatly disturbed," asks the angel is so important: "How can this be since I do not know man?" (Luke 1:34). In her simplicity Mary is very wise: She does not doubt God's power, but wants to understand His will better so that she can completely conform to this will. Mary is infinitely surpassed by the mystery and yet, she perfectly occupies the post that she is assigned at its center. Her heart and her mind are completely humble, and, precisely because of her singular humility, God awaits this young woman's "yes" to realize his design. He respects her freedom. Mary's "yes" implies both maternity and virginity, and it desires that everything in her is for God's glory, and that the Son whom she will bear will be wholly the gift of grace.

Dear friends, Mary's virginity is unique and unrepeatable, but its spiritual significance regards every Christian. It, in substance, is linked to faith: In fact, those who deeply trust in the love of God welcome Jesus within themselves, his divine life, through the action of the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of Christmas!

Dec. 21 - On Christmas: The "Love Story Between God and Man Passes by Way of the Manger of Bethlehem" – Translated extracts of the general audience. (Dec. 21, 2011,

Zenit.org).

...Christmas, then, while commemorating Jesus' birth in the flesh of the Virgin Mary -- and numerous liturgical texts put before our eyes this or that event -- is an efficacious event for us. ...

... And again, in another Christmas homily St. Leo the Great affirms: "Today the Maker of the world was born of a Virgin's womb, and He, who made all natures, became the Son of her, whom He created. ... (Sermon 26, "In Nativitate Domini," 6,1; PL 54,213).

[Italian greetings]: ...Dear young people, especially you students of the school of Braucci of Caivano, may you approach the mystery of Bethlehem with the same sentiments of faith as the Virgin Mary; ... and may you, dear newlyweds, desire to contemplate assiduously the example of the holy Family of Nazareth, in order that the virtues there practiced might be impressed upon the path of family life you have just begun.

Dec. 24 – Pope's Christmas Eve Homily: "A Child, in All Its Weakness, Is Mighty God" - A Vatican translation of an excerpt of the Christmas Eve Mass homily (Dec. 24, 2011, Zenit.org).

...This human existence of God became most visible to him [St. Francis] at the moment when God's Son, born of the Virgin Mary, was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. ...

Dec. 25 -- Pope's Urbi et Orbi Address: "Only the God Who Is Love, and the Love Which Is God, Could Choose to Save Us in This Way"- A Vatican translation of excerpts of the traditional blessing to the city [of Rome] and the world. (Dec. 25, 2011, Zenit.org).

...The Son of the Virgin Mary is born for everyone; he is the Saviour of all. ...

...They need to put their hands in a greater and stronger hand, a hand which reaches out to them from on high. Dear brothers and sisters, this hand is Jesus, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. ...

... This is the meaning of the Child's name, the name which, by God's will, Mary and Joseph gave him: he is named Jesus, which means "Saviour" (cf. Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31). ...

... Dear brothers and sisters in Rome and throughout the world, on this Christmas 2011, let us then turn to the Child of Bethlehem, to the Son of the Virgin Mary, and say: "Come to save us!" ...

Dec. 26 – “The True imitation of Christ Is Love” – Excerpt of Angelus address (Dec. 28, 2011, VIS):

...Let us pray to Most Holy Mary, Queen of Martyrs, to maintain our desire for goodness intact, especially towards those who oppose us. ...

Dec. 28 - On the Holy Family's Prayer: "Learn More and More to Say With Your Whole Existence: 'Father'" – Translated excerpts of the general audience (Jan. 1, 2012, Zenit.org).

...The home of Nazareth, in fact, is a school of prayer where we learn to listen, to ponder and to penetrate the profound meaning of the manifestation of the Son of God, drawing our example from Mary, Joseph and Jesus. ...

St. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph, "when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, brought the child up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (2:22). Like every observant Jewish family, Jesus' parents go up to the temple to consecrate the firstborn son to God and to offer sacrifice. Moved by fidelity to the law's prescriptions, they set off from Bethlehem and go up to Jerusalem with Jesus, who is now forty days old. Instead of a one-year-old lamb, they present the offering of simple families; that is, two young

pigeons. The Holy Family's pilgrimage is one of faith, of the offering of gifts, a symbol of prayer, and of encounter with the Lord, whom Mary and Joseph already see in the son Jesus.

The contemplation of Christ has in Mary its matchless model. The face of the Son belongs to her in a special way, since it was in her womb that He was formed, taking from her also a human resemblance. No one has dedicated himself to the contemplation of Jesus as devotedly as did Mary. Her heart's gaze focuses upon Him already at the moment of the Annunciation, when she conceived Him through the power of the Holy Spirit; in the months that follow, little by little she feels His presence, until the day of His birth, when her eyes are able to gaze with maternal tenderness upon the face of her Son, while she wraps Him in swaddling clothes and lays Him in the manger.

