

SIXTH DAY IN THE CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

Lk. 2:15-20) (Audio Disc D Track 051)

(Poem Vol. 1, pp. 150-5 – Gospel Vol. 1, pp. 180-7)

(Notebooks 1943, p. 531; Notebooks 1945-50, p. 311)

(The shepherd who gave the milk to Mary now says:) “Come with me, I know where He is. I saw the woman and I felt sorry for Her... so I gave the man some milk for Her. She is so young and beautiful, and She must be as good and kind as the angel who spoke to us. Come. Let us go and get some milk, cheese, lambs and tanned hides. They must be very poor... I wonder how cold He must be - Whose name I dare not mention! Imagine! I spoke to the Mother as I would have spoken to a poor wife!...”

They go into the shed, and come out shortly afterwards, some with little flasks of milk, some with... small whole round cheeses, some with baskets - each containing a little bleating lamb - and some with tanned hides.

The shepherd who gave the milk says: “I’m taking a sheep. She lambed a month ago, and her milk is very good. It will be useful if the woman should have no milk. She seemed a young girl to me, and so pale!...”

They close the shed and the enclosure, and setting out in the moonlight with torches, they go round Bethlehem, reach the stable, and go near the hole.

“Go in!” says one.

“I wouldn't dare!” says another...

“You, Levi, you saw the angel first...”

The boy hesitates, and then he makes up his mind. He goes near the hole, pulls the mantle a little to one side, looks... and remains enraptured.

“What can you see?” they ask him anxiously, in low voices.

“I can see a beautiful young woman and a man, bending over a manger. And I can hear... I can hear a little baby crying, and the woman is speaking to Him in a voice... oh! what a voice!”

“What is She saying?”

“She is saying: “Jesus, little one! Jesus, love of Your Mummy! Don't cry, little Son”. She is saying: “Oh! If I could only say to You: 'Take some milk, little one'. But I have not got any yet”. She says: “You are so cold, My love! And the hay is stinging You!”... She says: “Sleep, soul of Mine! Because it breaks My heart to hear You crying and see Your tears!” and She kisses Him. She must be warming His little feet with Her hands, because She is bent with Her arms in the manger.”

“Call Her! Let them hear you.”...

“I won’t. You should call Her, because you brought us here, and you know Her!”

The shepherd opens his mouth, but he only utters a faint moaning noise.

Joseph turns round and comes to the door. “Who are you?”

“Shepherds. We brought you some food and some wool. We have come to worship the Saviour.”

“Come in.”

They go in, and the stable becomes brighter because of the light of the torches. The older men push the young ones in front of them.

Mary turns around and smiles. “Come” She says. “Come!” She invites them - with Her hand and Her smile - takes the boy who saw the angel, and draws him to Herself, against the manger. The boy looks, and is happy.

The others - invited by Joseph - move forward with their gifts, and place them at Mary’s feet with some deep-felt words. They then look at the Baby Who is weeping a little, and they smile, moved and happy.

One of them - somewhat bolder than the rest - says: “Mother, take this wool. It’s soft and clean. I prepared it for my child who is about to be born, but I offer it to You. Lay your Son in this wool - it will be soft and warm.” And he offers the sheep hide, a beautiful hide, well covered with white soft wool.

Mary lifts Jesus, and puts it around Him. And She shows Him to the shepherds, who, kneeling on the hay on the ground, look at Him ecstatically!

They become bolder, and one suggests: “He should be given a mouthful of milk, better still, some water and honey. But we have no honey. We give it to little babies. I have seven children, and I know...”

Another says: “There is some milk here. Take it, Woman.”

And another: “But it is cold. It should be warm. Where is Elias? He has the sheep.”

Elias must be the shepherd who gave the milk. But he is outside and cannot be seen in the dark night.

“Who led you here?” asks Joseph.

“An angel told us to come, and Elias showed us the way. But where is he now?”

The sheep declares his presence with a bleat.

“Come in. You are wanted.”

He enters with his sheep, embarrassed because they all look at him.

"It's you!" says Joseph, who recognizes him. And Mary smiles at him, saying: "You are good."

They milk the sheep, and with the hem of a piece of linen dipped into the warm creamy milk, Mary moistens the lips of the Baby, Who sucks the sweet cream. They all smile, and even more so, when Jesus falls asleep in the warmth of the wool, with the little bit of linen still between His lips.

"But You can't stay here. It's cold and damp. And... there is too strong a smell of animals. It's not good... it's not good for the Saviour."

"I know" replies Mary with a deep sigh. "But there is no room for us in Bethlehem."

"Take heart, Woman. We'll look for a house for You."

"I'll tell my mistress" says Elias. "She is good. She will receive You, even if she has to give You her own room. As soon as it is daylight, I'll tell her... She'll find room for You."

"For My Child, at least. Joseph and I can lie on the floor. But for the Little One..."

"Don't worry, Woman. I'll see to it. And we'll tell many people what we were told. You'll lack nothing. For the time being, take what our poverty can give You. We are shepherds..."

