

# The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple

## Evidence from the Protoevangelium of James, Qumran and Venerable Catherine Emmerich

The story of Jesus begins in the Old Testament with all of the amazingly accurate prophecies about the Messiah who would be both King and lamb of sacrifice.

We can also say that the story of Jesus begins with the story of Mary. Mary was the dawn that announced the rising of the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ. She is the pure temple who alone was worthy to receive the presence of God within her.

The story of Mary begins with her parents (especially because Jesus only had ONE set of grandparents!) To learn about them we must go back to ancient church tradition and to a document called the "Protoevangelium of James," which tells the story of Joachim and Ann, the parents of Our Lady. Their story is not found in the Bible. However the Protoevangelium of James is from the mid-second century, which means that it is almost as old as the Biblical narratives of the childhood of Jesus found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Even if it may not accurate about every detail of the history of the birth and infancy of Mary, it should be taken seriously because it was written at a time when many people still remember the stories that were told by Jesus' relatives, who lived in Jerusalem in the second century A.D.

The story of Mary begins with the story of her parents, Joachim and Ann. According to the Protoevangelium of James, Joachim was a pious man who was very much saddened by the fact that he was an elderly man who did not have any children, which meant that he would be considered "unclean" and unworthy to perform his priestly duties in the temple. This is ironic because he was to be father of the most Immaculate Temple of God! But since Joachim was despised and rejected by the "assembly of the sons of Israel," he chose to go into the desert to escape and to pray that God would bless him with a child. He pitched his tent in the wilderness and fasted and prayed forty days and forty nights. There is an ancient document (from a Georgian lectionary from the fifth to sixth century) which says that the place where Joachim camped was in the wilderness of Judah in the Wadi Qelt in the grottoes of Kosiba. We know that this place was considered to be a holy place because a cloister with a sanctuary dedicated to Mary was constructed here around A.D. 470. Even today one can visit this place where Joachim prayed (it is near the Greek Orthodox Saint George Monastery).

In New Testament times, Kosiba appears to have been inhabited by Essenes, as is indicated in a reference found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (3Q15 7:14-16). One of these ancient scrolls, unearthed in 1947, is called the "Copper Scroll." Unlike the other scrolls found at Qumran in 1947, this text was written on copper rather than on parchment. The Copper Scroll contains a map and a list of hiding places where the Essenes hid their valuables to protect them from the armies of Rome which attacked and destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. Kosiba, where Joachim prayed, was one of the places where the Essenes kept buried treasure during the war with Rome. This could mean that Mary's parents had ties with the Essenes. It might be said that Joachim decided to make a "retreat" at an "Essene retreat center" in order to pray that his elderly wife would conceive and bear a son!

For those who know anything about the Essenes, the significance of this is obvious. The Essenes were a group of ascetics, many of whom practiced celibacy. This could explain the fact that when Anna eventually conceived and bore a daughter, this daughter, Mary, seems to have made a vow to remain a virgin for life. (cf. Luke 1:34) According to the Protoevangelium of James, the parents of Mary were so grateful to God for the birth of their daughter that they brought her to the temple and presented her so that she could be raised there. This is the origin of the tradition of the "Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary." It is not in the Bible, and so modern scholars often discount this tradition as unhistorical, but with modern archeological discoveries we have learned that these kinds of things were actually practiced among the Jews at the time of Jesus.

Some scholars doubt say there could not have been a group of celibate women in the temple because they say female celibacy did not exist among the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israelites. However, there may be evidence of this in the Dead Sea Scrolls. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls is called the "Temple Scroll", and in it there is an explanation of Numbers 30:4-9 which explains that young Israelite women would make penitential vows. Young Israelite woman would make a vow to do some sort of penance, and her father had the authority to release her from the vow or to allow her to continue to fulfill it. These ancient texts are very significant because they could be indications that Mary did make a vow to remain a virgin.

