

Fr Hoyal Writes

THE VISIT

Do keep Pope Benedict's visit this month in your prayers. It is a momentous event, the first ever state visit of a pope to Britain.

Benedict XVI is in no position to command the sheer excitement and popularity that accompanied John Paul II's visit in 1982 (not a state visit, of course). Then we were still amazed that after centuries of Italian pontiffs there was now a Polish pope, and one of remarkable public charisma, a pope who travelled, a pope who was a doughty bulwark against communism and the Soviet empire.

But we are thoroughly used to papal travels now, and the present Holy Father's gifts, great as they unquestionably are, are very different from his predecessor's, and less suited to the rigours of media scrutiny.

In recent years, moreover, the Roman Catholic Church has of course suffered a massive loss of moral credibility in the wake of widespread revelations of sexual abuse of children by clerics.

Once staunchly Catholic countries have seen Mass attendances dive, partly as a result of such scandals, partly too because the Vatican has stuck to its guns in relation to artificial contraception, abortion, gay relationships, women's ordination and clergy marriage. These are all areas where the Church's views are sharply at odds with prevailing Western attitudes.

So while I very much hope that Benedict will be received with courtesy and warmth, as befits the chief bishop of Christendom, I shan't be surprised if there aren't quite a few shows of protest and if some of them turn rather ugly. He rides a very controversial horse.

Nonetheless, I am impressed at his willingness to risk a difficult reception in Britain for the sake of encouraging the large Roman Catholic section of our population. Clearly, too, he is eager to remain on good terms with Anglicans despite the fact those heady hopes in the 1980s for growing unity have since been dashed by Anglican developments unwelcome in Rome.

And what a leap forward, that the head of the Roman Catholic Church can at last make a state visit to our country despite anti-Catholic aspects of our monarchy and the constitution. In this context I understand that it remains a legal offence to assert (against Article XXXVII of The Thirty-Nine Articles) that the Bishop of Rome has jurisdiction in this realm of England.

Of course, the Pope's visit comes at an interesting time, following General Synod's ungenerous refusal to support any scheme which would have granted traditional Anglicans a continuing and uncompromised succession of orthodox male bishops within the Church of England. (No, a code of practice will not do, for it cannot deliver such a succession.)

No doubt, the visit will be of particular interest to Church of England members who are attracted by Benedict's imaginative offer of an Anglican-style Ordinariate for Anglicans who feel drawn to convert - as over a period of time many undoubtedly will.

I shall not comment on this, but I am happy to reveal that, for me, perhaps the most significant aspect of the Pope's visit will be his beatification on 19 September of John Henry Newman, one time Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, and the most celebrated 19th English convert to Roman Catholicism from the Church of England.

Newman continues to challenge and to fascinate. He made important theological contributions in a number of areas, and his writings

continue to be studied minutely. As an Anglican who popped, he invites admiration and disapproval in almost equal measure, depending on whom you approach. At a popular level, he gave us the text of *The Dream of Gerontius* and the hymns *Lead, kindly light* and *Firmly I believe and truly*.

All Saints Clifton was founded on the premise that men like Keble and Pusey who didn't go over to Rome were right about the essential catholicity of the Church of England, and that Newman was wrong. What would they think now, I wonder? What would they make of the Pope's visit? Of his offer of an Ordinariate to converting Anglicans? And of his beatification of their friend?

The figure of Newman still towers over the ecclesiastical history of our nation; for me he stands as a great question mark.

I was rather brought up to believe that Newman was interesting (which he remains) but wrong about the Church of England. For better or worse, this has become a harder position for traditional Anglicans to hold.

Of course this is not an area that will interest the media or the general public. Some will be looking for a spiritual father figure in Pope Benedict, many others a villain or a scapegoat.

But I hope that many, whether or not they share his convictions, will see in Pope Benedict a good man deserving of respect, a man with tremendous responsibilities seeking to be a faithful Christian leader and pastor in impossibly difficult world circumstances. But it is Newman I shall be thinking about, much as I admire Benedict's integrity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Hoyal', is centered at the top of the page.

