

CHAPTER XII

What was Hidden from the Demon Regarding the Mystery of the Birth of the Incarnate Word, and Other Happenings until the Circumcision.

500. As far as depended upon the Lord the coming of the eternal Word as man was most fortunate and blessed for all mortals, for He came in order to give light and life to all those who were *in darkness, and in the shadow of death* (Lk. 1:79). If the foreknown and incredulous stumbled and hurt themselves on this cornerstone (Rom. 9:33; Mt. 21:44; I Peter 2:8), seeking ruin where they could and should have found resurrection to an eternal life, that was not the fault of the stone but of those who made of it an occasion of scandal and harm to themselves. Only for hell the birth of the Infant God was terrible, since He was the strong and invincible One (Ps. 23:8) who came to despoil that armed enemy of his tyrannous rule (Jn. 12:31), founded in lies, who had held his fortification in unjust yet peaceful possession for a long time (Lk. 11:21). In order to depose this prince of the world and of darkness it was proper for the sacrament of the coming of the Word to be hidden from him, for not only was he unworthy because of his malice to know the mysteries of infinite wisdom, but it was just that by divine Providence the malice of this enemy be blinded and confused (Wis. 2:21), for in his malice he had brought into the world the deceit and blindness of sin (Ib. 24), and had cast down the whole human race by the fall of Adam (Rom. 5:12).

501. Accordingly Lucifer and his ministers were left in ignorance of many things which they could naturally have known concerning the Nativity of the Word and other events in the course of his most holy life, a fact of which it is necessary to take notice in this History (*Inc.* 326; *Tran.* 217, 226, 284, etc.); for if he had known for certain that Christ was true God, he evidently would not have procured his death (I Cor. 2:8), but would have sought to prevent it as will be said in its proper place (*Tran.* 494, 540, 613). Concerning the mystery of the Nativity he knew only that most holy Mary had given birth to a Son in poverty and in a forsaken cave, and that She had not even found lodging and shelter; also that the Child was circumcised and otherwise treated as a mere man, all of which was calculated rather to mislead his pride than to enlighten it. But he was ignorant of the manner of his birth, and the virginity of the Blessed Mother before and after his birth, likewise of the message of the Angels to the just and the shepherds, and of their conversations and adoration of the infant God. Nor did he see the star, nor did he know the purpose of the Kings in coming to Bethlehem, though he saw them make the journey and attributed it to some worldly enterprise. The demons were also unable to account for the changes in the elements, stars and planets, though they well perceived these changes and wonderful effects. They misjudged the words of the Magi in the presence of Herod, their arrival at the stable, their adoration, and the gifts offered. Although they perceived the fury of Herod against the children and abetted it, stirring up his cruelty, yet they did not understand his object. Even though Lucifer suspected that Herod was seeking to kill the Messiah, he considered him demented and treated him with derision; in his pride he obstinately held fast to the opinion that the Word upon entering into the world in order to set up his dominion would not come humbly and in a hidden manner, but with ostentatious power and majesty, while in reality the Infant God chose a far different way, being born of a Mother poor and despised by men.

502. Thus misled, Lucifer, having noticed some of the strange events connected with the Nativity, called together his ministers in hell and said to them: "I do not find any occasion for fear in the events which we have noticed in the world. It is true, the Woman whom we

persecuted so much has given birth to a Son, but in such poverty and neglect that She could not even procure a lodging place in order to be delivered. We know all this to be far from the power and greatness of God. If He is to advance against us as weak as we have seen this Child and as we have assured ourselves concerning Him, He certainly can make no headway against our power. We need not fear He is the Messiah, since there is even a plot to kill Him as being mortal like the rest of men. This does not seem to point Him out as the Savior of the world, since He himself seems to stand in need of atoning for his fault by death. All these signs conflict with the purpose of the Messiah in coming into the world, and therefore it seems to me we can rest assured that He has not yet come.” The ministers of malice approved of the decision of their damned head and were all satisfied the Messiah had not yet come, for they were all accomplices in the malice and pride which blinded him (Wis. 2:21). It never occurred to Satan in his vanity and indomitable pride that in his majesty and grandeur God would humiliate himself, since he himself sought after applause, ostentation, reverence and exaltation, wishing if possible to appropriate all honor to himself. Since all honor was attainable by God, it never entered his mind that He would consent to the contrary and subject Himself to humiliation, so much abhorred by the spirits of evil.

