

Jesus in Juttah. He Makes Known The Death of John the Baptist

Jesus went with His companions to Juttah, the Baptist's birthplace. It was five hours' distance from the inn outside Jerusalem and one hour from Hebron. Mary, Veronica, Susanna, Johanna Chusa, Johanna Marcus, Lazarus, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and several of the disciples from Jerusalem were there awaiting

Jesus. They had travelled in small parties and, having come by a shorter route from Jerusalem, had reached their destination several hours before Him.



Zachary's house was situated on a hill outside of Juttah. Both it and its surroundings, consisting of vineyards, were the inheritance of the Baptist. The son of his father's brother, likewise named Zachary, occupied the house at this time and managed affairs. He was a Levite and an intimate friend of Luke, by whom not long before he had been visited in Jerusalem, and had then heard many particulars of the Holy Family. He was younger than the Baptist, of the age of the Apostle John. From his early years he had been like an own child in Elizabeth's house. He belonged to that class of Levites who were most like the Essenians and who, having received from their ancestors the knowledge of certain mysteries, waited with earnest devotion for the coming of the Messiah. Zachary was enlightened and unmarried. He received Jesus and His companions with the customary marks of respect, washing of feet and refreshments. After that Jesus repaired to the synagogue in Hebron. It was a fast day, and on that evening began a local celebration in Juttah and Hebron. It was in memory of David's victory over Absalom who had in Hebron, as being his birthplace, first raised the standard of revolt. Numerous lamps were lighted during this feast even in the daytime, both in the synagogue and private dwellings. The people gave thanks for the interior light which had at that time led their ancestors to choose the right, and implored a continuance of that heavenly illumination, to enable them always to make choice of the same. Jesus delivered an instruction to a very large audience.

The Levites showed Him great esteem and affection, and He took a meal with them.

As Mary was making the journey with the women to this part of the country, she related to them many particulars connected with her former journey thither with Joseph on the occasion of her visit to Elizabeth. She showed them the spot on which Joseph had bade her farewell on his departure for home, and told them how uneasy she felt when she reflected upon what Joseph's thought would certainly be when on his return he would notice her changed condition. She visited likewise with the holy women all the places where mysteries connected with her Visitation and the birth of John had occurred. She told of John's leaping for joy in his mother's womb, of Elizabeth's salutation, and of the Magnificat which she had herself uttered under the inspiration of God, and which she afterward recited every evening with Elizabeth. She told of Zachary's being struck dumb and of God's restoring his speech at the moment in which he pronounced the name of John. All these mysteries, until now unknown to them, Mary, with tears started by tender recollections, related to the holy women. They too wept at the different places, but their tears were more joyful than those of Mary, who was at the same time mourning John's death, still unknown to them. She showed them also the fountain which at her prayer had sprung up near the house, and from it they all drank.

At the family meal Jesus taught. The women were seated apart. After the meal, the Blessed Virgin went with Jesus, Peter, John, and the Baptist's three disciples, James, Heliacim, and Sadoc (the sons of her eldest sister Mary Heli) into the room in which John was born. They spread out a large rug, or carpet, on the floor and all knelt or sat around it. Jesus, however, remained standing. He spoke to them of John's holiness and of his career. Then the Blessed Virgin related to them the circumstances under which that rug had been made. At the time of her visit, she said, Elizabeth and herself had made it and on it John was born. It was Elizabeth's couch at the time of his birth. It was made of yellow wool, quilted and ornamented with flowers. On the upper border were embroidered in large letters passages from Elizabeth's salutation and the Magnificat. In the middle was fastened a kind of cover or pouch, into

which the woman about to become a mother could have her feet buttoned up as in a sack. The upper part of this pouch formed a kind of hooded mantle that could be thrown around her. It was of yellow wool, with brown flowers, and was something like a dressing gown, the lower half being fastened to a quilted rug. I saw Mary raising the upper border before her while she read and explained the passages and prophecies embroidered on it. She told them also that she had prophesied to Elizabeth that John would see Jesus face to face only three times, and how this was verified: first, as a child in the desert when on their flight into Egypt, Jesus, Joseph, and herself had passed him, though at some distance; the second time, at Jesus' baptism; and the third, when at the Jordan he saw Jesus passing and bore witness to Him.

