

CHRISTMAS TIME IN BETHLEHEM

Scenes About the Cities Where Was Spent the Life of Him Whose Birth All Christendom Celebrates



THE SEA OF GALILEE

THE HOME OF THE CHRIST CHILD, NAZARETH

VIA DOLOREOSA, THRO' WHICH CHRIST BORE HIS CROSS TO CALVARY



BETHANY—WHERE CHRIST VISITED MARTHA AND MARY



THE MOUNT OF OLIVES AND GETHSEMANE

GOING TO BETHLEHEM ON CHRISTMAS EVE

BY EVANGELINE BEN-OLIEL.
T is Christmas eve. Across the dark Judean hills and valleys resounds the ringing of the midnight chimes from the ancient Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Within the great edifice numbers of pilgrims and of natives clad in picturesque Oriental costumes are kneeling prostrate before the little gilded cradle containing the image of the Babe—which has suddenly, at the striking of the hour, appeared hanging above the manger arch.

From the great organ peals out the harmonious accompaniment to the hymn sung by the monks in the immense choir "Gloria in Excelsis." The cradle with the "Hambino" is lowered and received reverently by waiting priests and borne solemnly at the head of a procession descending to the little chapel where an altar marks the site of the wondrous birth which took place 2000 years ago. A large gilt star in the marble pavement recalls the advent of the shepherds to Bethlehem, led by the guiding star, to visit the Babe of whom the angels sang. Holding flaming torches and chanting solemnly, the priests and monks, pilgrims and visitors gather in the chapel, on the stairway and around the low-arched entrance and chanting worship the Child of Bethlehem. Then the little cradle is reverently laid onto the altar, bedecked to receive it. Here it lies for a week for pilgrims and visitors to come and adore.

Bethlehem, the little town to which the wise men came to visit the Christ Child, is today a quiet village, situated on the hillside above the valley where Bedouins lead their sheep to pasture in the "Fields of the Shepherds." As one approaches it on the road from Jerusalem, it is singularly picturesque. Its white limestone houses, with their flat roofs, rising one above the other and clinging to the hillside, surrounded by olive groves and vineyards, are surrounded by the massive walls of the ancient convent and church which give to the town its wonderful interest and make it the goal of pilgrims from all directions of the compass.

The Church of the Nativity was built in 327 A. D. by Queen Helena above the grotto which was the stable of the inn to which Joseph and Mary came on that memorable night. The basilica is perhaps the oldest monument of Christian architecture in the world. The shafts of the 80 columns which support its fine architecture and its decaying roof are each of a single piece of marble more than two feet in diameter and 16 feet high. They are surrounded by elaborately carved capitals. On the upper parts of the columns are faded frescoes with Greek and Byzantine figures of Saints. The columns

were taken from the ancient temple in Jerusalem. These and the mosaics on the walls and roof are made of cedar wood from Lebanon and reveal the former splendor of the church.

On the road from Bethlehem to Jerusalem one meets many a living illustration of the flight of the holy family to Egypt. The mother in her blue gown, her white veil covering her head and falling gracefully over her shoulders, sits on the strong Arabian donkey holding her babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, while her husband walks slowly by her side, guiding the animal from time to time.

In the mysterious life of the Holy Child there is the silence of 30 years unbroken except by the visit of the boy Jesus to Jerusalem at the age of 12.

The Scriptures give us but a short glimpse of the beauty of the character unfolding in the Boy during these years of seclusion. One picture is given us of filial devotion and of respectful submission combined with surpassing wisdom and attainment of knowledge which caused him to be "in favor with God and man." The episode at 12 years of age in the temple in Jerusalem reveals the studious and meditative inclinations of the Child, who soon became the Great Teacher of all mankind.

In the quaint little village of Nazareth he spent those childhood days of quiet seclusion. We can picture him on the beautiful hills on which Nazareth is situated, delighting in Nature's beauty and meditating on the task before him. To the fountain, now called the Virgin's fountain, he doubtless went daily with his gentle mother, helping her carry the stone pitcher to be filled from the village well every morn and eve. In the fields we can see him gathering the firewood for the little earthen stove. Standing at the bench with tool in hand he saw the appearance of the Virgin. Suspended from the roof hangs a broken column about the position of which miraculous stories are told. The whole sanctum and vestibule are paved in marble. The light of many silver lamps shed a dim radiance over the faces of pious monks on bended knee offering fervent petitions to the Virgin Mary. All around are pilgrims, some before the altar kissing the marble floor, others returning from the cave of Our Lady, carrying stones they have broken off the rocks, as precious relics. Before the altar is a painting depicting the tradition of the site. It was donated by the Empress of Austria.

