

## CHRISTMAS DAY – MIDNIGHT MASS

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS

(Lk. 2:1-14) (*Audio Disc D Track 050*)

(*Poem* Vol. 1, pp. 129-32, 134-42, 147-9 – *Gospel* Vol. 1, pp. 159-62, 164-74, 177-9)

**(*Maria Valtorta writes:*)** I see the house in Nazareth once again: the little room where Mary usually takes Her meals. She is now working at a white piece of cloth. She lays Her work down to light a lamp, because it is getting dark...

Her abdomen is now very big. But She is still so beautiful. Her pace is always agile, and all Her gestures are gentle... Only Her face has changed... Mary is now really a “Woman” full of dignity and grace. And Her smile has gained in sweetness and majesty. How beautiful She is!

Joseph comes in through the main door. Mary lifts Her head and smiles at him. Joseph smiles also, but his smile seems to be a forced one, as if he were worried. Mary looks at him inquisitively... “Is there anything worrying you?” She asks. “Can I help you?”

“You always comfort me, Mary. But this time, I have a big problem... and it concerns You.”

“Me, Joseph. And what is it?”

“They have posted an edict on the synagogue door. It orders the census of all Palestinians. And everybody must go and register in his place of origin. We must go to Bethlehem...”

“Oh!” exclaims Mary... putting one hand on Her bosom.

“It's a shock, isn't it? And a sad one. I know”

“No, Joseph. That's not it... I am thinking of the Holy Scriptures... Rachel was buried in Bethlehem, of which it is said: “But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born the Ruler”. The Ruler who was promised to the House of David. He will be born there...”

“Do You... do You think it is already the time?... Oh! What shall we do?” Joseph is completely dismayed. He looks at Mary with two pitiful eyes.

She realises this and smiles. But She smiles more at Herself than at him. A smile that seems to say: “He is a man, a just man, but a man. And he sees as a man. He thinks as a man. Have pity on him, O soul of Mine, and guide him, so that he may see as a spirit...” She then says: “I don't know, Joseph. My time is very close. But could the Lord not delay it, to relieve you from this worry? He can do everything. Don't fear.”

“But the journey!... Think of the crowds. Will we find good lodgings?... We have no home there...”

“Don't be afraid. Everything will be all right. God finds a shelter for the animal about to give birth. Do you think He will not find one for His Messiah? We trust in Him, don't we? We always trust in Him. The harder the trial, the more we trust. Like two children, we put our hands in His fatherly ones. He is our guide... We are His children and His servants. We fulfill His will. No harm can come to us. This edict is also His will. What is Caesar after all? An instrument in the hands of God.

Since the time when the Father decided to forgive man, He pre-arranged the events so that His Christ may be born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem, the smallest town in Judah, did not yet exist, and yet its glory was already destined... Can there be a happier hour for the rising of the 'Star', the light of which is divine and its influence is redemption? Oh! Don't be afraid, Joseph. If the roads aren't safe, if the crowds will make the journey a difficult one, the angels will defend and protect us. Not us: but their King. If we find no accommodation, their wings will be our tents. No mishap will come to us. It cannot: God is with us.”

Joseph looks at Her and listens to Her. The wrinkles on his forehead smooth away.... And he smiles. “...You are blessed, because You see everything through the Grace, of which You are full! Don't let us waste time, then. We must leave as soon as possible, and come back as soon as possible, because everything is ready here for the... for the...” [He doesn't finish the sentence.]

“For our Son, Joseph. He must be such in the eyes of the world. Remember that. The Father has covered His coming with the veil of mystery, and we must not lift that veil. Jesus will do it, when the time comes...”

The beauty of Mary's face, look, expression and voice - when She says “Jesus” - cannot be described. It is already an ecstasy...

**(*Maria Valtorta describes a later vision...*)** I see a very crowded main road. Little donkeys - loaded with goods and chattels, or with people - are going one way. Other little donkeys are going in the opposite way. The people are spurring their mounts, and those on foot are walking fast, because it is cold...

“Are you cold?” asks Joseph, when the wind starts blowing.

“No, thank you.”

But Joseph is not too happy. He touches Her feet... - hanging down along the side of the donkey - shakes his head, and envelops Mary's legs in a blanket...

They meet a shepherd who cuts across the road with his herd... Joseph bends down to say something to him. The shepherd nods in agreement. Joseph takes the donkey and drags it behind the herd into the grazing ground. The shepherd pulls a coarse

bowl out of his knapsack, he milks a big sheep with swollen udders, and he hands the bowl to Joseph - who offers it to Mary.

“May God bless you both” exclaims Mary. “You for your love, and you for your kindness. I will pray for you.”...

***(The shepherd suggests that, if they can't find any accommodation, there are some stables behind the hotel at the edge of the town. When they reach Bethlehem, they are treated with disdain, despite Mary's obvious condition. And having to resort to the shepherd's advice, they at last find a den among the ruins...)***

It is really a den... It seems to consist of the foundations of the old building, with the roof formed by rubble, supported by coarse tree trunks...

