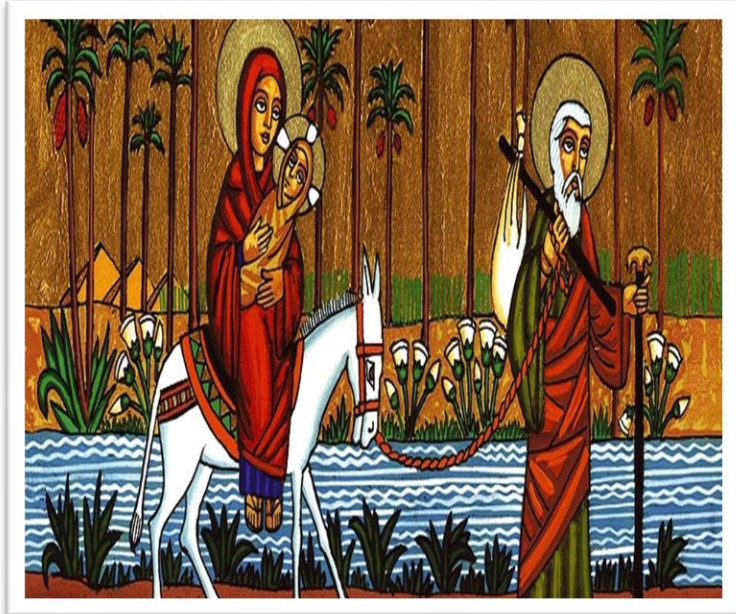


The Holy Family Go to Matarea

The Holy Family left Heliopolis on account of the persecution they there endured and because Joseph could not obtain work. They took byroads and went still further into the country, journeying southward toward Memphis. Passing through a little town not far from Heliopolis, they halted in the forecourt of an open, pagan temple, and sat down to rest; when, all on a sudden, down tumbled the idol and fell to pieces. It had the head of an ox with triple horns, and several cavities in the body to receive the sacrifices that were to be



consumed. At once arose a tumult among the pagan priests; they seized the Holy Family and threatened them with punishment. But one of them represented to his companions, as they were consulting what measures to take, that the best thing for them to do would be to commend themselves to the God of these strangers; for he remembered, he said, what plagues had come upon their forefathers when they had persecuted those people, and that upon the night of their departure from Egypt the firstborn in every house had died. These words were effectual, and the Holy Family was left in peace. The pagan priest who had spoken for them went soon after to Matarea with several of his people, and there joined the Holy Family and the Jewish community.

Mary and Joseph next went to Troja, a place on the eastern side of the Nile, opposite Memphis. It was large and very dirty. They had some idea of remaining there, but they were not well received; indeed, they could get not even a drink of water, much less a few dates for which they begged.

Memphis lay west of the Nile, which was at that point very broad and contained some islands. A part of the city lay also on this side of the river and, in Pharaoh's time, a large palace with gardens and high towers, from which Pharaoh's daughter often looked out on the country around. I saw the spot upon which, among the tall bulrushes, the child Moses was found.

Memphis was like three cities in one, for it was built on both sides of the Nile, and appeared also to be connected with Babylon, a city lying eastward of the river and nearer to its mouth. In Pharaoh's time, the country in general

around the Nile between Heliopolis, Babylon, and Memphis, was so covered with high stone dams and buildings, and so linked together by canals, that those three cities presented the appearance of one large city. But at the time of the Holy Family, all were separate, immense wastes intervening between them.

The holy travelers proceeded northward from Troja along the river toward Babylon, a dirty, low lying city. Between the Nile and Babylon, they took the route by which they had come and returned a distance of about two hours. Buildings in ruins were scattered here and there along the whole road. After crossing a small branch of the river, or a canal, they reached Matarea, which was built upon a tongue of land jutting out into the Nile. The river bathed the city on two sides. It was, in general, a wretched enough place, built only of date-wood and solid mud covered with rushes. Joseph found plenty of work here. He built more substantial houses of wickerwork with galleries around them, to which the occupants could go for air and recreation.

Here the Holy Family dwelt in a dark, vaulted cave that lay in a retired spot on the land side, not far from the gate by which they had entered. Joseph, as at Heliopolis, built a light screen before it. One of the idols in a little temple fell at their arrival and later all the others did the same. The people were in consternation, but one of the priests quieted them by recalling to their remembrance the plagues of Egypt. After some time, as a little community of Jews and converted pagans gathered around the Holy Family, the priests gave over to them the little temple whose idol had fallen at their coming, and Joseph turned it into a synagogue. Joseph was like the patriarch of the community. He taught them how to sing the Psalms correctly, for Judaism in those parts had greatly deteriorated.

Only the poorest Jews dwelt here in Babylon, and that in the most wretched dens and caves. But in the Jewish settlement between On and the Nile, they were numerous and better off. They had a regular temple, for they had lapsed into frightful idolatry. They had a golden calf, a figure with an ox's head, around which were ranged other representations of animals like polecats, or ferrets. These last mentioned animals defend people against the crocodile. . They had, too, an imitation of the Ark of the Covenant and horrible things in it. The idolatry they practiced was of the most shameful kind and, in a subterranean hall, they carried on the most infamous wickedness, deluded by the hope that from it their messiah should come forth. They were exceedingly stiff-necked, and would not be converted. Later on, however, many of them left that settlement and went to Babylon, about two hours distant. In doing so, they could not, on account of the numerous dykes and canals, travel by a straight road; they had to make a detour around

On.

