

THE MOST HOLY INCARNATION

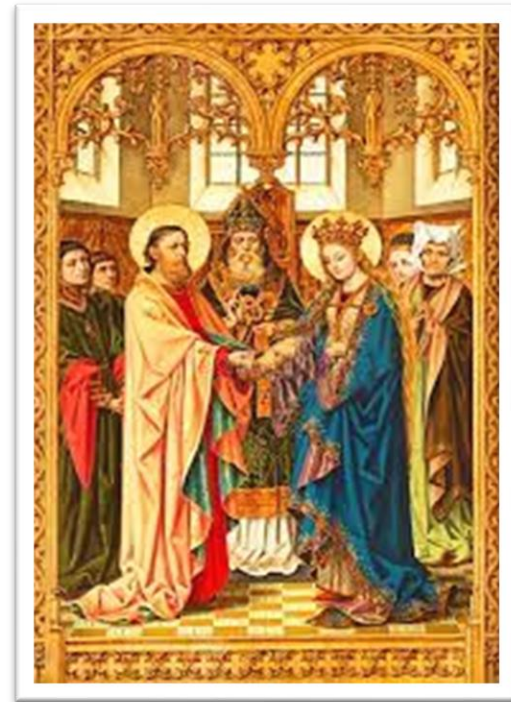
Mary Espoused to St. Joseph

Joseph was the third of six brothers. His parents dwelt in a large mansion outside of Bethlehem. It was the ancient birthplace of David, but in Joseph's time only the principal walls were in existence. His father's name was Jacob. In front of the house was a large courtyard, or garden. In it was a stone spring house built over a spring whose waters gushed forth out of faucets, each of which represented some animal's head. The garden was enclosed by walls and surrounded by covered walks of trees and shrubbery.

The lower story of the dwelling had a door, but no windows. In the upper story there were circular openings, over which ran around the whole top of the house a broad gallery with four little pavilions capped by cupolas. From these cupolas, a view far into the surrounding country was afforded. David's palace in Jerusalem was provided with similar towers and cupolas. It was out of one of them that he saw Bethsabee. Above the center of the flat roof arose another smaller story, likewise crowned by a tower and cupola.

Joseph and his brothers occupied that last story with an aged Jew, their preceptor. The latter occupied the highest room in the story, while the brothers slept in one chamber, their sleeping places separated from one another by mats, which in the daytime were rolled up against the walls. I have seen them playing up there, each in his own separate space. They had toys shaped like animals, like little pugs. Their preceptor gave them all sorts of strange instructions that I could not understand. He laid sticks on the ground in various figures and stood the boys in them. The latter stepped into other figures which they had formed by rearranging the sticks. They laid sticks also in various positions, as if for measurement. I saw too the father and mother of the boys. They did not appear to trouble themselves much about their children, for they paid very little attention to them. They, the parents, appeared to me to be neither good nor bad.

Joseph was perhaps eight years old. He was very different from his brothers, very talented, and he learned quickly; but he was simple in his tastes, gentle, pious, and unambitious. The other boys used to play him all kinds of tricks and knock him around at will. They had little enclosed gardens, at whose entrance there stood on pillars covered images like swaddled infants. I often



saw similar figures on the curtains of oratories, those of Anne and the Blessed Virgin, for instance. The only difference was that Mary's picture held in its arms a chalice above which something arose. In Joseph's parental home these images were like swathed infants with round faces environed by rays of light. There were many such pictures in Jerusalem, especially in the olden times, and also among the decorations of the Temple. I have seen them in Egypt also; and among the idols that Rachel purloined from her father, were similar figures though smaller. Many of the Jews had swathed puppets like them lying in little chests and baskets. They were intended to represent the child Moses in his little basket, and the swathing signified the binding power of the Law. When gazing at these figures, I used to think: The Jews honored the little image of the child Moses, but we have the images of the Child Jesus. In the boys' little gardens grew bushes, small trees, and plants. I saw that his brothers often slyly trod down and tore up the plants in Joseph's little garden. They always treated him roughly, but he bore all patiently. Sometimes, when kneeling in prayer in the colonnade that ran around the courtyard, his face turned to the wall, his brothers would push him over. Once I saw one of them, when Joseph was thus praying, kick him in the back; but Joseph appeared not to notice it. The other repeated his blows, until at last Joseph fell to the ground. Then I saw that he had been absorbed in God. But he did not revenge himself; he merely turned away quietly and sought another secluded spot.

Outside and adjoining the garden wall, were some small, low dwellings. In them dwelt two elderly, veiled females, as is often the case near the schools. They were servants. I saw them carrying water into the house. The domestic arrangements were similar to those of Joachim and Anne's house, the beds rolled up and wicker partitions before them. I often saw Joseph's brothers talking with the servant maids and helping them in their work; but Joseph never interchanged words with them; he was always very reserved. I think there were also some daughters in the family.