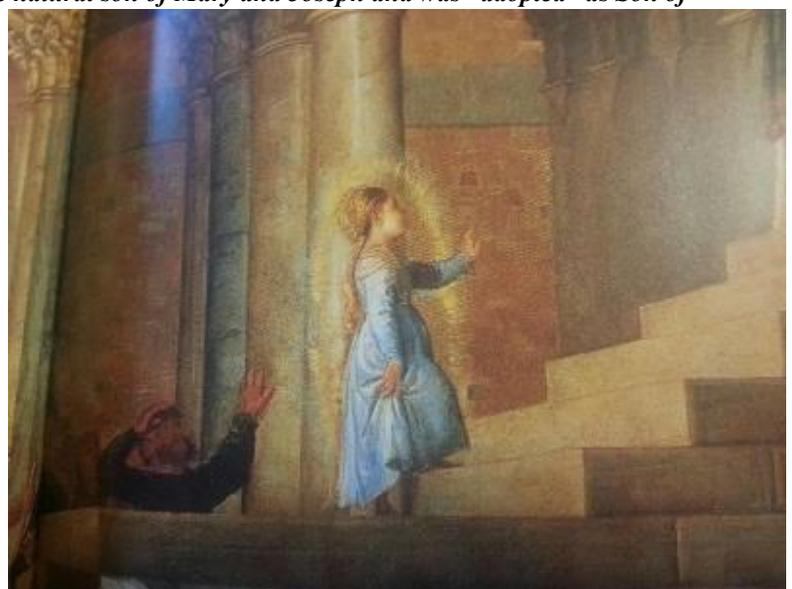
### "The Protoevangelium of James"

*The "Protoevangelium of James" is a document dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It describes details about the birth of Mary and the birth of Jesus which are not found in the Gospels. This document is not considered to be "inspired". It contains errors. The author wrote many fanciful details, but his intention was always to emphasize that Mary was a virgin. It was written to combat the Ebionite heresy which said that Jesus was born as the natural son of Mary and Joseph and was "adopted" as Son of God at the time of his baptism.*

*This document certainly contains historical errors. In fact, it has been condemned by several popes during the history of the church. However, this document should not be ignored because it is very ancient.*

*It was written only 100 years after the time of the Apostles. It was written by an author who was not a heretic but rather who was trying to defend the authentic church belief about the virgin birth. Some of the details may be accurate because the author may have obtained information from descendants of the relatives of Jesus. The document certainly proves that the early Christians were very interested in the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

*The Protoevangelium of James begins by describing how the parents of Mary, Joachim and Anne, were elderly, but they conceived a daughter by a miracle. St. Anne was so grateful to God that she immediately promised to offer their daughter to the Lord in the Temple.*



***The Protoevangelium of James describes in detail the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple:***

5. ...And her months were fulfilled, and in the ninth month Anna brought forth. And she said to the midwife: What have I brought forth? and she said: A girl. And said Anna: "My soul has been magnified this day." And she laid her down.

And the days having been fulfilled, Anna was purified, and gave the breast to the child, and called her name Mary.

6. And the child grew strong day by day; and when she was six months old, her mother set her on the ground to try whether she could stand, and she walked seven steps and came into her bosom; and she snatched her up, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, thou shall not walk on this earth until I bring thee into the temple of the Lord...

7. And her months were added to the child. And the child was two years old, and Joachim said: "Let us take her up to the temple of the Lord, that we may pay the vow that we have vowed, lest perchance the Lord send to us, and our offering be not received." And Anna said: "Let us wait for the third year, in order that the child may not seek for father or mother." And Joachim said: "So let us wait." And the child was three years old, and Joachim said: "Invite the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them stand with the lamps burning, that the child may not turn back, and her heart be captivated from the temple of the Lord." And they did so until they went up into the temple of the Lord. And the priest received her, and kissed her, and blessed her, saying: "The Lord has magnified thy name in all generations. In thee, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel." And he set her down upon the third step of the altar, and the Lord God sent grace upon her; and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.

8. And her parents went down marveling, and praising the Lord God, because the child had not turned back. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there...

This document can be found on the following website: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0847.htm>

**St. Catherine Emmerich's Description of her vision of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

*On October 28th, 1821, Venerable Catherine Emmerich describes her visions concerning the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although the visions of saints and mystics can sometimes include symbolic visions which do not represent actual historical fact, there are details of her vision which could be historical. For example, she describes the Holy Family as having ties to the Essenes, who emphasized mortification and celibacy. This is extraordinary because the Essenes were relatively unknown until their famous scrolls were discovered in 1947.*

*What follows is the words of Venerable Catherine Emmerich. Notice that at one point she even says that parts of her vision were symbolic. She says that Mary and the other virgins who lived in the temple stayed in rooms that were built into the wall of the temple. This is significant because symbolically, Mary herself is the temple within whom God would dwell.*

The child Mary will, I think, soon be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. Already some days ago I saw the three-year-old child Mary standing before Anna in a room in her house and being instructed in her prayers, as the priests were soon to come to examine the child in preparation for her reception in the Temple.

