

# Holy Infancy of the Christ Child

## *Meditations for the Month of January*

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The Adoration of the Shepherds by Annibale Carracci (1560-1609); Musée des beaux-arts d'Orléans, France;  
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January 1<sup>st</sup>

## The Circumcision

*O*n the first day of the year we commemorate the first shedding of the Precious Blood for us. Christmas week as it draws to a close, introduces us to the new-born King in the weakness of the nature that He shared with sinful man. We now learn that He came, not to manifest His power and majesty, but to be made like unto us in all things, as far as it was possible for one who was the Eternal Son of God. We begin to appreciate that He is flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone.

*T*oday He also proclaims that He is come to suffer for us. We listen to His first cry of pain, and see the strange spectacle of the first commencement of that life, of which the agony upon the Cross was the final consummation. How shall we ever thank Him as we ought? How great a joy we should consider it, if we have the privilege of suffering some little pain for Him in return!

*H*e also declares to us today that He is come to suffer with us, to take part in all the miseries of humanity, to learn by His own experience all that we have to endure in this valley of tears. This it is which should console us in all our troubles. Jesus Christ not only knows them all, but has in His mercy felt them all Himself in His Sacred Humanity.

January 2nd

## Mary at the Circumcision

The week succeeding the birth of her Son had been to Mary a week of exquisite joy, one long ecstasy of heavenly delight, with no sorrow to mar the brightness of the sunshine of His presence. But on the octave of His Nativity all was changed. She began to realize the fact that Jesus had come to suffer, that He Who was infinitely dearer to her than the whole world, was to be the Man of Sorrows, and Mary's joy was changed to bitter sorrow. Thus it is for all those who love God. The times when earth seems unable to contain the greatness of their joy are sure to be followed by sorrow and by pain.

It seemed but a trifle which thus changed the complexion of Mary's life. The pain that Jesus had to suffer was but a passing smart. Why should she thus grieve over it? It was because it betokened the indignities that He would have to suffer, the character of a victim for sin in that He had taken upon Himself. Often a mere trifle destroys the brightness of our life. God uses matters seemingly trivial to teach us our weakness.

Yet Mary would not have had it otherwise. She knew it was the will of God, and that was enough for her. Would that I could learn this lesson more perfectly! Then nothing would destroy my peace, as nothing destroyed Mary's.

January 3rd

## The Meaning of the Circumcision

*I*t seems strange that the spotless Lamb of God should have been subjected to a rite which is usually supposed to have been the occasion on which Jewish boys were freed from original sin. Was it not derogatory to Jesus, and calculated to produce the false impression that He was not the Son of God, born of a Virgin Mother, but a sinful son of Adam, like those around? Sometimes it is not only lawful, but a duty, to do what is calculated to mislead others, when God enjoins it or some higher motive exists for it.

*W*hat was this higher motive in the case of the Circumcision of Jesus? It was that He might become like us in all things, sin only excepted; that He might be made sin for us, i.e., might bear all the consequences of sin, and the suffering that is the result of sin. O merciful Savior, may my heart be ever full of gratitude to Thee for this Thy Divine condescension!

*O*ur Lord also was circumcised because He came to fulfill all the Jewish Law, with all its rites and ceremonies. He exalted it by His obedience and exact accomplishment of all its details. So I ought to love and obey every enactment of the Church, every ceremony and every detail of her ritual and discipline.

January 4th

## The Humility of the Circumcision

One of the most difficult things in the world is to submit to anything that lowers us in the opinion of men and tends to give them a false impression respecting us. Our self-love revolts against wrongful suspicion, and nature is eager to prove its injustice. Our Lord in the Circumcision submitted to a rite which seemed to imply that He was born in sin, in order to teach us, at the very opening of His life, a willingness to be misunderstood and judged guilty of faults we have never committed, and to be credited with natural disadvantages which we do not really possess.

We cannot all aim as high as this, or at least we have not yet reached this love of being wrongly judged and despised without cause. But we can learn to recognize how utterly opposed to the spirit of Christ is any attempt to make ourselves out better than we are, and to try and lead others to attribute to us virtues or advantages that are not ours, whether it be generosity, or piety, or learning, or riches, or high birth, or wide influence, or a distinguished position in the world.

If we want to test our humility, we cannot have a safer touchstone than this willingness to be under rated or disesteemed without any fault of our own. Happy those who can rejoice to suffer shame without giving cause for it! Am I one of these?