Joseph's parents were not well-satisfied with him. They would have wished him, on account of his talents, to fit himself for a position in the world. But he was too unworldly for such aims, he had no desire whatever to shine. He may have been about twelve years old when I often saw him beyond Bethlehem opposite the Crib Cave, praying with some very pious, old, Jewish women. They had an oratory hidden in a vault. I do not know whether these women were relatives of Joseph or not; I think that they were connected with Anne. Joseph often went to them in his troubles and shared their devotions. Sometimes he dwelt in their neighborhood with a master carpenter, to whom he lent a helping hand. The carpenter taught him his trade,

and Joseph found his geometry of use. The hostility of his brothers at last went so far that, when eighteen, Joseph fled from his father's house by night. A friend, who lived outside of Bethlehem, had brought him clothes in which to make his escape. I saw him in Lebona carrying on carpentry. He worked for his living in a very poor family. The man supported himself by making such rough wicker partitions as those Joseph knew how to put together. The latter humbly assisted the family as far as he could. I saw him gathering wood and carrying it to the house. His parents, in the meantime, believed that he had been kidnapped; but his brothers discovered him, and then he was again persecuted. Joseph, however, would not leave the poor people nor desist from the humble occupation of which his family was ashamed. I saw him afterward in another place (Thanach). There he did better work for a well-to-do family. Though a small place, it had a synagogue. Joseph lived very piously and humbly, loved and esteemed by all. At last he worked for a man in Tiberias, at which place he lived alone near the water.

Joseph's parents were long since dead, and his brothers scattered; only two of them still dwelt in Bethlehem. The paternal mansion had passed into other hands, and the whole family had rapidly declined. Joseph was deeply pious; he prayed much for the coming of the Messiah. I noticed, too, his great reserve in the presence of females. Shortly before his call to Jerusalem for his espousals with Mary, he entertained the idea of fitting up a more secluded oratory in his dwelling. But an angel appeared to him in prayer, and told him not to do it; that, as in ancient times, the Patriarch Joseph became by God's appointment the administrator of the Egyptian granaries, so now to him was the granary of Redemption to be wedded. In his humility Joseph could not comprehend the meaning of this and so he betook himself to prayer. At last he was summoned to Jerusalem to be espoused to the Blessed Virgin. There were seven other virgins who were with Mary to be dismissed from the Temple and given in marriage. On this account St. Anne went to Jerusalem to be with Mary, who grieved at the thought of leaving the Temple. But she was told that she must be married. I saw one of the distinguished old priests, who was no longer able to walk, borne into the Holy of Holies. An incense offering was enkindled. The priest prayed sitting before a roll of writings, and in vision his hand was placed upon that verse in the Prophet Isaias (11:1) in which it is written that there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a flower shall rise up out of his root. Thereupon I saw that all the unmarried men in the country of the House of David were summoned to the Temple. Many of them made their appearance in holiday attire, and Mary was conducted to their presence. I saw one among them, a very pious youth from the region of Bethlehem, who had

always ardently prayed to be allowed to minister to the advent of the Messiah. Great was his desire to wed Mary. But Mary wept; she wished not to take a husband. Then the high priest gave to each of the suitors a branch which was to be held in the hand during the offering of prayer and sacrifice.

After that, all the branches were laid in the Holy of Holies with the understanding that he whose branch should blossom, was to be Mary's husband. Now when that youth who so ardently desired to wed Mary found that this branch, along with all the others, had failed to blossom, he retired to a hall outside the Temple and, with arms raised to God, wept bitterly. The other suitors left the Temple, and that youth hurried to Mount Carmel where, since the days of Elias, hermits had dwelt. He took up his abode on the mount, and there spent his days in prayer for the coming of the Messiah. I saw the priests, after this, hunting through different rolls of writing in their search for another descendant of the House of David, one that had not presented himself among the suitors for Mary's hand. And there they found that, among the six brothers of Bethlehem, one was unknown and ignored.

They sought him out and so discovered Joseph's retreat, six miles from Jerusalem, near Samaria. It was a small place on a little river. There Joseph dwelt alone in a humble house near the water, and carried on the trade of a carpenter under another master. He was told to go up to the Temple. He went, accordingly, arrayed in his best. A branch was given him. As he was about to lay it upon the altar, it blossomed on top into a white flower like a lily. At the same time I saw a light like the Holy Spirit hovering over him. He was then led to Mary, who was in her chamber, and she accepted him as her spouse.

The espousals took place, I think, upon our 23rd of January. They were celebrated in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion in a house often used for such feasts.

The seven virgins that were to leave the Temple with Mary, had already departed. They were recalled to accompany Mary on her festal journey to Nazareth, where Anne had already prepared her little home. The marriage feast lasted seven or eight days. The women and the virgins, companions of Mary in the Temple, were present, also many relatives of Joachim and Anne, and two daughters from Gophna. Many lambs were slaughtered and offered in sacrifice.

