

CHAPTER XXII

The Nativity of the Precursor of Christ, and what the Sovereign Lady, Mary Most Holy, Did at His Birth.

270. The hour for the rising of the shining light (Jn. 5:35) which was to precede the clear Sun of justice and announce the desired day of the law of grace had arrived. It was the opportune time to issue forth to the light the great prophet of the Most High, and John was more than a prophet (Lk. 7:26), who preparing the hearts of men was to point out with his finger the Lamb (Jn. 1:29) who was to bring remedy and sanctification to the world (Lk. 1:76; 7:27). Before he issued from the maternal womb the Lord revealed to the blessed child the hour in which he was to begin his mortal career among men in the common light of all. The child had the perfect use of his reason and the divine science infused by the presence of the incarnate Word; he therefore knew he was to arrive at the port of a cursed and dangerous land (Gen. 3:17), and walk upon a world full of evils and snares, where many are overtaken by ruin and perdition.

271. For this reason the great child was as it were in a state of suspense and doubt. On the one hand, nature having nourished his body to that state of perfection which is proper to birth, he recognized and felt, in addition to the express will of God, the compelling forces of nature which urged him to leave the retreat of the maternal womb; on the other hand he knew and contemplated the risk of the dangerous journey through mortal life. Thus he hesitated between the fear of danger and the desire to obey, and he debated within himself: "Where shall I go, if I enter into the conflict of the danger of losing God? How can I submit myself to the conversation of mortals in which so many blind themselves and lose their sense and the way of life? I am in darkness in my mother's womb; yet into another darkness of great danger I must pass. I have been compressed here since I received the light of reason; yet more oppressed shall I be in the expanse and liberty of mortals. Nevertheless let us go, O Lord, into the world according to thy will, for to execute it is always best. And if in thy service, O highest King, I can employ my life and my faculties, this alone shall ease my passing into the light and the course of my journey. Give me, O Lord, thy blessing for my passage into the world."

272. By this prayer the Precursor of Christ merited new graces and blessings at his birth. The fortunate child knew by the presence of God in his mind that he was sent to perform great things and was assured of the necessary help. Before relating this most happy parturition of St. Elizabeth, and in order to reconcile the sequence of events with the text of the sacred Evangelists, I give notice that the pregnancy resulting from this admirable conception lasted nine days less than nine months, for due to the fecundity miraculously restored to a barren woman the fruit conceived matured for parturition in this shorter time. When St. Gabriel announced to most holy Mary that her cousin was in the sixth month of her pregnancy (Lk. 1:36), it must be understood to mean that eight or nine days were still lacking for the completion of the sixth month. I have also said in chapter XVI (206) that the heavenly Lady departed on the fourth day after the Incarnation of the Word for her visit to St. Elizabeth. St. Luke does not say that most holy Mary departed immediately, but *in those days* (1:39), and though She went *in haste*, yet She consumed four days on her journey, as said in the same chapter, number 207.

273. I likewise remind the reader that when the same Evangelist says most holy Mary remained about three months in the house of St. Elizabeth (Lk. 1:56), there were only two or three days missing, for in all respects the Evangelist was exact in his words. Accordingly most holy Mary, our Lady, was present not only during the confinement of St. Elizabeth and the birth of St. John,

but also at the circumcision and determination of his mysterious name as I shall now show (290). Counting eight days after the incarnation of the Word, our Lady arrived at the house of Elizabeth on the evening of the second of April, if we reckon according to our solar months; adding thereto three months less two days, we have the first of July, the eighth day of the birth of St. John, and early the next day most holy Mary departed on her return to Nazareth.* St. Luke mentions the return of our Queen before he speaks of the birth of St. John, although this happened before She returned (Lk. 1:56-7). The sacred text anticipates the mention of the journey in order to finish it and not interrupt the thread of the narrative of the birth of the Precursor. This is what I was told to write in explanation of the text.

274. Her time approaching, St. Elizabeth felt the child in motion as if he wanted to place himself on his feet, yet he was merely following the ordinary course of nature and the dictates of obedience. Some moderate pains overtook the mother and she informed the Princess Mary; however, she did not call Her to be present at the birth because the worthy reverence due to the excellence of Mary, and for the fruit within her womb, prudently withheld her from asking what might not seem appropriate. Neither was the great Lady personally present where her cousin was, yet She sent her the coverings and swaddling clothes which She had made for the fortunate child. Presently thereafter he was born, very perfect and mature, the cleanliness of his body testifying to the purity of his soul, for he was not born with such impurities as other children. He was wrapped in the coverings, which were already great relics worthy of veneration. Shortly after, when St. Elizabeth had composed herself, most holy Mary at the command of the Lord issued from her oratory in order to pay her visit to the mother and child and give them her blessing.

