

T H E B U L L E T I N .

The Annunciation Marble Arch

FEBRUARY 2015

EDITORIAL BY FR GERALD BEAUCHAMP

Among scholars there's some discussion about which came first: the date of Christ's nativity or his conception. When I was an undergraduate the received wisdom was that in the fourth century the Emperor Constantine pressurised the early church into agreeing to all sorts of things including the date of Christmas. 25 December is near the winter solstice. Constantine, keen to shore up a crumbling empire with the power of a popular new religion didn't want to alienate the old guard so he sought to combine the ancient worship of the sun (Sol Invictus) with Christianity. By combining the ideas of the strengthening sun and the birth of the light of the world he fused together the old and the new. But there's also an ancient tradition that Mary had her extraordinary experience around 25 March so the birth of Christ nine months later (25 December) made sense chronologically.

Which comes first: the chicken or the egg? Knowing how things began is a basic human preoccupation. This year is an exciting one for cosmologists as the NASA probe 'New Horizons' nears Pluto. We should learn more about the origins of our universe and how we all began. Our ever-expanding intellectual horizons are a cause of excitement but its been something of a tragedy for the church that it has tended to be suspicious if not hostile to the human endeavour. In the sixteenth century when Copernicus challenged the mediaeval idea that the sun goes round the earth he was excommunicated by the pope. Every generation has its own version of that.

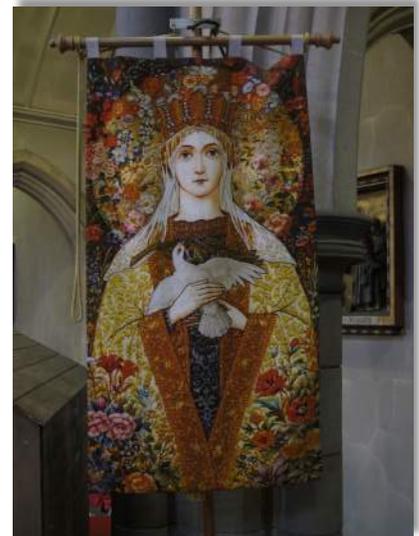
Since I was ordained in 1980 the church has pulled itself apart over issues of human sexuality – contraception, abortion, the ordination of women and gay marriage to name but a few. But truth will out. And now we have women bishops and other changes will be on the way. So why do Christians go through all these agonies? I think that it has something to do with our inability to contemplate – to see deeply what comes first.

In contemplative prayer God comes first. I was asked a while back by a parent how to explain to a child where God comes from. My answer is simple. God is like a wedding ring. The circle has no beginning and no end. So with God there is no 'before'. Once we discover this in contemplation we become open to the notion that what we contemplate loves us. There is a Word that speaks to us. And the Word is Love. This love is not for us alone but for other people and the whole cosmos as well. The Word/Love in generative.

Mary knew this. She is the great contemplative – so contemplative that in her 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth' as John's Gospel says. So on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation when Mary said 'yes' to her vocation we celebrate God's love revealed through her Son. We hear too, our call to contemplate the profound mystery of God, be reborn in the faith and share a love that emboldens us with truth.

Yours in Christ

Fr Gerald



IN CONVERSATION WITH...MATT HART

Like many families at the Annunciation, we've found a home among London's diverse community that suits our mixed family heritage.

I grew up in America, being raised in Louisiana then attending university on the East Coast. I met Lotta (who grew up in Sweden) while we were both working in Washington, D.C., at a political internship. After various adventures involving immigration laws, transcontinental "commutes" and two weddings (each to each other), we joined our lives as a married couple in America in 2006, and welcomed Caroline in 2008.

While we continued having adventures in America (moving to Houston, Texas, for a year among others), we still had close connections to Sweden through Lotta's family. So when the opportunity arose for us to move to London in 2010, we cautiously but excitedly packed our belongings into a sea container and woke up after an overnight flight in temporary corporate housing in Marylebone.

We still live on the same street as our "temporary" accommodations, having found a place of belonging in Marylebone and grown our family with Philip in 2011. Our integration into the routines of London life make the connection to the fabric of the community feel seamless now: we greet neighbors and friends on the school run; we struggle for places on the Central Line trek to City jobs (I toiling as a lawyer with Lotta in insurance broking) and we long for lighter, warmer weekends in Regents and Hyde Parks.

At other times, we step back and feel gratitude for the unique hospitality of the community that wove us into it. For us, particularly, it was the myriad playgroups, email lists and warm invites from many diverse families that have welcomed us as

part of the London life. Something quite universal and fundamental is revealed through the fact that the diverse, expatriate-replete Marylebone population comes together to form a community: it seems that with so many diverse "outsiders," you are naturally encouraged to focus on common values, rather than differences, in order to find fellowship.

