

## *Immaculate Conception*

**My Grandpa Turner died three years before I was born. I never got to meet him; everything I know of him came through my father. My Grandpa Bertrand died shortly before I turned three years old. I have only the vaguest memory of him. So it was my two grandmothers who helped form me across the generations. I grew up in Kansas City, but Grandma Turner lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Grandma Bertrand lived in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. I didn't get to see them very often, and I never saw them together. Still, I know that all four of these grandparents formed me because they formed my parents. I surely inherited many of their strengths and weaknesses without ever knowing what they were.**

**One strength that came down to my generation was our Catholic faith. My grandparents believed in God, respected traditions, valued morals, went to church, and prayed at home. I imagine they had those strengths because of their parents and grandparents.**

**When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, and when St. Paul described our relationship with God, they both used images of family life. Jesus famously taught us to call God "Father," which was a pretty bold thing. After all, in today's gospel, the angel tells Mary her son "will be called Son of the Most High." When Mary wondered how this could happen, the angel credited the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Mary's son would be called "the Son of God." He alone had the credentials to call God "Father." But the adult Jesus let us do it too. That's why the priest introduces the Lord's Prayer at Mass with the words "we dare to say." We dare to call God our Father, just as Jesus did, even though he is the only-begotten Son of God.**

**St. Paul explains why. He also calls God the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then he says, God "chose us.... In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ." Our parents gave us a physical birth, but Christ gives us a spiritual birth. We are God's own children by adoption. Two of my nieces are adopted children, and they are every inch part of our family. They inherited the same values as their parents and grandparents.**

**Today the Catholic Church celebrates the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, our belief that when Mary's parents conceived her, God protected her from sin from that moment throughout her life. We don't know much about Mary's parents or her grandparents, but we can be sure they passed on their values to her so that she could complete the mission God had chosen for her.**

**It's helpful to know where we came from in order to get to where we're going. The time we spend with parents, grandparents and other members of our family will help explain why we believe what we believe, and who it is God chose us to be. When we realize the great blessing we have in being alive, and in having the ancestors who shaped our beliefs, we can reflect more clearly on what message God's holy angel may be sending each of us. Then we can repeat confidently for ourselves the same words Mary spoke to God's messenger: "May it be done to me according to your word."**