Behind the grotto of the Annunciation are several chambers hewn in the rock. One of these is "Mary's kitchen." Further on is a room, the door of which is walled up now. The monks tell us that it was through this door that the Virgin passed out to the village well. There is a story that the remainder of the "holy

town a touch of Oriental grace. Even here the star and crescent glitter beside the cross of Christ. Tall palms wave their green branches above the white buildings, and stately cypresses stand like dark pillars, forming an effective background. It is with a feeling of reverence that one approaches the town, and one is filled with a sense of love for these valleys whose voice so often resounded.

The convent stands on the site believed by the Franciscans to be that of the Annunciation. It is surrounded by high walls. The gateway leads to a large courtyard where pilgrims in blue serge gowns, fastened by leather girdles, pace up and down, telling their beads. The church is somber and the sound of chanting and the fragrance of incense issues forth at the hours of vespers and matins. Down in the sanctum is a marble slab where a cross marks the spot of the angel's appearance to the Virgin. Suspended from the roof hangs a broken column about the position of which miraculous stories are told. The whole sanctum and vestibule are paved in marble. The light of many silver lamps shed a dim radiance over the faces of pious monks on bended knee offering fervent petitions to the Virgin Mary. All around are pilgrims, some before the altar kissing the marble floor, others returning from the cave of Our Lady, carrying stones they have broken off the rocks, as precious relics. Before the altar is a painting depicting the tradition of the site. It was donated by the Empress of Austria.

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house" was carried by angels from Nazareth to Loreto in Italy.

Though Josephus writes of Galilee as being covered by towns, with not less than 100 inhabitants each, yet today there are not more than 700 or 800 inhabitants in Nazareth, the greater number of whom are Christians belonging to the Greek and Latin Churches.

All around Galilee are sites connected with the life of Christ. As one stands forth at the blue waters of the little pear-shaped lake a strange scene presents itself to one's mind. A little boat is rising and falling on the gray waters tossed by white waves. Dark hills frown all around, shutting in the narrow lake from the rest of the world. Black clouds thunder from above. The little company of rowers are filled with fear. At the stern lies the Savior peacefully sleeping. In anguish the disciples cry out: "Master, save us, for we perish." Then, in gentle tones of assurance are uttered these memorable words: "Peace, be still," and the winds and waves at once subside.

These blue waters of Galilee are yet at times subject to similar sudden and violent tempests, when houses along the shores are engulfed by them. As we look upon this little lake, thoughts of the incidents stir our hearts and hold us spellbound to the spot, though its natural appearance has nothing particularly attractive about it. The features which distinguish it from other lakes are its desolation and its rugged bare hills rising abruptly from its banks to the height of 2000 feet above its waters.

The dwellers in the quaint villages which dot the hills—tawny Arabs in flowing garments—lead to the locality an element of the picturesque and inspire the artist. Its ruins and its former grandeur are what appeal to the historian. But the life of the Master is what endears Galilee to us above all else.

Bethlehem saw his birth, Nazareth his sheltered childhood, Jerusalem his work, his suffering and his death. But by the Sea of Galilee he was sought, loved and followed by the multitudes who were willing to forego their repasts to listen to his teaching.

Capernaum, the first place to which Christ came after his baptism, is one of the cities which flourished and was of great importance of old and is now but a heap of debris and ruins of interest to archaeologists. Here stood the synagogue in which Christ preached the sermon on the manna in the wilderness. The remaining walls show it to have been a rectangular building, reared in the fourth century, with a double row of columns, of which the broken pedestals remain. Part of an ancient Roman road is here to be seen, the main road from Damascus to Tiberias, and the ruins of a Roman castle which crowned the hill overlooking the town, encircled by its graceful terraces.

