

One of the biggest films at the box office this year has been the Barbie movie, a world where everything is pink. There is a singer named Tori V who sings a seasonal song named Pink Christmas. In the track, we hear from the songstress: *all I want for Christmas is a pink scarf, pink shoes and a pink necklace*. Without intending to be judgmental, I wonder; has Tori V captured the real meaning of Advent? If she had, all she would want for Christmas – is Christ. And. Mass. One can surely prepare for the coming of the Lord whilst wearing pink earphones, as Tori V does in her pop video; but will she be able to hear God's still small voice of calm with muffled ears, gently moving her attention from the material world to the spiritual; enabling her, and us, to receive Jesus this Christmas, *and to live through love in his presence* as St Paul encourages in the second reading to the Ephesians. Perhaps an ugly want for created things was Eve's undoing in Genesis, tempted to take fruit from the tree that God had forbidden. And Adam followed suit, easily led into sin. The most original of sins, at the time.

It's not yet Christmas, neither pink nor white, but early Advent and violet. But if pink evokes femininity, then today we celebrate a woman who become the Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church and Mother of all believers. Motherhood is the most fulsome of callings. A crucial character in the Advent story is Our Lady. Mary lived her later life in Ephesus and St Paul writes to the Ephesians: *before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence*. Mary is honoured at Mass today as the first and foremost saint of God, chosen to be Mother of God in fact, and Mother and help of all Christians. Conceived unencumbered by the original sin of Eve and Adam, she was quite free to choose good and evil in her later life. Thankfully she chose the good. Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy. Blessed be her holy and immaculate conception. Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

We'll sing later on addressing Immaculate Mary. **Immaculate** means flawless, perfect, pure and unblemished. Our Lady was all of those things through her Immaculate Conception. **Conception** was when our lives began in our own mothers' womb. Mary had been chosen even before she was born, called forever to be the Mother of Christ. Mother Mary, you are the Immaculate Conception. Pray for us this Advent and always.

On the Advent wreath, you will notice five candles, three of them violet, the official colour of Advent, a colour of hope. One white candle, representing the light of the world, Jesus Christ, the Holy Son of God in whom we put our trust. But the final candle has a different shade; rose-

pink. A colour representing joy. What can be more joyful than the message of an angel that Jesus was to be born. Mary was the first to receive the joyful news from the angel Gabriel, that of her Emmanuel was to be born. What a greeting from the angel Gabriel that fills us with wonder. Thankfully no earphones, pink or otherwise, were worn by Our Lady at the Annunciation. So she heard the angel's message from God clearly: *Listen!* spoke Gabriel: *You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.*

No other human being in history has received such tidings of great joy as Mary. Her life's mission became apparent in that moment. She identified as God's servant: *I am the handmaid of the Lord*, she said, *let what you have said be done to me.*

We are so used to seeing pictures of Our Lady clad in blue, and same for the colour of the altar frontal and vestments for today's Mass. Did you know that blue is not the only colour associated with her? Her original colour was pink, because royal blue was an expensive colour to use historically. Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City appears in both colours, blue and pink. Blue is fit for a queen, and a sorrowful colour; whilst pink represents the joyful mysteries that Our Lady cooperated in, for our salvation.

So the idea of a woman in pink, be it *Tori V*, or even *Barbie*, is nothing new. Long before, Our Lady, cause of our joy, had been painted symbolically in pink, as a woman of joy. The plastic *Barbie* has recently made a resurgence – seemingly an icon of self-fulfilment for a superficial age. But even in the recent *Barbie* movie, written by a Catholic, the leading character wanted to move beyond the superficiality of *Barbieland*, and reach out to her maker to determine the fulness of her calling, and reflect on why she was made. She searched, longing for a deeper meaning. We too long for our Creator, who is God. In the penny catechism of old the answer to the searching heart of *Barbie* – *Why did God make you?* – was quite simply, and profoundly: *God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.* Our Lady is the perfect fulfilment of such a beautiful calling, a model of Christian life for all believers. Our Lady Immaculate's spirit rejoiced in God, her saviour, she to whom the angel said; *Rejoice so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.*

*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.*