And now Jesus disclosed to them the fact that John had been put to death by Herod. Deep grief seized upon them all. They watered the rug with their tears, especially John, who threw himself weeping on the floor. It was heartrending to behold them prostrate on the floor, sobbing and lamenting, their faces pressed upon the rug. Jesus and Mary alone were standing, one at each end. Jesus consoled them with earnest words and prepared them for still more cruel blows. He commanded silence on the matter since, with the exception of themselves, it was at present known only to its authors.

Southward from Hebron was the grove of Mambre and the Cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and the other Patriarchs were buried. Jesus gave an instruction and cured some sick peasants who there lived isolated. The forest of Mambre was a valley full of oaks, beeches, and nut trees, that stood far apart. At the edge of the forest was the vast Cave Machpelah, in which Abraham, Sara, Jacob, Isaac, and others of the Patriarchs were entombed.

The cave was a double one like two cellars. Some of the tombs were hewn out in the projecting rocks, while others were formed in the rocky wall. This grotto is still held in great veneration. A flower garden and place for instruction guard its entrance. The rock was thickly clothed with vines, and higher up grain was raised. Jesus entered the grotto with the disciples, and several of the tombs were opened. Some of the skeletons were fallen to dust, but that of Abraham lay on its couch in a state of preservation. From it they unrolled a brown cover woven of camel's-hair cords thick as a man's finger.

Jesus taught here. He spoke of Abraham, of the Promise and its fulfillment. Some of the sick whom Jesus cured were paralyzed, others consumptive, others dropsical. I saw here no possessed, though there were some simpletons and lunatics. The country around was very fertile, and the

remarkably beautiful grain was already quite yellow. The bread of these parts was excellent, and almost everyone had his own vine. The mountains terminated in plateaus upon which grain was cultivated; their sides were covered with vineyards, and in them extended wonderful caves.

When Jesus and the disciples went into the Cave Machpelah, they put off their shoes outside the entrance, walked in barefoot, and stood in reverential silence around Abraham's tomb. Jesus alone spoke. From there He went an hour southeast of Hebron into the little Levitical city of Bethain, which was reached by a very steep ascent. He wrought some cures and gave an instruction in which He spoke of the Ark of the Covenant and of David, for at Bethain, the Ark had once rested for fifteen days. David, on God's command, had caused the Ark to be secretly removed by night from the house of Obededon and brought hither, he himself preceding it barefoot. When he took it away again, the people were so exasperated that they almost stoned him.

There was up here near Bethain a very deep spring, from which the water was drawn in leathern bags, or bottles. The rocky soil of the roads was white, also the little pebbles on it.

Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Lazarus, the women of Jerusalem, and Mary started on their homeward journey, Lazarus going to Jerusalem, where he had to discharge a seven days' service in the Temple.

Mary did not return to Bethania, but went straight to Galilee by way of Machmas, where she celebrated the Sabbath at the schoolmaster's house. She had Anna Cleophas and one of Elizabeth's relatives from Sapha with her. Sapha was the birthplace of James and John. Mary had brought Elizabeth's rug with her. A servant carried it rolled up in a basket.

When speaking in Juttah to those to whom the Blessed Virgin was showing the rug, Jesus referred to John's eager desire to see Himself. But John had, He said, overcome himself and longed for nothing beyond the fulfillment of his mission, which was that of precursor and preparer, not that of constant companion and fellow laborer. When a little boy he had indeed seen Him.

