

THE NATIVITY AND INCARNATION
THE ETERNAL SON
THE FULLNESS OF TIME
THE POOR HEAR THE GOSPEL
THE GENTILES SEEK THE KING OF THE JEWS

Introductions Needed p. 492-494: Ps 5 done

Christmas and Christmas Eve

December 25, 2014

Revision A

Epistle:

Christmas Eve: Hebrews 1:1-12 The Eternal Son

Christmas Day: Galatians 4:4-7 The Fullness of Time

Gospel:

Christmas Eve: Luke 2:1-20 The Poor Hear the Gospel

Christmas Day: Matthew 2:1-12 Gentiles Seek the King of the Jews

Introduction to Christmas

The Gospel lesson for Christmas Eve in the East is used universally in the West for Christmas Day. The Epistle lesson for Christmas Eve is used sometimes in the West for Christmas Day and sometimes in October.

The Gospel lesson for Christmas Day in the East is used universally in the West for Epiphany. The Epistle lesson for Christmas Day is used sometimes in the West for the Sunday after Christmas and sometimes for January first.

The above differences between East and West follow a similar pattern for lectionary readings for Easter. In both cases, the Western lectionary reads the historical account of the event on the day of the event (e.g. the resurrection text, the birth of Jesus text). The Eastern lectionary, on the other hand reads the historical account on the eve of the event and something about the spiritual significance on the day of the event. For example, the Easter Sunday reading in the East is John 1: Light versus Darkness; and the Christmas Day reading in the East is the visit by the Gentiles (the Wise Men) seeking the King of the Jews.

Christmas Eve follows “Royal Hours”, so called because we are awaiting the appearance of the King. This includes prayer services throughout the day using the Readings shown in the Table. “Royal Hours” are also observed in the Orthodox Church for Epiphany Eve and Good Friday, since we also await the appearance of the King. The pattern for each of the “Royal Hours” uses three Psalms, one reading from the Prophets, an Epistle and a Gospel lesson. Note that for each of the “3rd Hour Prayers”, Psalm 51 is repeated from Christmas Eve to Epiphany Eve to Good Friday.

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ROYAL HOURS READINGS

	EPIPHANY EVE	CHRISTMAS EVE	GOOD FRIDAY
1st Hour: 6:00 a.m.	Psalm 5	Psalm 5	Psalm 5
	Psalm 23	Psalm 45	Psalm 2
	Psalm 27	Psalm 46	Psalm 22
	Isaiah 35:1-10	Micah 5:2-4	Zachariah 11:10-13
	Acts 13:25-33	Hebrews 1:1-12	Galatians 6:14-18
	Matthew 3:1-6	Matthew 1:18-25	Matthew 27:1-56
3rd Hour: 9:00 a.m.	Psalm 29	Psalm 67	Psalm 35
	Psalm 42	Psalm 87	Psalm 109
	Psalm 51	Psalm 51	Psalm 51
	Isaiah 1:16-20	Baruch 3:36-4:4	Isaiah 50:4-11
	Acts 19:1-8	Galatians 3:23-4:4	Romans 5:6-10
	Mark 1:1-8	Luke 2:1-20	Mark 15:16-41
6th Hour: 12:00 p.m.	Psalm 74	Psalm 72	Psalm 54
	Psalm 77	Psalm 132	Psalm 140
	Psalm 91	Psalm 91	Psalm 91
	Isaiah 12:3-6	Isaiah 7:10-16; 8:1-4,9,10	Isaiah 52:13-54:1
	Romans 6:3-11	Hebrews 1:10-2:3	Hebrews 2:11-18
	Mark 1:9-11	Matthew 2:1-12	Luke 23:32-49
9th Hour: 3:00 p.m.	Psalm 93	Psalm 110	Psalm 69
	Psalm 114	Psalm 111	Psalm 70
	Psalm 86	Psalm 86	Psalm 86
	Isaiah 49:8-15	Isaiah 9:6-7	Jer. 11:18-12:5, 9-10, 14-15
	Titus 2:11-15; 3:4-7	Hebrews 2:11-18	Hebrews 10:19-31
	Luke 3:1-18	Matthew 2:13-23	John 19:23-37
Vespers: 6:00 p.m.	Genesis 1:1-13	Genesis 1:1-13	Exodus 33:11-23
	2 Kings 2:6-14	Isaiah 9:6-7	Job 42:12-17
	2 Kings 2:19-22	Is. 7:10-16; 8:1-4, 9, 10	Isaiah 52:13-54:1
	1 Cor. 9:19-27	Hebrews 1:1-12	Hebrews 2:11-18
	Luke 3:1-18	Luke 2:1-20	Luke 23:32-49

