

One of the great favors granted by Heaven to the Catholic Church comes through Venerable [Maria of Agreda](#) (1602-1665), the relatively obscure 17th century Spanish nun. Her extensive writings, now known to us as *The Mystical City of God*, document a wide-ranging series of revelations on the mystery of salvation and the hidden life of the Blessed Virgin. While still in her twenties, Maria was chosen as abbess of her convent, a position she held almost continually until her death 40 years later in 1665. Her reputation for holiness and prudence was widespread, even attracting visits from King Philip IV of Spain (r. 1621-1640).

Maria was also favored with the miracle of bilocation. Although she remained in her convent in Agreda, there is indisputable [evidence](#) that she made a number of visits to what is now Texas and New Mexico, where as “the lady in blue” she was instrumental in the conversion of native Indian tribes to the Faith. Maria’s body, examined as recently as 1989, remains incorrupt within the walls of the convent she ruled more than 400 years ago.

On the occasion of the Solemnity of the Epiphany (Jan. 6), we take a brief look below at *The Mystical City of God* and its revelations about the coming of the three Magi to pay homage to the Divine Child in Bethlehem. Among other intriguing details, the star of Bethlehem is depicted as an entirely supernatural phenomenon, which no doubt disappoints the many curious persons who have attempted to identify it as a comet, a conjunction of planets, or some other routine occurrence.

The Mystical City of God is available in English in print as well as [online](#). All excerpts below are extracted from Volume II (The Incarnation), Book Two with *quoted text in italics*. Three full chapters (XV thru XVII) are devoted to the visit of the Magi, compared with just twelve verses in the Gospels (Matthew 2:1-12). This writer, who has selected the excerpts and provided occasional paraphrased narrative (shown in regular font amidst the *quoted text*), hopes that a prayerful reading will help the reader gain a deeper appreciation for the majesty and providence of God as He revealed His Divine Son to the world so in need of redemption.

Angels Announce Christ’s Birth

Upon the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem, various angels were dispatched to certain favored persons to announce the great news. These included Mary’s parents, Sts. Joachim and Anne, Mary’s cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachary, the two holy persons Simeon and Anna, whom the Holy Family would later encounter in the Temple, and *other just and holy people, who were worthy to be trusted with this new mystery of our*

Redemption...Although not all the just upon earth were informed at that time of this sacrament, yet in all of them were wrought certain divine effects in the hour in which the Savior of the world was born. For all the just felt in their hearts a new and supernatural joy, though they were ignorant of its cause. There were not only movements of joy in the angels and in the just, but also wonderful movements in the insensible creatures; for all the influences of the planets were renovated and enlivened. The sun much accelerated its course; the stars shown in greater brightness; and for the Magi kings was formed that wonderful star which showed them the way to Bethlehem. Many trees began to bloom and others to produce fruit. Some temples of the idols were overthrown; and in others the idols were hurled down and their demons put to flight. These wonders and other happenings in the world on that day men accounted for in different ways, but far from the truth. Only among the just there were many, who by divine impulse suspected or believed that God had come into the world; yet no one knew it with certainty, except those to whom it had been revealed. Among these were the three Magi, to each of whom in their separate Oriental kingdoms angels of the Queen's guard were sent to inform them by interior and intellectual enlightenment that the Redeemer of the human race had been born in poverty and humility...

By the infused knowledge of holy Scriptures and Her high supernatural enlightenment, our great Queen knew that the Magi kings of the Orient would come to acknowledge and adore Her most holy Son as their true God. St. Joseph, however, was ignorant of this mystery and was concerned with moving the Holy Family as quickly as possible to more suitable and comfortable lodging in Bethlehem, where they could remain until after presenting the Child in the temple of Jerusalem. For Her part, the Blessed Virgin had an affection for the cave on account of its humbleness and poverty, and because the Incarnate Word had consecrated it by the mysteries of His Nativity and Circumcision, and was to hallow it by the mystery of the Magi's visit, although She did not know at what time that would happen...

