

That there were many shepherds in and around Bethlehem is clear from the number of flocks that pastured in its fertile valleys, plains, hillsides. How many of them were called to adore the new-born King? Even before the answer given by tradition, says Mgr. Gaume, the analogies of faith determine the number. The incarnate Word had accomplished the redemption of angels; of angels whom He had preserved from a fall, of men whom He had raised therefrom. Already the angelic world surrounded His manger-cradle, triumphing in His birth. There remained humanity to offer its homage. The three races sprung from the three sons of Noah should be represented in a mystery accomplished for all. The same signification that exists in the sacred number of the Magi holds good herein; hence there were three shepherds.

"In accordance with this and other testimony," observes Benedict XIV, "we affirm with assurance that there were three adoring shepherds, and that there were no more than three." Perpetuated from age to age by written or sculptured monuments, the tradition of the three shepherds was some years ago revived annually in Rome, the city of traditions. At the beginning of Advent, when the Eternal City was under Papal rule, the *pifferari*, or shepherds, of Sabine Hills descended their mountains, and, marching through the streets in their simple yet picturesque costume, announced, to the strains of rustic music, the approaching birth of the Child of Bethlehem. Although in considerable numbers, they ever walked three abreast—an old man, a middle-aged one, and a youth.

That these favored among all earth's children on that December night nineteen centuries ago were saints is the common opinion in both Eastern and Western churches. And it is certainly a doctrine presenting no difficulty to a fervent christian. The virtues which won for them their magnificent privilege could not but have been augmented and enhanced by their contact with the Infant Son of Mary; and the memory of that midnight scene, remarkable amidst all the occurrences that earth has ever witnessed, must have dwelt with them throughout their lives, a fountain of perennial joy, and a guerdon of final perseverance. Simplicity, humility, candor, are the characteristics in them that serve as examples for us.