These “hours of prayer” were used by devout Jews in the 1st century and were also followed by the 1st century Church. For example, Peter and John went to 9th Hour Prayer at the Temple (Acts 3:1). Peter also prayed privately on a house top at the 6th Hour in Joppa when he was away from Jerusalem (Acts 10:9). Cornelius had a vision while he was at 9th Hour Prayers (Acts 10:3). The use of these hours of prayer date from at least the time of David and include Compline and Midnight among the seven hours of prayer (Psalm 119:164). Since the morning and evening continual burnt offering (Exodus 29:38-42) represents 3rd and 9th Hour, the hours of prayer may even predate Moses.

The above readings include some of the readings for Christmas Day, which is as follows:

Matins Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

Epistle: Galatians 4:4-7

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

In addition to the Psalms listed above, Matins includes the following Psalms every Sunday and Feast Day:

Psalm 3	Psalm 88	Psalm 118
Psalm 38	Psalm 103	Psalm 51
Psalm 63	Psalm 143	Psalm 150

THE ETERNAL SON

p. 434

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2015
Revision A

Epistle: Hebrews 1:1-12

In the West, part of this Epistle is used in the fall of the year to show the contrast between His suffering for our sake and His glorification after the Ascension. In the East, this Epistle is used for Christmas Eve to consider just Who it is whose birth we celebrate on Christmas. In the East, this Epistle is also used for the Saturday of the 1st week of Lent.

Background and Overview

It is important to remember and consider just Who it is whose birth we celebrate on Christmas. This Epistle Lesson was quoted extensively by Ss. Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Ambrose during the Arian crisis in the 4th century. Arius had been saying that Jesus was not God Almighty, that He was not equal to the Father and that He was a created being. Ss. Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Ambrose refuted Arius by quoting from this Epistle Reading (among others) and showed that Arius was one of the worst blasphemers in the history of the planet. By looking into the arguments posed by the Arians, and the rebuttals from the Orthodox, we are able to understand a great deal about what Paul is saying to the Hebrews.

Paul began the Epistle to the Hebrews by stating that God had in earlier times spoken to the fathers by the prophets but now He had spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Concerning His Son:

- He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2)
- Through Him, the Father made the ages (Hebrews 1:2), the earth and the heavens (Hebrews 1:10), and all that exists (John 1:3)
- He is the radiance of the Father's Glory (Hebrews 1:3, 1 Timothy 6:16)
- He is the engraving of the Father's substance (Hebrews 1:3)
- He brings forth all things by the message of His Power (Hebrews 1:3)
- He sits at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High (Hebrews 1:3)

In other places, the Son of God is described as follows regarding His Divinity:

- He is before all things (Colossians 1:17)
- In Him all things consist (Colossians 1:17)
- In Him dwells all the Fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9, 1:19)
- The Father is in Him and He is in the Father (John 10:38)
- He is the Only-Begotten from the Father (John 1:15)
- He is the First-born of all creation (Hebrews 12:23, 1:6).

Comparing a description of Christ in Glory (Revelation 1:12-16) to one of the angels sent to the Prophet Daniel (Daniel 10:5-13), the descriptions are very similar: they are both clothed in radiance. Thus angels take on characteristics of the Glory of God because of their close association with Him. Yet, in spite of all the glory exhibited by the angels, they see themselves as our fellow servants (Revelation 19:20, 22:8-9), and “they are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those (i.e. us) who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).

Hebrews goes on to compare the Son of God with angels. There are a number of points:

- To which of the angels did God the Father say: “You are my Son” (Hebrews 1:5, Psalm 2:7)?
- To which of the angels did God the Father say: “I will be to Him a Father; He shall be to Me a Son (Hebrews 1:5, 2 Samuel 7:14)?
- Of the Son, the Father said, “Let all the angels of God worship Him (Hebrews 1:6, Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX).
- The angels are spirits (not humans); they are liturgists and a flame of fire (Hebrews 1:7, Psalm 104:4).

For more discussion on the relationship between the Son of God and the angels, see the Feast Day for the Archangels (November 8).