From the ruins of Capernaum one has a wonderful view of the beautiful plain of Gennesaret, and the whole extent of the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan descending from the mountains and passing on its way to the lone Haifa in the Dead Sea. As one sits on these ruins not a sound breaks the meditation of one's thoughts. The mute tongues of past grandeur speak to one in the surrounding stillness. A long descending road from Nazareth leads out through fragrant valleys, beside rivulets and dells filled with bright anemones, to the modern village of Kefr Cana, a dismal Arab village, though surrounded by blossoming orchards.

The ancient Cana is now a deserted spot in a wild locality which forms a good hiding place for wild boars and jackals. A Greek convent and chapel, not far off, commemorate the site of Christ's miracle, the turning of the water into wine. The monks show some earthen water-pots as relics of the feast. In Nain, where the widow's son was raised to life, is now nothing but a Mohammedan mud-hut village amidst many ruins. There are many rock-cut tombs in this locality.

From Galilee, Christ returned to Jerusalem, no longer a child, but a man, who could draw the multitudes to hear him and to follow him. He walked through its long streets and climbed the hillside to the Mount of Olives and to Bethany, and from there he looked down on the Holy City and wept over it.

The Jerusalem we enter today is not the city which he looked upon. That has vanished away long since. But the present town stands upon the foundations of the old, so that the general aspect has not materially changed. We can easily follow our Lord in his walks to the temple or to Olivet and Bethany, and look upon the ruins which speak of his deeds of love to man. The present town has grown up on the debris of ancient cities which preceded it. Jerusalem was built on four hills, and its former grandeur are what appeal to the historian. But the life of the Master is what endears Galilee to us above all else.

grand, but yet the country looks dreary and desolate compared with that "flowing with milk and honey" promised to Israel. Few remains are left to tell of the beauty of which King David loved to sing. But it has an interest and an attraction above its mere topography, because the Master lived in it and loved it. Like all ancient cities, Jerusalem is enclosed by a wall with many gates. This fortification is a mere relic of the past, for the gates are never closed now. The eastward one has been entirely walled up by the Mohammedans. This is the "golden or beautiful" gate, leading from the temple area out on to the Mount of Olives. It is the one through which, in all probability, Christ passed most often on his way to Bethany. It is interesting to know that the Prophet Ezekiel prophesied, many centuries ago, that this gate would be closed because "the Lord had entered in by it." As one approaches the city from the Jaffa gate, the principal entrance, it appears not unlike some modern town, for the larger Jerusalem extending outside the wall is what first meets the eye.

To obtain a true view of the old city one must ascend one of the hills which surround it. Looking down from a height above it one has a fine view of the situation of ancient Jerusalem, which was once "the joy of the whole earth."

One is struck at once by the absence of bright colors in the buildings and roofs, most of which are of a rugged gray or white stone. Many of the houses are flat roofed and others have a white limestone dome which stands out in a picturesque manner beside the tall white minarets. Above a Turkish mosque rises a Christian Church spire with a gilt cross shining in the sunlight, near to the silver crescent on the Mosque. Here and there a solitary palm tree waves its branches in a stately manner, towering over the house-tops. Above the gleaming city the changeless blue of the Syrian sky affords the touch of color needed to heighten the beauty of the landscape. The deep green olive trees on some of the hills around form a sombre background to the whole picture. One realizes that to the Turk also this is "The Holy City"—"El Kuds," and one cannot help respecting the liberality here depicted by an otherwise despotic and fanatic people in granting to both Jew and Christian the privilege of raising their own monuments of worship in a land where daily is proclaimed the fact that "Mohammed is the Prophet of God." For times a day cries ascend the long flights of steps to the summit of these minarets and from thence call out, in loud voices, "There is but one God and Mohammed is his prophet."

The most prominent buildings in the panorama are the Mosque of Omar and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The beautiful mosque stands on the site of Solomon's Temple, where Christ taught and healed. It is surrounded by a large open space where Saracenic arches, domes and minarets proclaim it a Mohammedan place of worship.

The most important street in Jerusalem is named after Israel's poet—King David. It runs through the town in an irregular, winding manner, down long stairways of stone steps. Many archways and overhanging houses darken the descent. On either side are dingy shops, where the owner sits on a raised platform with his goods arranged on low shelves, in easy reach of his hand, while he drinks coffee and smokes his long nargile. The buyers in this narrow street stand, keep a watchful eye on the strings of heavily-laden camels and donkeys which brush past quickly, knocking the lingers on all sides.

