

## Like Mary, the Christian is Presented to the Priest to Be Consecrated to God for His Purpose

The three years' time decreed by the Lord having been completed, Joachim and Anne set out from Nazareth, accompanied by a few of their kindred and bringing with them the true living Ark of the covenant, the most holy Mary, borne on the arms of her mother in order to be deposited in the holy temple of Jerusalem. The beautiful Child, by her fervent and loving aspirations, hastened after the ointments of her Beloved, seeking in the temple Him, whom She bore in her heart. This humble procession was scarcely noticed by earthly creatures, but it was invisibly accompanied by the angelic spirits, who, in order to celebrate this event, had hastened from heaven in greater numbers than ordinary as her bodyguard, and were singing in heavenly strains the glory and praise of the Most High. The Princess of heaven heard and saw them as She hastened her beautiful steps along in the sight of the highest and the true Solomon. Thus they pursued their journey from Nazareth to the holy city of Jerusalem, and also the parents of the holy child Mary felt in their hearts great joy and consolation of spirit.

They arrived at the holy temple, and the blessed Anne on entering took her Daughter and Mistress by the hand, accompanied and assisted by saint Joachim. ... She [Mary] alone perceived that the Most High received and accepted Her, and, amid divine splendor which filled the temple, She heard a voice saying to Her: *"Come, my Beloved, my Spouse, come to my temple, where I wish to hear thy voice of praise and worship."* Having offered their prayers, they rose and betook themselves to the priest. The parents consigned their Child into his hands and he gave them his blessing. Together they conducted her to the portion of the temple buildings, where many young girls lived to be brought up in retirement and in virtuous habits, until old enough to assume the state of matrimony. It was a place of retirement especially selected for the first-born daughters of the royal tribe of Juda and the sacerdotal tribe of Levi.

Fifteen stairs led up to the entrance of these apartments. Other priests came down these stairs in order to welcome the blessed child Mary. The one that had received them, being according to the law one of a minor order, placed Her on the first step. Mary, with his permission, turned and kneeling down before Joachim and Anne, asked their blessing and kissed their hands, recommending herself to their prayers before God. The holy parents in tenderest tears gave Her their blessing; whereupon She ascended the fifteen stairs without any assistance. She hastened upward with incomparable fervor and joy, neither turning back, nor shedding tears, nor showing any childish regret at parting from her parents. To see Her, in so tender an age, so full of strange majesty and firmness of mind, excited the admiration of all those present. The priests received Her among the rest of the maidens, and saint Simeon consigned Her to the teachers, one of whom was the prophetess Anne. This holy matron had been prepared by the Lord by especial grace and enlightenment, so that She joyfully took charge of this Child of Joachim and Anne. She considered the charge a special favor of divine

**Providence and merited by her holiness and virtue to have her as a disciple, who was to be the Mother of God and Mistress of all the creatures.**

**(Blessed Mary of Agreda, THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD, Vol. I, Tan Books and Publishers, Pages 331-333.)**

We offer for reflection this beautiful passage in Blessed Mary of Agreda's mystical account of the life of Mary as we celebrate the feast of the **Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (title in the West) or **The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple** (title in the East), on November 21<sup>st</sup>. This event is not recounted in the New Testament but is found in the apocryphal work of the Proto-evangelium of St. James; however, it has long been part of the Tradition of both the eastern and the western Church. Catholic biblical and theological understanding of typology shows the Scriptural significance of this event and the persons related to it with events and persons in the Hebrew Testament. A type is **"a person, a thing, or an action, having its own independent and absolute existence, but at the same time intended by God to prefigure a future person, thing, or action"...** It is **"a shadow of things to come."** It is **never accidental but is always ordained by the Lord God from all eternity.** (Reference: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15107a.htm>) St. Augustine reminds us that the Old Testament prefigures what is to come in the New and the New fulfills what was promised in the old and looks forward to the eternal kingdom where the beatific vision transcends all that has been revealed about God in time with the Reality of God as He is in Himself in eternity. **"... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him."** (Douay-Rheims Bible, 1Corinthians 2:9)

