

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

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THE SUPPLEMENT No. 80 – December 2015



With Christmas approaching, the theme for this Supplement is **Jesus & the Shepherds**. It begins with the Shepherds visiting Jesus at His birth with Mary and Joseph. This is followed by the many joyful visits Jesus makes to his “first friends”, the Shepherds, during his three-year ministry.

The Shepherds visit Jesus

...They reach the stable,,,

« What can you see? » they ask him anxiously in low voices.

« I can see a beautiful young woman and a man bending over a manger and I can hear... I can hear a little baby crying, and the woman is speaking to Him in a voice... oh! what a voice! »

« What is She saying? »

« She is saying: "Jesus, little one! Jesus, love of Your Mummy! Don't cry, little Son". She is saying: "Oh! If I could only say to You: 'Take some milk, little one'. But I have not got any yet". She says: "You are so cold, My love! And the hay is stinging You! How painful it is for Your Mummy to hear You crying so, without being able to help You!" She says: "Sleep, soul of Mine! Because it breaks My heart to hear You crying and see Your tears!" and She kisses Him, and She must be warming His little feet with Her hands, because She is bent with Her arms in the manger. »

« Call Her! Let them hear you. »

« I won't. You should call Her, because you brought us here and you know Her! »

The shepherd opens his mouth, but he only utters a faint moaning noise.

Joseph turns round and comes to the door. « Who are you? »

« Shepherds. We brought you some food and some wool. We have come to worship the Saviour. »

« Come in. »

They go in, and the stable becomes brighter because of the light of the torches. The older men push the young ones in front of them. Mary turns round and smiles. « Come » She says. « Come! », and She invites them with Her hand and Her smile, and She takes the boy who saw the angel and She draws him to Herself, against the manger. And the boy looks, and is happy.

The others, invited also by Joseph, move forward with their gifts and they place them at Mary's feet with few deep-felt words. They then look at the Baby Who is weeping a little and they smile, moved and happy.

And one of them, somewhat bolder than the rest, says: « Mother, take this wool. It's soft and clean. I prepared it for my child who is about to be born. But I offer it to You. Lay your Son in this wool. It will be soft and warm. » And he offers the sheep hide, a beautiful hide, well covered with white soft wool.

Mary lifts Jesus, and puts it round Him. And She shows Him to the shepherds, who, kneeling on the hay on the ground, look at Him ecstatically!

They become bolder, and one suggests: « He should be given a mouthful of milk, better still, some water and honey. But we have no honey. We give it to little babies. I have seven children, and I know... »

« There is some milk here. Take it, Woman. »

« But it is cold. It should be warm. Where is Elias? He has the sheep. »

Elias must be the shepherd who gave the milk. But he is not there. He remained outside and is looking from the hole, but he cannot be seen in the dark night.

« Who led you here? »

« An angel told us to come, and Elias showed us the way. But where is he now? »

The sheep declares his presence with a bleat.

« Come in. You are wanted. » He enters with his sheep, embarrassed because they all look at him.

« It's you! » says Joseph, who recognizes him, and Mary smiles at him saying: « You are good. »

They milk the sheep and with the hem of a piece of linen dipped into the warm creamy milk, Mary moistens the lips of the Baby who sucks the sweet cream. They all smile, and even more so, when Jesus falls asleep in the warmth of the wool, with the little bit of linen still between His lips.

« But You can't stay here. It's cold and damp. And... there is too strong a smell of animals. It's not good... it's not good for the Saviour. »

« I know » replies Mary with a deep sigh. « But there is no room for us in Bethlehem. »

« Take heart, Woman. We will look for a house for You. »

...« For My Child, at least. Joseph and I can lie also on the floor. But for the Little One... »

« Don't worry, Woman. I will see to it. ... For the time being, take what our poverty can give You. We are shepherds... »

« We are poor, too. And we cannot reward you » says Joseph.