The travelers, with the child Mary, approached Jerusalem from the north...

Zechariah and Joachim came out of the court of sacrifice and went up to this altar with a priest, in front of whom stood another priest and two Levites with scrolls and writing materials. Anna led the child Mary up to them; the maidens who had accompanied Mary stood a little behind. Mary knelt on the steps, and Joachim and Anna laid their hands on her head. The priest cut off a few of her hairs and burnt them in a brazier. Her parents also said a few words, offering up their child; these were written down by two Levites. Meanwhile the maidens sang the 44th Psalm and the priests the 49th Psalm accompanied by the boys with their instruments. I then saw Mary being led by the hand by two priests up many steps to a raised place in the wall dividing the outer court of the Holy Place from the other court. They placed the child in a sort of niche in the middle of this wall, so that she could see into the Temple...

On the other side of the dividing wall there was an old high priest standing at an altar of incense, so high up that one could see half of his figure. I saw him offering incense and the smoke from it enveloping the child Mary. During these ceremonies I saw a symbolic vision round the Blessed Virgin which eventually filled and dimmed the whole Temple. I saw a glory of light under Mary's heart, and understood that this glory encompassed the Promise, the most holy blessing of God. I saw this glory appear as if surrounded by the Ark of Noah, so that the Blessed Virgin's head projected above it. Then I saw the shape of the Ark about the glory change into the shape of the Ark of the Covenant, which in its turn changed into the shape of the Temple. Then I saw these shapes disappear, and out of the glory there rose before the Blessed Virgin's breast a shape like the Chalice of the Last Supper, and above this, before her mouth, a bread marked with a cross.... How can this be expressed? Its variations, its unfoldings, and its transformations were so innumerable that I have forgotten a very great deal. The whole significance of the Blessed Virgin in the Covenant of the Old and New Testaments and to all eternity was set forth therein...

As the whole significance of the Blessed Virgin unfolded itself before my eyes in these visions I saw her no longer as the child Mary, but as the Blessed Virgin, hovering tall above me.... I saw the priests behind her were uttering prophecies and admonishing the people to thank God and to pray that this child should be magnified. All those who were present in the Temple were hushed and filled with solemn awe... At last I saw nothing but the glory under Mary's heart, with the Blessing of the Promise shining within it. Then this disappeared, too, and I saw the holy dedicated child in her ceremonial dress standing alone once more between the priests... They placed a brown veil or hood on her head, and led her down the steps through a door into another hall, where she was met by six other (but older) Temple virgins who strewed flowers before her. Behind her stood her teachers: Noemi, the sister of Lazarus' mother, the Prophetess Anna, and still a third woman; the priests gave the child Mary over to them and withdrew. Her parents and near relations now approached; the singing was over, and Mary said farewell. Joachim's emotion was particularly deep; he lifted Mary up, pressed her to his heart, and said to her with tears, "Remember my soul before God!" Thereupon Mary with her teachers and several maidens went into the women's dwelling on the north side of the Temple itself. They lived in rooms built in the thickness of the Temple walls. Passages and winding stairs led up to little praying cells near the Holy Place and Holy of Holies.

Mary's parents and relations went back to the hall by the Golden Gate where they had first waited, and partook of a meal there with the priests... (Mary's parents were really well off; it was only as mortification and for almsgiving that they lived so poorly. I forget for how long Anna ate nothing but cold food; but their servants were well fed and provided for.) I saw many people praying in the Temple, and many had followed the procession to its gates. Some of those present must have had some idea of the destiny of the Blessed Virgin, for I remember Anna speaking with enthusiastic joy to various women and saying to them, "Now the Ark of the Covenant, the Vessel of the Promise, is entering the Temple".

Mary's parents and other relations reached Bethoron the same day on their journey home.