

THE ORATORY—dedicated to THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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Registered as a Charity

Parish Weekly Newsletter

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

December 20th 2009: THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED

The Gospel of the Last Sunday of Advent always draws our attention to Our Blessed Lady, as we, like her, await the birth of her Son. This year we hear what happened immediately after the Annunciation, when she had consented to God the Father's request, communicated to her by the Angel Gabriel, to become the Mother of His only-begotten Son.

Our Lady had been at first perturbed by the Angel's message, yet she did not doubt it, that is, *she did not disbelieve it*. Having asked the Angel how it was possible for her to conceive a son whilst remaining a Virgin, she was perfectly content to accept God's Will, saying: *"Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word"*.

The final proof of her complete trust in God's message was her response to the news the Angel gave her about her kinswoman Elizabeth. Learning from Gabriel that Elizabeth, who was now well past childbearing age, was expecting a son, she set off immediately without thought for her own comfort, in order to be a support and helpmate to her cousin, and to share in her joy that she was no longer childless.

The Gospel reading we hear today begins at the point where the Angel had just left Mary. The scene we witness is that of the meeting between the two cousins. Both were expecting their firstborn sons. Elizabeth had conceived wonderfully, despite being past the usual age of childbearing and having been barren all her life. Mary, however, had conceived miraculously, through the power of the Holy Spirit *"without losing her glorious virginity"* as a Preface in the Missal puts it.

The first thing we are told about Mary's arrival is that she greeted Elizabeth.

This greeting brought about an extraordinary effect in Elizabeth. We are told that she *"gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed'."* This ecstatic reaction is grace-filled. Elizabeth herself was filled with the Holy Spirit upon Our Lady's coming into her presence and greeting her. Wherever she goes, Our Lady brings the Holy Spirit who had overshadowed her. So Elizabeth went on to say, *"Blessed is the fruit of your womb!"* She was given the grace to recognise the special status Mary enjoys in God's sight because of the divine child Mary had accepted from God. Elizabeth was overwhelmed at the presence of the person whom she was given grace to recognise as *"the Mother of my Lord"*. How privileged she felt to receive such a person into her own home!

Our Lady does the same for us, too, when we make her welcome. When we pray to her, she answers by bringing us into the presence of her divine Son and of the Holy Spirit who dwelt in her heart. Elizabeth, who had conceived St. John the Baptist as a special gift of God's grace, was also given grace to recognise that Mary was *"Blessed because she believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled"*. That promise was not for Mary only, but for all who accept her Son as the Saviour of the world, born in our hearts at Christmas.

CHANGES AT THE ORATORY continued

As was announced last week, Fr Paul begins new fundraising work in the United States in February next year. On 2nd February, the normal date for new appointments in the Oratory, Fr. Richard Duffield will take over from Fr Paul as Provost of the Oratory and Actor for the Cause of Cardinal Newman's Canonisation. Fr. Richard has now moved to Birmingham in order to have plenty of time to prepare for his new responsibilities.

Sunday December 20th: The Fourth Sunday of Advent (Purple)

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

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT: Liturgical Calendar

Year 2 of the Lectionary at Weekday Mass and Psalter Week 4 in the Divine Office

Monday to Wednesday: Masses at 7.30 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.45 p.m.

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

PLEASE SEE OVERLEAF FOR EXCEPTIONS THIS WEEK

St John Vianney's devout biographer [in describing his "living" in his church all day] should not blind us to the fact that the Curé also knew how to "live" actively within the entire territory of his parish: he regularly visited the sick and families, organized popular missions and patronal feasts, collected and managed funds for charitable and missionary works, embellished and furnished his parish church, cared for the orphans and teachers of the "Providence" (an institute he founded); provided for the education of children; founded confraternities and enlisted lay persons to work at his side.