January 5th

## The Name of Jesus

*A*t the Circumcision, Jewish children received their name as other children do at their baptism. Mary's little Son received the name of Jesus or Deliverer, because He was to deliver men from the slavery of sin. This was His appointed office by the Divine command, to put an end to the slavery in which men were held by the devil. He was sent to deliver me from the bondage under which I have long labored, the bondage to the opinion of men, the bondage to ill-temper, the bondage to passion, the bondage to selfishness, the bondage to self-will, the bondage to riches or comforts. O Jesus, Deliverer of those in bondage, by Thy sacred Circumcision deliver me!

*J*esus is also our Deliverer from the terrible consequences of sin. Our sins were remitted by the shedding of His Precious Blood. Without the shedding of blood, says St. Paul, there is no remission. What reason I have to dread the consequences due to my sins! Yet Jesus can and will deliver me from it, if I love Him as I ought.

*J*esus also is the Deliverer of all creation from the curse which came upon the whole earth at the Fall. He has sanctified it by the drops of His Precious Blood that fell upon it. Henceforward, it became a new earth, and one day He will cleanse it from all its impurities, and renew it to the heavenly beauty, and make it worthy to be the home of His elect.

January 6th

## The Epiphany

The Sun of Justice that rose on Christmas morn did not shine on the Jews only. The light that shone upon the rejoicing earth was a light that was to enlighten the Gentiles as well as to be the glory of the people of Israel. The feast of the Epiphany was the declaration of the world-wide dominion of the new-born King. It proclaimed that the kingdoms of this world were to be the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Rejoice with the Infant King in His universal sovereignty, and pray that His Kingdom may speedily be acknowledged by all His subjects.

Those who came to visit Jesus on the Epiphany were three kings. They came as the representatives of all earthly monarchies. They came to do homage and to adore the universal King of the whole earth. What a shadow of a shade is all temporal dominion compared with the dominion of Jesus! What unlimited homage we all owe Him! How we should rejoice to acknowledge Him our King and Lord by our loyal obedience to Him!

This festival is especially the feast of those who were once outside the Church. We are all converts, at least by descent. Our ancestors were once pagans until the Vicar of Christ sent to our beloved country the Apostle who proclaimed to us the faith of Christ. This faith in many lands has faded now, and mockery sits on Juda's throne. Alas, to think that those who had the inheritance of the faith have lost it! How can I ever be grateful enough for the light that shines on me?

January 7th

## The Magi

The three kings who came to do honor to Jesus on the feast of the Epiphany are also called the three Magi, or three Wise Men. They were the rulers of an Eastern tribe at some distance from Bethlehem. Like Abraham, they left home and country at God's command. If Abraham thus deserved to be called the Friend of God and Father of the Faithful, so these Wise Men were not only the subjects, but also the friends of Christ, and the spiritual Fathers of all faithful Catholics. We are their spiritual offspring; the innumerable company of Christians in Heaven will all have to thank them for having led the way to Jesus.

What led them to this long and apparently aimless journey? In their tribe there had long existed a tradition that one day or other a star would appear which the princes of the tribe were to follow, and, following it, to find the King of Heaven incarnate upon earth. How many generations had looked and longed for the promised sign! Yet it came at last. God always grants sooner or later the desires of those who long after Him.

When the star appeared, the Magi lost no time in setting out to follow it. Prompt obedience was their watchword; prompt obedience brought them to Jesus. Prompt obedience made them the earliest converts and the earliest of God's Saints. Prompt obedience to God's holy will is the secret of all sanctity.

January 8th

## Their Journey

*T*he journey of the Magi from their own country to Palestine, just because a star appeared in a certain quarter of the heavens, was very like a fool's errand. Was a mere floating tradition a sufficient ground for undertaking a long and costly journey? Were not their duties at home of more importance, and had they not a greater claim than this strange apparition which tempted them away? What is folly with man is often wisdom with God. How often have similar arguments been used to deter Protestants from making their submission to the Church, and to dissuade Catholics from consecrating themselves to God? Perhaps I may sometimes have followed the dictates of mere worldly wisdom, neglecting supernatural grace.

*T*he star led the Magi on till they arrived at Jerusalem, and then it disappeared. In the bustle of the city there was no star. In the palace of Herod there was no star. The busy hum of the crowd, the mere intercourse with the world, seems to be a hindrance to God's holy inspirations.