Sermon preached by Fr Hoyal at All Saints on the Feast of the Assumption 15.8.10

Revelation 11.19- 12.6,10

God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'

To-day, of course, we specially honour the mother of Jesus, knowing that in the fullness of her being God has taken her into his heavenly glory.

But what you make of that powerful but strange first reading we've had this morning from that powerful but strange book we call the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse? In the wrong hands, the hands of dotty or exotic sects, it's a dangerous book, especially if, like some of them, you try to interpret every detail in a narrow, wooden, literal way.

But in the right hands, the hands of the Church Catholic, it is a most wonderful piece of writing - full of wonderful ideas and images and language to inspire and enrich our thinking about God and worship and heaven, about the struggle between good and evil and the ultimate victory of Christ and the great glory to come. Let me just point you to two evocative images in the reading to-day.

First, there is the vision of God's temple in heaven being opened to reveal the Ark of the Covenant within. Now the historical Ark had gone missing six centuries before, when Jerusalem was invaded and the temple destroyed. It was an ornate wooden chest and it contained the written Word of the Lord in the form of the two engraved tablets of stone bearing the Ten Commandments. The Jews paid great reverence to the Ark, because it housed and protected and honoured the Word of God to his people. It was symbolic of God's special relationship with his chosen people, God's covenant with the children of Israel.

But from early times, Bible imagery has prompted Christians to think of Mary as herself being a wonderful new Christian Ark of the Covenant, bearing within herself not lifeless tablets of stone but God's living Word to mankind, the Christ Child in her womb. From the moment of his conception and throughout his childhood, it is above all Mary who houses and protects and honours the Saviour. Mary's Son, of course, is born to shed his blood, not just for Jews, but for all mankind. His will be the blood of the *new* covenant, and Mary - carrying within herself the Word of God enfleshed from her flesh - Mary is accordingly the Ark of God's new and universal covenant with us through Jesus. So, in our reading from Revelation to-day, that fleeting glimpse of heaven opened to reveal the Ark of the Covenant inevitably makes more sense. It points us suggestively to Mary now in the glory of heaven with her divine Son.

Second, in our reading to-day there is that compelling vision of the great portent in heaven: the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She is the one who gives birth to the male child who will rule all nations.

The child is of course Christ. As for the woman, that is more complicated.

In part that woman represents Israel's history coming to its climax in the birth of the Messiah. For if you remember, in Joseph's dream about his family in the Book of Genesis, Joseph's father Jacob, his mother and the twelve sons are vividly portrayed as the sun and moon and twelve stars. But Jacob is later given the name Israel; so in our first reading, sun, moon and the twelve stars symbolically depict the people of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, the Jewish people. In turn, the woman resplendent with sun and moon, and crowned with stars, represents not the Jewish people as such, but Jacob's spiritual descendants, the Christian Church.

Note that the male child of the vision is born amid much travail, and a dragon threatens to devour the infant. The dragon, of course, represents the devil and the powers of evil out to destroy the child and prevent him from ruling. But just in time the child is snatched up to God's throne, and the woman escapes to a place prepared by God. The child under attack is, of course, Christ who has to face suffering and death before being raised to glory.

The background to the Book of Revelation is a time of persecution. Given this, we understand that the woman's agonies are the sufferings of God's people in their faithfulness to the Lord. But there is that place of safety and peace for

them till, in the fullness of time, God's people will be with their Lord in heaven.

All that is a traditional and respected interpretation of this passage about the woman and her child. But if the woman represents God's Church, suffering as she brings Christ to the world, and waiting for the fulfilment of heaven, she also represents Mary, Mary the pure, holy virgin who is the finest flower of Israel's history, Mary entrusted to be the one who physically brings Christ to birth, Mary who again and again waits on God and ponders, Mary who proclaims her radical Magnificat, Mary whose inmost being is so sharply pierced by that sword of suffering that old Simeon predicted, Mary deeply wounded not only by the sufferings of her Son but, as the spiritual mother of all who are his brothers and sisters, at the sufferings of the whole Christian family throughout history.

Alongside this we remember that in herself Mary is a major symbol of the Church. For in her own life and person she sums up what the Church is meant to be: humble, pondering, faithful, prayerful, Spirit-filled, and passionate for the agenda of her Magnificat, as she carries the life of Jesus within her and presents that life to the world.

