

## Preparations for Mary's Presentation

Mary was three years and three months old when she made the vow to join the virgins in the Temple. She was very delicately built and had golden hair inclined to curl at the ends. She was already as tall as a child of five or six here in our country. Mary Heli's daughter was a few years older than Mary, and much stronger and stouter. I saw in Anne's house the preparations for Mary's admittance into the Temple. It was made the occasion of a great feast. Five priests had assembled from Nazareth, Sephoris, and other places, among them Zachary and a son of the brother of Anne's father. They



were about to perform a sacred ceremony over the child Mary, a kind of examination as to whether she was sufficiently mature in mind to be admitted to the Temple. Besides the priests, there were present Anne's sister from Sephoris with her daughter Mary Heli and her child, and several other little girls and relatives.

The robes worn by the child at this feast were cut out by the priests themselves and the different parts quickly sewed together by the women present. The child was clothed in them at certain periods when subjected to a series of interrogatories. The ceremony was in itself very grave and solemn, although the faces of the aged priests were at times lit up by smiles of admiration at the expressions and answers of the little Mary, and it was frequently interrupted by the tears of Joachim and Anne. Three entire suits were prepared for Mary and put on her at different times during the ceremony, the questioning and answering going on in the meantime. All this took place in a large room next to the dining hall. Light entered through a square opening in the center of the roof, which opening was often covered by a net. The floor was covered with a red carpet. In the middle of the room stood a table, intended for an altar, with a red cover, and over that a white transparent one. Upon it lay a case with rolls of writings and a curtain upon which the picture of Moses was either embroidered or laid on and sewed down. He was represented in the large mantle in which he used to pray, the tables of the Law hanging on his arm. I have always seen Moses represented as a tall, broad-shouldered man. He had a high, somewhat pyramidal head, a large hooked nose, and upon his broad, high forehead, were two bumps

inclining toward each other and giving him a very remarkable appearance. In his childhood, they were like little warts. His complexion was brown, bright and ruddy, his hair inclined to red. I saw many such protuberances as those possessed by Moses on the foreheads of the ancient Prophets and hermits; sometimes only one such excrescence appeared upon the middle of the forehead.

On the altar lay the three outfits for the child Mary along with various materials, etc., presented by the relatives for her dowry. A kind of throne stood upon steps before the altar. The priests entered the hall with naked feet. Three of them only proceeded to the examination and blessed the child, who was as yet in her usual clothing. Joachim and Anne were present with their relatives; the women stood back, the little girls at Mary's side. One of the priests took the garments from the altar, explained their signification, and handed them to Anne's sister, from Sephoris, who put them on the child.

First came a little, yellow, knitted robe, and then a colored, laced bodice, which was put on over the head and fastened around the body. It had on the breast something like cords. Over that came a brownish mantle with armholes, from the upper part of which hung lappets. It was cut out around the neck, and closed under the breast. On her feet were brown sandals with thick, green soles. Her reddish-yellow curls were arranged, and a silken crown with feathers in it placed upon them. The feathers were a finger in length, and they bent over toward the inside of the crown. I know to what bird in that country they belonged. A large square, ash-colored kerchief was thrown over her head like a large veil. It could be drawn together under the arms in such a way that they might rest in it as in slings. It appeared to be a mantle used in time of prayer and penance, also in travelling.

The priests now put to the child all sorts of questions relative to the discipline enforced in the Temple. Among other things, they said to her: "Thy parents, having promised thee to the Temple, have made a vow that thou shouldst drink no wine nor vinegar, shouldst eat no grapes nor figs. Now what wilt thou add to this vow? Think upon this during thy meal." The Jewish people, and especially the young maidens were accustomed to drink vinegar. Mary, too, was fond of it. On these and similar things, was she interrogated.

And now the second suit was put upon the child, It consisted of a sky-blue body, a mantle of the same color, but of a lighter shade, a richer bodice, and a white veil, glossy like silk, which fell behind in folds something like the consecrated veil of a nun. Over this was a fine, closely-fitting wreath of colored flower buds made of silk and intermixed with small green leaves. Then the priests threw over her face a white veil gathered on top like a cap. It was caught by three clasps, one below the other, by means of which the veil

could be raised upon the head, either one third, or one half, or even the whole.

The child was instructed upon the use of this veil, when to be raised or lowered in eating or answering questions. In this array, Mary went to table where she sat between two of the priests, the third opposite to her. The women and children sat at one end of the table apart from the men. During the meal, the priests practiced the child in many points upon the use of the veil, asking questions and receiving her answers, and also in many other of the customary ceremonies. They reminded her that she still could partake of everything, and they offered her different dishes, tempting her in order to see how far her abstinence would go. But Mary excited their admiration by all that she did and said. She tasted sparingly of only a few dishes, and answered all their questions with simplicity and wisdom. During the meal and the whole of the examination, I saw angels hovering around her, directing and assisting her in all things.

