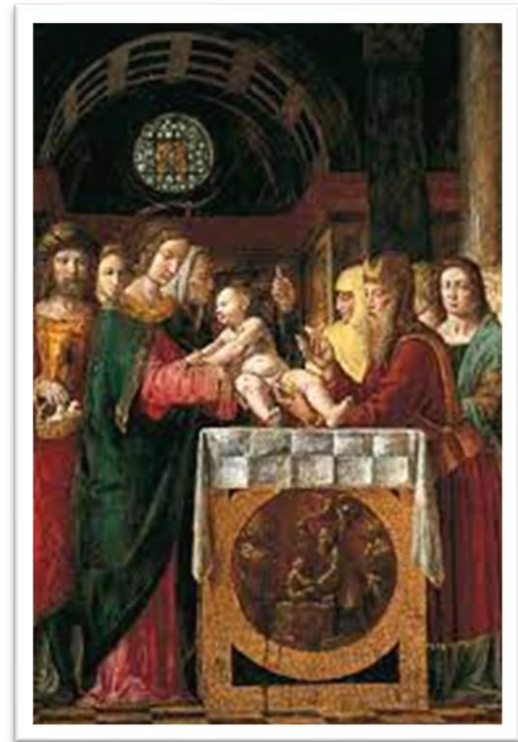


## The Circumcision

Joseph returned from Bethlehem with five priests and a woman whose services were necessary on such occasions. They brought with them the circumcision stool and an octangular slab with all that was needed for the ceremony. All this was placed in order in the passage. The stool was hollow and formed a chest, which could be taken apart, thus affording a kind of low seat with a support on the side. It was covered with red. The circumcision stone was, perhaps, over two feet in diameter. In the center was a metal plate under which, in a hollow of the stone, were all kinds of little boxes containing fluids. These boxes were in separate compartments, and at one side lay the circumcision knife. The stone was laid upon the little stool which, covered with a cloth, always stood on the spot upon which Jesus was born, and the circumcision stool was placed next to it. That evening a repast was spread under the arbor at the entrance to the cave. A crowd of poor people had followed the priests, as is usual on such occasions, and during the meal they were continually receiving something both from the priests and from Joseph. The priests went to Mary and the Child, spoke with the mother, and took the Child in their arms. They also spoke to Joseph about the name the Child was to receive. They prayed and sang the greater part of the night, and circumcised the Child at daybreak. Mary was very much troubled, very anxious about it. After the ceremony, the Infant Jesus was swathed in red and white as far as under the little arms, which also were bound and the head wrapped in a cloth. The Child was again laid on the octangular stone, and prayers recited over it. If I remember rightly, the angel had already told Joseph that the Child should be called Jesus, and I have a faint recollection that one of the priests did not at first approve the name, consequently, they still continued in prayer. Then I saw a radiant angel standing in front of the priest and holding before him a tablet like that above the Cross, upon which was inscribed the name of Jesus. I saw the priest writing the name upon a scrap of parchment. I know not whether he or any of the others saw the angel, but deeply moved, he wrote the name under divine inspiration. After that, Joseph received the Child back and handed it to the



Blessed Virgin who, with two other women, was standing back in the Crib Cave. Mary took the weeping Child into her arms and quieted It. Some shepherds were standing at the entrance of the cave. Lamps were burning, and the dawn was breaking. There was some more praying and singing and, before the priests departed, they took a little breakfast. I saw that all present at the circumcision were good people. The priests were enlightened and later attained salvation. Alms were distributed the whole morning to many poor people who presented themselves. Afterward followed a crowd of beggars, filthy, black creatures, very repulsive to me. They carried bundles and, coming up from the valley of the shepherds, passed the Crib as if going to Jerusalem for the celebration of a feast. They were very boisterous, cursing and scolding horribly, because they did not receive by way of alms, as much as they wanted. I do not know exactly what was the matter with them. During the ceremony of circumcision, the ass was tied further back than usual; at other times, it stood in the Crib Cave.

During the day, I saw the nurse again with Mary attending to the Child. That night, the Child was very restless from pain. It cried, and Mary and Joseph tried to soothe It by carrying It up and down the cave.