The childless couple, Joachim and Anne, like Elkanah and Hannah before them, cried out to God for the blessing of a child, promising to consecrate that child to God if their prayer was answered. In Hebrew times barren couples suffered great ridicule because childlessness was perceived to result from some disfavor with God. Romanos the Melodist, c. 490-556, spoke of the priests at the temple rejecting Joachim's sacrifice on the feast of Lights because of his childlessness. He tells how Joachim went into the desert and wept bitterly while Anne prayed and wept at home. The archangel Gabriel appeared to Joachim, reminding him how God had given Abraham and Sarah a child in their old age, for nothing is impossible to God. Gabriel also appeared to Anne and announced she would bear a daughter, Mary, who would be filled with grace and must be consecrated to God. All nations would call her blessed. We see this same action in the prayers of Anne's relatives, Elizabeth and Zachary, another barren couple at the confluence of the Old Covenant with the proclamation of the New. Unfolding is the mystery of God's plan for our salvation when, in the fullness of time, Gabriel would appear to the now betrothed Mary to announce that she would bear a Son and she must name Him Jesus for He would save His people from their sins. When Mary questioned how this can be as she does not know man and had made a vow of virginity to God, the angel said she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus she became Theotokos, Mother of God our Savior while remaining the Immaculate Virgin. Likewise is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, that a virgin would conceive and bear a son. Herein lie our dogmas about Mary: her divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity. This divine motherhood that centered Mary in Christ's redemptive mission was prepared for from eternity by that singular privilege of her Immaculate Conception. It was later crowned with her glorious Assumption of body and soul into heaven to reign as Queen-Mother at the right hand of her Divine Son, the Risen Lord and King of heaven and earth. It is

fitting that we celebrate Mary's presentation and consecration to God just days before our great liturgical feast of Christ the King and just prior to the Advent season that prepares us to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Everything about Mary points to Jesus. Thus are aligned three events in the lives of both Jesus and Mary: the announcement of their births by the archangel Gabriel, the actual births effected by the power of God, and the total consecration of both, not only in the temple but by a life of virginity, the complete gift of self to the Will and purpose of God.

Typology also references Jacob's ladder to the stairs Mary climbed during her Presentation in the Temple. As in Jacob's vision, angels were ascending as they accompanied Mary and were descending to welcome her into the Presence of God as Daughter and Spouse. Mary was pre-ordained to be Theotokos, God-bearer of the Promised Messiah, the God-man Who alone could bridge heaven with earth and man with God. Jesus, Son of the living God, our Savior, now in our flesh, is the only One Who can take us back to the Father from whose eternal womb we were all born in the act of creation. Mary makes the descent of the Savior possible with her "fiat" to the Will of God that puts flesh on God's Word. Jesus is the mystical ladder, the spiritual stairway to heaven, for He is the Way, the Truth and the Life Who enables us to ascend from one rung of grace and glory to another until we reach the top, the Eternal City of God where everlasting peace and happiness abound. The Hebrew people carried an Ark made of wood to hold the sacred symbols that were signs of their Covenant with God and His Presence with them, but Mary became the Ark in flesh and carried, not signs of God's Presence, but God Himself within her. She is the living tabernacle that gives God an intimate and personal dwelling place in our midst and in our very selves. She is indeed Theotokos, Mother of our Savior, the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God.

On November 22-23, 1957, Our Blessed Lady appeared to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil in a vision so important, for it revealed Our Lady as she really and truly was, this Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God. We can repeat the account of this appearance over and over and not fully grasp the enormity of grace that it holds out to us so we, too, can become living tabernacles for our Indwelling God.

