

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

6 January

(Mt: 2:1-12) *(Audio Year A Track 008)*

(Poem Vol. 1, pp. 168-174, Vol. 3, pp. 689-90 – Gospel Vol. 1, pp. 203-10, Vol. 6, pp. 225-6; Notebooks 1944, p. 291; Azariah (1993) p. 312 – (2007) p. 324; Notebooks 1943, p. 518)

(Christmas tableaux often show the three Wise Men visiting Jesus, in the company of the shepherds, at the stable in Bethlehem. But Matthew's Gospel (2:11) says: "And going into the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary..." This identifies a different place for the visit - and so suggests a different time. According to the writings of Maria Valtorta, the visit takes place many months after Jesus' birth. Maria describes the vision she sees:)

I see Bethlehem, small and white, gathered like a brood of chickens under the stars. Small streets divide the town into many sections, without the slightest resemblance to a road scheme as we understand it.

There is a low wide building, the widest in the village. There are many windows on the first floor. Underneath there are arcades, surrounding yards strewn with straw and rubble, with drinking troughs for horses and other animals. Attached to the rustic pillars, there are rings to which the animals are tied, and on one side there is a large shed to shelter herds and mounts. I realise that it is the hotel of Bethlehem.

[Nearby] there are several houses: some large, some small, some with a little orchard, some without. There is nobody in the streets, as it is so late.

I notice that the night light is increasing... A star - of such unusual size, that the moon seems small in comparison - is moving forward in the sky of Bethlehem. And all the other stars seem to vanish and make room for it, as maidservants do when their queen passes by: its brightness is such that it outshines them all...

With a brighter radiation of light, the star stops over a little house on the narrowest side of the square. Neither the people dwelling in it, nor the people in Bethlehem, see it, because they are all asleep in their closed houses... The little house is transfigured by this liquid fire of gems... But the Virgin does not know. She is awake near her Son's cradle, and is praying. There are splendours in Her soul, which outdo the splendour with which the star is decorating these material things.

From the main road, a cavalcade is approaching. Harnessed horses are led by hand, dromedaries and camels carry riders or loads... When they reach the square, they all stop. The cavalcade - lit up by the star - is a fantasy of splendour. The harnesses of the most rich mounts, the clothes of the riders, their faces, their baggage, everything shines. And the light of the star increases the splendour of

metals, leathers, silks, gems, coats. Eyes are radiant, and mouths are smiling. Because another splendour shines in their hearts: the splendour of a supernatural joy.

While the servants move towards the caravan with the animals, three members of the caravan dismount... and they walk towards the house. They prostrate themselves, touching the ground with their foreheads, to kiss the soil. They are three personages of power, as is quite obvious from their very rich attire...

After venerating the house where the Saviour is, they rise and go back towards the caravan.

(The vision ends here, and starts again later...)

It is daytime now. The sun is shining in the afternoon sky. One of the servants of the three Magi crosses the square, and climbs the steps of the little house. He goes in. He comes out, and he goes back to the hotel (where, it seems, the three Magi are now staying).

A full quarter of an hour later the three Magi come out, each followed by his own servant. They cross the square. The occasional passers-by turn round to look at the stately personages, who are walking very slowly and solemnly. The inhabitants of the little house would have had time to prepare to receive the guests.

The Magi are even more richly dressed than the night before. Their silks shine, the gems sparkle, a big bunch of precious feathers - covered with even more precious chips - quivers and shines on the head of the Wise Man wearing the turban.

One of the servants is carrying an inlaid coffer, the metal reinforcements of which are all engraved gold. The second servant is holding a beautifully wrought chalice, covered with a pure gold lid, which is even more finely finished. The third servant has a kind of wide low amphora, also in gold, with the cover shaped like a pyramid, and a diamond at the top. The gifts appear to be heavy, because the servants - particularly the one with the coffer - are carrying them with some effort.

The three Magi climb the steps and go in. They enter a room that extends from the road to the back of the house. The little kitchen garden at the back can be seen through a window, which is open to the sun. There are doors in the other two walls, and the owners - that is, a man, a woman and some boys and younger children - cast sidelong glances through them.

Mary is sitting with the Child in Her lap, and Joseph is standing near Her. She gets up and bows when She sees the Magi entering. She is all dressed in white. She is so beautiful: in Her plain white dress, which covers Her from Her neck down to Her feet, and from Her shoulders to Her slender wrists. She is so beautiful: with Her head crowned with blond plaits, Her face more rosy for the emotion, and Her eyes smiling so sweetly. She gives a greeting: "May God be with you." The three Magi stop for a

moment, completely astonished. They then proceed and prostrate themselves at Her feet. And they ask Her to sit down.

They do not sit down, although She asks them to do so. They remain kneeling, relaxing on their heels. Behind them - also on their knees - are the three servants. They have placed the three gifts they were carrying, in front of the Magi, and now they are waiting.

