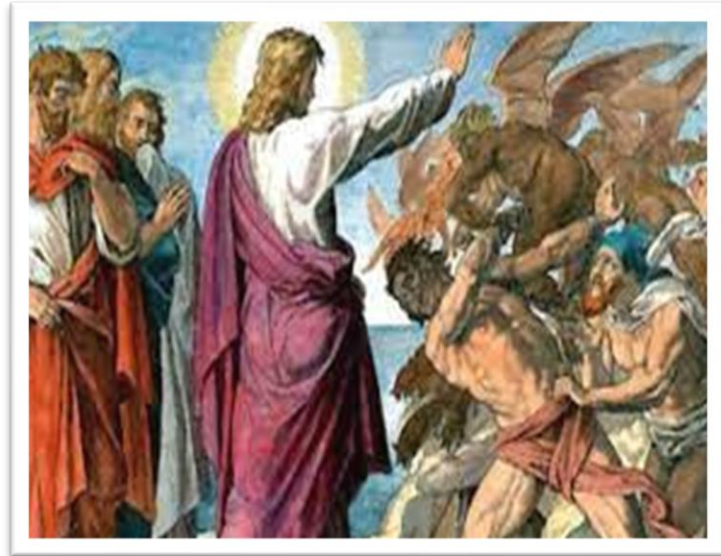


Jesus Goes Toward Maspha to Visit A Relative of St. Joseph

When Jesus and His disciples left the cave, they struck off in the direction of Bethlehem. On this side of Ephron they entered an inn that stood among houses built apart, and there, after washing their feet, took some refreshment. The people were good and somewhat inquisitive. Jesus instructed them on penance, the nearness of Redemption, and of what they must do to follow Him. They asked Him why His Mother took that long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, since she could have been so comfortably cared for at home. Jesus answered by telling them of the Promise and that He was to be born in poverty at Bethlehem among the shepherds, since like a shepherd He was to gather the flocks together. It was also for this same reason that now, after His Heavenly Father's testimony of Him, He visited these shepherd regions first.



From here Jesus turned His steps to the south side of Bethlehem about two hours distant, crossed a portion of the shepherd valley, and proceeded around the west side of the city, leaving Joseph's paternal house to the right. Toward evening He entered the now little city of Maspha, some hours from Bethlehem.

Maspha could be seen at a great distance, for on the highroads all around the city burned lights in iron lanterns. It was encompassed by walls and towers, and traversed by several streets. Maspha was long one of the principal places of devotion. Judas Maccabeus 1 had before battle held here a great prayer meeting in which he reminded Almighty God of all the outrageous decrees of the enemy, recalled to Him His own promises, and exposed the priestly garments before the assembled multitude. Then five angels appeared to him before the city and promised him victory. It was here also that Israel had assembled against the tribe of Benjamin, on account of an outrage and murder committed upon the wife of a travelling Levite. The infamous scene was enacted under a tree, which was afterward walled around, and no one went near it. In Maspha also Samuel had exercised his office of Judge; and here was found that Essenian cloister in which dwelt Manahem, who had foretold the scepter to Herod when the latter was only a boy. This cloister

had been built by the Essenian Chariot, who lived about one hundred years before Christ. He was a married man from the country of Jericho. He had separated from his wife and both, he for men and she for women, had founded several communities of Essenians. He was a very holy man and died in a cloister founded by him not far from Bethlehem. He was the first to arise from his tomb at the death of Christ and appear to men.

Maspha was full of inns, and the arrival of a stranger was soon noised about the city; consequently Jesus had scarcely entered the inn when He was surrounded by a crowd. He was conducted to the synagogue where He explained the Law. Some of His hearers were spies whose intentions were insincere. They sought to draw Him out, because they had heard of His promise to lead the heathens also into the Kingdom of God, and that He had spoken among the shepherds about the Three Kings. Jesus' words on this occasion were very severe. He said that the days of the Promise were completed; and that all who would be born again in Baptism, would believe in Him whom the Father had sent, and would keep His commandments, should as well as His followers have a share in the Kingdom. But from the unbelieving Jews should the Promise be withdrawn and given over to the heathens.

I cannot repeat Jesus' words exactly, but they were to this effect: that He knew their intentions, that they were spies, that they might betake themselves to Jerusalem, and there tell all they had heard Him say. Jesus had alluded to Judas Maccabeus and the several important events that had here taken place. His hearers boasted the magnificence of the Temple and the superiority of the Jews over the heathens. But Jesus explained to them that the end for which the chosen people had been called and their Temple erected was now attained, since the One promised by God through the Prophets was now come to establish the Kingdom of His Heavenly Father, and to raise to Him a new Temple.

After this instruction, Jesus left Maspha and went about an hour eastward. He reached first a row of houses, then came to a residence that stood alone and which belonged to one of Joseph's family. Joseph's father had married a widow with one son. This stepson had married and settled in this place, and his descendants now occupied the house alluded to. They had been baptized and had a family of children. They received Jesus cordially and with every mark of deference. Several of the neighbors assembled at the house. Jesus gave an instruction after which He partook of a repast with them. The meal over, He retired with two of the men, Aminadab and Manasses. They questioned Him as to whether He was acquainted with their circumstances and whether they should follow Him right away. Jesus replied no, that they

should for the present be numbered among His secret disciples. Then they knelt before Him, and He blessed them. Prior to His death, they publicly joined the disciples. Jesus stayed here overnight.

Jesus Visits an Inn at Which Mary Stopped on Her Journey to Bethlehem
From here Jesus and His disciples went on for a couple of hours till they came to a farmhouse which had been the last stopping place but one on Mary's journey to Bethlehem. It may have been about four hours' distance from the city. The men of the house came out to meet Jesus and, falling down before Him on the road, begged Him to enter. He was very cordially received. These people went almost daily to John's instructions and were all familiar with the wonders connected with the Lord's baptism. A warm bath was prepared for Jesus, also a repast, and a beautiful couch was made ready for Him that night. Jesus taught here.

The woman who had harbored the Holy Family here thirty years ago was still alive. But she was blind, and had been for many years almost bent double. She lived alone in the main building and her children, who lived nearby, sent her her food. When Jesus had performed His ablutions, He went to see the poor, old woman. He spoke to her of compassion and hospitality, of good works that bear no merit, and of selfishness, placing her present afflictions before her as a punishment of the same. She was deeply touched, confessed her fault, and He cured her. He ordered her to bathe in the water He had just used. She did so, recovered her sight, and became straight and well. But Jesus commanded her to say nothing of her cure.

The people of this place questioned Jesus as to which was the greater, He or John. Jesus answered: "He of whom John gives testimony." Then they spoke of John's zeal and energy, also of the beautiful, manly figure of Jesus Himself. Jesus remarked that, three and a half years hence, they would see no beauty in Him, they would not even recognize Him so disfigured would He be. Of John's zeal and energy He spoke, likening him to one knocking at the house of a sleeping man, to rouse him for the coming of the Lord; to one breaking a path through the wilderness, that the king might safely travel over it; and lastly to an impetuous torrent that rushing along purifies the channel through which it flows.