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THE HOLY CHRIST-CHILD



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THE HOLY CHRIST-CHILD

A DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF THE
INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

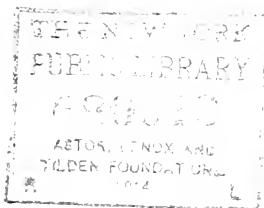
*"I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the
Bright and Morning Star"*

BY THE REVEREND
ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL KNOWLES

AUTHOR OF
"THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS," "THE BELIEF AND WORSHIP
OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH," "TURNING POINTS"
"COME UNTO ME," ETC.

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PREFACE

THE object of this work is twofold: first to present in a devotional manner the scene and story of the Nativity, secondly to show forth in simple yet suggestive words the fact and doctrine of the Incarnation.

We live in a superficial age, when, especially in religion, men will not devote time to the study of the Word of God and the Creed of the Church, and consequently, from the lack of any proper conception of the fundamental doctrines of the Faith, easily lapse into unbelief or misbelief.

As some slight contribution to offset this, the present book is written and published with the hope that it may get a hearing and a reading where weightier works are passed, and so, by conveying in simple way some suggestive thoughts regarding the truth, establish its readers more

firmly in their belief in the Divine Revelation of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth of our Lord.

In his treatment of this great Mystery, the Author has aimed to set forth nothing but that which is in strict accord with the accepted teaching of the Holy Scriptures and the Catholic Church (giving such occasional references as seem necessary), and he rejects anything that will not stand this test. And if occasionally a thought or counsel seems to be repeated in the several chapters, although differently expressed, let it be noted that this is done with the intention of making each part a distinct witness in itself to the one great central theme—the Incarnation.

May God accept this labour of love, and by blessing all that may be good, and pardoning all that may be imperfect, make all be for His Honour and Glory.

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We beseech Thee, O Lord, pour Thy Grace into our hearts; that as we have known the Incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an Angel, so by His Cross and Passion we may be brought to the Glory of His Resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Annunciation B.V.M.

I

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION
AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

B

Gloria in excelsis

GLORY be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

For Thou only art holy ; Thou only art the Lord ; Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the Glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE HOLY CHRIST-CHILD

I

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

“The Desire of all nations shall come”

THE story of the Nativity is not a poetic and picturesque play of the fancy. It is, on the contrary, the presentation of a most tremendous truth, the revelation of the Incarnation of the Son of God. This Holy Mystery is the crowning act of God's love. It brings man into union with his Maker, adds a new glory and dignity to life, and gives the inspiration to all that is high and holy. It is true that we cannot fully grasp a fact and doctrine which transcend human comprehension, but, in the words of Saint Augustine, we may “first believe, then understand,” here holding fast

the faith of the Gospel, hereafter seeing the full revelation of its meaning. With heart and soul we may love and worship the Son of God, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, although our mind fails to comprehend how God could become man without ceasing to be God, or how a virgin could conceive without human agency.

Nor should we expect to understand the mysterious ways of God. For God is from above, man is from below. God is the Creator, man the creature. God is Infinite, man finite ; and it does not pertain to the work of God's hands, full as man is of human frailty and ignorance, to comprehend the Mind, the Will and the Power of the Maker and Ruler of the Universe "*Whose ways are wonderful and past finding out.*"¹ From the very nature of things, God to be God must be beyond human thought and understanding, and the Laws which He ordained and by which He works must likewise be above our mental grasp. For we cannot perfectly trust to our own senses or our powers of observation. Consequently, we have no positive proof as to man's conception of the order and course of the so-called Laws of Nature. Surely, since God is, He

¹ Romans XI. 33.

is Master of the works which He created.¹ The Laws of Nature are but the modes in which He expresses His Power and Purpose, and may be varied by His Will. Consequently, the only proper approach to the contemplation of spiritual things is the way of faith, love, and humility, that here seeing "*as in a glass darkly*"² we may hereafter behold "*face to face,*"² ever realizing that the Mysteries of God, like the real Laws of Nature, are *not contrary* to reason, but rather above reason.

The Incarnation, therefore, is a doctrine both possible and probable, and also capable of demonstration to all who come to its contemplation with the proper dispositions for considering a holy mystery, and who are willing to be satisfied with sufficient and reasonable proof. It is with no distrust or diffidence that its believers assert that the Incarnation is the very foundation of the faith, the worship, and the life of the Church.

Or, to put this truth even more strongly, the Incarnation is absolutely essential to the structure of the Christian Religion, the existence of the Catholic Church, and the efficacy of the Sacramental System. As a house rests upon a foundation, so the Christian belief and character are built upon the Incarna-

¹ Our Lord's rebuke of the sea asserted His authority over Nature.

² 1 Cor. XIII. 12.

tion. Take away the foundations and the house falls in ruins. Reject the Incarnation and the faith, the worship and the life of the Church all come to pieces.

Not only would the Scriptures and the Creeds, which clearly and explicitly teach the Incarnation, be declared false, but also the higher life, in its fullest sense, would be rendered impossible. For a right life is largely dependent upon a right belief, and the Incarnation, above all other doctrines, is an illuminating and stimulating motive to holy living. It is probably through the denial or distortion of the truths of the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth that so many lives to-day are wrecked and ruined, and ideals and standards are lowered, while false doctrine, heresy, and schism so often claim their own.

The primary ground for the Church's belief in the Incarnation is, of course, the Revelation of God. The Scriptures speak with no uncertain sound on the subject, but in varying ways, from prophetic promises and living types to definite declarations, teach the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Epistle to the Hebrews well sums up these several modes of setting forth this doctrine in the opening words: "*God, Who at sundry times*

*and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds ; Who being the brightness of His Glory and the express Image of His Person, and upholding all things by the word of His Power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the Angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son ? . . . And again when He bringeth in the first-begotten in the world He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."*¹ The declarations of the Creeds are further proofs of the teachings of the Scriptures, which Revelation of God is sufficient argument to those in the Catholic Church for the truth of the doctrines set forth. Nor should the continued testimony of the Church be overlooked. For the cumulative evidence is very great. It is a significant fact that for almost two thousand years many millions of people, embracing the most cultivated and learned men and women of successive generations, have believed in the Incarnation with the

¹ Hebrews I. 1-6.

other doctrines of the Faith. The fact, that God became Incarnate was the very beginning of the existence of the Church. This alone is a wonderful witness to the truth of the Christian Creed.

The possibility of the Incarnation, however, is most reasonable and credible when viewed from a practical or philosophical standpoint. The evidence is so strong and cumulative that it can only fail to carry conviction where there is a total lack of belief in the supernatural, or where grave and secret sin has blinded (as it generally does) the intellectual and spiritual sight.

First the possibility of the Incarnation is inherent in the belief in God as the Creator and Controller of the world, for all things which are not contrary to His Divine Perfections and Attributes are possible to Him, Who accomplished the work of creation. Once admit God as the First Cause (or, in theological terms, as Eternal Energy), as even the Agnostic is forced to do, and all else taught by the Church easily follows as a logical consequence.

Further, He Who made all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, by His Own Power and Will as God, governs them by His Eternal Laws. At best man has but a limited comprehension of those Laws, only such as God has

chosen to reveal, as man by Divine permission rightly uses his God-given powers of investigation. Consequently, the Incarnation, instead of being a change or suspension of these Laws, may very properly, for all we know, have been the completion and fulfilment of them, as the Church believes and the Scriptures infer. He Who made the world out of nothing and made man in His Own Image, after His Likeness, He Who rideth upon the wings of the wind and ruleth the raging of the sea, could have found, may we reverently say, no difficulty about the Incarnation. Rather would this act of love (which bridges the gap between earth and heaven, by sending into our very midst God's Divine Son) seem to be the crowning work of the Almighty Father of all good !

Secondly, the possibility of the Incarnation is affirmed by human intelligence and experience, which argue that it is absolutely inconceivable that God, in His eternal knowledge of the unspeakable blessing the Incarnation would be to the world, would have failed to accomplish it.

For the Incarnation is the satisfaction of the highest aspiration of the human soul, and of the greatest longing of the human heart. Every religion has this in common : the *desire* for com-

munion and union with God. The highest hope of all men has been that deity shall come to dwell among them. The Christian Religion centres in Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, as fulfilling and responding to this longing. Yet also among those who have worshipped mythical divinities, or who have bowed down to wood and stone, there has been and is the same craving for communion with God.

An aspiration so absolutely universal, found as well among unenlightened and unlearned peoples as among those instructed and illumined by Divine revelation, can have but one reasonable explanation, that it is the true testimony that this longing was implanted by God in the human breast with the fore-ordained purpose of satisfying it. For it is a scientific fact that each desire and appetite is given with the means of gratifying it. Consequently, since man has the longing for communion with God through God dwelling with him, it seems most probable that the Incarnation is the fulfilment of that Divinely-given desire.

Again, the possibility and probability of the Incarnation would seem to be proven by the fact that, as far as man can see, it was only by God becoming Man without ceasing to be God, that

communion and union in the highest and fullest sense could be had. It is, as it were, the crowning of God's creative work, for His Only-Begotten Son, uniting in Himself the Divine and Human Natures, joins together the Creator and the created.

Nor does it seem that this could be other than God's original purpose, for while it is possible that the Incarnation was ordained as a remedy for sin, as some¹ have held, it would seem more consistent with the eternal knowledge of God, that as others² have thought, the Incarnation was but the consummation of God's work, the crowning act of Divine Love. For it is the manifestation of the goodness and Glory of God, and as such must have been in the mind of God from the beginning, since He knoweth all things, though without the Fall there would not have been the necessity for the Passion and Death of the Divine Son. Thus by means of the Incarnation, God, Who is ever immanent in the world, enters in this way into our human life and experience and gathers all things unto Himself, as True and Perfect God and True and Perfect Man united in the Second Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity.

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas and his followers.

² The Scotists.

Furthermore, the Incarnation is the key to the mystery of life, revealing to us the meaning of many secrets. It exhibits God in an unique way, and throws a new light upon His relations with man and with nature, attributing all things to Him as the Absolute One.

The Divine Institution of the Church, the Spiritual Powers of the Priesthood, the effectual working of the Sacraments—all derive their being from and find their explanation in the Incarnate Lord, and are in different ways the extension of the Incarnation. Human life becomes sacred since Christ lived a human life; the body becomes holy since the Word was made Flesh; nature becomes lovelier, because God dwelleth in it. All things are dignified, lifted up, exalted to a higher and holier plane, and given a new aspect and character by the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Man no longer regards nature as God, as did the ancients, but he sees dwelling in it the abiding presence or immanence of God, for, as Saint Gregory figuratively expressed it, "The works of nature are the footprints of the Creator." Man no longer looks upon the body as of little account, but he honours and reverences it as dignified by the Son of God, Who assumed Flesh of the substance of the

Blessed Virgin, and by taking unto Himself a Body exalted all flesh.

Nor should we fail to note as a consequence of the Incarnation that there is given us for our guidance, in the place of rules and regulations, the Perfect Pattern of a Perfect Life, as the Son of God made Man for us is held up as the great Example for all time. In Him all virtues and graces are seen presented in a *Person*, Who as God is the Brightness of His Father's Glory, and as Man is the Ideal of Humanity and the Standard of Perfection. Thus we come to see love, light, and life no longer as abstract perfections, but now as shown forth through the Mystery of the Incarnation in the Person of Our Lord—love in His coming into the world to save our souls, light in His making Himself a shining example for all time, life in His imparting Himself to us in the Sacraments.

In the Mystery of the Incarnation the Son of God enters creation, unites it to Himself, and submits Himself to human experience. He identified Himself with us, being weary, hungry, and faint, and being "*tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.*"¹ Putting aside all of the outward accompaniment or "*insignia*" of His Sove-

¹ Hebrews IV. 15.

reignty as God, Christ lived and died as Man, "*pleasing not Himself*,"¹ and "*going about doing good*."² Thus by His Life and Death, His Agony, Cross, and Passion, He is the Pattern of Perfect Man, absolutely without sin or flaw, no matter under what circumstances viewed.

Involved in the doctrine of the Incarnation is that of the Virgin Birth. In fact, the Incarnation cannot really be considered apart from it. As far as man can see, it was the only way in which God could become Incarnate and the restoration of man be accomplished. Consequently, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, which has been held by the Church from the beginning, is most explicitly set forth in the Creed,³ the "Te Deum Laudamus,"⁴ and the special preface for Christmas Day⁵ of the Communion Office. To *doubt* or *deny* the Virgin Birth is practically to reject the true doctrine of the Incarnation, to embrace heresy, and to put oneself

¹ Romans xv. 3.

² Acts x. 38.

³ "Was Conceived by the Holy Ghost, and Born of the Virgin Mary."

⁴ "Thou didst humble Thyself to be born of a Virgin" (American Prayer Book). "Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb" (Church of England Prayer Book).

⁵ "Was made very Man, of the substance of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, and that without spot of sin to make us clean from all sin."

against the accepted teaching of the Church from its very inception.¹

Without the Virgin Birth the Son of God would have had a human father, and would have become *a* man with a human personality. The Catholic Faith repudiates such a belief as *heresy*. The true belief is that by the operation of the Holy Ghost upon the substance of the Virgin Mary the Word became Flesh—that is, the Son of God was made Man (not *a* man), “*and that without spot of sin to make us clean from all sin.*”² He did not assume a human personality, but took unto Himself Human Nature, thus cutting off the taint of original sin inherited from Adam, and restoring the supernatural gifts lost by the Fall, by imparting the Divine Life to those who by the Sacraments are brought into union with God and have the Incarnation in a certain sense extended to them.

Here it may be noted how the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, although dependent upon the Incarnation, is a means of illuminating and illustrating it as faith opens the spiritual sight and shows the similarity of the union. In the Only-Begotten of the

¹ Not only the Fathers, but also such great divines as Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor, Pearson, etc., are most explicit in this belief.

² See note on p. 14.

Father we *see* Man, and confess that He is also God. In the Holy Mysteries we *behold* the earthly elements of bread and wine, and know that they are the Body and Blood of Christ. As the two Natures—Divine and Human—are distinct, yet united in the One Person of the Son of God, so the bread and wine and the Body and Blood of Our Lord are distinct yet mystically united in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, wherein Our Lord extends the Incarnation by giving to us Himself—all that He is—God and Man. The *character* of the union, however, is different in this respect : that while the Divine and Human Natures of Our Lord are hypostatically joined, never to be separated, the elements of bread and wine and the Body and Blood of Christ are only temporarily united—that is, until received by the communicant.

The Incarnation thus reveals to us God made Man. We believe, but we do not understand. We see, but it is with eyes dazzled by the light. Yet we may appreciate that which Saint Proclus beautifully wrote :

“ He came to save, but it was needful that He should also suffer. . . . Mere man could not save ; pure God could not suffer. What then ? He Himself being God Immanuel became Man : and

what He was, saved ; what He became, suffered. . . . The Same was in the bosom of the Father and in the Virgin's womb. The Same was in His Mother's arms and on the wings of the wind. The Same was worshipped by angels and sat down with publicans. . . . He was nailed to the Cross, and the Throne of Glory was not vacated. . . . I see the miracles, and I proclaim the Godhead. I see the sufferings, and I deny not the Manhood. Immanuel opened the gates of nature as Man, but as God He brake not the seal of Virginitv."

The Incarnation, therefore, finds abundant proof of its truth, not only in the revelation of God, but in the reasoning of philosophy and in the experience of man. It is a Mystery, and must remain a Mystery. All we know regarding it cannot better be expressed than in the Hymn of Saint Athanasius, wherein is definitely declared that "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man ; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of His Mother, born in the world ; Perfect God and Perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead : and inferior to the Father

as touching His Manhood. Who although He be God and Man, yet He is not two but one Christ ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God ; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by Unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one Man, so God and Man is one Christ."

This is He Whom we are to picture in the Nativity and see in the beautiful scene and story of the manger ; this is He Who is the immaculate Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world ; this is He Who is the Desire of Nations and the Light of the World, Who lies in the manger on Christmas morning, Who sits on the Throne of Glory on the Judgment Day, Who, worshipped here in the Mystery of the Incarnation, hereafter rewards our faith, love, and devotion by giving that peace past understanding, when in the heavenly places we see Him face to face and behold His Glory as the Only-Begotten of the Father and the Saviour of the world—True God and True Man.

