

The Immaculate Conception.

D ECEMBER, the last month of the civil year, is the first month of the ecclesiastical year, because around the first of December falls the first Sunday of Advent, which is the first day of the ecclesiastical year. Advent is that solemn time immediately preceding Christmas, instituted by the Church in order that we should prepare ourselves in a proper manner for the coming of Christ.

While spending the season of Advent, according to the spirit of the Church, preparing our hearts for the birth of the Divine Child, we are called upon at the outset of this holy time to celebrate a feast in honor of the Immaculate Mother of this Divine Child. This feast of Mary comes at a fitting time. For, whilst our thoughts are directed to Him who came in the fullness of time, and for whom the patriarchs and prophets longed, we are drawn towards her of whom was born the Messiah. She, after Jesus, was immediately comprised in the decree of the Divine Incarnation, and from eternity predestined to be the most august Mother of the Son of God.

It may be instructive to know what we understand by the Immaculate Conception of her who gave human nature to the Son of God.

This dogma of faith has been defined recently. But it was always believed, for the Church does but *define* what was ever believed by the Church, and confer on that belief an obligatory character which was wanting to it: so that it is the belief which gives rise to the decree, and not the decree to the belief. "Hence in 1854," to quote the words of the author of a recent work entitled, "The Hail Mary," "when the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pius IX. the Church did not create a new article of faith, nor approve solemnly any miracles which, according to some authors, attended the conception of Mary; nor teach that Mary's conception took place in any other than the usual way; nor that she was born in any other than the usual mode. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception has nothing to do with the physical events in the birth of Mary, in the natural order, as regards the origin of human life in her body. The dogma treats solely of the time of the origin of sanctifying *grace* in her soul. It teaches:

(1) That all children of Adam contract, and must contract, original sin at the moment when

their souls are, by God's creative act, united with their bodies in the course of formation—Jesus only excepted, as holiness by nature;

(2) That to become a child of God this stain must subsequently (at various times in various persons) be removed by the grace of God, merited for man by the blood of Jesus;

(3) That Baptism removes this stain *since* Christ, as faith did *before* Christ;

(4) That from some souls this stain has been removed, anticipatedly, before birth, as in St. John the Baptist and in Jeremiah the Prophet;

(5) That in Mary this anticipation was earlier. That in her this outpouring of grace, this application of the Blood of Jesus and the sanctification resulting from it, took place at the first moment of union between her soul and body in the process of formation;

(6) That in her case, conception, the beginning of bodily, the union of soul and body, and the sanctification of the soul, were all concurrent events happening all at one and the same time. Thus, in her the physical life of the human being composed of body and soul, and the spiritual life of grace and union with God began together by a spiritual Baptism administered at that first moment by God in the foreseen Blood of Jesus;

(7) That consequently she was altogether prevented by God's act, through the foreseen and fore-applied merits of Jesus Christ, from ever incurring that stain of original sin, which, but for this anticipated action of God, she would otherwise have incurred. Jesus, alone sinless by nature, made His mother sinless by His special gift, saving her by His own Blood from ever having, for even one moment, the stain of sin or evil on her soul.

This is a great, glorious and unique privilege conferred by God's pure bounty on our dear Mother Mary, rendering her more than all other human beings under obligation to Jesus. It was given to her for the honor and glory of her Son Jesus more than for her own, for it was bestowed on her for the purpose of making her the worthy Mother of Jesus, the All-holy One."

ASPIRATION: Blessed be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary! Indulgence—100 days.