Paul quoted Psalm 45¹, where the Father spoke to the Son saying, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Psalm 45:6, Hebrews 1:8). Paul also applied Psalm 102² to the Son of God: “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of Your hands” (Psalm 102:25, Hebrews 1:10). Following that, Paul quoted from Psalm 110³, where the Father said to the Son, “Sit at My Right Hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalm 110:1, Hebrews 1:13).

Thus Christ is God of God and we rightly say in the Nicene Creed that He is Light of Light, Very God of Very God. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father whereas the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father (John 15:26).

Various Times and Various Ways

Paul said, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2)

John Chrysostom noted⁴ how Paul introduced his Epistle to the Hebrews. He wanted to discuss Old versus New Covenant matters; but first he needed to get their attention. Paul’s words in this Epistle are aimed at getting their attention.

“Paul wanted to show the difference between the New and Old Covenant, and he scatters it everywhere; he shoots from afar, sounds it abroad and prepares beforehand. Even from the introduction, he laid down this saying, ‘God, who at

¹ Psalm 45 is one of the Readings for Royal Hours at Christmas for 6th Hour.

² Psalm 102 is another one of the Readings for Royal Hours at Christmas for 6th Hour.

³ Psalm 110 is another one of the Readings for Royal Hours at Christmas for 9th Hour.

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XII, 1.

various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*' (Hebrews 1:1-2). Afterwards, having spoken concerning the Son, who He was and what He had done, he gave an exhortation to obey Him, lest we should suffer the same things as the Jews. Having said that He is 'High Priest after the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 6:20), and having oftentimes wished to enter into the subject of this difference, he used much preparatory arguments. Having rebuked them as weak, and again soothed and restored them to confidence, then at last he introduced the discussion on the difference of the two dispensations to ears in their full vigor. For he who is depressed in spirits would not be a ready listener. That we may understand this, listen to the Scripture saying, 'They paid no heed to Moses because of their faintheartedness and cruel bondage' (Exodus 6:9). Therefore having first cleared away their despondency by many considerations, some fearful, some more gentle, he then from this point enters on the discussion of the difference of the dispensations."

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁵ that the "various times and various ways" was ordered so that we could understand it.

"We indicate to the deaf what we want them to do by gestures and signs, not because we have no voice of our own, but because a verbal communication would be utterly useless to those who cannot hear. Inasmuch as human nature is in a sense deaf and insensible to higher truths, we maintain that the grace of God at various times and in various ways spoke by the Prophets (Hebrews 1:1), ordered their voices conformably to our capacity and the modes of expression with which we are familiar. By such means it leads us, as with a guiding hand, to the knowledge of higher truths, not teaching us in terms proportioned to their heavenly greatness, but descending to the lower level of our limited comprehension. After God gave animals their power of motion, no longer prescribed each step they take, for their nature, having once for all taken its beginning from the Creator, moves of itself, and makes its way, adapting its power of motion to its object from time to time. Man, however, has his steps ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23). So our nature, having received from God the power of speech and utterance and of expressing the will by the voice, proceeds on its way through things, giving them distinctive names by varying inflections of sound; and these signs are the verbs and nouns which we use, and through which we signify the meaning of the things."

John Chrysostom began⁶ by pointing out that God spoke to His people by prophets and by angels in the Old Testament. Both of these are fellow servants of God. But He has spoken to us by His Son, Who is the Master of both the prophets and the angels.

"Because Paul rather wished to exalt the Hebrews; to show that their superiority was great, he said that God sent prophets to our fathers, but to us He has sent His Only-Begotten Son Himself. Well did he begin thus, 'At various times and in various ways' (Hebrews 1:1), for he pointed out that not even the

⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, "Answer to Eunomius' Second Book"

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, I, 1.

prophets themselves saw God, but the Son saw Him. ‘I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets (Hosea 12:10). Therefore the excellence consists not in this alone, that to them indeed prophets were sent, but to us the Son; but that none of them saw God, but the Only-begotten Son saw Him. Paul does not say this immediately, but by what he says afterwards he establishes it, when he speaks concerning His human nature. ‘But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool?”’ (Hebrews 1:13)

Notice Paul’s great wisdom. First he shows the superiority from the prophets. Then having established this as acknowledged, he declares that to them indeed He spoke by the prophets, but to us by the Only-begotten. God also spoke to them by Angels, and this again he establishes, with good reason (for angels also held converse with the Jews). Yet even here we have the superiority, inasmuch as the Master spoke to us, but to them servants, and prophets.”

