

DAY OF DAYS IN BETHLEHEM

Artist Tissot Writes of His Visits to the Birthplace of Christ.

HOW THE CITY APPEARS TODAY

Explanation of the Presence of Shepherds in the Fields, the Coming of the Magi and the Guiding Star.

When I left Paris in October, 1886, it was to go to Palestine, there to come into personal contact with those sanctified by the presence of the Savior when He trod the earth.

I went to Jerusalem and saw that Via Dolorosa along which He made His weary way toward Calvary. I saw Calvary itself and all the sacred spots in the neighborhood.

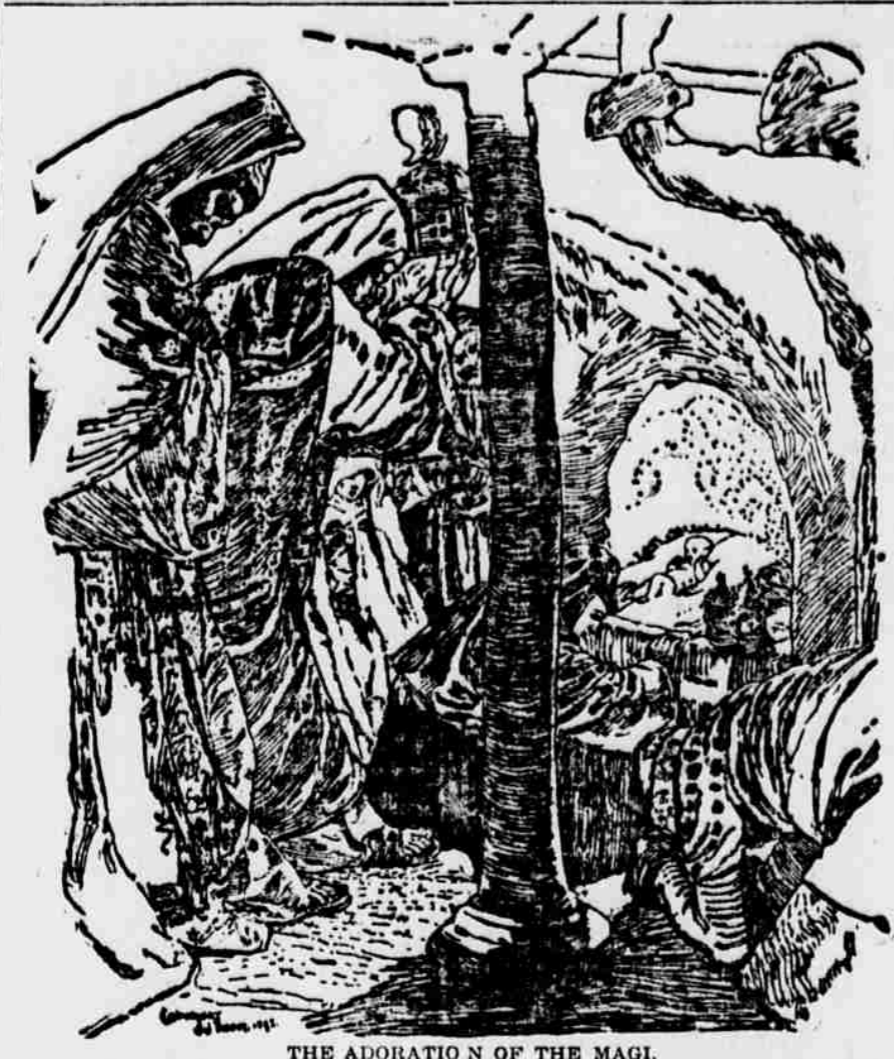
On the day before Christmas, accompanied by the French consul, I departed from Jerusalem toward Bethlehem, resolved to see that place and its sanctified grotto on the anniversary of the very night when Jesus the Christ first opened His eyes upon the world which He had come to save.

To my surprise and horror I found a seething mass of men and women surging around the place trying to push each other aside and see—they knew not what.

The next year (1887) I again passed Christmas eve in Palestine, but it was in the convent near Jerusalem, and there was deep sentiment and holy reverence, never can I forget the sermon preached in the

the Desert, where St. John dwelt; on the east Beit-Sahour rises from the little hill where Ruth gleaned the ears of grain in the fields of Boaz, while beyond can be seen the several stony hills called the Wilderness. Still further to the east the rocks of Mount Moab stretch along like a wall, the base of which is bathed by the waters of the Dead sea.

The grotto of the Nativity are a series of natural caves, extending for a considerable distance in the mountains, forming chambers connected with each other. As a matter of fact shepherds watching their flocks from the hills avail themselves of these shelters in cold or bad weather and it was in them that Mary and Joseph, finding no place in the caravansary, decided to take refuge.



THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

The particular place in the cave is situated in the lower part of the cave reached by two slopes now converted into flights of stone steps.

males—an ox and an ass. However that may be, Mary found something there to serve the purpose of a crib in which to lay her newborn child. This crib, or manger as it is generally called, is now preserved in the Church of Santa-Maria-Maggiore at Rome, where it is visited and venerated by numerous pilgrims.

The place rendered sacred by the birth of the Savior, naturally, has been a goal of pilgrimage to many thousands besides myself. The early Christians flocked to it in crowds. After the revolt of the Jews under Bar-Cochba, the Emperor Hadrian had a temple to Jupiter erected on the Mount of Olives, on the very scene of the ascension; a temple to Venus on Golgotha, and one to Adonis above the grotto of Bethlehem.

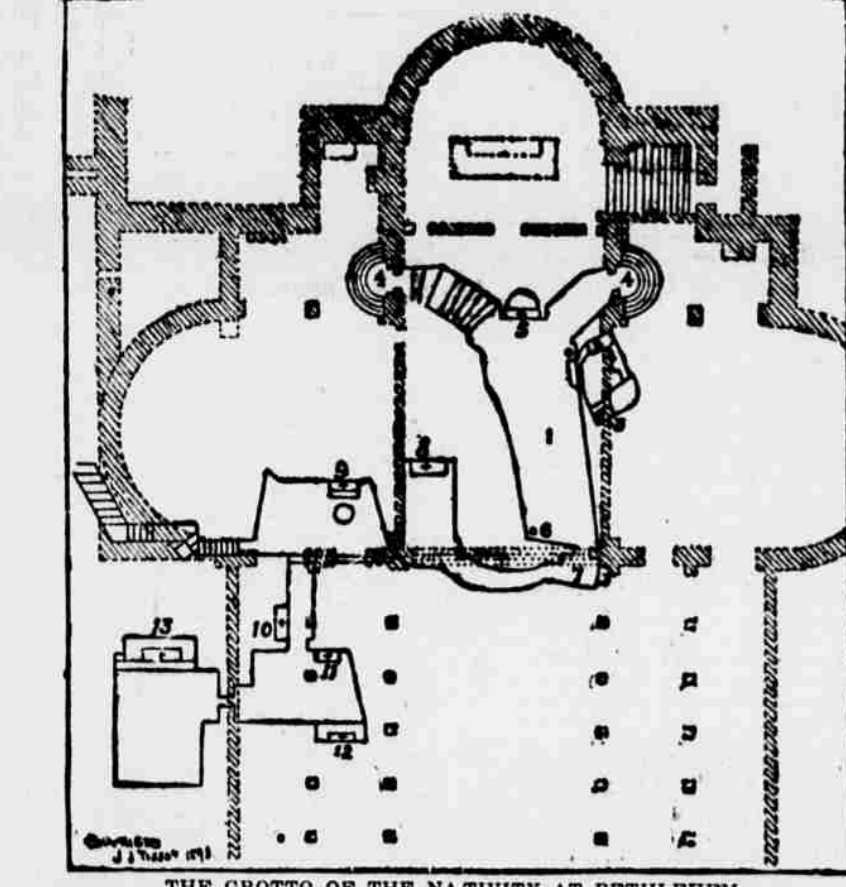
The basilica of Bethlehem is still standing and with the exception of the facade, which

is hidden by massive buildings, is almost intact. The interior consists of five naves, divided by rows of columns with Corinthian capitals which were probably taken from the ruins of the Temple of Jerusalem, doubtless the source of much of the material used in the basilica of St. Helena, which were erected in a very short space of time.

Presence of Shepherds Explained. Many have wondered how it was possible for the shepherds to be watching in the open air at the time when Christ was born. The place where the shepherds were when the angels appeared to them is supposed to have been what is now called Beit-Sahour, a word signifying "The House of the Shepherds." It is surprising at first sight that shepherds should be watching their flocks in open air at the time of the year set for the nativity, for the cold must have been intense. It was, no doubt, the end of December, that the account in holy writ refers, but the pastures were not vast grazing grounds where the sheep were gathered together in thousands from every direction, but mere local fields where each shepherd tended his own little group of animals, and there is nothing in this to surprise any one familiar with the customs of the east.

After the December rains are over the grass begins to grow again and the flowers reappear. The severity of the winter varies very much and some especially fine days occur, even in the very heart of the cold season, when the shepherds of Bethlehem would go down into the plain with their flocks, as the Arabs do now in good season. The gospels tell us that when the shepherds were surprised by the angels they were "abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." The night was always divided into three so-called watches. The shepherds changed guards every three hours during the short night of the summer and every four hours during the longer nights of the winter. In the latter case the first watch ended at 10 and the second at 2, while the third lasted till daybreak. The shepherds on guard gathered round the campfire while waiting their turn to rest and it must have been to those thus waiting that the angels appeared. They no doubt awakened their comrades to tell them the wonderful news and afterwards all went together to Bethlehem, where they found and worshiped the Holy Child.