The three Wise Men contemplate the Child, Who I think must be nine to twelve months old (He is so lively and strong). He is sitting on His Mother's lap, and smiles and prattles with a shrill voice like a little bird. He is all dressed in white like His Mother, with tiny sandals on His little feet. His dress is a very simple one: a small tunic, from which His restless feet protrude. (He has) plump little hands (which would like to get hold of everything), a most beautiful little face (in which two dark blue eyes shine), and a pretty mouth (with dimples at the sides). He shows His first tiny teeth when He smiles. His pretty little curls are so bright and soft, that they seem like gold dust.

The oldest of the Magi speaks on behalf of them all. He explains to Mary that one night the previous December (unknown to each other), they saw a new star of unusual brightness appear in the sky. The maps of the sky had never shown or mentioned such a star. Its name was unknown, because it had no name. Born out of the bosom of God, it had flourished to tell men a blessed truth, a secret of God. But other men had not paid any attention to it, because their souls were steeped in mud. They did not lift their eyes to God, neither could they read the words that He writes with stars of fire, in the vault of Heaven.

The Magi had seen it, and had striven to understand its meaning. They were happy to give up the little sleep they usually granted themselves, and forgetting even their food, they devoted themselves entirely to studying the zodiac. The conjunctions of the stars - the time, the season, the calculation of the hours passed, and the astronomic combinations - had told them the name and the secret of the star. Its name: Messiah. Its secret: "The Messiah had come to our world". And they had set out to worship Him.

Each of them was unknown to the others. Over mountains, across deserts, along valleys and rivers, travelling by night, they had come towards Palestine, because the star was moving in that direction. For each of them - from three different points on the earth - it was going in that direction. And then they met beyond the Dead Sea. God's will had gathered them there, and they proceeded together, understanding one another, notwithstanding that each spoke his own language. By a miracle of the Eternal Father, they were able to understand and speak the language of each other's country.

They had gone together to Jerusalem: because the Messiah was to be the King of Jerusalem, the King of the Jews. But over the sky of that city, when the star

had concealed itself, they felt their hearts breaking with pain, and they examined themselves to ascertain whether they had failed to deserve God. But when their consciences reassured them, they applied to king Herod, and asked him in which royal palace the King of the Jews was born, because they had come to adore Him. Then the king gathered the chief priests and the scribes, and asked them where the Messiah might be born. And they replied: "In Bethlehem, in Judah."

And they came towards Bethlehem. As soon as they left the Holy City, the star reappeared to them, and on the night before their arrival in Bethlehem, its brightness increased, so much so that the whole sky was ablaze. Then the star stopped above this house, engulfing all the light of the other stars in its ray. And they understood that the Divine Baby was there. And now they were worshipping Him, offering their gifts, and above all, their hearts, which never cease thanking God for the grace granted to them. Neither would they ever stop loving His Son, Whose holy human body they had now seen. Later, they intended to go back to king Herod, because he also wanted to adore Him.

One of the Wise men then says: "Here is the gold which befits a king to possess, here is the incense which befits a God, and here, Mother, is the myrrh - because Your Child is a Man as well as God, and He will experience the bitterness of the flesh and of human life, as well as the inevitable law of death. Our souls - full as they are of love - would prefer not to utter those words, and we would rather think that His flesh is also as eternal as His Spirit. But, Woman, if our writings - and above all our souls - are right, He is Your Son, the Saviour, the Christ of God. And consequently - to save the world - He will have to take upon Himself the evil of the world, of which one of the punishments is death. This myrrh is for that hour. That His holy flesh may not be subject to the rot of putrefaction, but may preserve its integrity until its resurrection. And on account of this gift, may He remember and save His servants, by allowing us to enter His Kingdom. In the meantime - that we may be sanctified - will You, Mother, trust Your Little One to our love. That His heavenly blessing may descend upon us, while we kiss His feet."

Mary - Who has overcome the fright caused by the words of the Wise Man, and has hidden with a smile the sadness of the sorrowful reference - offers the Child. She lays Him in the arms of the oldest one - who kisses Him and receives His caress - and he then hands Him over to the other two.

Jesus smiles and plays with the little chains and fringes of the robes of the three Magi. And He looks curiously at the open coffer, full of a yellow sparkling substance. And He smiles at the rainbow produced by the sun, shining on the brilliant top of the lid of the myrrh.

They then hand the Child back to Mary and they stand up. Mary also gets up. They bow to one another, after the youngest has given an order to the servant, who goes out. The three Men go on speaking for a little while. They cannot make up their

minds to leave the house. Tears shine in their eyes. At last they move towards the door, accompanied by Mary and Joseph.

The Child wants to get down and give His hand to the oldest of the three. And He walks hand-in-hand with Mary and the Wise Man, both of whom bend down to steady Him. Jesus walks with a hesitant step - like all children - and He laughs, kicking His little feet on the strip of the floor, lit up by the sun.

