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# "BLESSED IS THE FRUIT

I FELT SORRY FOR THE NEW CAMEL. He had to be content with the company of the three kings in the dusty confinement of the sacristy closet until the sixth of January. But the Crib was finished for Christmas Eve. I adjusted the "*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*" scroll until it hung over the door of the stable at a better angle and made a mental note to get a brighter bulb for the Star of Bethlehem. It had been a long, trying task, but the Crib was finished. The shepherds were grouped expectantly at the doorway and the lambs with their stiff, plaster-cast wool were scattered amiably about the straw. I stepped back and proudly surveyed the finished masterpiece.

I knelt down before the Crib, no longer thinking of chipped statues and the faded coat of St. Joseph. My thoughts flew back through the centuries to the first Christmas Eve with its loving memories of the shepherds and the straw-strewn stable and



the shining star, of Mary and Joseph who found no room in the inn. . . . I stood at the doorway of a hillside cave, and entered it to pray.

Mary was there in the dim moonlight, bending over her firstborn Son Whom she had wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger. "Hail Mary, full of Grace; the Lord is with thee." Yes, O Mary, the Lord is with thee. He is thy Child Who lies before thee in the oxen's stall. He is thy Babe Who sleeps in thy cradling arms. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus." O Mary, thou indeed art blessed among women, the holiest of all creatures, endowed with all blessing and with every grace - but thy blessed Child is blessed above all creatures with the very uncreated Blessedness of God.

St. Joseph stands beside Mary gazing at the little Infant lying in the straw of the crude manger. St. Joseph was a just man. Mary was immaculately conceived, free from every stain of sin and endowed with the plenitude of grace. They were indeed blessed. Yet their holiness is nothing compared with that of the sleeping Babe. This Infant is Blessedness Itself, He is holy, not with the shadowy holiness that God gives to His creatures, but with the white, blinding Holiness of the God-head.

The greatest saint, the great Queen of Saints herself, is holy only because God, in His infinite

goodness and generosity permits her

to show forth in some slight degree the great uncreated Holiness Which is Himself. God gives Mary and the saints holiness by permitting them to share His Own Divine Life by that wonderful participation in the Life of God which we call grace. But while Mary has this gift in the greatest abundance, she is holy; her Son is Holiness Itself. Mary *has* holiness, *has* blessedness, through a communication of the Blessedness of God; Jesus *is* infinite, uncreated Blessedness, for He is God.

The little Infant sleeping in the manger is the Son of God, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity. Those tiny Hands which clutch feebly at the straw hold the power which created the world. Those baby Feet which have not yet walked on earth have walked in heaven. Within the Baby eyes there shines the light of eternal Wisdom. Mary's Son is God!

It is the Divinity of Christ which gives Christmas all its meaning. The birth of Christ is the most important event in history. The rise and fall of empires, the growth of dynasties, the glamour of battles ... all give place to the birth of a Babe in a small city in the Roman Province of Judea over nineteen centuries ago. We count our years from that event, and as an eloquent preacher of our own day pointedly remarks, if you wish to deny the existence of Christ, you must date your denial in the one thousand nine hundred and thirty-second year since His birth.

This Child is God. He claimed to be God and He substantiated His claim by the sublimity of the doctrine He taught mankind, and by innumerable miracles, especially by raising Himself to life after being three days dead and in the grave. When moderns patronizingly praise Him as a social reformer, or a philosopher, or a religious teacher they do not praise but insult Him. He will have no homage in place of the absolute adoration which is His due, since He is true God as well as true man.

Whenever we say the "Hail Mary" we make an act of faith in the Divinity of Christ. After declaring the blessedness of Mary, we speak of the infinite, uncreated Blessedness of Mary's Divine Son: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Mary's Son is God.

As we say it over and over again the wonder of it all grows upon us. What a marvelous thing it is that God should so love us as to want to be one of us! How stupendous it is that an Infant on a bed of

By HARRY T.