« Oh! We don't want it. Even if You could afford it, we would not want it. The Lord has already rewarded us. He promised peace to everybody. The angels said: "Peace to men of good will". But He has already given it to us, because the angel said that this Child is the Saviour, Who is Christ, the Lord. We are poor and ignorant, but we know that the Prophets say that the Saviour will be the Prince of Peace. And he told us to come and adore Him. That is why He gave us His peace. Glory be to God in the Most High Heaven and glory to His Christ here, and You are blessed,

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Woman, who gave birth to Him: You are holy, because You deserved to bear Him! Give us orders as our Queen, because we will be happy to serve You. What can we do for You? »

« You can love My Son, and always cherish the same thoughts as you have now. May God reward You. I will remember you, Elias, and every one of you. »

« Will You tell Your Baby about us? »

« I certainly will. »

« I am Elias. » « And I am Levi. » « And I am Samuel. » « And I am Jonah. » « And I am Isaac. » « And I am Tobias. » « And I am Jonathan. »

« And I am Daniel. » « And I am Simeon. » « My name is John. » « I am Joseph and my brother Benjamin, we are twins. »

« I will remember your names. »

« We must go... But we will come back... And we will bring others to worship Him. »

« How can we go back to the sheep-fold, leaving the Child? »

« Glory be to God Who has shown Him to us! »

« Will You let us kiss His dress? » asks Levi, with an angelic smile.

And Mary lifts Jesus slowly, and sitting on the hay, envelops the tiny little feet in a linen, and offers them to be kissed. And the shepherds bow down to the ground and kiss the tiny feet, veiled by the linen. Those with a beard clean it first; almost everyone is crying, and when they have to go, they walk out backwards, leaving their hearts there...»

(The Poem Vol. 1 pp 150-4, The Gospel Vol. 1 p. 181-5)

Jesus visits Levi, Elias and Joseph

After approximately one hundred yards, there is a large, green pasture, surrounded on all sides by huge aged trees. Many sheep are grazing on the thick grass of the undulated meadow. Three men are watching over them. One is old: his hair is all white, of the other two, one is about thirty, the other about forty-years-old.

...[Jesus] goes on, tall and handsome in His white tunic, with the setting sun in front of Him. He seems an angel, so bright He is...

« Peace be with you, My friends » He greets when He reaches the edge of the meadow.

The three men turn round, surprised. There is silence. Then the oldest one asks: « Who are You? »

« One Who loves you. »

« ,, Where are You from? »

« From Nazareth. »

« Oh! Well, tell me. Has a Child ever come back to Nazareth, a Child with a woman whose name was Mary and a man called Joseph, a Child, who was even more beautiful than His Mother, so beautiful that I have never seen a fairer flower on the slopes of Judah? A Child born in Bethlehem of Judah, at the time of the edict? A Child who later fled, most fortunately for the world. A Child, oh! I would give my life just to hear whether He is alive... He must be a man by now. »

« Why do you say that His flight was a great fortune for the world? »

« Because He was the Saviour, the Messiah and Herod wanted Him dead. I was not there when He fled with His father and Mother. When I heard of the slaughter and I came back... because also I had children (he sobs), my Lord, and a wife... (he sobs), and I heard they had been killed (he sobs again), but I swear by the God of Abraham, I was more afraid for Him than for my own family - I heard He had fled and I could not even enquire; I could not even take away my own slaughtered creatures... They threw stones at me, as they do with lepers and unclean people, they treated me like a murderer... and I had to hide in the woods, and live like a wolf... until I found a master. Oh!... He is hard and cruel... If a sheep gets hurt, if a wolf preys on a lamb, he either beats me till I bleed or he takes my poor pay, and I have to work in the woods for other people, I must do something, to pay him back three times the value. But it does not matter. I have always said to the Most High: "Let me see Your Messiah, at least let me know that He is alive, and all the rest is

nothing". My Lord, I have told You how the people in Bethlehem treated me, and how my master deals with me. I could have repaid them in their own coins, I could have wronged them, stealing, so that I would not suffer under my master. But I preferred to suffer, to forgive, to be honest, because the angels said: "Glory to God in the Highest Heaven and peace on earth to men of good will". »

« Is that what they said? »

