

Chapter One

Saint Therese of the Child Jesus was born at Alencon, in Normandy, on January 2, 1873.

Normandy is a beautiful province in the northwest of France, a land of woods and streams and green pastures. On the night of Therese's birth the whole countryside was covered with snow. It seemed to be an image of her soul, which was never to lose the whiteness of its baptismal innocence.

The parents of Therese, Monsieur and Madame Martin, were fervent Catholics, and they welcomed this ninth child as a precious gift from God. There were already four girls in the family, and four other little ones had died when they were babies.

The children were all in bed and asleep when Therese was born, but their father himself went to wake up the two elder girls to tell them the joyful news. Marie, aged thirteen, sat up in bed, but Pauline, who was eleven, jumped out at once to run and see the baby. However, Monsieur Martin told them both to go to sleep again, promising that they should see her the first thing in the morning. He did not wake Leonie, who was nine, and still less Celine, who was only three, as he feared they would be too excited.

When he went back to Madame Martin, he found her praying earnestly. "I have been asking the same grace for this child as for the others," she said: "that God will choose her for Himself, and above all that her soul may never soiled by mortal sin. Rather than this, I begged He would take her from us at once, as He took the other children."

Very early the next morning the four little girls were clustering round their baby sister. They spoke in whispers for fear of waking her, but Celine could not long keep quiet. She climbed on a chair, clapping her hands with little cries of joy, and finally gave the baby a resounding kiss, which, of course, woke her up. This was greeted with exclamations of delight from the others.

"Oh, Mamma," said one, "how pretty she is! Her eyes are just like bits of sky."

"Oh, she's smiling," said another; "do come and look, Mamma. She's smiling!"

And a third went into raptures over her tiny hands.

The parents of little Therese wished to have her baptized on the day of her birth, as all her brothers and sisters had been, but tho their great regret they had to wait for the arrival of the godfather. Even one day seemed a long delay to the pious mother as she watched her child with anxious eyes. At last, on the morning of January 4, Therese was baptized in the Church of Notre-Dame. Her eldest sister, Marie, was her godmother, and she received the name of Marie Francoise Therese.