While they were thus conferring with each other, the Lord Himself informed them through the two celestial princes Michael and Gabriel, who were attending in corporeal forms to the service of their Lord and God and of their great Queen. They spoke to Mary and Joseph, saying: "Divine Providence has ordained that three kings of the earth, coming from the Orient in search of the king of heaven, should adore the Divine Word in this very place (cf. Ps. 71:6). They are already ten days on the way; for at the hour of the birth of Jesus they were informed of it, and they immediately set out on their journey. Therefore, they will shortly arrive, fulfilling all that the Prophets had from very ancient times foreknown and foretold" ...

Origin of the Magi

The three Magi Kings, who came to find the Divine Infant after His birth, were natives of Persia, Arabia and Sabba (cf. Ps. 71:10), countries to the east of Palestine. Their coming was prophesied especially by David, and before him, by Balaam, who, having been hired by Balaac, king of the Moabites, to curse the Israelites, blessed them instead (cf. Num. 24:17). In this blessing, Balaam said that he would see the King Christ, although not at once, and that he would behold Him, although not present; for he did not see Him with his own eyes, but through the Magi, his descendants many centuries after...

These three Kings were well versed in the natural sciences, and well read in the Scriptures of the people of God; and on account of their learning they were called Magi. By their knowledge of Scripture, and by conferring with some of the Jews, they were imbued with a belief in the coming of the Messiah expected by that people. They were, moreover, upright men, truthful and very just in the government of their countries...Because these Magi governed adjoining countries and lived not far from each other, they were mutual friends and shared with each other the virtues and the knowledge which they had acquired, consulting each other in the more important events of their reigns. In all things they communicated with each other as most faithful friends.

Angelic Instructions, Miraculous Star

*In obedience to the Divine will, and immediately after the birth of the Christ Child, one of the many angels accompanying the Blessed Virgin was dispatched to each of the guardian angels of the three kings. They were directed to make known to their charges the mystery of the Incarnation and of the birth of the Redeemer, which they did by speaking to them in a dream. Their angels informed them that *the King of the Jews was born as true God and man; that He was the Messiah and Savior who was expected; that He was the One who was promised in the Scriptures and prophecies (cf. Gen 3:15); and that they themselves, the three Kings, were singled out by the Lord to seek the star, which Balaam had foretold. Each one of the three Kings also was made aware that the same revelation was being made to the other two in the same way; and that it was not a favor or miracle which should remain unused, but that they were expected to co-operate with the divine light and execute what it pointed out. They were inspired and inflamed with a great love and with a desire to know the God made man, to adore Him as their Creator and Redeemer, and serve Him with most perfect devotion...**

After receiving these heavenly revelations in their sleep, the three Kings awoke at the same hour of the night, and prostrating themselves on the ground and humiliating themselves to

the dust, they adored in spirit the immutable being of God. They exalted His infinite mercy and goodness for having sent the Divine Word to assume flesh of a Virgin (cf. Isa. 7:14) in order to redeem the world and give eternal salvation to men. Then all three of them, governed by an impulse of the same Spirit, resolved to depart without delay for Judea in search of the Divine Child in order to adore Him. The three Kings prepared gifts of gold, incense and myrrh in equal quantities, being guided by the same mysterious impulse; and without having conferred with each other concerning their undertaking, the three of them arrived at the same resolve and the same plan of executing it. In order to set out immediately, they procured on the same day the necessary camels and provisions together with a number of servants for the journey. Without heeding the commotion caused among their people, or considering that they were to travel in foreign regions, or caring for any outward show of authority, without ascertaining particulars of the place whither they were to go, or gathering information for identifying the Child, they at once resolved with fervent zeal and ardent love to depart in order to seek the newborn King.

At the same time the holy angel, who had brought the news from Bethlehem to the kings, formed of the material air a most resplendent star, although not so large as those of the firmament; for it was not to ascend higher than was necessary for the purpose of its formation. It took its course through the atmospheric regions in order to guide and direct the holy Kings to the cave, where the Child awaited them. Its splendor was of a different kind from that of the sun and the other stars; with its most beautiful light it illumined the night like a brilliant torch, and it mingled its own most active brilliancy with that of the sun by day. On coming out of their palaces each one of the kings saw this new star (cf. Matt 2:2), although each from a different standpoint, because it was only one star and it was placed in such distance and height that it could be seen by each one at the same time. As the three of them followed the guidance of this miraculous star, they soon met. Thereupon it immediately approached them much more closely, descending through many shifts of the aerial space and rejoicing them by shedding its refulgence over them at closer range. They began to confer among themselves about the revelation they had received and about their plans, finding that they were identical. They were more and more inflamed with devotion and with the pious desire of adoring the newborn God, and broke out in praise and admiration at the inscrutable works and mysteries of the Almighty.