*D*id the Magi, under these circumstances, accept the situation, and devote their time to the sights and wonders of the Holy City? No, nothing would satisfy them except the fulfillment of their mission, what a lesson to us, who are so easily diverted by worldly things from seeking after God!

January 9th

## The Magi's Stay at Jerusalem

When the star disappeared, the Magi were not disconcerted. If God saw fit to withdraw His direct and extraordinary supernatural guidance, they must fall back on the ordinary means. So they sought for information from those on the spot as to the birthplace of the King of the Jews. Sometimes God leads us by His holy inspirations; sometimes He leaves us to discover His will by natural means. We cannot expect to live always, in the blaze of supernatural light showing us the way.

When Herod heard of the arrival of these distinguished strangers, and of their inquiries after a new-born King, he was troubled. The tyrant dreaded lest he should be superseded. It is one of the miseries of pride that it lives in continual dread of being set aside and humbled. Humility is never troubled, because it always loves the lowest place and rejoices in its own discomfiture.

The priests, when consulted, declared with one voice that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the King of the Jews. Yet they manifested no desire to follow the Magi thither. Their knowledge of the truth created in them no wish to carry it into practice. They could teach others, but they did not themselves act on the lessons they taught. How often have I done the same! I preach so well: I practice so ill.

January 10th

## Their Arrival at Bethlehem

When the Wise Men had obtained the information they needed, they wasted no further time at Jerusalem, but turned their steps towards the village of Bethlehem. Their faith was being very sorely tried. The star had disappeared; and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, instead of sharing their eagerness to find the new-born King, seemed to be either indifferent or positively hostile to the idea of His presence in their midst. So Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament lays waiting in the Tabernacle for a visit from those whom He loves. They have no longing after Him, no desire for His Company. Only a few faithful souls go to pay their court to Him. Am I one of them?

Scarce had they quitted the city when the star appeared again to their joyful eyes. There it is; there is no mistaking it. God has not deserted us! He is still guiding us, and we shall find Him whom we seek. No wonder that they rejoiced with great joy. So to those who have persevered amid doubt and darkness God soon restores the light of His presence. Courage, faint heart, the star will soon reappear.

At length the star, instead of moving above them in the heavens, came nearer to earth, and settled over the humble dwelling-place where Jesus and His Mother abode. What! the King of the Jews in that poverty-stricken shed? Yes, so it is; Christ scorns the gilded palace, and loves the humble hut. There He is at home; thither He invites His friends to come and see how He dwells with the poor and humble of heart.

January 11th

## The Finding of Christ

*I*t must have been rather a surprise to the Magi to find the new-born King so poorly housed and humbly clad. Their Eastern ideas of magnificence must have had rather a shock from the absence of all visible splendor from the cradle of the King of kings. Yet their faith never wavered. God was their teacher, and they had learned from Him the difficult lesson of not judging by outward appearances and the impressions of sense.

*W*ith beating hearts they knock at the door and Joseph opens to them. Within they find Him whom they were seeking, in the arms of Mary His Mother. That humble dwelling is full of a celestial light. Sweet songs of angel minstrelsy ring in their ears. Their hearts are full of an unspeakable joy and assurance that before them they have the King of the Jews, nay, the Lord of heaven and earth, the Saviour and their God.

*T*he first impulse of their hearts is to fall prostrate before that little Child. They fell down and adored Him. What a happiness it was to them to make their submission to Him! - To profess their loyalty, to declare that they belonged to Him body and soul for time and for eternity. O Jesus, to Thee and to Thee only I belong. Make me Thy faithful servant now and forever.

January 12th

## Their Gifts: (1) Gold

*Why* did the Magi offer gold to the Babe in Mary's arms? It was in recognition of Him as their King. It was the tribute by which they declared themselves His vassals, professed their loyal submission to His sway. This is the very foundation of all supernatural virtue, not only to acknowledge Christ as our King, but to pay Him the homage which is His due as the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

*The* Magi also by their offering of gold gave to Him the most precious gift they had to give. They were the first Christian almsgivers, and their almsgiving was a pattern to all who should follow them. They gave liberally; they gave royally; they gave gifts which cost them something. Is this the character of my almsgiving? Or do I give sparingly and grudgingly? I must not forget that Christ sees and remembers not only the amount of the gifts I give to Him, but the spirit in which they are given.