The Incarnation : a beautiful story, an unfathomable Mystery. Only by *love* can we rightly read the story ; only by *faith* can we partly understand the Mystery. Shall we not seek those keys of faith

and love which open the secrets of the Nativity, and diligently and devotionally dwell upon each and every scene of the sacred story until the darkness and deadness of our hearts and minds and souls disappear before Jesus, the Light of the World, and the Incarnation becomes for ever firmly fixed in our faith as the great central Truth of our holy religion, witnessed to by the most infallible proofs? "*The Word was made Flesh.*" Let us worship and adore God Incarnate.

"Jesus is God! The glorious bands
 Of golden angels sing
 Songs of adoring praise to Him
 Their Maker and their King.
 He was true God in Bethlehem's Crib,
 On Calvary's Cross true God;
 He Who in Heaven eternal reigned,
 In time on earth abode.

"Jesus is God! There never was
 A time when He was not;
 Boundless, eternal, merciful,
 The Word the Sire begot!
 Backward our thoughts through ages stretch,
 Onward through endless bliss—
 For there are two eternities,
 And both alike are His.

“Jesus is God! Oh! could I now
But compass land and sea
To teach and tell this single truth,
How happy should I be!
Oh! had I but an angel’s voice,
I would proclaim so loud—
Jesus the Good, the Holy One,
Is everlasting God!”

Faber.

II

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Hebrews 1. 3.

THE brightness of His Glory and the express image of His Person, and upholding all things by the word of His Power.

The Gospel. St. John 1. 1.

IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His Own, and His Own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

II

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

*“ Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call
His name Immanuel ”*

TO appreciate and understand the scene and story of the Nativity and the events associated with Our Lord's Birth, those of the western world should try and picture as far as possible the ways and manners of the East, and the mode of life and the attitude of mind which obtained there in those centuries long since past. Life in those bygone days had a certain simplicity and beauty largely lacking in these times. The religious feeling was very strong. Man lived close to God and close to Nature, this conscious acknowledgment and realization of God's Presence and Nearness bringing a greater conception of the spiritual world. Consequently, men welcomed supernatural revelations as evidences of God's Love and Favour.

The life and law of the Jews were essentially religious. If there were not seen fitting fruits of faith, love, and devotion, there was at least the strict fulfilment of the duties and obligations of their religion. For generally the Sacrifices of the Temple, the services of the Synagogues, the study of the Scriptures, and the ceremonial conformity to the commands of their Law formed a large part of the life of the Jews, while their manner of thinking and their way of speaking were also characterized by a religious tone.

Especially was this so in Nazareth, where the Blessed Virgin Mary had her home. This place, in the fertile and populous country of Galilee, was a typical town of the old eastern world, hidden away perhaps from the multitudes, and on this account more rigidly resisting any kind of change.

It is thought by many that Saint Mary was born and brought up in Nazareth. Of the royal line of David, she was nevertheless of very straightened means, and consequently lived in a very humble way. Thus she was a fitting vessel to bring forth Him Who was to draw all men unto Himself; Who was to pass His life among the poor, and to make His grave among the rich.

We know little of the early days of the Virgin,

but from her acts and words, when she comes before our eyes, we see that she was of a deeply religious nature, and possessed of a very contemplative spirit. We fancy her rigidly conforming to the Jewish Law, regularly reading such of the Scriptures as she, a little Jewish maiden, could obtain, and frequently withdrawing apart by herself for the purpose of prayer and meditation.

From the Fall, the world had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, and Mary must have been familiar with the promise that this Saviour should be the seed of the woman, should bruise the serpent's head, and should be born of a Virgin. The Law and the Prophets had ever set forth these truths before the Jews, and had shown the Saviour in Type, Symbol, and Prophecy, and if the Jews failed to understand the promises of God, and misinterpreted them so as to picture the Messiah coming in a very different way from that predicted, it was but the consequence of the sin which had blinded their eyes, which made them, as men have done in later times, argue and speculate upon the letter of the inspired words, instead of seeking the spiritual meaning underlying it. Yet in right manner or in wrong manner the Advent of the Christ was anticipated, and many a Jewish maiden high

in rank and position treasured in her heart the hope that she might be the chosen of God to be the mother of the Messiah.

In God's Providence, however, it was not to some rich palace of the great, but to the humble home of Mary that this blessing came. For God, Who knoweth the secrets of every heart, singled out the devout young Virgin at Nazareth to be the handmaid of the Lord, to give her substance,¹ sanctified by the Holy Spirit,¹ to be assumed by the Son of God.¹ Truly, "*He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek,*"² for while all generations call Mary "*blessed among women,*"³ the royal and noble maidens of Israel are scarcely known even by name!

It was evidently during one of her hours for retiring for prayer that the Annunciation was given and the Incarnation occurred, for the words, "*The angel came in unto her,*"⁴ imply that the Messenger of God found Mary in a place by herself, engaged in devotion and contemplation.

As the Blessed Virgin thus stands, or kneels, communing with God, the Archangel Gabriel

¹ St. Luke 1. 30-35.

² St. Luke 1. 52.

³ St. Luke 1. 28, 42.

⁴ St. Luke 1. 28.

suddenly appeared before her, possibly presenting her a lily,¹ as tradition has said, as the symbol of Mary's Virginity, saluting¹ her, and saying, "*Hail, thou that art highly favoured: the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*"² To Mary, a devout maiden of Jewish descent, deeply spiritual, and firmly believing in heavenly visitations, the advent of the Angel was not so strange or startling as were the words of his salutation, which the Virgin must have realized were of deep and mysterious import.

In her humility she probably wondered why God should single her out for so great honour, not only sending an Angel to visit her, but also announcing that she was to be favoured with a special blessing. At the same time she must have marvelled as to the precise meaning of the Angel's words.

Yet her trouble of mind was but devout wonderment mingled with the fear of God. It was a religious awe natural to one who constantly communed with the Almighty, and realized that He was now speaking to her through His heavenly

¹ In Art, the Angel is frequently represented as bending the knee to Mary as he presents to her the lily as a symbol of her Virginity.

² St. Luke 1. 28.

messenger. Nor did the Angel's assurance help her as he continued to speak in words equally mysterious: "*Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His Name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever: and of His kingdom there shall be no end.*"¹

Still in wonder, but now with a vague perception of the truth, and not in doubt or distrust, the Virgin asks, "*How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*"² Her question was but the natural prompting of a soul overcome with awe and amazement, yet desiring more fully to know God's will. And God answers by a further revelation: "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her who*

¹ St. Luke i. 30-33.

² St. Luke i. 34.

was called barren. For with God nothing is impossible."¹

How wonder, hope, and fear must have filled Saint Mary's mind ; wonder as with spiritual sight she saw the Son of God taking upon Himself our nature in this mysterious way ; hope as she thought of the blessed privilege which God had thus given her, and looked forward to the care of her Divine Son ; fear as she realized the suspicions and surmises which would attach to her when she was seen to be with child. To be the Mother of the Messiah, and give birth to Him Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, to give her flesh to the Son of God and be the Christ-bearer : it was so wonderful, so past understanding, so stupendous a truth, that the mind of that Maiden Mother was filled with unutterable awe, adoration, and amazement.

A few moments before she was but a modest maid of Israel raising her soul to God. Now, at the Annunciation of the Angel, she had become the Christ-bearer, having the Son of God Incarnate, as by the operation of God the Holy Ghost upon her pure and spotless substance "*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*"² It was

¹ St. Luke 1. 35-37.

² St. John 1. 14.

God's place to will, it was Mary's duty to submit. The accomplishment of the most tremendous mystery of which the world could conceive, which transcends all human comprehension, was never doubted by that holy Virgin, for "*with God nothing is impossible.*"¹ In faith, love, and humble obedience Mary bowed before the Lord; she believed that which she could not understand, and accepted all of the consequences to come from her condition. "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy will.*"² Her words are those of perfect assent to God's will—of perfect obedience to God's command. Her sole desire was to be the passive instrument in His Hands—to be the means of showing forth His Glory. God had highly favoured her; God had called her blessed among women. It was like a vision of Heaven, for the Presence of God was there and the Angel of God was there, and in Mary's heart and soul were feelings of wondrous peace and joy. Her Song of the Magnificat was in her thoughts long before she spoke those beautiful praises. The lights battled with the shadows in her mind, the lights of Divine Revelation shining through the shadows of human inability to understand. And

¹ St. Luke 1. 37.

² St. Luke 1. 38.

as she ponders and wonders and sees through a glass darkly, and has beautiful, glorious visions of the truth, the light before her fades away, the Angel departs, and alone in the Presence of God Saint Mary the Christ-bearer bows in adoring contemplation of the Mystery of the Incarnation as yet so vaguely comprehended.

As we reverently draw a veil before the picture of the Virgin with heart and soul thus uplifted to God, do we not feel a deep love for her so favoured by God? Surely we cannot over-estimate Saint Mary's place in the Church, as the first and foremost of all the saints of God, who, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, gave her substance to be assumed by the Saviour of the world. *For "without spot of sin to make us clean from all sin,"*¹ the Son of God came into the world, a Virgin Lord born of a Virgin Mother.² When or how this supernatural sanctification of Saint Mary was accomplished we may not know nor dare inquire. It must suffice for us, that born in a natural way and needing a Saviour, as she confessed in the Magnificat, Mary

¹ Preface for Christmas Day, office of H.C. in P.B.

² This is the explicit declaration of the Creed, and has been the teaching of the Church from the very beginning of her being, and has the corroboration of Holy Scripture and Ancient Authors (see page 15).

was yet sanctified by God to become the hallowed instrument of the Incarnation, a woman and a saint, henceforth to be loved and honoured by all ages as the Blessed Virgin Mary, since to her was given the most glorious privilege ever accorded to mankind.

We reverence her not as God, which would be blasphemous, but as the Mother of God;¹ not as the Mediator (for Our Lord is the one and only Mediator), but as she who conceived and brought forth the Mediator; not as the Dispenser of Grace, since Jesus is the *sole* Fount and Giver, but as she who, full of grace, nourished within her womb and nursed upon her breast Him Who is the Source of all Grace, Whom Mary first of all magnified and adored as her own Lord and Saviour.

Nor can we give the Virgin too much love and honour, save that only to be offered to God

¹ Θεοτόκος (Dei Genitrix), the title given to St. Mary by an Ecumenical Council. It is commonly rendered the same as the Latin words "Mater Dei," "Mother of God," but the more exact meaning in English is "She who brought forth Him Who was God." Thus we do not mean to say that Mary was the Mother of His Godhead, but that Mary brought forth and was the Mother of Him Who as God of the substance of the Father begotten before the worlds, assumed Flesh in His Mother's womb. As St. Augustine wrote, "Assumpsit quod non erat et permansit quod erat" (Serm. 184, 1).

Himself, which we safeguard by remembering the relative positions of the Divine Son and the human mother, and following the practice of the Ancient and Apostolic Church, to *worship and adore* Christ as *Lord of Lords*, to *honour and reverence* Mary as *blessed among women*. This is our duty, and each failure to give the Virgin the love and honour which are her due is a slight upon Him, Who as her Saviour and our Saviour scorned not to assume her spotless substance. For Mary was *chosen by God*, not only to be the Mother of our Lord,¹ but also to be the pattern of holy womanhood, maid and mother. In Mary is seen the restoration of woman to the plane of the man, save that his authority over woman remains. In Mary is seen the enriching and ennobling of the weaker sex.² In Mary is seen the spirit of love and trust and obedience which is the glory of the woman, which hallows

¹ St. Luke i. 43.

² There is no better way to combat Mariolatry (which unduly exalts the Virgin unto honours savouring of the Divine) than to give Mary the right honour which properly belongs to her according to the Word of God as "blessed among women." It is sad that the Church of Rome, by making the belief in the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. a dogma of the faith, forgot the warning words of the great St. Bernard, that this doctrine was "a novelty which is the mother of rashness, the sister of superstition, and the daughter of levity," and so by giving too great honour opened the way for giving too little reverence.

the home, adorns society, and beautifies the Church. Thus in honouring Mary we give reverence to her who is the queen of saints and the purest of all the servants of God, a noble example as Maid and Mother, highly favoured, not so much for her own merit, but as she who was the Bearer of the Saviour, to Whose honour and glory we sing when we honour her who received her glory from the Son of God.

“Shall we not love thee, Mother dear,
Whom Jesus loves so well,
And to *His* glory, year by year,
Thy joy and honour tell?

“Joy to be Mother of the Lord,
And thine the truer bliss,
In every thought and deed and word
To be forever His.

“And as He loves thee, Mother dear,
We too will love thee well,
And to *His* glory, year by year,
Thy joy and honour tell.”

Hymns A. & M.

III

THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY

Magnificat. St. Luke i. 46.

My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For He hath regarded : the lowliness of His hand-maiden.

For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is His Name.

And His mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with His arm : He hath scadden the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich He hath sent empty away.

He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel : as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

III

THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

“My soul doth magnify the Lord”

IT was probably not very long after the Annunciation that the Blessed Virgin hastened away to the hill country of Judæa to visit her cousin Elizabeth. In her own religious joy as the Christ-bearer, Saint Mary also thought of the blessing which had been given to her kindred; and it was but a natural impulse to seek Elizabeth, that together they might praise God for His mercy and reverently talk over His wonderful revelation. Yet God, Who ever watcheth over the children of men, made that visit the occasion both of the explicit recognition of the privilege which had been given to Mary and the religious expression of her joy in God's favour.

It is always a beautiful sight to see the old and the young come together when closely united by

the bonds of a common love and a common joy. How sacred, then, must have been that meeting of the youthful Virgin Mary and her aged cousin Elizabeth! for it was the meeting of the coming Mother of the Messiah and of her who was to bring forth His humble forerunner. Nor was it wanting in strange and impressive accompaniments.

As Mary entered the house of Zacharias and greeted her aged cousin, the yet unborn John the Baptist acknowledged the Presence of the Master,¹ also yet unborn, while Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, realized the reason of the mysterious movement within her, and, speaking by inspiration of God, saluted the Virgin with the solemn words: "*Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*"² Thus was Mary greeted and revered by Elizabeth as the Mother of God;³ thus was the still unborn Christ acknowledged and

¹ St. Luke I. 41.

² St. Luke I. 42-5.

³ See foot-note, p. 32.

worshipped as the Lord of Life, as the Holy Ghost quickened the unborn Baptist and illumined the mind of the aged mother.

It is hard to realize the feeling of the Virgin as her own cousin saluted her with such reverence. The scene and message of the Annunciation so fresh in her mind must surely have assumed still greater meaning and mystery as Elizabeth thus greeted her as the Mother of the Lord. A holy fear possessed Mary's mind, a religious joy filled her breast, her whole being seemed thrilling with thanksgiving and rapture, and at last the praise of God in her heart came swelling to her lips in the glorious Song of the Magnificat, which the Church for centuries since has used as her hallowed vesper hymn.

In that song we hear not only the words of the Virgin, but also the praises of the whole Catholic Church, of which Mary is here, in a sense, the representative, rejoicing at the Mystery of the Incarnation and for the blessing of salvation. For that sweet and solemn song, the Hymn of Saint Mary, was no exaltation of self, no assertion of pride in the high place of honour which was to be hers henceforth, but it was the singing by one meek and lowly of heart of the Glory of God, of

the joy in the Saviour, of the wonders of His works. Not merely her lips, but her whole spiritual being, sang of Him Who had crowned her with such signal honour, that for His glory "*all generations should call her blessed.*"¹

Doctrinally and devotionally the Hymn of Mary is a beautiful inheritance of the Church. Its praises are ever being repeated, its prophecies are ever being fulfilled, as throughout the ages Mary's words are ever being continually realized. For the Magnificat was given by inspiration, as Mary, guided by the Holy Ghost, praised God for the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Message of the Gospel, taking perhaps the Song of Hannah² and the Psalms of the Temple as the model for her hymn.

The Virgin sang, and her song is alike for the individual soul and for the Catholic Church; but when we sing we should breathe a prayer to God that we may have Mary's spirit of joy and thanksgiving. Adoration, thanksgiving, prophecy, are the order of her song. Her soul magnified the Lord, her spirit rejoiced in God, ere she thought of herself to predict that which has literally been fulfilled, that "*all generations shall call her blessed.*"³

¹ St. Luke I. 48.