So as we ponder our reading, now we see that resplendent woman as the Church of Jesus, now we see her as Mary. Now we see the Church's travail and the suffering of the faithful, now we see Mary's own great sorrows. Now we take refuge with God's people in the waiting wilderness of this world's travails, now we glimpse Mary's glory as the Ark of the Covenant in heaven. We do so knowing that, as she is a symbol of the Church, so her place in heaven is our destiny too.

Barton Camp rocks

There were 7 children and 7 adults from All Saints and All Hallows

I loved Barton camp this year and last year - it's a great place to have fun! I enjoyed Barton camp because I liked swimming, craft, horse riding and playing.

Barton camp is set in Somerset (in the middle of nowhere). We had our supper then we went swimming and then we went out for a walk on the Friday evening and we saw some cows and horses. When we got home\Barton camp we went to bed. I never said we went to sleep straight away.

On Saturday morning we went horse riding and my horse was called Barley. The horse riding was fun because the horses were really gentle and they could gallop if you wanted them to. In the afternoon we made bright multicoloured kites - ours flew. On Saturday evening we had lots of visitors they came to join us for mass which Father Richard came to say. Then we all went outside and ate our supper. We had a treasure hunt too. Then we went swimming then to bed

On Sunday morning we went for a very long walk. In the afternoon we had a mass with Fr André and the people from Westbury-on-Trym and started to pack then. To finish the great holiday we went swimming.

And that's why you should go next year
Thea Griffiths

Barton Camp

Barton Camp is really fun because you get to hang out with new people and do new things. You can also go horse riding, swimming, and hiking. There is a sports hall and a football pitch which is open all day. You can choose who you share a room with, and stay up late.

Everyone takes part in different activities including a treasure hunt. Overall I think Barton Camp is a really nice place to be.

Christabel Robinson

Assumptiontide 2010

The glorious Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, falling as it does in the middle of the summer holiday, is often not given its due recognition by Anglican Catholics. This year however, the Assumption (15th August) fell on a Sunday so at All Saints Clifton it was celebrated as the Solemn Mass of the day, presided over by Fr. Richard who also preached a rousing sermon (in a C of E sort of way!).

In the evening I was fortunate enough to cross the water for Vespers of Our Lady, torchlit procession of Our Lady of Walsingham and fireworks at St. Mary's Butetown, Cardiff (which used to be called St. Mary the Docks' but is now in Cardiff Bay rather than Tiger Bay. About 250 faithful gathered for a celebration of a more continental style with Welsh fervour! It was thrilling to process around the streets of Cardiff singing the Walsingham Hymn.

Then to complete the week there was, on Saturday 21st August, the Bristol Catholic Societies Assumptiontide Festival at Bristol Cathedral. This was a splendid celebration of The Faith presided over by the Right Rev'd David Thomas, formerly Provincial Assistant Bishop for Wales.

Around 150 gathered around Bp David in the Cathedral with 13 priests concelebrating. The new Dean of Bristol welcomed us in the Lady Chapel where we sang the *Regina Coeli* and then processed, with the statue of Our Lady of Glastonbury, into the nave singing 'Ye who own the faith of Jesus' - even enough to rouse an Englishman!

Music was provided by the Mixolodian directed by Timothy Hill who also shared the organ with our own Garfield Griffiths. I was quite amused by the fact that Churches Together in Bristol were holding an outreach celebration of a louder and different kind on College Green at the same time. It was possible to experience two completely different kinds of worship at the same time.

Bishop David preached a very moving sermon on Our Lady and St John at the Cross and Mary's ministry to Christians today. The Bishop concluded with a quote from Rhisiart ap Rhys, an early 16th century pilgrim to the shrine of Our Lady of Penrhys, who on looking at the image of Our Lord in His Mother's arms, said that Mary was "Nursing Jesus for a kiss". Bp David said that the image of Our Lady of Glastonbury reminded him of a statue at Penrhys. As Mary "Nursed Jesus for a kiss" so does she now nurse US, His brothers and sisters, for a kiss. This was a very powerful and encouraging image with which to leave us.