*The* gold of the Magi also signifies the virtue of charity, without which we can do nothing to please God. Charity is the gold fire-tried which He counsels the tepid to buy of Him. It is the virtue which is the standard by which the value of all other virtues is tested. It is the virtue which caused Jesus Christ to come and dwell upon earth. O that I had more self-denying charity to others, more of the gold wherewith Heaven is bought!

January 13th

## Their Gifts: (2) Frankincense

The offering of frankincense to any one has always been regarded by the common consent of mankind as an acknowledgment of inherent deity. When the Christians were commanded to throw a grain of incense on the altar of Jupiter or Minerva, it was in acknowledgment of their divinity. The Magi, then, by this offering to Christ of incense, were the first Gentile witnesses to His Divinity. They made thereby an implicit act of faith in His Godhead, and proved the honor they paid Him to be that highest honor that belongs to God alone.

Frankincense is, moreover, a symbol of all that is sweetest and most fragrant. What's so sweet to Jesus as the complete offering of ourselves to Him implied in the homage paid to Him as God? Jesus, my God, my all, I offer Thee my heart, my soul, myself!

Frankincense is the material symbol under which prayer is indicated in Holy Scripture. The Angel offers in the Apocalypse the prayers of the Saints in a golden censer, and there comes up continually from earth the cloud of prayers as a cloud of incense. Among them my prayers arise. Are they such as will be fragrant and pleasing to God?

January 14th

### Their Gifts: (3) Myrrh

*M*yrroh is the herb used most largely for embalming. It has the power to prevent corruption and preserve the purity and freshness of the body which is in contact with it. It was offered to our Lord as a testimony, not only of the perfect and unsullied purity of those to whom He is united by the bonds of charity, but also in evidence of the power of His Sacred Body to save from corruption those who partake of It in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

*T*hus myrrh was offered to our Lord as possessing a true human body, as being truly Man as well as truly God. We must never lose sight of this fact of Christ's Humanity, that He has all the sympathy and interest in all that concerns us that we have perhaps received from some kind earthly friend, all His desire to help us, all His wisdom, prudence, patience, appreciation of our griefs and sorrows; and all this to a degree compared with which our best friend on earth does not deserve the name. Why do I not have recourse to Him more?

*M*yrroh is also the symbol of mortification. If our bodies are to be pure, we must mortify our evil desires and give up what is very attractive to our lower nature. If we desire great purity of heart, we must mortify ourselves in things lawful, and deny ourselves even what we might enjoy without sin. Do I do this?

January 15th

## Their Return Home

*B*efore the Magi left Jerusalem for Bethlehem, Herod had enjoined upon them that they should return and tell him where the new-born King of the Jews was to be found, declaring that he too desired to come and adore Him. Hypocrite and treacherous liar that he was, his real object was to destroy his supposed rival. He made no scruple of planning the murder of one who might possibly supplant him. Those who love worldly honor are always unscrupulous. It has the power of blinding the eyes and deadening the conscience, and making men esteem evil good and good evil.

*T*he Magi seem to have been deceived by Herod's fair words, and to have promised to return with the information he asked for. Good men are always unsuspecting of evil. We all judge others by ourselves. If you want to know your own character, ask yourself whether your judgment of others is a charitable or uncharitable one.

*W*hen the Magi had finished their visit to Bethlehem, they prepared to return to Herod. But an Angel warned them to avoid the city where he dwelt, and to go back to their own country by some other way. We need never fear lest our charitable judgments should do harm. God will provide against this; it is our harsh and severe judgments which are productive of so much evil to ourselves and others.

January 16th

## Herod's Vengeance

**W**hen Herod found that the Magi did not return with the information respecting the King whom they were seeking, he became uneasy. The plan he had cunningly devised had come to naught; the rival monarch seemed likely to escape his hands. One day perhaps he or his children would be dethroned by Him. O empty fears! That little Child seeks no worldly honor; He will not interfere with any earthly monarch. The secret fear that destroys the peace of unscrupulous men is often as empty as Herod's. The terrors they suffer are the just rewards of their evil deeds. How often I have been anxious and troubled because my pride could not brook being humbled!

**B**ut Herod was utterly unscrupulous as well as ambitious. There was one way in which he could secure this end. By putting to death all the young children in the country round Bethlehem, he would compass the death of this royal Child. Pride and ambition not only blind men, but make them utterly indifferent to the sufferings of others and the laws of right and wrong. I, too, have often recklessly made others suffer to gratify myself and carry out my own selfish ends.