# OF THY WOMB, JESUS!"

DEEGAN, C.M. straw should be God, that a little Boy among a group of playmates should be the God of Heaven! How close it brings God to us!

"Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people," said the angel to the shepherds on that first Christmas eve, "For this day is born to you a Savior Who is Christ, the Lord." Good tidings of great joy ... and the joy of Christmas is still the same. Our hearts are glad with the thought of the holiday, at the expectation of family reunions, in the anticipation of the pleasure of giving and receiving gifts ... but their chief joy is that this day there is born to us a Savior Who is Christ, the Lord. God is with us.

And He is still with us; the life of Our Lord is not an event of the past known to us only through history. We cannot enter the stable with the joyful shepherds to adore the new-born Savior of the world; but we can approach the very same Lord and God on our altars and adore Him as truly present as He was in the Crib. The seemingness of it all is beyond us. It doesn't seem the same to us at all. We know we would have been thrilled and overjoyed if we had been keeping the nightwatch on the hills of Judea during the greatest night of all time. Our hearts would not have been cold and unresponsive when we entered the hillside cave. And

yet we would have seen only a new-born Babe lying in the straw. The uncreated Blessedness of Mary's Son is visible only to the eyes of Faith.

And so it is on our altars. The linens are blessed, the candles are blessed, the chalice is consecrated by the Bishop to make it a more fitting receptacle for the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. We gaze upon these sacred things which we rightly hold in reverence, and we see the little white Host after the consecration ... but only through Faith do we realize that the Host, lying on the altar amid the blessed articles of worship, is Blessedness Itself.

By faith in the stable of Bethlehem the shepherds knew that Mary's Son was God. By faith at our midnight Mass we know that the Host, after the consecration, is Mary's Son.

The altar is as beautiful as we can make it for the midnight Mass. The snowy white linens reflect the soft candlelight and the sparkle of the jewels on the chalice. The bright red Christmas flowers stand erect like a guard of honor awaiting the coming of the King of kings. The organ sounds out the most stirring strains of music. All the arts and crafts have

combined to make the midnight Mass a thing of beauty ... and yet we know that the glory and beauty of the altar and the flowers and the jeweled chalice, and of all the creatures used in the service of God, are but the faintest shadow of the Beauty ever ancient and ever new that lies hid under the whiteness of the little Host.

And surely this is Bethlehem again. The massive stone church is the hillside cave, the blaze of candles is the blinding light, the little ruddy glow of the sanctuary lamp is the shining star. The linens of the altar are the swaddling bands that clothe our Savior. And we ... we are the shepherds who have left our task of every day to come to the hillside cave to adore our new-born King. A bell peals out, taking the place of the angels, telling us of the coming of the Savior. A holy hush descends upon the congregation as the priest bends low over the wheaten host on the altar. He



whispers the words of power, he genuflects, and then raises on high the Host whose whiteness conceals the presence of the Son of God. The Babe of Bethlehem is here. Come let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

At the coming of the Savior in this midnight Mass our thoughts fly back to the first Christmas, and in spirit we enter the stable to adore the Child in Mary's arms. And after adoring her Son, surely we are going to have a word for Mary. All must see the sweet reasonableness of recognizing Mary's place in the celebration of Christmas. Who ever went to see a new baby and left the house without a word for the mother? If you went in to see a neighbor's baby, wouldn't you greet and congratulate its mother? You would try to find something appropriate to say about her happiness in the child and some word of praise for the infant.

Why should it be different with Mary, the Mother of God? Cannot all, whatever their religious prejudices be, see the fittingness of coming to the Crib at Christmas time with a greeting for Our Lady, with a word of congratulation and a reference to her new-found happiness and a word of praise for her wonderful Baby?

"Hail Mary, full of grace," we greet her. "The Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women," we congratulate her. And in praise of her Child, "Blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus."