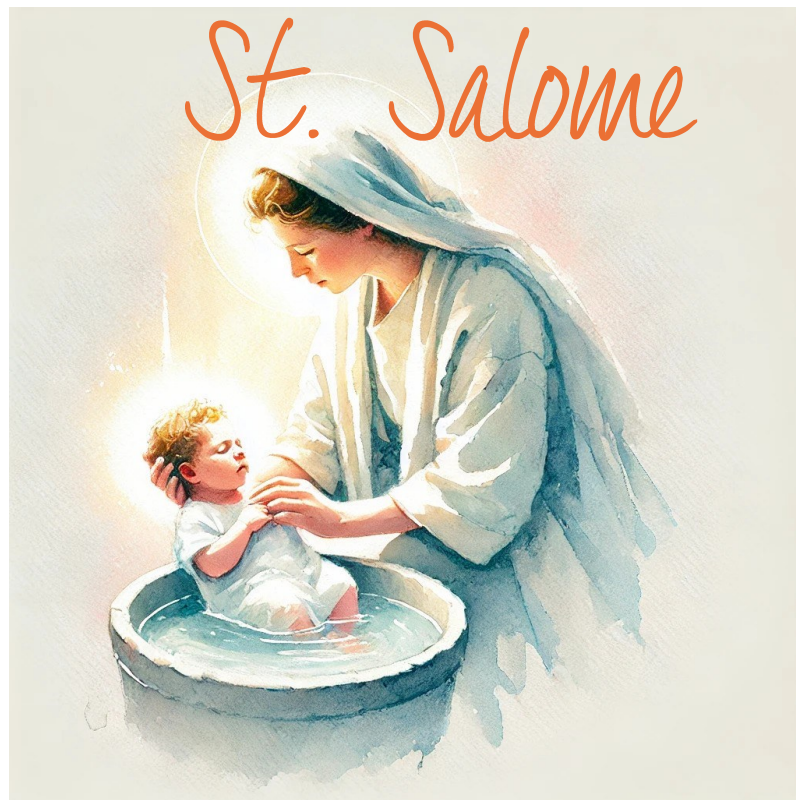


Once Upon a SAINT

by Rebecca O'Loughlin



Mid-wife and Myrrh-Bearer

My dearest children, in the days just before Jesus was born, homes in Judea were built in such a way that animals lived on the ground level in a kind of cave, and the people lived above them in a house built on top. The home for people consisted of one large family room for cooking, eating, and sleeping, and there was a smaller room that the family would use as a guest lodging when visitors came. People in those days remembered that taking care of a guest was like taking care of an angel of God. You never knew when an angel or even Elijah might come knocking on your door, and they might come in the disguise of someone you least expect.

Caesar Augustus commanded a census of the land. So

Joseph took Mary (who was pregnant with Jesus) on their donkey and traveled over 80 miles from Nazareth by the Sea of Galilee (where Mary was from) to go to Joseph's own home town of Bethlehem in Judea. Bethlehem is where Joseph was born, so he needed to register there for the census. A lot of people were visiting and there was no room in the guest room, so Mary and Joseph had to stay with the animals in the cave.

Not far from Bethlehem is another little town called Bethsaida, which is also in Judea. In Bethsaida lived one of Mary's relatives, a midwife named Salome. Salome lived with her husband Zebedee and their young son

James, who Zebedee was training to be a fisherman (later they had another son named John, but he is not born yet in this story).

One cold day there was a knock on the door.

James opened the door. One of Joseph's relatives was outside, breathless.

"Mary of Nazareth is going to have her baby tonight. The other midwife is already on her way, but Mary is really hoping for Salome to come and help."

James smiled, showing off a gap in his teeth where he had lost his very first tooth only the day before.

"I will tell my eema," he replied.

Salome was kneading bread. "Eema!" James told his mother, "Mary is about to have a baby, and they want you in Bethlehem!"

"A baby?" Salome replied, she smiled at her young son. Then her face grew serious. "But Joseph and Mary have not been married long. I had best go see. Perhaps Mary is having her baby too soon and the child will die. James, you will need to cook the bread for your father's supper tonight. I may be gone for some time. Pray for the little child."

Salome kissed James on the head, gathered her midwifery things (such as clean cloth to wrap the baby in, herbs, and a knife to cut the umbilical cord) and went on her way to Bethlehem. It was already dusk, and with the evening came a bitter cold. She had six miles to go, but she walked fast and trusted that with a first baby it would take Mary some time to deliver.

Salome arrived in Bethlehem. The other midwife stepped out of the cave where all the animals were. She hugged Salome tightly, tears pouring down her cheeks. "Salome, Salome, I will tell you an amazing thing, which I have seen. A virgin has given birth to a child. This is naturally impossible! Isaiah's prophecy has come true! The Messiah is here!"

Salome laughed. "Impossible! Are you telling me that Joseph is not the father of Mary's baby? That she had a baby miraculously and by the Breath of God? I will need proof of this!"

Salome went into the cave, ready to rebuke Mary for the ridiculous tale, but no sooner had she touched Mary when her hand withered up just like a grape withers up into a raisin.

Salome cried out "woe to me, because of my sin! I have doubted God and His Word, that a virgin would bear a Son! Ah Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner! How am I to

help women give birth with only one hand?"

One of the angels who was there for Jesus' birth saw that Salome truly felt sorry for doubting God, and he spoke to her: "Salome, touch baby Jesus, and you will be healed."

Salome reached out to hold baby Jesus. Salome's hand was healed when she touched His soft baby skin. She rocked the sweet baby in her arms. This was the very first miracle that Jesus brought about, and He was less than an hour old!

"Thanks be to God!" cried Salome, "I have seen the Messiah today."

Salome stayed with Mary and helped her with baby Jesus for several weeks (James and Zebedee were quite used to taking care of themselves since Salome was often gone helping mothers and babies). Can you imagine a better Christmas gift than being allowed to serve the Messiah and His mother in their time of need?

The angel spoke once more to Salome: "be sure not to say anything to anyone about the miracle that has taken place here."

Salome replied, "ok, but I don't like to keep secrets from my husband!"

"You may tell Zebedee, because after all you are made one. But it is not Jesus' time to be known as the promised Messiah in public just yet."

Salome waited until Christ was a grown man, and then she became one of Jesus' followers. Her sons became Jesus' Apostles. St. Mark wrote that Salome was at Jesus' Crucifixion, and she was also one of the Myrrh-bearers at His tomb, so she is one of the only people who gave Jesus a gift both at His birth and His death! Both gifts involved herbs, herbs for a healthy birth and herbs for the dead. Hyssop was probably one of those herbs as it was used for cleansing and purifying. You can drink hyssop tea during winter months to help with respiratory illness too.

Did you ever hear this story about St. Salome the Myrrh-Bearer before? I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find the real story in the Protoevangelium of St. James.

As we are contemplating gifts, one wonderful way to honor Salome around the birth of Christ is to ask a birthing center what supplies they need. In the Book of Matthew Jesus says: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40). Imagine bringing diapers for Baby Jesus!