The Bristol festival concluded in the afternoon with a procession of members of the Guild of the Servants of the Sanctuary to the Lord Mayor's chapel for Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Two dates for your diaries in 2011:

Saturday 14th May, Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Penrhys at which the preacher will be Bp Lindsay Urwin, Administrator of the Shrine at Walsingham.

Saturday 20th August, the Bristol Festival at the Cathedral.

John Vile

DONALD AND JEAN MOVE ON

His last parish mass having ended, he passed the church keys, electoral roll and map to the churchwardens, laid the Eucharistic vestments on the altar, donned his ordination stole and joined his wife Jean in the nave, before pronouncing the blessing. Thus ended 25 years of faithful ministry of the Rev'd Canon Donald Macdonald at St Osmund's, Derby.

Fr Donald came to All Saints as a curate in the early 1970s and received his training under the then vicar, Fr John Norton. More thorough training in priestly and parish ministry could not be had. Leaving Clifton, he moved to Derby. Here all Donald's subsequent ministry was to be worked, first as chaplain of Derby Lonsdale College and then at St Osmunds, returning only to marry Jean (who was then our parish administrator) during a memorable Sunday mass at All Saints. Notwithstanding other job offers, Donald admits that one of the things that kept him at St Osmund's was the opportunity a comparatively small parish provides to do other non-parochial jobs. Chaplaincy work at the local FE college, industrial mission at the post office and theatres and rural dean of Derby South. He started producing morning thoughts for BBC Radio Derby, eventually taking over as presenter of the Sunday breakfast programme. Other diocesan appointments followed, including Communications Office, Bishop's Officer for Environmental Affairs and membership of the Worship Advisory Group and the Diocesan Communications Committee. All these different 'hats' gave an excellent balance between parish work and other ministries. "I like to think this

kept my parish work fresh and kept me awake theologically” says Donald.

Throughout all this and in addition to her many other interests, Jean worked tirelessly supporting Donald and in various parish roles, using her administrative skills in parish organisation and extracting important amounts of grant money for things like renewing the church roof and funding for local community projects.

Donald and Jean’s last Sunday at St Osmund’s was on the Solemnity of the Transfiguration, 8th August and we were delighted to be able to be there as friends and representatives of All Saints. We understand that the removal vans were due the following morning for a move to Mickleover, to the south of Derby.

Very best wishes for your retirement, Jean and Donald. Without doubt the Church in Derby will miss you – but who knows where the future will lead?

Roger & Janice Hopkins



Feast of **MICHAELMAS**

St Michael & All Angels

WEDNESDAY
29TH SEPTEMBER

9.30 am MASS

10.30 Mass at All Hallows Easton

7.30 pm FESTIVAL MASS

Guest Preacher

The Revd Canon David Sansum

Refreshments afterwards

Come and join us celebrate the Holy Angels

Opera picnic was greatly appreciated

The Opera Picnic: All Saints, Clifton

This occasion, the brainchild of Andrew Morgan, was being presented for the second year running.

The event relies on favourable weather and the organisers were thankful that the threatening rain did not materialise before everyone retired to the church, where a packed audience was entertained by four soloists from the the Welsh National Opera. A selection from *Tosca* started with *Recondita Armonia*, sung by Ian Yemm (tenor) with great feeling.

He was joined by Naomi Harvey (soprano) for a duet before the latter gave a powerful rendition of the famous aria *Vissi d'arte* with some brilliantly controlled singing.

After the maturity shown by Joanne Thomas (mezzo) in *Casta Diva*, selections from three Verdi operas included the quartet *Bella Figlio* from *Rigoletto*, in which the four soloists gelled successfully.

The second half was in a lighter vein. Five items from Mozart's *Così fan tutte* gave each of the singers a chance to shine before Owen Webb (baritone) joined the two ladies in a hushed and poignant rendering of *Soave Sia il Vento*

The excellent accompanist Nicola Rose played an arrangement of Gershwin's *The Man I Love* before pieces from *Oklahoma* and *Carousel* led up to the final item from *The Gondoliers*.

