

The Protevangelion of James

An Historical Account of the BIRTH of CHRIST, and the Perpetual VIRGIN MARY, his Mother, by JAMES THE LESSER, Cousin and Brother of the Lord Jesus, chief Apostle and first Bishop of the Christians in Jerusalem.

[This Gospel is ascribed to James. The allusions to it in the ancient Fathers are frequent, and their expressions indicate that it had obtained a very general credit in the Christian world. The controversies founded upon it chiefly relate to the age of Joseph at the birth of Christ, and to his being a widower with children, before his marriage with the Virgin. It seems material to remark, that the legends of the latter ages affirm the virginity of Joseph, notwithstanding Epiphanius, Hilary, Chrysostom, Cyril, Euthymius, Theophylact, Occumenius, and indeed all the Latin Fathers till Ambrose, and the Greek Fathers afterwards, maintain the opinions of Joseph's age and family, founded upon their belief in the authenticity of this book. It is supposed to have been originally composed in Hebrew. Postellus brought the MS. of this Gospel from the Levant, translated it into Latin, and sent it to Oporimus, a printer at Basil, where Bibliander, a Protestant Divine, and the Professor of Divinity at Zurich, caused it to be printed in 1552. Postellus asserts that it was publicly read as canonical in the eastern churches, they making no doubt that James was the author of it. It is, nevertheless, considered apocryphal by some of the most learned divines in the Protestant and Catholic churches.]



ELIZABETH RECEIVING THE VISIT OF MARY. FROM A GREEK
DIPTYCHON OF THE THIRTEENTH OR FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAP. I.

1 Joachim, a rich man, 2 offers to the Lord, 3 is opposed by Reuben the high-priest, because he has not begotten issue in Israel, 6 retires into the wilderness and fasts forty days and forty nights.

IN the history of the twelve tribes of Israel we read there was a certain person called Joachim, who being very rich, made double 1 offerings to the Lord God, having made this resolution: my substance shall be for the benefit of the whole people, and that I may find mercy from the Lord God for the forgiveness of my sins.

2 But at a certain great feast of the Lord, when the children of Israel offered their gifts, and Joachim also offered his, Reuben the high-priest opposed him, saying it is not lawful for thee to offer thy gifts, seeing thou hast not begot any issue in Israel.

3 At this Joachim being concerned very much, went away to consult the registries of the twelve tribes, to see whether he was the only person who had begot no issue.

4 But upon inquiry he found that all the righteous had raised up seed in Israel:

5 Then he called to mind the patriarch Abraham, How that God in the end of his life had given him his son Isaac; upon which he was exceedingly distressed, and would not be seen by his wife:

6 But retired into the wilderness, and fixed his tent there, and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying to himself,

7 I will not go down either to eat or drink, till the Lord my God shall look down upon me, but prayer shall be my meat and drink. [1](#)

CHAP. II.

1 Anna, the wife of Joachim, mourns her barrenness, 6 is reproached with it by Judith her maid, 9 sits under a laurel tree and prays to the Lord.

IN the meantime his wife Anna was distressed and perplexed on a double account, and said I will mourn both for my widowhood and my barrenness.

2 Then drew near a great feast of the Lord, and Judith her maid said, How long will you thus afflict your soul? The feast of the Lord is now come, when it is unlawful for any one to mourn.

3 Take therefore this hood which was given by one who makes such things, for it is not fit that I, who am a servant, should wear it, but it well suits a person of your greater character.

4 But Anna replied, Depart from me, I am not used to such things; besides, the Lord hath greatly humbled me.

5 I fear some ill-designing person hath given thee this, and thou art come to pollute me with my sin.

6 Then Judith her maid answered, What evil shall I wish you when you will not hearken to me?

7 I cannot wish you a greater curse than you are under, in that God hath shut up your womb, that you should not be a mother in Israel.

8 At this Anna was exceedingly troubled, and having on her wedding garment, went about three o'clock in the afternoon to walk in her garden.

9 And she saw a laurel-tree, and sat under it, and prayed unto the Lord, saying,

10 O God of my fathers, bless me and regard my prayer as thou didst bless the womb of Sarah, and gavest her a son Isaac. [2](#)

CHAP. III.

1 Anna perceiving a sparrow's nest in the laurels bemoans her barrenness.

AND as she was looking towards heaven she perceived a sparrow's nest in the laurel,

2 And mourning within herself, she said, Wo is me, who begat me? and what womb did bear me, that I should be thus accursed before the children of Israel, and that they should reproach and deride me in the temple of my God: Wo is me, to what can I be compared?