² See I Sam. II. 1-10.

³ St. Luke I. 48.

Then with words both grateful and prophetic Mary recounted the wonders that God doeth for the children of men,¹ as underneath are the everlasting arms² of Him the Giver of all good gifts,³ Who showers His blessings to all who seek and knock and ask.⁴ The proud, the mighty, the rich, those who trust in themselves and mind not heavenly things, are put down from their seats and sent away empty, while the meek and lowly of heart, those who have hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and have trusted in the power and grace of God, have been exalted and crowned with many an honour.

Mary's Hymn is, as it were, the Triumph Song of the Saints and Martyrs and Confessors of the Church, the multitudes which no man can number,⁵ of whom the world was not worthy, who, after suffering for the Master,⁵ have been blessed with mercy and filled with spiritual good things and exalted far above those of the earth earthy. Truly God had helped Israel—the Church then, the Church now—and Mary sang with true prophetic power. Yet in her, the daughter of Israel, was seen the crown-

¹ Ps. CVII. 8.

² Deut. XXXIII. 27.

³ St. James I. 5, 17.

⁴ St. Matt. VII. 7.

⁵ Rev. VII. 9-17.

ing act of God's love. Her low estate was no hindrance to the favour of God. Not only then, or now, or to the end of time, but into eternity, all generations shall call her blessed, who was the Divinely appointed means of bringing into the world the Ancient of Days, the Ever-Glorious Son of God. Mary magnified God, and the Church echoes her praise with her own inspired song. Mary rejoiced in God her Saviour, and the children of men unite with the Virgin Mother in her exceeding great joy. The Church and her children, redeemed by their Most Holy Saviour, obey the will and command of God, to honour her who, according to Divine Appointment, was the hallowed instrument of the Incarnation.

The Magnificat ended, and as if those prophetic praises were too high and holy to be followed by minor matters, the Scriptures draw a veil over the subsequent details of Mary's visit. We are told that the Virgin stayed about three months¹ with her cousin, but we know nothing more than the fact of that sojourn. Whether or not Saint John the Baptist was born before or after Mary's departure is not stated. In either event the strange occurrences attending the Circumcision of that child

¹ St. Luke i. 56.

would have been full of meaning to the Blessed Virgin. The desire of the people to call Saint John Zacharias after his father,¹ the assertion by Saint Elizabeth that the child's name was John,² the appeal to the aged father, still dumb, and his writing on a table "*his name is John*,"³ was all strange and interesting, but would have been forgotten had not Zacharias, recovering his speech, have given utterance by inspiration of God⁴ to the beautiful Hymn of the Benedictus,⁴ another of the songs of the Incarnation.

Like the Magnificat, the Benedictus was both praise and prophecy, first glorifying God for the redemption of His people, in sending the Saviour as predicted in the Psalms and Prophets, and then pointing out the future work of Christ the Messiah and John His Forerunner. It was to be the part of Elizabeth's child to be the Prophet of the Highest, to go before the face of the Lord and prepare His way by preaching pardon by repentance; it was to be the part of Mary's Child to be the Saviour of the world, the "*Day Spring from on high*," Who hath visited us "*to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and*

¹ St. Luke i. 59.

² St. Luke i. 60.

³ St. Luke i. 62, 63.

⁴ St. Luke i. 67-79.

*to guide our feet into the way of peace."*¹ Thus in the Benedictus was summed up the many Scriptures of the Christ and His Prophet, and Mary must have been more and more impressed with the mission of her Divine Son, thus heralded as the Day Spring from Heaven, the long-looked-for Messiah.

The three months ended, Mary returned to her own home at Nazareth.² Then it must have been that the secret of her condition was discerned by Joseph, although they had not yet come to live together. For they had been previously espoused in marriage, and among the Jews such betrothal was as binding and as sacred as the marriage itself, so that even before the actual union the man and the woman were called husband and wife. Thus it was with the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, that through their promise of marriage, God's purpose was fulfilled that the Maiden Mother should have a holy and just man as a friend and protector.

During the months which had elapsed since the Visit of the Angel, Mary apparently had given no intimation to Joseph of the great blessing which had been conferred upon her. This is not surprising, for, still living apart, it would seem quite in

¹ St. Luke 1. 67-79.

² St. Luke 1. 56.

accord with the reverent and retiring nature of the Virgin that she should have kept these solemn revelations to herself and pondered them in her heart.

When Saint Joseph finally discovered her condition and found his espoused wife to be with Child by the Holy Ghost, he was greatly troubled. If he had strictly conformed to the Jewish law, it would have necessitated making Mary a public example, with the probable punishment of death by stoning; while if he had followed the prompting of charity, it would have meant quietly and secretly cancelling the betrothal and putting away the Virgin.¹

God, however, answered his anxious doubt by revealing to him the right course to take. As God by an Angel announced to Mary by *word* the Mystery of the Incarnation, so now by an Angel He assured Joseph in a *dream*² of this wonderful fact. For God, through His angelic messenger, not only revealed to Saint Joseph the mysterious conception by the Holy Ghost,² of the coming Messiah, but also showed how this Holy Child, Whose name is Jesus, or Saviour,² is God Incarnate, Emmanuel,² or God with us, Who, according

¹ St. Matt. i. 19.

² St. Matt. i. 20, 21.

to the Scriptures,¹ was to be born of a Virgin,¹ which prediction of the prophets was to be fulfilled in Mary.

It is significant of the real religion and reverence of Joseph, that he gave instant belief² to the message of the Angel, and prompt obedience² to the command of God, not only taking unto himself Mary as his wife, but also, if ancient tradition³ be true and instinctive reverence is not at fault,⁴ looking upon Mary and treating her as holy and consecrated unto the Lord, to remain the Ever Virgin Mother of God. For Saint Joseph doubtless recalled the words of the prophet and, as the fathers of the Ancient Church did later, attached to them a mysterious Messianic meaning: "*this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.*"⁵ Consequently we may well believe that

¹ Isa. VII. 14.

² St. Matt. I. 24.

³ St. Augustine.

⁴ One can hardly think of her who was sanctified by God to give her substance to His Divine Son as having children in a natural way. The only argument against this is the mention of the "brethren of our Lord," but Pearson and other noted writers well show that cousins or children of Joseph by a former marriage would have been so called, according to Jewish custom.

⁵ Ezek. XLIV. 2.

Saint Joseph respected this prediction and counsel, and revered Mary as a chosen vessel of God.

For the Ancient Fathers ever regarded Saint Mary as "*a Virgin conceiving, a Virgin bringing forth, a Virgin dying.*"¹ And with no evidence to the contrary, the Church throughout the centuries has ever held this as a pious belief.

Yet though physically Mary was the Mother of Our Lord alone, spiritually she is the mother of us all, loving and cherishing those for whom her Divine Son died, who doing the will of the Father in Heaven, are called by Jesus Himself His brothers and sisters.²

“ Virgin-Born, we bow before Thee,
Blessèd was the womb that bore Thee ;
Mary, Maid and Mother mild,
Blessèd was she in her Child.

“ Blessèd she by all creation
Who brought forth the world’s Salvation,
And blessèd they, for ever blest,
Who love Thee most, and serve Thee best.”

Hymns A. & M.

¹ St. Augustine.

² St. Matt. XII. 50.

IV

THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR,
JESUS CHRIST

The Gospel. St. Luke II. 1.

AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David :) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

IV

THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST

“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

How wonderful and past finding out are the ways of God, as, without forcing man's will or actions, God overrules them to accomplish His Own Divine purpose! It was by inspiration of God that the Prophets had named Bethlehem¹ as the place of the Saviour's Birth. It was by imperial decree² that Joseph and Mary went to that royal city and that Our Lord's Birth was recorded. Yet how little did Cæsar Augustus who ordered the census, or King Herod who enforced it, or the State officials who executed it, realize that they were furthering the Will of God and helping to fulfil the ancient Jewish prophecies!

¹ Micah v. 2.

² St. Luke II. 1-5.

Nor did the Roman Authorities, in permitting the Jews to take the census in their own peculiar way, in which they would insist upon those who were to be taxed¹ going to their own city, where their birth and lineage would be on record, see that they were here accomplishing God's purpose for the publishing officially the Birth of the Messiah!

Thus we see Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem, to conform to the command for the census.¹ We know little of that journey, nor would we wish to draw the veil which hides it from our sight, further than reverently to picture the Blessed Virgin and her aged protector as they draw near the ancient city. We fancy them going slowly on their way, the young Virgin pondering in her heart the Mystery of the Incarnation, the aged Joseph reverently assisting her along the road, as now obedient to the revelation of God he watches over her as a sacred charge.²

¹ St. Luke II. 1-5.

² Rubens, in executing an order for a picture of St. Christopher, departed from the traditional representation of this saint carrying the Christ-Child on his shoulder, and instead gave the splendid painting now in the Cathedral of Antwerp, called the "Descent from the Cross," in which in three panels Rubens represents the Christ-bearers: (1) St. Mary on her way to Bethlehem; (2) St. Simeon holding Christ in his arms at the Presentation; (3) the Disciples and the Maries taking our Lord's Body from the Tree.

Perhaps they speak of the past and of the future and recall all the sayings of Scripture as to the coming of the Saviour. Perhaps more often they journey in silence, lifting up their hearts and souls to God, to fit themselves for the wonderful event which is to occur, realizing in a certain sense the words: "*The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.*"¹ The Mystery of the Incarnation was probably ever before their minds, transcending their power to understand, even as it is above our comprehension to-day, but inspiring them to special spiritual uplifting, as it should do all those who try in some measure to meditate upon this central doctrine of the Christian Faith. Nor should we forget the blessed example of the Virgin, who pondered all these things in her heart,² for reverently to try to picture the blessed condition of Saint Mary as being with Child by the Holy Ghost will bring more clearly to the mind the tremendous mystery of God made Man for us.

When Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem they found the inn a busy place. It was like many another such, common to the East, probably consisting of a small one-story house, built over

¹ Hab. 11. 20.

² St. Luke 11. 19, 51.

a cellar or cave in the rocky foundation, and having erected about it, within an enclosure or fence, many tents or booths, now used by those coming up to be taxed. Alas! For Saint Mary and Saint Joseph and the Saviour to be born, "*there was found no room in the Inn.*"¹ Of the royal line of David, they might have boasted descent far above all others there; but their sadly straitened means won for them no welcome, save in the dark and lowly cave where the ox and the ass were stabled. The Inn is crowded, perhaps by a gay and careless throng; but the Virgin Mother, bearing the Judge and Saviour of the world, is sent away to the Stable! Thus is the Cross seen at the very start of the Saviour's earthly life, as the Holy Family are sent away and directed to a dark cave, typical of many a rejection to-day, when those in the world either refuse to let Jesus be born into their lives or else give Him but a hidden corner there.

When we are disappointed in our desires and aspirations, let us remember that the Son of God was turned away from the Inn! When we wish for richer homes and greater state, let us recall that the Saviour was born in a Stable! When we

¹ St. Luke 11. 7.

long for more luxury and greater comfort, let us picture Jesus lying in a rude, rough Manger! When we feel that we are slighted and neglected, let us see Christ unnoticed and unhonoured by the little world in the Inn! For if Almighty God, the All Glorious and All Holy One, could condescend to endure all this for sinners, surely we the creatures of His Hand can bear something for Him Who on the eve of the Nativity shows forth the Cross and goes to be born in a stable!

Few spots are so sacred as that of the Grotto of the Nativity, for in that Cave strange and wonderful things occurred unknown to those in the Inn above. In the Rock, He Who is the Rock of Ages saw the light as Man, in a hollow of a rock to rest at His Birth, in a hollow of a rock to rest at His Death, and in the hollow of the Rock, His Own Piercèd Side, to draw all those who love Him close to His Sacred Heart.

In a Cave, with rude walls and rocky floor and rough manger, which the poorest man would scorn to own as his birthplace, the Son of God deigned to be born. Yet one would fain believe the ancient tradition that the Angels¹ of God made ready

¹ There seems nothing strange in this to those who have any right conception of the spiritual world and who remember the constant mention in the Scriptures of the ministration of Angels.

that rocky stable for the Coming of the Infant Saviour, perhaps to teach us to cleanse our souls for His Coming to us in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

In this humble but quiet grotto Mary made ready for the prospective Birth of Jesus, and doubtless in prayer and contemplation awaited the Will of God. Little by little the sounds died away in the crowded Inn, one by one the lights went out in the ancient city, and silence settled upon the scene. The Inn above slept in darkness ; but below in the Cave the shadows danced upon the floor, as the light of a little lantern flickered and wavered in the draughts, showing Mary and Joseph watching in prayer, and the ox and the ass blinking with wondering eyes at the strange intruders, while outside the heavens shone with a beautiful radiance and the earth seemed waiting with a hushed expectancy.

There was a time when all was still within the Grotto and the dim light cast lengthening shadows on the wall. The minutes passed and there came a time when the cave was filled with a wondrous brightness and a little Voice was heard. The Holy Child Jesus was lightening the humble cave with His Heavenly Glory !

In the solemn stillness of the night He Who became Incarnate at the Annunciation was Born as a Child on the Nativity. "*The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"¹ The Promise of the ages was fulfilled, and the world saw God manifested as Man.

Free from the pains of travail² Mary became the Mother of Our Lord. "*Before she travailed she brought forth; before her pain came she was delivered of a Man-Child. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things?*"³ With her own hands the Virgin reverently wrapped the swaddling clothes⁴ about the Sacred Body of the Infant Saviour and laid Him in the Manger⁴ upon a bed of straw. Who can really picture the joy of that Maiden Mother, or the blessing from that Wondrous Child, Mary singing in her heart the Song of the Nativity, "*Thou Only art Holy: Thou Only art the Lord: Thou Only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the Glory of God the Father,*"⁵ Jesus smiling in tender love at the Virgin Mother, "*to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the*

¹ St. John I. 14.

² So the Ancient Fathers ever held.

³ Isa. LXVI. 7, 8.

⁴ St. Luke II. 7.

⁵ The Gloria in Excelsis, P.B.

shadow of death: and to guide our feet into the way of peace!"¹ Truly there was no shadow of darkness or death with Mary as she held to her breast Jesus, the Prince of Peace and the Light of the World!

A Cave, a Stable, the company of an ox and an ass! A Manger Crib, a bed of Straw, the presence of a youthful Virgin and an aged man! Is that Child so strangely surrounded truly the Son of God? Can we believe that He is really the King of Kings, the Creator and Controller of the world? We see no sumptuous palace, enriched with all the adornments of art and architecture; we see no polished courtiers brave in apparel and stately of mien; we see no glint and glitter of jewelled dress and golden furniture, no crown or sceptre, no purple or ermine, all that one is wont to associate with the advent of a King. Can we believe that this Child, born in a rude and rocky cave, is the Incarnate Son of God?

And heart and soul and spirit answer, "Yes; He is God," as we love and look and worship. For the very strange and unique accompaniments and surroundings of the Birth of the Saviour, so different from what man would expect or would

¹ The Benedictus.

picture if it was but a story, carry to the mind the conviction of the Divinity of that Holy Child and of the supernatural character of His Conception. Nor is it reasonable to doubt that which we cannot comprehend in the spiritual world when in the natural world we see and believe in the wonders which God doeth for the children of men, where the unseen forces and hidden powers may be but mysteries preparing the mind for the great Mystery of Mysteries, the Incarnation.

Surely the heart aglow with the ardour of devoted love and the spirit raised on the wings of adoring worship are no unworthy witnesses of this Child as God, Who as the Light of the World has guided and guarded us through the many changes and chances of life. For the love of the heart and the worship of the soul convince us of the truth of the fact and doctrine of the Incarnation, before which the mind of man is helpless, overcome by the mystery which it cannot grasp.

