

**The Marian Pilgrimage: Day Eight: Thursday 14 May 2020**

**The Shrine of Our Lady of Altötting, Bavaria, Germany**



Altötting: The Heart of Bavaria

The Bavarian town of Altötting is Germany's most significant pilgrimage site for the veneration of St. Mary. Pope Benedict celebrated Mass in Germany during his visit to Bavaria in 2006.



One of Europe's holiest sites

Located just a few miles from the German-Austrian border, Bavarian dukes held court in Altötting as far back as 748. But the town really gained larger significance after the year 1489, when a miracle was reported in a local church.

According to the historical memory, a three-year-old boy had drowned in a nearby creek and was placed on the church altar by his desperate mother, who began praying, with other worshippers, for the child's life. The boy's miraculous recovery [seen as a 'resurrection'] laid the foundation for centuries of pilgrimages to the town.

Those who received help from St. Mary placed votive tables made from wood outside the Chapel of Grace. These depicted the miracle. This is now surrounded by several churches and basilicas in the centre of town.

When Benedict XVI was pope he was the third Holy Father to visit Altötting [2006]. His predecessor, Pope John Paul II, visited in 1980 and the first pontiff to make the pilgrimage was Pius VI in 1782.

Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) was born nearby, in the village of Markt, and over many years had strong ties to Altötting - his older brother, Georg, was born there.

"I was fortunate to be born near the city of Altötting," the Pope Emeritus Benedict wrote in a foreword to the city's Guide Book. *"The many pilgrimages to Altötting with my family are among my oldest and fondest memories."*



The Shrine of Our Lady of Altötting (Gnadenkapelle), Kapellplatz. 5:30-20:30. The shrine and the Black Madonna, that is housed in the shrine, are the destination of every pilgrimage to Altötting since 1489. The chapel itself dates back to the 8th century.

The **Shrine of Our Lady of Altötting**, also known as the **Chapel of Grace** (German: *Gnadenkapelle*), is the national shrine of Bavaria dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is known for the many healings which are said to have taken place there, and is commonly called the Lourdes of Germany.

The octagonal chapel which houses the image of Our Lady dates to about A.D. 660, and is the oldest Marian shrine in Germany. The image of Mary venerated there is a Black Madonna of great antiquity (possibly about 1330), carved from linden wood. The shrine became a popular pilgrim destination when it became known for the miraculous recovery in 1489 of a young boy who had been drowned, after his mother laid his body before the image and prayed to the Blessed Mother for a miracle.

Many of the votive offerings which have been given to the shrine over the centuries are displayed in the porch encircling the church.

The shrine has been served by the Capuchin friars for centuries. One member of the Order, Brother Conrad of Parzham, O.F.M. Cap., (1818-1894) served there as porter for over 40 years. During his lifetime of service he developed a reputation for holiness and miraculous healings. He has been declared a saint by the Catholic Church.



The shrine was honoured by a visit by Pope John Paul II in November 1980. He was accompanied by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was born in a nearby town. On 11 September 2006, Ratzinger, newly elected as Pope Benedict XVI, returned to the shrine and donated the episcopal ring he had worn while he was the Archbishop of Munich. The ring is now a part of the sceptre held by the Blessed Virgin.

YouTUBE: History of the Black Madonna (Germany) [Look at this if you can.]

The Statue of the Black Madonna:

In addition to the natural darkening process of the wood, the Altötting Madonna is blackened by the soot of all the candles lit throughout the centuries and is therefore revered as the "**Black Madonna**".

In her left hand, Mary holds a sceptre with a lily blossom as a sign of her virginity. The Child Jesus rests on her right arm and carries a celestial sphere representing the omnipotence of God. Since the Baroque period, both Our Lady of Altötting and the Child Jesus have worn elaborate crowns adorned with precious stones. These treasures were often donated by female members of the royal Wittelsbach family.

The Altötting Madonna has been dressed in exquisite robes, the so-called "**Gnadenröckln**" [skirt of mercy], since 1518. The robes are changed depending on the liturgical festival concerned. After their wedding, which was traditionally preceded by a pilgrimage to Altötting, the Wittelsbach princesses often sacrificed their wedding dresses to have valuable Gnadenröckln made for the Madonna. Particularly precious specimens can be admired at the pilgrimage museum. In 2017 a new purple Gnadenröckln for the Lent season was donated to the Altötting Madonna by a lady wishing to stay anonymous.



