

Mary's Purification

Before the break of day, Mary seated herself on the ass, the Child Jesus on her lap. She had only a couple of covers and one bundle. She sat upon a side seat that had a little footboard. They started to the left around the Crib hill and off by the east side of Bethlehem unperceived by anyone.

I saw them at midday resting at a spring that was roofed in and surrounded by seats. A couple of women came out here to Mary, bringing to her little mugs and rolls. The offering that the Holy Family had with them was hanging in a basket on the ass.

The basket had three compartments; two contained fruit, and in the third, which was of open wickerwork, were doves. Toward evening, when about a quarter of an hour's distance from Jerusalem, they turned and entered a small house that lay next a large inn. The owners were a married couple without children, and by them the holy travelers were welcomed with extraordinary joy. The house lay between the brook Cedron and the city. I saw Anne's man servant and the maid stopping with these people on their journey home, at which time also they engaged quarters for the Holy Family. The husband was a gardener; he clipped the hedges and kept the road in order. The wife was a relative of Johanna Chusa. They appeared to me to be Essenians.

The whole of the next day, I still saw the Holy Family with the old people outside Jerusalem. The Blessed Virgin was almost all the time alone in her room with the Child which lay upon a low, covered projection of the wall.

She was always in prayer, and appeared to be preparing herself for the sacrifice. I received at that moment an interior instruction as to how we should prepare for the Holy Sacrifice. I saw in her room myriads of angels adoring the Child Jesus. Mary was wholly absorbed in her own interior. The old people did out of pure love all they could for the Mother of God. They must have had some presentiment of the Child's holiness.

I had a vision also of the priest Simeon. He was a very aged, emaciated man with a short beard. He had a wife and three grown sons, the youngest of whom was already twenty years old. Simeon dwelt at the Temple. I saw him going through a narrow, dark passage in the wall of the Temple to a little cell which was built in the thick walls. It had only one opening, from which he



could look down into the Temple. Here I saw the old man kneeling and praying in ecstasy. The apparition of an angel appeared before him, telling him to notice particularly the first Child that would, early the next morning, be brought for presentation, for that It was the Messiah whom he had now awaited so long. The angel added that, after seeing the Child, he would die. Oh, what a beautiful sight that was to me! The little cell was so bright, and the old man radiant with joy! He went home full of gladness, announced to his wife the good tidings of the angel, and then returned to his prayer. I have seen that the pious priests and Israelites of those times did not sway to and fro so much when at prayer as the Jews of our days; but I saw them scourging themselves. Anna in her Temple cell was also rapt in prayer; and she, too, had a vision.

Early in the morning while it was still quite dark, I saw the Holy Family accompanied by the two old people going into the city and to the Temple. The ass was laden as if for a journey, and they had with them the basket of offerings. They first entered a court that was surrounded by a wall, and there the ass was tied under a shed. The Blessed Virgin and Child were received by an old woman and conducted along a covered walk up to the Temple. The old woman carried a light, for it was still dark. Here in this passage came Simeon full of expectation to meet Mary. He spoke a few joyous words with her, took the Child Jesus, pressed Him to his heart, and then hurried to another side of the Temple. Since the preceding evening, when he had received the announcement of the angel, he had been consumed by desire. He had taken his stand in the women's passage to the Temple, hardly able to await the coming of Mary and her Child.

Mary was now led by the woman to a porch in that part of the Temple in which the ceremony of presentation was to take place. Anna and another woman (Noemi, Mary's former directress) received her. Simeon came out to the porch and conducted Mary with the Child in her arms into the hall to the right of the women's porch. It was in this porch that the treasure box stood by which Jesus was sitting when the widow cast in her mite. Old Anna, to whom Joseph had handed over the basket of fruit and doves, followed with Noemi, and Joseph retired to the standing place of the men.

It was understood at the Temple that several women were coming today to offer sacrifice, and preparations had been made accordingly. Numerous pyramidal lamps were burning round the walls, the little flames rising out of a disk supported upon an arm in the form of an arch, which shone almost as brightly as the light itself. On the disk hung extinguishers which, when struck together above the flame, put it out. Before the altar, from whose corners projected horns, was placed a chest, the doors of which opened outward and

afforded supports for a tolerably large slab, the whole forming a table. This surface was covered first with a red cloth and over that a white transparent one, both of which fell to the floor. On the four corners burned lamps with several branches; in the center of the table was a cradle-shaped basket, and near it two oval dishes and two small baskets. All these objects, as also the priests' vestments, which were lying on the horned altar, were kept in the chest whose open doors formed the table. A railing enclosed the whole. On both sides of this hall were rows of seats in tiers where priests were sitting in prayer.

Simeon conducted Mary through the altar rail and up to the table of sacrifice. The Infant Jesus, wrapped in His sky-blue dress, was laid in the basket cradle. Mary wore a sky-blue dress, a white veil, and a long, yellowish mantle. When the Child had been placed in the cradle, Simeon led Mary out again to the standing place of the women. He then proceeded to the altar proper, whereon lay the priestly vestments and at which, besides himself, three other priests were vesting. And now one of them went behind, one before, and two on either side of the table, and prayed over the Child, while Anna approached Mary, gave her the doves and fruit in two little baskets, one on top of the other, and went with her to the altar rail. Anna remained there while Mary, led again by Simeon, passed on through the railing and up to the altar. There upon one of the dishes she deposited the fruit, and into the other laid some coins; the doves she placed upon the table in the basket. Simeon stood before the table near Mary while the priest behind it took the Child from the cradle, raised It on high and toward the different parts of the Temple, praying all the while. Simeon next received the Child from him, laid It in Mary's arms, and, from a roll of parchment that lay near him on a desk, prayed over her and the Child.

After that Simeon again led Mary to the railing, whence Anna accompanied her to the place set apart for the women. In the meantime, about twenty mothers with their firstborn had arrived. Joseph and several others were standing back in the place assigned to the men.

Then two priests at the altar proper began a religious service accompanied by incense and prayers, while those in the rows of seats swayed to and fro a little, but not like the Jews of the present day.

When these ceremonies were ended, Simeon went to where Mary was standing, took the Child into his arms and, entranced with joy, spoke long and loud. When he ceased, Anna also filled with the Spirit, spoke a long time.

I saw that the people around heard them indeed, but it caused no interruption to the other ceremonies. Such praying aloud appeared not to be unusual. But all were deeply impressed, and regarded Mary and the Child

with great reverence. Mary shone like a rose. Her public offerings were indeed the poorest; but Joseph in private gave to Simeon and to Anna many little, yellow, triangular pieces to be employed for the use of the Temple, and chiefly for the maidens belonging to it who were too poor to meet their own expenses. It was not everyone that could have his children reared in the Temple. Once I saw a boy in Anna's care. I think he was the son of a prince, or king, but I have forgotten his name.

I did not witness the purification ceremonies of the other mothers; but I had an interior conviction that all the children offered on that day would receive special grace, and that some of the martyred innocents were among them. When the Most Holy Child Jesus was laid upon the altar in the basket cradle, an indescribable light filled the Temple. I saw that God was in that light, and I saw the heavens open up as far as the Most Holy Trinity.

Mary was now led back into the court by Anna and Noemi. Here she took leave of them, and was joined by Joseph and the old people with whom she and Joseph had lodged. They went with the ass straight out of Jerusalem, and the good, old people accompanied them a part of the way. They reached Bethoron the same day, and stayed overnight in the house which had been Mary's last stopping place on her journey to the Temple thirteen years before. Here some of Anne's people were waiting to conduct them home.