**W**hen Herod came to die, how awful must have been the terrors of his guilty conscience. The blood of those children slaughtered at his command had long cried out to Heaven for vengeance. Each one of them added to his remorse and eternal misery in Hell. If evil men foresaw the consequences to themselves of the sins they commit, they would dread sin, even venial sin, far more than any earthly misery they could suffer.

January 17th

## The Angel's Warning

One night when Joseph was peacefully sleeping at Bethlehem, an Angel's voice aroused him from his slumber, and he saw before him one of the messengers of the Most High, who said: "Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and fly into the land of Egypt, for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." Hence observe:

That God's ways are very different from ours. We should have expected that He would exert His Divine power in behalf of His only-begotten Son, and that the soldiers of Herod would be struck with blindness on the road, or would somehow fail to discover where Jesus was, or perhaps would come and fall prostrate at the feet of the new-born King. How different the course enjoined by the Angel! Apparently, so clumsy a way of saving Jesus from His enemies. Yet such are God's ways--clumsy in the eyes of men. What strange presumption it is that I should criticize the Divine arrangements as I sometimes do.

Then the conditions of safety seemed so unnecessarily hard. Why to Egypt? A pagan land, the very name of which was a synonym for bondage and misery. Was this the only way to preserve the life of the Son of God? To all this one answer: It was God's will, and that was enough.

But after all it was but a vision of the night, perhaps a dream or a mere subjective fancy. Could anything so wild and imprudent come from God? To all this one answer: I know the message came from God, and I cannot and will not evade the Divine command.

January 18th

## Joseph's Obedience

No such questioning as we have supposed in our last meditation ever occurred to St. Joseph's mind. His duty, his pleasure was to hear and to obey. Not a moment did he lose. He roused his Virgin Spouse and told her what they had to do, and ere morning dawned, they had left Bethlehem far behind.

Yet there was no hurry or bustle or undue haste in the preparation they made. No rushing to and fro, no impatience, not a movement but such as was calm and deliberate, modest and dignified. It is one of the marks of sanctity to have thus under control every look and every action. How can I stand this test? When time presses, or my indignation is aroused, or my patience tried, am I gentle, and peaceful and calm?

Observe, moreover, how there is not a single word of complaint or of grumbling, no expression of annoyance or word of mutual commiseration. Each seeks to lighten the work of the other. How cheerful both Mary and Joseph are--almost joyous! It is a trial, yes, but more for the sake of the Divine Child than for their own. Even the thought of what Jesus may have to suffer never destroys their peace. O happy Joseph! O blessed Mary! make me more like you.

January 19th

## The Perils of the Way

Out into the darkness of the night went Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Can these homeless wanderers really be the three whose value in the eyes of Heaven made all the rest of the world insignificant as a grain of sand compared with a continent? Yes, this is God's way of treating those whom He loves best. Herod, in his luxurious palace, is feasting and reveling; Jesus, Mary and Joseph are shivering in the cold and stormy night. How foolish, then, to desire ease and comfort, or to regret the hardships that befall me!

Whither were they going? To Egypt, along an unknown road to a distant and idolatrous country; not knowing the way, not knowing how long they should find subsistence from day to day. What was the trial of Abraham compared with this? He went forth with an escort of servants and camels, and tents, and a store of good things; the Divine Son of God and His parents are empty-handed and alone. Picture with compassion the sufferings of the Holy Family on their perilous journey.

What were those sufferings? Often they knew not where to lay their heads, and had to sleep under the starry sky. Sometimes they were in danger from the rough bandits who infested the road. Sometimes the wild beasts howled around them. This was a model of the life of the Christian. Sometimes deprived of all spiritual sustenance and of all human consolation; sometimes fiercely attacked by men: sometimes by evil passions and the rage of Satan: yet always safe under the watchful care of God.

January 20th

## The Arrival in Egypt

At length they reached the spot that God desired for their sojourn, in a land full of idols and idolaters. What uncongenial surroundings for the Holy Family, alone in the midst of those who worshipped a false god! How painful for them to see God thus dishonored! In the same way many a Catholic has to dwell in a most uncongenial atmosphere--perhaps among heretics, or bad Catholics, or those whose words and looks and actions continually jar and cause pain. Patience! Jesus and Mary know by experience what such have here to suffer.

