

## **Birth of the Child Jesus**

I saw Joseph on the following day arranging a seat and couch for Mary in the so-called Suckling Cave of Abraham, which was also the sepulcher of Mar aha, his nurse. It was more spacious than the cave of the Crib.

Mary remained there some hours, while Joseph was making the latter more habitable. He brought also from the city many different little vessels and some dried fruits. Mary told him that the birth hour of the Child would arrive on the coming night.

It was then nine months since her conception by the Holy Ghost. She begged him to do all in his power that they might receive as honorably as possible this Child promised by God, this Child supernaturally conceived; and she invited him to unite with her in prayer for those hard-hearted people who would afford Him no place of shelter. Joseph proposed to bring some pious women whom he knew in Bethlehem to her assistance; but Mary would not allow it, she declared that she had no need of anyone. It was five o'clock in the evening when Joseph brought Mary back again to the Crib Cave. He hung up several more lamps, and made a place under the shed before the door for the little she-ass, which came joyfully hurrying from the fields to meet them. When Mary told Joseph that her time was drawing near and that he should now betake himself to prayer, he left her and turned toward his sleeping place to do her bidding. Before entering his little recess, he looked back once toward that part of the cave where Mary knelt upon her couch in prayer, her back to him, her face toward the east. He saw the cave filled with the light that streamed from Mary, for she was entirely enveloped as if by flames. It was as if he were, like Moses, looking into the burning bush. He sank prostrate to the ground in prayer, and looked not back again. The glory around Mary became brighter and brighter, the lamps that Joseph had lit were no longer to be seen. Mary knelt, her flowing white robe spread out before her. At the twelfth hour, her prayer became ecstatic, and I saw her raised so far above the ground that one could see it beneath her. Her hands were crossed upon her breast, and the light around her grew even more resplendent. I no longer saw the roof of the cave. Above Mary stretched a pathway of light up to Heaven, in which pathway it seemed as if one light came forth from another, as if one figure dissolved into another, and from



these different spheres of light other heavenly figures issued. Mary continued in prayer, her eyes bent low upon the ground. At that moment she gave birth to the Infant Jesus. I saw Him like a tiny, shining Child, lying on the rug at her knees, and brighter far than all the other brilliancy. He seemed to grow before my eyes. But dazzled by the glittering and flashing of light, I know not whether I really saw that, or how I saw it. Even inanimate nature seemed stirred. The stones of the rocky floor and the walls of the cave were glimmering and sparkling, as if instinct with life.

Mary's ecstasy lasted some moments longer. Then I saw her spread a cover over the Child, but she did not yet take It up, nor even touch It. After a long time, I saw the Child stirring and heard It crying, and then only did Mary seem to recover full consciousness. She lifted the Child, along with the cover that she had thrown over It, to her breast and sat veiled, herself and Child quite enveloped. I think she was suckling It. I saw angels around her in human form prostrate on their faces. It may, perhaps, have been an hour after the birth when Mary called St. Joseph, who still lay prostrate in prayer.

When he approached, he fell on his knees, his face to the ground, in a transport of joy, devotion, and humility. Mary again urged him to look upon the Sacred Gift from Heaven, and then did Joseph take the Child into his arms. And now the Blessed Virgin swathed the Child in red and over that in a white veil up as far as under the little arms, and the upper part of the body from the armpits to the head, she wrapped up in another piece of linen. She had only four swaddling cloths with her. She laid the Child in the Crib, which had been filled with rushes and fine moss over which was spread a cover that hung down at the sides. The Crib stood over the stone trough, and at this spot the ground stretched straight and level as far as the passage, where it made a broader flexure toward the south. The floor of this part of the cave lay somewhat deeper than where the Child was born, and down to it steps had been formed in the earth. When Mary laid the Child in the Crib, both she and Joseph stood by It in tears, singing the praises of God.

The seat and the couch of the Blessed Virgin were near the Crib. I saw her on the first day sitting upright and also resting on her side, though I noticed in her no special signs of weakness or sickness. Both before and after the birth, she was robed in white. When visitors came, she generally sat near the Crib more closely veiled.

On the night of the Birth there gushed forth a beautiful spring in the other cave that lay to the right. The water ran out, and the next day Joseph dug a course for it and formed a spring.

In those visions to which the event itself, and not the feast of the Church, gave rise, I saw, indeed, no such sparkling joy in nature as I sometimes see at

holy Christmastide. Then the joy has an interior signification. But yet, I saw extraordinary gladness, and in many places, even in the most distant regions of the world, something marvelous on that midnight. By it the good were filled with joyful longings, and the bad with dread. I saw also many of the lower animals joyfully agitated. I saw fountains gushing forth and swelling, flowers springing up in many places, trees and plants budding with new life, and all sending forth their fragrance. In Bethlehem it was misty, and the sky above shone with a murky, reddish glare. But over the valley of the shepherds, around the Crib, and in the vale of the Suckling Cave floated bright clouds of refreshing dew.

I saw the herds of the three oldest shepherds near the hill under sheds; but those further on near the shepherds' tower, were partly in the open air. The three eldest shepherds, roused by the wonders of the night, I saw standing together before their huts, gazing around and pointing out the magnificent light that shone over the Crib. The shepherds at the distant tower were also in full movement. They had climbed up the tower and were looking toward the Crib over which they, too, saw the light. I saw something like a cloud of glory descend upon the three shepherds. I saw in it figures moving to and fro, and heard the approach of sweet, clear voices singing softly. At first, the shepherds were frightened. Soon there stood before them five or seven lovely, radiant figures holding in their hands a long strip like a scroll upon which were written words in letters a hand in length. The angels were singing the

The angels appeared also to the shepherds on the tower and where else, I do not now recall. I did not see them hurrying off at once to the cave. The first three were indeed an hour and a half distant from it, and those on the tower as far again. But I saw that they began at once to reflect upon what gifts they should take to the newborn Saviour, and to get them together as quickly as possible. The three shepherds went to the Crib early next morning.