So with the multitudes throughout the ages we kneel with Saint Mary and Saint Joseph in homage to the Infant King as we sing the angels' song of praise, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" Alike through the dazzling courts of heaven and in the darkened

paths of earth sounds that glorious hymn, borne on the voices of men and angels. It makes music and melody in our hearts, no fleeting strain once raised and then for ever lost, but an everlasting song, never dying, never ceasing, the song ever swelling, the love ever growing, as year by year the whole Church unites to sing "*O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*"

Perhaps none saw the Glory which we fancy played about the Holy Child, save those who looked in adoring love. For as Balaam on the ass saw not the angel in the way,¹ and as the soldiers with Saul saw not² the Lord in the road, so also many who met Jesus in His earthly Ministry saw not His Glory. To see the light which shone forth from the Infant Saviour and illumined the farthest corner of the Cave, one must have the spirit of Mary and Joseph, which will reflect that light into the hearts and minds and souls, warming, brightening, and purifying until we come to see more and more clearly regarding the Mystery of the Incarnation. Yet even in that radiant light we *behold* but do not plainly see. It is but a vision of the promised land, for the Mystery is a Mystery still. We see but in a glass darkly, catching but a glimpse of the

¹ Num. XXII. 24-35.

² Acts IX. 7.

truth, yet that glimpse is as an open door which none may shut, and by it the sons of men enter into the joys of God ; a ladder from heaven to earth, and by it the children of earth climb to the courts on high.¹

For as by looking at and studying an inaccessible mountain range the distant peaks with their shining summits and glistening glaciers, white with the eternal snows, assume form and character, and become more impressive and inspiring from the beauty which blinds and the mysterious vagueness of the lights and shadows and the very knowledge of the inaccessibility, so by contemplating and meditating upon the Incarnation, the fact and doctrine there set forth assume reality and meaning in our minds, and become all the more stimulating to awe, adoration, and appreciation from the very realization that this Mystery is still beyond our mental grasp, partly revealed in the light, partly shrouded in the shadows.

Thus as we picture the Manger, with the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* ringing in our ears and with the Glory of God shining before our eyes, there dawns upon us some ray of light by which we dimly

¹ Gen. XXVIII. 12, etc. The ancients saw symbolized in the vision of "Jacob's Ladder" the Incarnation of the Son of God.

apprehend and humbly confess the Eternal Being and Divine Attributes of that Wonderful Child, Who as God made Man, though in outward appearance similar to any beautiful new-born babe, was the Word made Flesh, the Light of the World and the Lord of Life.

The first of these truths, that "*the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us*," is, as has been said, beyond our grasp ; for the human mind has its limitations. God can only fully be apprehended by God. We finite creatures are unable to understand such truths as the Eternal Being of God, or the union of the Divine and Human Natures in Christ, or the Second Person of the Trinity becoming Man without ceasing to be God, and dwelling among men in human flesh. Yet our inability to do so in no way affects their truth. Rather does it establish it, since it proves the revelation to be of God.

Only by contrast or antithesis, the setting of one thought against another, do we gain any comprehension of the Mystery, and then the more we see the more we marvel. Wonderful indeed was that Holy Child : He Who possessed so little in the Manger is the Lord and Creator of the Universe;¹

¹ St. John 1. 3.

He Who smiled at the Virgin soars upon the wings of the wind; He Who lay so weak and helpless in the Stable reigns as the Almighty upon the Throne of God. He assumed flesh at the Annunciation, and was manifested at the Nativity as the Infant Saviour, yet He was and is God eternal,¹ without beginning or end,¹ with never a time when He was not,¹ the Ancient of Days.¹ All that God is, He is, for He is God:² all that man is, He is, for He is Man:³ God and Man united in the Mystery of the Incarnation; God and Man joined in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus the Word made Flesh was the Holy Child of the Manger, the Desire of Nations, Who by the union of the Divine and Human Natures in Himself, becomes the Deliverer and Restorer of fallen man. For as True Man Christ knows all things from experience, having been "*tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin,*"⁴ being, therefore, the Absolutely Spotless Ideal, Pattern,

¹ Rev. i. 8, etc. The references of the above are so numerous that the reader is referred to the Oxford Bible Subject Index, "Christ," etc.

² Col. ii. 9; Heb. i. 3; Phil. ii. 6.

³ Heb. ii. 14-17; Phil. ii. 7, 8.

⁴ Heb. iv. 15; ii. 17, 18.

and Standard for all ages ; and as True God He has Wisdom and Strength to keep us, being the Possessor of all Divine Powers and Perfections. Thus by our union with Christ, God and Man, through the Sacraments of the Church, the bands and fetters of sin are broken and cast away, the ruin worked in man by the Fall is repaired, the Image of God, which was defaced but not destroyed, is restored, and the righteousness of the Lord of Glory is imparted to the soul.

We look upon the Manger, and we see there the fulfilment of the Prophet's words,¹ in the whole scheme of redemption, resulting from the Incarnation : "*For unto us a Child is Born,*" the Child of Mary, "*unto us a Son is given,*" the Son of God, "*and the government shall be upon His shoulder*"; the Cross which He carried throughout His earthly Life, and on the way to Calvary. There as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,² Crucified upon the Tree, He suffered as Man, and atoned as God, paying man's ransom,³ bearing man's penalty,⁴ blotting out the handwriting that was against us,⁵ reconciling the sinner unto God,⁶ by the "One

¹ Isa. ix. 6.

³ 1 St. Timothy II. 6.

⁵ Col. II. 14.

² Rev. v. 6.

⁴ 1 St. Peter II. 24.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 19.

Full, Perfect, and Sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation and Satisfaction of Himself once offered for the sins of the whole world.”¹

Who, seeing the Holy Child in the Manger, would then have thought of the Cross? Yet that was the destiny of the Infant King; those little hands stretched out to the Virgin Mother, those sacred feet resting upon the rough straw, were to be pierced by the cruel nails; those holy lips smiling in love at Mary were to cry “*I thirst!*”; those blessed brows then encircled with Glory were to wear the crown of thorns; that sacred body wrapped in swaddling clothes was to be stripped upon the Tree. The government of the Cross was upon His shoulder! That Cross was then symbolized by the crossing beams of the Crib. It was later carried with bleeding feet to Calvary. For He, Whose “*Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace,*”² was to win His title by reigning from the Tree; His Cross henceforth the conqueror of the world, the sign of the Christian, the standard of the Church and the test of life, His Name Jesus or Saviour, the joy and solace of each

¹ Canon of Consecration, H.C. Office, P.B.

² Isa. IX. 6.

faithful servant of the Master. We look at the Manger and see the Word made Flesh ; we look at the Cross, and see the Saviour of the world ; it is life won by death, God Redeeming, Man Dying, One Christ, the Desire of Nations, the Restorer and Deliverer, on the Altar of the Tree, the same Lord Who was born as a Child on Christmas Day.

The Babe of Bethlehem is also the *Light of the world*.¹ At the Creation God said "*Let there be light,*"² and there was light, as the Father willed, the Son spake, the Spirit moved. In Heaven we are told that the redeemed there "*need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light.*"³ Yet how hard it is to realize that in the Manger was He that lighteth the many mansions on high, and was "*The True Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*"⁴ Of no mere man could it be said that "*in Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*"⁵ Life grows dark and dim, but the brightness of that Babe of Bethlehem never fades. The powers of darkness were hurled against Him, in His Life and in His Death, at the Manger, in the Garden, at the

¹ St. John ix. 5.

³ Rev. xxii. 5.

⁵ St. John i. 4.

² Gen. i. 3.

⁴ St. John i. 9.

Cross, but they comprehended Him not,¹ they conquered Him not ; for Jesus the Light still shineth in the darkness,¹ piercing the clouds of doubt and despair, and illuminating the sorrows and sufferings of life.

As colours absorb the light of the sun, so should we drink in the light of the Sun of Righteousness, which will warm, purify, and illumine, to bring forth in us the fervour of love, the grace of holiness, as we reflect His radiance in our daily life. When the darkness of worldliness and wickedness dims our faith, and sorrow and suffering, loneliness and loss, bow us down ; when the darkness of despondency and disappointment dulls our powers ; when the valley of the shadow of death opens before us, and life is about to pass into "*the great beyond*" ;—what joy and comfort and strength to feel that we can turn to Jesus, "*In Whom is no darkness at all,*"² Who lay in the Manger as "*The Light of the world.*" The Inn typifies the world buried in darkness. The Cave symbolizes the Church illumined with light. It is the Presence of Jesus which makes the difference. If we make Him our Light amid all the chances and changes of this mortal life, as a lantern unto our feet, then by

¹ St. John I. 5.

² I St. John I. 5.

His Merits and Mediation we may hope hereafter to see Him in Glory, and behold His Beautiful Face.

So also the Holy Child was God, the Lord of Life. "*God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*"¹ "*I am come,*" saith the Lord, "*that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*"² This was one object of the Incarnation: that man might have the heavenly fire replenished by the imparting in new measure of the Divine Life. The Holy Child in the Manger was this Source of Life,³ the very Giver of Life,⁴ and when men drink in this Divine Life from Him, its Fountain Head, then is realized the words of Saint Paul: "*I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,*"⁵ or to put it in the words of that other text, we live "*a life hid with Christ in God.*"⁶

The Lord of Life; Jesus in the Manger; Jesus on the Cross; Jesus in Heaven! All that is of earth dies; only God remaineth, and Jesus is God. To live in Him is to die in Him, and to live hereafter. There is no break to the soul, for he who lives with Jesus here passes from earth to the

¹ 1 St. John v. 11.

² St. John x. 10.

³ St. John I. 4; XIV. 6.

⁴ St. John x. 10.

⁵ Gal. II. 20.

⁶ Col. III. 3.

world of Spirit to see the Lord face to face. "*In Christ shall all be made alive.*"¹ Death hath no more dominion over us. We seek the Lord of life, we draw grace and strength from Him; all that we need or desire He will give. Naught else will satisfy. We may blind ourselves and seek to be filled with pleasure, business, travel, study, art, music, literature—anything, everything that the world can give; but if Jesus is not sought they will all prove to be empty husks—hollow, unsatisfying masks of death. Well Saint Augustine wrote, "Thou hast made me for Thyself, O God, and my heart findeth no true rest till it find rest in Thee."

The Incarnation brought life. The Gift, the Giver, is Jesus the Lord of Life, Who touches with gold every experience of earthly existence, lived in union with Him; Jesus that wonderful Babe of Bethlehem, the Child of a Maid and the Son of God.

"A Babe on the breast of a maiden He lies,
Yet sits with the Father on high in the skies;
Before Him their faces the Seraphim hide,
While Joseph stands waiting unscared by His side.

"Lo! here is Immanuel, here is the Child,
The Son that was promised to Mary so mild;
Whose power and dominion shall ever increase,
The Prince that shall rule o'er a kingdom of peace.

¹ I Cor. xv. 22.

“The Wonderful Counsellor, boundless in might,
The Father’s Own Image, the Beam of His Light ;
Behold Him now wearing the likeness of man,
Weak, helpless, and speechless, in measure a span.

“O wonder of wonders, which none can unfold,
The Ancient of Days is an hour or two old ;
The Maker of all things is made of the earth,
Man is worshipped by Angels and God comes to Birth.

“The Word in the bliss of the Godhead remains,
Yet in Flesh comes to suffer the keenest of pains ;
He is that He was and for ever shall be,
But becomes that He was not, for you and for me.

“Then let us adore Him, and praise His great love,
For to save us poor sinners, He came from above.”

Old Carol.

V

THE VISION OF THE SHEPHERDS AND
THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

The Gospel. St. Luke 11. 8.

AND there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the Glory of the Lord shone round about them : and they were sore afraid. And the Angel said unto them, Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the Angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

V

THE VISION OF THE SHEPHERDS AND THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

“Let all the angels of God worship Him”

OUT in the fields, perhaps not far distant from the little town of Bethlehem, shepherds were watching their flocks on this holy night of the Nativity. In those days, in the East, constant care was necessary to keep the charges from being carried off by thieves or wild beasts, as the sheep were kept either in the open pastures or in low enclosures called sheepfolds. Perhaps in this instance there was more than usual care, as the sheep may have been those selected for the Temple Sacrifices, and were thus in a measure looked upon as sacred.

We fancy them safely gathered together in the fold, and their guardians reclining on the soft green turf. The heavens were strangely bright, the moon shone with more than wonted brilliancy, and a holy peace and quiet seemed to pervade the scene.

As they sat watching the sheep, the shepherds may have whiled away the hours thinking of the Scriptures (perhaps the only writings they ever heard), an occupation natural to those reared among a religious people and brought into frequent touch with the sacrificing priests of the Jewish faith. Perhaps they were thinking of the ancient prophecies, and hoping that the fullness of time was drawing near when the long-expected Messiah was to come. Nor is it unlikely that they opened their hearts to one another, confiding their fears and disappointments, commenting upon the strange and solemn stillness which seemed to reign, and questioning as to whether it might bode anything unusual.

Suddenly they saw a strange light and a strange visitant.¹ They were filled with fear and wonder as the Angel of the Lord appeared and the Glory of the Lord shone round about, for well may mortal men be filled with awe at the advent of the messenger of God, even if he comes with blessings on his lips. To their fear was added amazement, when the Angel spoke God's message of love: "*Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto*

¹ St. Luke II. 9.

*you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you : ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger."*¹

Wonderful words they were, and no sooner spoken than suddenly there appeared with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and singing, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"²

What a message, what a vision for those humble shepherds! To see that company of heavenly soldiers, whose life was spent in Angelic service and Angelic worship, to see those whose beauty and glory reflected the beauty and glory of the heavenly places! In Heaven, before the throne of God, those Angels joined in the Sanctus Song, singing, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts : heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory.*"³ Now on earth they praised and glorified Him, Who in the Mystery of the Incarnation united Heaven and earth, God and man, as God not vacating the Throne of the Father in Heaven, yet as the Word made Flesh resting as the Babe of Bethlehem in the Holy Manger.

¹ St. Luke II. 10-12.

² St. Luke II. 13-14.

³ See Isa. VI. 3.

How little many people appreciate this hymn of the Angels! How seldom they stop, when reading the sacred story, to think of the "*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*"¹ Yet the Church has expanded the first Christmas Carol to form her great Eucharistic Hymn of Praise to the Incarnate Lord, Mystically Present in the Blessed Sacrament. Cannot we make the Angels' Song speak to us personally, and teach us some helpful lessons? Look, for instance, at the order of this hymn. The first thought is that of adoration of God. The praise of God precedes the message of peace on earth. God must be worshipped and glorified before man may expect His pardon and blessing. Beautifully has the Church expressed this truth in her addition to the Angels' Song by the solemn ascription, "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for *Thy Great Glory*, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty."² This well accords with the example of the Master, Who, in giving us the ideal pattern for prayer and praise, puts at the very beginning, "*Hallowed be Thy Name.*"

God Himself is Glorious beyond our power to express; all the works of His Hand are made for

¹ St. Luke II. 14.

² *Gloria in Excelsis*, P. B.

His Glory, and our very redemption was wrought that the ransomed souls around the Throne in Heaven may sing His Praise and Honour. *Whatsoever ye do, do all for the Glory of God.*"¹ The Angels' Song is for our pattern of praise, and we do well to note it. We must render Glory to God in the Highest, far up in the heights. Then we may hope to win the peace on earth, good will towards men. For this peace is the favour of God to those who love and worship Him, a peace past understanding, which comes from Jesus the Saviour, the Prince of Peace, who comes to the penitent with "*healing in His wings,*"² bringing pardon for the past, grace for the present, glory for the future. Let us learn the lesson of the Angels' Song: to worship God with glorious praise and adoration, that we may win and extend the blessing of peace and pardon. Let us cultivate the Angels' spirit of sacrifice which failed not to adore Him, "*Who was made a little lower than the Angels for the suffering of death,*"³ yet by His Life and Death exalted Human Nature to be "*crowned with Glory and honour,*"³ so that the Father when "*He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, saith: let all the Angels of God worship Him.*"⁴

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31.

² Malachi iv. 2.

³ Hebrews ii. 9.

⁴ Hebrews i. 6.

The message of glad tidings was first revealed, not to the proud Pharisee in Jerusalem or to the worldly Priest in the Temple, but to the humble shepherds in the fields. It is not wealth or learning or position which makes men favoured of God, but rather the heart and mind and soul which seek their light and inspiration from on high, those who, walking the humble paths of earth, have their spirits soaring upwards towards heaven.

A strange significance and mystical meaning is seen in the message of salvation being first announced to the shepherds on the hills. For was it not fitting for those who tended the little lambs of the flock to hear of the Coming of the Lamb of God? Was it not meet for those who watched as shepherds near Bethlehem, the city of David the shepherd-king, to see Jesus, the Good Shepherd Who giveth His Life for the sheep? Nor should we fail to see in those humble men, who watched their flocks by night, the type of those in the Sacred Ministry who watch for souls early and late, who if they are true to their vocation will meditate upon the Word of God, will guard the souls committed to their care, will hear many a message and song from on high, and will seek the Saviour where He may be found, not now in the Manger, but at the Altar.