When His parents were journeying with Him through the desert on their flight into Egypt, their road led past the spot where John was, about the distance of an arrow shot. John was running along a brook among the high bushes. He held in his hand a little stick upon which was fastened a pennon of bark, which he waved to them as he skipped and danced for joy along the

brook, until they had crossed it and were out of sight. His parents, Mary and Joseph, Jesus continued, held Him up with the words: "See, John in the desert!" It was thus the Holy Spirit had led the boy to salute his Master whom he had already saluted in his mother's womb. While Jesus was relating the above, the disciples were shedding tears at the thought of John's death, and I saw again the indescribably touching scene to which He was referring. John was naked with 'the exception of the skin that he wore crossed over one shoulder and girded around his waist. He felt that his Saviour was near and that He was athirst. Then the boy prayed, drove his little stick into the earth, and a gushing spring spouted up. John ran on some distance ahead and waited, dancing and waving his little standard at them, to see Jesus and His parents as they journeyed past the little current. Then I beheld him hurrying back to a kind of dell where a great overhanging rock formed a cave. A stream from that spring found its way into a little cavity in the dell, which John turned into a well for his own use. He remained in that cave a long time.

The way of the Holy Family on that journey led across a portion of Mount Olivet. One half hour east of Bethlehem they halted to rest, and then pursued their way, the Dead Sea to their left, seven hours to the south of the city and two hours beyond Hebron, where they entered the desert in which was the boy John. I saw them stepping across the new rivulet, pausing to rest in a pleasant spot near it, and refreshing themselves with its waters. On the return journey of the Holy Family from Egypt, John again saw Jesus in spirit. He sprang forward exultingly in the direction of his Lord, but he did not then see Him face to face, as they were separated by a distance of two hours. Jesus spoke also of John's great self-command. Even when baptizing Him, he had restrained himself within the bounds exacted by the solemn occasion, although his heart was well nigh broken by intense love and desire. After the ceremony, he was more intent upon humbling himself before Him than upon gratifying his love by looking at Him.

Jesus taught in the synagogue of Hebron on the occasion of a festival celebrated in memory of the expulsion from the Sanhedrin of the Sadducees who, under Alexander Jannaeus, had been the domineering party. There were three triumphal arches erected around the synagogue, and to them vine leaves, ears of corn, and all kinds of floral wreaths were brought. The people formed a procession through the streets, which were strewn with flowers, for it was likewise the beginning of the Feast of the New Moon, that of the sap's

rising, and lastly that of the purification of the four-year-old trees. It was on this account that so many arches of leaves and flowers were erected. This Feast of the Expulsion of the Sadducees (who denied the resurrection) coincided very appropriately with that upon which was celebrated the return of the trees to new life.

In His discourse in the synagogue Jesus spoke very forcibly against the Sadducees and of the resurrection of the dead. Some Pharisees from Jerusalem had come hither for the feast. They did not dispute with Jesus, but behaved most courteously. He indeed experienced no contradiction here, for the people were upright and very well-disposed. He performed some cures both in the houses and before the synagogue, the cured being mostly of the working class. There were cripples, consumptives, paralytics, and simpletons, also others disturbed by certain temptations.

Juttah and Hebron were connected. Juttah was a kind of suburb joined to Hebron by a row of houses. Formerly they must have been entirely separated, for a turreted wall in ruins, as well as a little valley, ran between the two places. Zachary's house comprised the school of Juttah. It was about a quarter of an hour from the city and was situated on a hill. Around it lay lovely gardens and vineyards, and not far off were other luxuriant vineyards in the midst of which stood a little dwelling. These vineyards likewise belonged to Zachary. The school was adjoining the room in which John was born, I saw all that while Jesus, Mary, and the disciples were examining the rug.