**Our Lady was standing on a globe, her right foot resting on a crescent or quarter moon, the left on the snout of a rather small and very ugly looking dragon. I saw fire come out of his huge jaws, but not very much, as he could not open them wide enough because of Our Lady's foot. At times he seemed to be somewhat black, again of a shade of green. Our Lady was all in white. Her veil was so long that it seemed to envelop the globe halfway. Sometimes the veil appeared so transparent that Our Lady's hair could be seen through it and the hair seemed to be sparkling with the light of many glittering stars. At times the edges of the veil, sleeves, and garments seemed to be outlined in light. The veil was held about the head by a wreath of white roses. Her feet were bare.**

**The previous day Our Lady had appeared with her hands outstretched. At this second visit she slowly raised them, then crossed them on her breast rather close to her waist. While doing so, she bent her head slightly forward, and it seemed that her eyes were closed, not just lowered. On her breast, as though through a veil, the Triange and the Eye, which is often depicted as the symbol of the Divine Indwelling, could be visibly seen. I said that Our Lady's feet were bare,**

that is, devoid of any kind of footwear, but on each foot was a large white rose. The roses, both on the feet and on the crown, were of such dazzling whiteness that the outlines of the petals could barely be seen, sometimes not at all. It seemed that a strong beam of light streamed from the Divine Presence within Our Lady onto the globe at her feet. Then halfway around the figure of Our Lady above her head appeared a scroll on which were written in letters of gold the words: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within."



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Though it did not appear that her lips moved, yet I heard these words quite plainly: "I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within." She seemed suffused in a soft glow of light that appeared to come from within her. It seemed to permeate and, as it were, saturate her whole being, even her apparel and the roses.

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Fostoria, OH, Pgs. 22-23.)

In the liturgical celebration of Baptism, most of us, like Mary, were taken as children by our parents and were presented to the priest in our Church to be consecrated to God for whatever purpose He has ordained for us individually, and as part of God's family, in the work of redemption. Some of us have spent years in study to be better prepared for the work God wills us to do, but sadly, some of us have come away from this most significant event with little understanding of its importance or with no willingness to take the hand of Jesus lest we fall on the rocks along the way. He has given us His example, His grace, His Church to be our Mother, and Mary, His own mother to be our mother, too. His gifts and sacraments are endless, but he has also given us free will, so we must choose to take His hand. He has come into our world in flesh so we might better know Him and touch Him. In Baptism He comes to dwell within us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so we will never be alone.

In a letter to Father Paul F. Leibold, Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil's spiritual director, she recounted being transported to Lourdes in France and being given a vision of Bernadette as a young girl. There Sister was shown a stairway into the clouds. She wanted so much to climb it straightway into heaven, but Bernadette said she could not for her work was not yet done.

Each of us is given a vocation, a work to do that is ours alone. Each of us has been shown deep within the depths of our souls the vision of that "stairway" that leads into the

Presence of God. As we prayerfully grow in our journey in faith, we learn from Jesus and Mary preeminently, and from all the saints who have gone before us, that the way to heaven is rocky. It is a Via Dolorosa, a way of suffering, for suffering purifies the soul and makes it ready for the vision of God. Nothing impure can enter into God's Presence! This is the salvific action and redemptive grace of Jesus into which we have all been baptized. ***"And he that doth not take up his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me."*** (Mt 10:38)

In order to rise with Jesus, we must die with Him. Where are we on our journey of Faith in accomplishing the work God has given us to do? Have we picked up our cross to climb the rocky road to heaven? How genuine is our hope in sharing in Christ's Resurrection? A stairway may literally be made of stone, but its ascent is always an exercise of the spirit. We have been placed on the first step by the priest at our Baptism. We must exert the necessary energy to climb the rest of the way. Jesus has offered us His hand to guide us. Let us imitate Mary who, impelled by grace, never looked back and did not delay!

***The Holy Spirit has marked us with the seal of the Lord ("Dominicus character") "for the day of redemption." "Baptism indeed is the seal of eternal life." The faithful Christian who has "kept the seal" until the end, remaining faithful to the demands of his Baptism, will be able to depart this life "marked with the sign of faith," with his baptismal faith, in expectation of the blessed vision of God—the consummation of faith—and in the hope of resurrection. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1274.)***

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