I saw that Anne at Nazareth, Elizabeth in Juttah, Noemi, Anna, and Simeon in the Temple—all had on this night visions from which they learned the birth of the Saviour. The child John was unspeakably joyous. But only Anne knew where the newborn Child was; the others, and even Elizabeth, knew indeed of Mary and saw her in vision, but they knew nothing of Bethlehem.

I saw something very wonderful taking place in the Temple. The writings of the Sadducees were more than once hurled by an invisible force from the places in which they were kept, which circumstance gave rise to unaccountable dread. The fact was ascribed to sorcery, and large sums of money were paid to hush the matter up.

I saw that in Rome, across the river where numbers of Jews dwelt, a well of

oil gushed forth spontaneously, to the wonder of all the witnesses. And when Jesus was born, a magnificent statue of the god Jupiter fell with violence from its place. All were struck with fear. Sacrifices were offered and another idol, I think Venus, was interrogated as to the cause. The devil was forced to speak by its mouth, and he proclaimed that it had happened because a virgin unmarried had conceived and brought forth a son. He told them also of the miracle of the oil well. Where this took place now stands a church in honor of the Mother of God. I saw that the pagan priests were deeply perplexed at the whole affair. They searched their writings, and discovered the following history. About seventy years previously, this idol (Jupiter) had been greatly venerated. It was magnificently ornamented with gold and precious stones, grand ceremonies were held in its honor, and numerous sacrifices offered to it. But there was in Rome at that time an extraordinarily pious woman who lived on her own means. I know not for certain whether she was a Jewess or not; but she had visions, uttered prophecies, and informed many persons as to the cause of their sterility. This woman had thrown out words to this effect that they should not honor the idol at so great a cost, for that they would one day behold it burst asunder in their midst. This speech proved so offensive that she was imprisoned and tormented until by her prayers she obtained from God the information as to when that misfortune would happen. The pagan priests demanded what had been revealed to her, and when at last she replied: "The idol will be shattered when an Immaculate Virgin shall bring forth a son," they hooted at her, and released her as a fool. And now the people recalled the fact and declared that the woman had spoken truly. I saw also that the Roman consuls, of whom one was named Lentulus and who was a friend of St. Peter and an ancestor of the martyr-priest Moses, made notes of this occurrence, as well as that of the bursting forth of the oil well.

On this night, I saw the Emperor Augustus at the Capitol where he had an apparition of a rainbow upon which sat the Virgin and Child. From the oracle that he caused to be interrogated upon what he had seen, he received the answer: "A Child is born, and before Him we must all flee!" The emperor at once erected an altar and offered sacrifice to the Son of the Virgin, as to the "Firstborn of God."

I had also a vision of Egypt far beyond Matarea, Heliopolis, and Memphis. There was in that region a large idol that used to give answers to all kinds of questions. Suddenly it became mute. The king ordered immense sacrifices to be offered throughout his whole dominions. Then was the devil, upon the command of God, forced to say: "I have become silent, I must give place to another. The Son of the Virgin is born, and a temple will be here erected to

His honor." Upon hearing this, the king wanted to raise a temple to the newborn Child next to that of the god, but I do not clearly recall the story. I know, however, that the idol was put aside and that a temple was erected to the Virgin and Child whom it had proclaimed, and who were afterward honored with pagan rites.

I beheld a great wonder in the country of the Three Kings. There was a tower on a mountain to which the Kings retired in turn with a retinue of priests, in order to observe the stars. What they saw they committed to writing and communicated to one another. On this night there were two of them there, Mensor and Seir. The third, who dwelt toward the east side of the Caspian Sea, was called Theokeno. He was not present. There was a certain constellation at which they always gazed, and whose variations they noted. In it they saw visions and pictures. Upon this night also, they had several visions of various kinds. It was not in one star alone that they saw those visions, but in several that formed a figure, and there seemed to be a movement in them. They saw the vision of the moon over which arose a beautiful rainbow-colored arch on which was seated a Virgin. The left limb was drawn up in a sitting posture, the right hung a little lower and rested on the moon. To the left of the Virgin and rising above the arch, was a grapevine, and on her right a sheaf of wheat. In front of the Virgin was a chalice like that used at the Last Supper. It appeared to issue, but with greater clearness and brightness, from the brilliancy that emanated from her. Out of the chalice arose a Child, and over the Child shone a bright disk like an empty ostensorium. It was surrounded by radiating beams. It reminded me of the Blessed Sacrament. On the Virgin's right was an octangular church with a golden door and two small side-doors. With the right hand, the Virgin put the Child and the host into the church which, meanwhile, grew larger and larger, and in which I saw the Most Holy Trinity. Above the church arose a tower. Theokeno, the third king, had similar visions in his own home. Over the head of the Virgin sitting on the arch shone a star, which suddenly shot from its place and skimmed along the heavens before the Kings. It was for them a voice announcing as never before that the Child, so long awaited by them and by their ancestors, was at last born in Judea, and that they were to follow that star. For some nights immediately preceding that blessed one, they had from their tower seen all kinds of visions in the heavens, kings journeying to the Child and offering their homage to It. So now they hurriedly gathered together their treasures and with gifts and presents began the journey, for they did not want to be the last. I saw all three after a few days meeting on the way.