503. O sons of vanity! What examples are here given to you for your enlightenment! Great is the lesson which the humility of Christ, our Teacher and our highest Good, teaches and urges upon us. But if this does not move us, let the pride of Lucifer at least deter and frighten us. O vice, O sin, dreadful beyond human imagination, since it confused an angel of such high intellect so much that he could judge of the infinite bounty by no other standard than that by which he judged himself and his own malicious disposition! How far then does man proceed in malice, if to his ignorance he joins guilt and pride? O unhappy and most foolish Lucifer! How far didst thou go astray in judging of so reasonable and commendable a proceeding! What is more beautiful than humility and meekness joined with majesty and power? Why dost thou fail to see, insignificant creature, that not to know how to humiliate thyself is only weakness of mind and comes from a base heart? The magnanimous and truly great do not seek payment in vanity, nor do they seek after what is low, nor can they be satisfied with what is false and apparent. It is evident, O Lucifer, that when it comes to the truth thou art tenebrous and blind, and but a most confused guide for the blind (Mt. 15:14), since thou didst fail to understand that the grandeur and goodness of divine love manifested and exalted itself (Rom. 5:8) by humility and obedience even to the death of the cross (Philip. 2:8).

504. All these errors and insanities of Lucifer and his ministers were known to our Lady, the Mother of Wisdom, and with a just appreciation of such high mysteries She magnified and blessed the Lord because He had concealed them from the proud and arrogant and revealed them to the poor and humble (Mt. 11:25), thus beginning to overcome the tyranny of the demons. The most kind Mother offered up fervent prayers for all mortals who because of their faults were unworthy of seeing the light which for their salvation had appeared in the world (Jn. 1:9-10), and all this She presented to her most sweet Son with incomparable compassion and love for sinners. In these affections She spent most of the time of her stay in the cave of the Nativity. Yet since this place was bare of all comfort and much exposed to the inclemencies of the weather, the great Lady was most solicitous for the shelter of her tender and sweet Child. As a most prudent Mother She had brought along a mantle with which She covered Him in addition to the ordinary swaddling clothes; moreover, She held Him continually in the embrace of her sacred arms, except at times when in order to make St. Joseph happy She asked him to hold his incarnate God in his arms and serve him as a father.

505. When for the first time She placed the Infant God in his arms most holy Mary said to him: “My spouse and helper, receive in thy arms the Creator of heaven and earth, and enjoy his amiable and sweet company, so my Lord and my God may be delighted and recompensed by thy faithful services (Prov. 8:31). Take to thyself the Treasure of the eternal Father, and participate in this blessing of the human race.” And speaking interiorly to the divine Infant She said: “Sweetest Love of my soul and Light of my eyes, rest in the arms of Joseph, my friend and spouse. Do Thou hold sweet conversation with him, and pardon me my shortcomings. Much do I feel the loss of Thee even for one instant, but I desire to communicate without envy (Wis. 7:13) the good I have received to all who are worthy.” Her most faithful spouse, acknowledging this new blessing, humbled himself to the earth and answered: “Lady and Sovereign of the world, my Spouse, how can I, being so unworthy, presume to hold in my arms God himself, in whose presence tremble the pillars of heaven (Job 26:11)? How can this vile wormlet have courage to accept such an exalted favor? I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27); but do Thou, Lady, assist me in my lowliness, and ask His Majesty to look upon me with clemency and make me worthy through his grace.”

