

Immaculate Conception – December 8, 2017
St. Mary's Catholic Church, Richmond VA
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Stevie grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, with his mom, dad and three sisters.

As a kid, he did not like school. He was not a good student. He wasn't good at sports. At times he felt bullied.

Some people in the neighborhood made fun of him because he was Jewish. Others just called him a nerd.

As Stevie was getting ready to celebrate his 16th birthday, he told his parents the gift that he wanted: he wanted a car. He told them that an old, used car would be fine. He believed that if he had a car he could drive wherever he wanted, and get away from the people at school who weren't nice to him. He could explore the world. The gift he wanted for his birthday was – a car.

But on the day of his birthday, he did not get a car. Instead, his dad gave him a camera. Not for regular pictures – it was an old 8 millimeter video camera. The kind you could use to make home movies.

Well, you can imagine Steve's disappointment. This was not the gift he wanted! But then he started to mess around with the camera, figuring out how it worked.

He started to make some home movies. He forced his sister to be the actresses!

He kept making movies, and he got better at it. Eventually he decided he might want to make movies when he grew up. And that's what he did!

Steve often thinks about the fact that his life would be very different if his parents had actually given him the gift that he asked for when he was 16. If they had given him a car, he might never have started to make movies.

If his parents had given him a car, *our* lives would be different too. Because young Steve grew up to make movies that some of you have seen. Movies like: *Jaws*, *ET*, *Jurassic Park*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Hook*, *Indiana Jones*. Steve's last name is: Spielberg.

Thank goodness that his father knew what kind of gift Steve needed when he was a teenager. And he gave it to him.

Today, the church celebrates a woman – probably a teenager herself - who received a special gift from God. We celebrate the memory of Mary, the mother of Jesus. As we heard in today's Gospel, the angel of the Lord told Mary that God was giving her an amazing gift. And I am fairly certain that this young woman was NOT expecting this gift!

She was looking forward to marrying Joseph. The arrival of a miraculous child was NOT what she was hoping for just now.

But Mary came to understand that God had a special plan for her life. God had called her to become the mother of His son. She was called to be the Mother of God, the first and greatest Christian disciple. This child was the gift she needed. In fact, this child is the gift we all need!

On this feast of the Immaculate Conception, we Catholics celebrate not only Mary's call, her vocation – we also celebrate the fact that God gave Mary *every* gift she would need in order to carry out that vocation with joy.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception tells us that God kept Mary free from original sin from the moment of her conception. God wanted to prepare Mary to become the Mother of the Messiah, so he gave her the gift of freedom from original sin (this is a gift, by the way, that God gives each of us in baptism).

The point is that God gives this gift to Mary *first*, because she is the first of Christ's disciples. She needed that gift, that grace, that freedom, to live out her vocation as the mother of the savior.

This feast, centered on a remarkable young woman of faith, reminds us of two basic truths. The first is this – God has a plan for you! You are here, in this place, at this time, because God has something for you to do which **ONLY** you can do. God wants to take flesh in the world right now through you, to change this world for the better. Mary said yes to that invitation. Will you say yes?

And the second truth is this – God never calls you do something without first giving you all of the gifts which you will need to carry it out. God does not set us up for failure! God knows the special, wonderful things that he wants you to accomplish in this world, and he knows what gifts you need in order to accomplish them. And, *he has already given those gifts to you!*

God surprised Mary with his message and his gift in today's Gospel reading. And God surprises us, too. When that happens, remember Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was given every gift she would need in order to become the first and best disciple of Christ.

So...on this special Advent day, perhaps we could spend some time thinking about why God placed us here on earth. Have you asked God to show you the plan he has for your life? Before you decide what you want to be when you grow up, (or as you *continue* to grow up!) be sure that you allow God to speak to your heart. You might be surprised where you will meet one of his angels.

And, remember this: whatever Christ asks you to do, he has already given you the gifts you need to do the task. So don't be afraid. Perhaps the surest way to discover God's call in your life is to pay attention to the gifts he has already given you. Pay attention to the

gifts you are already aware of and dedicate yourself to a sense of gratitude for all that God has given you.

God has a plan for you, no matter how young, or old, you are.

God knows what you need, and has already given the gift to you.

So celebrate that. Thank God for it. And use your gifts to best of your ability, and for the glory of the God who made you.

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