



**AUGUSTINIANS
OF THE
ASSUMPTION**

Thy Kingdom Come

Charity No. 233428

Christmas 2008



*The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...."*

(Luke 1. 34)

How can this be?....

This is a common question for many and one that dominates the Christmas season. God's response to it also seems to receive differ. Why was Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, treated differently from Mary? Fr J. Foley s.j. treats this question in his Advent homily. He says that Zechariah's response was one of disbelief. "You must be joking! Give me some proof!" Zechariah did not believe so he did not hear God speaking to him and had no words with which to reply. Being "struck" dumb by the angel only reinforced what was already the case.

Mary's response is quite different. Like Zechariah, she was afraid and the request troubled her greatly. "Why me?" She thought. But she did not doubt the messenger or that the message came from God, so she had the words with which to reply when told the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and the power of the Most High

would fill her being. She trusted and believed in the unbelievable.

The daily News constantly reminds us of the injustices, wars, pointless killings taking place today; we are told repeatedly that society is becoming more and more 'god-less'; natural disasters continue to devastate populations already suffering. The recent economic crisis has just reinforced the impression that the world is falling apart and raises the question of whether God has forsaken his people. More than ever we want the Christmas message to be true - a

message of peace and healing, where swords (guns and bombs) are beaten into ploughshares or instruments of good; where enemies acknowledge their sins and seek forgiveness in order to build a better world together. But the question echoes ever more loudly "How can this be?" The Advent readings time and again speak of a



God whose love urges him to reach out and save, to heal and renew, to uplift and encourage, to nurture and, above all, to be-with-us. God is saddened by the plight of his people. Mary believed this and in the face of the impossible said yes, as did Zechariah eventually; and our future was changed. Is the angel's response too simple to believe? *"The Holy Spirit will overshadow YOU, the power of the Most high will come upon YOU!"* Believe the advent readings and, like Mary, say YES or, like Zechariah, wait a while then say YES!

Christ will come again. The smile of the baby in Bethlehem will melt hearts, restore hope and belief, and banish fear and hatred.

Christ the Hope of the Future, the Light of the World, will be born anew to inspire and motivate, to uplift and dignify. *How can this be?* The answer lies not with great leaders but with you and me. Gabriel came not to the leaders but to Mary and Zechariah who agreed to participate in God's plan..... will YOU?

Elsewhere Assumption flourishes:



The Philippines:

The mission in the Philippines has new faces and a new community, that of the Emmanuel d'Alzon novitiate in **Antipolo**.

The new community in Antipolo includes Fr Richard Brunelle (Novice Master & superior), Brother Ricky Montañez (treasurer), and 2 novices. The novitiate began on 14th August.

In Manila there are two communities: Adveniat House and Pavel House. **Adveniat House** includes the professed religious and the postulants, and offers hospitality to two Chinese priests and to Thomas Lop Vip, a lay volunteer.

Pavel House accommodates four candidates, accompanied by Father Jean-Marie Chuvi and Brother Ed Molina. Most of the residents are students.

A Holy Year in Vietnam - 2010

The Bishops' Conference in Vietnam had decided to make 2010 a holy Year, consecrated to the commemoration of three and a half centuries of the Church there and to fixing its orientations for the future. The year will include a number of events, the most important of which will be a Special Assembly of "The People of God of Vietnam."

In 2010, the Church in Vietnam celebrates the 350th anniversary of the creation of two apostolic vicariates: Tonkin (Đàng Ngoài) and Cochinchine (Đàng Trong). During the year, the Catholics of Vietnam will also celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Hierarchy in their coun-

The Assumption in TOGO Sokodé

Since 14th February 2008, the community is complete. Fr Roger Randriarinala returned after two months in Madagascar where he was ordained on 22nd December 2007. Fr Jean-Paul Sagadou represented the community there. On his return, everyone wanted the blessing of the new priest. On 25th February he celebrated his first solemn mass in our parish of Our Lady of the Assumption where he was joined by Bishop Djoliba of Sokodé. Some guests (priests, religious & Orantes of the

try, by the decree "*Venerabilium Nostrorum*" on 24th November 1960, which set up three ecclesiastical provinces: Hanoi, Huê and Saigon.

The Orphanage in Vietnam is going well there are 15 young people between the ages of 6 and 15. Recent donations from England to the orphanage have topped £3,000. Our Assumptionists in Vietnam, where Peter Khue, who was ordained in Bethnal Green in 2006, is Superior, are truly grateful for all your support and assure all their benefactors of their daily prayers.

In 2009 they will open a Novitiate not far from Saigon.

The number of Vietnamese Assumptionists continues to increase every year.

Assumption) were invited to a meal with the community afterwards .

At the beginning of the year, two young people joined the community for an experience of Assumptionist Religious life. Marcel (28) - Togolese - has started philosophy; Auguste, (32) - Beninese - had been a teacher in Dakar for several years. The community numbers 7 with 6 different nationalities. Five Religious: 2 Congolese, 1 Burkinabe, 1 Madagascan, and 1 French; the Togolese and the Beninese. This small cluster of cultures and generations seeks to fulfil the project of the Assumption in West Africa...

Feast of the Assumption and Lourdes

For the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions at Lourdes the Assumptionists led a tremendous number of Pilgrims for the Feast of the Assumption (15th August) including a group of Pilgrims from England led by the Assumptionists and the Religious of the Assumption. Despite the rain it was a great celebration of prayer and thanksgiving and of the family spirit of the Assumption. Pilgrims of all ages, led by Assumptionist men and women, came from all over the world. Duy, our Assumptionist brother in Bethnal Green even took a group of young people who camped there... in the rain....!!

Our Superior General joined the celebrations and on returning to Rome wrote a letter to the young Assumptionists a few extracts

Dear brothers,

..... My focus is not why a man decides to commit himself definitively to religious life, but how he should live once he has made such a commitment.

I think we should live like men on a journey.

This thought has been prompted by many things, not the least of which is some music.... a whole album *"The World As Best as I Remember It"* composed by a Catholic rock musician, Rich Mullins. (see iTunes)

Augustine said it in just a few words, a long time ago: *"Our hearts are restless, until they rest in you, My God ..."*

..... being on the move... suggests adventure, discovery, surprise, the thought of "getting away". And for our life of faith, the image fits: we're far

from having arrived; we've got few if any definitive answers to anything. In fact, we shy away from people who are dogmatic or too sure of themselves. It's easy, even natural, to relate to this idea of being on the move.

But, there is a less attractive side of being on a journey. On a hundred-mile hike ... I remember how I felt after walking for three days and over fifty miles. In the middle of the wilderness, with painful blisters and fifty miles away from a cold beer and "civilization" in any direction...the idea of being restless and on a journey had lost its charm! I understood why the Israelites longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt. I could have used a few flesh-pots at that point on my journey!!

.... on a journey like that, we have our moments of weakness and doubts. Our emotions have a way of playing on us, and our confidence can weaken. Mullins ... *"The river is deep..., the river is wide..., and I may lose every dream I dreamt that I could carry with me"*.

Our documents speak about the disillusionment that can set in when we discover that our initial enchantment and our early ideals fade in the face of a reality that we wish were otherwise. *"I've lost my enthusiasm for the mission..." "I came with so many ideals about the fraternal life... And I really wanted to make a difference in the world... but..."* At some point, we hit a wall ...Prayer seems like too much of an escape. In any case, I have a hard time doing it, and I don't much sense its value.

It's like being on a road-trip: we blow out a tire, run into traffic, lose patience with our travelling companion, get lost. We might even have a serious accident. Yes, *"the river is deep..., the river is wide."* But there's a strange thing I've noticed in the midst of those painful moments as if the difficulties we experience on the way aren't only negative or destructive; we're not meant to hold our breath until they go away. On the contrary, without them, we might never discover the particular beauty of the journey... like the surprising, unexpected vision we can have, on a rainy day, of a blue sky and a ray of sunlight and we see the clouds in a form we've never seen before... or the sober but deep joy we can have in a long-standing relationship that has been tried by sin and limitation... Our journey in this world could appear tragic to some: *"Ain't it awful?" ... "No, I think it's just fine."* (Mullins)

.... someone who had suffered loneliness and utter emptiness told me: *"There are moments when I am pierced through by an inexplicable joy, as if in having nothing, I have the world."* Considering the way a Christian might spend his life on earth, Saint Augustine put it this way to his community one Easter Sunday morning: *"Sing alleluia... and keep on walking!"*

..... I think this has something to do with the fact that Jesus is not only at the end of our journey: he is also **the way, the journey itself**. Not only is he present with us on the journey he is the road we are travelling. Our experience on the journey is his experience.

Will we meet him at the end of the journey if we haven't met him along the way?

There's no denying the difficulties involved But it is possible to travel the road with a confidence that comes from the fact that it's not a road we travel alone, and we know where it leads. We're not lost in a labyrinth that leads only to dead-ends, even if we don't see what's beyond the next turn. We may be in a labyrinth but we know what (and who) is waiting for us at the end of the journey. We can put up with a road-trip on unfamiliar highways and face adventures just a bit frightening if someone else is at the wheel, but... we are in the driver's seat. It's up to us. It's a demanding journey that forces us to take charge ourselves.

.... If we climb on board, the least God could do is help out a bit, but by all appearances God places the responsibility squarely on our shoulders. Don't be surprised if you feel like you're carrying the load alone.... you are a pilgrim and there's no way round it. It may be hard. We may be tempted to jump off, but it's really not that bad if only we keep on moving. In fact, it can be a real charm....

.... to keep on going, one thing is necessary: keep your eyes focused on what's important, on the deepest longing of your heart... not on the most recent thought or feeling.

"I will seek you in the morning, and I will learn to walk in Your ways, And step by step You'll lead me, And I will follow You all of my days."

Augustine would have us understand that whatever its pain or whatever its charm, being on a journey is part and parcel of what it means to be human and Christian in this world. "But even here", he says in one of his homilies (#256), "among the dangers, among

the trials and temptations of this life, let alleluia be sung! God is faithful... Sing, but keep on walking... Don't stray off the road, don't go back, don't stay where you are... Sing and keep on walking."

Richard Lamoureux a.a., while on pilgrimage in Lourdes (Feast of the Assumption 2008)

Fr Brendan O'Malley a.a. RIP

Fr Brendan O'Malley a.a. died suddenly on 7th September, a Sunday, the day before Our Lady's birthday which he wanted to spend with her in heaven. He had suffered a sudden heart attack during the night.

Diabetes was beginning to take more and more control of Brendan's life but he was always cheerful and always had time for others. The day before he died, he had presided the community mass in the parish Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, prayed with us morning and evening and greeted the people after the evening mass.

Brendan died as he had lived, serving God's people and working for the Kingdom of God. Heaven's gain is our loss, and he will be greatly missed not just by his community but by the many people who knew him and to whom he brought healing and hope, laughter and joy.

The masses celebrated the evening before and on the day of the funeral were packed to overflowing. A fitting tribute to a man loved by so many and who loved so much.



Although the Priory at Bethnal Green seems empty without him, one can hear echoes of his laughter in the corridors and the faint sounds of his rich singing voice in the quiet of the chapel... and we are reassured. Christmas is a great reminder of him to the community. It is a festival of light in honour of the Light of the World born anew among us. Brendan in the example of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, was a light to us and to many.

May his light, like the star from the East, lead you to the manger and the true light of the world.....

Golden Jubilee of priesthood of Fr Robert Henshaw a.a.

