

THE ORATORY—dedicated to THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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Registered as a Charity

Parish Weekly Newsletter

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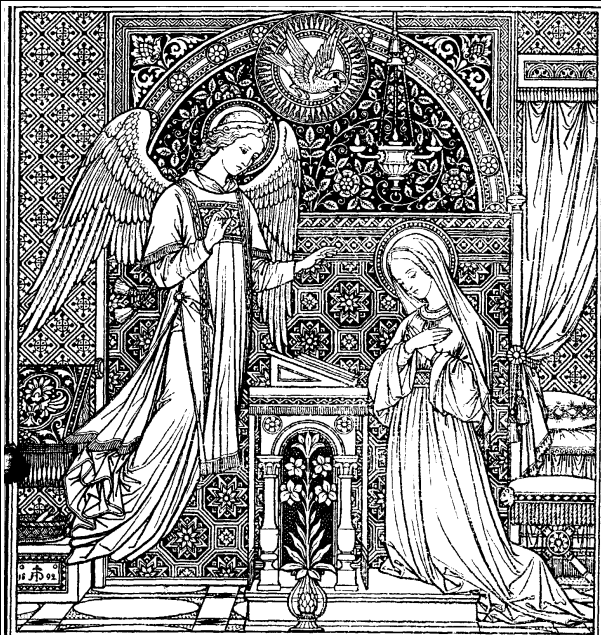
Web-site: www.theoratory.org.uk

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This newsletter is available in large-print format. Ask at the Sacristy.

December 21st 2008: THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



GOD HAS BECOME A MAN

In today's Gospel we hear the account of the Annunciation to Our Lady. This is such a familiar story that we can run the risk of taking it for granted. But what a wonderful event it is—truly amazing, when one only begins to reflect even a little on it!

Why else did God take such pains to prepare fallen mankind? It was because of His plan for the **Incarnation** of His Divine Son. The Incarnation is a fact which we cannot fully grasp. How can Almighty God, infinite and omnipotent spirit, become a part of His own creation? Without God's revelation of this, we could never have imagined it. God began to prepare us for this wonderful truth as far back as the Fall of our first parents, when He said to Satan: "I will make you enemies of each other; you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head and you will strike its heel" (Genesis 3:15). In this way, however obscurely, God was promising both that rescue would come to mankind, and that it would come from one of Adam and Eve's own descendants. From this, the first announcement of the Saviour, the Church has ever since called Our Blessed Lady the "New Eve", for it is from her offspring that we have been rescued from eternal death.

Throughout the many following centuries, God often spoke through those whom He chose to bear His message of salvation: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Later still, God chose Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. It was to be a long and painful journey in which God taught them patience and obedience, giving them the Commandments and the Ark of the Covenant as a sign of His favour. The Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred sign of God's presence, containing as it did the original tablets of stone on which God had given His Law to the chosen people via Moses on Mount Sinai. Centuries later, King David wanted to build a permanent dwelling place for this sacred Ark, and planned a fitting Temple. But as we hear in today's First Reading, God sends the prophet Nathan to tell David that he cannot build such a place. God cannot live in a temple made by human hands. Yet God still shows great favour to David. Nathan tells him that there will always be a king among his descendants.

The fulfilment of these two statements is found in Mary and Jesus. Mary becomes the living temple of God's dwelling-place, when the Son of God enters into her womb and becomes her Son. This is why we call her the "Ark of the Covenant", in whose most holy body Our Lord becomes man. This is the real heart of the Incarnation—that God actually became man. It is a mystery too great for us to grasp, but it is revealed to us by God Himself in the message brought by the Angel Gabriel to our Blessed Lady in today's Gospel. Moreover, Jesus is the "Son of David" and fulfils God's promise to King David, that his royal line would never fail.

OUR LADY QUESTIONS BUT DOES NOT DOUBT

So Our Lady's response to the Angel Gabriel is very important in so many ways. What should she say? What does the Angel's message mean? She is "deeply disturbed", because it is clear that God has shown her great favour and is now asking her to do something tremendous, and beyond her power to grasp fully. She must trust Him even though she does not know what it means. And how is she to bear a Son when she has promised her virginity as an offering to God? Some suggest that such a vow or promise of virginity by Our Lady is not likely, that it would not have been authentic among the Jews of her time. Yet this is not so. John the Baptist also remained unmarried in a state of consecration to God, and so, of course, did Our Lord Himself. Even if unusual, it is not impossible. Cardinal Newman was brought up in a society which took marriage for granted, even for the Anglican clergy. Yet he also believed from an early age that God had called him to consecrate himself in a celibate state. Our Lady similarly questions how she is to be a mother if she is also to remain a virgin. This is not to doubt God's word, simply to ask for clarification that she is not being asked to dispense with her special consecration to God. She learns from the Angel that she will remain a virgin precisely in order to be God's Mother. Her virginity is not barrenness, but allows her a greater dedication to God than marriage would bring.

Finally, in the Incarnation we recognise the wonderful truth that God our creator and redeemer chooses to share our own nature. Human nature has been raised to unimaginable dignity because God Himself shares it with us! That is the magic of Christmas!

Sunday December 21st: The Fourth Sunday of Advent (Purple)

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| • 8.30 a.m. <i>Low Mass</i> | • 12.00 p.m. <i>(Families with young children)</i> |
| • 9.30 a.m. <i>Latin Low Mass (1962 Missal:)</i> | • 5.30 p.m. <i>Sung Congregational Mass</i> |
| • 10.30 a.m. <i>High Mass</i> | • 7.30 p.m. <i>Vespers and Benediction</i> |

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON WEEK OF THE YEAR: Liturgical Calendar

Year 2 or B of the Lectionary at Mass and Psalter Week 4

Monday and Tuesday: Masses at 7.30 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.45 p.m. Rosary at 7.45 p.m.

Confessions are heard from 12.30 p.m. and from 5.30 p.m. until the end of Mass.

Wednesday onwards: PLEASE SEE OVERLEAF