Chrysostom also stated⁷ that because God has now spoken to by His Son, and not just by His servants, the prophets, we should exhibit a heavenly wisdom worthy of this honor. We do this by not seeking just our own agenda, but concentrating on helping others.

“Since then we have been granted a larger and more perfect teaching, God having no longer spoken by the prophets, but ‘having in these last days spoken to us by His Son’ (Hebrews 1:1), let us show forth a conversation far higher than theirs, and suitable to the honor bestowed on us. Strange would it be that He should have so far lowered Himself, as to choose to speak to us no longer by His servants, but by His own mouth, and yet we should show forth nothing more than those of old. They had Moses for their teacher; we have Moses’ Lord. Let us then exhibit a heavenly wisdom worthy of this honor, and let us have nothing to do with earth. It was for this that He brought His teaching from heaven above, that He might move our thoughts there, that we might be imitators of our Teacher according to our power. But how may we become imitators of Christ? By acting in everything for the common good, and not merely seeking our own. ‘But even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me”’ (Romans 15:3; Psalm 69:9). Let no one therefore seek his own. In truth, a man really seeks his own good when he looks to that of his neighbor. What is their good is ours; we are one body, and parts and limbs one of another.”

Basil the Great stated⁸ that when we speak of the Holy Spirit, we say that He is in us. On the other hand we say that the Father and the Son are with us. Similarly for iron in a fire, we say that the heat exists *in* the iron, but the heat co-exists *with* the fire. When the fellowship is inseparable, “with” is more expressive; when grace comes and goes, it is “in” us when present.

“The Spirit is said to *be in* us ‘at various times and in various ways’ (Hebrews 1:1), while in relation to the Father and the Son it is more consistent with the true Faith to assert Him not to *be in* but to *be with*. The grace flowing from Him when He dwells in those that are worthy and carries out His own

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 3.

⁸ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XXVI, 63.

operations is well described as existing in those that are able to receive Him. On the other hand His essential existence before the ages, and His ceaseless abiding with Son and Father, cannot be contemplated without requiring titles expressive of eternal conjunction. Absolute and real co-existence is predicated in the case of things which are mutually inseparable. We say, for instance, that heat exists in the hot iron⁹, but in the case of the actual fire it co-exists; and, similarly, that health exists in the body, but that life co-exists with the soul. It follows that wherever the fellowship is intimate, congenital, and inseparable, the word *with* is more expressive, suggesting, as it does, the idea of inseparable fellowship. Where on the other hand the grace flowing from the Spirit naturally comes and goes, it is properly and truly said to exist *in*, even if on account of the firmness of the recipients' disposition to good the grace abides with them continually. Thus whenever we have in mind the Spirit's proper rank, we contemplate Him as being *with* the Father and the Son, but when we think of the grace that flows from Him operating on those who participate in it, we say that the Spirit is in us."

Christ as Almighty God

Paul said, "The Father has appointed Christ as heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:2-3). However the Arians of the 4th century had some difficulties with these words.

Gregory of Nyssa stated¹⁰ that the Arians of his day were like children trying to understand sunlight. What they claimed to understand was really way beyond their perception; but that didn't prevent them from speaking much about it. Men of discernment see right through their words, however.

"If anyone should interrogate us, will any of us be found so presumptuous as to promise an explanation? No! The only reply that can be given by men of sense is this: He Who made all things in wisdom can alone furnish an account of His creation. For ourselves, 'By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible' (Hebrews 11:3). If, then, the lower creation which comes under our organs of sense transcends human knowledge, how can He, Who by His mere will made the worlds, be within the range of our apprehension? Surely this is vanity, and lying madness to think it possible to comprehend the things which are incomprehensible (Psalm 39:6). So may we see tiny children busying themselves in their play. Often, when a sunbeam streams down on them through a window, delighted with its beauty they throw themselves on what they see, and are eager to catch the sunbeam in their hands, struggle with one another, grasp the light in the clutch of their fingers, and fancy they have imprisoned the ray in them. But when they unclasp their hands and find that the sunbeam which they held has slipped through their fingers, they laugh and clap their hands. In like