When the Holy Family arrived in Egypt, in the town where they came to dwell, all the idols in the temples fell prostrate to the ground, and were shattered to pieces. Thus when Christ comes to dwell within the soul, all that opposes itself to God is destroyed by His sacred Presence. If Jesus dwells with us, we shall no longer allow pride, envy, bitterness, self-will, and discontent, to reign in our hearts.

The presence of the Holy Family in Egypt hallowed the spot where they sojourned. In early Christian times it was covered with the cells of the monks and hermits. Thus Jesus always leaves a blessing behind Him. When He comes to me in Holy Communion, if only I put no obstacle in the way, my soul will flourish with virtues and good works as the effect of His Presence.

January 21st

## The Long Waiting

*F*rom week to week and month to month the Holy Family remained in the land of Egypt. From day to day they knew not whether they were to spend all their days in banishment, far from the dear land of Israel, or to return thither, it might be on the morrow; yet no shade of impatience ever marred the perfection of their peace and resignation to the will of God. How different from me, who is so anxious and troubled about the future!

*D*uring all this time, St. Joseph supported his holy Spouse and the Infant Jesus by working at his trade. They often felt the pinch of poverty, but never wanted for bread. God forsakes not His own, though He sometimes tries them to the very edge of their powers of endurance. He will not forsake me, if I put my trust in Him.

January 22nd

## The Return Home

*A*t length, when it seemed as if God had almost forgotten His well-beloved Son, the summons came to return to the land of Israel. An angel appeared to Joseph with the welcome news that those who had sought the life of Jesus were dead, and that therefore they might go back in safety. Those who are willing to wait are sure to obtain their desires. It is impatience, and the restless desire for immediate relief, that lead to so many disappointments. In the things of God, as in all else, it is those who wait who win.

*H*ow full of joy were the hearts of Joseph and Mary, as they neared once more their native land. Like all the Saints, they had an intense love for their country and their people and their home. Holy indifference does not mean that we have no natural affections for kindred and for fatherland, but that those affections are entirely subordinate to the will of God.

*I*f the people of Egypt knew not that their God was dwelling among them, they knew that they had amongst them those who were the special friends of God. Mary and Joseph had endeared themselves to all around by their gentleness, charity, patience, courtesy, humility, thoughtful kindness to all. To them how terrible a grief was the departure of the Holy Family! Do I endear myself to those among whom I live?

January 23rd

## The Arrival in Palestine

**W**hen, Joseph arrived with Mary and her Divine Son in their land, his first thought was to turn to Bethlehem, and to dwell in peace where he had dwelt so peaceably before. But to his sorrow he had learned that the son of the impious Herod was ruling in his father's place. He was not going to expose to any risk the treasure committed to him, and at once he determined to turn his steps elsewhere. Notice his prudence, and beware of running any risk with the treasure of grace God has committed to you. One serious sin will lose them all.

**W**hither should he go? It was all one to St. Joseph, as long as he went whither God sent him. He was quite as ready to go to Nazareth as anywhere else, if God directed his steps thither. This should be my disposition, to be ready to go anywhere, and live in any place, where God may send me.

**H**ow did St. Joseph decide where he was to dwell? [He did so ] by prayer and by good counsel. He asked of God to turn his steps whither He willed, and he also did not neglect the rules of human prudence. This is St. Ignatius' advice: (1) Act with prudence but never forget to consult God. (2) While you trust all to God, do not lose sight of the importance of using natural means.

January 24th

## The Hidden Life

*T*he life of each member of the Holy Family was from the first a hidden life, for it was a life hidden with God, and concealed from the busy world. The life of Jesus in Mary's womb was thus the model of the lives of all who desire to give themselves entirely to God; a life completely withdrawn from all that could interfere with a continual thought of God and a continual union with Him by acts of adoration and of love. This should be my aim at least during such portions of the day as I am able to give to prayer and to spiritual things.

*B*ut a life of complete removal from external things is not possible on earth. It is reserved for the Blessed in Heaven. Even Joseph and Mary had sometimes to turn their thoughts to earthly things and to the cares of life. Yet they never lost sight of God, and amid the most distracting occupations the remembrance of Him was ever in their hearts. This should be my constant endeavor; thus to lead a hidden life by having ever hidden in my heart the precious treasure of the love of God.