506. His desire of holding the Infant God and his reverential fear of Him caused in St. Joseph heroic acts of love, faith, humility, and most profound reverence. Trembling with discreet fear he fell on his knees to receive Him from the hands of his most holy Mother, while sweetest tears of joy and delight copiously flowed from his eyes at a happiness so extraordinary. The divine Infant looked at him caressingly and at the same time renewed his inmost soul with such divine efficacy as no words can suffice to explain. St. Joseph broke out in new canticles of praise at seeing himself thus enriched with such magnificent blessings and favors. After having for some time enjoyed in spirit the sweetest effects of holding in his arms the Lord who contains heaven and earth (Is. 40:12; 48:13), he replaced Him into the arms of his fortunate Mother, both of them being on their knees in receiving and giving Him. Similar reverence the most prudent Mother observed every time She took Him up or relinquished Him, in which also St. Joseph imitated Her as often as it was his happy lot to hold the incarnate Word. When they approached His Majesty they also made three genuflections, kissing the earth and exciting heroic acts of humility, worship and reverence. Thus both the great Queen and blessed St. Joseph observed all propriety in receiving or giving the Child to and from one another.

507. When the heavenly Mother judged it time to nourish Him at her breast She reverently asked permission of her Son, for though She knew She was to nourish Him as her true and human Child, She nevertheless bore in mind that He was at the same time the true God and Lord, and that a great distance intervened between the infinite Being and a mere creature such as She was. As this consciousness was unailing in the most prudent Virgin, her reverence remained faultless and undiminished, permitting not the least forgetfulness in Her. She was always filled with a comprehensive insight, and always reached perfection in all her acts. Therefore She nourished, served and watched over her Child not with an uneasy haste, but with unremitting care, reverence and discretion, causing ever new admiration in the Angels, whose celestial understanding reached not so far as to comprehend such heroic acts of a tender Maiden. Since they were always corporally present during the time which She spent at the portal of the Nativity, they served and administered to Her all things necessary for the service of the Infant God and the Mother herself. All these mysteries are so wonderful and admirable, and so worthy of our attention and remembrance, that we cannot deny our negligence in forgetting them, and we cannot acknowledge sufficiently what harm we are doing ourselves in ceasing to think of them,

nor do we sufficiently understand the divine effects which the memory of them produce in the faithful and grateful children of the Church.

508. By the intelligence which has been given me concerning the veneration with which most holy Mary and the glorious St. Joseph treated the Infant God made man, and the reverence of the angelic choirs toward Him, I could greatly extend this discourse on the subject. Though I refrain, yet I wish to confess the lack of reverence with which I have until now audaciously behaved toward God, and how many faults of which I have been guilty toward Him in this respect have become known to me. In order to assist the Queen all the holy Angels of her guard remained present in visible forms from the time of the Nativity until the flight of the Child into Egypt, as I shall relate later on (619ff.). The solicitude of the humble and loving Mother for her divine Infant was so unremitting that She would not part with Him to place Him in the arms of St. Joseph or into those of the holy princes Michael and Gabriel except on rare occasions when She was obliged to take some nourishment, for these two Archangels had besought Her to consign the Child to their care during meals or when St. Joseph was at his work. Thus He was placed into the hands of the Angels in admirable fulfillment of the words of David (Ps. 90:12): *In their hands they shall bear thee up*, etc. The most watchful Mother would not take any sleep in her solicitude for her most holy Son except when His Majesty commanded Her to do so. In reward for her diligence He provided for Her a new and more miraculous kind of sleep than what She had until then enjoyed, for while She slept her Heart was awake, continuing or rather not interrupting the divine intelligences and contemplation of the Divinity. But from this day on the Lord added still another miracle, namely during the sleep which was necessary She retained in her arms the power of holding and embracing the Child in the same way as if She were awake, and She gazed upon Him with the eyes of her intellect as if She were looking upon Him with her bodily eyes, understanding all that She herself and her Child did exteriorly in the meanwhile. Thus was miraculously fulfilled what is said in the Canticles (5:2): *I sleep, and my heart watcheth*.

