

## Merry Christmas

*"Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*



The Sunday before Christmas I ran a pastor's column about the Holy Family settling into Bethlehem and the cave in which baby Jesus was born. Today I write about Our Lord's birth in the cave and the shepherds who saw the angels and visited Our Lord. These visions are taken from Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich about the life of Jesus

Christ. Blessed Anne was the greatest visionary on the Life of Jesus the Church has ever known. She passed away in 1823. You can find all of her visions from Angelico Press, much of them are free online as well. What I share here is highly abridged due to a lack of space. If you missed the pastor's column "Journey to Bethlehem" from Sunday, December 21, you can still read it by visiting our website at [columbiarivercatholic.org](http://columbiarivercatholic.org) and clicking on the Resources tab, or scanning the QR code at the end of this Pastor's Column. Enjoy this story of how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.

May Almighty God Bless You,

Fr. Thomas Nathe

**Taken from The Life of Christ by Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich**

### The Birth of the Child Jesus

[The morning after arriving at the cave] I saw Joseph arranging a seat and couch for Mary in the so-called Suckling Cave of Abraham. It was more spacious than the cave of the Crib. Mary remained there some hours, while Joseph was making the latter more habitable. Mary told him that the birth hour of the Child would arrive on the coming night. It was then nine months since her conception by the Holy Ghost. She begged him to do all in his power that they might receive as honorably as possible this Child promised by God, this Child supernaturally conceived; and she invited him to unite with her in prayer for those hard-hearted people who would afford Him no place of shelter. It was five o'clock in the evening when Joseph brought Mary back again to the Crib Cave. He hung up several more lamps, and made a place under the shed before the door for the little she-ass, which came joyfully hurrying from the fields to meet them.

When Mary told Joseph that her time was drawing near and

that he should now betake himself to prayer, he left her and turned toward his sleeping place to do her bidding. Before entering his little recess, he looked back once toward that part of the cave where Mary knelt upon her couch in prayer, her back to him, her face toward the east. He saw the cave filled with the light that streamed from Mary, for she was entirely enveloped as if by flames. It was as if he were, like Moses, looking into the burning bush. He sank prostrate to the ground in prayer, and looked not back again. The glory around Mary became brighter and brighter, the lamps that Joseph had lit were no longer to be seen. Mary knelt, her flowing white robe spread out before her. At the twelfth hour, her prayer became ecstatic, and I saw her raised so far above the ground that one could see it beneath her. Her hands were crossed upon her breast, and the light around her grew even more resplendent. I no longer saw the roof of the cave. Above Mary stretched a pathway of light up to Heaven, in which pathway it seemed as if one light came forth from another, as if one figure dissolved into another, and from these different spheres of light other heavenly figures issued. Mary continued in prayer, her eyes bent low upon the ground. At that moment she gave birth to the Infant Jesus. I saw Him like a tiny, shining Child, lying on the rug at her knees, and brighter far than all the other brilliancy. He seemed to grow before my eyes. But dazzled by the glittering and flashing of light, I know not whether I really saw that, or how I saw it. Even inanimate nature seemed stirred. The stones of the rocky floor and the walls of the cave were glimmering and sparkling, as if instinct with life.

Mary's ecstasy lasted some moments longer. Then I saw her spread a cover over the Child, but she did not yet take It up, nor even touch It. After a long time, I saw the Child stirring and heard It crying, and then only did Mary seem to recover full consciousness. She lifted the Child, along with the cover that she had thrown over It, to her breast and sat veiled, herself and Child quite enveloped. I think she was suckling It. I saw angels around her in human form prostrate on their faces. It may, perhaps, have been an hour after the birth when Mary called St. Joseph, who still lay prostrate in prayer. When he approached, he fell on his knees, his face to the ground, in a transport of joy, devotion, and humility. Mary again urged him to look upon the Sacred Gift from Heaven, and then did Joseph take the Child into his arms. And now the Blessed Virgin swathed the Child in red and over that in a white veil up as far as under the little arms, and the upper part of the body from the armpits to the head, she wrapped up in another piece of linen. When Mary laid the Child in the Crib, both she and Joseph stood by It in tears, singing the praises of God.

The seat and the couch of the Blessed Virgin were near the Crib. I saw her on the first day sitting upright and also resting on her side, though I noticed in her no special signs of weakness or sickness. Both before and after the birth, she was robed in white. When visitors came, she generally sat near the Crib more closely veiled.

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On the night of the Birth there gushed forth a beautiful spring in the other cave that lay to the right. The water ran out, and the next day Joseph dug a course for it and formed a spring.

