



*As a star its kindred ray,
Mary doth her Child display,
Like in nature:
Still undimmed the Star shines on,
And the Virgin bears a Son,
Pure as ever.*

(CHRISTMAS SEQUENCE)

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A MARY CHRISTMAS

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Behold, I come . . . to do thy will, O God.
Ps. 39, 8-9.



ESUS AND MARY are so inseparable that it seems significant, or at least symbolic and not merely a pun, that in our tongue the Yuletide greeting "Merry Christmas" can so easily be heard as "Mary Christmas."

Mary's Christmas, her first Christmas, what a memorable one it was! True it was spent in a stable and was without the royal splendors that should have attended the birth of the King. Yet as she held the Infant in her arms, did Mary sing a lullaby to her Baby or whisper a prayer to her God? Her gentle lullaby was a prayer and her every prayer a lullaby. Never before was so sweet a song sung to so precious a Child by so tender a Mother. There was much music in the air that night. Angels filled the vault of the sky and their song came from Heaven to earth. It was the Glory to God in the Highest. While the Blessed Mother wrapped the Lord of creation in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, shepherds heard the angels' song. To these simple folk a message was delivered:

Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there has been born to you today in the town of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.¹

The shepherds were asked to leave their sheep and come to see the Lamb of God. The thronged little town of Bethlehem was probably quiet by now. No one, besides Mary and Joseph, was at the birth-

¹ Luke 2, 10-12.

place of the Lord, but only dumb animals. Traditionally these were the ox, the donkey, and the sheep: the ox of which it is said: Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out thy corn on the floor.² Yet this Child would some day be crucified by those who were the fruit of His redemption. The donkey recalls the triumphal entrance of Christ into Jerusalem. While the sheep, of course, is here, for this is the *Agnus Dei*. But lo! The shepherds arrive to behold their shepherd. Mary shows them the Blessed Fruit of her womb. The loving Mother and Child impart their benediction.

Mary has just brought the Divine Saviour into the world, and, as she looks on these first visitors, she prays that the world will be brought back to its God. The reign of Jesus through Mary has begun. As the shepherds gaze on the Holy Family, somehow they realize something tremendous is before them although they hardly understand it. The Immaculately Conceived is holding her Redeemer and theirs! All they know is what the angels told them, but they do perceive the beauty of Mary. She is evidently only a Jewish maiden, yet there is a maturity, a motherly affection, a warmth about her that make them consider her less the young girl and more the queen she really is.

MADONNA AND CHILD

True the Child is the main object of the shepherds' attention. It is to see Him that they have come. Out of recognition of His greatness these good people fall upon their knees. There is no doubting already that this little Child will take after His Mother, although the shepherds do not know the reason why this must be so. Looking at Mary they realize that the Infant will be a comely youth and a handsome man. Such beauty as this they had never seen in the hills of Judea.

Since it was to be Mary's delight to be with the children of men, it must have been a special favor of God, now that the first half of the Hail Mary was completed, that brought her in contact with her future children so quickly. In the Divine Mind of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity all men were at the crib in Bethlehem, that is, all the men who would ever adore at the crib. And Mary knew this. She knew that with God there is no past nor future, but all things are immediately present. Although the baby eyes of her little Child could barely perceive the small gathering of shepherds paying homage, the

² Deuteronomy 25, 4.

Divine Mind saw every Christmas scene there ever would be and everyone who was in it.

Christians who have heeded the call of God must some Christmas day fall to their knees in prayer at the reproduction of this first Nativity night. Mary could not see the future as God has it present to Himself. But she could, did, and always will pray for all men to be included in the elect who come to the spiritual Bethlehem. Mary realized the signification of the word Bethlehem. It means "House of Bread." She also knew that her Divine Son was to be the Bread of Life. The whole purpose of her role in the Redemption of mankind was clear to her. Someday, she knew, there would be many Bethlehems, Houses of Bread, in other words, churches and chapels, where the Eucharistic Body of Christ would be reserved; and, during the solemn celebration of His Sacred Passion, this Bread would be fed to His followers in Holy Communion.

JOYFUL MOTHER

Perhaps for this one great night Mary saw only the goodness of God and not the depravity of man. She saw only what God had given and not what man would forget or refuse. That night, in the shepherds, Mary beheld man turned towards God in love and supplication, his arms outstretched to receive the gifts of God. There was at the crib in the mind's eye of Mary, the innocence of children, the purity of the virgins, the steadfastness of the martyrs, the boldness of the confessors. She could see the sacrifices of mothers and fathers, the thoughtfulness of the powerful, the meekness of the poor. Before her passed all the virtues, graces, and favors man would be given and could accept. For this one night, the first Christmas, Mary had all the joy of the feast. Since her mind and heart were lifted in prayer to God, this was perhaps the most joyful moment of her earthly existence.

Yet there were so many reminders of man's hardness of heart. The humiliating surroundings of a stable for a human being's birth place. Even the coldness of the still night could have impressed upon Mary the selfishness of men. And she might have felt sad at the thought of holy Joseph's futile but courageous efforts to provide a better lodging. Somehow, in spite of this, since Joseph uttered no complaint, Mary could not be distracted from the great mystery of the birth of the Saviour. Nothing else really mattered.

Actually this first Christmas of the Blessed Mother could not be other than joyful. The Word was made flesh, from her flesh. Now

that He was born, now that His human nature no longer dwelt within her, Mary would nevertheless keep the Word in her heart, pondering upon It constantly. With her mind and heart dedicated to God, Who is goodness itself, Mary had no room for any other thoughts. Hence, since she had Goodness possessed, there was nothing left to do but rejoice. The angels sang and Mary's heart was dilated with joy.

But that first Christmas is gone. It is past as far as time is concerned. To God, however, all things are present, including that night in Bethlehem. Each year on earth, where time still measures motion, there can be another Mary Christmas. It can be had amidst all the additional activities that men have put into Christmas. The cheerful greeting of "Happy Christmas" can remind one of the "artless mirth of the shepherds." The Christmas tree that opens wide the eyes of little boys and girls and is often a source of joy to the poor, Christ's representatives in the poverty of the stable, has the greenness and freshness of things young and new.³ The only requirement for a Mary Christmas is to exchange gifts with God: to return one's heart for the heart of the Babe of Bethlehem.

³ St. Andrew Daily Missal. By Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, O.S.B. p. 126.