⁹ That is, iron that is placed in a fire.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, "Answer to Eunomius' Second Book"

manner the children of our generation sit playing in the market-places. Seeing the power of God shining in on their souls through the dispensations of His providence, and the wonders of His creation like a warm ray emanating from the natural sun, they marvel not at the Divine gift, nor adore Him Whom such things reveal. But passing beyond the limits of the soul's capabilities, they seek with their sophisticated understanding to grasp that which is intangible, and think by their reasoning to lay hold of what they are persuaded of. When their argument unfolds itself and discloses the tangled web of their sophistries, men of discernment see at once that what they have apprehended is nothing at all. So pettily and childishly laboring in vain at impossibilities do they set themselves to include the inconceivable nature of God in the few syllables of the term 'ungenerate'. They applaud their own folly, and imagine God to be such that human reasoning can include Him under one single term; and while they pretend to follow the teaching of the sacred writers, they are not afraid of raising themselves above them."

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out¹¹ how the Arians misinterpreted Scripture and applied the things about Christ's humanity to His Divinity. For example, they pointed to the following:

1. Proverbs 8:22-23 OSB: "The Lord **created** me in the beginning of His ways for His works. He established Me in the Beginning before time".
2. Hebrews 1:3-4: "Being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having **become** so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they".
3. Hebrews 3:1-2: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who **made** Him".
4. Acts 2:36: "Therefore let the whole house of Israel know assuredly that God **has made** this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ".

Each of these Scripture, they quoted repeatedly out of context to imply that Christ was a created being. From Proverbs, they latch on the word "created", but ignored the following sentence, which states that Christ was established before time began, and He is therefore eternal. From Hebrews 1, they latched on the word "become", but ignored the previous verse stating that Christ is the Brightness of the Father's glory, and concentrated only on Christ having become something. From Hebrews 3, they latched on the word "made", but ignored the following verse, "but Christ as a Son over His own house" (Hebrews 3:6). From Acts 2, they latched on the words "God has made this Jesus", but ignored the previous three verses which state that Christ is seated at the Right Hand of the Father waiting for His enemies to be His footstool. Each of these quotes applies to Christ's humanity, which was created in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Athanasius stated, "These passages they brought forward at every turn, mistaking their sense, under the idea that they proved that the Word of God was a creature and one of things originate; and thus they deceive the thoughtless, making the language of Scripture their pretense, but instead of the true sense of the Scripture, they sowed the poison of their own heresy".

¹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, i, 13, 53.

The Brightness of His Glory

Paul said, referring to Christ, “who being the Brightness of *His* Glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3).

The Sun and Its Radiance

Many of the Church Fathers have used the illustration of the sun and its radiance to illustrate the relationship of the Father to the Son. If the Father is the sun and the Son is the radiance coming from the sun, the sun was never without its radiance, just as the Father was never without His Son. For the Arians to say that Christ is not the radiance of the Father, they are really saying that the Father was once without Light.

John Chrysostom used¹² the illustration of the sun and its radiance to show the relationship of the Father to the Son. The radiance of the sun (Christ) did not appear at a later time than the substance of the sun (the Father), but the radiance was always present when the substance of the sun was present. Thus Paul calls Christ “the Brightness of His Glory” (Hebrews 1:3)

“Tell me, does the radiance of the sun proceed from the substance of the sun, or from some other source? Anyone not deprived of his senses must confess that it proceeds from the substance of the sun itself. Yet, although the radiance proceeds from the sun itself, we cannot say that it is later in point of time than the substance of the sun, since the sun has never appeared without its rays. If in the case of these visible bodies there has been shown to be something which proceeds from something else, and yet is not after that from whence it proceeds; why are some incredulous in the case of the invisible and ineffable Nature? This same thing there takes place, but in a manner suitable to That Substance! It is for this reason that Paul calls Christ ‘Brightness’ (Hebrews 1:3); setting forth thereby Christ being from Him and Christ’s Co-eternity. Again, tell me, were not all the ages, and every interval created by Him? Any man not deprived of his senses must necessarily confess this. There is no interval therefore between the Son and the Father; and if there is none, then He is not after, but Co-eternal with Him. For ‘before’ and ‘after’ are notions implying time, since, without age or time, no man could possibly imagine these words; but God is above times and ages.”

