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The Little Song of the Holy Family

Joseph Meets Mary

It was a lovely, sunny day and I was working as usual in my shop exchanging the odd word with people passing by, just the usual kind of thing that people like to say and hear, when I heard laughter drifting from somewhere up the street. Old Simon was just telling me about the new taxes and the devious way the Romans have dragging the last denarius out of our pockets.

“Disgraceful,” he was saying, “how much longer is this going on....” I was going hot and cold, sometimes walls have ears... then this happened. I was relieved, then surprised, then curious. Passing by were two young girls with pitchers on their heads, nothing special about that, but one of them ... my goodness, I could not take my eyes off her. Old Simon was rambling on finally realizing that I was staring past him. Giving me a sideways look he said:” Joachim’s daughter, she is a one ... but who am I to tell you.”

Then he left and I was glad. He has sharp eyes, has Simon, and a loose tongue! But what a girl ... I can’t get her out of my mind.

Some time ago the old rabbi took me aside admonishing me to do my duty. I knew what he meant but so far I have been content on my own, working, praying, going to the synagogue on the Sabbath ... I have been quite content, really. I do know that every grown-up man must marry to have a son, because one day the Expected One will come, one day!

Come to think of it, I seem to remember Joachim has passed away, Anna is now a widow, hmmm.

I must talk with the rabbi and with Anna, of course.

Joseph asks Mary to be his Wife

None other do I want. None other will I take. I am only a poor labourer in Israel with no wealth to offer you, you are a queen among women. I come with my thumb wrapped in a rag asking you to be my wife.

From the moment I met you I knew you were special and very close to our God. I also knew that God had entrusted you to me; though why He would entrust such a treasure to me is beyond me. This gift left me breathless and stammering. Daughter of Israel, Miriam bar Joachim, I barely dare ask you to be espoused to me, but I will guard the priceless treasure that you are with all my being.

Mary Departs

It has been such a day for me. Quite a lot to do and not the right wood for the job. Old Simon passed by, he could not stop himself to tell me that he saw my Mary with a bundle joining the monthly caravan. Of course he wanted to know where she was going but I was not letting on. Why should I? "Family affairs, I said and he got the message. Sometimes my patience runs thin.

Now I am sitting here alone with my thoughts. I have not liked her to go, but of course she must help her cousin now. What a blessing to have a child at that age. Truly the ways of the Almighty are mysterious! It is all so strange. I miss her already and I feel uneasy, but I don't know why. My Mary is such a good girl. I trust her completely.

As soon as she returns I must make arrangements, Anna will be pleased. I am a lucky man.

Mary Returns

Something is different, I can see that. Seven times a day I have praised you, Lord, and thanked you that you have given this woman to me. Now I have no words for what I see before me. It is so sudden, so unexpected. Must I now sacrifice my Miriam as Isaac thought he had to sacrifice his son Isaac? The wound burns already in my soul and in my heart. My Mary, this wonderful treasure, lost to me, just lost.

Lord, you were the strong foundation of our relationship; you were to be the centre of our life together. Mary, my Mary, so gentle and yet so strong. Now you are to be a mother, but it seems that I can have no part in your life as it is now. I still love you, I will not expose you, never. I will do what I must do, but quietly. Let people blame me for it, it is the one thing I can do for her.

O Lord, strange are your ways, yet, though I walk through this valley of darkness, I will still trust you, Lord.

Joseph's Dream

What a queer night I had! I went to bed rather late, agitated as I was because of this affair. I was tormented by doubts, am I doing this the right way? I was so sure of her. But facts are facts.

But then I had an odd dream. An angel seemed to be standing next to me calling me by my name. I was startled, I am just an ordinary man and not a learned rabbi. This kind of thing does not happen to the likes of me--but then I could not doubt it. He was so majestic and beautiful. He towered over me. I was confused, thrilled and frightened all in one go. Then he spoke to me and his voice was like a gentle breeze: Joseph", he said, "Joseph, do not hesitate to take Mary as your wife, the child to be born of her is God's Son, the Almighty entrusts Him to you. Please look after Him and his mother also." That was all he had to say. I really don't know what to make of it, it's all so odd. How could the Almighty have a Son? Is he perhaps going to be the Messiah? I just don't understand. I can't ask the rabbi, but I am going to talk to my Mary, we must get prepared!

Joseph takes Mary to his House

It is but a workman's house, Mary, nothing very grand. I made a new cupboard for you to keep your things in and I swept up the wood-shavings afterwards, though no doubt, they will be back soon! It's a sound and strong house and I will be strong for you and the precious burden you are carrying within. I want to love you, my Mary, with all my heart and our love shall be creative, our giving to each other can be and will be complete! *Fiat!* Be it done unto me, be it done unto us. We will yield ourselves to God and to each other fully, in truest love. Our tenderness will be wholly of God, for God and in God. In our hearts will be gathered all the hopes and dreams of Israel. The blessed fruit of your giving I will love guide and protect.