I saw extraordinary gladness, and in many places, even in the most distant regions of the world, something marvelous on that midnight. By it the good were filled with joyful longings, and the bad with dread. I saw also many of the lower animals joyfully agitated. I saw fountains gushing forth and swelling, flow-ers springing up in many places, trees and plants budding with new life, and all sending forth their fragrance. In Bethlehem it was misty, and the sky above shone with a murky, reddish glare. But over the valley of the shepherds, around the Crib, and in the vale of the Suckling Cave floated bright clouds of refreshing dew.

I saw the herds of the three oldest shepherds near the hill under sheds; but those further on near the shepherds' tower, were partly in the open air. The three eldest shepherds, roused by the wonders of the night, I saw standing together before their huts, gazing around and pointing out the magnificent light that shone over the Crib Cave. The shepherds at the dis-tant tower were also in full movement. They had climbed up the tower and were looking toward the Crib Cave over which they, too, saw the light. I saw something like a cloud of glory descend upon the three shepherds. I saw in it figures and heard the approach of sweet, clear voices singing softly. At first, the shepherds were frightened. Soon there stood before them five or seven lovely, radiant figures holding in their hands a long strip like a scroll upon which were written words in letters a hand in length. The angels were singing the *Gloria*.

The angels appeared also to the shepherds on the tower and elsewhere. I did not see the shepherds hurrying off at once to the cave. The first three were indeed an hour and a half distant from it, and those on the tower as far again. But I saw that they began at once to reflect upon what gifts they should take to the newborn Savior, and to get them together as quickly as possible. The three shepherds went to the Crib Cave early next morning.

I saw that Anne at Nazareth, Elizabeth in Juttah, Noemi, Anna, and Simeon in the Temple—all had on this night visions from which they learned the birth of the Savior. The baby John the Baptist was unspeakably joyous. But only Anne knew where the newborn Child was; the others, and even Elizabeth, knew indeed of Mary and saw her in vision, but they knew nothing of Bethlehem.

In the early dawn after the birth of Jesus, the three oldest of the shepherds came to the Crib Cave with the gifts they had gathered together. They told Joseph at the entrance of the cave what the angel had announced to them, and that they had come to do homage to the Child of Promise and to offer Him gifts. Joseph accepted their presents and allowed them to lead the animals [given as gifts] into the space that formed a kind of

cellar near the side entrance of the cave. Then he conducted them to the Blessed Virgin, who was sitting on the ground near the Crib, a rug under her, the Infant Jesus on her lap. The shepherds, their staves resting on their arms, fell on their knees and wept with joy. They knelt long, tasting great interior sweetness, and then intoned the angelic canticle of praise, and a Psalm that I have forgotten. When they were about to take leave, Mary placed the Child in their arms.

Some of the other shepherds came in the evening, accompanied by women and children, and bringing gifts. They sang most sweetly before the Crib the *Gloria*, some Psalms, and short re-frains of which I remember the words: "O Child, blooming as a rose art Thou! As a herald Thou comest forth!" They brought gifts of birds, eggs, honey, woven stuffs of various colors, bundles of raw silk, and ears of corn, also several bundles of a corn with heavy grains growing on a stalk with large leaves like those of rushes.

The three oldest shepherds came back in turn and helped Joseph to make the Crib Cave and its surroundings more comfortable. I saw also several pious women with the Blessed Virgin, performing some services for her. They were Essenians, and lived in the valley, not far from the Crib Cave, in little rocky cells adjoining one another. They owned little gardens near their cells, and they taught the children of their community. St. Joseph had invited them to come, for he was acquainted with them even in early youth. When he was hiding in the Crib Cave, from his brethren, he visited these pious women who dwelt in the side of the rock. They now came in turn to the Blessed Virgin, bringing little necessities and bundles of wood. They cooked and washed for the Holy Family.

Some days after the birth of Jesus, I saw a touching scene in the Crib Cave. Joseph and Mary were standing by the Crib and gazing with emotion upon the Infant Jesus, when suddenly the ass fell upon its knees and lowered its head to the ground. Mary and Joseph shed tears. After the Sabbath, the Essenian women got a meal ready under the arbors which Joseph, with the help of the shepherds, had put up at the entrance of the cave. Joseph went into the city to engage priests for the circumcision of the Child. The cave was cleared and put in order. The partition that Joseph had put up in the passage was removed, and the ground spread with carpets, for in this passage near the Crib Cave, the place for the ceremony was prepared.

(To read previous Pastor's Columns, scan the QR code.)

