

O Holy Night!

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*Mary's Espousal to Saint Joseph
and
Her Wedding Ring*



Mary's Espousal to Saint Joseph and Her Wedding Ring

According to the revelation of Ann Catherine Emmerich, Joseph was the third of six brothers. His parents dwelt in a large mansion outside of Bethlehem. It was the ancient birthplace of David, but in Joseph's time only the principal walls were in existence. His father's name was Jacob. David's palace in Jerusalem was provided with towers and cupolas. From these cupolas, a view far into the surrounding country was afforded. Joseph's family home was similar in nature.

Joseph was perhaps eight years old and very different from his brothers. He was very talented, and he learned quickly; but unlike his brothers he had simple tastes, was very gentle, pious, and not ambitious. His brothers played all kinds of tricks on him and treated him roughly, but he bore it all patiently. Sometimes when kneeling in prayer, his brothers would push Joseph over and kick him in the back with repeated blows, until at last Joseph would fall to the ground. Then Catherine Emmerich saw that Joseph was absorbed in prayer to God, and he did not seek revenge, but merely turned away quietly and sought another secluded spot to pray.

Joseph's parents were not pleased with him. Because of his many talents they wanted him to have a position in the world. But he was too unworldly for such aims, he had no desire whatsoever to shine in the world. At around twelve years of age, Joseph would be found praying with some very pious, old, Jewish women. He often went to them with his troubles and shared their devotion for God. Sometimes he dwelt in their neighborhood with a master carpenter, to whom he lent a helping hand. The carpenter taught him his trade. Eventually leaving home he supported himself by making rough wicker petitions. Moving to Thanach, Joseph found employment with a well-to-do family and spent his spare time in the synagogue. He lived very piously and humbly (although from a well-to-do family) and was esteemed by all. Lastly, he worked for a carpenter in Tiberias, where he lived alone.

Joseph was deeply pious; and often prayed for the coming of the Messiah. He also had great reserve in the presence of females. Shortly before his call to Jerusalem for his espousal with Mary, he entertained the idea of building a more secluded oratory (a private chapel) in his dwelling. But an Angel appeared to him in prayer, and told him not to do it. As in ancient times, when the Patriarch Joseph became by God's appointment the administrator of the Egyptian granaries, so now to Joseph was the granary of Redemption to be wedded. In his humility Joseph could not comprehend the meaning of this and so he continued to pray to God.

"She was found, before they came together, to be with child by the Holy Ghost." Her condition was discovered by no one else but Joseph; concerning his future wife, he had almost the privilege of a husband to know everything about her. The qualification, "before they came together" does not imply that afterwards they did come together. The Scripture is merely indicating that up to this time they had not done so.

"But Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wishing to expose her to reproach, was minded to put her away privately." If anyone is joined to a fornicator, he becomes one body with her; and it is a precept of the Law that not only the one who commits a crime, but

anyone who is silently aware of it, is guilty of sin. Then how can Joseph be called a just man, when he is hiding his wife's crime? The question is not to the point. The point is that Joseph was a just man, and his conduct becomes a piece of evidence in



Mary's favor. What he knew was not her crime (there was none to be known), but her chastity. What he did not know was the mystery of how she had conceived; and by his silence he kept hidden from the public the circumstance that was a source of wonder to him.¹

NOTES:

1. Matins of the Vigil of Christmas.

No mention is made of Joseph in the narrative of the Visitation (Luke 1: 39-56), which has Mary leaving Nazareth "in haste into the hill country, to a town of Judea (Ain Karim)," and



concludes about three months later when Mary "returned to her own house." That would put the events of Matthew 1: 19-24 at roughly the fourth month of Mary's pregnancy; a reasonable guess in that neither account has them immediately hurrying off to Bethlehem, and in that they are likely to have married before Mary publicly appeared to be pregnant. The Church celebrates the espousal of Mary and Joseph on January 23rd, which would put a July or August wedding celebration nicely within the three to twelve months normally observed.

A Homily of St. Jerome, Priest

Book 1 of the Commentary on Matthew, Ch. 1.

Why must she who conceives the Lord be not simply a virgin, but a betrothed virgin? First, that through the genealogy of Joseph the (Davidic) origin of Mary may be demonstrated. Second that she might not be stoned as an adulteress by the Jews. Third, that she may have a protector during the flight into Egypt. The Martyr Ignatius adds a fourth reason for our Lord's being conceived by one who is betrothed: that His birth may be hidden from the devil, who thinks that this is the child of a married woman, not of a virgin.

