

CHAPTER XXIV

The Holy Travelers Jesus, Mary and Joseph arrive in the Populated Parts of Egypt; They are Conducted by the Angels through Many Towns, and the Infant Jesus Destroys the Idols along the Way.

641. I have already mentioned that the flight of the incarnate Word contained other mysteries and aimed at more exalted ends than to evade Herod and his persecution. The flight into Egypt was to give the Lord an occasion of visiting that country and performing the miracles spoken of by the ancient Prophets (Ez. 30:13; Osee 11:1). Isaias more expressly prophesies of them when he says *the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst thereof* (Is. 19:1). These and other things contained in this prophecy happened at the time of the birth of Christ our Lord. Yet passing over what does not pertain to my purpose, I wish to say that, continuing their pilgrimage in the manner already described, Jesus, Mary and Joseph arrived in the populated districts of Egypt. Before they came to the place of their abode in Heliopolis they were conducted by the Angels, according to the ordainment of the Most High, in a roundabout way so they would pass through many places where God desired his miracles and blessings to be wrought for the good of the Egyptians. Thus it came that they consumed in this journey more than fifty days, and the distance of their journey from Bethlehem or Jerusalem amounted to more than two hundred leagues, while by a direct route such long-protracted travel would not have been necessary.

642. Egypt was much given to idolatry and its corresponding superstition. Even the small villages of this country were full of idols. In many of these places temples had been built and in them were various demons, and the inhabitants, instructed by these same demons, gathered in them to offer services and sacrifices in their honor, while the demons answered their prayers by oracles, thus obtaining full control over this foolish and superstitious nation. Steeped in these deceits they lived on in such error and subjection to the demons that only the strong arm of the Lord (which is the incarnate Word [Is. 51:9]) could rescue these forsaken people and deliver them from the oppression in which Lucifer held them,* more hard and dangerous than that in which the Egyptians had held the people of God (Ex. 1:11). In order to obtain this deliverance and enlighten those who were living in the region and the shadow of death (Lk. 1:79), and so they could see the great light spoken of by Isaias (Is. 9:2), the Most High ordained that Christ, the Sun of justice (Mal. 4:2), would a few days after his birth appear in Egypt in the arms of his most fortunate Mother, and journey and pass through this country, illumining it everywhere by the power of his divine light.

643. Thus the infant Jesus, with his Mother and St. Joseph, reached the inhabited country of Egypt. Upon entering the towns the divine Infant, in the arms of his Mother, raised his eyes and his hands to the Father asking for the salvation of these inhabitants held captive by the demon, and immediately made use of his sovereign and divine power and drove the demons from the idols, hurling them to the infernal abyss. Like lightning flashed from a cloud they darted forth and descended to the lowermost caverns of hell and darkness (Lk. 10:18). At the same instant the idols crashed to the ground, the altars fell to pieces, and the temples crumbled to ruins. The cause

* cf. Lk. 11:21-22 [Ed.]

of these marvelous effects was known to the heavenly Lady, for She united her prayers with those of her most holy Son as Cooperatrix of his salvation. St. Joseph also knew this to be the work of the incarnate Word, and he praised and extolled Him in holy admiration. But the demons, though they felt the divine power, knew not from whence this power proceeded.

644. The Egyptian people were astounded at these inexplicable happenings, although among the more learned, ever since the sojourn of Jeremias in Egypt, there was a certain enlightenment or tradition that a King of the Jews would come and the temples of the idols would be destroyed. Yet regarding this prophecy the common people had no knowledge, nor did the learned know how it was to be fulfilled, and therefore the terror and confusion was spread among all of them, as was prophesied by Isaias (19:1). In this disturbance and fear some, reflecting on these events, came to our great Lady and St. Joseph, and in their curiosity at seeing these strangers in their midst they also spoke to them about the ruin of their temples and their idols. Making use of this occasion the Mother of Wisdom began to undeceive these people, speaking to them of the true God and teaching them that He is the one and only Creator of heaven and earth (Ecclus. 1:8; Is. 37:16), who alone is to be adored and acknowledged as God (Dt. 6:13); that all others are but false and deceitful gods (Bar. 6:44), nothing more than the wood or clay or metal of which they are made, having neither eyes, nor ears, nor any power; that the same artisans who made them, or any other man, could destroy them at will, since any man is more noble and powerful than they;* that the oracles which they gave forth were answers of the lying and deceitful demons within them; and that the latter had no power, since there is but one true God.

