

FLOWERS OF OUR LADY AND MARY GARDENS

SLIDE LECTURE NARRATION TEXT

SLIDES 1-10 AND TEXT

1.



Chartres Rose Window

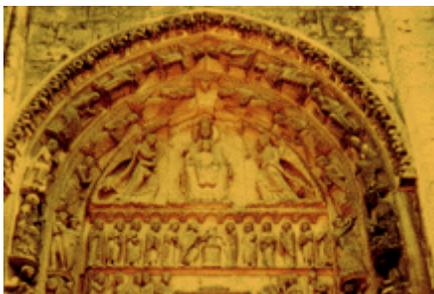
Prominent among medieval flower symbols of the Blessed Virgin Mary were the Rose Windows of the gothic cathedrals - great gardens of glass in which a central figure of the Virgin and Child enthroned in majesty was surrounded with symbols of devotion and truth.

In the medieval age of faith, before the introduction of printing, catechisms or religious illustrations, these, together with the sculptured programs of the cathedrals were a primary means for the instruction of the largely illiterate faithful.

Here, in the famous twelfth century rose window of the north transept of Chartres Cathedral the surrounding symbols include fleurs-de-lis of the Annunciation, doves of the Holy Spirit, adoring angels, the twelve kings of the Line of David (celebrated in Christian geneology and art as the "Tree of Jesse") and the last twelve prophets - all in a spiral geometric arrangement similar to the underlying growth pattern found in roses, sunflowers and daisies.

The rose window, as a whole, was seen to represent the truth of the Incarnation as expressed by Dante: "Behold the rose wherein the Divine Word was made incarnate" - a representation of Isaiah's prophecy of the Virgin Birth of the Messiah as a miraculously blossoming rod of Jesse, the origin in revelation of all flower symbolism of the Blessed Virgin: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him."

2.



In sculpture, central images of the enthroned Mother of God were similarly surrounded with other symbols of truth and devotion, as they are shown here on the right tympanum of the west facade of Chartres Cathedral.

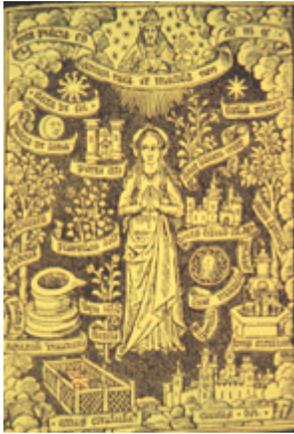
Supplementing the symbols of Old Testament prophecy of the rose window, this tympanum includes representations of the New Testament story of the Incarnation (the Joyful Mysteries of the Virgin).

Thus, on the bottom level can be seen: on the left, the Annunciation and the Visitation; in the center, the Nativity; and on the right, the Annunciation to the Shepherds.

On the second level is the Presentation in the Temple.

The three arch rims, starting with the inner one, depict adoring angels, the liberal arts, and the signs of the zodiac - showing how angels and men and the heavens all proclaim the praises of the Divine Savior and His Holy Mother.

3.



With the introduction of printing, books of hours illustrated with miniature paintings were used for daily meditations.

As in the rose windows and tympana of the gothic cathedrals, images of the Blessed Virgin and Child, or of the Blessed Virgin alone prior to the Nativity, were surrounded with symbols recalling her life, mysteries, virtues and divinely endowed prerogatives.

This sixteenth century French book of hours illustration represents Mary as the Immaculate Virgin surrounded with biblical symbols which the Church Fathers discerned to be prophetic symbols of her immaculate conception.

At the top God pronounces the words from the Cantic of Canticles: "Thou art all fair my love, and there is no spot in thee." Surrounding the Blessed Virgin - portrayed here as the Immaculate Conception, as a young maiden prior to the Incarnation - are her emblems and the biblical phrases, in medieval Latin, which they depict:

Bright as the sun . . . fair as the moon . . . gate of heaven . . . star of the sea . . . a lily among thorns . . . exalted cedar . . . rose plant . . . tower of David . . . fair olive tree . . . well of living waters . . . blossoming rod of Jesse . . . spotless mirror . . . fountain of gardens . . . garden enclosed . . . and city of God.

4.



As reflection and meditation on the Blessed Virgin matured in the lives of the faithful, further symbols of her discerned virtues and attributes were found in nature itself.