The memories of Jesus -- fixed in her mind and in her heart -- marked every moment of Mary's life. She lives with her eyes on Christ and she treasures His every word. St. Luke says: "For her part [Mary] kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (2:19) and in this way he describes Mary's attitude before the Mystery of the Incarnation, an attitude that will extend throughout her entire life: to keep all these things, pondering them in her heart. Luke is the evangelist who makes Mary's heart known to us, her faith (cf. 1:45), her hope and obedience (cf. 1:38), above all her interiority and prayer (cf. 1:46-56) and her free adherence to Christ (cf. 1:55). And all this proceeds from the gift of the Holy Spirit who descends upon her (cf. 1:35) as He will descend upon the Apostles according to Christ's promise (cf. Acts 1:8).

The image of Mary given us by St. Luke presents Our Lady as a model for every believer who keeps and confronts Jesus' words and actions, a confrontation that always involves a growth in the knowledge of Jesus. In the wake of Blessed Pope

John Paul II (cf. Apostolic Letter "Rosarium Virginis Mariae") we may say that the prayer of the rosary draws its model from Mary, since it consists in contemplating Christ's Mysteries in spiritual union with the Mother of the Lord.

Mary's ability to live by the gaze of God is, as it were, contagious. The first to experience this was St. Joseph. His humble and sincere love for his betrothed, and the decision to unite his life to Mary's, also attracted and introduced him who was already a "just man" (Matthew 1:19) into unique intimacy with God. In fact, with Mary -- and above all, with Jesus -- he enters into a new way of relating to God, of welcoming Him into his own life, of entering into His plan of salvation, by fulfilling His will. After having trustingly followed the Angel's instructions -- "do not fear to take Mary your wife" (Matthew 1:20) -- he took Mary to himself and shared his life with her; he truly gave himself totally to Mary and to Jesus, and this led him toward the perfect response to the vocation he had received.

... We may imagine that he [St. Joseph] also, like his spouse, and in intimate harmony with her, lived the years of Jesus' childhood and adolescence savoring, as it were, His presence in their family. ... Certainly, he educated Jesus in prayer, together with Mary. ... And lastly, another episode that sees the Holy Family of Nazareth gathered together in prayer: Jesus, we heard -- at the age of twelve-- went with his parents to the temple in Jerusalem. As St. Luke emphasizes, this episode occurs within the context of the pilgrimage: "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom" (2:41-42).

... After searching for three days, His parents find him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers while he listens to them and asks them questions (cf. 2:46). When asked why He did this to His father and mother, He responds that He only did what a

Son should do: that is, be near the Father.

Here, when Jesus is still fully a part of the life of the Family of Nazareth, it is important to note the resonance that hearing the word "Father" from Jesus' mouth would have had in the hearts of Mary and Joseph, [to hear Him] reveal and emphasize who the Father is, and to hear this word spoken from His mouth in the awareness of the Only Begotten Son, who on this account willed to remain for three days in the temple, which is the "Father's house."

From then on, we may imagine, life in the Holy Family was filled even more with prayer, since from the heart of the Child Jesus -- and then from the adolescent and young man -- this profound sense of relationship with God the Father unceasingly poured forth and was reflected in the hearts of Mary and Joseph. ...

... the Holy Family is the icon of the domestic Church, which is called to pray together. ... I would like to address to you the invitation to rediscover the beauty of praying together as a family in the school of the Holy Family of Nazareth. ...

[In English:] Our continuing catechesis on prayer leads us, during this Christmas season, to reflect on the place of prayer in the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth. In the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we learn to contemplate the mystery of God's presence and to grow as faithful disciples of Christ. The Gospels present Mary as the supreme model of prayerful meditation on the mysteries of Christ's life; in praying the Rosary, in fact, we unite ourselves to her contemplation of those mysteries in faith and hope. ... Jesus' unique relationship with his heavenly Father was reflected in the prayer life of the Holy Family and stands at the heart of all Christian prayer. May the example of the Holy Family inspire all Christian families to be schools of prayer, where parents and children alike come to

know that closeness to God which we joyfully celebrate in these days of Christmas.

[In Italian:] ... The feast of the Holy Family, which we will soon celebrate, is a propitious occasion to rethink our relationships and our affections. Dear young people, look to the Holy Family and imitate them, by allowing yourselves to be formed by God's love, the model of human love. Dear sick, with Mary's help entrust yourselves always to the Lord, who knows your sufferings and who, uniting them with His own, offers them for the salvation of the world. And you, dear newlyweds, who wish to build your homes on the rock of God's Word, make your homes, in imitation of the home of Nazareth, a welcoming place, full of love, understanding and forgiveness. ...

Dec. 31 - Pope's Vespers Homily at Threshold of New Year: "There Is No More Room for Anxiety ... Now There Is Room for Unlimited Trust in God" – Extracts of the Vatican translation (Jan 1, 2012, Zenit.org).

... How evocative it is, at this close of a year, to listen again to the joyful message addressed by Saint Paul to the Christians of Galatia: "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5).

...And let us place these prayers in the hands of Mary, Mother of God, Salus Populi Romani.