645. The heavenly Lady was so sweet and kind in her words, which were at the same time so full of life and force, her appearance was so charming, and all her conversation was accompanied by such salutary effects, that the rumor of the arrival of these strange Pilgrims quickly spread about in the different towns, and many people gathered to see and hear them; moreover, the powerful prayers of the incarnate Word wrought a change of hearts, and the crumbling of the idols caused an incredible commotion among these people, instilling into their minds knowledge of the true God and sorrow for their sins without their knowing whence or through whom these blessings came to them. Jesus, Mary and Joseph pursued their way through many towns of Egypt, performing these and many other miracles, driving out the demons not only from the idols but out of many bodies possessed by them, curing many who were grievously and dangerously ill, and enlightening the hearts by the doctrines of truth and eternal life. By these temporal benefits and others, so effectual in moving the ignorant, earthly-minded people, many were drawn to hear the teaching and doctrine of life and salvation of their souls.

646. They arrived at Hermopolis, which lies in the direction of the Thebaid, and is called by some the city of Mercury. In it there were many idols infested by powerful demons. One of them dwelt in a tree at the entrance of the city. The neighboring inhabitants had begun to venerate this tree because of its size and beauty, whence the demon had taken occasion to erect his seat in it. When the incarnate Word came within sight of this tree, not only was the demon hurled from his seat and cast into hell, but the tree bowed down to the ground as if rejoiced by its good fortune, for even the senseless creatures testify how tyrannical is the dominion of this enemy. This miraculous reverence of the trees happened at other times during this journey of Christ, although these incidents are not all recorded, but the memory of this event remained for centuries, for the leaves and fruits of this tree cured many sicknesses. Of this miracle some authors make mention,

* cf. Ps. 134:15-17; Wis. 15:15-17 [Ed.]

as well as others in other cities visited by the incarnate Word and his Mother in that land.* There is to this day a fountain near Cairo from which the heavenly Lady drew water for Herself and the Child, and for washing his clothes. All this rests on truth, and the veneration for these wonders and these places still lives, not only among the faithful who visit the holy places, but also among the infidels, who there occasionally obtain temporal benefits from the hands of the Lord, for also the infidels sometimes obtain certain favors so the Lord would be justified before them, or so the memory of his wonders could be preserved. But it is not necessary to speak of them especially just now, since the principal wonders during the stay of our Lord in Egypt were wrought in Heliopolis, which not without mysterious import was called City of the Sun, and is now called Grand Cairo.

647. In writing of these wonders I asked the great Queen in astonishment how She could have traveled with the Child through so many strange provinces and cities? For it appeared to me that She thereby prolonged exceedingly the labors and hardships of their journey. And our Lady replied: "Do not wonder that my most holy Son and I journeyed so far in order to gain souls. For the sake of even one soul, if necessary, and if there was no other remedy, we would willingly traverse the whole world." If what Jesus and Mary did for our salvation seems great to us, it is because we do not understand the immensity of their love, and understand just as little how to make a proper return for such love.

648. Because of these strange happenings, when so many of the demons were driven by a new and unaccustomed power to populate hell, Lucifer was highly disturbed. Furiously enraged, he issued forth into the world in order to investigate the cause of such unlooked for events. He roamed about through all Egypt, where so many temples and altars of his idols had been overthrown, and reaching Heliopolis, which was a major city and the scene of the greatest destruction of his dominions, he sought to find out and examine with great attention what kind of people dwelt therein. He found nothing new, except most holy Mary had arrived in the city. Of the infant Jesus he made no account, deeming Him a child just like all the rest of that age, for he knew nothing particular about Him. But since he had been so often vanquished by the virtues and sanctity of the Virgin Mother, he was seized with new consternation. Although he considered a woman far too insignificant for such great works, yet he resolved anew to persecute Her and stir up against Her his associates in wickedness.