The other personages mentioned in scripture in connection with the birth of Jesus are the Magi, Magi or soothsayers are mentioned in the book of Daniel as being



THE GROTTA OF THE NATIVITY AT BETHLEHEM. 1—Grotto of Nativity. 2—Altar of the Adoration of the Magi. 3—Manger in which the infant Jesus was born. 4—Staircase leading from the Basilica to the Grotto. 5—Altar marking the spot where Jesus was born. 6—Spring which gushed out at the nativity. 7—Entrance to subterranean chambers. (Shaded portion of the plan represents the Basilica, which has been built above the Grotto.)

chapel by a truly devout priest of Him whom he glorified. What an inspiration in the very soil on which the preacher stood! What other subject could he choose but that of the Christ? How his voice touched every heart as with extended fingers he said: "A stone's throw from here He was buried. A little further on He was crucified. Through that city He walked to His death. Just over the hills He was taken prisoner after His agony in the garden, and in that direction (pointing toward Bethlehem) He first saw the light."

In the Virgin's Steps. The holy pleasure of visiting Bethlehem under proper conditions I enjoyed a short time after my first unpleasant experience. I followed the path which leads from Nazareth to that town to which Mary and Joseph had come at that critical time in their career. It is a walk of three days from one to the other, but it is worth far more than the fatigue which must be endured to feel that one is walking in the very footsteps of the Virgin.

Bethlehem, or Bethlehem, is also known by the Hebrew name of Efratha. These words mean the "House of Bread" and "the land" or "country." It was indeed to be a "House of Bread" in a great and spiritual sense after the birth of the Savior there. The Arabs give it another name resembling the first, for they call it Beit-Lahem, or the "House of Meat." The town itself dates from most remote antiquity. Moses speaks of it in the xxxvth chapter of Genesis in connection with the birth of Benjamin, which took place, he tells us, when his parents had but a little way to come through Efrath (which is the same as Bethlehem), Rachel dying immediately afterward.

When Palestine was conquered by Joshua, Bethlehem, like Jerusalem, was inhabited by the idolatrous Canaanites and in the division of the conquered districts it fell to the lot of the tribes of Judah. The situation of Bethlehem is indeed most beautiful. Built on the crest of the mountains of Judah, about two leagues to the south of Jerusalem, its form is that of a crescent, one end of which is marked by the Wells of David, the other by the Grotto of the Nativity. Between the two horns of the crescent stretches a fertile valley, the Wady-el-Karoubeh. The descent of this valley is very steep and resembles a circus with low parallel walls, which keep the earth from sliding down, and have the form of tier on tier of seats. This valley presents a charming appearance, clothed as it is with an abundant vegetation in which vines, fig, olive and almond trees abound. The view from the top of the ascent is bounded on the north by the hill of Marjias and on the west, by the Mountains of

THE MAGI ON THEIR WAY TO BETHLEHEM.



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THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS.

In the service of King Nebuchadnezzar. They studied astronomy and interpreted dreams. Those referred to in the gospels seem to have been not only wise men, but kings, or sheiks of Chaldea and its neighborhood. They, too, engaged in the study of the heavenly bodies and perhaps also worshipped them, a fact which explains the immediate attention accorded to a sign appearing in the heavens at the moment of the birth of the Messiah. The color of their undergarments, yellow, indicated their profession.

The Star of Bethlehem. What was the star referred to in the sacred records? There is absolutely no positive evidence on this point. Some think it was a comet or some other similar body; others are of the opinion that it was a meteor, resembling more or less a shooting star, which trailed slowly along at a little distance from the ground, so as actually to guide the steps of the Magi. The gospel seemed to sanction the latter interpretation when it says: The star "came and stood over where the young child was." A star, properly so-called, would not have indicated the spot with such precision. Nevertheless, it is clear that the significance of the sign was revealed in some way to the Magi.

Had the travelers exchanged ideas previous to their arrival? It is very probable that they had. No doubt their caravans, though they started from different points, met beyond the Jordan on the side of the mountains of Moab, whence they entered the promised land, still preceded by the star. The word "house" used by the Evangelists to indicate the place where the Magi found the Messiah seems to point to the conclusion that during the journey of their visitors from the east, Joseph and Mary had left the cave of the nativity for a more comfortable dwelling. It is impossible to convey the idea aroused in the breast of the devout Christian by the sight of Bethlehem and its sanctified spots any better or more clearly than in the pictures in which I have tried to express my interpretation of those stirring scenes as they must have taken place. If, by my pictures and books, I have been able to bring the Christ nearer to the minds

and hearts of Christians of all lands, I am more than repaid for all my labor. James Tissot The writer has had occasion to use Chamberlain's Cough Remedy in a case of croup in his family within the last week, and the results were such that he can heartily testify to its merits.—J. C. Johnson, Business Manager of the Council Magazine, Memphis, Tenn.

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