“If in any case you say that you have found a beginning to the Son, see whether by the same reason and argument you are not compelled to reduce the Father also to a beginning, earlier indeed, but still a beginning. For when you have assigned to the Son a limit and beginning of existence, do you not proceed upwards from that point, and say, that the Father was before it? Clearly you do! Tell me then, what is the extent of the Father’s prior subsistence? Whether you say that the interval is little, or whether you say it is great, you equally have brought the Father to a beginning. It is clear, that it is by measuring the space that you say whether it is little or great; yet it would not be possible to measure it, unless there were actually a beginning. So that as far as you are concerned you

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IV, 2.

have given the Father a beginning, and henceforth, according to your argument, not even the Father will be without beginning. Notice that the word spoken by Christ is true, ‘He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him’” (John 5:23).

John Chrysostom pointed out¹³ how Paul’s words in Hebrews were the key in refuting many heresies concerning Christ in the 4th century.

“We must receive the phrase ‘The Brightness of His Glory’ (Hebrews 1:3) with reverence and clear of all incongruities. Observe in what reference Paul understands this, so we receive it the same way: That Christ is of the Father without passion; that He is neither greater, nor less; since there are some, who derive certain strange things from the illustration. Some say, ‘the brightness’ is not substantial, but has its being in another. Don’t receive it this way, neither be sick with the disease of Marcellus¹⁴ and Photinus¹⁵. Paul has a remedy for you close at hand that you don’t fall into that imagination and fatal malady. Paul said ‘And the express image of His¹⁶ person’ (Hebrews 1:3); that is, just as the Father is personally subsisting, being in need of nothing, so also the Son. Paul said this here, showing the undeviating peculiar image of the Prototype (Christ), that He [the Son] is in subsistence by Himself. For he who said above, that ‘by Him He made all things’ (Hebrews 1:2) here assigns to Him absolute authority. Paul adds, ‘And upholding all things by the word of His power’ (Hebrews 1:3); that we might hence infer not merely His being the express image of His Person, but also His governing all things with absolute authority.”

“Notice then, how he applies to the Son that which is proper to the Father. For on this account he did not say simply, ‘and upholding all things’, nor did he say, ‘by His power’, but, ‘by the word of His power’. Just now we saw Paul gradually ascend and descend; so also now, as by steps, he goes up on high, then again descends, and says, ‘by whom also He made the worlds’”.

“Notice how Paul goes on two paths, by the one leading us away from Sabellius¹⁷, by the other away from Arius¹⁸. Paul also shows that Christ should

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, II, 1.

¹⁴ Marcellus was Bishop of Ancyra in the 4th century and was present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. He was accused of being a follower of Sabellius, but his exact teachings are difficult to determine because of all the plots against him. He was deposed in 336 AD by a council chaired by the Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia. The semi-Arian Eusebius of Caesarea wrote two books against him. However, at the end of his life, Athanasius of Alexandria resisted attempts to have him condemned and re-established communion with him. The 2nd Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 AD condemned his followers (Marcellians) but not Marcellus. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcellus_of_Ancyra.

¹⁵ Photinus was a deacon of Bishop Marcellus who was later elevated to Bishop of Sirmium in Galatia. He taught that Jesus was not Divine and that the Logos did not exist before the conception of Jesus by Mary. He was exiled in 345 and 347 AD, but stayed in office due to popular support. He was approved by Emperor Julian the Apostate (who tried to reinstate paganism), but exiled again by Valentinian I. See also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photinus>.

¹⁶ Or subsistence.

¹⁷ Sabellius taught that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were three modes or manifestations of the one divine person. They would say that God revealed Himself as the Father in creation, the Son in redemption and the Holy Spirit in sanctification. Sabellius considered the Father and Son to be one person and was excommunicated by Bishop Callixtus of Rome in 220 AD. See also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabellius>.

not be accounted ‘unoriginate’, which he does also throughout, nor alien from God.”

Yet the Arians claimed that this Brightness had a beginning for the Son of God. Gregory of Nyssa described¹⁹ the Arian viewpoint (as expressed by Eunomius) as having a logical gap. They applied human terms to God, claiming that the Glory of God existed at some time without its Brightness, such that the Glory of God was dark and dim at one time.