In keeping with the truth that all things, spiritual and material, were created through the Eternal Word of God, through whom all things were made, it was believed that such discovered nature symbols were providentially

created correspondences, or "signatures", of spiritual qualities.

Accordingly, illustrations such as this one of the Annunciation, from another French sixteenth century book of hours, employed realistic paintings of discerned flower symbols of Our Lady to signify her attributes and virtues for reflection and meditation.

Among the flowers shown here are: the white lily, emblem of her purity and holiness . . . the red rose, emblem of the Incarnation and of her burning love of God . . . the myrtle, emblem of her virginity . . . the violet, emblem of her humility . . . the columbine, emblem of her overshadowing, indwelling and espousal by the Holy Spirit . . . and the strawberry, emblem of her fruitful virginity.

The representation for meditation of Mary's virtues and endowed prerogatives by their signature flowers imparts to the faithful an affective and illuminative sense of their infused supernatural reality, and of their sowing, planting, or engrafting in the heart and soul - per the Parable of the Sower - to be nurtured through spiritual acts in grace, that they may grow to maturity and fruition like flowers in a garden.

5.



As a further development of religious nature symbolism in art, the Blessed Virgin was represented in "Mary Gardens" surrounded by some of her symbolical flowers.

This renowned Mary Garden illustration is by an unknown artist of the 15th century at the Art Gallery, in Frankfurt.

Mary is seated in an enclosed garden surrounded by a castellated wall. Her crown is of leafy sprigs. Nearby the child, Jesus, is being taught to play a musical instrument.

Behind Our Lady, irises, hollyhocks, marigolds and other flowers of Our Lady are growing in a raised bed. In the foreground are daisies, lilies-of-the-valley, violets, cowslips, strawberries and other symbolical flowers. A rose tree, cherries and apples are also featured.

(Illustration courtesy the Massachusetts Horticultural Society)

While these flowers, like those in the books of hours, have all been found by researchers to have been known by names indicative their Marian religious symbolism, there are so many in this painting, and they are so small, that it is more of a tribute to Our Lady, and thus a historical documentation, than a support for meditation comparable to the books of hours with their larger depictions of individual flowers.

The fullest spiritual impact of the flower symbols of the Blessed Virgin is experienced through their actual beholding and collection in nature and by their cultivation in actual gardens for devotion, meditation and prayer.

This was our experience in undertaking the work of Mary's Gardens of Philadelphia, in which while we were highly motivated upon learning of the Flowers of Our Lady and seeing their illustrations and photographs, we were utterly in awe when we we first saw the actual symbolical flowers themselves in the beauty, purity and clarity of their growth.

We found also that in Mary Gardens the meditative quality of even a large number of the Flowers of Our Lady could be maintained - through the overall design of the garden, the proportions of the beds and the size and spacing of the flower clumps - since one reflects on the flower varieties sequentially as one walks through the garden, as one does in praying the mysteries of the Rosary.

6.



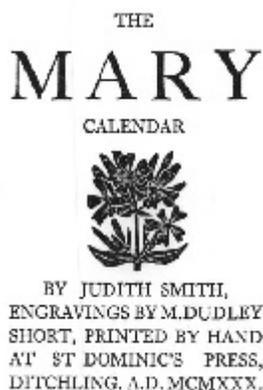
Due to the almost total lack of records of flowers, other than roses and lilies, grown in medieval monastery gardens, the extent to which such gardens actually included or were planned around the Flowers of Our Lady is matter of conjecture.

We do know, however, that the preserved accounting records for Norwich Priory in England list plant purchases for a pre-Reformation "S. Mary's Garden". And in her book, *Green Enchantment*, Rosetta Clarkson envisages the plantings of such a Mary Garden at Melrose Abbey in Scotland as distinct from the sacristan's garden, with "as many white flowers as possible, for purity and holiness . . . lilies . . . white and red roses . . . costmary . . . spearmint . . . snowdrops . . . marygolds . . . daisies . . . violets . . . cross-shaped flowers and many 'Mary plants'."

This is the garden of the Bonnefont Cloister at The Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at Ft. Tryon Park in New York City. originally planted with over 100 flowers cultivated, or collected from the wild, in medieval Europe - most of them known and named in one area or another in the popular religious traditions of the countryside as Flowers of Our Lady. Walking through this garden in the 1950's beholding the symbolic flowers in the setting of the actual cloister, brought from Europe, assisted us in experiencing what a medieval Mary Garden was like.