649. He therefore returned immediately to hell, and calling a meeting of the princes of darkness he told them of the destruction of the temples and idols in Egypt, for these demons had been hurled by the divine power from their habitations with such suddenness, confusion and torment that at their departure they were unable to ascertain the fate of the idols and temples which they were forced to leave. Informing them of all that had happened, and that he feared the destruction of his reign in Egypt, Lucifer told them he could not find out or understand what the cause of this ruin was, since he had found there only that Woman, his enemy (for so the dragon called most holy Mary); and though he knew her virtue was very distinguished, yet he did not presume it to be of such great force as had been experienced on that occasion. Nevertheless, he wished them to begin a new war against Her, commanding all to prepare themselves for it. The satellites of Lucifer proclaimed their readiness to obey, trying to console him in his desperate fury and promising him victory, as if their forces were as great as their arrogance (Is. 16:6).

* cf. Nicephor 1. 10, c. 31; Sozomen 1. 5, c. 20; Brocard in *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, part II, c. 4. [Most Rev. Samaniego]

650. Many legions of demons issued forth together from hell and went to the place where the Queen of heaven was at that time. Since they suspected God had used most holy Mary as his instrument in causing all their losses in that wretched kingdom, they thought they could make up for their defeat and restore their dominion if they succeeded in overcoming Her. But they were astonished to find that when they attempted to approach Her in order to begin their diabolical temptations they could not come nearer to Her than a distance of two thousand paces, for they were restrained by the divine power which they perceived issuing forth from the heavenly Lady herself. Although Lucifer and the hostile bands struggled violently, they were paralyzed and as if bound in strong and tormenting shackles, without being able to reach the most unconquerable Queen, while She witnessed their struggles, holding in her arms the power of God himself. As Lucifer persevered in his attempts he was suddenly hurled into the abyss of hell with all his squadrons and wicked spirits. This defeat and ruin filled the dragon with vast torment and anxiety, and since similar defeats had overtaken him repeatedly since the Incarnation, as has been said (130, 318, 370, 643), he began suspecting whether the Messiah had come into the world. But since he knew nothing of the mystery, and expected the Messiah to come in great splendor and renown, he remained in uncertainty and doubt, full of tormenting fury and wrath. He was consumed with the desire to find out the cause of his sufferings, and the more he inquired the more he was involved in darkness and so much the less did he find out the true cause.

INSTRUCTION OF MARY MOST HOLY, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

651. My daughter, great and above all else to be esteemed is the consolation of the faithful friends of my most holy Son when with living faith they consider that they serve a Lord who is God of gods and Lord of lords, who alone holds power and dominion over all creation and who triumphs and reigns over his enemies. In this feeling of assurance the intellect is delighted, the memory is recreated, the will is rejoiced, and all the powers of the devout soul enjoy the sweetness of the most noble operations, looking upon that Object of goodness, sanctity, and infinite power (I Tim. 6:15-16), who has need of nothing outside of Himself (II Mach. 14:35), and upon whose will depends all created things (Apoc. 4:11). O how many blessings do mortals lose who, forgetful of their true happiness, employ all the time of their life and all their powers in attending upon visible things, pursuing the momentary pleasures, and seeking the apparent and deceitful goods of this world! In the knowledge and light vouchsafed to thee I desire thee, my daughter, to withdraw thyself from this danger and occupy thy intellect and memory continually with the reality of the existence of thy God. In this endless sea engulf and annihilate thyself, repeating without cessation (Ps. 112:5): *Who is like to God our Lord, who dwells on high and looks upon the humble in heaven and on earth? Who is like to Him who is almighty and depends upon no one? Who humbles the proud and casts down those whom the blind world calls powerful, who triumphs over the demon and hurls him to the abyss?*

652. So thy heart may dilate so much the more upon these truths and attain a greater power over the enemies of the Most High and of thyself, I desire thee as far as possible to imitate me, glorying in the victories and triumphs of his mighty arm and seeking thyself to have a share in those which He gains over this cruel dragon. No created tongue, not that of the Seraphim, can describe what my soul felt when I beheld my most holy Son working such wonders against his enemies for the benefit of souls blinded and terrorized by their errors, and for the exaltation and honor of the Most High. In this jubilation I magnified the Lord, and in company with my Son I

composed new hymns of praise as his Mother and as Spouse of the Holy Ghost. Thou art a daughter of the holy Church and a spouse of my most blessed Son, favored by his grace; it is therefore just for thee to be zealous in acquiring this glory and honor for Him, striving against his enemies and battling for the triumphs of thy Spouse.