

COUNTDOWN TO BISHOP LOPES' VISIT AND THE CONSECRATION OF OUR NEW ALTAR: 6 WEEKS!

Each week we will look into the details of one of the aspects of our sanctuary renovation.

THIS WEEK:

THE TRIPTYCH CENTER PANEL

Above our new altar in the sanctuary will be a triptych reredos. A reredos is a large altarpiece placed behind the altar in a church. Our reredos incorporates a triptych (a **three panel artwork**) with the **painted wooden carvings called "reliefs"** in each section portraying elements of salvation history. The Gospel (left) and Epistle (right) panels depict the Annunciation and the Harrowing of Hell, respectively. These elements will be described in more detail in a future bulletin insert. This week we will look at the center panel, which depicts the Crucifixion. **The carving in the center panel of the triptych closely resembles the center panel of the triptych behind the altar in the Slipper Chapel in Walsingham (UK),** at the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady. More information about the Slipper Chapel can be found on the reverse of this sheet.

While taking the Walsingham carving as an inspiration, our carving is unique in that it adds the **the sun above Our Lady (to the left of the crucifix) and the moon above St. John the Evangelist (to the right of the crucifix)**. The ***sun represents Christ***, the uncreated Light: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (Jn 1: 4-5) The ***moon represents Our Lady***; *as the moon reflects the light of the sun, she reflects the light of her Son.* "God, who made the sun, also made the moon. The moon does not take away from the brilliance of the sun. All its light is reflected from the sun. The Blessed Mother reflects her Divine Son; without Him, she is nothing. With Him, she is the Mother of men." (*The World's First Love*, Blessed Fulton Sheen)

The carving and painting seek to be faithful to our **English Gothic** patrimony. In the last few hundred years, Western art, including religious art found in many Catholic Churches, has evolved to emphasize a "realistic" approach; that is, art should look as "exactly real" as possible. Early Christian art represents the other end of this spectrum - **it was not meant to look realistic but rather to convey a theological message**. Early Christian iconography also had this sense of **heavenly realities rather than attempting to depict an exact representation of earthly realities**. Finally, the colors used in our triptych come from the **rich medieval color palate**, which like the Slipper Chapel triptych will have a generous amount of 24k gold paint.



Slipper Chapel Triptych Left, Artist Rendering of our Triptych Right

TRIPTYCH CARVING AND PAINTING BY ALBL OBERAMMERGAU

Our triptych relief figures were carved and painted in Germany by ALBL Oberammergau, Germany. The triptych frame itself is being made by Little Way Woodworking in Katy, Texas. You can read about both woodworkers in previous bulletins.

The Slipper Chapel at Walsingham

(from “Visiting the Slipper Chapel” www.walsingham.org.uk)

Located on the grounds of what is now the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady at Walsingham, the mid-fourteenth century “Slipper Chapel” owes its survival, given the Protestant Reformation, to the fact that it was purchased intact when the Priory and Friary were destroyed. It became very dilapidated over the years, and was used at various times as a poorhouse, a forge, a cow barn, even two cottages. In spite of this, it still attracted the attention of the great Victorian architect, Pugin, who made a fine sketch of it, and a detailed description of its architectural features. Its survival proved providential, because since 1934 it has been the heart of the National Shrine of Our Lady for Catholics in England. (Pictures of the exterior and interior of the Slipper Chapel at Walsingham at the bottom of the page.)

The Slipper Chapel was the last wayside chapel before travelling pilgrims walked to the original Shrine in the village of Walsingham. It is dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, whose Shrine is on Mount Sinai, the holy ground where Moses took off his shoes before the Burning Bush. Interestingly, the Chapel of the Burning Bush in the apse of the Monastery Church of the Transfiguration on Mount Sinai is dedicated to the Annunciation, and the sun is said to shine across it when it rises on 25th March, the Feast of the Annunciation. The Crusaders brought the devotion to St. Catherine back with them to Europe, and she became the patron saint of pilgrims. Crusader Knights of St. Catherine protected pilgrims on the road to the Holy House of Mary in Nazareth. People have even been known to notice that the Slipper Chapel is oriented to the southeast so that on St. Catherine’s Feast Day, 25th November, the sun rises directly behind the altar.

Although the sorrows of Mary dominated late medieval Marian spirituality on account of plagues and child mortality, and the accompanying grief and sorrow that came with these realities, the people of England also had a particular devotion to her joys, the first of which was her Annunciation. Mary’s joy was the joy of her vocation, the joy of being called to be the mother of the Lord, the joy that through her God became man and lived among us, our Saviour, in His Incarnation. Even today, pilgrims often comment on the joy they experience in Walsingham, and this is certainly at the heart of Walsingham’s spirituality, where Our Lady asks people to come and have ‘in memorial the great joys’ of her Annunciation.

Our Lady’s obedience and her fidelity make her a role model for all of us which is why we will have a carving of the Annunciation to the left of the Crucifixion which will be featured in next week’s bulletin.

