



## CLARE OF MONTEFALCO

### BIOGRAPHY

It was the time of the “Avignon Captivity”, those years from 1309 to 1377 when, for various reasons, the Apostolic See was in Avignon, in France.

After a long period when the papal throne was unoccupied, the Provençal Jacques d’Euse ascended to the pontificate, taking the name John XXII. His rise coincided with that of his fellow-countryman Jean d’Amiel (1296/7-1371), one of the protagonists of this story.

The papal Curia was not based in Rome at that time but had transferred to various centres in Lazio and Umbria, which were then papal territories. One of these was the town of Montefalco, where Chiara di Damiano (1268-1308) lived. While still a child, Chiara left her family to join her sister Giovanna who lived in a closed institution. From an early age Chiara had a variety of visions there, for example the Madonna with the Infant Jesus under her mantle, portrayed here making a gesture of benediction. She later became an Augustinian, inspiring admiration for her wholehearted adherence to the evangelical message, but also intolerance from those who considered it too extreme.

In 1303, Chiara built the oratory of Holy Cross where, on her death in 1308, her remains were laid. The oratory was later absorbed into the seventeenth-century church of Saint Clare.

Béranger Donadieu de Saint-Affrique, vicar to the Bishop of Spoleto, was charged with gathering testimonies for initiating the process of benediction. Though initially quite sceptical, he became convinced of Chiara’s sanctity, and she was canonized in 1881, many centuries after her death.