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Germigny-des-Prés

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On October 23, 2000 the French post office issued a stamp honoring the church at Germigny-des-Prés. (Scott 2759)

The *commune*, population 500, is located in the *departement* of Loiret on route D60, thirty kilometers east of Orléans.

Some years ago as our friends in Burgundy were bidding us a gracious *au revoir*, they virtually ordered us to stop at Germigny-des-Prés, one hundred twenty-five kilometers distant. The visit to the historic church proved to be a most rewarding experience.

In the early ninth century Theodulfe, a friend and counselor of Charlemagne, founded Germigny and constructed a summer palace on the site. A private oratory, built to serve the palace, was consecrated January 3, 803.

The oratory was in the form of a Greek cross, a modest ten meters square, with four apses. It was modeled after Charlemagne's church in Aix-la-Chapelle.

The palace was demolished by fire in the mid-ninth century, probably during one of the Viking raids that plagued the area.

In a renovation during the fifteenth century the builders destroyed the west apse of the oratory and

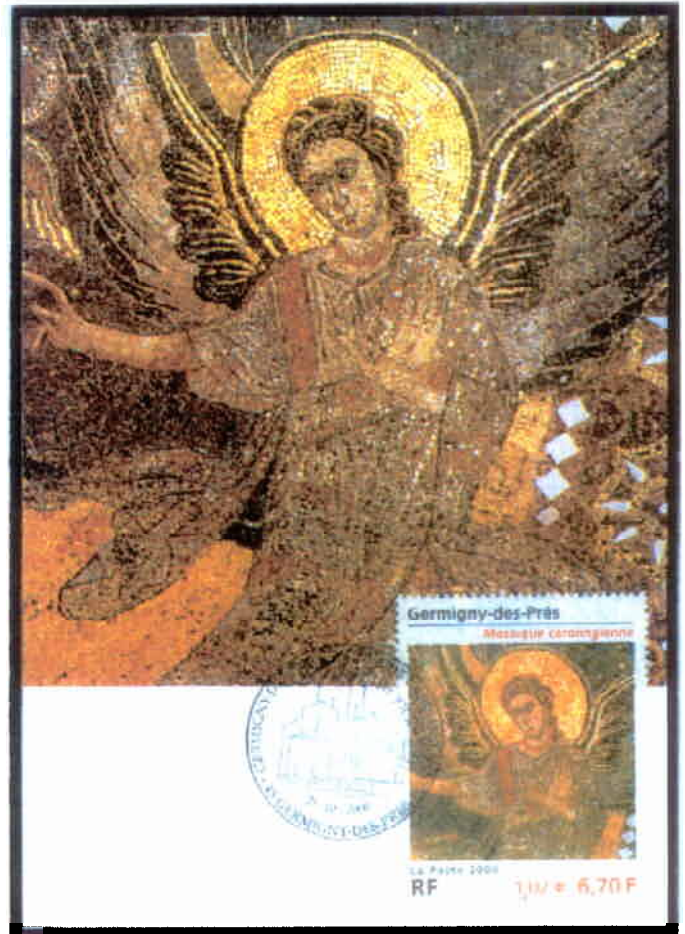


Figure 1

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added a nave with nine bays. They erected a lantern tower whose openings for light were covered with sheets of translucent alabaster.

Over the years the building was neglected and fell into disrepair. Restoration undertaken in 1867 went on for ten years.

During the reconstruction several urchins were observed playing with glass cubes they had picked up in the church. The removal of layers of plaster from the ceiling of the east apse disclosed a mosaic picture dating from Carolingian times. Experts agree that mosaics had once decorated the entire oratory. Only those in the east apse have survived.

The 130,000 little glass cubes which make up the

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