It is believed that the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was first celebrated in Syria as early as the fifth century, but what exactly is it that we celebrate? What we celebrate today (which is sometimes confused) is that the Blessed Virgin Mary, daughter of St. Ann and St. Joachim, was conceived without sin. Immaculate Conception - macula [mak´u-la] (L.) a stain immacula w/o stain. Not only was Mary conceived without sin, but Mary also remained sinless for the rest of her life. Mary is the highest model of the Church for all believers. So what are we, as people who do sin and have such a different life from Mary, have to learn from her?

First of all - just to be clear – Mary did suffer – she did suffer as the result of sin, especially the torturous execution of her son, Jesus. Shortly after the birth of her son, Joseph had to take Mary and her son Jesus, abandon their homeland, and flee to Egypt to escape the rage of a deadly king. Ask any refugees, what it is like to leave home and family to travel to a foreign country, this too is suffering. You see suffering is not the punishment for sin, for clearly Mary did not sin, and still she suffered as a result of the sin of others. Her sinless state was not something she merited; it was a free gift from God that was granted to her in view of the merits of Jesus Christ. She did not earn this gift – salvation is not earned. God granted this gift, because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The reason was she would be the Mother of Jesus.
Mary sums up the very same gift God offers us through Baptism and the other sacraments. When we are baptized, we (at that point) are like Mary, without original sin - and any other sin for that matter. Unlike us, Mary remained without sin – something we cannot claim. As St. John wrote, “If we say, “We are without sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8)

But do not despair, Mary shows what happens when we cooperate with God’s grace. Mary’s son, Jesus, by his life, death, and resurrection has wiped away our sins. For our part, we are to ask for forgiveness of our sins and forgive others of their sins. Our paths differ from Mary, but our destination is the same. What other things do we share with Mary?

We, like Mary, suffer in this life.

We, like Mary, are full of grace – God dwells within our soul.

We, like Mary, are called to cooperate with God’s plan.

We, like Mary, are highly favored by God.

We, like Mary, are called to eternal life.

Let us now pray the prayer that honors Mary:

Hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.