There were seven other virgins who were with Mary to be dismissed from the Temple and given in marriage. On this account St. Ann went to Jerusalem to be with Mary, who grieved at the thought of leaving the Temple. But she was told that she must be married. A distinguished old priest went into the Holy of Holies and an incense offering was enkindled. The priest prayed sitting before a roll of writings, and his hand was placed upon that verse in the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11: 1) in which it is written that there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a flower shall rise up out of his root. Thereupon all the unmarried men in the country of the House of David were summoned to the Temple. Mary was conducted into their presence. One among the many unmarried men had always ardently prayed to be allowed to minister to the advent of the Messiah. Great was his desire to wed Mary. But Mary wept; she wished not to take a husband. Then the high priest gave to each of the suitors a branch which was to be held in their hand during the offering of prayer and sacrifice. After that, all the branches were laid in the Holy of Holies with the understanding that he whose branch should blossom, was to be Mary's husband. Now when that youth who so ardently desired to wed Mary found that his branch, along with all the others, had failed to blossom, he retired to a hall outside the Temple and, with arms raised to God, wept bitterly. The other suitors left the Temple, but this youth hurried to Mt. Carmel where, since the days of Elias, hermits had dwelt. He took up his abode on the mount, and there spent his days in prayer for the coming of the Messiah.

The priest hunting through different rolls of writing in search for another descendent of the House of David, noticed that one person had not presented himself among the suitors for Mary's hand. Among the six brothers in Joseph's family who resided in Bethlehem, one was unknown and ignored. They sought him out and discovered it was Joseph who lived in a retreat, six miles from Jerusalem, near Samaria. There Joseph dwelt alone in a humble house near the water, and carried on the trade of a carpenter under another master. He was summoned to the Temple. When he went to the Temple, he was given a branch. As he was about to lay it upon the altar, it blossomed on top into a white flower like a lily. At that same moment Catherine Emmerich saw a light like the Holy Spirit hovering over him. He was then led to Mary, who was in her chamber, and she accepted him as her spouse.

The espousal took place, according to Catherine Emmerich on the 23rd of January. Mary and Joseph were celebrated in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion in a house often used for such feasts. After the celebration, Mary, accompanied by the seven other virgins who had also left the Temple with Mary, began their festal journey to Nazareth, where St. Anne had already prepared her little home. The marriage feast lasted seven or eight days. The women and the virgin companions of Mary in the Temple, were present, along with many relatives of Joachim and Anne. Many lambs were slaughtered and offered in sacrifice.

Mary's bridal dress was colored, she had on a woolen under dress without sleeves, her arms encircled by white, woolen fillets. On the breast and as high as the neck, lay a white collar ornamented with jewels, pearls, etc. Then came a kind of a gown open in front, wide like a mantle from top to bottom, and with flowing sleeves. This gown was blue, embroidered with large red, white, and yellow roses and green leaves, something like the ancient vestments worn at Mass. It fastened around the neck on the white-collar, and the lower border was edged with fringes and tassels. Over this was a kind of a scapular of white and gold flowered silk, set over the breast with pearls and shining stones. It lay upon the front opening of the dress, and reached to the edge of the same; it was about one half an ell (approximately 23 inches) wide and was fringed with tassels and balls. A corresponding strip hung down the back, while shorter and narrower ones fell over the shoulders and arms. These lappets were caught under the arms from front to back with the gold cords, or delicate chains, with which the broad upper piece of the bodice was fastened, as also the breast piece that was placed over the upper body. By this arrangement, the flowered stuff of the dress was puffed out between the cords. The wide sleeves were tightly fastened in the middle of the upper and lower arm by buckles, puffing out around the shoulders, the elbows, and the wrists.

Over this costume fell a long sky-blue mantle. It was fastened at the neck by an ornament, and over it was a white ruffle seemingly of feathers or silk dots. The mantle fell back from the shoulders, forming a large fold on the sides, and hung behind in a pointed train. It was embroidered around the edge in flowers of gold.

Question: What does the Gospel mean when it refers to Mary as the "espoused wife" of Joseph?

Answer: An "espousal" or "betrothal" is a formal agreement to marry. In modern American terms it would be something more than an engagement, yet less than a marriage.

In the Jewish culture of New Testament times, a young woman became marriageable at age twelve and a half. At a ceremony of betrothal, the bride and groom would exchange marital consent, but normally the bride would remain in the house of her father for somewhere between three months to a year. Marriage had the aspect of a man acquiring title to his bride, and only later did he acquire actual possession.

We know that Mary and Joseph had completed the contract of betrothal from the testimony given by St. Matthew (1: 18) and St. Luke (2: 5). What causes some confusion, though is Luke's reference to "Mary his espoused wife" when Mary and Joseph were already in Bethlehem, seeking a place to give birth to our Infant Lord. For them to be in Jerusalem together, Joseph had obviously taken Mary from her father's house, and it seems clear that their betrothal had already been converted into a marriage. As he was aware of the circumstances of our Lord's conception by the Holy Ghost, Luke was probably following the custom of referring to a non-consummated marriage as an "espousal."