Miriam, I take you now into my home that our marriage may be ratified in the eyes of the Almighty and the world. I will share your maternity and guard your virginity. Welcome home, my bride, my sister, mother of my fruitfulness also.

Bethlehem

Well, we have finally arrived! But what a place this town has become! The lanes are crowded with people, but nobody seems to know his nearest neighbour passing by. It is this census that has caused this. Every man must return to his place of birth to be registered with his clan. I must say I was looking forward to meet some of the old folks again, but I might have known that there would be no room anywhere ... I just briefly met old Hannah and she took one look at my Mary and quickly pointed to a new pub further on, hopefully not yet overrun. She ask no questions about my wife and I was grateful for that. But she urged me to be off rather speedily. So on we pushed through the crowds shouting and waving at each other catching up with bits of news after so many years of absence. But, really, we had no time to lose. Eventually we got here only to find that even this place was packed out to capacity. It was the landlady who with a knowing wink directed her young lad to take us across the yard and here we are in this shelter, at least it is dry!

Shepherds

Well, this was possibly the most exciting night of my life! No sooner had we arrived that things began to happen. Mind you, my Mary was well prepared and I just gave a hand. But then something very odd happened. I had this feeling that somebody was watching us. I looked around, but there was nobody, the ox was chewing contently, the donkey exhausted from the long trek was dozing also, so there was nothing and no one else. But still I felt odd, I could have sworn that there was somebody somewhere! Then I spied it, a pair of dark brown eyes behind bushy eyebrows in a bearded face looming up between the wall and the roof. Not an unkind face, just a curious expression and a rumbling voice said: "Saw the light as I passed by," and then," Need a woman, don't you?" Turning round to someone behind him he said something and I heard hasty footsteps disappearing into the dark. I moved to the door holding the lantern aloft only to discover that the man must be a shepherd of sorts, because he has a lambkin slung over his shoulders. "Poor thing got lost," he said by way of an explanation, "they do stray sometimes and then they panic and become an easy prey for the wolves, you see." I took an instant liking to him, rough but a heart of gold. "Sent the lad to fetch the wife, you need a woman." So far he had avoided looking at my Mary but I was sure that he had taken the situation in.

At that point several figures emerged, in front a youngish lad followed by a matronly woman who made straight for the place where my Mary rested. I was glad, she could do with some help. But there were others too, talking excitedly:” Where is the child,” they wanted to know,” we had been told that there would be a child.” I became frightened and moving over I placed myself in front of my Mary, but she smiled. This gave me confidence, my Mary knows. So we squatted down and they told me that an angel, no less, had proclaimed unto them about our child having been born this night in a stable. "We must have looked doubtful, because the angel gave us a sign,...'he will be wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger.' Then we knew, he would be one of us, also help was needed. So we came and brought some food.”

Well, I don't mind admitting that I was ready for a good spread, all this anxiety makes a body hungry. Then they went their way and we got some rest. But ever since that time my Mary and I have pondered at what those men had to say.

The Magi

It is good to have you both in a solid house at last, Mary, grateful as we were for the straw and a roof over our heads. The Lord's ways are strange and mysterious and nothing comes more mysterious than these visitors, gentiles, but God-fearing men. They were searchers, with open minds and hearts and nobility in their eyes. “Of His kingdom there will be no end,” the angel had said to my Mary, but who could have guessed that gentiles would come seeking Him even while He is still a nursling child. Such a strange tale as they had, quite odd. They told of a star leading them. Our son, so little fuss at his birth. It seemed that everything conspired to make His birth a hidden event: far from home not even a proper house to live in. How could anyone know where to find Him? And then this! Shepherds seeing legions of angels, gentile philosophers, astrologers — it's hard even to know what to call them, but wise men they are, certainly, or seekers of wisdom. And such strange gifts! They said they had learnt that a great king had been born to the Jews and with little more to go on with than that fact, they went to Jerusalem. I suppose it is understandable that they went straight to King Herod, but it leaves me strangely uneasy — Herod is the last person we would have told about the angel's words about Davis's throne! And along come strangers from far away and they tell him! Truly the ways of the Almighty are mysterious indeed! It was just odd to have such lordly men in our humble lodging though. Funny thing is they did not seem to find it strange at all.