Joseph pulls out tinder and flint, and lights a little lamp that he takes out of the knapsack... He goes in, and is greeted by a bellow. “Come in, Mary. It is empty. There is only an ox.” Joseph smiles. “It's better than nothing!...”

Mary dismounts from Her donkey and goes in.

Joseph has hung the little lamp on a nail... They see the vault covered with cobwebs, the stamped ramshackle earth, with holes, rubbish and excrement. The soil is strewn with straw. In the rear, an ox turns its head around and looks, with its large quiet eyes, while some hay is hanging from its lips...

Mary, goes near the ox... and puts Her hands on its neck to feel its warmth. The ox bellows, but does not stir. It seems to understand. And when Joseph pushes it aside to take a large quantity of hay from the manger and make a bed for Mary, the ox remains calm and quiet... There is some spare hay, which Joseph also pulls down. The ox makes room for the little donkey which, tired and hungry as it is, starts eating at once.

Joseph discovers a battered bucket... He goes to a little stream outside, and comes back with some water for the little donkey... He then lights a fire, and with the patience of Job, he dries the hay, a handful at the time...

Mary sits down comfortably on the soft hay, with Her back leaning against one of the tree trunks. Joseph... hangs his mantle... on the hole that serves as a door... He then offers some bread and cheese to the Virgin, and gives Her some water out of a flask.

“Sleep now” he says. “I will sit up and watch that the fire doesn't go out...”

Mary lies down obediently. Joseph covers Her with Her own mantle, and with the blanket that She had around Her feet earlier.

“But you... you will be cold.”

“No, Mary. I'll be near the fire. Try and rest now. Things will be better tomorrow.”

Mary closes Her eyes without insisting. Joseph creeps into his little corner, and sits on a stool... He turns around now and again to look at Her, and he sees She is lying quietly, as if She were sleeping. He breaks the little sticks as noiselessly as possible ,and throws them one at a time on the little fire ...

[A short time later] Mary goes on Her knees, and prays with a blissful smile on Her face. She stretches out Her arms, almost in the shape of a cross - with the palms of Her hands facing up and forward - and She never seems to tire in that position. She then prostrates Herself with Her face on the hay, in an even more ardent prayer. A long prayer.

Joseph rouses... “Are You not sleeping, Mary?” he asks.

He asks Her three times, until She turns around and replies: “I am praying.”

“Is there anything you need?”

“No, Joseph.”

“Try and sleep a little. At least try and rest.”

“I will try. But I don't get tired, praying.”

“God be with You, Mary.”

“And with you, Joseph.”

Mary resumes Her position. Joseph, to avoid falling asleep, goes on his knees near the fire, and prays with his hands pressed against his face...

A thin ray of moonlight creeps in through a crack in the vault... It stretches in length, as the moon climbs higher in the sky, and at last it reaches Mary. It is now on Her head, where it forms a halo of pure light... She is now the Depository of the Light, which She is to give to the world...

The Virgin disappears in so much light... and then the Mother emerges...

I see Mary with the new-born Son in Her arms. A little Baby, rosy and plump, bustling with His little hands as big as rose buds, and kicking with His tiny feet that could be contained in the hollow of the heart of a rose. He is crying with a thin trembling voice, just like a new-born little lamb, opening His pretty little mouth that resembles a wild strawberry, and showing a tiny tongue that trembles against the rosy roof of His mouth. And He moves His little head, that is so blond, that it seems without any hair, a little round head that His Mummy holds in the hollow of Her hand. She looks at Her Baby and adores Him, weeping and smiling at the same time. She bends down to kiss Him - not on His innocent head, but on the centre of His chest, where underneath there is His little heart, beating for us... and where one day, there will be

the Wound. His Mother is doctoring that wound in advance, with Her immaculate kiss.

The ox... gets up with a great noise of hooves, and bellows. The donkey turns its head around and brays. It is the light that rouses them, but I love to think that they want to greet their Creator, both for themselves, and on behalf of all the animals.

Joseph... now rouses, and sees a strange light filter through the fingers of his hands pressed against his face. He removes his hands, lifts his head, and turns around. The ox, standing as it is, hides Mary. But She calls him: "Joseph, come."

Joseph rushes. When he sees, he stops... and he is about to fall on his knees... But Mary insists: "Come, Joseph." She leans on the hay with Her left hand, and holding the Child close to Her heart with Her right one, She gets up. She moves towards Joseph, who is walking, embarrassed, because of a conflict in him between his desire to go, and his fear of being irreverent.

They meet at the foot of the straw bed, and they look at each other, weeping blissfully.

"Come, let us offer Jesus to the Father" says Mary. And while Joseph kneels down, She stands... lifts up Her Creature in Her arms, and says: "Here I am. On His behalf, O God, I speak these words to You: here I am to do Your will. I, Mary, and My spouse, Joseph, with Him. Here are Your servants, O Lord. May Your will always be done by us, in every hour, in every event, for Your glory and Your love."

Then Mary bends down and says: "Here, Joseph, take Him", and offers him the Child.

