

## **The Crib Cave, A Place of Devotion Among the Shepherds**

The path to the Crib Cave ran along the east, from which side Bethlehem was not directly accessible, since no straight road led thither. The city could scarcely be seen from this side, for it was separated from the valley of the shepherds by dilapidated walls, and massive ruins of similar masonry between which ran deep ravines. The nearest direct entrance into the city was by the south gate that led to Hebron. Leaving this gate, one would have to go around toward the east in order to reach the region of the Crib. This region was contiguous to the valley of the shepherds from which one could go to it without entering Bethlehem. Both the Crib Cave and the adjoining caves belonged to the shepherds, who used them for storing their utensils and sheltering their cattle. No one from Bethlehem had any communication with this region, neither road nor path leading thither. Joseph, whose father's house stood on the south side of the city, had often when a boy visited the shepherds here, concealed himself in the caves from his brothers, and spent therein much time in prayer.



When Jesus now visited the Crib in company with the shepherds, it was already very much changed, for they had fitted it up as a place of devotion. No one was allowed to step on the sacred ground; consequently a grated passage had been made around the cave, thus enlarging the space covered by it. Into this passage opened cells hewn in the rock. It was like a cloister. The ground and walls of the cave were covered with the tapestry and carpets left by the Kings. They were woven in colors, the principal figure in them being pyramids.<sup>2</sup> Two flights of steps ran from the passage up above the Crib Cave. The roof of the latter, wherein had once been oblique openings to admit light, had been entirely removed and replaced by a domelike cupola through which the light streamed. By one of the flights mentioned above, one could mount from the dome of the cave to the top of the hill and thence proceed toward Bethlehem. All these changes had been made with the means left by the Kings.

The Sabbath was just beginning and the lamps had been lighted in the Crib Cave when the shepherds brought Jesus hither. The Crib itself still occupied the same place. Jesus pointed out to the shepherds something that they did not know; viz., the exact spot upon which He was born. He gave them an instruction and they celebrated the Sabbath in the Cave. He told his hearers that His Heavenly

Probably many-colored triangles. The triangle was a favorite figure among the Jews for the ornamentation of walls. Sister Emmerich frequently refers to it, as, for instance, in Mary's little chamber at the Temple. Father had chosen this place for His nativity at the time of Mary's Immaculate Conception, and I saw that it had been the theater of several significant events of the Old Testament. Abraham and Jacob had been within its walls, and before them had Seth, the Child of Promise, been born therein of Eve after a penance of seven years. An angel appeared to Eve on that occasion, telling her that this was the seed that God had given her in the place of Abel. Seth was for a long time hidden here and nursed, also in the Suckling Cave of Abraham's nurse Maraha; for, as Jacob's sons pursued Joseph, so did the brothers of Seth pursue him. The Suckling Cave was now Maraha's tomb.

The shepherds led Jesus into the adjacent cave also, where for a time the Holy Family had tarried. The fountain that had sprung up therein on the night of Christ's Nativity, they had beautifully enclosed, and they made use of its waters in sickness. Jesus commanded them to take some of the water away with them. On leaving the cave, He visited the shepherds' huts.

Saturnin baptized several aged men who were unable to go to the baptism of John. Into the water which they had brought from the fountain of the cave near the Crib, they poured some of Christ's baptismal water from the pool on the island in the Jordan. At John's baptism all confessed their sins publicly; but at that of Jesus each acknowledged his sins privately, gave proofs of contrition, and received pardon. The old men whom Saturnin baptized knelt, their shoulders bared to the breast, their head bowed over a large basin. In this manner they were baptized. The form made use of at this baptism was similar to that employed by John at the baptism of Jesus. But to the word Jehovah and the invocation of the three gifts, was added "and in the name of the One that has been sent."