Flight into Egypt

I was restless all day long. I could not help it. Something was very wrong, somewhere. I tried to hide my anxiety in front of my Mary, but I think she noticed I was fidgeting. The day passed as usual, the baby was all right, that is the main thing always. We bedded down, all as usual. It took me a long time to go to sleep and then it happened. Something touched me! No, I did not imagine this! Something touched my hand and a voice said:” Joseph, get up, take your wife and the child and flee to Egypt.” Egypt, he said, “ Herod is after the child and wants to kill him.” Instantly I was fully awake, Egypt I thought, nothing nearer than Egypt!! Through the desertwith a baby! My heart pounded, I was sore afraid. Then I turned to wake my Mary, but she was already awake. Together we packed our few belongings. She asked no questions, seemingly she knew! I led the donkey out and she mounted. The baby in her arms was fast asleep. Quietly I closed the door. It had been a good place, people were kind to us, but now we must go.

The sky was still dark, there was a gentle breeze, pleasant for travelling. I called on the archangel Raphael journeying with the young Tobias and my Mary remembered our forefather Jacob as he and his whole clan went down to Egypt to meet his son Joseph. The Almighty had brought good out of evil! Recalling the psalm:” Under the shadow of His wings...I seized the donkey by the rein and passing through the city-gate we moved towards the desert. Under the shadow of His wings.....

Dream — Return to Nazareth

I heard myself saying:” Mary, Mary, wake up my love!” Another dream, yes I had thought to return to Judea after the angel had told us of Herod’s death, in fact it was to Bethlehem we intended to go. The good people there would have given us a place to live until we had a place of our own. No swollen crowds this time. It was worrying, though, that Archelaus now ruled the area in place of his father Herod, but I did not think that there was any danger. Strange the way the Almighty works in our life: one step at the time.” Go to Egypt,” so we went to Egypt.” Return to Judea,” so we plan on Bethlehem. Now it seems that Judea is not the right place! We will go North, my Mary, and head for Nazareth and the Almighty will look after us and let us know the next step. For now, all I know is that I must snatch from danger the treasure that the Almighty has entrusted to us.

Finding in the Temple

We have been dreading this day, my Mary and I, not because we don't want our son to have his bar mitzvah, but because of the many things said about him when he was born. Simple folks came and learned ones bringing beautiful gifts, quite odd it was: gold for a king, frankincense for the God and myrrh for burial. It was just so odd ...

But we have lived quietly here in Nazareth for years now and I suppose we had silently hoped it would all work out for best. Our son is a good son, he helps me with my work, he is friendly with the customers, knows his place with his elders and altogether we would have liked it to stay like this. I suppose most parents do.

But then he must go to Jerusalem, to the Temple and we had to take him there in accordance with the Law.

Well, it worked out fine and we left as soon as possible, anxious to start for home, but, of course, we met so many old friends that just for a time we lost sight of him. Naturally, we knew him to be safe among our friends and relatives, our boy likes to socialize but he is such a good son. Never gave us a day's trouble. As we journeyed on there were fewer and fewer people as they gradually dropped out. Then it happened, I noticed my Mary looking anxious. I looked around, where was our son? He should have turned up by now. We asked, we searched, always the same answer.....nobody has seen him. We returned to Jerusalem. I was beside myself with worry. How could I have been so careless? I was responsible for him! Up to now at least. My Mary was silent. At long last the Temple loomed up on the horizon, we ran, here and there we looked, no luck ...Then we picked up a babble of voices and one ringing out above the others, we knew in an instant, his voice! We turned the corner — to my dying day I shall never forget the sight before us....here he sat among the elders, asking questions and expounding the Scriptures. An equal among equals. I was dumbfounded. I am just an ordinary man, I had nothing to say, but his mother, she spoke out wanting to know what he was about. He seemed surprised: "did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" Just that. Then He arose and came away with us as if nothing had happened. Little was said on the homeward journey, but just before we branched off to Nazareth I took a deep breath and said:" Son, from to-day onward you are a man before the law, you don't have to come with....., He looked at me somewhat puzzled, then He took my hand and his mother's and together we in the direction of Nazareth.

Joseph's Deathbed

My Mary, it seems that I have to leave you ... and our son. It is hard, believe me. Our son has strong hands and arms now and skills far surpassing mine. I have taught him a trade, but he has taught me even more than a trade. Never did a man have such skill with his hands as our son.... but then, never did a man have such a son. Such works he will do with his hands, my Mary.

Three simple folks we have been, but we have loved one another. It has been good to spend my life with you, my Mary and I thank you! And our Jesus He will take care of you, I am sure of it. I do not know what the future will hold for you or for Him, all I know is that I must leave you. It has been a blessed life, I never expected such closeness between the three of us, truly the Almighty was at the centre of our life.

Ah, here comes our son! Son, look after your mother!

by a Poor Clare Colettine Nun



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