

Nativity and Youth of Jesus

1.—The Birth of John the Baptist Announced.

1. During the reign of King Herod there lived in the mountains of Judea an aged priest, named Zachary, and his wife, Elizabeth. Though just before God and otherwise happy, there was one drawback—they had no family. They had often asked for a son, but their prayers seemed unheard,

2. One day while Zachary, according to the custom of the priests, was burning incense within the sanctuary, suddenly an angel appeared at the right of the altar. Zachary was much frightened, but the angel bade him fear not. Then the angel told him his prayer had at length been heard, and his wife, Elizabeth, in her old age, would bear him a son, and he should call his name *John*.

3. When Zachary heard this he began to doubt, and to reason with himself, saying he was old and his wife was old. In answer to his objections the angel said to him: "Because you have doubted and have not believed my word, you shall be dumb till what I have announced to you come to pass." The angel disappeared, but Zachary was struck dumb from that moment.

2.—The Birth of Jesus Announced.

1. Six months after the events above related, the angel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth, a little town in Galilee, to a virgin called *Mary*. Though of the royal family of David, she was very poor in this world's goods; but in virtues she was exceedingly rich. A short time before the angel appeared to her she had been married to a poor carpenter, called Joseph, who, like herself, also belonged to the house of David.

2. While this humble virgin was deeply absorbed in prayer, suddenly the angel Gabriel entered her chamber, and said to her: "Hail, full of grace! the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women!"

3. When Mary heard these strange and, to her, startling words, she became exceedingly troubled, not knowing what they could mean. But the angel hastened to relieve her anxiety by telling her that God had sent him to announce the coming of the Messiah, and that she had been chosen to be His

mother. When Mary objected that she was a virgin, and knew not man, the angel bade her fear not: "for the Holy Ghost would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, and the Holy One that should be born of her should be called the Son of God."

4. To confirm his words Gabriel told her that her cousin Elizabeth had also conceived. When Mary understood the great things God proposed to do in her she no longer opposed the divine will, but gave her consent. The same moment she consented she became the *Mother of God*. In her was thus fulfilled the promise made in the garden of paradise, that the woman should crush the serpent's head. The Son of Mary has indeed conquered the devil.

3.—Mary visits Elizabeth.

1. After the angel left her, Mary hastened to visit her cousin. When she entered the house, Elizabeth was suddenly filled with the Holy Ghost, and, in an ecstasy of joy, cried out: "Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!"

2. Mary was also carried away with the fulness of the grace that was within her, and burst forth into that magnificent canticle the Church daily sings, and is so well known as the *Magnificat*, viz.: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Savior; because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid. Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me *blessed*."

3. Mary remained about three months with Elizabeth; after this she returned to her own humble home, at Nazareth, where she gave herself up to prayer and to the duties of her house.

4.—The Birth of John the Baptist.

1. When the time was come Elizabeth brought forth a son. It was customary among the Jews to give a name to the child at its circumcision. Now when the neighbors gathered together to do for the child as the law required, they thought to call him by his father's name. But Elizabeth objected, and ordered him to be called John.

2. Some hesitating, they asked the father; but he, being dumb, took a pen and wrote, "John is the name." On the instant Zachary recovered his speech, and began to praise God and to publish His works.

Fear came upon all when they saw and heard what had happened; and, wondering, they asked: "What would the child become, for the hand of God was with him?"

3. Soon the news of these wonders was spread through the mountains of Judea, and excited in some hopes, in others fears, according as each regarded it.

The child grew, and the Spirit of God was in him. At a tender age John went into the desert, where he remained in prayer and penance, until God bade him come into Judea and preach to the people of Israel. It was of him the prophet Malachi said, "I will send My angel, who will prepare the way before Me."

5.—The Birth of Jesus Christ.

1. When Joseph discovered the condition of his wife Mary, he was very much troubled, and, not understanding the deep mystery that surrounded her, resolved to put her away secretly. Whilst he was thus debating the matter with himself, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in sleep and told him to fear not, for Mary had become a mother by the over-shadowing power of God; and, moreover, the angel bade him call the child that would be born of her Jesus—that is to say, Savior. Joseph did as he was commanded.

2. Soon after this, Augustus, the Roman Emperor, published an edict that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrolment first began in Judea, and every one was required to go to his family city, there to be enrolled. It was thus Joseph and Mary, being descendants of David, were forced to go to Bethlehem, the city of David.

3. When they arrived the city was full of strangers, and they could find no place in the inns or among their friends, and so were forced to seek for shelter in a poor stable, near by the gates of the city. It was in this wretched place, that but poorly served as a shelter for the ox and the ass, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Master of all things, was born. With holy joy and tender care, Mary, the Virgin Mother, wrapped her child in swaddling-clothes and laid Him in the manger.