*B*ut the hidden life of Mary and Joseph was from the very first much more than this; they, in the midst of the most distracting cares, had the gift of always having the thought of God actually present to them. Their conscious intercourse with Him never ceased. This is the nearest approach to the life of the Angels that is possible for mortal man on earth. What a contrast to my life, so often absorbed in worldly trifles!

January 25th

## Mary's Hidden Life

Though Mary's life was essentially a hidden life, even from the beginning, yet we may date the hidden life which she enjoyed as Mother of God from the moment when He came to dwell in her chaste womb. Before this she had the thought of God always in her heart; now she had God Himself within her. By day and by night, sleeping and waking, she had the Infinite God not only present to her, not only within her, but bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh. Who can understand this mystery? Who can ever fathom the depth of God's love for Mary, if He could rejoice in dwelling in her immaculate womb?

St. Paul was so closely united to Jesus that he could say with literal truth: "It is no more I that live, but Christ that lives in me." How far more truly and literally could Mary make these words her own; in every possible sense they were true of her during the nine months that followed. Yet with us in Holy Communion our Lord makes Himself one in a manner scarcely less wonderful. Ask yourself how far you can make St. Paul's words your own.

What, too, can have been the nature of the intercourse of Mary with Him who was far nearer to her than to any other of all the creatures that He had made? Her prayers had not to be carried up by angels to the throne of God; for God had come down to be not only her guest, but was so entirely one with her that every throb of her heart was echoed in His. Wonder at Mary's privileges, and reflect what must have been her unapproachable holiness to have merited them.

January 26th

## The Hidden Life at Bethlehem

When the Son of God first appeared among the children of men, He chose no ordinary dwelling for His birthplace. Not even the little cottage at Nazareth, not even the humblest room in the humblest of the shepherds' huts at Bethlehem, but a stable--a place quite unfit for human habitation. There it was that Mary had to take shelter, there it was that the God-made Man first saw the light of day. Compassionate Jesus and Mary on what seems to us so unworthy of the dignity of God and His Holy Mother.

Why did Jesus choose a stable for the place of His Nativity? It was not merely on account of its poverty, or the discomforts it brought with it, but also because it was of all places the last where men would naturally look for the Son of God, and therefore the one where He would most perfectly fulfill the words of Holy Scripture, "Truly Thou art a hidden God!" As He completely concealed His Divine glory under the veil of flesh, so He concealed the glory attaching to Him as Man by seeking all those circumstances where it would be most entirely out of sight. What a contrast to myself, who seek to make the most of all that I think would tend to my own honor, and exalt me in the eyes of men.

There was another reason why Jesus thus hid Himself. He desired to teach us that if we wished to live in close union with God, we must live a hidden life, far away from the busy crowd and the din and strife of human society. Even if our lot is cast in the midst of the world's din and tumult, yet in heart and desire we must seek to dwell with Jesus in the retirement of the peaceful stable at Bethlehem.

January 27th

## The Days of Purification

*D*uring the forty days that followed on childbirth, Jewish women were regarded as impure; they were not allowed to enter the Temple, or to touch things holy, but had to live in seclusion at home. Was Mary subject to this law? Was she in any sense impure through her having brought forth the Divine Son of God? On the contrary, He consecrated and increased her spotless purity by dwelling in her immaculate womb. She was made more holy, more glorious than ever, by the fact of her bringing into the world the King of Heaven and earth.

*W*hy then did Mary undergo the time of Purification? It seems almost to imply that she was impure, like all the other daughters of Eve. Yet Mary submitted to it, out of love of the laws that God had laid down for His people. Each detail of the ordinances and customs prescribed with Divine sanction was dear to her, and she rejoiced to obey.

*M*ary had another reason for submitting herself to the humiliating seclusion. Anything that lowered her in the eyes of men was a source of heartfelt joy to her. Her humility delighted in anything that served to hide her high privileges from the eyes of those around her. How different am I, who am anxious to conceal all that lowers me in the eyes of others, and to make known whatever I think will exalt me before them. O Mary, pray for me, that I may have more of thy spirit of true humility!

January 28th

## The Lessons of the Purification

*How* was it that Almighty God allowed the spotless Virgin to submit to what seemed to justify the inference that Mary did not differ from the rest of the Jewish women, and even that the Son of God was born in the same condition as any other child? Jesus had come to be made sin for us; and therefore took upon Himself all the consequences of sin as far as His sinless and Divine Nature permitted. Mary then, on account of her share in the work of redemption, had to submit to the same law. She had to share all the various forms of suffering and ignominy that Jesus took upon Himself, so far as one could whose nature was wholly created by God.