Here, at the Annunciation and Hampden Gurney as well, we've been enveloped in the breadth and warmth of the community. Indeed, the diversity of the Annunciation's communicants encourages a common focus on fundamental values and the deeper questions we each confront in our lives' spiritual journeys. As established members of the church and Marylebone community (by expatriate standards at least), we now want to extend similar love and graciousness to other members of the church and community, and especially to those who've, planned or unplanned, come to London from other homes. And through extending the hospitality that welcomed us, we hope to be part of the community that welcomes you.



OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER LOCAL CHURCHES

If you come to the Annunciation regularly do you also go to other churches? Its always fascinating to see how other churches worship and organise themselves. Churches need each other so that as with any organisation when times are lean they can rely on the support of their neighbours.

This is particularly true here in the West End. Both the Annunciation and St Cyprian's Clarence Gate have had problems with both small congregations and a lack of money in the past. All Saints Margaret Street especially with Fr Alan Moses as both Vicar and Area Dean has stood behind both churches resisting calls for their closure or wholesale change in their traditions.

Today things are going better at the Annunciation. The congregation is larger, relationships with local institutions are stronger and we have the vicarage back in use.

The Parochial Church Council is discussing whether or not it will ask the Bishop of London to have not just a Priest-in-Charge but a Vicar once again.

St Cyprian's has not fared as well in terms of resources but under Fr Simon Stokes' care growth is perceptible. With excellent music there is a sense that the worship is deep and generous.

Alongside this particular triumvirate there all sorts of contacts with our neighbours across the Edgware Road at St John's Hyde Park Crescent and St James Sussex Gardens. In supporting the West London Day Centre for homeless people we are also sharing in the ministry of Hinde Street Methodist Church. During the centenary year last year it was a joy to welcome so many people from other churches at our events.

We may soon be a parish once again with a vicar but let's never be too parochial.

STATUES OF THE VIRGIN MARY

There are many images of Mary in the Annunciation in the banners, glass windows and pictures. We also have two statues. The one that stands in front of the screen opposite the pulpit is in memory of Emma Elizabeth Shaw who died in 1929. Nothing is known of the origin of the statue. It seems to be a copy of an image typical in mediaeval Germany. There is a certain 'Hausfrau' quality about the face. This is a no-nonsense Mary, purposeful in presenting her son to the world.

English churches are different to continental buildings in often having quite large Lady Chapels. The Annunciation is typical with its mini-church under the organ where weekday masses are said. Here behind the altar is a statue similar to that in the great Marian shrine at Walsingham, Norfolk. Mary, seated with the child on her lap presides from a throne rather than standing to attention. It is as if she is holding court awaiting our petitions.

To stand before either of these images and contemplate the woman they represent is to be drawn into the mystery of the interaction of God and humanity – the mysterious intermingling to which our faith in the incarnation bears witness. There is a power in taking a deep breath, stilling our minds and lighting a candle. Mothers are a great comfort and from them we derive much strength. Mary is mother of us all.



MARCH EVENTS

- 18 FEB.** Wednesday 18 February, 12.30pm
Ash Wednesday Low Mass with Imposition of Ashes.
(There is a sung mass at St Cyprian's at 7.00pm)
- 25 MAR.** Wednesday 25 March, 7.00pm.
The Feast of the Annunciation. High Mass & Procession. Preacher:
Fr Paul Thomas, Vicar of St James Sussex Gardens
- 29 MAR.** Sunday 29 March, 10.30am
Palm Sunday. Parish Mass with the Blessing of Palms. Holy Week
begin
- 02 APR.** Thursday 2 April, 7.00pm
Maundy Thursday Mass of the Last Supper
- 03 APR.** Friday 3 April, 3.00pm
Good Friday Liturgy
- 05 APR.** Sunday 5 April, 10.30am
Easter Day Parish Mass

Children's Choir Rehearsals on Tuesdays, 3.45pm in church on 24 February and 3, 10, 17 & 24 March
Sunday 29 March after mass Parochial Church Council meets to agree 2014 Accounts

LOCAL BUSINESSES

Eliská Design Associates, 16a New Quebec Street W1

In this occasional series we are asking some of the local businesses around the church five questions to tell us about what they do.

How would you describe your business?

We are an architectural and interior design company.

How long have you been in the neighbourhood?

We have been in the area since 2008.

Who is your clientele?

Our clientele are mixed from private individuals to boutique hotels, nationally and internationally, as well as clients from our shop in New Quebec St.

Do you have an online presence? If so, please let us have your website address.

We have an online presence at www.eliskadesign.com, along with a weekly blog on Twitter and Facebook.

What would you like people to know about your business?

With over 27-years of design experience, Eliská Sapera's work is known and in demand around the world, from Shanghai and Australia, to the Middle East, the UK and USA. Also, Eliska was recently named one of Britain's top 30 interior designers by the Sunday Times. Eliska specialises in unusual antique silver items, contemporary furniture and unique pieces.

The Annunciation is grateful to Eliská for restoring the leather on the sanctuary stools and the doors at the east end of the north aisle in recent years.



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