“Eunomius exhibits a vain juggling of words. Is he aware that it is God of Whom he speaks, Who was in the beginning and is in the Father, nor was there any time when He was not? He doesn’t know what he’s talking about; he endeavors, as though he were constructing the pedigree of a mere man, to apply to the Lord of all creation the language which properly belongs to our nature here below. For example, Ishmael did not exist before the generation that brought him into being, and before his birth there was of course an interval of time. But with Him Who is ‘the Brightness of His Glory’ (Hebrews 1:3), ‘before’ and ‘after’ have no place. Before the brightness, of course neither was there any glory, for concurrent with the existence of the glory there assuredly beams forth its brightness. It is impossible in the nature of things that one should be severed from the other; plus it is not possible to see the glory by itself before its brightness. He who says thus will make out the glory in itself to be dark and dim if the brightness from it does not shine out at the same time. This is the unfair method of the heresy: to endeavor by the notions and terms employed concerning the Only-begotten God, to displace Him from His oneness with the Father. It is to this end they say, ‘Before the generation that brought Him into being He was not Son’. This Eunomius now ascribes to the Maker of the worlds and of all creation, Who has the Eternal Father in Himself, and is contemplated in the eternity of the Father, as He Himself says, ‘I am in the Father, and the Father in Me’” (John 14:10-11).

Christ is the Exact Image of the Father

Paul said that Christ is “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). For Christ to be the “Express Image” of the Father, He has to have always existed; otherwise the Father would have been at one time without an image and likeness – and He would have had to change. Christ must be exactly like the Father except in being begotten. He who looks at Christ sees the Father in portrait. For the Arians to teach that Christ is unlike the Father is just wrong!

Alexander of Alexandria, Arius’ Bishop, spelled out²⁰ to Arius how Christ related to the Father. He is the exact Image, always existing, and in no way different from the Father, except

¹⁸ Arius was a priest in Alexandria who began teaching that Christ was distinct from and subordinate to God the Father. Arius claimed that Christ did not always exist but was created by God the Father. Arius and Arianism were thoroughly rejected as being un-Christian by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and by the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. See also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arianism>.

¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II, 9.

²⁰ Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistles on the Arian Heresy*, 12.

in that He is Begotten. Arius couldn't accept this and continued to teach that Christ was a created being.

“That Christ is equally with the Father unchangeable and immutable, lacking in nothing, and the perfect Son, and like to the Father, we have learned. In this alone is He inferior to the Father, that He is not unbegotten. He is the very exact image of the Father, and in nothing differing from Him. It is clear that He is the image fully containing all things by which the greatest similitude is declared, as the Lord Himself has taught us, when He says, ‘My Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28). According to this we believe that the Son is of the Father, always existing. ‘For He is the brightness of His glory, the express image of His Father’s person’ (Hebrews 1:3). But let no one take that word always so as to raise suspicion that He is unbegotten, as they imagine who have their senses blinded. Neither are the words, ‘He was’, or ‘always’, or ‘before all worlds’, equivalent to unbegotten. But neither can the human mind employ any other word to signify unbegotten.”

It is clear that the words, ‘He was’, ‘always’, and ‘before all ages’, come far short of words needed to describe God. Whatever word shall be employed is not equivalent to unbegotten. Therefore to the unbegotten Father, indeed, we ought to preserve His proper dignity, in confessing that no one is the cause of His being; but to the Son must be allotted His fitting honor, in assigning to Him a generation from the Father without beginning. We allot adoration to Christ, so as only piously and properly to use the words, ‘He was’, ‘always’, and ‘before all worlds’, with respect to Him. We by no means reject His Godhead, but ascribe to Him a similitude which exactly answers in every respect to the Image and Exemplar of the Father. But we must say that to the Father alone belongs the property of being unbegotten, for the Savior Himself said, ‘My Father is greater than I’” (John 14:28).

Ambrose of Milan compared²¹ the words of Scripture with what the Arians said. Paul called Christ the Image of the invisible God, yet Arius said that He was unlike the Father. How can Christ be an image if the Father has no likeness? Image teaches that there is no difference; expression teaches that Christ is the counterpart of the Father’s form; brightness teaches that Christ is from eternity. He who looks at the Son sees the Father in portrait. The Father said to the Son, “Let Us make man in our Image and Likeness”; if even man is in the likeness of God, how can anyone deny that the Son is like God?