"We are poor, too. And we cannot reward you" says Joseph.

"Oh! We don't want a reward. Even if You could afford it, we wouldn't want it. The Lord has already rewarded us. He promised peace to everybody. The angels said... that this Child is the Saviour, Who is Christ, the Lord. We are poor and ignorant, but we know that the Prophets say the Saviour will be the Prince of Peace. And he told us to come and adore Him.... Glory be to God in the Most High Heaven, and glory to His Christ here. And You are blessed, Woman, Who gave birth to Him: You are holy, because You deserved to bear Him! Give us orders as our Queen, because we will be happy to serve You. What can we do for You?"

"You can love My Son, and always cherish the same thoughts as you have now."

"But what about You?... Have You no relatives You would like to inform?..."

"Yes, but they are far away, at Hebron..."

"I'll go" says Elias. "Who are they?"

"Zacharias, the priest, and My cousin Elizabeth."

“Zacharias? Oh! I know him well. In summer I go up those mountains because the pastures are rich and beautiful, and I am a friend of his shepherd. When I know you are settled, I will go to Zacharias.”...

“May God reward You. I will remember you, Elias, and every one of you.”

“Will You tell Your Baby about us?”

“I certainly will.”

[And one by one they introduce themselves.]

“I am Elias.”

“And I am Levi.”

“And I am Samuel.”

“And I Jonah.”

“And I Isaac.”

“And I Tobias.”

“And I Jonathan.”

“And I Daniel.”

“And I Simeon.”

“My name is John.”

“I am Joseph, and my brother Benjamin, we are twins.”

“I will remember your names.”

“We must go... But we will come back... And we will bring others to worship Him.”

Another says: “How can we go back to the sheep-fold, leaving the Child?”

And another: “Glory be to God Who has shown Him to us!”

“Will You let us kiss His dress?” asks Levi, with an angelic smile.

Mary lifts Jesus slowly, and sitting on the hay, envelops the tiny little feet in a linen, and offers them to be kissed. The shepherds bow down to the ground and kiss the tiny feet, veiled by the linen. Those with a beard clean it first. Almost everyone is crying, and when they have to go, they walk out backwards, leaving their hearts there...

The vision ends, with Mary sitting on the straw with the Child on Her lap, and Joseph who, leaning with his elbow on the manger, looks and adores...

(Jesus says to Maria Valtorta:) "...Note to whom the angel reveals himself first... Levi, the boy. God shows Himself to those who have a child's soul. He also shows them His mysteries, and allows them to hear His divine words and Mary's. Those with a child's soul also have Levi's holy daring, and they say: "Let us kiss Jesus' dress". They say that to Mary, because it is always Mary Who gives you Jesus.

She is the Bearer of the Eucharist. She is the Living Pyx. Whoever goes to Mary, finds Me. Whoever asks Her for Me, receives Me from Her. When a creature says to Mary: "Give me Your Jesus, that I may love Him", My Mother's smile causes Heaven's colours to change into a more lively brightness, because of its greater delight.

Say, therefore, to Her: "Let me kiss Jesus' dress, let me kiss His wounds". And dare even more: "Let me rest my head on Your Jesus' Heart, that I may delight in It". Come. And rest. Like Jesus in His cradle, between Jesus and Mary."

(Mary says to Maria Valtorta:) "When the shepherds came to the grotto, they had looks and expressions of love only for my Child. Joseph and I were secondary Figures for them. At the foot of the poor litter where He would sleep - when He wasn't sleeping on my lap - they laid their gifts and acts of tenderness. Nor was I pained at not being praised, as, so to speak, the plant that had given the world the Flower of Heaven. It was enough for me that they should love my Child and love Him very much. There would be so many who would hate Him later!..."

(And Jesus says to Maria:) "...Indeed, I tell you that, whereas one of the twelve apostles was lost, not one of the twelve shepherds was left deprived of the halo of the blessed. And that was because, in their simplicity, they were fulfilled and pervaded by my simplicity as a Child. They saw and loved only the Son, born to the People of Israel, the Child Savior, 'wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger,' whom they later saw sucking milk and growing, like all children. Nor did his poverty and exiguousness as a baby invalidate their faith in the divine origin of the Little Child, born in Bethlehem of Judah. Nor did they calculate the benefits they could obtain from **Him**, whom most in Israel dreamed of as a king and avenger, rather than a spiritual Savior of his people and the world. They loved. Always..."

(Very early in the first year of His public life, Jesus went back to Bethlehem and began a search for the twelve shepherds, who had adored Him at His Birth. One by one, in various parts of the country, He made joyful encounters with those who were still alive. Three had died – one in the presence of Jesus and Mary – and a new one, Joseph, son of the original shepherd Joseph, had joined the group. The story of these remaining ten shepherds - disciples throughout Jesus' public life, and sorrowful witnesses of His Crucifixion - fills many pages in the five volumes of The Poem of the Man-God and The Gospel as Revealed to Me.)

