



B. S. + SS.T.

Ave Maria SS.ma

Lett. Circ. IV/2022

Let's go to Bethlehem

Dear Sisters in the Holy Trinity,
Greeting, peace and joy!

Last year, we meditated on the simplicity and faith of the shepherds when they arrive and see the baby Jesus as the Angel had told them. For this Christmas 2022, we let ourselves be involved and enveloped by the *historical and spiritual journey* that Mary and Joseph make to reach Bethlehem. In fact, the evangelist St. Luke notes:

"Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. This census -- the first -- took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space." (Lk 2: 1-7)

Christmas today is generally associated with the holiday in which to find oneself warm and sheltered, surrounded by one's dearest loved ones, and by the joy of the anniversary of the Savior's birth. But looking at the Nativity scene, the memory that this should transmit to us is not only that of the coming of the Child Jesus but also of the courage

and effort that Mary and Joseph made from Nazareth to Bethlehem, so as to take them as a reference for the life of each of us.

Bethlehem, at the time was considered a center of secondary importance, despite being the city of King David and there was buried Rachel, the second wife of Jacob, 7 kilometers from Jerusalem. Joseph seems to have been a native of Bethlehem, in Judea; but at that time, he was living with Mary in Nazareth, in northern Galilee. According to Luke's Gospel, that was the place where the two of them were living when Mary became pregnant with Jesus. And that mountainous road between the two cities, consisting of the plain of Esdrelon, the steep Samaria and the heights of Judea, was normally beaten by many caravans, headed from Jerusalem to Egypt.

It was so at that time, in March of the year 8 BC., the same in which Mary and Joseph married, that the emperor Augustus gave the order to carry out a census of the population, at the behest of Herod, king of Judea. And for that reason, the people were obliged to go to the village of which they originated. In Palestine, however, this census took place a year later, on 7 BC. So, Mary was nearing the end of her pregnancy; although her presence was not mandatory, she still decided to face this long journey of 156 kilometers together with her beloved husband Joseph, a descendant of King David. A difficult situation, of no small importance. At that time, there were certainly not all the means we have today. Although the Roman Empire had already built many paved roads, just as many were not; Embarking, therefore, a journey meant riding your donkey or camel, with all the efforts that this entailed. We can only imagine the effort that awaited a couple economically poor and composed of a pregnant lady, close to childbirth, and a man no longer young. Not to mention that they will certainly have had to find food and places to rest during the nights of the trip. We can only imagine that this took place in the context of a temporary camp or sheltered in an inn encountered on the way. Everything up to the stable where Mary *"gave birth to her firstborn son. There she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the lodging."*

At first, we looked at the arduous journey of Mary and Joseph... Now, looking at our reality, we see men and women fleeing their cities, their homes, because of war and hunger; Or they are beggars, homeless, poor, who leave their land, in silence, fleeing from pain, misery and suffering for a better future. They wander, at times, like ghosts in our opulent cities to find accommodation, a hot meal; instead, they are forced to live in shacks or under bridges... Let us also look at the reality of our Missions and at the Sisters who work there and work in unfavorable and disadvantaged conditions, but always trust in the Divine Providence as Our Beloved Foundress, Mother Maria Teresa of the Holy Trinity, reminds us.

Now let us turn our gaze to Bethlehem. What does this "place" of the spirit suggest to us? What suggestion does it give us? What memories does it arouse in our souls? As is well known, Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Strangely, he never returns to the place of his birth. However, Mary and Joseph discover, and we with them, in a crescendo of amazement, that Bethlehem is not a simple place of registry.

In reality, *going back* to Bethlehem meant for them, rediscovering "*the roots*", what lies at the beginning of a "*promise*" that came from afar and from above. They immerse themselves in a human and family event marked by God, and therefore are grafted into the vein of a history that then, in the light of faith, will be called "*history of salvation*".

Yes, let us go spiritually to Bethlehem, where there is nothing great: only a poor child wrapped in swaddling clothes, with shepherds around. And there is God, in *littleness*. Here is the message: God has nothing to do with greatness but comes in smallness. It is the way he chose to reach us, to touch our hearts, to save us and bring us back to what matters. This is what to ask of Jesus for Christmas: *the grace of littleness*. We often repeat throughout the day, "Lord, teach us to love smallness. Help us to understand that it is the way to true greatness." But what does it mean, concretely, to welcome littleness? First, it means believing that God wants to come in the *little things of our lives*, he wants to inhabit the daily realities, the simple gestures that we perform every day in fraternal life in community and in our apostolate. He is in our ordinary life that he wants to achieve extraordinary things. And it is a message of great hope: Jesus invites us to value and rediscover the little things in life. If He is with us there, what

do we lack? Let us then leave behind the regrets for the greatness that we do not have. Let us give up what leaves us unsatisfied! The smallness, the amazement of that little child: this is the message. But there's more. Jesus does not want to come only in the little things of our life, but also **in our littleness**: in our feeling weak, fragile, inadequate. Dear sister, if as in Bethlehem, the darkness of the night surrounds you, if you feel a cold indifference around you, if the wounds you carry inside cry out: "You count little, you are worth nothing, you will never be loved as you want", in the Night of Christmas, if you hear this, God answers and tells you: "I love you the way you are. Your smallness does not frighten me, your fragility does not worry me. I made myself small for you. To be your God I became your brother, friend, and husband. Beloved daughter, do not be afraid of me, but find your greatness in me. I am close to you and only this I ask of you: trust me and open your heart to me".

So, we have realized not the long and tiring journey of Mary and Joseph, as I have already written above, but the spiritual one, that of the heart, which makes us return to ourselves, to regain confidence, hope, courage and go forward in our Trinitarian consecration.

Let us make our own the prayer of Pope Francis: *"Lord, we want to come to Bethlehem. The road, even today, is uphill: the summit of selfishness must be overcome, we must not slip into the ravines of worldliness and consumerism. I want to get to Bethlehem, Lord, because that is where you await me. And realize that You, laid in a manger, are the bread of my life. I need the tender fragrance of your love to be, in turn, bread broken for the world. Lord, take me on your shoulders, Good Shepherd: beloved by you, I too will be able to love and take my brothers and sisters by hand. Then it will be Christmas, when I will be able to say to you: "Lord, you know that I love you" (cf. Christmas Homily, 24 December 2018).*

May these brief reflections help us to prepare our hearts and all the communities of the Institute, together with the people who collaborate in apostolic activities, to welcome Emmanuel, God with us, not only for this Christmas now at hand, but every day of our existence.

May the Virgin Mary, Immaculate Mother, intercede before the Most Holy Trinity and obtain abundant graces and heavenly blessings that each of you desires.

May Patriarch St. John of Matha together with Our Venerable Foundress, Mother Maria Teresa Cucchiari, watch over us and be models of redemptive charity and liberating from every form of ancient and present slavery.

In conclusion, I take advantage of this Letter of mine to send to each of you, to your relatives, parents, friends, and benefactors my most fervent wishes for a Holy Christmas 2022 and a Merry Year 2023.

Rome, 8.12. 2002



Mother Maria Augustine dell'Assunta
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