The names and symbolism of the Mary-flowers were evidently spread out from such monastery gardens, especially those on pilgrimage routes, into the surrounding countryside, where they were adopted into local usage. In his book, *The Englishman's Flora*, Geoffrey Grigson lists the exact counties of the U.K. in which several hundred Mary-names of flowers were once current.

7.



Since there are so few actual lists of the plants grown in medieval monastery gardens, we know of the old religious plant names and symbolism almost entirely through the recording centuries later by botanists and folklorists of those still found in the oral traditions of the surrounding countryside.

So far we have found records of some thousand such symbolically named plants in England, Ireland, France, Germany, Spain and Latin America - some common to a number of these countries; others unique to one only.

This is the title page of "The Mary Calendar" by Judith Smith listing, by the sequence of their blooms through the year, some hundred such flowers from the English countryside, together with old legends and lore associated with their names.

8.



From Flowers of Our Lady cultivated for their symbolism in present-day English monastery gardens, and from "The Mary Calendar", Frances Crane Lillie selected some 40 for planting in 1932 in a "Garden of Our Lady" at St. Joseph's Church in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

This is a 1937 photo of the garden taken by landscape architect, Dorothea K. Harrison, after five years of work on the garden design and planting with Mrs. Lillie.

In this garden Mary's praises are proclaimed and meditated upon through her symbolical flowers grown in all the freshness of their living purity and beauty - surrounding her image in the tradition of the multiple imagery of the medieval rose windows, tympana, books of hours and Mary Garden paintings. Their care is undertaken as a prayerful work offered to Mary and her Divine Son for spiritual intentions.

9.



Inspired by the Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady, Mary's Gardens was founded in Philadelphia in 1951, with the blessing of Mrs. Lillie, for the purpose of further researching the Flowers of Our Lady and spreading the custom of planting them in Mary Gardens as a prayerful, religious work in the modern world.

In medieval times the popular religious traditions of the Flowers of Our Lady were circulated through the countryside by itinerate preachers, mendicant friars, wandering minstrels, roving players, pilgrims, merchants, missionaries and other travelers.

The old religious names were then recorded in writing by research botanists and folklorists, from the various countries and regions - serving to preserve them and bring them down to the present day.

In our modern Information Age the tradition of the flowers, drawing on those from all the countries, is being circulated again: through the print media, and now electronically throughout the entire Global Village via the Internet World Wide Web.

Learned of through the Net, the Flowers of Our Lady are cultivated in home Mary Gardens, from which individuals - when they have become experienced with their care and been enriched by reflection and meditation on their symbolism - then go forth to plant them at parishes, schools, institutions, burial plots, shrines, and other locations.

In medieval times the generic tradition of the Flowers of Our Lady was adapted by circulating itinerate preachers, mendicant friars, etc. to the plants growing in the wild in each given area. Now, from the global lists available on the Internet, selections of flowers of desired symbolism are procured from retail and mail order commercial seed and plant sources and planted in Mary Gardens.

10.



Of the flowers of the Mary Garden the rose, queen of flowers, is an ancient and universal symbol of the Incarnation, of Mary, of her love of God, and of her spiritual beauty and fragrance, pleasing to God.

This is a wild rose typical of those known to the Christians of the Middle Ages and called by them, Mary's Rose. It is also the rose adopted as the model for the central rose windows of the medieval cathedrals.

Pope Plus XII has said, "The liturgical development of the symbol of the rose in the cult of Mary has nothing which should astonish us, for man has instinctively chosen the most beautiful of flowers to offer to the most beautiful of creatures."

"The Virgin herself was then compared to a rose . . . and now Christians invoke her twice in the litany of Loreto under the title of the queen of flowers: 'Mystical Rose,' and 'Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.'

"While cultivating the rose one is naturally borne to honor the Creator and to elevate one's soul toward her who bears the beautiful title of Mystical Rose, the honor and joy of the human family."

Finally., an entire garden of roses was used to symbolize the fullness of Our Lady's virtues and glories, and as Pope Pius XII has said, further, "The rosary represents primarily a garden of roses offered to Mary, an adornment of her image, a symbol of her graces".

For prayer everywhere, as well as in the garden, the symbolism of the rose and the garden of roses has been embodied in the string of rosary beads, which serves as an aid for meditating on fifteen of Our Lady's mysteries.