### THE "POPE'S RING" OF THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE

Since 11 September 2006 the sceptre of the Miraculous Image has been adorned with a very special ring. During his pastoral visit to Altötting, **Pope Benedict XVI** also prayed to Our Lady of Altötting at the Gnadenkapelle and gifted the episcopal ring that he had worn as Archbishop of Munich to the Altötting Madonna, the patroness of Bavaria, as a sign of his deep devotion to the Virgin Mary and his attachment to the Marian shrine. It is an amethyst set in gold presented to him by his siblings Mary and George on the occasion of his episcopal ordination.



While in Altötting, a visit should be paid to The Basilica of St Anne



The **Basilica of St. Ann** also called **Altötting Basilica**. It is the main place of Catholic worship of Altötting, Bavaria, in the Diocese of Passau. It is the largest church built in Germany in the twentieth century and is located in the Capuchin convent in Bruder-Konrad-Platz.

In 1913 Pope Pius X elevated it to the rank of minor basilica.

The current basilica was designed in neo-baroque style by Johann Baptist Schott inspired by the convent church of Fürstenfeld. The construction was financed with donations from Bavaria. The works took two and a half years and ended October 13, 1912 being consecrated by the Bishop of Passau, Sigismund Felix von Ow-Felldorf.

## **OBERAMMERGAU**

### **Four centuries of Christian devotion in a small Bavarian town**



While at Altötting in the heart of Bavaria, we should try not to miss the opportunity of driving for just over two hours to visit Oberammergau. There are particular reasons why we should try to get there as in two days' time The Oberammergau Passion Play was due to have had its first performance running until 4 October 2020. This schedule has been compromised by the Corona virus Pandemic. It has been postponed until 2022. It is a apt that we should visit Oberammergau.

The Oberammergau Passion Play arose out of the fears arising from an epidemic of the bubonic plague which as it spreads kills between 40 and 60 percent of its victims, and sometimes even more. It swept through Europe, Asia and Africa, becoming known as 'The Black Death'. In the mid-14th century there was no effective treatment, and somewhere between a quarter and two-thirds of the population of Europe died. Altogether, the entire population of the world may have dropped from an estimated 450 million to around 350-375 million. Some estimates, in fact, put the global death toll as high as 200 million.

Over the next several generations, the disease was a recurrent and terrifying visitor to Europe. During eighteen horrific months in 1665 and 1666, for example, approximately a quarter of the population of the English capital died as a result of 'The Great Plague of London'.

When the plague appeared in the southern German Duchy of Bavaria in 1632, there was widespread concern and panic. In 1634, the disease killed approximately fifteen thousand residents in Munich, Bavaria's capital. (That may have been a majority of the city's population).

A resident of the Bavarian village of Oberammergau inadvertently brought the disease into his hometown that same year. He died as did many others. The citizens of the little town were desperate. Nearly every family in the village had lost at least one victim, and some families had been essentially wiped out. Now they were facing the plague after having suffered massive casualties during the devastating Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). It seemed to many that Oberammergau's survival was at risk.

The villagers of Oberammergau collectively vowed to God that, if he would spare them from the plague, they would faithfully perform a play every ten years in which they would commemorate and recall the last days of Jesus. The epidemic failed to claim a single additional victim, and all of those who had been suffering from the plague recovered, so there was a thanksgiving for this deliverance.

The original "Passionsspiele" (Passion Story) was in 1634, and since then 'The Oberammergau Passion Play' has been presented in years ending with a zero, every decade. There have been some exceptions. In 1940 because of the outbreak of World War II there was no performance. A special 300th anniversary performance season occurred in 1934. Another special season was staged in 1984, celebrating the 350th anniversary of the first performance.

What is a Passion play? A Passion play is a dramatic pageant, a depiction of the Passion {Latin-passionem} of Jesus focused primarily upon his trial, his suffering and eventual death on the Cross - only secondarily upon his ultimate triumph



and resurrection. Such plays have long been common in Catholic areas of Europe during the days of Lent, leading up to Easter Sunday.

Nearly 2,000 actors, singers, musicians and technicians, all residents of the small village of Oberammergau — which has roughly 5,200 inhabitants. — participate directly in the decennial effort. (In order to take part, a person must either have been born in the village or have lived in it for a minimum of 20 years.) For six hours each performance day, punctuated by dinner, local shopkeepers and tradesmen cease to be Bavarians and become, instead, first-century Palestinian Jews and ancient Roman soldiers. And hundreds of thousands of people come from all around the world to watch.

Much has changed in Europe generally and in Germany in particular since 1634. Through all the wars and other stresses of the intervening centuries, though, the Oberammergau Passion play remains. [Derived from an article by Daniel Peterson]