The next time that Jesus taught in the synagogue of Hebron the sacred edifice was thrown open on all sides, and near the entrance, placed in an elevated position, was a teacher's chair by which He stood. All the inhabitants of the city and numbers from the surrounding places were assembled, the sick lying on little beds or sitting on mats around the teacher's chair. The whole place was crowded. The festal arches were still standing and the scene was truly touching. The multitude seemed impressed and edified, and above all not a word of contradiction was heard. After the instruction Jesus cured the sick. Jesus' discourse on this occasion was full of deep significance. The lessons from Scripture were those referring to the Egyptian darkness, the institution of the Paschal lamb, and the redeeming of the firstborn; there was also something from Jeremias. Jesus gave a marvelously profound explanation of

the ransom of the firstborn. I remember that He said: "When sun and moon are darkened, the mother brings the child to the Temple to be redeemed." More than once He made use of the expression, "The obscuring of the sun and of the moon." He referred to conception, birth, circumcision, and presentation in the Temple as connected with darkness and light. The departure from Egypt, so full of mystery, was applied to the birth of mankind. He spoke of circumcision as an external sign which, like the obligation to ransom the firstborn, would one day be abolished. No one gainsaid Jesus; all His hearers were very quiet and attentive. He spoke likewise of Hebron and of Abraham, and came at last to Zachary and John. He alluded to John's high dignity in terms more detailed and intelligible than ever before, namely, his birth, his life in the desert, his preaching of penance, his baptism, his faithful discharge of his mission as precursor, and lastly of his imprisonment. Then He alluded to the fate of the Prophets and the High Priest Zachary, who had been murdered between the altar and the sanctuary, also the sufferings of Jeremias in the dungeon at Jerusalem, and the persecutions endured by the others. When Jesus spoke of the murder of the first Zachary between the Temple and the altar, the relatives present thought of the sad fate of the Baptist's father, whom Herod had decoyed to Jerusalem and then caused to be put to death in a neighboring house. Jesus nevertheless had made no mention of this last fact. Zachary was buried in a vault near his own house outside of Juttah.

As Jesus was thus speaking in an impressive and very significant manner of John and the death of the Prophets, the silence throughout the synagogue grew more profound. All were deeply affected, many were shedding tears, and even the Pharisees were very much moved. Several of John's relatives and friends at this moment received an interior illumination by which they understood that the Baptist himself was dead, and they fainted away from grief. This gave rise to some excitement in the synagogue. Jesus quieted the disturbance by directing the bystanders to support those that had fainted, as they would soon revive; so they lay a few moments in the arms of their friends, while Jesus went on with His discourse.

To me there was something significant in the words, "Between the Temple and the altar," as recorded of the murder of that first Zachary. They might well be applied to John the Baptist's death since, in the life of Jesus, it also

stood between the Temple and the altar, for John died between the Birth of Jesus and His Sacrifice upon the Altar of the Cross. But this signification of the words did not present itself to Jesus' hearers. At the close of the instruction they who had fainted were conducted to their homes. Besides Zachary, John's cousin, Elizabeth had a niece, her sister's daughter, married here in Hebron. She had a family of twelve children, of whom some were daughters already grown. It was these and some others who had been so deeply affected. On leaving the synagogue Jesus went with young Zachary and the disciples to the house of Elizabeth's niece, where He had not yet been. The holy women, however, had visited her several times before their departure. Jesus had engaged to sup with her this day, but it was a very sad meal.

Jesus was in a room with Peter, John, James Cleophas, Heliacim, Sadoch, Zachary, Elizabeth's niece and her husband. John's relatives asked Jesus in a trembling voice: "Lord, shall we see John again?" They were in a retired room, the door locked, so that no one could disturb them. Jesus answered with tears: "No!" and spoke most feelingly, but in consoling terms, of John's death. When they sadly expressed their fear that the body would be ill-treated, Jesus reassured them. He told them no, that the corpse was lying untouched, though the head had been abused and thrown into a sewer; but that too would be preserved and would one day come to light. He told them likewise that in some days Herod would leave Machaerus and the news of John's death would spread abroad; then they could take away the body. Jesus wept with His sorrowful listeners. They afterward partook of a repast which, on account of the retired situation of the apartment, the silence, the gravity, the great ardor and emotion of Jesus, made me think of the Last Supper.