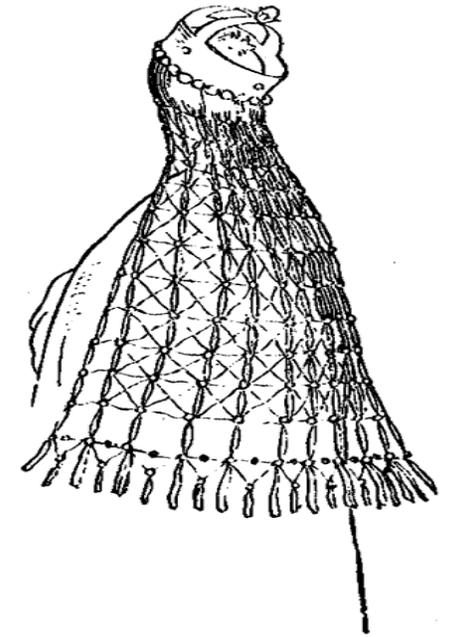
The Scriptures do not record exactly when Mary and Joseph were married, but the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel describes the circumstances. Verse 18 speaks of them being "betrothed ... before they came together." Joseph, on learning that she is pregnant with the child Jesus considers what he ought to do in verses 19-20, the situation is explained to him by an angel in verses 20-23, and in verse 24 we are told that he "did as the angel commanded him, and took unto him his wife." Presumably, this took place in Nazareth, as he would not have brought her to Bethlehem if she was still a member of her father's household. It (obviously) has to have followed the Annunciation (Luke 1: 26-38), and very likely followed the three months Mary spent with Elizabeth.



Here is the description Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich gives of the Blessed Virgin Mary's wedding ring: "I saw the Blessed Virgin's wedding-ring; it is neither of silver nor of gold, nor of any other metal; it is dark in color and iridescent; it is not a thin narrow ring, but rather thick and at least a finger broad. I saw it smooth and yet as if covered with little regular triangles in which were letters. On the inside was a flat surface. The ring is engraved with something. I saw it kept behind many locks in a beautiful church. Devout people about to be married take their wedding-rings to touch it. "

The online newspaper Umbria (www.tuttoggi.info/articolo/24465) has an account of the yearly festival that transpires celebrating the ceremony of the Holy Ring exposition. ... As reported by Geraldine Rindinella. ... Every year on July 29th and 30th in Perugia, Italy the right of exposition of the Holy Ring takes place. The ring is housed at the Cathedral of San Lorenzo and its exposition symbolically renews the strong ties it has with the public. The ring arrived in Perugia on July 29, 1473. It is a ring of chalcedony (various gemstones) that the ancient tradition revered as a pledge of the marriage of St. Joseph with Mary of Nazareth. The nuptial ring is the memorial of an event of great importance. Every year both civil and ecclesiastical authorities who hold the 14 keys needed to access The Relic kept in a chest, converge into the Cathedral of San Lorenzo. Taken from the town of Chiusi, Italy, the wedding ring was repaired in the Chapel of the Plazzo dei Priori, waiting for the completion of the extension work at the Cathedral where it was transferred on July 31, 1488. The online newspaper article relates many more interesting facts surrounding the Holy Ring dating back to the Emperor Aurelian and the famous "War of the Ring" which prompted Perugia to keep possession of the ring from neighboring Italian states in the fourteen hundreds. Also you can read about the Brotherhood of the Ring, an aggregation of citizens dedicated to the persistence of veneration of the ring.

Mary's hair was arranged with such skill that Catherine Emmerich had difficulty in describing it. It was parted on top of the head and divided into numerous fine strands, which were caught together with pearls and white silk. It formed a large net that fell over the shoulders and down the back to the middle of the mantle. It looked like a web. The ends of the hair were rolled in, and the whole net edged with fringe and pearls.



On her head was placed, first a wreath of white raw silk or wool, closing on top with three bands of the same fabric meeting in a tuft. On this rested a crown about the breadth of one's hand, set with many colored jewels. Three pieces arose from the circlet and met together in the center, where they were surmounted by a ball.

In her left hand Mary carried a little garland of red and white roses made of silk, and in her right-hand a beautiful candlestick covered with gold. It had no foot, but was furnished like a scepter with knobs above and below the point in which it was to be grasped by the hand. The stem began to swell out in the middle and ended in a little dish upon which burned a white flame.

On her feet she wore heavy sandals about two fingers in thickness under which, both in front and in back, were supports like a heel. They were green and gave the foot the appearance of standing upon sods. Two straps, white and gold, went over the foot and held them in their place.

Joseph wore a long, wide bluecoat fastened from the breast down, with loops and buttons. The wide sleeves were laced at the sides, a broad cuff turned up at the wrist, the inside provided, as it were, with pockets. Around the neck was something like a brown collar, over which lay a kind of stole, and upon the breast hung two white bands.