« Yes, they did, my Lord, You must believe, at least You, who are good. You must know and believe that the Messiah is born. No one would believe it any longer. But angels do not lie... and we were not drunk, as they said. This man here, was a boy then, and he was the first to see the angel. He drank but milk. Can milk make one drunk? The angels said: "Today, in the town of David the Saviour was born, He is Christ, the Lord. And here is a sign for you. You will find a Child wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger". »

« Did they say exactly that? Did you not misunderstand them? Are you not mistaken, after such a long time? »

« Oh! no! Isn't it, Levi? In order not to forget, - we could not forget in any case, because they were heavenly words and were written in our hearts with a heavenly fire - every morning, every evening, when the sun rises, when the first star starts shining, we repeat them as a prayer, as a blessing, to have strength and comfort in His name and in His Mother's. »

...« But ... who are you looking for? »

« Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, the Nazarene, the Saviour. »

« It is I. » Jesus is radiant when saying so, revealing Himself to His persevering lovers: persevering, faithful, patient.

« You! Oh! Lord, Saviour, Our Jesus! » The three men prostrate themselves on the ground and kiss Jesus' feet, crying with joy.

« Stand up. Get up. Elias and you, Levi and you, whose name I do not know. »

« Joseph, the son of Joseph. »

...The shepherds are no longer prostrated on the ground, they are kneeling, sitting back on their heels. They worship thus the Saviour, with loving eyes, trembling lips, while their faces blanch and blush with joy.

Jesus sits down on the grass.

« No, my Lord. You, King of Israel, must not sit on the grass. »

« Never mind, My dear friends. I am poor. A carpenter as far as the world is concerned. I am rich only in My love for the world, and in the love I get from good people. I have come to stay with you, to share the evening meal with you and sleep beside you on the hay, and to be comforted by you... »

« Oh! comfort! We are coarse and persecuted. »

« I am persecuted, too. But you give Me what I am seeking: love, faith and hope, a hope that will last for years and bear flowers. See? You waited for Me and you believed without the least doubt, that I was the Messiah. And I have come to you. »

« Oh! Yes! You have come. Now, even if I die, I will not be upset, by the fact that I hoped in vain. »

« No, Elias. You will live until Christ's triumph and after. You saw My dawn, you must see My glory. And what about the others? You were twelve: Elias, Levi, Samuel, Jonah, Isaac, Tobias, Jonathan, Daniel, Simeon, John, Joseph, Benjamin. My Mother always mentioned your names to Me. Because you were My first friends. »

« Oh! » The shepherds are more and more moved.

« Where are the others? »

« Old Samuel died of old age about twenty years ago. Joseph was killed because he fought at the gate of the enclosure to give time to his wife, who had just become a mother a few hours before, to escape with this man (Joseph's son), whom I took with me for the sake of my friend... also to have children around me once again. I took Levi also with me... He was persecuted. Benjamin is a shepherd on Lebanon with Daniel. Simeon, John and Tobias, who now wants to be called Matthew [Matthias] in memory of his father, who was also killed, are disciples of John [the Baptist]. Jonah works on the plain of Esdraelon for a

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Pharisee. Isaac suffers very much from his back, which is bent in two, he lives in dire poverty, all by himself at Juttah. We help him as much as we can, but we have all been badly hit and our help is like dew drops on a fire. Jonathan is now the servant of one of Herod's big men. »

... « I would like to see them all. »

« Yes, My Lord. We will go and say to them: "Come, He is alive. He remembers us and loves us". »

« And He wants you to be His friends. »

« Yes, my Lord. »

« But we will go first to Isaac. And where are Samuel and Joseph buried? »

« Samuel in Hebron. He remained in Zacharias' service. Joseph... has no tomb. He was burned with the house. »

« He is no longer in the cruel fire, but in the flames of God's love and will soon be in His glory. I am telling you, and particularly you, Joseph, son of Joseph. Come here, that I may kiss you to thank your father. »

« And my children? »

« They are angels, Elias. Angels who will repeat the "Gloria" when the Saviour is crowned. »

(The Poem Vol. 1 pp 390-3, The Gospel Vol. 1 p. 466-9)

Jesus finds Isaac

At the corner there is a little house, or rather, a room with the door wide open. Almost on the threshold there is a little bed, on which an emaciated sick man is lying, asking all passers-by for alms, in a plaintive voice.