Arrival in Jerusalem

The Magi pursued their journey under the guidance of the star without losing sight of it until they arrived at Jerusalem. As well on this account as also because this city was the capital and metropolis of the Jews, they suspected that this was the birthplace of their legitimate and true King. They entered into the city and openly inquired after Him, saying

(Matt 2:8): "Where is the king of the Jews, who is born? For we have seen His star in the East, announcing to us His birth and we have come to see Him and adore Him. Their inquiry came to the ears of Herod, who at that time unjustly reigned in Judea and lived in Jerusalem. The wicked king, panic-stricken at the thought that a more legitimate claimant to the throne should have been born, felt much disturbed and outraged by this report. With him the whole city was aroused, some of the people, out of flattery to the king, others on account of the fear of disturbance. Immediately, as Saint Matthew relates, Herod called together a meeting of the principal priests and scribes in order to ask them where Christ was to be born according to the prophecies and holy Scriptures. They answered that, according to the words of one of the Prophets, Micheas (cf. Mich. 5:2), He was to be born in Bethlehem; since it was written by him that thence the Ruler of Israel was to arise.

Thus informed of the birthplace of the new King of Israel, and insidiously plotting from that very moment to destroy Him, Herod dismissed the priests. Then he secretly called the Magi in order to learn of them at what time they had seen the star as harbinger of his Birth (cf. Matt 2:7). They ingenuously informed him, and he sent them away to Bethlehem, saying to them in covert malice: "Go and inquire after the Infant, and when you have found Him, announce it to me, in order that I, too, may go to recognize and adore Him." The Magi departed, leaving the hypocritical king ill at ease and in great consternation at such indisputable signs of the coming of the legitimate King of Israel into the world. Although he could have eased his mind in regard to his sovereignty by the thought that a recently born infant could not be enthroned so very soon, yet human prosperity is so unstable and deceitful that it can be overthrown even by an infant, or by the mere threat of far off danger...

First Encounter with the Holy Family

On leaving Jerusalem the Magi again found the star, which at their entrance they had lost from view. By its light they were conducted to Bethlehem and to the cave of the Nativity. Diminishing in size it hovered over the head of the Infant Jesus and bathed Him in its light; whereupon the matter of which it had been composed dissolved and disappeared. Our great Queen had already been prepared by the Lord for the coming of the Kings, and when She understood that they were approaching the cave, She requested Saint Joseph not to leave it, but to stay at Her side. This he did, although the sacred text does not mention it. Like many other things passed over in the Gospels, this was not necessary for establishing the truth of the mystery. Nevertheless, it is certain that Saint Joseph was present when the Kings adored the infant Jesus. The precaution of sending him away was not necessary; for the Magi had already been instructed that the Mother of the Newborn was a Virgin, and that He was the true God and not a son of Saint Joseph. Nor would God have permitted them to be

led to the cave ignorant of such an important circumstance as His origin, allowing them to adore the Child as the son of Joseph and of a Mother not a Virgin. They were fully instructed as to all these things, and they were deeply impressed by the sacramental character of all these exalted and complicated mysteries.

