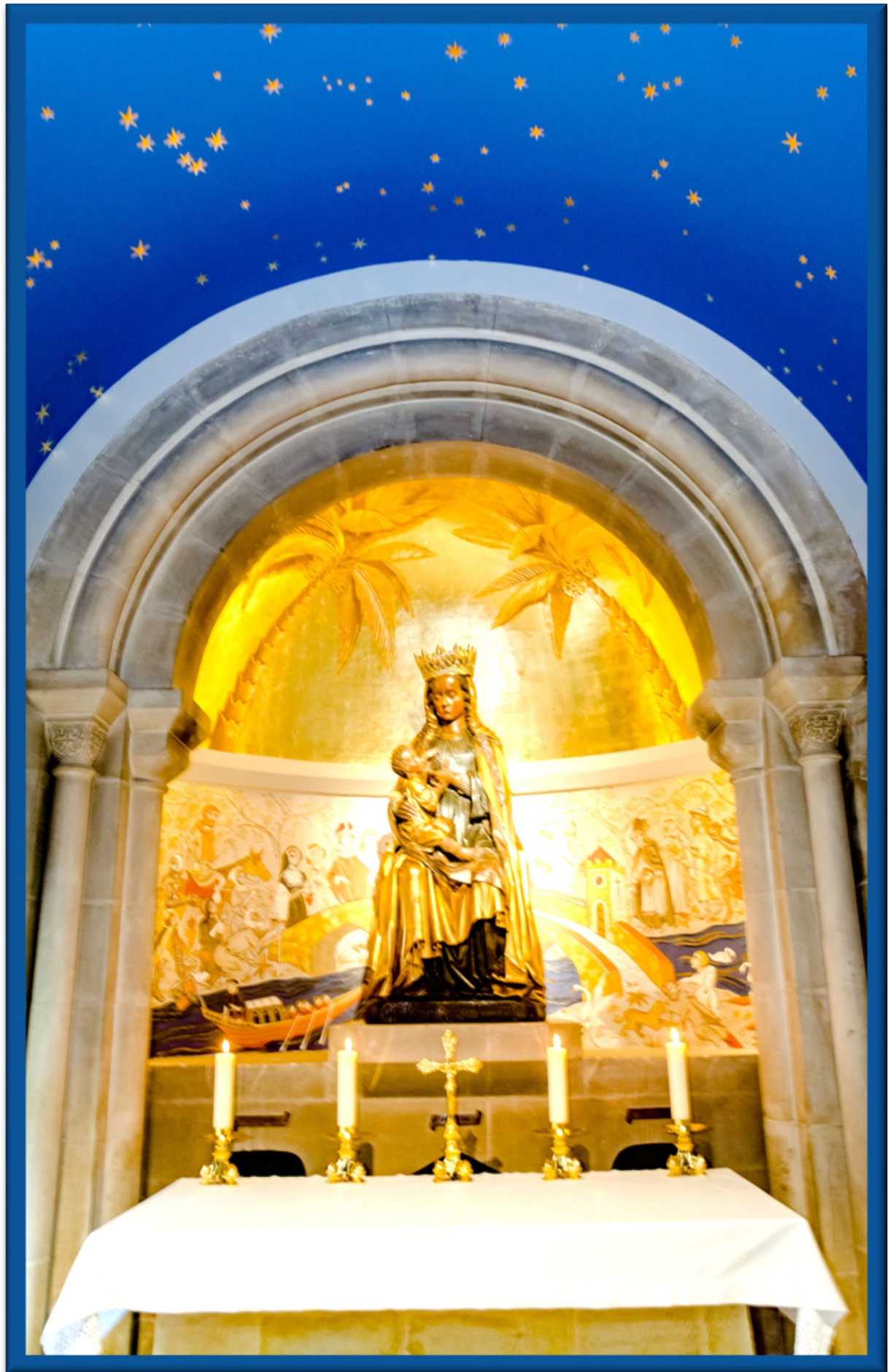


Background to the artwork in the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham



Notes on the Murals for the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham.