Elias dashes in. « Isaac... it's me. »

« You? I was not expecting you. You were here last month. »

« Isaac... Isaac... Do you know why I have come? »

« No, I don't... You are excited. What's happening? »

« I have seen Jesus of Nazareth, He is a man, now, a rabbi. He came looking for me... and He wants to see us. Oh! Isaac! Are you not well? »

Isaac, in fact, has fallen back as if he were dying. But he comes round: « No. The news... Where is He? What is He like? Oh! If I could see Him! »

« He is down in the valley. He sent me to say to you exactly this: "Come, Isaac, because I want to see you and bless you". I'll call someone now to help me and I'll take you down. »

« Is that what He said? »

« Yes, it is. But what are you doing? » « I'm going. »

Isaac throws away the blankets, he moves his paralysed legs, he throws them off the straw mattress, he puts his feet on the floor, he stands up, still somewhat hesitating, and shaky. It all happens in an instant, under Elias' wide-open eyes... who at last understands and begins to shout... A little woman looks in curiously. She sees the sick man stand up and cover himself with one of the blankets, since he has nothing else, and run away, shouting like a mad man.

« Let us go... this way, it will be quicker and we will not meet the crowd... Quick, Elias. »

They run through a little door of a kitchen garden in the back, they push the gate made of dry branches, and once outside, they run along a narrow dirty path, then down a little road along kitchen gardens and finally through meadows and thickets, right down to the torrent.

« There is Jesus, over there » says Elias, pointing at Him. « The tall, handsome one, with fair hair, with a white tunic and red mantle... »

Isaac runs, he cuts through the grazing sheep, and with a cry of triumph, joy and adoration he prostrates himself at Jesus' feet.

« Stand up, Isaac. I have come to bring you peace and blessings. Stand up, that I may see your face. »

But Isaac cannot stand up. Too much excitement at the one time and he remains prostrated, with his face on the ground, crying happily.

« You came at once. You did not worry whether you could... »

« You told me to come... and I came. »

« He did not even close the door or pick up the alms, Master. »

« It does not matter. The angels will watch his house. Are you happy, Isaac? »

« Oh! My Lord! »

« Call Me Master. »

« Yes, my Lord, my Master. Even if you had not cured me, I would have been happy to see You. How could I find so much grace with You? »

« Because of your faith and patience, Isaac. I know how much you suffered... »

Nothing! nothing! It does not matter! I have found You. You are alive. You are here. That's what matters. The rest, all the rest is over. But, my Lord and my Master, You are not going away any more, is that right? »

« Isaac, I have the whole of Israel to evangelise. I am going... But if I cannot stay, you can always serve and follow Me. Do you want to be My disciple, Isaac? »

« Oh! But I am not capable! »

« Can you avow Who I am? Avow it against jeers and threats? And tell people that I called you and you came? »

« Even if You did not want, I would avow all that. I would disobey You in that, Master. Forgive me for saying so. »

Jesus smiles. « You can see then that you are capable of becoming a disciple! »

« Oh! If that's all one has to do! I thought it was more difficult, that we had to go to school with the rabbis to learn how to serve You, the Rabbi of rabbis... and to go to school at my age... »

The man in fact must be at least fifty years old.

