

## **The Return of St. Anne**

After the departure of the Kings, the Holy Family went over into the other cave, and I saw the Crib Cave quite empty, the ass alone still standing there.

Everything, even the hearth, had been cleared away. I saw Mary peaceful and happy in her new abode which had been arranged somewhat comfortably. Her couch was near the wall and by her rested the Child Jesus in an oval basket made of broad strips of bark. The upper end of the basket, where the head of the Infant Jesus lay, was arched over with a cover. The basket itself stood on a woven partition, before which Mary sometimes sat with the Child beside her. Joseph had a separate space at a little distance. Above the movable partition, there projected from the wall a pole to which a lamp was suspended. I saw Joseph bringing in a pitcher of water and something in a dish. But he did not go any more to Bethlehem for

necessaries; the shepherds brought him all that he needed.

And now I saw Zachary coming for the first time from Hebron to visit the Holy Family. He wept for joy as he held the Child in his arms, and recited, with some little changes, the canticle of thanksgiving that he had uttered at John's circumcision. He spent the following day with Joseph, and then took his departure.

Many persons going up to Bethlehem for the Sabbath called also at the Crib Cave; but when they no longer found Mary there, they went on to the city.

Anne now came back to the Mother of God. She had been eight days with her youngest sister, who had married into the tribe of Benjamin. She lived about three hour's distance from Bethlehem, and had several sons who later became disciples of Jesus; among them was the bridegroom of Cana. Anne's eldest daughter was with her. She was taller than Anne and looked almost as old. Anne's second husband also was with her. He was older and taller than Joachim, was named Eliud, and was engaged at the Temple where he had something to do with the cattle intended for sacrifice. Anne had a daughter by this marriage, and she, too, was called Mary. At the time of Christ's birth, the child may have been from six to eight years old. By her third husband, Anne had a son, who was known as the brother of Christ. There is a mystery connected with Anne's repeated marriages. She entered into them in



obedience to the divine command. The grace by which she had become fruitful with Mary had not yet been exhausted. It was as if a blessing had to be consumed.

Mary told Anne all about the Kings, and she was very much touched at God's bringing those men so far to adore the Child. She was filled with emotion on seeing their gifts, upon which she looked as expressions of their adoration. She helped to arrange and pack them, and she also gave many of them away.

Anne's maid was still with Mary. When in the Crib Cave, she stayed in the little cellar-like cave to the left, and now she slept under a shed that Joseph had put up for her just in front of their present abode. Anne and her daughters slept in the Crib Cave. I saw that Mary let Anne take care of the Child Jesus, a favor she had not granted to anyone else. I saw something that very much affected me. The hair of the Infant Jesus, which was yellow and crisp, ended in very fine rays of light which glistened and sparkled through one another. I think they curled the Child's hair, for they twisted it over the little head when they washed it. Then they put a little cloak around Him. I always saw Mary, Joseph, and Anne full of devout emotion for the Child Jesus; but their expression of it was quite unaffected and simple, as is always the case among holy, chosen souls. The Child displayed a love in turning toward Its Mother such as is by no means usual in young children. Anne was so happy when she was nursing the Child. Mary always laid It in her arms. The King's gifts were now hidden in the cave in which Mary had taken up her abode. They were in a wicker chest placed in a recess of the wall and perfectly concealed from sight.

Anne's husband with her daughters and maid soon returned home, taking with them many of the royal gifts. Anne was now all alone with Mary and Joseph, and she remained until Eliud and the maid came back. I saw her and Mary weaving or embroidering covers. She slept in the cave with Mary, but separate.