After the repast, she was clothed anew before the altar in the next room. Anne's sister from Sephoris assisted the priest in the ceremony, during which the latter explained the signification of the garments and spoke of spiritual things. The robes now put on the child were the most beautiful of all. A violet-blue bodice, and over it a breast-piece embroidered in colors. The latter was now fastened to the piece that covered the back, caught to the plaited skirt, and fell below in a point. Over this fell a violet-blue mantle, full and magnificent, rounded in the back very much like a chasuble. When it was closed on the breast, it formed puffs on the arms, like arches, wherein they could rest, and yet be exposed to view. It had five rows of gold embroidery down the front, the middle one furnished with the buttons or hooks that fastened the mantle. It was also embroidered around the edge. A large changeable-colored veil was then put on, which glanced from white to violet-blue. Upon this veil rested a crown, closed on top by five clasps. It was a thin, broad circlet lined with gold, the upper edge spreading into points tipped with little balls. A network of silk covered the outside, which was ornamented with small roses of the same material in whose center were fastened five pearls. The five points also were of silk and surmounted by a ball. The breast piece was fastened behind, yet had cords also in front as if for lacing. Her mantle was caught first over the breast by a cross band, which was prevented from pressing upon the breast ornament by a button with a long shank; it closed again under the bodice and fell behind the arms in folds. In this festive attire, Mary was placed upon the steps before the altar, the little girls at her side. She now repeated her resolve to abstain from flesh, fish, and milk, to make use of only a certain drink prepared from the pith of a

reed soaked in water. This was much used by the poor of Palestine, just as here in our own country rice or barley water is drunk by them. To this beverage, Mary proposed to add occasionally some terebinthine juice. This juice is like a white, viscid oil and is very refreshing, though not in the same degree as balsam. Mary expressed her resolution to refrain also from spices and fruits, with the exception of a kind of yellow berry that grows in bunches. I know them well. Children and poor people eat them in that country. She said also that she would lie on the bare ground and nightly rise three times to pray. The other maidens rose but once.

Upon hearing this, Anne and Joachim shed tears, and the aged Joachim pressed his child in his arms, saying: "Ah, my child, that is too hard! If thou livest so mortified a life, I, thy poor old father, shall never see thee again."

This scene was very affecting.

But the priests replied to the child that she should, like the others, rise once only during the night, and they laid down other and milder conditions for her. Finally, they said, "Many of the other virgins enter the Temple without a dowry or even wherewith to pay their board. On this account and with their parents' consent, they engage to wash the blood-besprinkled garments of the priests and the rough woolen cloths. This is a very heavy work, and not accomplished without bleeding hands. But thou wilt never be called upon for such services, since thy parents are able to maintain thee at the Temple."

But Mary quickly replied that she was ready even for this work, were she esteemed worthy to perform it. At this speech, Joachim again betrayed his emotion.

During these holy ceremonies, I beheld Mary becoming at times so tall that she even rose above the heads of the priests. This was for me a sign of her wisdom and grace. The priests were filled with amazement, at once solemn and joyful.

At last, Mary was blessed by the priests. I saw her radiant with light as she stood on the little altar throne, two priests on either side of her and one opposite. They held rolls of writing, and prayed over the child, their hands outstretched above her. At that moment, I saw a wonderful vision in the child Mary. She seemed, by virtue of the blessing, to become transparent. In her was a glory, a halo of unspeakable splendor, and in that halo appeared the Mystery of the Ark of the Covenant, as if in a glittering crystal vessel. I saw Mary's heart open like the doors of a temple, and the Holy Thing of the Ark of the Covenant, around which a tabernacle of precious stones of multiplied signification had been formed like a heavenly throne, going into her heart through that opening, like the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies, like the ostensorium into the tabernacle. I saw that by this the child

Mary was glorified; she hovered above the earth. With the entrance of this Sacrament into Mary's heart, which immediately closed over It, the vision faded, and I saw the child all penetrated by glowing fervor. During this wonderful vision, I saw that Zachary received an interior assurance, a heavenly monition that Mary was the chosen vessel of the Mystery. From it he had received a ray that had appeared figuratively in Mary.

And now the priests led the child to her parents. Anne caught her child to her breast and kissed her, but Joachim—deeply affected—reverenced Mary and only took her hand. The elder sister Mary Heli embraced the favored child with much more gaiety than did Anne, who was a very serious, practical, moderate, and self-possessed woman. The little niece, Mary Cleophas, acted as any child would, and fondly embraced the little Mary.

Then the priests took the child again, disrobed her, and led her forth in her customary dress. I saw them standing drinking out of a cup, and then departing.