The heavenly Mother awaited the pious and devout kings, standing with the Child in Her arms. Amid the humble and poor surroundings of the cave, in incomparable modesty and beauty, She exhibited at the same time a majesty more than human, the light of Heaven shining in Her countenance. Still more visible was this light in the Child, shedding through the cavern effulgent splendor, which made it like a heaven. The three kings of the East entered and at the first sight of the Son and Mother they were for a considerable space of time overwhelmed with wonder. They prostrated themselves upon the earth, and in this position they worshiped and adored the Infant, acknowledging Him as the true God and man, and as the Savior of the human race. By the divine power, which the sight of Him and His Presence exerted in their souls, they were filled with new enlightenment. They perceived the multitude of angelic spirits, who as servants and ministers of the King of kings and Lord of lords attended upon Him in reverential fear (cf. Heb. 1:6). Arising, they congratulated their and our Queen as Mother of the Son of the eternal Father; and they approached to reverence Her on their knees. They sought Her hand in order to kiss it, as they were accustomed to do to their queens in their countries. But the most prudent Lady withdrew Her hand, and offered instead that of the Redeemer of the world, saying: "My spirit rejoices in the Lord and My soul blesses and extols Him; because among all the nations He has called and selected you to look upon and behold that which many kings and prophets have in vain desired to see (cf. Luke 10:24), namely, Him Who is the eternal Word Incarnate (cf. John 1:1-3, 14). Let us extol and praise His Name on account of the sacraments and mysteries wrought among His people; let us kiss the earth which He sanctifies by His Real Presence."

At these words of most holy Mary, the three kings humiliated themselves anew, adoring the Infant Jesus; they acknowledged the great blessings of living in the time when the Sun of justice was arising in order to illumine the darkness (cf. Mal. 4:2). Thereupon they spoke to Saint Joseph, congratulating him and extolling his good fortune in being chosen as the spouse of the Mother of God; and they expressed wonder and compassion at the great poverty, beneath which were hidden the greatest mysteries of Heaven and earth. In this intercourse they consumed three hours, and then the kings asked permission of most holy Mary to go to the city in order to seek a lodging, as they could find no room for themselves in the cave. Some people had accompanied them; but the Magi alone participated in the light and the grace of this visit. The others took notice merely of what passed exteriorly, and witnessed only the destitute and neglected condition of the Mother and Her husband.

Though wondering at the strange event, they perceived nothing of its mystery. The Magi took leave and departed, while most holy Mary and Joseph, being again alone with their Child, glorified His Majesty with new songs of praise, because His Name was beginning to be known and adored among the Gentiles (cf. Ps. 85:9)...

Holy Conversation Amongst Themselves

From the grotto of the Nativity, into which the three Kings had entered directly on their way to Jerusalem, they betook themselves to a lodging inside of the town of Bethlehem. They retired to a room where, in an abundance of affectionate tears and aspirations, they spent the greater part of the night, speaking of what they had seen, of the feelings and affections aroused in each, and of what each had noticed for himself in the Divine Child and His Mother. During this conference they were more and more inflamed with divine love, amazed at the majesty and divine effulgence of the Infant Jesus; at the prudence, modesty and reserve of His Mother; at the holiness of Her spouse Joseph, and the poverty of all three; at the humbleness of the place, where the Lord of Heaven and earth had wished to be born. The devout kings felt a divine fire, which flamed up in their hearts, and, not being able to restrain themselves, they broke out into exclamations of sweet affection and acts of great reverence and love. "What is this that we feel?" they said. "What influence of this great King is it that moves us to such desires and affections? After this, how shall we converse with men? What can we do, who have been instructed in such new, hidden and supernatural mysteries? O greatness of His Omnipotence unknown to men and concealed beneath so much poverty! O humility unimaginable for mortals! Would that all be drawn to it, in order that they may not be deprived of such happiness!"

During these divine colloquies the Magi remembered the dire destitution of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in their cave, and they resolved immediately to send them some gifts in order to show their affection and to satisfy their desire of serving them, since they could not do anything else for them. They sent through their servants many of the presents, which they had already set aside for them, and others which they could procure. Most holy Mary and Joseph received these gifts with humble acknowledgment and they made a return not of empty-worded thanks, as other men are apt to make, but many efficacious blessings for the spiritual consolation of the three Kings. These gifts enabled our great Queen to prepare for Her ordinary guests, the poor, an abundant repast; for the needy ones were accustomed to receive alms from Her, and, attracted still more by Her sweet words, were wont to come and visit Her. The Kings went to rest full of incomparable joy in the Lord; and in their sleep the angels advised them as to their journey homeward.