4. The prophecy of Micah was accomplished: "*And thou, Bethlehem, art the least among the cities of Judah, but out of thee shall come the Ruler of Israel.*";

6.—The Shepherds.

1. On the night Christ was born a few shepherds were watching their flocks a short distance from Bethlehem. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and a bright light shone round about them. Great fear came upon them; but the angel bade them fear not, for he came to announce to them tidings of great joy. Then he told them that in the neighboring city of Bethlehem a child had just been born, who was Christ the Lord and the Savior of the world; and, as a sign of the truth he told them they would find the child wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger. While he was yet speaking a great multitude of angels suddenly appeared and began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good-will!"

2. When the angels disappeared the shepherds hastened to go over to Bethlehem, where they found the child lying in the manger. Wondering, they told Mary and Joseph all they had heard, and, having adored the infant King, returned, glorifying God.

Eight days after this the child was circumcised and received the name of JESUS.

7.—The Kings from the East.

1. Sometime after the birth of Christ there came into Jerusalem three Eastern kings, asking where they could find the new-born King of the Jews, for they had seen His star in the east, and were come to adore Him. When Herod, the king, heard this he was very much troubled, as was also all Jerusalem. Then he called together the chief priests and doctors of the law and asked where Christ should be born. They promptly answered at Bethlehem.

2. When Herod heard this he called the three king, privately to him, and bade them go and search for the child, and when they had found Him, to come and tell him. So he dismissed them. They had scarcely left Jerusalem when the star they had seen in the east again went before them, until it stood over where the child was. Entering, they found the infant Savior, and, falling down, adored Him. They then presented gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

3. In the night God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod, for he meditated mischief to the child. They therefore returned another way into their own country.

We have also a star, that leads us to the heavenly Jerusalem, namely, the grace of God, by which we are enlightened and led on to the truth taught us by the Church.

8.—Jesus presented in the Temple.

1. Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph carried the child to the Temple, that they might present Him to the Lord. They also took with them the usual offering of the poor,—*two turtle-doves*,—according as the Law prescribed.

2. At this time there was living at Jerusalem a man named Simeon. He was very pious, and the Holy Ghost had revealed to him that he should not die until he had seen the Savior. When Mary and Joseph entered the Temple, Simeon, led by the Spirit, also entered. Seeing the child, he took Him in his arms and cried out: "Now, O Lord, dismiss Thy servant in peace, because my eyes have seen Thy salvation."

3. After this he blessed Mary and Joseph; but he warned her that a sword of sorrow should one day pierce her heart.

While Simeon was speaking, a prophetess named Ann entered the Temple. She also took the child in her arms, and, praising God, went forth, publishing the news to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel.

9.—The Flight into Egypt.

1. Herod, seeing the Magi did not return to him, became very angry, and, resolving to destroy this new-born King, ordered all the children in Bethlehem and the country round about to be put to death. He foolishly thought Jesus would surely be killed among the rest, little dreaming how easily God could shield Him.

2. Whilst Herod was preparing for the murder of the holy innocents, an angel appeared to Joseph in his sleep, and told

3. He had scarce gone, when Herod's messengers came to Bethlehem, and tearing the children from their mothers' arms, murdered them. Every house was filled with lamentation and sorrow, and the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled: "Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not." As a punishment for his

cruelty, Herod died, some years after, amid the most horrid torments.

4. Again the angel appeared to Joseph, and commanded him to return to Judea, because Herod was dead. Joseph rose, and, taking the child and Mary, returned, and dwelt in Nazareth. Thus it came to pass that Christ was called a Nazarene.

Jesus, the Savior of the world, was saved by a miracle; so was Moses, the savior of the Israelites, saved by a miracle.

10.—The Child Jesus in the Temple.

1. In accordance with the custom of the Jews, Mary and Joseph went up every year to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Pasch. At the age of twelve years Jesus also went up to Jerusalem with His parents. When the celebration was over, Mary and Joseph, together with their friends, returned to their homes; but Jesus remained in Jerusalem.

2. Not finding the child in their own company, His parents thought He was with some of their friends, and so continued the journey. But, when at night they sought Him and could not find Him, they were filled with much anxiety, and hastened back to Jerusalem.

3. After a search of three days they found Him in the Temple, in the midst of the doctors, listening to them and asking them questions. All were astonished at His wisdom and His answers.

His mother, approaching, asked Him why He had acted thus towards them. In a kindly manner He told them He was there engaged about His Father's business. In obedience to their wishes He returned to Nazareth, and was subject to them. He also grew in age and wisdom and grace before God and men.