I have had a clear vision of Mary in her bridal dress. She wore a colored, woolen under dress with-out sleeves, her arms encircled by white, woolen fillets. On the breast and as high as the neck, lay a white collar ornamented with jewels, pearls, etc. Then came a kind of gown open in front, wide like a mantle from top to bottom, and with flowing sleeves. This gown was blue, embroidered with large red, white, and yellow roses and green leaves,

something like the ancient vestments worn at Mass. It fastened around the neck on the white collar, and the lower border was edged with fringes and tassels. Over this was a kind of scapular of white-and gold-flowered silk, set over the breast with pearls and shining stones. It lay upon the front opening of the dress, and reached to the edge of the same; it was about one-half an ell wide and was fringed with tassels and balls. A corresponding strip hung down the back, while shorter and narrower ones fell over the shoulders and arms. These lappets were caught under the arms from front to back with the gold cords, or delicate chains, with which the broad upper piece of the bodice was fastened, as also the breast piece that was placed over the upper body. By this arrangement, the flowered stuff of the dress was puffed out between the cords. The wide sleeves were tightly fastened in the middle of the upper and the lower arm by buckles, puffing out around the shoulders, the elbows, and the wrists.

Over this costume fell a long sky-blue mantle. It was fastened at the neck by an ornament, and over it was a white ruffle seemingly of feathers or silk dots. The mantle fell back from the shoulders, forming a large fold on the sides, and hung behind in a pointed train. It was embroidered around the edge in flowers of gold.

Mary's hair was arranged with such skill as is difficult to describe. It was parted on top of the head and divided into numerous fine strands, which were caught together with pearls and white silk. It formed a large net that fell over the shoulders and down the back to the middle of the mantle. It looked like a web. The ends of the hair were rolled in, and the whole net edged with fringe and pearls.

On her head was placed, first a wreath of white raw silk or wool, closing on top with three bands of the same meeting in a tuft. On this rested a crown about the breadth of one's hand, set with many colored jewels. Three pieces arose from the circlet and met together in the center, where they were surmounted by a ball.

In her left hand Mary carried a little garland of red and white roses made of silk, and in the right a beautiful candlestick covered with gold. It had no foot, but was furnished like a scepter with knobs above and below the point at which it was to be grasped by the hand. The stem began to swell out in the middle and ended in a little dish upon which burned a white flame.

On her feet she wore heavy sandals about two fingers in thickness under which, before and behind, was a support like a heel. They were green, and gave the foot the appearance of standing upon sods. Two straps, white and gold, went over the foot and held them in their place.

The virgins at the Temple arranged Mary's skillfully woven hairnet. I saw

them thus engaged. There were many busied with it, and the work went more swiftly than one could imagine.

Anne brought all the beautiful clothes, but Mary was so modest that it was only with reluctance that she allowed herself to be arrayed in them. After the nuptial ceremony, her braided hair was wound around her head, a milk-white veil reaching up to the elbows thrown over her, and the crown placed upon it.

The Blessed Virgin had auburn hair, dark eyebrows, fine and arched, a very high forehead, large downcast eyes with long, dark lashes, a straight nose, delicate and rather long, a lovely mouth around which played a most noble expression, and a pointed chin. She was of medium height, and she moved very gently and gravely, looking very bashful in her rich attire. After the marriage feast, she wore another dress. It was striped and less magnificent than the one described. I have a scrap of it among my relics. This striped dress she wore at Cana and on other holy occasions. She wore her wedding suit once again in the Temple.

The very wealthy among the Jews changed their dress three or four times during a marriage feast. Mary in her magnificent apparel presented an appearance somewhat similar to the richly adorned women of a much later period, the Empress Helena, for instance, and even Cunegundis herself. The usual clothing of the Jewish women enveloped them closely, giving them an appearance of being wrapped up; but Mary's wedding dress was very different; it was something on the Roman style.

Joseph wore a long, wide blue coat fastened from the breast down with loops and buttons. The wide sleeves were laced at the sides, a broad cuff turned up at the wrist, the inside provided, as it were, with pockets. Around the neck was something like a brown collar, over which lay a kind of stole, and upon the breast hung two white bands.

After the marriage, Joseph went to Bethlehem on some business, and Mary with twelve or fifteen women and maidens went to Anne's house near Nazareth. They made the journey on foot. When Joseph returned, I saw at Anne's house a feast at which, besides the usual household, there were about six guests and several children present. Cups were on the table. The Blessed Virgin wore a mantle embroidered with red, white, and blue flowers. Her face was covered with a transparent veil over which was a black one.

I afterward saw Joseph and Mary in the house of Nazareth. Joseph had a separate apartment in the front of the house, a three-cornered chamber this side of the kitchen. Both Mary and Joseph were timid and reserved in each other's presence. They were very quiet and prayerful.

Once I saw Anne making preparations to go to Nazareth. Under her arm she

carried a bundle that contained some things for Mary. To reach Nazareth, which lay in front of a hill, she had to go over a plain and through a grove. Mary wept very much when Anne was leaving and accompanied her a part of the way. Joseph was alone in his apartment in the front of the house. Mary and Joseph had, properly speaking, no regular housekeeping affairs; they received from Anne all that they needed. I saw Mary spinning and sewing too, but yet with wide stitches. The clothes then worn had not many seams and were entirely in strips. I saw her embroidering also, and with little white sticks knitting or working. The cooking she did was very simple and, while it was going on, the bread was baking in the ashes. They used sheep's milk, and of meat generally pigeons only.