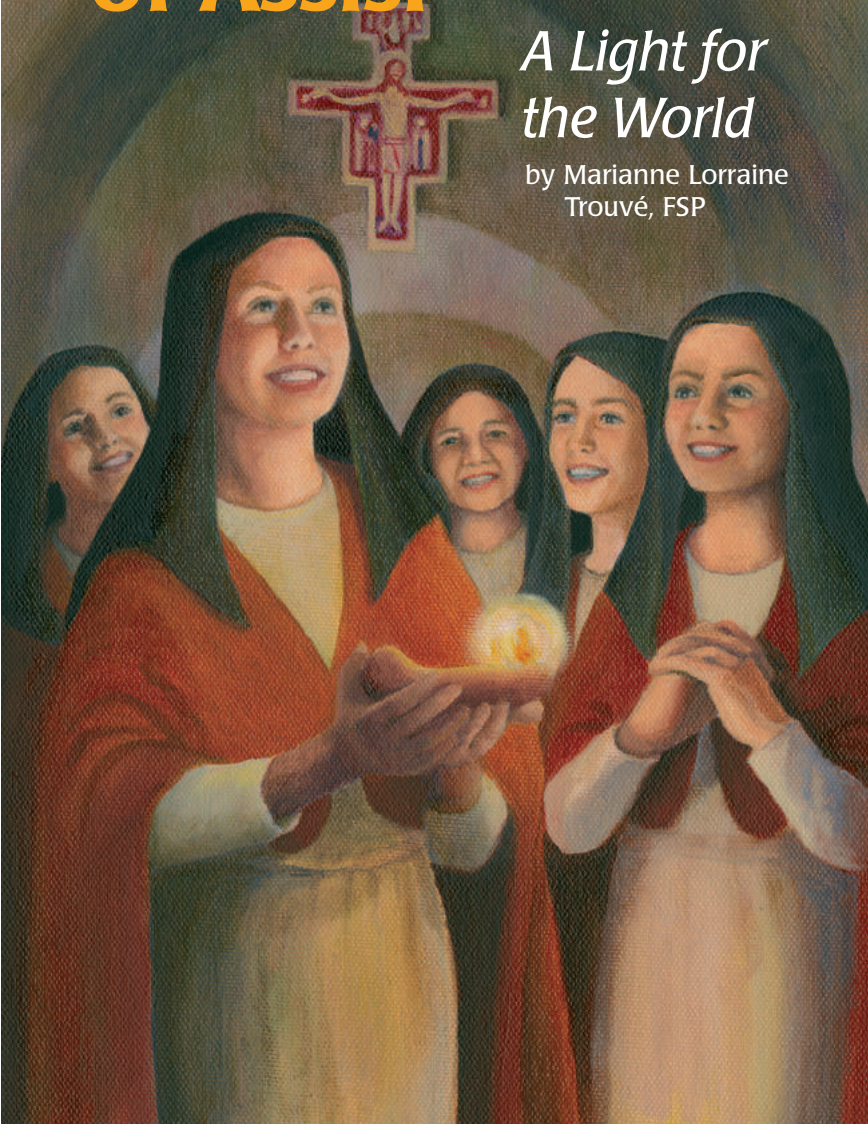


Saint Clare of Assisi

*A Light for
the World*

by Marianne Lorraine
Trouvé, FSP



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A Light for the World

Written by Marianne Lorraine Trouvé, FSP

Illustrated by Mary Joseph Peterson, FSP



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A LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

Lady Ortolana Offreduccio stopped in the middle of the hot, dusty road. Breathing hard, she bent over slightly, pushing aside the wisps of hair clinging to her damp face.

Her two ladies-in-waiting, distant relatives of the noblewoman, sprang to her side.

"My lady, let me help you," said one.

"Thank you, Pacifica," murmured Lady Ortolana. "Normally I don't mind the heat. But now, with the baby due so soon, I need to rest a bit."

The three women were walking to the nearby Cathedral of San Rufino in Assisi, Italy. Ortolana wanted to pray that she would give birth to a healthy baby.

"Don't worry, my lady," said Bona, the other lady-in-waiting. "We will be at the church soon. God will hear your prayers for a safe delivery."

Ortolana smiled. Her husband, Lord Favarone, had beamed with joy when she told him she was expecting their first baby. Since then she had prayed often for their child.

Soon the women entered the cathedral.

"I want to pray in front of the crucifix," Ortolana whispered. Her long gown rustled as she knelt down, her eyes fixed on Jesus on the cross. *Lord, watch over and protect this child of mine. Give me a safe delivery. May the child be healthy and come to know and love you.*

Ortolana was filled with the love of Jesus. A great sense of peace came over her. Then, in her heart, she suddenly heard the words, "You will bear a child who shall be a light for all the world."

Startled, she looked up at the cross. *Lord, was that you?*

Ortolana pondered the words, repeating them over and over in her mind. *You will bear a child who shall be a light for all the world.*

What could it mean?



A few weeks later, in the summer of 1194, Lady Ortolana gave birth. The cries of a newborn baby girl filled the room. Tears rolled down Ortolana's face as she cradled her daughter to her heart and showed the child to Favarone.

"What shall we call her?" he asked.

"Clare. It means light—brilliant light."

Ortolana again thought of the words she had heard in the church: "You will bear a child who shall be a light for all the world." As she looked at the tiny baby, now quietly sleeping, she wondered again what it all meant.