What a beautiful sequel is there to the story, when the Angels have gone and the Glory has faded away, leaving the shepherds as they were before! Yet not quite the same, for their ears still seemed to hear the blessed news of salvation, and their eyes longed to behold Him Whose Advent the Angels had announced. With one accord, with instant and spontaneous reply to the prompting of their hearts, they expressed the same resolve and wish, and said aloud to one another, "*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass which the Lord hath made known unto us.*"¹ They did not argue as to the necessity, they did not wait until time had chilled their ardour and dimmed the revelation, but they gave immediate answer to the message, instant response to the call. God had spoken to them of the Saviour in a strange and mysterious way. Should they not seek Him and sing to Him the Angels' Song as He slumbered in the Manger?

With crook in hand they started to see their Lord and King. Above them shone the stars, and perhaps in their midst they saw the "Star of the East,"² the glorious herald of Him Whom the Scriptures call "*The Bright and Morning Star.*"³

¹ St. Luke II. 15. ² Num. XXIV. 17. ³ Rev. XXII. 16.

Silently the shepherds wended their way, thinking of Him Who from heaven had come to earth to save from the devil the souls of sinners, even as they had saved their sheep from the prowling beasts. Those men were shepherds, not scholars; tenders of sheep, not theologians; but He Who is the Great Shepherd of the sheep¹ must have spoken to their loving hearts, and have deigned to bless them with some spiritual discernment of the Mystery of the Incarnation, as their souls opened like flowers of the field to catch the heavenly dew.

The miles were traversed, the Grotto was reached, and the shepherds knocked at the rough-hewn door. They entered to behold the holiest of all holy scenes: the Maiden Mother and the aged Joseph kneeling in silent love and adoration before a Manger, in which was lying, upon a bed of straw, bathed in a flood of Glory, the Infant Saviour, the Light of the World. And close at hand, if tradition be true, were the Ox and Ass on bended knee, for "*The Ox knoweth his Owner, and the Ass his Master's Crib.*"²

The worldly-wise might have passed by that Cave and have seen no strange light shining through

¹ St. Peter II. 25; St. John x. 11.

² Isa. I. 3.

the cracks of the door ; they might have looked upon that Holy Child and have noticed no un-earthly Glory illuminating that humble abode ; they might have stood and listened and have heard none of those heavenly harmonies, as adoring Angels sang their songs of praise. “ *God hath hid these things from the wise and prudent.*”¹ The worldly could have seen but an old man, a village maid, and a Child cradled in a manger. The shepherds saw the Saviour surrounded by the Glory of God, adored by a Spotless Virgin, the Mother of Our Lord, and an aged saint, the guardian of the Holy Child Jesus.

History ever repeats itself. There is the same difference between people to-day as there was during the life of Christ from the Crib to the Cross. As God and Man the Holy Child lay in the Manger, yet only Mary and Joseph, the Shepherds and the Wise Men owned Him as the Divine Saviour ! As God and Man the Master walked the paths of earth, yet only the humble following of chosen disciples and holy women saw in Him the Redeemer of the World ! As God and Man the Christ hung upon the Cross, yet only one thief and one centurion in addition

¹ St. Matt. xi. 25.

to His Own followers acknowledged Him as the Son of God. So to-day Jesus Christ as God and Man, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is preached to the people in service and sermon, and presented to the faithful in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, but only a few of those who hear and receive and worship see Him with the spiritual understanding, and take Him to their hearts as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world !

Thus the shepherds become an example to us, as they humbly hearkened to the Word of God, and gave instant response to God's call and message. For they lovingly sought their Saviour in His Manger Throne, and reverently adored and worshipped Him there. The whole picture is a story in action, a doctrine lived, for the reality of it all has its counterpart in a mystical way in our midst now. The Church, like Bethlehem, is the "House of Bread"; the Altar, like the Manger, enthrones Jesus ; there, like the shepherds, we may seek the Saviour, and in the unspeakable bliss of the Blessed Sacrament may worship and adore the Lord of Glory.

The Angel's message may be made personal to each of us as the salutation sounds, "*Unto you is*

*born this day a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord,"*¹ for each day or week the message comes, each day or week the Saviour may be sacramentally born afresh in our hearts, each day or week we may worship and adore Him in the Holy Mysteries of the Altar.

Nor should we fail to note Mary's blessed example as the shepherds came and went, telling their strange news of the Angel's visit, of the Angel's Song: "*Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*"² To keep means to treasure, to ponder means to consider. So the Virgin Mother, by keeping and pondering, ever sought for a clearer comprehension of the mysteries of God. Little by little the light must have shone more brightly. Day by day there must have dawned on Mary's mind some fresh revelation of the truth, leading her onward and upward, until at the Cross the full light burst upon her, showing in all its majesty the Sacrifice of her Divine Son as the Lamb of God, but bringing with the wondrous joy of understanding the Atonement, the unutterable sorrow of seeing sinners crucify the Saviour of the World. May we not also keep and ponder in our hearts the Mysteries of the Faith, that opening

¹ St. Luke II. 11.

² St. Luke II. 19.

the windows of our souls the light of heaven may shine in to lead us to the truth!

Forth from the Cave went the shepherds when they had seen and glorified the Master; but not as they were before, for they had been in the Presence of their King. Out into the world with its darkness and sin went those watchers of sheep; but not as they went before, for they had worshipped Him Who saves from sin, they had given their homage to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. Henceforth, as sheep placed in His Fold of the Catholic Church, the shepherds went to spread the glad tidings of the Gospel,¹ to make known all that had been told them concerning the Holy Child, announcing that the All Holy had come to dwell among sinners, the King with His subjects, the Creator with His creatures. Yet though the shepherds went forth from the Glory of the Cave into the darkness of the world, they carried with them the remembrance of the Divine Presence of the Saviour, of the Brightness of the Father's Glory, to warm their hearts and souls with the heavenly fire of love, to fill their minds with higher and holier aspirations, and to add a new beauty and dignity to their humble labours

¹ St. Luke II. 17.

and lowly life as they glorified and praised God for all that they had seen and heard.

“O Brightness of the Immortal Father’s Face,
Most Holy, Heavenly, Blest,
Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom His Truth and Grace
Are visibly exprest.

“The sun is sinking now, and one by one
The lamps of evening shine ;
We hynn the Eternal Father and the Son
And Holy Ghost Divine.

“Worthy art Thou at all times to receive
Our hallowed praises, Lord,
O Son of God, be Thou, in Whom we live,
Through all the world adored.”

Ancient Hymn by Sophronius.

VI

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN, OR
THE THREE KINGS OF THE EAST

WHEN Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

VI

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN, OR THE THREE KINGS OF THE EAST

*“The Kings of Tharsis and of the Isles shall give presents :
the Kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts.”*

OUT from the shadows of antiquity stand three strange and mysterious personages borne along on the swaying backs of camels. These have ever had a peculiar charm and fascination, partly because of the poetic and picturesque circumstances connected with their journey, partly because of their high rank and standing as Kings, Priests, and Scholars. They are the Wise Men, the Three Kings of the East, who visited and worshipped Our Lord in the Manger, whose memory henceforth is enshrined in Scripture, History and Tradition. The Old Testament prophesied of their journey, the New Testament records its fulfilment, and Tradition has supplemented the Scriptural account in such a way as to add many illuminating suggestions while largely leaving undisturbed

the mystery which partly veils their origin, life, and end.

Of priestly office, sacred caste, and kingly rank, the Wise Men had assured position in their own land of Arabia or Persia. They were probably worshippers of God as the Lord of Light and Goodness, possibly being followers, at least to some extent, of the ancient religion of Zoroaster. Tradition¹ says that they were three in number, by name Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, who as Kings, Priests, and Scholars, spent their time studying the Scriptures and watching the heavens, apparently being well acquainted with the Jewish prophecies regarding the coming of the Saviour, Whose advent was to be heralded by a star. Of an alien race, these Three Kings were to be the first fruits of the Gentiles won for Christ, respectively representing the races of the world descended from Shem, Ham, and Japhet. Of no mean birth, they were to show rank and learning, worshipping at the Manger, giving homage to an Infant King Who, though lacking outward marks of honour, was the Incarnate Son of Almighty God.

Often as they watched the stars, the Magi must

¹ St. Leo the Great.

have thought of the prophecies associated with the heavens: "*A star shall come out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel,*"¹ or "*The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and Kings to the brightness of thy rising.*"² The last specially suggested the possibility of their own action should the star appear, for did not also the prophecies read "*The Kings of Tharsis and of the Isles shall give presents: the Kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts*"?³ These and many longer sayings of Scripture would have been significant to them of much mysterious meaning, carrying to their minds the certainty of the coming Messiah being worshipped by Kings from the east, led to Him by a star, which favoured ones might be themselves.

What must have been their joy when God spoke to those students of the heavens by placing there the long-expected sign! They had looked above for light and guidance, and their prayers were answered, their hopes were realized. Nor was the star which appeared a constellation or conjunction of planets, as unbelievers in the supernatural would fain believe, for the scriptural word (*ἀστὴρ*) is that used for a *single* star. Surely it

¹ Num. XXIV. 17.

² Isa. LX. 3.

³ Ps. LXXII. 10. See also Jer. XVI. 19; Isa. XLV. 14.

was possible to the Power of Almighty God, Who made the Heavens, to herald the coming Birth of His Divine Son by a new star!

This star appeared in the western skies to those living in the east and was probably full of wonderful beauty and radiance, revealing within its glory, if tradition be true, the Vision of the Christ-Child, as a Jewel set in light and splendour. Nor need that star have been seen by other than those scholars and students of the heavens who believed, for God leads men now by spiritual lights and spiritual aids, which others neither see nor feel.

As the Pillar of Cloud¹ by day and the Pillar of Fire¹ by night were given to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land, so the Star as an Angel in the sky was sent to bring the Wise Men to the Goal of their hopes and desires, to the Christ, the Bright and Morning Star.

One loves to picture the long journey of the Three Kings. It was a beautiful instance of faith and love, patience and perseverance; for we must not forget that travel then was far more tiresome and tedious, far more difficult and dangerous, than in the age in which we live. It must have been many months before the Wise Men reached their

¹ Exod. XIII. 21, 22.

journey's end, according to the slow progress of those days. Their trip was no rapid rush to the goal, whirled along tracks by steam or electricity as in modern times, but the slow passage over moor and mountain, field and forest, on the backs of camels, after the manner of the patriarchs of old. Nor was it a pleasure trip, or a business expedition, or an object of curiosity. It was truly a *religious journey*, with a religious intention, a religious end, a kind of gradual psalm in action, a real approach unto God. For that journey had for its ultimate end the acknowledgment and worship of the Infant Saviour and the offering of gifts and homage to the Son of the Highest.

Now swiftly speeding along over the plains on the fleet-footed camels, then carefully crossing the trackless plains, again slowly climbing the low-lying mountains, the journey wore on. Often probably it would be pursued in solemn silence and stillness, as the feet of the camels made scarcely a sound on the soft turf of the moors or sank into the shifting sands of the desert, while the riders would give themselves up to thought and contemplation, or study the strange star so brightly shining in the skies. Perhaps at times, to enliven their journey or to show forth God's praise, they

chanted the Psalms, as the Jews were wont to do in going up to their festivals in the Holy City. This would have been a spiritual preparation of the Wise Men for their coming into the Presence of their King, and would have helped them make ready their minds for the coming revelation, which education we may believe was one object of that long journey.

During all of these days there seems never to have been a sign of discouragement or the thought of turning back. The Wise Men were going to see their Saviour, they were going to greet their King, and in their faith in God's Guidance they minded not the dangers and difficulties of the way, for they looked above for inspiration and help, and there shone the wonderful star, as the pledge and symbol of their trust. It is not revealed to us how much they understood concerning the coming of the Christ, when at their home in the East, but from their subsequent worship of the Saviour, and from the presentation of their Gifts, rich in symbolical meaning, we may have reasonable assurance that they then partly apprehended the truth.

Yet how little one appreciates their trust and confidence! Think of that faith which implicitly

believed in the ancient prophecies, so hard to understand ; which saw God calling them by a star ; and which followed its guidance even to the forsaking of home and people ! Think of that faith which never wavered or waxed weak, but which supported them through the hot days and the lonely nights of their long, laborious journey ! That faith never questioned, as do some to-day, as to who wrote the prophecies ; it never sought a natural explanation of the star ; it never permitted suggestions of doubt as to the necessity of the trip, or the probability of accomplishing any good by it. It was the faith of those who lived in close communion with God, and saw evidences of the spiritual and supernatural on every side. It was the trusting, loving, obedient, humble faith of a little child, that which Our Lord held up as the pattern for all men to have.¹

The Journey of the Three Kings was indeed a lesson of patience and perseverance, love and devotion, the outward composure of the Wise Men being the result of that inner repose which men get from resting in God and communing with the Unseen. May we not fancy too, that the very characteristics of the country traversed imaged

¹ St. Matthew XVIII. 1-5.

before them great spiritual truths of the Master they were to see, Who was pictured before them by Prophet and Psalmist? Surely the Holy Spirit speaks to those listening for His Voice! As the Magi camped at night by some wayside well, may they not have thought of Him Who was "*the well of living waters,*"¹ "*the well of salvation*"?² When they sought a refuge from the tempest, or wearied and thirsty from their journey looked ahead to rest at some rocky oasis rising from the desert, may they not have yearned for Him Who is as "*an hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land*"?³ Truly they were going "*from strength to strength,*"⁴ as each step suggested some Scripture which imaged before them some characteristic of the Christ.

At last the City of the Great King is seen before them, Jerusalem in all its glory on its wall-encircled hills. Terraced palace and frowning castle looked down upon the houses and shops clustered together in the city below, while crowning all was the Temple's glittering mass of marble

¹ St. John IV. 10, 14.

² Isa. XII. 3.

³ Isa. XXXII. 2.

⁴ Ps. LXXXIV. 7.

and gold. It was then a splendid city, superbly situated, and perhaps the Wise Men regarded it as a fitting abode of the King they had come to see, for it would appear from the scriptural account that they thought they were at their journey's end, although uncertain where to turn, as the star was no longer seen.

Entering the city of Jerusalem, their rank and position made it easy to gain an audience with King Herod. What a strange meeting was that of those three Kings of the East, holy and honoured men of God, with one of the most wicked and worldly monarchs of ancient or modern times, stained with all manner of evil-doing! Nor was Jerusalem as a city much better than Herod as a King. Both were whited sepulchres, as it were, outwardly full of glory, inwardly full of sin, in no way ready to welcome the Messiah.

It is not strange, therefore, to find that not only Herod, but all Jerusalem with him, was troubled¹ by the story of the Wise Men, and by their question: "*Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His Star in the east, and are come to worship Him.*"² The Master is never welcomed by souls steeped in sin, resolved to continue in evil-

¹ St. Matt. II. 3.

² St. Matt. II. 2.

doing! Herod feared to hear of a possible rival to his throne, while Jerusalem was troubled at the news of a monarch whom the Wise Men had come to worship as Divine.

The matter, however, being urgent, Herod called together the chief priests and scribes to ask where the Messiah was to be born. These men had no difficulty in repeating the prophecy of Micah: "*Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule My people Israel,*"¹ which words were a prediction of the birthplace of the Messiah; but it seems strange that they should have omitted the words following: "*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,*"¹ which indicated the Eternal Being and Divine character of the Christ.

When Herod questioned the Wise Men more particularly regarding the star, and asked them to advise him of the finding of the Holy Child, so that he too might worship Him,² it would hardly seem that they were deceived as to his intentions, or were impressed by any show of interest on the part of the Jews. They probably left Herod with a great feeling of relief, and, now that they knew

¹ Micah v. 2.

² St. Matt. 11. 8.

where to go, proceeded on their way with rejoicing, largely increased¹ when again they saw the star, which led them steadily onward until it stood over the house,² below which was the Grotto of the Nativity.