An interesting arrangement of *Moon River* for the four voices was given as an encore

The artistes worked very hard throughout and the whole

concert was immensely appreciated by the audience. 8/10

JOHN PACKWOOD

PARISH RETREAT 2011

Our 2011 Parish Retreat will be at Abbey House, Glastonbury, on Friday 18 – Sunday 20 February 2011. Theme and Conductor to be arranged, but please make a note in your diaries. This is always a good event and gives time to renew one's spiritual energies.

For further details please see Fr Richard or Liz Badman

Do your bit and knit! September Update

We're off to a great start, 41 squares received so far and many more underway!

I know a few of you have had trouble getting your squares the right sort of size and one member of the congregation has suffered an attack of 'knitters rage' (he's had a lie down and is feeling much better!), but despite this you've not given up. Thank you.

Frequently asked questions:

How many squares does it take to make a blanket?

12 squares = 1 blanket for a newborn baby

24 squares = 1 blanket for a child age 0-3 years

35 squares = 1 blanket for a child age 4-7 years

40 squares = 1 blanket for a child age 8-15 years

How much of a tail should I leave?

1.5 meters

Where can I buy wool?

DON'T! I've been given several bags of wool, so please come and take some (I'll leave a selection by

the display in the atrium). I've also been given some needles.

Do I need to say what type of yarn my square is made from?

I only need to know if the square is made from real wool or a high wool blend rather than an acrylic yarn. Wool has fire retardant properties that acrylic yarn does not so the woollen blankets are given to children who cook on open fires and use candle light.

How many squares are we aiming to knit?

As many as we can but 200 is our initial target. There is a totaliser in the atrium tracking our progress.

If you missed last month's magazine and have no idea what all this is about please see the display in the atrium, speak to me (Charlotte Hopkins) or visit www.knit-a-square.com.

Happy knitting!

DOORS OPEN DAY

Saturday 11 September 10 am – 4 pm.

Once again we are participating in Bristol Doors Open Day. It is always a splendid opportunity to meet people and welcome visitors to our church. Do encourage friends to join us, and be around if you can to support on teh day.

CHURCH UNION PILGRIMAGE

Saturday 18 September to Downside Abbey and Tyntesfield. See porch notice and forms in atrium, or ring Mr Keith Taplin 0117 9514509.

BIRDCOMBE COURT CONCERT

Saturday 18 September at the home in Wraxall of Peter and Carol Sapsed.: "A Tudor Treat at Birdcombe Court". Music and food from the time of Henry VIII. See information in church or visit *All Saints Arts* on our website for details.

'CHARLES WESLEY: THE GIFTED BROTHER' Saturday 18 September 10.30 – 4.15 Joint Methodist Sacramental Fellowship & Affirming Catholicism day at Thornbury Methodist Church. See porch notice and magazine.

WALSINGHAM PILGRIMAGE Monday 4 – Friday 8 October. There may still be a place or two for this wonderful opportunity for rest and refreshment in England's Nazareth. Contact Garfield Griffiths – 9441035 for details.

<p>EBBSFLEET LAY CONFERENCE Important meeting open to all: 10.30 - 4 Saturday 25 September at Backwell School (Station Road, Backwell BS48 3BX). An opportunity to discuss Anglican futures. The Bishop of Ebbsfleet will be present.</p>
--

NEXT CONCERT MATINEE

4-5 pm Saturday 25 September.

This Matinee is a special CHILDREN'S CONCERT.

Free admission. Retiring collection. Tea and cake.

This justly popular series is well worth supporting. Do join us.

Sermon preached by Fr Hoyal at All Saints on the Feast of the Assumption 15.8.10

Revelation 11.19- 12.6,10

God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'

To-day, of course, we specially honour the mother of Jesus, knowing that in the fullness of her being God has taken her into his heavenly glory.

But what you make of that powerful but strange first reading we've had this morning from that powerful but strange book we call the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse? In the wrong hands, the hands of dotty or exotic sects, it's a dangerous book, especially if, like some of them, you try to interpret every detail in a narrow, wooden, literal way.