*Already* by His Circumcision Jesus had appeared, as it were, in the character of a sinner; and therefore it was but fitting that Mary should appear as one who needed purification. Yet how false, how blasphemous the inference! Learn never to Judge rashly, however plausible the inference may seem to be.

*As* our Lord prayed and fasted to teach us the importance of prayer and fasting, though He needed neither, so Mary was purified that we might learn how essential it is that we should purify ourselves from all defilement, if we are to be fit to approach the God of infinite purity and to hold sweet communion with Him in His temple. In this way, we may learn how in the sight of God, Mary Immaculate, of all creatures the purest, spent these days of legal purification.

January 29th

## Holy Simeon

*When* the ceremony of Presentation was over, an aged man advanced towards the little group, and took the Infant Jesus out of His Mother's arms. Sweetly he smiled upon the Child, and then looking up to Heaven he thanked God for having given him the privilege of seeing that happy day on which, in the Temple of the Lord, he saw the Lord of the Temple Himself presented to His Eternal Father. Now he was content to depart in peace; for this foretaste of Heaven made earth and earthly things grievous and wearisome to him. Has the presence of Jesus the same effect of making me dissatisfied with aught else than Him?

*How* long Simeon had been waiting for that day! Long years before, God had revealed to him, that he should not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. But year after year had passed, and he had almost begun to wonder whether he had been deceiving himself in thinking that such a promise had been made him. So we have often to wait long before God fulfills His promises to us. Yet if we wait a little longer He will give us what we desire in rich abundance, even beyond what He promised.

*It* must have appeared very strange to those who listened to him that the holy man should speak of this little Child in what must have seemed to them such extravagant terms. They saw in Him nothing so wonderful. His father and mother were ordinary sort of people, of the lower class. It is the old story; the natural man judging by appearances; the spiritual man endowed with a clearer vision, and judging in accordance with the Truth of God.

January 30th

## The Prophecy of Simeon

*W*hen holy Simeon had finished his act of thanksgiving, and had blessed the Holy Family, he uttered the prophecy that still goes by his name, and that is especially remembered by us as having pierced with anguish the Immaculate Heart of Mary. "This Child is set for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel." How could Jesus their Saviour be set for their fall? Yet so it is: to those who reject Him, He is not a Saviour, but a Judge.

*H*ow can this be? Because every grace rejected is not merely lost, but the loss leaves him who has rejected it in a worse condition than before. It actually proves the occasion of sorrow and regret to him. The fact of rejection injures and weakens the soul. My God, may I never knowingly reject any grace of Thine!

*T*he last portion of Simeon's prophecy was a direct presage of anguish to Mary herself: "Yea, through thine own soul a sword shall pierce." Mary knew well that these words contained a promise of sorrow such as no child of Adam had ever endured before. She knew this, and she joyfully accepted it for the sake of being like to her Divine Son, who, she well knew, was to be the Man of Sorrows. Am I thus willing to bear pain for His sake?

January 31th

## Holy Anna

*A*fter Simeon had handed back the Divine Child to His Mother, another dweller in the Temple came upon the scene. Holy Anna, an aged servant of God, who never left the Temple, and devoted her whole life to the prayer and praise of God, advanced under God's holy inspiration to adore the Infant Christ, and pay her homage of respect and congratulation to His Holy Mother and foster-father. She, too, had waited long for that crowning grace. She was eighty years old before it was vouchsafed to her. Perhaps I have been waiting long years for some grace, and think that it is too late now. Courage! it is never too late. Our greatest grace may come at eighty years of age.

*H*oly Anna, full of joy and happiness, confessed to the Lord, bearing witness before all that the Infant in Mary's arms was none other than the promised Messiah, the Deliverer and the King of His people Israel, and the God and Lord of all the earth. Her long fasts and prayers had obtained for her the gift of faith, so clear and vivid that she saw beneath the veil of flesh the Divine Nature of the Babe before her. It is thus that the mental vision becomes quick in its discernment of heavenly things; those who pray and mortify themselves have always a keen appreciation of Divine truths.

*H*oly Anna did not keep to herself the knowledge that in their midst was the Lord of Heaven and earth. She spoke of Him to all the dwellers at Jerusalem. Happy those who speak of God to others! They shall shine like the stars to all eternity.