3 I am not comparable to the very beasts of the earth, for even the beasts of the earth are fruitful before thee, O Lord! Wo is me, to what can I be compared?

4 I am not comparable to the brute animals, for even the brute animals are fruitful before thee, O Lord! Wo is me, to what am I comparable?

5 I cannot be compared to these waters, for even the waters are fruitful before thee, O Lord! Wo is me, to what can I be compared?

6 I am not comparable to the waves of the sea; for these, whether they are calm, or in motion, with the fishes which are in them, praise thee, O Lord! Wo is me, to what can I be compared?

7 I am not comparable to the very earth, for the earth produces its fruits, and praises thee, O Lord!

CHAP. IV.

1 An Angel appears to Anna and tells her she shall conceive; two angels appear to her on the same errand. 5 Joachim sacrifices. 8 Anna goes to meet him, 9 rejoicing that she shall conceive.

THEN an angel of the Lord stood by her and said, Anna, Anna, the Lord hath heard thy prayer; thou shalt conceive and bring forth, and thy progeny shall be spoken of in all the world.

2 And Anna answered, As the Lord my God liveth, whatever I bring forth, whether it be male or female, I will devote it to the Lord my God, and it shall minister to him in holy things, during its whole life.

3 And behold there appeared two angels, saying unto her, Behold Joachim thy husband is coming with his shepherds.

4 For an angel of the Lord hath also come down to him, and said, The Lord God hath heard thy prayer, make haste and go hence, for behold Anna thy wife shall conceive.

5 And Joachim went down and called his shepherds, saying Bring me hither ten she-lambs without spot or blemish, and they shall be for the Lord my God.

6 And bring me twelve calves without blemish, and the twelve calves shall be for the priests and the elders.

7 Bring me also a hundred goats, and the hundred goats shall be for the whole people.

8 And Joachim went down with the shepherds, and Anna stood by the gate and saw Joachim coming with the shepherds.

9 And she ran, and hanging about his neck, said, Now I know that the Lord hath greatly blessed me:

10 For behold, I who was a widow am no longer a widow, and I who was barren shall conceive.

CHAP. V.

1 Joachim abides the first day in his house, but sacrifices on the morrow. 2 consults the plate on the priest's forehead. 3 And is without sin. 6 Anna brings forth a daughter, 9 whom she calls Mary.

AND Joachim abode the first day in his house, but on the morrow he brought his offerings and said,

2 If the Lord be propitious to me let the plate which is on the priest's forehead 1 make it manifest.

3 And he consulted the plate which the priest wore, and saw it, and behold sin was not found in him.

4 And Joachim said, Now I know that the Lord is propitious to me, and hath taken away all my sins.

5 And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and he went to his own house.

6 And when nine months were fulfilled to Anna, she brought forth, and said to the midwife, What have I brought forth?

7 And she told her, a girl.

8 Then Anna said, the Lord hath this day magnified my soul; and she laid her in bed.

9 And when the days of her purification were accomplished, she gave suck to the child, and called her name Mary.

CHAP. VI.

1 Mary at nine months old, walks nine steps, 3 Anna keeps her holy, 4 When she is a year old, Joachim makes a great feast. 7 Anna gives her the breast, and sings a song to the Lord.

AND the child increased in strength every day, so that when she was nine months old, her mother put her upon the ground to try if she could stand; and when she had walked nine steps, she came again to her mother's lap.

2 Then her mother caught her up, and said, As the Lord my God liveth, thou shalt not walk again on this earth till I bring thee into the temple of the Lord.

3 Accordingly she made her chamber a holy place, and suffered nothing uncommon or unclean to come near her, but invited certain undefiled daughters of Israel, and they drew her aside.

4 But when the child was a year old, Joachim made a great feast, and invited the priests, scribes, elders, and all the people of Israel;

5 And Joachim then made an offering of the girl to the chief priests, and they blessed her, saying, The God of our fathers bless this girl, and give her a name famous and lasting through all generations. And all the people replied, So be it, Amen.

6 Then Joachim a second time offered her to the priests, and they blessed her, saying, O most high God, regard this girl, and bless her with an everlasting blessing.

7 Upon this her mother took her up, and gave her the breast, and sung the following song to the Lord. [2](#)

8 I will sing a new song unto the Lord my God, for he hath visited me, and taken away from me the reproach of mine enemies, and hath given me the fruit of his righteousness, that it may now be told the sons of Reuben, that Anna gives suck.

9 Then she put the child to rest in the room which she had consecrated, and she went out and ministered unto them.

10 And when the feast was ended, they went away rejoicing and praising the God of Israel.