When they reach the door, the Magi take leave, kneeling down once again, kissing Jesus' feet. Mary - bending down over the Child - takes His hand and guides it, in a blessing gesture, over the head of each Wise Man. It is already a sign of the cross, traced by Jesus' little fingers, guided by Mary.

The three Men go down the steps. The caravan is already there, waiting for them. The horses' studs shine in the setting sun. People have gathered in the little square, watching the unusual sight.

Jesus laughs, clapping His hands. His Mother has lifted Him up on the wide parapet of the landing, and is holding Him against Her breast with Her arm, so that He may not fall. Joseph has gone down with the Magi, and is holding the stirrup to each of them, while they mount their two horses and the camel.

Servants and masters are now all mounted. The starting command is given. The three Men bow down: as low as the necks of their mounts, in a final gesture of homage. Joseph bows down. Also Mary bows, and then She guides Jesus' hand again, in a gesture of goodbye and blessing. ***(And so this vision ends.)***

(The story resumes more than 30 years later. Jesus and His disciples are in the town of Engedi, near the Dead Sea, talking with an old man called Abraham, who is excitedly describing an event he experienced with his son, near some fountains and vineyards at the edge of the town, many years ago:)

"I had gone with the boy, and looking beyond the desert... my son said: "Father! Look! A great caravan, with horses and camels, and servants and gentlemen going towards Engedi. Perhaps they are coming to the fountains before it gets dark..." The men were really coming to the fountains. They dismounted, they saw me, and they asked whether they could camp there for the night.

"But Engedi has hospitable homes, and it is not far".

"No. We will be keeping watch to be ready to flee, because Herod is pursuing us. Our guards will be able to control every road from here, and it will be easy to escape from those seeking us".

"What sin have you committed?" I asked, as I was surprised... "I do not see how you can have sinned against Herod."

And one of them replied: "We have worshipped the Messiah, Who was born in Bethlehem of Judah, and to Whom we were led by the star of the Lord. Herod is looking for Him, and that is why he wants to find us, so that we may tell him where the Child is. But he is looking for Him to kill Him. We may die in the deserts, on a long unknown road, but we will not reveal the whereabouts of the Holy Child, Who descended from Heaven!".

The Messiah! (I thought). The dream of every true Israelite! My dream! And He was in the world! In Bethlehem of Judah as it was foretold! And pressing my son Elisha to my heart, I asked for more information and details, saying: "Listen, Elisha! Remember! You will certainly see Him!". I was already fifty years old, and I no longer hoped to see Him. Neither did I hope to live so long as to see Him grown into a man."

The old man collects himself, and says: "The three Wise Men spoke kindly and patiently, and they described You in Your holy infancy, and Your Mother and father. I could have spent the night with them, but Elisha was falling asleep in my lap. I said goodbye to the three Wise Men, and I promised that I would not say one word that might be detrimental to them. Later we heard of the slaughter, and for years I did not know whether You were alive. Now I know! My faith in the power of God - which was already alive - became perfect after that remote evening, when three men, of different races, bore witness to the power of God by being united - through the voices of stars and of their souls - on the road of God, to worship His Word. "

"And your faith will be rewarded... " says Jesus...

(Mary says:) "...In the three Magi, I saw all of those who - from everywhere in the world, in all periods of the earth, and from that moment on - would come towards the Light, towards my Lord. And they would proclaim Him to be their King, and their Savior and God..."

(Jesus also speaks of the Magi:) "...They were among the obedient. They obeyed the celestial voices. Always. Both when these voices said to them, 'Depart, to worship the newborn King of the Jews,' and when the voices said, 'Do not go back to Herod.' They obeyed, and deserved to bend their knees. They were the first fruits of all the peoples: before Christ, before the Son of God and of Mary - Jesus..."

(And Jesus has stern words to say, to some of us:) "I had come as Light into the world. Light for the world. Light in the world. I was calling the world to the Light. The whole world.

"And I call it. I have been calling it incessantly for twenty centuries. I do not cease to make my Light shine over your darkness. If you were able to raise yourselves over the barrier of the haze you have spread over the world, you would see the Divine Sun, always glowing and kindly over men, over all men.

"Nor is it any wonder if those who are farthest from Catholic Rome now precede you. Gaspar, Melchor, and Baldazar - from three points of the earth - came on the patient backs of camels to the Light of the world, which was not seen by the compatriots of the Son of Mary. Africans, Asians, and Southerners are coming to the Cross which you have rejected. And they will surpass you. On the last day, when time and men are illuminated at every point and side, the unpleasant gap left by you, Catholics for centuries, will be seen. While the others - idolaters and heretics, fascinated by the Christ, the Holy Lord - will have poured in, with their souls rendered virginal by Grace..."