« You have done your schooling already, Isaac. »

« Me? No. »

« Yes, you have. Have you not continued to believe and love, to respect and bless God and your neighbour, not to be envious, not to wish what belongs to other people, and even what was your own and you no longer possessed, to speak only the truth, even if it should be harmful to you, not to associate with Satan committing sins? Have you not done all these things, in the last thirty years of misfortunes? »

« Yes, Master. »

« So you see, you have done your schooling. Go on doing so and reveal, in addition, to the world, that I am in the world. There is nothing else to be done. »

« I have already preached You, Lord Jesus. I preached You to the children, who used to come, when I arrived lame in this village, begging for bread and doing some work, such as shearing and dairy work, and the children used to come round my bed, when I got worse and I was paralysed from my waist downwards. I spoke of You to the children of many years ago, and to the children of present times, who are the sons of the previous ones... Children are good and they always believe... I told them of Your birth... of the angels... of the Star and the Wise Men... and of Your Mother... Oh! Tell me! Is She alive? »

« She is alive and She sends you Her regards. She always spoke of you all. »

« Oh! If I could see Her! »

« You will see Her. You will come to My house one day. Mary will greet you saying: "My friend". »

(The Poem Vol. 1 pp 396-99, The Gospel Vol. 1 p. 472-5)

Jesus finds Joseph, Simeon, John and Tobias

« Peace be with you » says Jesus raising His arms as if He were embracing them. And He specifies: « Peace to you, Simeon, John and Matthias (Tobias), faithful to Me, and faithful to John the Prophet! Peace to you, Joseph » and He kisses him on his cheeks. The other three are now on their knees. « Come, My friends. Under these trees, on the exposed river-bed and let us talk. » They go down and Jesus sits on a large protruding root, the others on the ground. Jesus smiles and looks at them intently, one by one: « Let Me become familiar with your faces. Your souls are already known to Me, souls that seek and love what is good contrary to all worldly yearnings. Isaac, Elias and

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Levi send you their regards, and there are other greetings, from My Mother. Have You any news of the Baptist? »

«... we felt that the Baptist was the man of God, foreseen by the Prophets to prepare the way to His Christ and we went to him. We said: "If the Baptist precedes Him, if we go to the Baptist, we will find Him" ...because, my Lord, it was You we were looking for. »

« I know, and you found Me. And now I am with you. »
(*The Poem* Vol. 1 pp 434-5, *The Gospel* Vol. 2. pp. 29-31)

Jesus finds Levi and Jonah

From the dark thicket, which is faintly lit up by moonlight, Levi, visible in his light clothes, appears, followed by a person of darker dress. « Master, Jonah is here. »

« May My peace come to you! » greets Jesus, before Jonah reaches Him.

But Jonah does not reply. He runs and throws himself weeping at His feet and kisses them. When he is fit to speak he says: « How long have I waited for You! How long! How depressing it was to feel that my life was passing away, that death was approaching, and I had to say: "I have not seen Him!" And yet, no, not all hopes were destroyed. Not even when I was about to die. I would say: "She said so: 'You will serve Him again' and She could not have said something that was not true. She is the Mother of the Immanuel. No one, therefore, possesses God more than She does, and who has God knows what is of God". »
« Get up. She sends you Her greetings. You have been near Her and You are still near Her. She lives at Nazareth. »

« You! She! At Nazareth? Oh! I wish I had known. At night, in the cold winter months, when the fields rest and evil people cannot cause damage to farmers, I would have come, I would have run there, to kiss Your feet and I would have come back with my treasure of certainty of faith. Why did You not show Yourself, Lord? »

« Because it was not the time. ... »

The man is listening to Him, smiling happily, and he keeps saying to himself: « Oh! You are really here! You are really here! »

« You were about to die? When? »

« ... Look how many wounds! » He lowers his tunic and shows his shoulders all marked by irregular scars. « He beat me with an iron rod. He counted the bunches of grapes that had been picked, he could see where the stalks had been torn off, and he gave me a blow for every bunch. And then he left me there, half dead. ...I recovered after two months, for the sores had become infected because of the heat, and had given me a high temperature. I said to the God of Israel: "It does not matter. Let me see Your Messiah again, and this misfortune is of no importance to me. Accept it as a sacrifice. I can never offer You a sacrifice. I am the servant of a cruel man and You know. He does not even allow me to come to Your altar at Passover. Accept me as a victim. But give me Him!" »

« And the Most High has satisfied you. Jonah, do you wish to serve Me, as your friends are already doing? »

« Oh! How shall I do that? »