Second Encounter, Bestowal of the Gifts

On the following day at dawn they returned to the cave of the Nativity in order to offer to the heavenly King the special gifts which they had provided. Arriving they prostrated themselves anew in profound humility; and opening their treasures, as Scripture relates, they offered Him gold, incense and myrrh (cf. Matt 2:11). They consulted the heavenly Mother in regard to many mysteries and practices of faith, and concerning matters pertaining to their consciences and to the government of their countries; for they wished to return well instructed and capable of directing themselves to holiness and perfection in their daily life. The great Lady heard them with exceeding pleasure and She conferred interiorly with the Divine Infant concerning all that they had asked, in order to answer and properly to instruct these sons of the new Law. As a Teacher and an instrument of divine wisdom, She answered all their questions, giving them such high precepts of sanctity that they could scarcely part from Her on account of the sweetness and attraction of Her words. However, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, reminding them of the necessity and of the will of the Lord that they should return to their country. No wonder that Her words should so deeply affect these Kings; for all Her words were inspired by the Holy Spirit and full of infused science regarding all that they had inquired and many other matters.

The heavenly Mother received the gifts of the Kings and in their name offered them to the Infant Jesus. His Majesty showed by signs of highest pleasure, that He accepted their gifts: they themselves became aware of the exalted and heavenly blessings with which He repaid them more than a hundredfold (cf. Matt. 19:29). According to the custom of their country, they also offered to the heavenly Princess some gems of great value; but because these gifts had no mysterious signification and referred not to Jesus, She returned them to the Kings, reserving only the gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. In order to send them away more rejoiced, She gave them some of the clothes in which She had wrapped the Infant God; for She neither had nor could have had any greater visible pledges of esteem with which to enrich them at their departure. The three Kings received these relics with such reverence and esteem that they encased them in gold and precious stones in order to keep them ever after. As a proof of their value these relics spread about such a copious fragrance that they revealed their presence a league in circumference. However, only those who believed in the coming of God into the world were able to perceive it; while the incredulous perceived none of the fragrance emitted by the relics. In their own countries the Magi performed great miracles with these relics.

Departure and Legacy

The holy Kings also offered their property and possession to the Mother of the sweetest Jesus, or, if She did not wish to accept of them and preferred to live in this place, where her most holy Son had been born, they would build Her a house, wherein She could live more comfortably. The most prudent Mother thanked them for their offers without accepting them. On taking leave of Her, the three Kings besought Her from their inmost hearts not to forget them, which She promised and fulfilled; in the same way they spoke to Saint Joseph. With the blessing of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, they departed, so moved by tenderest affection that it seemed to them they had left their hearts all melted into sighs and tears in that place. They chose another way for their return journey, in order not to meet Herod in Jerusalem; for thus they had been instructed by the angel on the preceding night (cf. Matt. 2:12). On their departure from Bethlehem, the same or a similar star appeared in order to guide them home, conducting them on their new route to the place where they had first met, whence each one separated to reach his own country.

For the rest of their lives these most fortunate Kings lived up to their divine vocation as true disciples of the Mistress of holiness, governing both their souls and the people of their states according to Her teaching. By the example of their lives and the knowledge of the Messiah, which they spread about, they converted a great number of souls to the belief in the true God and to the way of salvation. Finally, full of days and merits, they closed their careers in sanctity and justice, having been favored both in life and in death by the Mother of mercy. After dismissing the Kings, the heavenly Queen and Saint Joseph spent their time in new canticles of praise of the wonders of the Most High, conferring them with the sayings of the Scriptures and the prophecies of the Patriarchs, which they saw fulfilled one after another in the Infant Jesus. But the most prudent Mother, who profoundly penetrated into the deepest meaning of these high sacraments, remembered them all and treasured them up in Her bosom (cf. Luke 2:19). The holy angels, who were witnesses of these holy mysteries, congratulated their Queen, that Her most holy Son had been manifested and that His Majesty had been adored by men; and they sang to Him new canticles, magnifying His mercies wrought upon mankind...

Postscript: Concerning the gifts offered by the Magi, Mary and Joseph decided to divide them into three parts: one destined for the temple of Jerusalem, namely the incense and myrrh, as well as part of the gold; another part as offering to the priest, who had circumcised the Child, in order that he might use it for himself and for the synagogue or oratory in Bethlehem, and the third part for distribution among the poor. This resolve they executed with generous and fervent affection.