

# BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

## CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

### CHAPTER V.

## THIRD ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

### *Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.*

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## I. - CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST.

100. *The Child Raised to Life by Eliseus (otherwise known as Elisha).* -

I know not, children, whether you may have reflected on it, but it seems to me that there is something more extraordinary in the mystery of the Incarnation than in any of the others. A God to make Himself man that he might be able to suffer and to die, in order to redeem the world, is something very strange, but it tends to give us an idea of the love and mercy of God for men. We find a beautiful figure of this in the life of the prophet Eliseus. One day, a poor Sunamite woman sent him word that her son, the only child she had, had died. Eliseus gives his stick to his disciple, and says to him : "Go to that woman's house and lay my stick on the body of her child, that he may return to life." But neither the stick nor the servant could work that miracle. Eliseus goes himself, and here it is, children, that the story applies to our subject - The prophet enters the chamber of the

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dead child, recollects himself a moment, calls God to his assistance, then stretching himself at full length over the corpse, he gathers himself up, as it were, to take the exact size of the child, so as to have his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands, his mouth on his mouth, his feet on his feet, and his heart on his heart. After a few moments, life had, as it were, passed from the body of Eliseus to that of the dead, and restored his existence. This is precisely what was done by Our Lord Jesus Christ. We were dead by sin, and he restored us to life by uniting his divine nature to ours.

- *II Kings, (IV Kings in the Douay Bible), Chapter IV.*

101. *The Holy-House of Nazareth.* -

The Most Holy Virgin dwelt in Nazareth when the Archangel Gabriel came to announce to her, on the part of God, that she should be the mother of the Messiah promised and expected for more than four thousand years, indeed since the time of the promise given to our first parent, Adam. The house which she then inhabited is no longer in that little town; it was miraculously conveyed to Loretto, a pretty little town of Italy, in the year 1294, as is proved by the most authentic traditions. The place in Nazareth, whereon that so venerable house once stood, is now enclosed within the limits of the Franciscan Convent. It is reached from the interior of the church by a flight of seventeen marble steps; one finds themselves then in a subterraneous chapel, lit night and day by several lamps. An altar has been raised on the spot whereon the mystery of the Incarnation was

wrought. Close by are two granite pillars, one of which marks the spot

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where stood the Angel of the Lord when he said to the Blessed Virgin - "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee!" But, my young friends, the most interesting part of this subterranean sanctuary is the centre of the marble pavement, whereon is inscribed, in large letters, those Latin words which you all know by heart:

**VERBUM CARO HIC FACTUM EST.**

*Here the Word was made flesh.*

Let us thank Our Lord, dear children, for the favour He did us in coming into the world; and when we assist at Mass on the day of the Annunciation (25th March), let us imagine that we are prostrate on the pavement in Nazareth, reading those words of the *Angelus*: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt with us!"

- MGR. MISLIN, *The Holy Places*, III., 392. (Is the citation to Mgr Lislin or Mgr Mislin?)

102. *A Rock that Rolls Miraculously.* -

You remember, children, the story of that pagan sacrificer to whom St. Gregory Thaumaturgus gave a note to bring back the devil into a temple, whence he had been expelled by the sign of the Cross (No. 76 of this series)? That sacrificer, touched by the miracle, was converted, and besought St. Gregory to instruct him himself. The holy bishop, as you may well believe, faithfully discharged this duty, and naturally commenced with the principal mysteries. Having explained that of the Holy Trinity, he came to that of the Incarnation, when he said that the Son, the, Second Divine Person, had compassion on the world,

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lost by the sin of Adam. He explained that He, God the Son, came down on earth, and took a body and soul like to ours, to the end that He might be able to suffer and die for us. "Impossible!" cried the pagan priest, "impossible! I cannot understand that!" "But, my friend," replied the Saint, "I do not understand it myself, for it is a mystery; I believe it, nevertheless, because such truths as these are not demonstrated by reasoning, but by the miracles of God's omnipotence." "Well, since that is the case, I will believe you, if you can, by a word, make this rock which is here beside us, go and place itself yonder on the opposite side of the stream." St. Gregory raises his eyes to Heaven, addresses to God a short but fervent prayer, and cries: "*Rock, betake yourself thither!*" Instantly, the huge stone rolled of itself to the spot indicated. This ended the dispute, the incredulous sacrificer found nothing difficult to believe, after that, in the sublime mysteries of religion, and became sincerely converted.

- ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*.

