

**Solemnity of the
Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
And the Inauguration of the Year of the Youth**

1. Today we celebrate with joy a day in which God constructed His own dwelling place - the Blessed Virgin Mary. This dwelling place of God stands at the confluence of the New and Old Testaments. On one hand, Mary brings to an end an era of waiting; and on the other hand she inaugurates the new times of grace and salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. Today, we rejoice at the close of our diocesan celebrations of 125 Years of Catholicism in Zambia and at the same time, we launch the **Year of the Youth** - the future of the Church. We too, stand at the confluence of a legacy of 125 Years of Catholicism in Zambia and the transfer of that legacy to our Young generation - the Church of tomorrow.
3. As we reflect on the role of Mary in the scriptures, we recognize that she stands as a link between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament records God's plan for human salvation in His preparations to make the world ready for the Incarnation. Of all the tribes of the earth, God chose a particular people to whom He revealed Himself. He nurtured and instructed them through His prophets in order for them to be able to recognize His Son when at last He came. And when the time came, He chose a woman from the house of David to bore Him.
4. It is through the Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world and it is also through her that He has to reign in the world. Through her consent the entire universe was saved. The Son of God became man for our salvation but in Mary and through Mary.
5. From her obedience at the Annunciation to the events of Christ's passion, Mary illustrates for us a model of **Christian virtue**, a model of **faith** and a model of **obedience** as she remained true to Jesus and His word – being both a mother and a disciple. As salvation history unfolds in our own personal lives, God invites us to have: the *faith, hope and love* of **Mary**; the *submission and obedience* of **Mary**; and *that readiness to be a mediator* of God in the world like **Mary**.

6. Today, we inaugurate the **Year of the Youth**, trusting in a provident God, who provides for our future, who prepares His children for their assigned mission in life even before they are born (cf. Jer. 1:5). We believe in God who foresees and equips us with all the qualities we need in order to play our part in life.
7. Our dear Youths, the time has come for the Church to pass on the cudgel of blessings to you. It is our desire to accompany you on your life journey to maturity so that, through a process of discernment, you may come to discover your plan for life and to realize it with joy. It is our wish that you may experience throughout this year and beyond a deeper encounter with God and neighbour and to actively participate in the transformation of society and the Church today.
8. However, the challenges of globalization, technological dominance, as well as economic and social hardships cannot be overlooked in the discovery of your vocation. All things being equal, the Church wishes to listen to your voice, your sensitivities and your faith, even your doubts and your criticism. It is only then the Church can inspire and accompany you adequately on your life journey to maturity. May Mary, the immaculately conceived intercede for you. Amen.