509. The canticles of praise and exaltation of the Lord which our celestial Queen composed in honor of the Child, alternately singing them with the holy Angels and with her spouse Joseph, I cannot express by my curtailed expressions and limited terms of speech. Regarding them alone there would be much to write, for they were uninterrupted; however, the knowledge of them is reserved for the special enjoyment of the elect. Among mortals the most happy and privileged in this regard was the most faithful St. Joseph, for in many of them he himself participated and many of them he understood. Besides this he enjoyed another favor of singular benefit and consolation to his soul and procured for him by the most prudent Virgin, namely many times in conversing with him of the Child She spoke of Him as “our Son” (Lk. 2:48); not that He was the natural son of St. Joseph, since in the supernatural order He was the Son of the eternal Father and in the natural order the Son of his Virgin Mother, but because in the opinion of men He was reputed to be the son of Joseph. This favor and privilege was of inestimable value to the Saint and caused him immeasurable delight; for this reason his heavenly Spouse delighted in using this appellation when conversing about her Son.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN AND LADY OF HEAVEN GAVE ME.

510. My daughter, I see thee full of devout emulation of the happiness which the conversation with my Son gave to me, to my spouse, and to the holy Angels, since we beheld Him present to our bodily eyes as thou dost desire for thyself if it were possible. I desire to console thee and guide thy affections toward that which thou thyself can and should do according to thy condition

in order to attain the same happiness which thou dost covet in us. For this purpose, beloved, recall what thou hast already sufficiently understood concerning the ways of God in raising up those souls whom He seeks with paternal love and affection. Thou hast attained this knowledge by being favored with so many particular calls and enlightenments of the Lord whereby He continually waits at the portals of thy heart (Wis. 6:15; Apoc. 3:20), calling thee and waiting so long, urging thee by repeated favors and exalted doctrine in order to teach thee and secure for thee the close bond of his love (Col. 3:14) and conversation for which He has in his condescension disposed and chosen thee, and expecting thee to procure by most attentive solicitude the great purity which this calling requires.

511. Faith likewise teaches thee that God is present in all places by his essence and by the power of his divinity, and that to Him are open all thy thoughts, desires and sighs without exception. If thou cooperate with this truth so as to preserve the graces which thou receivest through the holy Sacraments and other channels divinely instituted, the Lord shall remain with thee also by divine and special assistance, and in it He shall regale thee with his love as his chosen spouse. Now since thou knowest and understandest all these truths, tell me, what more canst thou envy or desire, when thou dost already possess all thou so anxiously sighest after? What remains for thee, and what I desire of thee, is for thee to labor by this holy emulation to imitate the conversation and condition of the angels and the purity of my spouse, and to copy in thyself the way of my life, as far as possible, in order to be a fit dwelling place of the Most High (I Cor. 3:17). All those endeavors, desires and exertions with which thou wouldst have wished thyself to be animated if thou hadst seen and adored my most holy Son in his birth and infancy thou must direct toward the fulfillment of this doctrine, for if thou shalt imitate me thou mayest rest secure thou hast me for a Teacher and the Lord for an assured possession of thy soul. In this assurance thou canst speak to Him, embrace Him, and delight thyself with Him, since thou hast Him present with thee; for in order to communicate these delights to the pure and untainted souls He has assumed human flesh and become a Child. But always look upon Him as the great God, though a Child, so thy caresses can be guarded by reverence and thy love accompanied by holy fear, for the one is due to Him as God and the other befits his immense bounty and merciful magnificence.

512. In this manner of treatment thou must continue without intervals of lukewarmness, lest thou disgust Him.* Thy legitimate and chosen occupation should be none other than the love and praise of his infinite Being. All the rest thou must enter into only sparingly, in such a way as if visible and earthly things scarcely concerned thee and cannot detain thee even for a moment. In this soaring flight thou must consider thou hast nothing urgent to attend to outside of the true and highest Good whom thou seekest. Thou must imitate me, and for God alone must thou live; all the rest must not exist for thee, nor must thou exist for it. But the gifts and blessings which thou receivest I desire thee to dispense and communicate for the benefit of thy neighbor according to the order of perfect charity, that by doing so thy gifts may not become void (I Cor. 13:8), but rather more augmented. In this thou must preserve thy manner of proceeding according to what is appropriate for thy condition and state, as in other places I have shown and instructed thee.

* cf. Apoc. 3:16 [Ed.]