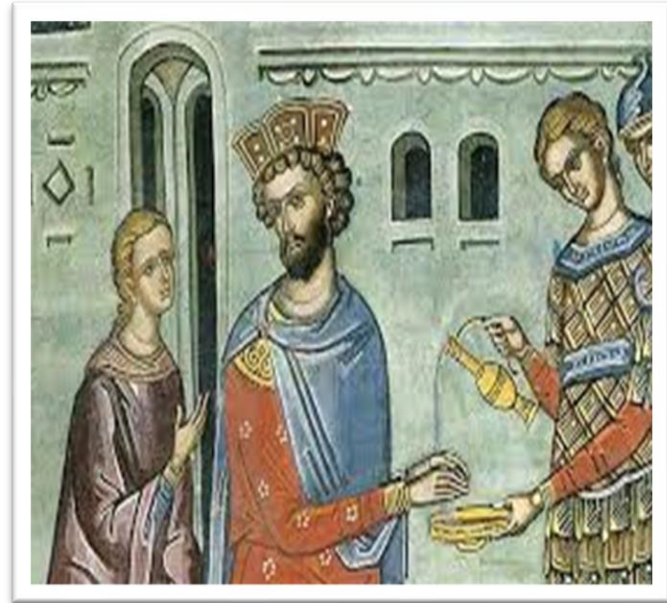


## Pilate and his Wife

Whilst the Jews were leading Jesus to Herod, I saw Pilate go to his wife, Claudia Procles. She hastened to meet him, and they went together into a small garden-house which was on one of the terraces behind the palace. Claudia appeared to be much excited, and under the influence of fear. She was a tall, fine-looking woman, although extremely pale. Her hair was plaited and slightly ornamented, but partly covered by a long veil which fell gracefully over her shoulders. She wore earrings, a necklace, and her flowing dress was drawn together and



held up by a species of clasp. She conversed with Pilate for a long time, and entreated him by all that he held sacred not to injure Jesus, that Prophet, that saint of saints; and she related the extraordinary dreams or visions which she had had on the previous night concerning him.

Whilst she was speaking I saw the greatest part of these visions: the following were the most striking. In the first place, the principal events in the life of our Lord—the annunciation, the nativity, the adoration of the shepherds and that of the kings, the prophecy of Simeon and that of Anna, the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the Innocents, and our Lord's temptation in the wilderness. She had likewise been shown in her sleep the most striking features of the public life of Jesus. He always appeared to her environed with a resplendent light, but his malicious and cruel enemies were under the most horrible and disgusting forms imaginable. She saw his intense sufferings, his patience, and his inexhaustible love, likewise the anguish of his Mother, and her perfect resignation. These visions filled the wife of Pilate with the greatest anxiety and terror, particularly as they were accompanied by symbols which made her comprehend their meaning, and her tender feelings were harrowed by the sight of such dreadful scenes. She had suffered from them during the whole of the night; they were sometimes obscure, but more often clear and distinct; and when morning dawned and she was roused by the noise of the tumultuous mob who were dragging Jesus to be judged, she glanced at the procession and instantly saw that

the unresisting victim in the midst of the crows, bound, suffering, and so inhumanely treated as to be scarcely recognisable, was no other than that bright and glorious being who had been so often brought before her eyes in the visions of the past night. She was greatly affected by this sight, and immediately sent for Pilate, and gave him an account of all that had happened to her. She spoke with much vehemence and emotion; and although there was a great deal in what she had seen which she could not understand, much less express, yet she entreated and implored her husband in the most touching terms to grant her request. Pilate was both astonished and troubled by the words of his wife. He compared the narration with all he had previously heard concerning Jesus; and reflected on the hatred of the Jews, the majestic silence of our Saviour, and the mysterious answers he had given to all his questions. He hesitated for some time, but was at last overcome by the entreaties of his wife, and told her that he had already declared his conviction of the innocence of Jesus, and that he would not condemn him, because he saw that the accusations were mere fabrications of his enemies. He spoke of the words of Jesus to himself, promised his wife that nothing should induce him to condemn this just man, and even gave her a ring before they parted as a pledge of his promise. The character of Pilate was debauched and undecided, but his worst qualities were an extreme pride and meanness which made him never hesitate in the performance of an unjust action, provided it answered his ends. He was excessively superstitious, and when in any difficulty had recourse to charms and spells. He was much puzzled and alarmed about the trial of Jesus; and I saw him running backwards and forwards, offering incense first to one god and then to another, and imploring them to assist him; but Satan filled his imagination with still greater confusion; he first instilled one false idea and then another into his mind. He then had recourse to one of his favourite superstitious practices, that of watching the sacred chickens eat, but in vain,—his mind remained enveloped in darkness, and he became more and more undecided. He first thought that he would acquit our Saviour, whom he well knew to be innocent, but then he feared incurring the wrath of his false gods if he spared him, as he fancied he might be a species of demigod, and obnoxious to them. 'It is possible,' said he inwardly, 'that this man may really be that king of the Jews concerning whose coming there are so many prophecies. It was a king of the Jews whom the Magi came from the East to adore. Perhaps he is a secret enemy both of

our gods and of the emperor; it might be most imprudent in me to spare his life. Who knows whether his death would not be a triumph to my gods?' Then he remembered the wonderful dreams described to him by his wife, who had never seen Jesus, and he again changed, and decided that it would be safer not to condemn him. He tried to persuade himself that he wished to pass a just sentence; but he deceived himself, for when he asked himself, 'What is the truth?' he did not wait for the answer. His mind was filled with confusion, and he was quite at a loss how to act, as his sole desire was to entail no risk upon himself.