This explanation has been written by the artist, Marcelo Lavallen, who dedicated the summer of 2017 to decorating the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham, to help those who travel here from far and wide to pray and to leave their petitions with Our Lady of Caversham.

The Bridge Mural

In the centre is the old Caversham Bridge spanning the River Thames and its swans, with Saint Anne's Chapel on one end; this chapel was built from 1219-1231 by Reading Abbey and the Lord of the Manor of Caversham.

Nobles, religious, peasants and ailing characters crossing the bridge represent the history of pilgrims travelling to Caversham through the ages.



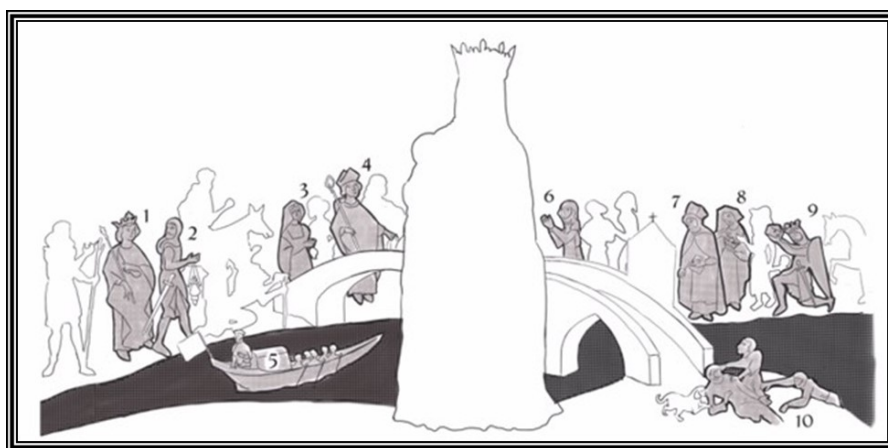
1. King Henry II, 1207-1272 : he donated, among many gifts, the oak for ferries to carry pilgrims to Caversham and for the roof of the original shrine. Notice the oak pattern on his robe.
2. William Marshal. Earl of Pembroke, 1147-1219, with a burning lamp in his hand, as his requested condition for the donation of land.
3. Queen Catherine of Aragon, 1485-1536, a devotee of Our Lady of Caversham; holding a pomegranate, her heraldic symbol, chosen when still a princess, from her parent's heraldic arms.

Isabel and Fernando added the pomegranate to the arms following the conquest of Granada.

4. Blessed Abbot Hugh Faringdon, martyr, last Benedictine abbot of Reading Abbey, 1539.
5. Royal Boat, with Dr John London, envoy of Thomas Cromwell sent to close down the shrine (Sept 14th 1538) and ship all religious images to London.

Notice the flag with the arms of Henry VIII.

6. A French sister of Soeurs de la Misericorde de Sees; they founded a convent in Caversham in 1896.
7. An Augustinian Canon; guardians of the Shrine for three centuries since 1162.
8. Isabella Beauchamp, Countess of Warwick; she gave the original crown to the statue of Our Lady in 1439.



9. Duke Robert of Normandy, 1000-1035, who brought a relic of the Passion from the first Crusade to the shrine.
10. The three drowned men in the River Medway; brought to the shrine and miraculously revived, according to the Cistercian chronicles of Margam Abbey in Wales.

The Palm Trees Garden

The inspiration for the garden is a medieval attribute to Mary: The Enclosed Garden or “Hortus Conclusus” in

Latin from the Song of Songs 4;12

‘Hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus’

(‘A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up’.)



This is an allegory of Mary’s untouched womb and absence of sin. –a reference to her Perpetual Virginity and Immaculate Conception.