These Jews of the Land of Goshen had already made the acquaintance of the Holy Family, while the latter abode in On. Mary while there had done various kinds of work for them, such as knitting and embroidering covers and bands. She would never undertake works for vanity or extravagance, but only useful things and religious vestments. I saw women bringing work to her, which they wanted done in accordance with the requirements of vanity and fashion, and Mary returning it although so much in need of the pay she would have received for it. The women mocked and scornfully derided her. The Holy Family at first suffered greatly from want. Good water could not be had and wood failed; the inhabitants used only dried grass and reeds for their cooking. The Holy Family generally ate cold food. Joseph had plenty to do. He improved the poor huts for the people; but they treated him almost like a slave, giving him for his labor only what they themselves thought proper. Sometimes he brought home something as a remuneration for his work, and sometimes he brought nothing. The people were very unskillful in building their huts. They had no wood, excepting here and there a log or two; and even if they had had wood, they had no tools to shape it, for they had only knives of bone or stone. Joseph had brought the most necessary tools with him.

The Holy Family were soon settled somewhat comfortably. They had little stools and tables, wicker screens, and a well-ordered fireplace also. The Egyptians ate sitting flat on the ground. In the wall of Mary's sleeping place I saw a recess that Joseph had hollowed out, and in it was Jesus' little bed.

Mary's couch was beside it, and I have often seen her by night kneeling in prayer to God before that little bed. Joseph slept in another enclosed corner.

The oratory of the Holy Family was in a passage outside. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin had separate places in it and Jesus, too, had His little corner, where He prayed sitting, standing, or kneeling. There was a kind of little altar before the Blessed Virgin's place, a small table covered with red and white.

This table was like a leaf on hinges that could be let down from or put up against the wall. When let down, it disclosed a shelf in the wall itself and on the shelf were various objects, among them something that was held as sacred. I saw little bushes in pots formed like chalices; a withered, though still whole branch, on top of which was the lily that had blossomed in Joseph's hand when he had been chosen by lot in the Temple for Mary's spouse; and something like fine, thin, white sticks that were placed crosswise in the rounded part of the recess. The blossoming lily branch was the top of Joseph's staff; it was stuck in a box about one-and-a-half inches in diameter.

The little sticks that were arranged crosswise, were also in a box, a

transparent one. There were about five of those little white sticks of the thickness of a coarse straw. They were crossed and bound in the middle to a kind of little sheaf. But one pays very little attention to such things when in vision; one's thoughts are chiefly intent upon the holy personages there presented.

I saw that the Holy Family had to subsist on fruits and bad water. They had been so long without good water that Joseph resolved to saddle the ass, take his leathern bottle, and start for the balsam spring in the desert in order to get some. But the Blessed Virgin was told in prayer by an angelic apparition that she should seek and find a spring at the back of their present abode. I saw her going over the hill in which they dwelt, to a deep vacant lot that lay at some distance between ruined walls. A large, old tree stood on that ground. Mary had in her hand a rod provided with a little scoop, such as the people of that country commonly carry on journeys. She stuck it into the ground near the tree, and a beautiful, clear stream of water instantly gushed forth. She hurried back joyfully to call Joseph, who soon removed the upper crust of earth and disclosed a well which had long ago been dug out and lined with masonry, but which for some time had been choked up and dry. He soon restored it and paved it around very beautifully with stones. At the side of the well toward which Mary had approached, lay a great stone almost like an altar. I think it was used for that purpose in former times.

The Blessed Virgin after that often washed Jesus' clothes and bands here, and dried them in the sun. The well remained unknown and was used only by the Holy Family until Jesus had grown large enough to go on little errands and even to bring water for His Mother. Once I saw Him taking other children to the well and giving them a drink of the water which He scooped up in a hollow, crooked leaf. The little ones told this to their parents, and so the well became known. Others now began to go to it, though it remained principally in the use of the Jews. Even in the time of the Holy Family, it possessed healing properties for the leprosy. Later, when a little chapel had been built over the dwelling of the Holy Family, there was near the high altar a flight of steps leading down to their first abode. There I saw the spring. It was surrounded by dwellings, and its waters used for the cure of leprosy and similar diseases. Even the Turks kept a light burning in the little chapel, and dreaded being overtaken by some misfortune if they neglected it. But the last I saw of the spring, it was lying solitary, surrounded only by trees.

I saw the Boy Jesus bringing water from the well for His Mother for the first time. Mary was in prayer when the Boy slipped to the well with a bottle, and brought it back full of water. Mary was unspeakably affected when she saw Him coming back with the water. She knelt down and implored Him never to

do that again, for He might fall into the well. But Jesus replied that He would take care, and that He wanted to render her that service whenever she needed it. If Joseph happened to be working at a little distance from home, and did he leave a tool lying behind him, I used to see the Boy Jesus running after it and bringing it to him. The Boy noticed everything. I think the joy that Mary and Joseph experienced on His account, must have outweighed all their sufferings. Though perfectly childlike, He was very wise, skilled in everything; He knew and understood everything. I often saw Mary and Joseph filled with unspeakable admiration.

When the Boy Jesus took to their owners the covers embroidered or woven by His Mother, who hoped to receive bread in return for her work, I often saw Him teased at first, and consequently sad. But after awhile, the Holy Family was very much loved by the people. I saw other children giving Jesus figs and dates, while many of their elders sought the Holy Family for help and consolation. All in trouble said, "Let us go to the Jewish Child." I saw the Boy going on all kinds of errands, even to a Jewish town a mile distant, to get bread in exchange for His Mother's work. The wild animals, numerous on His route, did Him no harm; on the contrary, they and even the serpents showed Him affection. Once I saw Him going with other children to the Jewish town; He was weeping bitterly over the degradation of the Jews.

When He went for the first time alone to that Jewish town, He wore, also for the first time, the brown robe woven by Mary. It was trimmed around the border with yellowish flowers. I saw Him kneeling and praying on the way. Two angels appeared to Him and spoke of Herod's death, but He said nothing of it to His parents.