"What! I?... Me?... Oh, no! I am not worthy!" Joseph is utterly dumbfounded at the idea of having to touch God.

But Mary insists, smiling: "You are well worthy. No one is more worthy than you are, and that is why the Most High chose you. Take Him Joseph, and hold Him while I look for the linens."

Joseph, blushing almost purple, stretches his arms out and takes the Baby, Who is screaming because of the cold. When he has Him in his arms... he presses Him to his heart and bursts into tears, exclaiming: "Oh! Lord! My God!" He bends down to kiss His tiny feet, which feel cold... He then goes between the ox and the donkey, with his back to the door, and bends over the New-Born, to help form a shelter with his body. The two sides of the shelter are: a grey head with long ears; and a huge white head with a steaming nose and two gentle, soft eyes.

Mary has opened the trunk and pulled out the linens and swaddling clothes. After warming them near the fire, She moves towards Joseph and envelops the Baby, with

the linen and then with Her veil, to protect His little head. "Where shall we put Him now?" She asks...

Joseph looks around, thinking... He then makes up the fire - this time to have a good blaze - warms the hay, and dries it close to his chest, so that it will not get cold. Then, when he has gathered enough to make a little mattress for the Child, he goes to the manger and sorts it out as if it were a cradle... He takes the wide mantle of soft, dark blue wool, double folds it, and lays it on the hay, leaving a strip hanging out of the manger. The first bed for the Saviour is ready.

And the Mother - with Her sweet, graceful gait - moves to the manger, lays Him in it, and covers Him... Only His little face, the size of a man's fist, is left uncovered. Mary and Joseph, bending over the manger, are blissfully happy, watching Him sleep His first sleep ...

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**(*Maria Valtorta writes...*)** I see a very wide country. The moon is at its zenith... with stars like diamond studs, fixed to a huge canopy of dark blue velvet... Streams of light descend, and make the earth... look as white as milk, and a little house far away like a block of white marble.

On my right I see a place enclosed by a thorn-bush hedge on two sides, and by a low rugged wall on the other two. The wall supports a kind of low wide shed... From the enclosure, short bleating of sheep can be heard now and again... The brightness is increasing more and more...

A shepherd looks out of the door, and lifting one arm to his forehead to shield his eyes, he looks up... He calls his companions, who all come to the door: a group of hairy men of various ages. Some are just teenagers, some are already white haired. They comment on the strange event, and the younger ones are afraid. One in particular - a boy about twelve years old - starts crying, and the older shepherds jeer at him...

But the little shepherd is no longer listening to them. He looks as if he is no longer frightened... because he goes out on to the grassy fold in front of the shed... At a certain moment he shouts: "Oh!" and remains petrified, with his arms slightly stretched out. His mates look at one another, dumbfounded...

Smiling, he whispers: "There, there above the tree, look at the light. It seems to be coming on the ray of the moon. It is coming near. How beautiful it is!"

"I can only see a rather brighter light" says one of the other shepherds...

"No. I see something like a body" says one whom I recognise to be the shepherd who gave the milk to Mary.

“It is... it is an angel” shouts the boy. “Here he is, he is coming down, he is coming near... Down! On your knees before the angel of God!”

A long and venerable “Oh!” comes from the group of shepherds, who fall face-down to the ground. The older they are, the more they appear to be crushed by the shining apparition...

The angel comes nearer and nearer, then he stops mid-air above the enclosure wall, waving his large wings. He is a pearly brightness, in the white moonlight surrounding him.

“Do not fear. I am not bringing you misfortune. I announce to you a great joy for the people of Israel, and for all the people of the world.” The angelic voice is the harmony of a harp and of singing nightingales.

“Today, in the City of David, the Saviour has been born.” In saying so, the angel spreads his wings wider and wider, moving them as a sign of overwhelming joy. And a stream of golden sparks and precious stones seem to fall from them...

“... the Saviour, Who is Christ.” The angel shines with a brighter light. His two wings, now motionless, are pointed up towards the sky... like two bright flames ascending to Heaven.

“... Christ, the Lord!” The angel gathers his sparkling wings... and bows down in adoration, with his arms crossed over his heart...

Then he stirs, spreads out his wings, lifts his head, and bright with a heavenly smile he says: “You will recognise Him from the following signs: in a poor stable, behind Bethlehem, you will find a baby in swaddling clothes, in a manger for animals, because no roof was found for the Messiah in the city of David.” The angel becomes grave, almost sad, in saying that.

But from the Heavens many angels - oh! how many! - come down, all like him - a ladder of angels descending and rejoicing, and dimming the moonlight with their heavenly brightness. They all gather round the announcing angel, fluttering their wings, exhaling perfumes, playing notes in which are the most beautiful voices of creation... elevated to uniform perfection...”

The angelical “Glory” spreads throughout the quiet country in wider and wider circles... The birds join their singing to greet the early light, and the sheep add their bleatings for the early sun. But, as previously in the grotto with the ox and the donkey, I love to believe that the animals are greeting their Creator...

The singing and the light slowly fade away, and the angels ascend to Heaven...