While reflecting upon the mystery of the circumcision, I had a vision. I saw two angels with little tablets in their hands, standing under a palm tree. Upon one tablet were pictured various instruments of martyrdom, of which I remember one, a pillar which stood in the middle. On it was a mortar, which had two rings. On the other tablet were letters denoting the seasons and years of the Church. On the palm tree and as if growing out of it, was kneeling a Virgin, her flowing mantle, or veil, for it was fastened over her head, floating around her. In her hands was a heart upon which I saw a tiny, shining Child. I saw an apparition of God the Father draw near to the palm tree, break off a heavy branch that formed a cross, and lay it on the Child. Then I saw the Child raised, as it were, on the cross, and the Virgin reaching the palm branch with the crucified Child on it to God the Father, the heart alone remaining in her hand.

On the evening of the following day, I saw Elizabeth on an ass and accompanied by an old servant, coming from Jutta to the cave. Joseph received her most cordially. The joy of Mary and Elizabeth was extremely great as they embraced each other. Elizabeth pressed the Child to her heart. She slept in Mary's cave next the place in which Jesus was born. Before the sacred spot stood a stool upon which they often laid the Child.

Mary told Elizabeth all that had happened to her, and when Elizabeth heard of their difficulty in getting a lodging on their arrival in Bethlehem, she wept heartily. Mary gave her all the details of the Infant Jesus' birth. I remember hearing her say that she had been in ecstasy ten minutes at the time of the Annunciation, that it appeared to her as if her heart had grown double its size and that she was filled with unspeakable happiness. But at the Child's birth she had experienced an intense longing. She felt while kneeling that she was upheld by angels, and as if her heart was broken asunder and one-half taken from her. She had also been ten minutes in ecstasy at the time of the birth. She had been conscious of an emptiness within her, a longing after something outside of herself. Suddenly a light shone before her, and the figure of the Child seemed to grow before her eyes. Then she saw It moving and heard It crying and, coming to herself, she raised It from the rug to her breast, for at first seeing It environed with glory, she had hesitated to take It up.

Elizabeth said: "Thou hast not given birth in the same way as other mothers.

The birth of John was sweet also, but it was not like that of thy Child."

Once I saw Elizabeth with Mary and the Child concealing themselves toward evening in the side cave. They remained there the whole night, for visitors from Bethlehem were approaching by whom they did not want to be seen.

The Jewish women do not leave their children long without other nourishment than the breast; and so the Infant Jesus was fed in those first days on pap made of the sweet, light, nutritious pith of a certain rush-like plant.

As in the Temple at Jerusalem, the holy Feast of the Machabees began at this time, it was also celebrated by Joseph in the Crib Cave. He fastened three lamps with seven little lights on the walls of the cave and, during a whole week, lighted them morning and evening. Once I saw in the cave one of the priests who had been present at the Child's circumcision. He had a roll of writings from which he prayed with St. Joseph. It seemed to me that he wanted to find out whether Joseph kept that feast or not. I think, too, that he announced to him another, for a fast-day was near at hand. I saw the preparations for it in Jerusalem. Food was prepared the day before the feast, the fire was covered, servile work was put aside, the doors and windows were hung with tapestry.

Anne often sent servants with gifts of provisions and utensils, all of which Mary soon distributed to the poor. Once Anne sent a beautiful little basket of fruit with large, newly-blown roses stuck in among it. The pink roses were

paler than ours, almost flesh colored, and there were some yellow, and some white. Mary was very much pleased, and placed it beside her.

And now came Anne herself, accompanied by her second husband and a servant. The Infant Jesus stretched out His little arms to her, and great was her joyful emotion. Mary gave her a full account of all as she had done to Elizabeth. They mingled their tears together, pausing at times to fondle the Infant Jesus.

Anne had brought with her many things for Mary and the Child, coverlets, swathing-bands, etc. Although Mary had already received so many things from her, yet the Crib Cave was still quite poor in appearance, since whatever was at all unnecessary was given away at once. Mary told Anne that the Kings from the East were approaching with rich gifts, and that their coming would attract much attention. Anne, therefore, resolved to go and stay with her sister, who dwelt at some hours' distance, and to return after the departure of the royal visitors. Then I saw Joseph set to work to clear out the Crib Cave as well as those in its vicinity, in order to prepare for the arrival of the Kings whom Mary in spirit had seen coming. He went also to Bethlehem to make the second payment of taxes and to look around for a dwelling, for he intended to settle in Bethlehem after Mary's Purification.