275. At the request of his mother the Queen received in her arms the newborn child and offered him as a new oblation to the eternal Father, and His Majesty received it with approbation and pleasure as the firstfruits of the works of the incarnate Word and the execution of his divine decrees. The most blessed child, full of the Holy Ghost, acknowledged his sovereign Queen, showing Her not only interior but outward reverence by a secret inclination of his head, and anew he adored the divine Word made man in the womb of his most pure Mother, where He was at that time manifested to him by a special light. And since he also knew the singular benefit he among all mortals had received, the infant in recognition performed great acts of gratitude, humility, love, and reverence of the Godman and of his Virgin Mother. The heavenly Lady in offering him to the eternal Father offered this prayer for him: "Most high Lord and eternal Father, holy and powerful, receive into thy service the gift and first fruit of thy most holy Son and my Lord. He is sanctified and rescued by thy Onlybegotten from the power and effects of sin and of thy ancient enemies. Receive this morning sacrifice, and infuse into him along with thy holy blessing thy divine Spirit, so he may faithfully accomplish the ministry destined for him in thy honor and that of thy Onlybegotten." This prayer of our Queen was efficacious in all respects, and She perceived how the Lord enriched this child, chosen as his Precursor. She also felt within Herself the effects of these admirable blessings.

276. While the Queen of the universe held the infant in her arms She was for a short time secretly rapt in sweetest ecstasy; during it She offered up this prayer for the child, allowing him to recline on her bosom where the Onlybegotten of the Father and her own was soon to rest. This

* The Catholic Church celebrates the great mystery of the Visitation on this date, July 2, when proper attention and devotion can be given to it, even though this is the date of Our Lady's *departure*. On the date of her *arrival*, April 2, the Church is enveloped in the remembrance of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary. [Ed.]

was the singular prerogative and excellence of the great Precursor, granted to none other among the saints. Therefore it is not surprising that the Angel called him great in the eyes of the Lord (Lk. 1:15), for before he was born the Lord visited and sanctified him, and at his birth he was raised and placed on the throne of grace. He was embraced by the arms which were to enfold God himself made man, and thereby excited in the sweetest Mother of God the entrancing desire of holding within them the Son of the Most High, filling Her with delightful affections for his Precursor, the newborn child. St. Elizabeth knew these divine sacraments, for the Lord manifested them to her. She beheld her miraculous child in the arms of one who was his Mother in a more exalted sense than she herself, since St. Elizabeth was his mother in regard to nature, while most pure Mary was his Mother regarding his existence in such excellent grace. All this caused a most sweet consonance in the hearts of the two most happy and fortunate mothers and in the child, who also shared in the light of such venerable mysteries. By the motions of his tender body he manifested the joy of his spirit, clinging to the heavenly Lady and seeking to attract her caresses and remain with Her. The sweetest Lady caressed him, but with such majestic moderation that She did not kiss him as his age would have permitted, for She preserved her most chaste lips intact for her most holy Son. Nor did She look intently into his face, directing all her attention to the sanctity of his soul. So great was the prudence and modesty of the great Queen of heaven in the use of her eyes that She would scarcely have known him by sight.

277. When the birth of John became known all the relations and acquaintances, as St. Luke says (1:58), gathered to congratulate Zacharias and St. Elizabeth, for his house was rich, noble, and honored in the whole province, and their piety attracted the hearts of all who knew them. Having known them so many years without children, and being aware of the sterility and advanced age of Elizabeth, all were stirred to amazement and joyful wonder, and they looked upon the birth of the child rather as a miracle than a natural event. The holy priest Zacharias remained mute and unable to manifest his joy by word of mouth, for the hour of his miraculous cure had not arrived; yet, freed of his incredulity, he showed his joy in other ways and was full of affectionate gratitude and praise for the rare blessing which he had now witnessed with his own eyes. His behavior we shall describe in the next chapter.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN AND LADY OF HEAVEN GAVE ME.