There were again in Bethlehem, soldiers seeking in many houses after the king's son newly-born. They especially importuned with their questions a noble Jewish lady who was in childbed, but they went no more to the Crib Cave. It was now reported that only a poor, Jewish family had been there, but of them nothing more could be learned. Two of the old shepherds went to Joseph (two of those that had first gone to the Crib) and warned him of what was going on in Bethlehem. Then I saw Joseph, Mary, and Anne with the Child Jesus making their way from the cave to the tomb under that large cedar tree beneath which I had heard the Kings singing one evening. It was distant from the cave about seven and a half minutes. The tree stood upon a hill at the foot of which was an obliquely lying door opening into a passage

that led to a perpendicular door which closed the entrance to the tomb. The shepherds often stayed in the forepart of it. In front of the tomb was a spring. The tomb cave itself was not square, but rather rounded in form. At the upper end, which was somewhat broader, something like a scalloped stone coffin stood on heavy supports upon a foundation of stone; one could see between it and the coffin. The interior of the cave was of soft, white stone. I saw the Holy Family entering it by night with a covered light. In the cave that they had vacated nothing now was to be seen which could attract notice. The beds had been rolled up and taken away, as well as all their household effects. It looked like an abandoned dwelling place. Anne carried the Child in her arms, Joseph and Mary at her side, while the shepherds led the way as guides. And now I had a vision, but I do not know whether it was seen by the Holy Family or not. I saw around the Child Jesus in the arms of Anne a glory made up of seven angelic figures entwined together and leaning one upon the other. There were, besides, many other figures in this aureola, and on either side of Anne, of Joseph, and of Mary, I saw figures of light supported by them, held up, as it were, under the arms.<sup>1</sup> Passing through the first entrance, they shut it and went on into the interior of the tomb cave. A couple of days before Anne's return home, I saw some shepherds entering the tomb cave and speaking to Mary; they told her that government officials were coming to seek her Child. Joseph hurried off with the Child Jesus wrapped in his mantle, and I saw Mary, for half a day perhaps, sitting in the cave very anxious and without the Child.

When Eliud with Anne's maid came again from Nazareth to take Anne home, I saw a very beautiful ceremony celebrated in the Crib Cave. Joseph had taken advantage of Mary's withdrawal to the tomb cave, and with the help of the shepherds had adorned the whole interior of the Crib Cave. It was festooned with flower garlands, both walls and roof, and in the center stood a table. All the beautiful carpets and stuffs of the Kings that had not yet been removed, were spread over the floor and hung in festoons from the walls. A cover was spread on the table, and on it was placed a pyramid of flowers and foliage that reached to the opening in the roof. On top of the pyramid hovered a dove. The whole cave was full of light and splendor. The Child Jesus in His little basket cradle was placed upon a stool on the table. He sat upright as He had done on the lap of His Mother at the adoration of the Kings. Joseph and Mary were standing on either side of Him. They were adorned with wreaths, and they drank something out of a glass. I saw choirs of angels in the cave. All were very happy and full of emotion. It was the anniversary of Joseph and Mary's espousals.

When the celebration was over, I saw Anne and Eliud going away and taking

with them on two asses what still remained of the Kings' gifts.

The Holy Family immediately set about preparing for their own departure. Their household effects had steadily diminished. The portable partitions and other pieces of furniture made by Joseph were now bestowed upon the shepherds, who removed them at once.

I saw the Blessed Virgin going twice by night to the Crib Cave with the Child Jesus, and laying It on a carpet on the spot upon which It was born. Then she knelt down at Its side and prayed. I saw the whole cave filled with light as at the moment of the Birth. It was now entirely cleared out, for Anne on reaching home had dispatched two of her servants to get whatever the Holy Family would not need on their journey. I saw them returning with the two asses on which they rode laden with goods. The cave to which the Holy Family had removed, as well as the Crib Cave, were now quite empty; they had also been swept out, for Joseph wanted to leave everything perfectly clean.

On the night preceding their departure for the Temple, I saw Mary and Joseph taking formal leave of the Crib Cave. They spread the deep red cover of the Kings first over that spot upon which the Child Jesus was born, laid the Child on it, and kneeling beside It prayed. Then they laid the Child in the Crib and again prayed beside It; and, lastly, on the place where It had been circumcised where, too, they knelt in prayer. Joseph had caused the young she ass to be pawned among his relatives, for he was still resolved to return to Bethlehem and build himself a house in the valley of the shepherds. He had mentioned his intention to the shepherds, saying that he would take Mary for awhile to her mother, that she might recover from the hardships undergone in her late abode. He left all kinds of things with them.