I had on this occasion a vision of Mary's coming to present Jesus in the Temple, which presentation took place on the forty-third day after His birth. The Holy Family, on account of a feast of three days, had to remain with the good people of the little inn outside the Bethlehem gate. Besides the usual offering of doves, Mary brought five little triangular plates of gold, gifts of the Three Kings, and several pieces of fine embroidered stuff as a present for the Temple. The ass that he had pawned to one of his relatives, Joseph now sold to him. I am under the impression that the ass used by Jesus on Palm Sunday sprang from it.

Jesus taught in Juttah also and, accompanied by about ten Levites, went to the houses in the neighborhood, in which He restored many sick to health. Neither lepers, nor raging possessed, nor great sinners male or female, appeared before Him in these parts. That evening He took with the Levites a frugal meal consisting of birds, bread, honey, and fruit.

Joseph of Arimathea and several disciples were come hither in order to invite Jesus to Jerusalem, where numbers of sick were longing for Him. He could, they said, come now without fear of molestation, since Pilate and Herod were in conflict with each other on the subject of the ruined aqueduct, and the Jewish magistrates likewise had their attention fixed upon the point at issue. But Jesus would not go right away, though He promised to do so before His return to Galilee.

John's female relatives celebrated the Sabbath at their own home. They clothed themselves in mourning garments and sat on the ground, a stand full of lights, or lamps, being placed in the center of the apartment.

The Essenians who dwelt near Abraham's tomb came two by two to Jesus. They lived around a mountain in cells cut out of the rock. Upon the mountain was a garden which they owned.

All around Zachary's house were very lovely gardens and remarkably high, thick rosebushes. Coming hither from Jerusalem, one could see it on the hill; about a quarter of an hour farther on and to the right rose a higher hill upon which were his vineyards, and at its foot gushed the spring that Mary had discovered. The Hebron of Abraham was not identical with that in which Jesus now was. The former lay to the south in ruins, separated from the latter by a vale. In Abraham's time when it was still in existence it had broad streets and houses partly hewn out of the rock. Not far from Zachary's house was a place called Jether. I saw Mary and Elizabeth there several times.

The people of Juttah began to suspect from the words of Jesus and the mourning of the Baptist's relatives that John was no longer among the living, and soon the report of his death was whispered around.

Before His departure from Juttah, Jesus visited Zachary's tomb in company with His disciples and the nephews of the murdered man. It was not like ordinary tombs. It was more like the catacombs, consisting of a vault supported on pillars. It was a most honorable burial place for priests and

Prophets. It had been determined that John's body should be brought from Machaerus and here buried, therefore the vault was arranged and a funeral couch erected. It was very touching to see Jesus helping to prepare a resting place for His friend. He rendered honor to the remains of Zachary also. Elizabeth was not buried here, but on a high mountain, in that cave in which John had sojourned when a boy in the desert.

On Jesus' departure from Juttah, He was followed by an escort of men and women. The latter, after accompanying Him the distance of an hour, took leave, but not till they had knelt and received His blessing. They wanted to kiss His feet, but Jesus would not allow it. Jesus and His disciples were now journeying toward Libna, outside of which they stopped at an inn. The men of the escort now set out for home. Saturnin, Judas Barsabas, and two other disciples who had gone from Galilee to Machaerus, then to Juttah, and lastly had come hither in quest of Jesus, arrived today. With many expressions of grief they related the murder of the Baptist. When Herod and his family, with a numerous escort of soldiers, removed from Machaerus to Hesebon, the news of John's beheading was spread by some deserters. Some of the Centurion Zorobabel's servants who had been wounded at the late disaster in Jerusalem, returning to Capharnaum had also brought the news. Zorobabel had immediately imparted the frightful occurrence to Judas Barsabas, who was in the neighborhood—upon which he, with Saturnin and two other disciples, hastened into the region of Machaerus, where they everywhere received the same account. From Machaerus they had hurried to John's native place in order to take steps for the removal of the body. But hearing that Jesus was at the inn, they had come hither to meet Him. Soon after, accompanied by the sons of Mary Heli, Joseph of Arimathea's nephews, those of Zachary, and the sons of Johanna Chusa and Veronica, they set out for Machaerus, taking Juttah on their route. They took with them an ass laden with all that was necessary for carrying out their design. Machaerus now, with the exception of a few soldiers, was quite deserted.