The pilgrimage of the Three Kings was ended. They had reached the place where they would worship, and the crowning evidence of their faith is witnessed in their conduct there. For as they entered, no sign of splendour, no mark of royalty, no display of power, met their eyes. Before them they saw a rough Stable, a bare Manger, a bed of hay, a young Maiden, an aged man, an ox, an ass, and in the midst of all a Little Child in outward appearance as any Beautiful Babe; yet the Wise Men, like the shepherds, recognized the presence of the King, and saw His Glory shining about His Sacred Form.

¹ St. Matt. II. 10.

² Some have taken the use of this word to imply that the Holy Family were no longer in the stable. Yet if we carefully note the various meanings of the Greek words it would seem that *κατάλυμα* would be the Inn or Upper Room (see use in St. Mark XIV. 14; St. Luke XXII. 11), *οἶκία* the House or Abode, *φάτνη* the Stable or lower part. Many of the Ancient Fathers wrote of Our Lord being laid in the Manger, in the *Stable*, formed in the *Cave* below the *Guest Chamber* or Inn proper, over which the star stood. Thus *οἶκία* could just as exactly be rendered "*abode*," which would be the *Cave*, as at the Birth.

The Magi prostrated themselves in the most reverent way before that Manger Bed, and worshipped in the most adoring manner the Infant Saviour.¹ Kings of the East, they own Him as the Sovereign King of Kings;² Priests of an ancient religion, they accept Him as the Great High Priest of the New Covenant;³ Preachers and Stargazers, they acknowledge Him as the Prophet⁴ of the Gospel and the Bright and Morning Star;⁵ Wise Men, they greet Him as the Wisdom of God.⁶ The Pilgrim Kings were in the presence of the Lord's Anointed, God Incarnate, the Messiah, Who was Prophet, Priest, and King, and they adored Him as such.

This homage rendered, the Wise Men opened their chests⁷ or caskets containing the choicest treasures to be had in the East, and offered to their Infant King costly presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh—gifts not only rich and rare, but also full of symbolic meaning.⁷ For they confessed by the Gold Christ's Sovereignty and Dominion as Lord, by the Incense His Glory and Divinity as God, by the Myrrh His Suffering and

¹ St. Matt. II. 11.

³ Heb. III. 1.

⁵ Rev. XXII. 16.

⁷ St. Matt. II. 11.

² 1 St. Tim. VI. 15.

⁴ Deut. XVIII. 15.

⁶ 1 Cor. I. 24.

Death as Man. Nor is it mere fancy that sees also in the worship of the Wise Men the coming of all nations to the Master and the final acknowledgment of Him as Prophet, Priest, and King.

In the Providence of God, however, this worship of the Wise Men is not only a beautiful picture and a sacred story, most true and real, but is also a sermon, setting forth certain great suggestions. The Adoration of the Magi is a great lesson in action, for their homage and offering are in a way the pattern of all worship. Consequently we cannot attach too much importance to both the manner and the matter of their gifts, but may see in them the example we may do well to follow.

First there is the lesson to us individually that the proper approach to Almighty God and the very essence of real worship is that of adoration and bowing down. This need not necessarily be the prostration of the body to the ground, which the Wise Men made, according to the custom of the East, but it should be the humbling of the soul before God, which in many devout persons will have the outward accompaniment, at fitting times, of such acts of reverence as bowing, kneeling, the Sign of the Cross, and the like.

Secondly there is taught the lesson of offering

gifts to God, not some small alms or trivial work which costs us little or nothing, but rather rich treasures, after the manner of the Magi, that is the offering of our *best* to God—our means, our prayers, our praise, ourselves, the entire consecration of our bodies, minds, and souls, even the hallowing of our whole being, which will be all the more acceptable when coupled with large measure of self-sacrifice.

In this gift of ourselves there are what may be called both the *act* and the *attitude* of offering, the first shown by some silent or ejaculatory prayer,¹ by which we unite ourselves to God, the second by regarding ourselves as a sacred trust, for which we are accountable, and thus using our talents, opportunities, and blessings for His Glory. For we really belong to God. Therefore we should learn to rest in Him, trying to make His will our will, His way our way, *passively*, as objects of His love trusting in God, *actively* as agents for His work, co-operating with His Grace. Thus our offering to God will be a costly one, since it will

¹ O my God, I offer myself to Thee, with all that I have and all that I love. Accept and use all for Thine Honour and Glory, I beseech Thee, washing away all that is evil in the Blood of Jesus, and joining all that is good to His Merits and Mediation, for Christ's sake. Amen.

be ourselves with all that we are or have, sanctified by His Holy Spirit.

God in my head and in my understanding,
God in my eyes and in my looking,
God in my mouth and in my speaking,
God in my heart and in my thinking,
God at my end and at my departing.¹

Thus the Adoration of the Magi teaches us individually the way in which we must approach God and the way in which we must offer to God.

The lesson, however, is not yet exhausted. There is the application to the Church Catholic, for since the Wise Men typify the nations of the world coming to Christ, they also represent "all sorts and conditions of men," collectively offering up Common Prayer and Praise in Divine Service. What then are the special lessons suggested by their Homage to the Christ-Child which are applicable to public worship?

Surely we see these set forth, as it were, as teaching Reverence and Ritual, or that worship which embraces the three parts of man's being, body, mind, and soul, and presents this offering of praise ceremonially to God.

It is surprising how many persons fail to realize how Reverence and Ritual rightly go together, how

¹ Adapted from Old Sarum Primer, 1531.

Reverence naturally expresses itself in Ritual or Ceremonial, how Ritual interprets Reverence by doing all things, as the Apostle says, "decently and in order." Each is crippled without the other. For our worship is lacking if it does not have its fitting expression in the body by ritual acts as well as in the mind by well-chosen words, and in the soul by spiritual uplifting and adoration.

Surely God, Who on Mount Sinai commanded the most ornate ceremonial for the Jewish Church and in the Book of Revelation pictures to us the elaborate ritual of the Church Triumphant in Heaven, wills that man should *now* approach Him with all those outward signs which show that he who worships is man a sinner and He Who is worshipped is God the All-Holy! Surely Jesus, Who in the Manger accepted the ceremonial adoration of the Wise Men and in His Ministry attended the ritualistic services of the Temple, wishes His Church not to fall short of the barbarian kings or the Jewish people! Surely the Church in providing for beautiful rites and ceremonies "hath chosen the better part," and in making it possible for all to show forth their inner reverence by outward observance is guided by the Holy Ghost!

The Wise Men teach this lesson to the Church.

They offered adoration, they gave gifts, and they did so *ceremonially*, with every outward mark of honour to Jesus Christ, in Whose Sacred Presence they were. Consequently, there seems no undue pressing of the point, that the Church must do likewise. So when the faithful meet together to offer up the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the one great office of solemn obligation when Our Lord is Really but Spiritually and Supernaturally Present in the Holy Mysteries, men should not fail to render meet honour and worship to Him, the Lamb of God, by making art and music and all the other accessories of ritual and ceremonial show forth the Glory of God, and express their reverence in body, mind, and soul.

If we are mindful of the Presence of God and have for our sole motive the desire to honour Our Lord, we shall not be lacking either in the spirit or expression of this reverence.

“’Tis for Thee we bid the frontal its embroidered wealth
unfold,
'Tis for Thee we deck the reredos with the colours and the
gold ;
Thine the floral glow and fragrance, Thine the vesture's fair
array,
Thine the starry lights that glitter where Thou dost Thy
Light display.

"'Tis to Thee the chant is lifted, 'tis to Thee the heads are
 bowed ;
 Far less deep was Israel's rapture when the glory filled the
 cloud :
 O our own true God Incarnate, what should Christians'
 Ritual be
 But a voice to utter somewhat of their pride and joy in
 Thee?"¹

Of the subsequent history of the Three Kings little is known save that, warned by a dream, they did not return to Herod, but went home another way.² Tradition, however, states that later they were baptized and ordained by Saint Thomas, to spend the rest of their life spreading the religion of Him Whom they had sought, and in prayer uniting themselves with Him Whom they had seen and worshipped face to face.

Now in a splendid shrine beneath the vaulted heights of the cathedral of Cologne rests all that is mortal of the Three Kings. Yet though dead they yet speak, drawing many pilgrims to that majestic cathedral church, which dominates the scene for miles around, as its graceful spires soar upwards towards the skies. They seem to draw all there. They make one enter the great portals; they lead one up among the clustered columns, with the soaring arch and fretted vault far above, and painted

¹ Dr. Bright.

² St. Matt. II. 12.

window and carven statue on every side—on and on, until in a little chapel the shrine of the Three Kings is seen. Rare in workmanship and rich in gems and gold, it forms a fitting vessel for those who offered their costliest treasures to the Christ Child, for those whose bodies now dressed in gorgeous vestments and crowned with crowns of gold sleep in the House of God, awaiting the Resurrection Day. Well may we in spirit kneel before that shrine and adore the Good God, Whose faithful servants were those Three Kings of the East, while we learn the lessons of faith, love, devotion, patience, and perseverance shown forth in their lives as we too journey through life, like them looking upwards for guidance, and going with joy in our hearts and gifts in our hands to worship and adore Jesus Our Incarnate Lord.

“ As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold ;
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright ;
So, Most Gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

“ As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly Manger Bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him Whom heaven and earth adore ;
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek the mercy seat.

“As they offered gifts most rare
At that Manger rude and bare,
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin’s alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our Heavenly King.”

NOTE

IN commemorating the Visit of the Wise Men on the Epiphany or Twelfth Day, the most venerable of all Festivals, the Church is not necessarily committed to this date being the exact time of the visit. Some have thought that the Visit of the Wise Men did not occur until after the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, since Mary only offered for her Purification two turtle-doves, the general gift of the poor. Yet this is no argument of weight, for if the Magi had worshipped the Lord in His Manger Bed as many others have thought, surely Mary would never have taken for her own use their rich and symbolical gifts, but would reverently have regarded them as Sacred unto the Lord. As the date in no way affects the fact of the Visit, one may reasonably infer that the Wise Men worshipped the Christ-Child while still in the Manger, which traditional time is supported by such authority as that of Augustine and Chrysostom. It may be of interest to remember that the Nativity and the Epiphany at first were kept as one festival, it not being until later that through the influence probably of the Fathers Augustine, Ambrose, Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Jerome, December 25 came to be kept in special honour of Our Saviour’s Birth. It may also be well to note that the Epiphany really commemorates three special manifestations of our Lord (1) to the Wise Men as Prophet, Priest, and King, (2) at the Marriage of Cana, (3) at His Baptism in the Jordan.

VII

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN
THE TEMPLE

The Gospel. St. Luke 11. 22.

AND when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord; (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law, then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel. And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

VII

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

*"The Desire of Nations shall come, and I will fill this
House with Glory."*

OUR Lord, Who said that He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets,¹ began at the Nativity to conform to each requirement of the Jewish religion. Thus on the eighth day He, Who humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin, deigned to be circumcised² in the flesh and to receive a human name,² by this rite owning Himself the Seed of Abraham and beginning His life of suffering. Yet the name of Jesus, which was part of the humiliation which the Son of God endured, has become honoured and hallowed as that of the Saviour of the world, to be venerated as we do His Heavenly Name, since He Who bare them both is the same Lord. For as we reverence the recital of the fact of the Incarnation, so we reverence the mention of

¹ St. Matt. v. 17.

² St. Luke II. 21.

the Holy Name, at which every knee in heaven and earth should bow.¹ It is the sign of the world's redemption: that most precious Name through which we, before the Throne of Grace, make our prayers and offer our adoration, and remember the Merits and Mediation of Him Who bore it.

Nor should we miss the meaning which it gives to our own names conferred in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism which has replaced the Jewish rite of Circumcision, for then we are made a "member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven,"² and receive therewith a name or names which should ever be a reminder of our Christian profession and our Christian privilege, recalling us in times of temptation to the sense of the sacredness of our names in God's sight and the danger we run by defiling them.

On the fortieth day after the Saviour's Birth the Holy Family might have been seen entering the Temple Courts at Jerusalem for the Presentation of the Holy Child and the Purification of the Virgin Mother.³ We cannot fail to be impressed with the obedience of Jesus and Mary in conforming to ceremonial observances which neither of them

¹ Phil. 11. 9, 10. ² Church Catechism in P.B.

³ St. Luke 11. 22.

needed. For that Mother had conceived by the Holy Spirit without spot of sin,¹ and required no purification. And He Who was presented and redeemed was Himself the All-Holy,² the Saviour of the World, presenting eternally His Sacrifice before the Father. Perhaps this lesson of obedience is to make man more faithful in following out the commands and counsels of the Catholic Church when often they may seem exacting or unnecessary. Yet this visit of Our Lord and His Mother to the Temple was also the means of calling forth further prophetic words, in the aged Simeon and Anna speaking by the Holy Ghost in reference to the work of the Messiah and the sorrows of Mary.

The Presentation³ and the Purification³ were two distinct rites, but when practicable were generally performed together. As a commemoration of His sparing the children of the Jews when He smote the first-born of the Egyptians, God had commanded⁴ that the Jewish mother should regard her first son as one consecrated to the Lord, to be

¹ See Preface, II.C. Service for Christmas.

² Heb. IV. 15; St. John VIII. 46.

³ See Edersheim.

⁴ Exod. XIII. 2; XXII. 29.

redeemed upon the payment of a small sum of money.¹ This was called the Presentation or Redemption of the first-born.

The other observance was the ceremonial cleansing after child-birth, when a prayer and benediction would be said over the mother as she made the customary offering, which in the case of the rich would be a lamb and a turtle-dove, or in the case of the poor of two turtle-doves or pigeons.² This rite was called the Purification.

In the fulfilment of these requirements there is a peculiar fitness in both taking place together, for as we see the Christ presented and the Virgin purified, it is as a sermon in action, teaching that if we would have the Divine Son we must copy the purity and humility of the human Mother. In ancient art the Presentation was the most prominent thought, in medieval art the Purification; the one centering all attention upon the Infant Saviour as the object of adoration and worship, the other pointing specially to the Virgin Mother, as Simeon predicted "the sorrows of Mary." It is in the consideration of both thoughts that we get the greatest illumination of this beautiful event.

¹ Five shekels or about twelve shillings or three dollars.

² Lev. XII. 8.

In the Temple, then rich in splendid marble and glittering gold, with great open courts and huge columned cloisters, the Holy Family stood on this eventful day.¹ They probably entered by the Court of the Women and went directly to the appointed place, Saint Mary holding Our Lord in her arms, and accompanied by Saint Joseph and an attendant carrying the cage containing the two little doves for her offering.² They attracted little or no attention from the passers-by, or, if noticed at all, were regarded as humble folk on their way to fulfil the Law.

As they stood there the aged Simeon³ and Anna³ entered the Court, and, led by the Holy Ghost, went directly to meet the Holy Family. We are not told by the Scriptures whether or not Simeon was the officiating priest, though there would seem to be a beautiful fitness about his being so. Nor do we know if Saint Mary was surprised at seeing him. If the tradition is true that the Virgin had been instructed within the sacred precincts of the Temple, Simeon may have known her, and may have heard from Mary or Joseph or Elizabeth

¹ It is helpful to fix the scenes of the Nativity by looking at pictures representing them, even if all of the details are not certain.

² St. Luke II. 24.

³ St. Luke II. 25-27, 36-38.

something of the Angel's Message. In any event, this aged man, being just and devout,¹ had been specially favoured by God¹ and was full of the Holy Ghost,¹ God probably not only revealing to him that he would live to see the Messiah, but also showing to him Who the Master was and what He had come to do. Thus through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Simeon singled out the Holy Family in the Temple, and saw in that humble group the Lord's Anointed and his Virgin Mother.

Forward he went to salute the Christ, to hold out his trembling hands to the Master, to look upon Him with his own eyes face to Face, as the words of the ancient prophecies rang in his ears, "*The Lord Whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His Temple.*"²

Thus was Simeon blessed with the answer to his aspiration. It had been revealed to him that he would see the Christ. Then he held Him in his arms and clasped Him to his breast. He was a real Saint Christopher—a Christ-bearer.³ He had been just and devout; he had looked and prepared for the coming of the Lord, and he had

¹ St. Luke II. 25, 26.

² Mal. III. 1.