But in the right hands, the hands of the Church Catholic, it is a most wonderful piece of writing - full of wonderful ideas and images and language to inspire and enrich our thinking about God and worship and heaven, about the struggle between good and evil and the ultimate victory of Christ and the great

glory to come. Let me just point you to two evocative images in the reading to-day.

First, there is the vision of God's temple in heaven being opened to reveal the Ark of the Covenant within. Now the historical Ark had gone missing six centuries before, when Jerusalem was invaded and the temple destroyed. It was an ornate wooden chest and it contained the written Word of the Lord in the form of the two engraved tablets of stone bearing the Ten Commandments. The Jews paid great reverence to the Ark, because it housed and protected and honoured the Word of God to his people. It was symbolic of God's special relationship with his chosen people, God's covenant with the children of Israel.

But from early times, Bible imagery has prompted Christians to think of Mary as herself being a wonderful new Christian Ark of the Covenant, bearing within herself not lifeless tablets of stone but God's living Word to mankind, the Christ Child in her womb. From the moment of his conception and throughout his childhood, it is above all Mary who houses and protects and honours the Saviour. Mary's Son, of course, is born to shed his blood, not just for Jews, but for all mankind. His will be the blood of the *new* covenant, and Mary - carrying within herself the Word of God enfleshed from her flesh - Mary is accordingly the Ark of God's new and universal covenant with us through Jesus. So, in our reading from Revelation to-day, that fleeting glimpse of heaven opened to reveal the Ark of the Covenant inevitably makes more sense. It points us suggestively to Mary now in the glory of heaven with her divine Son.

Second, in our reading to-day there is that compelling vision of the great portent in heaven: the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of

twelve stars. She is the one who gives birth to the male child who will rule all nations.

The child is of course Christ. As for the woman, that is more complicated.

In part that woman represents Israel's history coming to its climax in the birth of the Messiah. For if you remember, in Joseph's dream about his family in the Book of Genesis, Joseph's father Jacob, his mother and the twelve sons are vividly portrayed as the sun and moon and twelve stars. But Jacob is later given the name Israel; so in our first reading, sun, moon and the twelve stars symbolically depict the people of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, the Jewish people. In turn, the woman resplendent with sun and moon, and crowned with stars, represents not the Jewish people as such, but Jacob's spiritual descendants, the Christian Church.

Note that the male child of the vision is born amid much travail, and a dragon threatens to devour the infant. The dragon, of course, represents the devil and the powers of evil out to destroy the child and prevent him from ruling. But just in time the child is snatched up to God's throne, and the woman escapes to a place prepared by God. The child under attack is, of course, Christ who has to face suffering and death before being raised to glory.

The background to the Book of Revelation is a time of persecution. Given this, we understand that the woman's agonies are the sufferings of God's people in their faithfulness to the Lord. But there is that place of safety and peace for them till, in the fullness of time, God's people will be with their Lord in heaven.

All that is a traditional and respected interpretation of this passage about the woman and her child. But if the woman represents God's Church, suffering as she brings Christ to the world, and waiting for the fulfilment of heaven, she also represents Mary, Mary the pure, holy virgin who is the finest flower of Israel's history, Mary entrusted to be the one who physically brings Christ to birth, Mary who again and again waits on God and ponders, Mary who proclaims her radical Magnificat, Mary whose inmost being is so sharply pierced by that sword of suffering that old Simeon predicted, Mary deeply wounded not only by the sufferings of her Son but, as the spiritual mother of all who are his brothers and sisters, at the sufferings of the whole Christian family throughout history.

Alongside this we remember that in herself Mary is a major symbol of the Church. For in her own life and person she sums up what the Church is meant to be: humble, pondering, faithful, prayerful, Spirit-filled, and passionate for the agenda of her Magnificat, as she carries the life of Jesus within her and presents that life to the world.

So as we ponder our reading, now we see that resplendent woman as the Church of Jesus, now we see her as Mary. Now we see the Church's travail and the suffering of the faithful, now we see Mary's own great sorrows. Now we take refuge with God's people in the waiting wilderness of this world's travails, now we glimpse Mary's glory as the Ark of the Covenant in heaven. We do so knowing that, as she is a symbol of the Church, so her place is heaven is our destiny too.