Christian street, the second of the three thoroughfares, distinguished by a name, is strangely enough composed of Jewish shops. It gradually leads down to the neighborhood of the Holy Sepulchre, in the vicinity of which are Greek sellers of relics, rosaries and gilded pictures of saints to be laid on the sacred tomb.

city depends all the year around on the rain water gathered from the flat roofs in winter. The house-tops afford a delightful walk or resting place during the long, cool, summer evenings, many persons preferring to take up their mattresses and sleep under the starlit sky.

All business is transacted between sunrise and sunset. Persons going out after dark are obliged to carry lanterns, by order of the Governor. Otherwise they are arrested by the soldiers of the Sultan. The twilight is very brief and with darkness perfect stillness broods over the city. All shops are barred, the streets are deserted and absolute quiet reigns.

At the foot of the Mount of Olives, just beyond the valley, which separated the hill from the city, is the quiet little garden of Gethsemane.

The grand old olive trees alone remain as monuments of the past. When one stands with bowed head under these ancient trees in the stillness of this solitary place and meditates on the sad events which took place here one is impressed with a new meaning by the hymn, "The Midnight and on Olivet's Brow." Outside the walls of the city and not far from the beautiful Damascus gate stands a little hill. By its very contour against the clear sky it proclaims its name "Golgotha, the Place of a Skull."

It presents a striking appearance, having strange, eyeless sockets, giving the mound a perfect resemblance to a human skull. A very impressive mark on the sacred hill is the rent made in the rocks by the great earthquake at the Crucifixion. One huge boulder still hangs over the precipice on the hillside, apparently having been cleft from the larger half of the hilltop.

The most important feature of the hill is a precipitous declivity in which are three slots, evidently each an opening in which the foot of a cross was placed, to facilitate the raising of it after the body had been fastened on. Here, in full view of the city, stood the three crosses, upon which hung the two thieves and between them the Great Teacher and Healer who had spent his days "going about doing good."

Change of Date for Christmas.
Puck.
I wish that Christmas day would come some other time of year—
In Summer, when the fishes an' th' swimmers' days are here!
If Christmas came in August then th' Santa Claus might bring
A bathing suit or fishin' rod, or trap or patent swing.
Th' things a feller uses in th' woods an' I'd ha' my swimmin' pool
I'd ha' my swimmin' pool shinin' when they let me out of school—
But jest because it always comes aroun' th' same old day,
I git th' same old presents in th' same old Christmas way!

I never git a bat an' ball. If Christmas only came
In June I'd have enough 't keep th' fellows in th' game!
Then, I wish that a pony, if Kris Kringle came in May,
When I could feed him grass instead of Santa Claus's hay!
If Christmas came in April Santa Claus'd never leave
Around a little boy a fuzzy overcoat,
A cap an' boots an' gloves—he'd bring him out of school—
When he leaves his coat at home an' paddies round without his shoes!

I'm waitin' fer th' Summer an' I'm lonely fer th' Spring;
But Santa Claus is comin', an' he'll never leave a thing
To suit me in vacation, when they let me out of school—
A dog 't fetch a grinnin', or a hobbin' fer th' pool,
A pair an' a pair 't gather cider, wood an' grain,
An' haul th' girls 't picnic in th' grove at Shady Lane.
Oh, I wish that Santa Claus would throw his 'tern an' sled away,
An' come aroun' next Christmas on a load of Summer hay!

His Christmas gift.
Puck.
"Could I but offer a Christmas gift"—
He paused, "an' his deep eyes shined bright,
They always did when he saw her lit!
Her eyes with that tranquil gleam—
"Could I but hope," he grew bold again—
"That your love would be all my eye,
To have and to hold, in joy and pain,
My treasure, and mine alone—"
"Grant me this happy Christmaside,
Grant heart, with thy precious freight,
And forever my love, my bride"—
And then as she saw him wait—
"But, what are you giving me?" she said,
And shrug, at all, she was not
"I fall to perceive any gift—instead,
I thank you are asking a lot!"

Coldly Practical.
Louisville Courier-Journal.
His dulcet lyre
He twanged with care,
And warbled to the dove,
"You was the lay
He did sing—
"Oh, some and be my love."
The maiden heard
Her true work,
Then with a scornful look,
She asked the swain
"Canst guarantee a cook?"