A palm tree is a biblical tree; a symbol of the righteous soul (Mary being the most righteous of all) whose leaves never fail and which bears much fruit; its height as near as possible to heaven.

Psalm 92:12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.

Psalm 1;3 (The blessed one) is like a tree planted by streams of water; that yields fruit in due season and its leaves do not wither.

Song of Songs 7;7 Your stature is like a Palm tree.

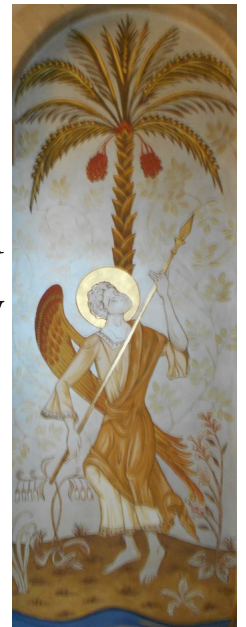
Song of songs 7;8 'I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruits' just as the faithful will reach Christ's fruits of Redemption through Mary.

In ancient iconography, the Flight into Egypt is usually depicted as bent palm trees.

An allusion to the apocryphal account in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew where the child Jesus commanded a palm tree in the desert:

“O tree, bend thy branches and refresh my mother with thy fruits.”

The One winged Angel: an old English legend tells of a one winged angel who brought the holy spearhead of the Crucifixion to Caversham. See the present plaque on Caversham Bridge.



The Burning Bush: The Fathers of the church, such as Gregory of Nyssa, as well as tradition understood the burning bush as a foreshadowing of the Virgin Mary who was engulfed by the fire of the Holy Spirit; she became mother while remaining a virgin.

The ceiling: The stars on the ceiling are exactly as they were at 8pm on the night of 8th September 2017, Feast of the Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary, one of the oldest Marian solemnities. The various sizes of the planets and stars are all painted to show the relative size of the objects – planets and constellations are larger, small stars have only three lines.

‘The day of the Nativity of the Mother of God is a day of universal joy, because through the Mother of God, the entire human race was renewed, and the sorrow of the first mother, Eve, was transformed into joy’.



Saint John Damascene +749

The Tree of Jesse



The genealogy tree of Jesus as was often depicted in Medieval Christian art. This mural is based in the vision-prophesy of Isaiah 7;11 ‘and there shall come forth a rod (Virga in latin) out of the stem of Jesse’.

There are two figures:

Jesse at the foot, sleeping as he is traditionally depicted; the Prophet Isaiah, sitting on a branch, the one who fore-saw the lineage of the Saviour, with a banner declaring : ‘Flos de radice eius ascendet’ – a flower will rise from its root.

The bird next to him holds the burning coal from Isaiah 6,6 .

Isaiah's Commission

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

The banners contain the names in Latin of the great kings from the Old Testament mentioned in the Gospel genealogy of Matthew: Jesse, David and Solomon (father, son and grandson); Ozias, 'did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord' 2 Kings 15;3; Zorobabel began to rebuild the temple after the exile in Babylon.

Anne and Joachim, parents of our Holy Mary, not mentioned in Matthew's genealogy but in the protoevangelium of Saint James.

Saint Joseph, spouse of Mary;

“Mater Dei” Mother of God.

Birds: The Holy Spirit is represented by a white dove
7 golden birds symbolise the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Pomegranates: In Christian symbolism these represent fertility, the Unity of the Church, Resurrection and hope of eternal life.

“BENEDICTUS FRUCTUS VENTRIS TUI IESUS”

Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Luke 1;42

Elizabeth's greeting at the Visitation.

Inspiration for the whole project

The painting style of the murals took inspiration from the existing small medieval stain glass window in the shrine; combined with my training in Byzantine iconography.

I researched illuminated manuscripts from Medieval England and I intended to convey the colourful, fresh and naive feeling of those decorated parchments on the walls.

U. I. O. G. D

(so that in all things God may be glorified)

Marcelo Lavallen, 2017