

Subject: Lactation and Mysticism  
Genre: Essay/Commentary  
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Publisher: [StarGateLibraries.com](http://StarGateLibraries.com)  
Latest Revision: 19 July 2017

## **The Vision of St. Bernard**

In the year 1146 AD, in the Imperial Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption and St Stephen in Speyer Germany, knelt an ascetic monk, prostrate in prayer before a statue of the Virgin Mother. After hours of fervent prayer, suddenly before this abstemious monk appeared incarnate, Mary, Mother of God. And astonishingly from the breast of the Virgin Mother, a spray of milk wet the parched lips of this humbled monk.

One might think this a hallucination of an over-tired, over-zealous ascetic, too long denied the carnal pleasures of a hedonistic world, and one might be correct, if this was just any ordinary monk, but this was Bernard of the Abbey Clairvaux!

Born near Dijon France in the year 1090 to noble parents Tescelin, Lord of Castle Fontaines and soldier in service to King Philip I, and Aleth, noble woman of Montbard, Bernard would become an outstanding student in literature and study of the Bible at the school of Châtillon-sur-Seine. As a youth, Bernard developed a special devotion to the study of the Virgin Mother.

In the year 1112, shunning the military life of his father, Bernard entered the Cisterian Abbey of Cîteaux seeking the monastic life of an ascetic, a life he would wholly embrace until his death in 1153. And just three years later at the exceptionally young age of 25, he would be ordained by St. Stephen to found an Abbey in the Vallée d'Absinthe, which he would name Clairvaux. From the Abbey of Clairvaux, sixty-eight monasteries would be founded in France, Italy, Germany, England, Spain, and Portugal.

In 1128, Pope Honorius II called upon Bernard to assist at the Council of Troyes, which had been convoked by the Pope to settle specified disputes between the Bishops of Paris, and regulate other matters of the Church of France. During this council, Bernard would draw the principal outline for the Rule of the Knights Templar.

Upon the death of Pope Honorius II in 1130, the Cardinals in Rome were unable to elect a new Pope. The resulting schism caused the church to split its allegiance between Pope Innocent II of France and Antipope Anacletus II of Rome. To bring

an end to the dispute, King Louis VI of France convened a National Council of Bishops at Étampes, and with the blessing of the Bishops, Bernard of Clairvaux was appointed to judge which was the rightful Pope.

In 1144, when the Christians were defeated by the army of Imad ad-Din Zengi at the siege of Edessa, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem threatened by Muslim invaders, Bernard was called upon by Pope Eugene III to preach the ordination of a Second Crusade. At the call of the Pope, Bernard traveled throughout France and Germany engendering support, and helping raise an army for the Second Crusade.

Had the Virgin Mother appeared incarnate to anyone but Bernard of Clairvaux, the validity of this miracle might have been called into question; however, because of his incorruptible devotion to his beliefs as an ascetic, and his fidelity to the church, his credibility was irreproachable. Even today, his theology, (particularly his belief in the Virgin Mother as intercessor to God), still profoundly influence Christian beliefs.

In 1174, because of the respect and reverence garnered among his peers, Bernard of Clairvaux was canonized by Pope Alexander III, making him the first Cistercian monk to be placed on the Calendar of Saints. And because of his theological contributions to the church, in 1830, Pope Pius VIII would bestow upon him the title of Doctor of the Church.

Whether or not this miracle occurred as recorded, is today a debate without resolution; however, as evidenced by art and literature, we can be certain the people of that time did believe that Mary, Mother of God, did indeed appear incarnate before Bernard of Clairvaux, and wet the parched lips of a prostrate ascetic with milk from her own breast.

The point is not whether this Miracle occurred, (for that is a matter of one's own spiritual convictions), rather the point is in how our ancestors viewed milk in a woman's breast. The milky breast has never been taboo: for in the view of our ancestors, milk in a woman's breast was the most sacred Virtue of Womanhood!

Essay/Commentary by Hudson