Jesus tarried awhile in these parts in order not to meet Pilate who, with his wife and a retinue of fifteen persons, was on his way from Jerusalem to Appolonia. He passed through Bethzur and Antipatris. From Appolonia he embarked for Rome, to lodge a complaint against Herod. Before his departure from Jerusalem, Pilate had held a conference with his

officers upon Jesus the Galilean who performed so great miracles and who was then in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Pilate asked: "Is He followed by a crowd? Are they armed?" "No," was the answer. "He goes about with only a few disciples and people of no account whatever, people from the very lowest classes, and sometimes He goes alone. He teaches on the mountains and in the synagogues, cures the sick and gives alms. To hear His instructions, people gather from all quarters, often to the number of several thousands!" "Does He not speak against the Emperor?" asked Pilate. "No. His teachings are all on the improvement of morals. He inculcates the practice of mercy, and impresses upon His hearers to render to the Emperor that which belongs to him, and to God that which is His. But He often makes mention of a Kingdom that He calls His own, and says that it is near at hand." Thereupon Pilate replied: "So long as He does not go around working His miracles with soldiers or an armed crowd, there is nothing to be feared from Him. As soon as He leaves a place in which He has performed miracles and goes to another, He will be forgotten and calumniated. Indeed I hear that the Jewish priests themselves are against Him. No danger is to be apprehended from Him. But if He is once seen going about with armed followers, His roving must come to an end!"

Pilate had already had several encounters with the Jews, who detested him. Once he had ordered the Roman standards to be brought into the city, whereupon the Jews raised a sedition. Another time, on the occasion of a certain feast upon which the Jews were not allowed to bear arms nor to touch money, I saw Pilate's soldiers go into the Temple, break open the box in which were the offerings, and carry off the contents. That was when John was still baptizing at the Jordan near On, and Jesus came out from the desert. From Libna Jesus went to Bethzur, about ten hours to the north and two hours' distance from Jerusalem. Bethzur was a fortified place. It had citadels, ramparts and moats, which had, however, somewhat fallen to ruin, though not so much as those of Bethulia. Bethzur was certainly as large as Bethoron. The side by which Jesus entered was not steep, while between it and Jerusalem lay a beautiful valley. From the high points of either city, the other could be seen. On the opposite side the ascent was steep and the city built with a view to ward off enemies. The Ark of the Covenant was once at Bethzur for a long time, as was publicly known.

Jesus was very well received at Bethzur. Lazarus and some others of His friends from Jerusalem were already there. The Bethzurites washed Jesus' feet, as also those of the disciples, and with sincere affection offered them an abundant supply of whatever they needed. Jesus lodged at an inn near the synagogue.

The Three Kings, when journeying from Jerusalem to the Crib, passed near Bethzur, took some refreshments at a caravansary, and once more saw the star in this region. Bethzur must not be confounded with a certain Bethsoron that lay between Bethlehem and Hebron, and near which Philip baptized the servant of Queen Candace. Sometimes this place, namely, Bethsoron, is improperly called Bethzur.

In some houses of Bethzur, Jesus cured without disturbance several old people that were very sick, some of them dropsical. The inhabitants were very well-disposed, and the Elders of the synagogue themselves conducted Jesus to the different houses. He taught also in the school, and I saw Him blessing a great number of children, first the boys and then the girls. He greatly interested Himself with them and performed some cures among them.