Word about the new baby's name quickly spread. "What a beautiful name!" Pacifica and Bona told each other as they bustled around the house. "A beautiful name for a beautiful baby!"

They loved helping Lady Ortolana care for the little girl. By the time Clare was three-and-a-half years old, another baby, Catherine, was born. Two years later, a third daughter, Beatrice, made her appearance. Lady Ortolana's joy was complete!

The three girls grew up in a happy household. In the large Offreduccio villa in the hill town of Assisi, the family lived a life of luxury. The children were very happy as they played. But outside the villa, serious problems were brewing.

A civil war had broken out in Assisi. Many of the poorer people were angry at the wealthier, noble families. There was fighting in the streets. Villas and castles were attacked. Clare's parents talked about what they should do.

“Ortolana,” said Favarone. “It’s too dangerous to stay here. The mobs may attack our house—burn it—and even kill us!”

“What shall we do?” cried Ortolana, with tears in her eyes.

“We must flee to Perugia. It’s not too far away, but we’ll be safe there.”

“Oh, Favarone,” said Ortolana, “I hate to leave our lovely home in Assisi!”

“Don’t worry, Ortolana,” he replied. “As soon as peace comes again, we’ll return.”

So the family fled to Perugia, fifteen miles away, for safety. The older girls cried as they left, sad to leave their friends and their home. Their house in Assisi was indeed damaged in the riots, but fortunately it wasn’t burned. After several years in Perugia, the Offreduccios were able to return. Finally, they were home again!

THE MARKET OF ASSISI

Twelve-year-old Clare skipped down the cobbled street, followed by Catherine. They loved visiting the markets and shops of Assisi with their mother. Colorful mounds of fruits and vegetables glowed against the pale stone walls. The streets were alive with busy shoppers, shouting vendors, donkeys, horses, and the occasional stray dog. The Offreduccio girls enjoyed it all!

“Mama, look!” Clare cried. “There, across the street, is the beggar I told you about. I want to help him. May I give him some food?”

A frail, elderly man sat by the street, covered with a tattered cloak. As people walked by, he looked up to plead with them. “Can you spare some food for me, for the love of our Lord, Jesus Christ?”

Clare tugged at her mother’s silk dress. “Please, Mama, can I give him something?”

Her mother replied, “Yes, Clare, take some of this bread I just bought and give it to him. God has given us many blessings, so we ought to share with the poor.”

“Thank you, Mama,” Clare shouted as she took the loaf and ran across the street.

She approached the beggar and offered him the loaf of bread. “Please take it for the love of Jesus Christ,” she told him.

The beggar looked up at the little girl with the golden hair. He reached out his hand and took the loaf. “Thank you, my little one” he told her. “May God reward you!” The bread was hardly in his hand before he began to devour chunks of it.

“Stay with me, girls,” said Ortolana. “I need to visit this shop to price some silk for a new dress. I won’t be buying anything today, though, so it shouldn’t take long.”

They entered a shop where they saw a young man measuring bolts of cloth. When Ortolana and her daughters entered, he approached them with a bow. “Can I interest you lovely ladies in some of the finest cloth in all of Assisi?” he asked with a smile.

Ortolana looked at the brightly colored cloth and thought of new curtains ... new bed hangings ... and ...

“Francis Bernardone, I must admit it’s tempting!” she exclaimed. “I hadn’t intended to buy anything, but ...”

“Lady Offreduccio, surely a lovely lady like you will want some lovely cloth for your home.”

Ortolana shook her head, laughing. “It’s hard to say no to you, Francis!” she replied. She chose her cloth and paid the young man. Clare was watching him intently.

Francis caught her eye. “I’m a lucky man! It is not every day that such a beautiful princess comes to our shop! What’s your name?” he asked.

Clare smiled shyly. “I’m not a princess! My name is Clare!”

“You certainly look like a princess to me!” Francis replied. “Let’s play a game. See this coin in my hand?” He held out his hand. A large coin was in his palm. “Watch it disappear!” He closed his fingers over his palm, then opened them up again. The coin was gone!

“How did you do that?” Clare cried.

“A magician never tells the secret!” Francis laughed.

“All right, Clare,” Mama said. “Enough magic tricks for today! It’s time to go home.”





"How did you do that?"

One night several years later, Clare and her family were eating dinner.

“Did you hear what happened today?” her father asked.

Everyone looked at him. “No, Father, what is it?” Clare asked.

“It’s the talk of the town!” Favarone said. “That young Francis Bernardone has made a total fool of himself!”

“Why?” Ortolana asked. “Whatever did he do?”

“His father dragged him before the bishop and accused Francis of stealing from him. Francis admitted it was true. He took some cloth from his father’s shop and sold it. He wanted to give the money to the poor. But the bishop told him it wasn’t right to steal. He said that Francis should give back the money.”

“So did he do that?” Catherine asked.

“Yes, but not only that!” Favarone said. “Francis not only gave the money back, he also took off his clothes—since his father had paid for them—and gave those back, too! The bishop had to wrap Francis in a cloak!”

Clare’s eyes grew big. “So Francis has nothing at all?” she asked.

“He wants nothing at all!” her father said. “Now he’s going around Assisi preaching to people. Francis keeps talking about something crazy—being Christ’s knight—and serving Lady Poverty.”

“I wonder what he means by that,” Clare said. “Lady Poverty ...” She grew thoughtful and finished her dinner in silence.