278. My dearest daughter, do not be surprised that my servant John feared and hesitated to come into the world. Life can never be loved by the ignorant children of the world in the same degree as the wise, in divine science, abhor and fear its dangers. This science was eminently possessed by the Precursor of my most holy Son; hence, knowing the loss which threatened he feared the risk. But since he who knows and dreads the treacherous seas of this world sails so much the more securely over their unfathomed depths, it served him well for entering securely into the world. The fortunate child began his career with such disgust and abhorrence of all earthly things that his horror never abated. He made no peace with the flesh, nor partook of its poison, nor allowed vanity to enter his senses or obstruct his eyes; in abhorrence of the world and of worldly things (James 4:4) he gave his life for justice (Mk. 6:17ff.). The citizen of the true Jerusalem cannot be in peace or alliance with Babylon, nor is it possible to enjoy at the same time the grace of the Most High and the friendship of his declared enemies; for no one can serve two hostile masters,* nor can light and darkness, Christ and Belial, harmonize (II Cor. 6:14-15).

* cf. Mt. 6:24 [Ed.]

279. Guard thyself, my dearest, against those living in darkness and the lovers of the world more than against fire, for the wisdom of the sons of this world is carnal and diabolical (Rom. 8:7), and their ways lead to death. In order to walk the way of truth, even at the cost of one's natural life, it is necessary to preserve the peace of the soul. Three dwelling places I point out for thee to live in, from which thou must never intentionally come forth. If at any time the Lord bids thee to relieve the necessities of thy fellow creatures, yet I desire thee not to lose this refuge. Act as one who lives in a castle surrounded by enemies, and who perchance must go to the gate to transact necessary business; he acts with such wariness that he will pay more attention to safeguard his retreat and shield himself than to transact business with others, being always on the watch and on guard against danger. So must thou live if thou dost desire to live securely, for doubt not that enemies more cruel and poisonous than asps and basilisks surround thee.*

280. Thy habitations shall be the Divinity of the Most High, the humanity of my most holy Son, and thy own interior. In the Divinity thou must live like the pearl in its shell, or like the fish in the sea, allowing thy desires and affections to roam in its infinite spaces. The most holy humanity shall be the wall which defends thee, and his bosom shall be the place of thy rest, and under his wings shalt thou find refreshment (Ps. 16:8). Thy own interior shall give thee peaceful delight through the testimony of a good conscience (II Cor. 1:12), and it will, if thou keep it pure, familiarize thee with the sweet and friendly communication with thy Spouse. So thou mayest be aided therein by retirement of the body, I desire thee to remain secluded in thy choir or in thy cell, leaving it only when obedience or charity makes it inevitable. I will tell thee a secret: There are demons whom Lucifer has expressly ordered to watch for the religious who come forth from their retirement in order to beset them and engage them in battle and cause their fall. The demons do not easily go into the cells because there they do not find the occasions given by speech, sight, and the bad use of the senses, whereby they ordinarily capture and devour their prey like ravenous wolves. They are tormented by the retirement and recollection of religious, knowing they are foiled in their attempts as long as they cannot entice them into human discourse.

281. In general it is also certain that the demons have no power over souls unless the souls subject themselves and allow the demons to gain entrance by some venial or mortal sin respectively. Mortal sin gives the demons a sort of direct right over those who commit it, while venial sin weakens the strength of the soul and invites their attacks. Imperfections diminish the merit and the progress of virtue and encourage the enemy. Whenever the astute serpent notices the soul sustains its own lukewarmness, or takes danger lightly with an idle levity and becomes oblivious of its danger, he blinds it and seeks to instill his deadly poison. The enemy then entices the soul like a careless little bird until it falls into one of the many snares from which there seems to be no escape.

282. Be astonished, my daughter, by what thou hast learned by divine enlightenment, and weep in deepest sorrow over the ruin of so many souls absorbed in such dangerous tepidity. They live darkened by their passions and depraved inclinations, oblivious of the danger, unaware of the damage, and careless in the occasions of evil; instead of fearing and avoiding them, they seek them with blind ignorance. They follow in furious impetuosity their twisted inclinations toward pleasure, place no restraint on their passionate desires, and care not where they walk, even if to the most dangerous precipices. They are surrounded by innumerable enemies who pursue them with diabolical treachery, unceasing vigilance, unquenchable wrath, and restless diligence. Hence what wonder is it that from such extremes, or rather from such unequal combat,

* cf. Ps. 90:13 [Ed.]

irreparable defeats arise among mortals, and since *the number of fools is infinite* (Eccles. 1:15) the number of the reprobate is uncountable, and the demon is puffed up with pride by such triumphs he has over mortals in their own and formidable perdition? May the eternal God preserve thee from such unhappiness, and do thou weep and deplore that of thy brethren, praying always for the remedy as far as it is possible.