

UNIT2: JESUS AND THE NEW COVENANT

THE PROMISED ONE COMES

Lesson 5: God's Final Preparation: Mary!

CONTENT:

1. God's final act of 'preparation' before he sent Jesus was to choose Mary and prepare her for her role as mother of his Son.
2. He did this by applying the merits of Jesus beforehand and redeeming her from the stain of sin from the very first moment of her life (her conception).
3. This is the dogma of the 'Immaculate Conception' believed in for many centuries and finally proclaimed in 1854 by Pope Pius IX. We celebrate this truth as a feast on the 8th of December.
4. Thus Mary is compared with the 'ark of the covenant' which contained the tablets of the Law; and with the tabernacle which contains Christ. These are very specially crafted and dedicated for use.
5. This special act of God points to the greatness and holiness of Christ: such a holy gift had to be placed in a holy and special 'container'.
- 😊 6. We too are called to be 'holy containers' of Christ, because the gift has been given to us too.

ASSIGNMENT: Learn by heart: Ephesians 1:4.

REFERENCES: Ephesians 1:3-4. CCC 487-493.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts; blackboard.

I. STARTER:

- Today we are going to talk about gifts and their wrappings. I'm sure all of you have given some kind of gift to someone. Some gifts may be very valuable and others less so. For example, you may have picked up a very pretty stone or shell from a beach and given it to your mother. Or you may have given something you made at school to your dad. Think back to the gifts you have given and specially try and remember how you wrapped or presented them... what you put them into.

[After a minute or two ask students to share with their partner what gift they gave, and how they wrapped it. Get a few to share with the class. Bring out:]

- In most cases, the way you wrap a gift shows its value. If the gift is a biscuit packet, you might not wrap it at all, or just put it in a plastic packet, but if you are giving a diamond ring to the girl you want to marry, you would probably put it in a special velvet-lined box. So we can conclude that the more precious the gift, the more special the box and the wrapping.

NB. If you like you could begin this class by showing the students a gift-wrapped box and asking them to guess what was in it. You could then proceed as given above.

II. DEVELOPMENT:

1. We have been talking about Jesus and how God prepared far his coming for many centuries. Now it was time to swing into action; to give this wonderful gift to the world. This very holy and priceless gift needed a very special 'container' or vessel. So God had one more preparation to make. What do you think that was? *[It was Mary!]*

[Give out handouts at this point]

- In your handout you have 2 pictures of special ‘boxes’ or containers. Do you have any idea what they are? [*One is the Ark of the Covenant and the other is a tabernacle.*]
 - Can you tell me anything about the ark? [*It was the special container that Moses was told to make to contain the tablets of the Ten Commandments.*] It was made of special wood and covered inside and out with pure gold.
 - What about the tabernacle? [*It is the box placed normally at the centre of the sanctuary in a church. It contains the consecrated hosts. In other words it contains Jesus in the form of bread.*] [*Students fill in the answers in [1] and [2] from handouts*]
2. Mary is often compared with the ark and the tabernacle because she was the vessel that contained God himself. Do you know what God did to prepare Mary for this? At the bottom of the page there is a quote which might give you a clue.

[Allow students to discuss in pairs and then bring out:]

- The reading tells us that God chose each of us even before the world began to be holy and blameless and to live for him. This reading applies to Mary in a special way. God prepared Mary by keeping her free from sin all through her life, and right from the first moment of her life. What was the first moment of your life? Not your birth, but the moment you were conceived in your mother’s womb. [*Students write the answer in [3]*]
- For many centuries Christians had come to believe in this act of God, but it was only in 1854 that Pope Pius IX, inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed this belief. It is called the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Immaculate means ‘pure’ or ‘sinless’. We celebrate this truth as a feast on the 8th of December. [*Students write*]
- Note: Immaculate Conception doesn’t mean that Mary’s mother was a virgin when she conceived her daughter. Mary was conceived in the normal way.
- Now we come to another question that we should think about: How did God make Mary sinless? After all, all human beings have a tendency to sin. I’ll explain it with an example: There is an American TV serial called ‘The Voyagers’, about two young men whose job is to set history right in case it goes wrong for any reason. In one episode, they found that the Americans were losing a very important battle because a certain brilliant general, General La Fayette was missing from the scene. They boys quickly pressed a button on their special gadget and went flying backwards through time landing just at the right spot where the would-be general was joining a pirate ship. They knew the story was going wrong at this point so they managed to persuade the man to give up this idea and go home. Then they zoomed back to the battlefield and found that all was well. General la Fayette was in command and saved his town from the invaders.
- This is something like what God did. He took the saving power that Jesus earned by his death and resurrection and applied it to Mary beforehand. Thus he did what only God could do, without any fancy gadgets. He made the mother pure by the merits of her son.
- One more point: When you look at a beautifully-wrapped gift you realise, ‘There is something precious inside’. When we look at Mary’s holiness, we realise, ‘Jesus is someone very holy and special’. [*Students write in their own words in the arrow.*]

III. REFLECTION & PRAYER:

- Mary is not the only one called to carry Jesus. In a different but very real way, God wants you to carry his Son. He wants you to be his tabernacle. Reflect on the words of Ephesians 1 again, then write a prayer to God in response. [*Students reflect in silence then write in [4]*]

Home assignment: Ask the students to memorise Ephesians 1:4