## **II. - BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY.**

103. *The Stable of Bethlehem.* -

How happy would you not be, my dear children, to be able to visit the stable wherein Our Lord Jesus Christ was born! The grotto of Bethlehem to which the blessed Virgin and St. Joseph retired still exists; it has been enclosed within the precincts of the vast Church of the Nativity. You descend to it by a flight of sixteen

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steps. It is a natural cavern, part of which has been covered with masonry, and subsequently, the vault and ceiling coated with marble, by the piety of the faithful. The pavement is itself composed of white marble, with encrustations in jasper and porphyry. In the centre is seen a silver star, laid in 1717, on which has been inscribed in Latin these words, at once so simple and so touching :

**ON THIS VERY SPOT JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN OF THE  
VIRGIN MARY.**

Oh! my young friends, what an impression should the reading of these two lines make on a Catholic heart! Emperors, kings, patriarchs, thousands of travellers have read them, and were so struck with awe that they fell prostrate on the floor and adored Him who was born on that spot for our salvation. Many sovereigns desired to leave in the grotto of Bethlehem a perpetual mark of their faith and piety; hence there are as many as thirty-two lamps continually burning there, which were given by the Republic of Venice, Emperors of Austria, Kings of Spain, and Naples, and finally by the pious King Louis XIII of France.

- MGR. MISLIN, *Les Saints Lieux, (The Holy Places)* III., 12 et 18. (Mgr Lislin or Mislin?)

104. *The Virgin's Tree.* -

Forty days after His birth, Jesus Christ was brought to the temple of Jerusalem, according to the law of Moses. There exists, children, in connection with that event, a touching tradition brought back by most pilgrims who

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have visited the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. The Blessed Virgin, bearing the Divine Child in her arms, feeling herself fatigued, sat down to rest under a turpentine-tree, nigh midway between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Beside her was St. Joseph, holding in his hands two white doves, which were to be offered to the Lord in the temple. Whilst they sat in that place, the tree bent its branches, and spread them so as to protect the Holy Family and do homage to the Child Jesus. This miraculous tree existed for many long ages, and every pilgrim who passed that way kissed it respectfully, taking away with them some of its leaves or branches. It was unhappily destroyed in 1645; a Mahometan Arab follower of the Moslem faith cut it down in order to prevent the pious pilgrims from passing over his field. The pacha (or pasha) of Jerusalem being apprised of this by the Fathers of the Holy Land, gave orders that young shoots should be engrafted on the roots of the old tree; but it was useless. The monks sold the wood in small pieces and made of it crosses and beads which they distributed amongst travellers. They likewise caused a cairn, or heap of stones, to be erected on the spot where the Virgin's tree had stood.

- MGR. MISLIN, *Les Saints Lieux, (The Holy Places)* III., 2. (Mislin or Lislin?)

105. *Condemnation and later Death of the Impious Nestorius.* -

The Most holy Virgin is the Mother of Jesus Christ, since she really brought Him into the world ; but, since Jesus Christ is God, it follows that, in one sense, Mary is truly Mother of God. Such has always been the belief of the Church. The first heretic who dared to

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refuse that glorious title to the Blessed Virgin was Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, who lived in the fifth century. The whole Catholic world was indignant at such audacity, and it was to protest against that heresy that the General Council of 431 was held at Ephesus. The entire population of the city and its environs repaired with incredible faith and fervour to the great square adjoining the church wherein the council was held. And there they remained during the entire day, so impatient were they to see the issue of the assembly. When the news was at length spread, towards evening, that the heretic Nestorius was condemned and anathematized, and that the doctrine of the Church was still that Mary is truly Mother of God, the enthusiasm of the people was beyond all description. Each one cried out repeatedly "*Mary is truly the Mother of God! Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us!*" It being already night, the men lit torches, and escorted the bishops to their several lodgings; the women preceded this triumphal cortege, scattering perfumes along the streets; in a word, the whole city of Ephesus testified the greatest joy, and the most fervent devotion for the Blessed Virgin.

- TILLEMONT, *Ecclesiastical History*, XIV., 400.

106. *Midnight Mass in the Woods.* -

Religion has many touching solemnities, my dear children, but there are few, I think, so much so as the midnight Mass. I have read something very curious about that in the life of St. Francis of Assissium (as it is known in Latin - English speakers generally call his native city Assisi). He had so much devotion for the mystery of the Birth of

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Christ, that he rose daily at midnight, in order to adore Our Lord at the hour when He made His first appearance in the world. Subsequently, he came to do something still more extraordinary. He asked and received from Pope Honorius III. permission to have midnight Mass sung on Christmas night, in the midst of a forest which was near the Monastery of Grecio. He commenced by arranging, with his friars and some monks, a sort of stable or rustic cave, with rocks, moss, and branches of trees; then they put up a manger, with a fodder rack, and the other accessories to a stable. Finally, in order to complete the representation of the holy places they scattered straw over the floor of the stable, and brought thither an ox and an ass. It was in this rude edifice that an altar was afterwards erected and midnight Mass said. A vast concourse of people crowded to the place, bearing torches, and making the forest resound all night long with their pious hymns and prayers. I am sure, my little friends, you would be all well pleased to assist at a Mass of this kind but that should not prevent you from recalling the humiliations of the little Jesus on the day of His birth.

- PERE CHALIPPE, *Life of St. Francis of Assissium*, 166.