

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Most of the great operas have been provided with overtures which are played by the orchestra before the curtain is raised on the stage. Some of the overtures composed by Rossini, Verdi or Wagner enjoy a greater popularity than the operas themselves. The aim is to help the audience settle in their seats, but also the multiple musical themes which are woven into the overture assists them in anticipating the joys which await them. The prophetic readings and the excerpts from the gospels of Matthew and Luke which the Church proposes to us in the seven days leading up to December 24 form a complex and colourful overture to the great Nativity story. The gospel of this Sunday is Luke's account of the Annunciation. I have frequently been asked how Luke was able to describe in such detail and give a verbatim account of the conversation which took place between the angel Gabriel and Mary in what was her private room at home in Nazareth. Did Luke manage to catch up with Mary as an old woman who had vivid recall of the event which defined her life and ultimately her celestial and ecclesial destiny [she is after all *Theotokos*/Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Queen of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council proudly proclaimed].

The account provided by Luke as well as that provided by Matthew of the "annunciation" to Joseph of the same divine intervention in the affairs of men which was to be the conception in the womb of Mary of his only Son, born of woman, bring us to the very heart of that central mystery of faith we celebrate at Christmas, i.e. the Incarnation. We might well ask how these episodes, recounted in the infancy narratives of both Matthew and Luke, can help us prepare for Christmas; does reading the story make it all more meaningful for us. This year there will be no Nativity plays in our primary schools, there will be no carol concerts in our secondary schools or parish churches, even the carols at King's are without a congregation. And all that is very sad. But, perhaps, circumstances might invite us to relive in the inner sanctum of our own hearts the story that the plays and the carols relate and make so concrete in "normal" years. Mary, after all, the evangelist Luke tells us "*kept these things in her own heart*" and maybe for precisely that reason, having meditated them all her life long - even as she stood at Calvary - the photographic memory of these great moments of her Son's "*wondrous childhood*" enabled her, with tender and loving recall - and perhaps too with theological insight into the events - to tell Luke the story which has moved every Christian generation down to our own day.

All of this is the personal interpretation of one man, but I feel sure that if each of you thinks of and relives this great story you too will come up with elements in it that touch you and that illumine your own life's path. We are living in dark times, of that there is not doubt. But it was into a world of darkness, in the depths of the winter night, coinciding with the winter solstice, that the "Light of the world" was born.

Father Patrick