³ See note, p. 52.

his reward. His limbs, bowed with years, had led him to the Master; his eyes, dimmed with age, looked upon His Face; he even held Him on high: Simeon, the priest of the Old Covenant, welcoming Jesus, the Priest of the New Dispensation, the Law holding aloft the Gospel, and the Glory of God through that Gospel illuminating the Law, even as then the Light of the World cast a halo of sainthood about the hoary head of Simeon.

How holy and happy must have been that moment for the aged Simeon! The hopes and anticipations, the prayers and aspirations of years were at last realized! The Desire of the Nations had come to His Temple, and He had filled the Father's House with Glory. Jesus the Life-giver was there. He was presented before man on earth that He may present man before God in Heaven. He was held aloft in the Virgin's arms, He was taken in Simeon's arms, and He brought peace and joy to those who received Him. "*The Lord is in His holy temple.*"¹

Simeon's heart was full: his lips blessed God, his soul worshipped God, and in his exceeding great joy he spoke by the Holy Ghost; and the

¹ Hab. 11, 20.

words that Simeon tremblingly uttered are sung day by day in the Church, in her Hymn the Nunc Dimittis, wherein the faithful praise the same Master Whom Simeon saw and loved. "*Of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*";¹ and the Church treasures Simeon's words, so that "*being dead he yet speaketh.*"²

The Nunc Dimittis was spoken prophetically by Simeon, and is both the hymn of praise of an aged saint near the close of a long life and the farewell words of one representing the departing dispensation of the Law, "*That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away*":³ Simeon soon to be translated to a place of rest and refreshment, the Old Covenant to pass into the Gospel of Christ.

"*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation.*"⁴ Here is the aspiration of the true lover of God, as Simeon was, and also the last earthly thought of many a Christian soul as he passes through the valley of the shadow of death to meet the Lord of Life and Light. Simeon, the servant of God, was ready to go, for he, who

¹ St. Luke vi. 45.

² Heb. xi. 4.

³ Heb. viii. 13.

⁴ St. Luke ii. 29, 30.

held in his arms the Prince of Peace and saw his Saviour face to Face, had nothing to fear in death and nothing to desire in life. Life had brought him its greatest Gift—Jesus Himself. Faith was realized in sight, hope was fulfilled, love only remained, as love will ever remain, since love is of God.¹

“*Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; To be a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people Israel.*”² Before Simeon’s eyes there came the vision of all that God had done and was to do for man. In the Garden, after the Fall, when man lost his original righteousness, God had given the promise of the Saviour, and since then had, according to His Own ways,³ prepared the world for His Coming in the fullness of time. Step by step His people had advanced by slow stages to an ever higher spiritual plane, in which restoration, fear, and obedience were to generate love, and types and symbols were to be the promise of good things to come. In this preparation of the world for Christ the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews, had all their share. The Greeks by their philosophy

¹ 1 St. John iv. 16.

² St. Luke II. 31, 32.

³ Read Hebrews.

taught men how to think and reason, and by their language gave to the world an exact and expressive medium for Scripture, Creed, and Liturgy ; the Romans by their rule taught authority, and gave to the world the elements of Law, Justice, and Order, and built the highroads for the subsequent spread of the Gospel ; while the Jews, by their belief in the One, True, and Only God, and by their system of sacrifices and their trust in a future state, taught men how to pray and worship God as a Spiritual Being. Thus Simeon saw Greeks, Romans, and Jews respectively but all unwittingly preparing man for the Coming of Christ. That Saviour he then held in his arms would be rejected by the Jews and accepted by the Gentiles. Simeon sees the Master, born of the royal line of David, living, thinking, and teaching after the manner of a Jew, yet summing up all perfections in Himself, a beautiful Branch springing from the Root of Jesse,¹ the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valley,² the Choice Product of His Nation, truly the Glory of His people Israel, yet at the same time the Universal Exemplar and Pattern.

Yet those who rejected the Master are now

¹ Isa. XI. 1.

² Cant. II. 1.

scattered over the face of the earth; those who did Him to death are often persecuted themselves. The Glory of His people Israel has become the Light to lighten the Gentiles. The alien nations have accepted the Person and Religion of the Christ. The Master is their Light-giver, inspiring man, liberating woman, promoting all that makes for holiness and righteousness. The Light to lighten the Gentiles is a Living Lord, a Personal Saviour, guiding nation and individual not by abstract morality, not by a code of laws, but by Himself, being the Pattern, Standard, and Ideal for every age, every clime, every person. Our Lord is a Light to lighten the Gentiles because all that He taught is shown forth in Himself. The Sermon on the Mount, the Summary of the Law may be swept away, but both counsel and commandment are seen as shining lights before us in the Life of the Master.

Saint Simeon, as it were, held the Christ-Child as a lantern on high, holding Him up for the worship of all time: "*Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father.*"¹

The Nunc dimittis came to an end, while Mary

¹ Te Deum Laudamus.

and Joseph marvelled¹ at the words so full of mingled prophecy and praise, but far too wonderful for them then perfectly to grasp. And as they wondered, Simeon blessed them and prophesied again, now directing his words specially to the Virgin Mother.² The Holy Child was to bear His Cross. Some by unbelief in Him would fall, for He would only be to them "*a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.*"³ Others by love would rise, "*looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.*"⁴ Yet He Who brought salvation—He Who was a Sign in the world because a Witness of the Truth—would be spoken against, for He lived and died and preached the Cross which "*is to them that perish foolishness*": but unto "*those which are saved is the power of God.*"⁵ He would be spoken against; His followers would be spoken against. The Saviour and the saved would be rejected of men. So in Simeon's prophecy of the Cross for Christ is seen also the cross for the Christian, for "*the disciple is not above his Master.*"⁶

For Mary too was predicted sorrow, so great that

¹ St. Luke II. 33.

³ I St. Peter II. 8.

⁶ I Cor. I. 18.

² St. Luke II. 35.

⁴ Heb. XII. 2.

⁶ St. Luke VI. 40.

it would be as if a sword pierced her heart,¹ for that sorrow would come in seeing the malice of the enemies of her Divine Son, and in the sight of the Saviour nailed upon the Cross. Many a mother has sorrowed for her son, but no such sorrow as Christ's holy Mother was to suffer as she beheld her Son crucified and realized the way in which salvation must be won.

Saint Simeon ceased speaking, whereupon Anna, a widow of great age, who had lived a holy life of prayer and fasting, raised her voice in devout thanksgiving and spoke of the coming redemption.²

Thus the Law was fulfilled, the Lord presented, the Mother purified, while an aged man and an aged woman glorified God and prophesied of the work of Redemption. As we picture the Holy Family leaving the Temple to go to their home in Nazareth, may we not take one more lesson of this Day of Lights (or Candlemas, as the Church calls it) from the offering of Mary, so full of strange significance? Is not Mary's poverty become the means of enriching the lesson? She offered no lamb—only two little turtle-doves. Yet He, Whom she presented, was the Lamb of

¹ St. Luke II. 35.

² St. Luke II. 36-38.

God,¹ compared to Whom all the others were as nothing.

Nor are the two doves without meaning, for they are emblematic of the love and purity of the Prince of Peace. May we not learn from this sacred scene in the story of the Nativity, to copy the obedience of Jesus and Mary, and to purify ourselves, that Our Lord may be presented to us as Christ-bearers? We should not, like many in the world, have Christ upon our tongue while we deny Him in our life, but rather, like Saint Simeon, we should embrace Him with the arms of the soul and clasp Him with love and adoration to our heart, as our greatest Hope and Desire.

It is not surprising that the Church loves to observe with appropriate ceremonies a day so honoured and hallowed by the presentation of Christ in the Temple and the purification of Saint Mary the Virgin. For centuries this Festival has been joyfully and solemnly kept, two very beautiful customs of antiquity being the lighting of innumerable candles and tapers to symbolize Our Lord being a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the processions about the precincts and boundaries of the parishes to commemorate the going to the

¹ St. John 1. 36.

Temple. In the writings of Aelfric, once Archbishop of Canterbury, we read: "We on this day bear our lights to Church and let them there be blessed. . . . Though some men cannot sing, they can nevertheless bear the lights in their hands: for on this day was Christ, the True Light, borne to the Temple, Who redeemed us from darkness and bringeth us to the eternal light."

The Venerable Bede wrote in the same strain: "On the day of Blessed Mary all the people, with the Priests and Ministers, proceed with the voice of Hymnody through the Church, and through fitting places of the city, carrying burning tapers in their hands, which they receive from the Bishop . . . according to the Parable of the Wise Virgins, all the elect, with the lamps of good works burning brightly in their hands, shall go forth to meet their Spouse and King."

Saint Bernard even more graphically depicts this beautiful ancient custom, when he says: "This holy procession was first made by the Virgin Mother, Saint Joseph, holy Simeon and Anna, to be afterwards performed in all places and by every nation with the exultation of the whole earth to honour this mystery. We go in procession, two by two,

carrying candles in our hands, which are not lighted at a common fire, but at a fire blessed in the Church by a Bishop. . . . In the way we sing, 'Great is the Glory of the Lord.' We go two by two in commendation of charity and a social life, for so our Saviour sent out His disciples, that our light should shine before men; secondly, this we do this day, especially in memory of the Wise Virgins, of whom this Blessed Virgin is the chief, that went to meet their Lord with their lamps lit and burning. And from this usage and the many lights set up in the Church this day, it is called Candelaria, or Candle-mas. Because our works should all be done in the holy fire of charity, therefore the candles are lighted with holy fire. They that go out first return last, to teach humility, '*in humility preferring one another.*' Because God loveth a cheerful giver, therefore we sing in the way. The Procession itself is to teach us that we should not stand idle in the way of life, but proceed from virtue to virtue, not looking back to that which is behind, but reaching forward to that which is before." Perhaps some may learn this spirit from the picture of the Presentation in the Temple, and be fitting followers of the Holy Child held up before them.

“ Hail to the Lord Who comes—
 Comes to His Temple gate !
Not with His Angel Host,
 Not in His Kingly state ;
No shouts proclaim Him nigh,
 No crowds His Coming wait.

“ But borne upon the Throne
 Of Mary’s gentle breast,
Watched by her duteous love,
 In her fond arms to rest,
Thus to the Father’s House
 He Comes, the Heavenly Guest.

“ O Light of all the world,
 Thy children wait for Thee !
Come to Thy Temples here,
 That we, from sin set free,
Before Thy Father’s face
 May all presented be ! ’

VIII

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AS AN
ILLUMINATION OF THE INCARNATION

“ Prostrate we adore Thee, Deity Unseen,
Who Thy Glory hidest 'neath these shadows mean.
Lord, our faith unfeignèd evermore increase ;
Give us hope unfading, love that cannot cease.
Shepherd of the faithful, Jesu, hear our cry :
Lord, increase our faith who on Thy truth rely.

“ 'Twas the Godhead only, in the Crib was veiled :
Here the Manhood also is from sight concealed.
Both alike believing, Thee, O Christ, we own,
Pleading penitently at Thy mercy's throne.
Shepherd of the faithful, Jesu, hear our cry :
Lord, increase our faith who on Thy word rely.”

Adapted from Priest's Book of Private Devotions.

VIII

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AS AN ILLUMINATION OF THE INCARNATION

*“ Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself,
O God of Israel, the Saviour ”*

WHILE, strictly speaking, it is the Incarnation which gives meaning and efficacy to the Sacraments, and leads to the right understanding of the Eucharist, the Ministry and the Scriptures, nevertheless these (especially the Holy Communion), by being thus clearly comprehended, become in turn the means of showing forth the greater fundamental Truth. For to apprehend the union of the earthly and the heavenly in the Bible, in the Priesthood and in the Eucharist, so easy of credence by comparison with the Incarnation, and so evident to the spiritually minded, is to make far less difficult of belief and comprehension the union of the Divine and Human Natures in Christ.

Spiritual apprehension is generally a gradual

growth. The more one seeks, the more one finds. As the use of the physical senses strengthens and develops them, so the use of the spiritual perceptions strengthens and develops them.

From seeing and understanding things close at hand, we come to perceive and know those afar off. It is like mountain climbing, wherein the summit gained shows greater peaks of which this was but a spur, and reveals that of which the climber had no conception until he had attained the first heights. So to climb to some comprehension of the Eucharist, the Ministry, and the Scriptures in their twofold aspect enables one better to understand the Incarnation, which they in a way set forth, and opens the spiritual sight to the greater truths not seen before. As the stars get their light from the sun, but from the study of them we better understand the greater planet, so the Ministry, the Word, and the Sacraments get their illumination from the Incarnation, but we come to comprehend the latter from the contemplation of the former.

Of course, it will not do to press the resemblance too far, yet, for all there are great points of difference, in all can the union of the Divine and human be seen. In the Sacred Ministry are those

who, viewed as men, are of like passions¹ with those of the laity, but who, regarded as Priests, exercise the office of Christ, the very Priesthood of Our Lord Himself,² their nature human, their office Divine! In the Holy Scriptures are contained the writings of holy men of old,³ (who wrote in their own way after their own style), but writings which were inspired by the Holy Ghost,⁵ and through His guidance kept free from error, writings human as to their composition, Divine as to their matter and content.⁴ Consequently, while acknowledging the human, we also confess the Divine, regarding every part of the Bible as the Inspired Word of God,⁵ and every Ministerial act of the Priest as the continued work of Christ.⁶ Thus there is the union of the heavenly and the earthly, as human writings give the Divine Message, and human agents perform the Divine Office. Thus the Bible and the Priesthood lead up to the greater truth of the Incarnation.

When, however, we pass from the consideration

¹ Acts XIV. 15.

² 2 Cor. IV. 1, v. 20; St. John XX. 21; St. Luke X. 16.

³ 2 St. Peter I. 20, 21.

⁴ 2 St. Peter I. 21.

⁵ 2 St. Timothy III. 16.

⁶ St. Matthew XXVIII. 19, 20; 2 Cor. V. 19, 20; St. John XX. 21-23.

of the Scriptures and the Ministry to the Eucharist, the resemblance to the union in the Incarnation is seen to be far more definite and exact. For the Blessed Sacrament is the very extension of the Incarnation. Our Lord *speaks* through the Scriptures, Our Lord *works* through the Priest, but He not only speaks in and works through the Communion, He is actually *Present* in the Holy Mysteries, though after a spiritual, sacramental manner. There, under the earthly elements of Bread and Wine, we acknowledge the Heavenly Gifts of Our Lord's Body and Blood—Christ Himself. Here the Mystery of the Incarnation is perpetuated in the Mystery of the Eucharist.¹

Yet we know no more as to how Our Lord gives Himself to us in the Sacrament of the Altar than as to how He became Man in the womb of the Virgin. Both are beyond our knowledge and understanding, and must be accepted upon the Revelation of God as facts, doctrines, and blessings transcending all human grasp. All that we know is, that according to the Will of the Father, through the act of Our Lord and the work of the Holy Ghost, the Son of God became Man, and gives us

¹ Incidentally, it is worth noting how the words of Institution bring out the fact that the sacrifice is ever being pleaded, the Incarnation is ever being extended.

His Body and Blood: in the Incarnation coming through the instrumentality of the Virgin, in the Sacrament coming through the instrumentality of the Priest.

Yet while above and beyond us, in both instances, surely the Mystery of the Eucharist opens the mind of the believer to the greater Mystery of the Incarnation, the light growing clearer and clearer as we unite Christ with ourselves by regular and frequent reception of the Sacrament of the Altar.

For Communion, among other blessings and benefits, gives us increase of grace, illumination of mind, and purification of desire. Thus we open the windows of the soul and let in the light which helps us comprehend somewhat of the Holy Incarnation, of which the Holy Eucharist is the extension. By sense we perceive the Bread and Wine, by faith we acknowledge the Body and Blood of Christ, by Communion we realize the blessing of this indwelling, pervading Presence of the Son of God, for "*In Him was Life*"¹ and "*Of His Fulness have we all received.*"² Thus filled with His sanctifying power, the life is hallowed, the mind is illumined, the heart is warmed, and the soul

¹ St. John 1. 4.

² St. John 1. 16.

is uplifted, so that the Voice of the Spirit is more clearly heard, and the heavenly truth and revelation more clearly apprehended.

By communion we have union with God, and in the light and grace of that union, thereby brought close to the dear Lord and Redeemer, we are led from the Altar to the Manger, and learn from the Holy Eucharist to appreciate the Holy Incarnation.