« As they do. Levi knows and he will tell you how simple it is to serve Me. I only want your good will. »

« I have given You that since the time You cried in the manger. It made me overcome everything. Both dejection and hatred. »

(*The Poem* Vol. 1 pp 468-10, *The Gospel* Vol. 2 pp. 68-73)

Jesus finds Joseph and Jonathan

A loud noise of iron-shod hooves and the shouting of children is heard in the street. « He is here! He is here! Stop, man. » And before Jesus and the disciples become aware of what is happening, the dark body of a horse steaming with sweat appears before the door, a horseman dismounts, dashes in and prostrates himself at Jesus' feet, kissing them with veneration. They all look at him quite amazed. « Who are you? What do you want? »

« I am Jonathan. »

Joseph responds with a cry: as, sitting behind the high bench, and, because of the flashing arrival, it had been impossible for him to recognise his friend. The shepherd rushes toward the prostrated man: « You, it is you!... »

« Yes. I am worshipping my beloved Lord! Thirty years of hope, oh! What a long wait! Here: those years have now blossomed like the flower of a solitary agave, all of a sudden, in a blissful ecstasy, even more blissful than the one of long ago! Oh! My Saviour! »

...« Stand up, Jonathan. I was about to come and look for you, Benjamin and Daniel... »

« I know... »

« Stand up, that I may give you the kiss that I gave your friends. » Jesus forces him to stand up and kisses him.

« ... Oh! Lord God! How a soul hears and perceives You, when You call it! » Jonathan is moved.

«... Here is My Mother. » The Virgin, who has obviously been informed by someone, is hastening towards them followed by Mary of Alphaeus. « Son, are You going away? »

« Yes, Mother. I am going with Jonathan. He has come. I knew I would be able to let You see him. That is why I waited an extra day. » Jonathan at first has bowed down deeply, with his arms crossed over his chest, he now kneels down and lightly lifts the hem of Mary's dress and kisses it saying: « I salute the Mother of my Lord! »

(*The Poem* Vol. 1 pp 543-5, *The Gospel* Vol. 2 pp.161-2)

Jesus finds Daniel and Benjamin

« Here we are in Elisha's estate. The pastures are still far away. But at this time the sheep are almost always in the folds because of the heat. I'll go and see if they are there.» And Jonathan runs away.

He comes back after some time with two robust grey-haired herdsmen, who really dash down the slope to meet Jesus.

« Peace to you. »

« Oh! Oh! Our Baby of Bethlehem! » says one, and the other:

« May the peace of God, which has come to us, be blessed. » The two men are prone on the grass. The reverence paid to an altar is not so deep as the present reverence for the Master.

« Stand up. I reciprocate your blessing, and I am happy to do so because it descends joyfully on whoever is worthy of it. »

« Oh! We worthy! »

« Yes, you are, because you have always been faithful. »

« And who would not have been faithful? Who can forget that hour? Who can say: "It is not true what we saw?" Who can forget that You smiled at us for months, when we used to call You in the evening, when we came back with our sheep and you clapped your hands to the sound, of our pipes?... Do you remember, Daniel? Almost always dressed in white in Your Mother's arms, You appeared to us in the sun-rays in Anne's meadow or at the window, and You looked like a flower on Your Mother's snow-white dress. »

« And once You came, taking Your first steps, to caress a little lamb, not quite so curly as You! How happy You were! And we did not know what to do with our rustic persons. We would have liked to be angels to be less coarse... »

« Oh! My friends. I saw your hearts, and I still see them now. »

« And You smile at us as You did then! »

« And You came here to see us poor shepherds! »

« To My friends. I am happy now. I have found you all and I will not lose you any more. Can you give hospitality to the Son of man and His friends? »

« Oh! Lord! Do You have to ask us? We are not short of bread and milk. But if we had only one morsel, we would give it to You, to have You here with us. Is that right, Benjamin? »

« We would give You our hearts as food, our longed for Lord! »

« Let us go then. We shall speak of God... »

(*The Poem* Vol. 1 p. 552, *The Gospel* Vol. 2 p. 170)