On 20th December in Our Lady Immaculate & St Andrew, Hitchin, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Fr Robert Henshaw's priesthood. Fr Robert had great plans for this celebration, being ordained on 21st December 1958. This was a quieter celebration, the joy and gratitude for the service of one so loved and whose word inspired so many, was marred by his absence.

Some short extracts from the Homily:

I called today a "Golden Jubilee, a Golden Memory a Golden Advent" and I am sure that given the present economic crisis some of you would prefer just to have the first part of each doublet!! We gather here to remember and to celebrate golden events. We hear again today of that Golden event that was instrumental in transforming our destiny from one in which we were lost and truly poverty stricken into a new golden destiny in which we continue to live. The event I refer to is Mary saying yes to God and yes **to** us and **for** us. It is, therefore, not only appropriate but just and right that we choose today to give thanks for 50 Golden years of Father Robert's priesthood, for his saying yes to God and a yes to us; a response that he lived so generously in the example of Mary.

... Robert's support was the book of scriptures and the church that he built was made of people ... If Robert was visited by an Angel, he never let on; although I believe he was visited by many angels who brought him messages from God even if his angels were unaware of what they were doing.....

... Mary gave birth to the word of life, the Word of God, the Emmanuel who came among us that we might share his life. Joseph of Arimathea, who, if the legend is true, first brought that word of Life to these ancient shores and saw it blossom like the white flowers from his thorn stick. Robert took that word and planted it in our hearts where it has taken root and blossoms as beautiful as that stick in Glastonbury those many years ago; and which we wait to blossom anew.

... Robert lived and preached the Word so we could join him in giving praise and glory to God and with Mary say "**My Soul glorifies the Lord...**" And if we ask, like Mary, how can we bring Jesus Christ into our world today? The answer we will receive will be like that given to David and Mary. *The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you!* And with the Holy Spirit all things are possible! Mary, Joseph and Fr Robert will all testify to that....

So today we celebrate ancient stories and recent memories that remind us that we live in a Golden age, the age of Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ comes to renew his presence in our lives so that the Word of life sown within us flowers and blossoms all the more brightly ... reflecting the glory of God.

Advent is always a Golden time, but it helps us realize this more deeply when we celebrate the golden years of one of the master messengers of God, Fr Robert Henshaw, the bearer of the Good News, that Golden word that enriches our lives.

Other News . . .

Hitchin

In October Fr Michael Lambert had major surgery on his foot but this did not prevent him from celebrating mass on one leg. The healing is progressing well and he will be fit for the marathon in the 2012 Olympics!!

Br Damien Clemas joined the community to give them support, for which they are truly grateful.

Advent Preparation: Fr Tom O'Brien led an afternoon of quiet Advent reflection and prayer in Hitchin on the day the parish celebrated the Golden jubilee of Fr Robert Henshaw's priesthood, 20th December.

Bethnal Green

Fr Andrew has come through two hernia operations and looking younger than ever.

This year the parish is preparing 11 adults for reception into the Church and baptism. The parish is making preparations to celebrate its centenary in 2011.

The Lay Assumption: Apologies.

The programme of events was interrupted owing to the deaths of Fr Robert and Fr Brendan. A new programme will surface in the new year.

For more news and longer articles please visit our web site listed below.

Please pray for our Brothers in the Congo, the fastest growing Province in the Congregation. Thousands are suffering from the unjust war taking place there!

**Please pray for Fr Simon Denton OFM, who died recently.
He is the younger brother of Fr Edwin Denton a.a.**

DO YOU KNOW about THESE WEB SITES?

Main web site of the Assumptionists. <http://www.assumptio.org/e>

Information about us in the Philippines <http://www.assumptionists.ph/>

<http://www.assomption.org/MissionOrient/IndexMO.php>
offers information about Assumptionist work in Eastern Europe. This also has a section in English.

And of course our own web site: <http://www.assumptionist.org.uk/>

**Happy Christmas**
to all our readers

We thank all our benefactors and friends for their continued support and help. You are remembered in our community prayers. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to "Our lady of the Assumption Vocations Fund".

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