Nor is the Church's teaching forced or the likeness fanciful in this holding up the Holy Eucharist as the extension of the Incarnation. For compare the Manger¹ and the Altar,² and we see the same Holy Mystery: the human substance of Flesh and Blood, veiling the Presence of the Son of God; the earthly elements of Bread and Wine, hiding the Presence of the Son of God. As seen by the eye unillumined by faith and revelation, only a Child in a Manger, only Bread and Wine upon the Altar; but to the faithful, who believe the Word of God, Our Lord is Really Present in both places: at the Altar veiled in the Holy Sacrament; in the Manger veiled in His Sacred

¹ It has already been stated that while the Incarnation occurred at the Annunciation, it was manifested at the Nativity.

² After the Canon of Consecration.

Humanity; *Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.*"¹

If Our Lord is not Present in the Sacrament of the Altar, then He was not Present in the Manger of Bethlehem: for He who said that He was the Son of God, also said "*This is My Body,*"² "*This is My Blood.*"² Consequently, those who believe the Word and Revelation of God, find in the Holy Eucharist a great illumination of the Holy Incarnation; while those who fail to accept Christ's explicit teaching regarding His Real, Objective yet Spiritual and Supernatural Presence³ in the Sacrament of the Altar, can never have an adequate conception of the Mystery of "the Word made Flesh,"⁴ the Incarnation.

Nay, further than this: he who kneels and communicates at the Altar rail and does not believe in the Presence of Our Lord in the Sacrament, is in the position of one, intentionally or unintentionally as the case may be, of partaking of a mean-

¹ Isa. XLV. 15.

² St. Matt. XXVI. 26, 28; St. Mark XIV. 22-24; St. Luke XXII. 19, 20; St. John VI. 53-56; I Cor. XI. 23-29. Words of Consecration and Administration, H.C. office, P.B.

³ It is astonishing how any member of the Church can doubt or deny the Real Spiritual, Objective, Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist, in the face of the most explicit teaching of the Bible and P.B.

⁴ St. John I. 14.

ingless meal, or of performing a sacrilegious act, for the Holy Communion is or is not the True Body and True Blood of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.¹ If we do not receive Our Lord's Body and Blood, then Communion is an empty form and the words of Consecration and Administration a mockery! If, however, we do receive Our Lord's Body and Blood, as the Church and Scriptures declare¹ and the faithful believe, then it is the extension of the Incarnation, then is God with man, then "*He dwells in us and we in Him,*"² in mysterious blessed union, and we come to see more and more of the fundamental doctrine of the Faith—the Incarnation.

For we should note well that Our Lord's revelation must be accepted or rejected in its *entirety*. Man cannot pick and choose among His sayings. Christ is either God, or else *not even good*: He could not claim that which He did and by His Words and Works ever set forth that claim and be at the same time false, mistaken or misleading in His Teachings and Statements. There is no half-way position: Jesus Christ is either God Our Saviour, Who is absolutely True and Infallible and

¹ See Notes 2 and 3 preceding page.

² H.C. Service, P.B.

Perfect as the Church confidently holds and teaches, or He is not even a good man ; for to claim that which He was not, to teach that which was not true, would nullify any right to be our guide and pattern. If not true, Christ is not God, for God is Truth ; if not God, He is not the Saviour, since God alone could atone ; if not the Saviour, then there is no Christian Religion or Catholic Church, since both have their origin in Him we call Our Incarnate Lord. The faithful, however, need no proof of the Divinity of Christ, of the truth of all His claims, of His dwelling with man in the Incarnation and the Eucharist : for the Religion of Jesus Christ is most real and true, and is capable of sufficient proof and demonstration to all who sincerely seek to know, for they will be led by the "*spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive*"¹ "*Who will guide them into all truth.*"²

Thus the Sacrament of the Altar is a key to the Manger of Bethlehem. When we know the Master in the Breaking of Bread, when we have been with Jesus in His Holy Mysteries, we have a clearer comprehension of and a richer faith in that Holy Child in the Grotto. The Eucharist thus becomes the test of our Christian Convictions

¹ St. John xiv. 17.

² St. John xvi. 13.

and our Christian Professions. For therein we see the Presence of Jesus, the Incarnate Lord, in our very midst to-day to be worshipped and adored in the Holy Mysteries.

So the Manger and the Altar help one another : Then it was the Son of God laid as a Child in the Manger, now it is the Son of God enthroned in the Sacrament of the Altar ; Jesus Christ in the Manger, Jesus Christ at the Altar, Jesus Christ, "*the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.*"¹ His Glory was veiled in that Holy Childhood ; His Glory is hidden by those Sacred Symbols : but the Presence of the Son of God, all that He is, Human and Divine, was in the Holy Manger at Bethlehem as It is in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. The more we realize the Presence of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar, the more we shall appreciate that Presence as the Holy Child Jesus in the Manger. As Saint Ambrose said : " Christ was in a Manger that thou may'st be at Altars. He was on earth that thou may'st be in Heaven," for each Communion is a glimpse of God and His Home. In the Holy Eucharist we receive and adore Jesus and have the blessed truth of the Incarnation made a reality to us.

¹ Hebrews XIII. 8.

“ Only a Manger cold and bare,
 Only a maiden mild,
Only some shepherds kneeling there
 Watching a Little Child ;
And yet that maiden’s arms enfold
 The King of Heaven above,
And in the Christ-Child we behold
 The Lord of Life and Love.

“ Only an Altar high and fair,
 Only a vested Priest,
Only Christ’s children kneeling there,
 Keeping the Christmas Feast ;
And yet beneath the outward sign,
 The Inward Grace is given—
His Presence, Who is Lord Divine,
 And King of earth and heaven.”

A. R. G.

IX

THE DRAWING POWER OF THE
MANGER

Benedictus. St. Luke i. 68.

BLESSED be the Lord God of Israel : for He hath visited and redeemed His people ;

And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us : in the house of His servant David ;

As He spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets : which have been since the world began ;

That we should be saved from our enemies : and from the hand of all that hate us.

To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers : and to remember His holy covenant ;

To perform the oath which He sware to our forefather Abraham : that He would give us ;

That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies : might serve Him without fear ;

In holiness and righteousness before Him : all the days of our life.

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways ;

To give knowledge of salvation unto His people : for the remission of their sins,

Through the tender mercy of our God : whereby the Day-spring from on high hath visited us ;

To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death : and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

IX

THE DRAWING POWER OF THE MANGER

“ A little Child shall lead them ”

IN the foregoing pages we have aimed to picture in a simple and suggestive way the story of the Nativity of Our Blessed Lord, which has such a wonderful fascination for old and young. Now, as ever, the Christ-Child possesses a drawing power that never lessens with age. The world grows old, but the Nativity seems ever new. One never tires of the theme, but loves to picture again each and every scene of the Sacred Story, and see the Glory which seems to radiate from the Manger and to surround the Holy Child and His Virgin Mother. To recall each and every event associated with the Saviour's Birth is indeed like turning the leaves of some precious parchment of the past, where we see illustrated (as in those rare medieval manuscripts, where each page reveals some richly illuminated

picture in gold and colour), the beautiful story of old, wherein God, in the Mystery of the Incarnation, manifested His love for man and reigned as the Babe of Bethlehem.

Year by year, at Christmas especially, the world gathers at the Manger Throne and looks upon the Infant King, many perhaps little thinking of the prediction of the drawing power of that Holy Babe: "*a little Child shall lead them.*"¹ What effect does it have upon their lives? What answer is made to the Divine Claims of the new-born Saviour? What practical result has the Incarnation had upon the world?

It is perhaps not too much to say that the Nativity affects every soul born into a Christian community, that the coming of the Christ-Child has changed the whole world. Why? Because the Babe of Bethlehem was God Incarnate. No reason short of this will satisfy or explain why the Nativity has had such a tremendous influence upon man, has become a favourite subject in art and literature, and is also associated with the most happy and holy memories of the Church and the Home.

The Coming of the Christ-Child has, in fact,

¹ Isa. xl. 6.

completely changed the whole world. Wickedness and worldliness may abound, but the Christian Religion has an universal influence, if not always a dominating power. Men may deny Our Lord's Divinity, they may affect to doubt that He was Conceived by the Holy Ghost and Born of the Virgin Mary, they may sneer at those who believe and defend the doctrine of the Incarnation, so explicitly taught by the Church and the Scriptures; but they are forced to admit that the Coming of Christ has stamped an indelible impress on the world, while at the same time they are unable to give any reasonable explanation for a fact so unique and remarkable.

The Church is on surer ground. Her witness is positive. It is impossible that so many of the conditions and circumstances of life—religious, political, and social—could have been changed, that the manners and morals of mankind have been so refined and purified, that a new and lofty standard and ideal of faith and practice have obtained, through the life and teaching of any one person save that of the Son of God Incarnate. It is inconceivable that all that has been accomplished could have been done by the life and teaching of an ordinary child with absolutely no worldly power

or influence or wealth, but born in a stable in an obscure village of the far distant east. It is incredible that He, Who lay in the Manger, by His Life from His Advent to His Ascension, could have so radically and permanently affected the whole wide world, have stamped His influence upon each succeeding century, and have even the very reckoning of the year date from the time of His Birth, unless He was, as He claimed to be, the Incarnate Son of God. Let it be reverently said that Christ's Own logic bare witness to this truth. ". . . *The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me.*"¹ ". . . *Though ye believe not Me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him.*"² Only thus could these things have been accomplished.

Nor is it without weight that many of the greatest thinkers for nineteen hundred years and more have been believers in the Incarnate Lord. Not that learning makes them more acceptable to God, but that it is a fitting answer to those who, in their ignorance, have thought that Christians have come chiefly from the uncultivated. For look at the "multitudes which none can number"—the great

¹ St. John v. 36.

² St. John x. 38.

train of believers in the Holy Child of the Manger. Can we fail to be impressed with the fact that they were not only those of humble station and little learning, but also were among the mightiest minds the world has known—kings, scholars, and writers who have accepted the Infant Saviour as their Lord and Master ! All ages, ranks, and conditions have been carried away captive by that Holy Child, and have laid their faith, their love, their devotion, their learning, their lives, as an offering before the Manger Throne. For they saw there Him Who is God—“ *The Light of the World.*” There the brush of the artist, the fancy of the poet, the pen of the writer, the mind of the thinker, have found their inspiration, so that the believers may venture to ask, without fear of contradiction, have any contributions of man ever equalled or excelled those of *Christian Art, Architecture, Music, or Literature?*

Or consider the crowds thronging the streets of a Christmas Eve or a Christmas Day, in thought at least picturing the Manger. Some look and worship, some look and wonder, others see but the poetic and the picturesque ; but the Nativity nevertheless affects all for good, for if the Holy Child does not make all hearts sing “ *Glory to God in the*

Highest,"¹ surely He fills them in some measure at least with the spirit of "*Peace on earth, goodwill towards men.*"¹

The Incarnation is true. God Who fills the universe was born as man. And God Incarnate satisfies every need. He is the stimulation and inspiration to all that is high and holy. He brought a new power and energy into the world, that enthralled and bound in fetters mind, body, and soul, that attracted alike the meek and lowly of heart and the mighty and exalted of mind, and sent them soaring on the wings of love to that Throne on High where He Who, in the Manger, rested on a bed of straw as God made Man, there in Heaven, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, reigns in all the Glory and Majesty of Almighty God. For the Nativity is no mere story, symbol, or suggestion. The Incarnation is a reality—wonderful, glorious, beautiful. The Nativity was the manifestation of the Incarnation, God manifest in the Flesh, God with man in the Manger, God with man in the Sacraments, God the Son, the Proof, the Pledge, the Evidence of the Father's Love, for "*God so loved the world that He sent His Only-Begotten Son.*"²

¹ St. Luke II. 14.

² St. John III. 16.

The Nativity is also representative of the only true socialism : the Bond of Love. For we see the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. We think of the Father's love in sending, of the Saviour's love in coming, of the Virgin's love in bearing, of kings' and shepherds' love in journeying to worship, and in the fulfilment of those acts of love is seen Heaven and earth joined together : God the Divine Father, Mary the human mother, Jesus Christ both God and Man uniting both.¹ In His Sacred Person all that is Divine, all that is human, were forever joined together in the Incarnation, in which holy Mystery at the Nativity He rested in the Bosom of the Father and slept on the bosom of His Mother, in Heaven crowned with glory and honour, on earth cradled in a lowly manger. There the Son of God is ready to give to the world pardon and peace, ready to transform life, to make the dark places light, to make the rough places smooth, to purify, quicken, and ennoble, and fit men for the Kingdom of Heaven !

So in palace and in hovel, in glorious Cathedrals and in humble Missions, in salon and in slum, amid the fragrant fields and the leafy lanes, amid

¹ "The Holy Family" by Murillo in the National Gallery, London, is a beautiful illustration of this thought, showing the Saviour elevated on the knee of the Virgin, *above* her and between her and the Father Who looks from Heaven.

the reeking alleys and the fetid courts, the Song of the Christ-Child is sung, the story of the Christ-Child is told. "*Lift up your hearts*" is the burden of that song and story. "*Lift them up unto the Lord,*" for God is here to bless, even where man blights and ravages, even where man lives at the level of a beast. Jesus Christ the Deliverer speaks from the Manger. He blesses, He pardons, He raises, He restores. Through the Sacraments the Incarnation may be repeated in each and every heart. Jesus may be born there, and the world, with its deadening allurements and pleasures, driven back, and the dulled souls and the weary hearts thus freed from their burdens will have a new energy and power as the Lord quickens into new spiritual aspiration and new spiritual activity, whereby graces and virtues may spring up within the soul as the peace and joy of the Babe of Bethlehem come in and the warm rays from the Sun of Righteousness bring forth the fragrant flowers and fruits of holy living.

There never was such another story as that of the Nativity; there never was such another Child as He who lay in the Manger. Both are unique, both speak as no others; both charm as no others. We love to listen to the angels, we love to go with the shepherd men and the pilgrim kings, we love

to kneel with the Virgin Mother and the aged Joseph, seeing in all these adoring souls stars revolving about the Sun, reflecting His light and radiance, and throwing into greater prominence the central Character of all, the Lord of Glory. Cold hearts grow warm, the old become young again, sorrow dries its eye, and many, weary with the world, bowed with the trials and disappointments of life, find a joy and solace past expression in that sweet story of the Coming of the Saviour, in that blessed sight of the Holy Child and His Virgin Mother.

God Incarnate! What a Mystery—what a blessing! God Incarnate! The most holy doctrine of the Faith, the most holy fact of our experience, as the Holy Communion illumines our spiritual sight and sheds light upon the Holy Manger. God Incarnate: sleeping as a Child in the Virgin's arms! We *look*, and as we look we *love*; we *love*, and as we love we *live*; for that Holy Child is the Source and Embodiment of Love and Life: the Son of God,¹ the Son of Man,² the Desire of Nations,³ Who maketh all things new. By virtue of the Holy Incarnation, with one hand, as it were, He helps up the poor, struggling, sinning children of

¹ St. Matt. xvii. 5; St. John i. 18; Rom. viii. 3, etc.

² St. Matt. viii. 20; Acts vii. 56, etc. ³ Hag. ii. 7.

the earth ; and with the other hand, through union with Him, and through His Merits and Mediation, He raises them as pardoned, redeemed souls to the Father in Heaven.

“Who can forget, never to be forgot,
 The time that all the world in slumber lies :
 When, like the stars, the singing angels shot
 To earth, and Heaven awakened all his eyes,
 To see another Sun at midnight rise
 On earth? Was never sight of peril fame.
 For God before, man like Himself did frame,
 But God Himself now like a mortal man became.

“A Child He was, and had not learned to speak,
 That with His word the world before did make ;
 His Mother’s arms Him bare, He was so weak,
 That with one Hand the vaults of heaven could shake.
 See how small room my Infant Lord doth take,
 Whom all the world is not enough to hold.
 Who of His years, or of His age hath told
 Never such Age so young, never a Child so old !

“He is a path, if any be misled ;
 He is a robe, if any naked be ;
 If any chance to hunger, He is Bread ;
 If any be a bondsman, He is free ;
 If any be but weak, how strong is He !
 To dead men life He is, to sick men health ;
 To blind men sight, and to the needy wealth ;
 A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth.”

Giles Fletcher, d. 1623.

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