“Paul said that Christ is the image of the Father — for he calls Him ‘the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation’ (Colossians 1:15). First-born, notice, not first-created, in order that He may be believed to be both begotten, by virtue of His nature, and first by virtue of His eternity. In another place Paul declared that God appointed the Son ‘heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds, Who is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His substance’ (Hebrews 1:2-3). Paul calls Christ the image of the Father, and Arius says that He is unlike the Father. Why, then, is He called an image, if He has no likeness? Men will not have their portraits unlike them, and Arius

²¹ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, I, vii, 48-53.

contends that the Father is unlike the Son, and would have it that the Father has begotten one unlike Himself, as though unable to generate His like.”

“The prophet David said, ‘In Your light we shall see light’ (Psalm 36:9); Solomon said, ‘Wisdom is the radiance of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the operative power of God, and the image of his goodness’ (Wisdom 7:26 LXX). Notice what great names are declared! ‘Brightness’, because in the Son the Father’s glory shines clearly; ‘spotless mirror’, because ‘he who sees the Son sees the Father Who sent Him’ (John 12:45); ‘image of goodness’, because it is not one body seen reflected in another, but the whole power [of the Godhead] in the Son. The word ‘image’ teaches us that there is no difference; ‘expression’, that He is the counterpart of the Father’s form; and ‘brightness’ declares His eternity²². The ‘image’ in truth is not that of a bodily face, not one made up of colors, or modeled in wax, but simply derived from God, coming out from the Father, drawn from the fountainhead.”

“By means of this image the Lord showed Philip the Father saying, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father?” Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?’ (John 14:9-10) He who looks upon the Son sees, in portrait, the Father. Note what manner of portrait is spoken of. It is Truth (John 14:6), Righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16, 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30), the Power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24); it is not dumb, for it is the Word (John 1:1-18); it is not touchable, for it is Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24); it is not vain and foolish, for it is Power; it is not soulless, for it is the Life; it is not dead, for it is the Resurrection (John 11:25). You see, then, that while an image is spoken of, the meaning is that it is the Father, Whose image the Son is, seeing that no one can be his own image.”

“We might set down from the Son’s testimony; however, let us inquire of the Father. The Father said to the Son, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ (Genesis 1:26). The Father said ‘in Our image and likeness’, and Arius says that the Son of God is unlike the Father!”

“John said, ‘Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him’ (1 John 3:2). O blind madness; O shameless obstinacy; we are men, and, so far as we may, we shall be in the likeness of God. Do we dare deny that the Son is like God?”

“Therefore the Father has said: ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’. At the beginning of the universe itself, as I read, the Father and the Son existed, and I see one creation. I hear the Father speaking. I acknowledge the Son creating; but it is of one image, one likeness, that I read. This likeness belongs not to diversity but to unity.”

Athanasius of Alexandria noted²³ how impossible the Arian teachings were: that God was without Reason until He created Christ; that there was no before and after for the establishing of

²² The brightness of a body lasts as long as that body exists. Since the Father is eternal, the Son who is His brightness, must be eternal also.

²³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, xviii, 33.

Reason for God. Similarly, comparing the Father to the sun and Christ to the radiance of the sun, both always existed, and it impossible to separate them.

“The heterodox employ evil sophistries; yet, though we have already shown their shallowness, the exact sense of the Scriptures themselves and the force of these illustrations will serve to show the baseless nature of their loathsome tenet. We see that Reason is always, and is from Him and proper to His Essence, Whose Reason it is, and does not admit a before and an after. So again we see that the radiance from the sun is proper to it, and the sun’s essence is not divided or impaired. Its essence is whole and its radiance perfect and whole, yet without impairing the essence of light, but as a true offspring from it. We understand in like manner that the Son is begotten not from without but from the Father, and while the Father remains whole, the Expression of His Subsistence is always, and preserves the Father’s likeness and unvarying Image. He who sees Christ, also sees in Him the Subsistence, of which He is the Expression. From the operation of the Expression we understand the true Godhead of the Subsistence; Christ Himself teaches this when He says: ‘Father who dwells in Me does the works which I do’ (John 14:10); and ‘I and My Father are one,’ (John 10:30) and ‘Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me’ (John 14:11). Therefore let the heterodox attempt first to divide the examples found in things originate and say, ‘Once the sun was without his radiance,’ or, ‘Radiance is not proper to the essence of light,’ or ‘It is indeed proper, but it is a part of light by division. Then let it divide Reason, and pronounce that it is foreign to mind, or that once it was not, or that it was not proper to its essence, or that it is by division a part of mind. Following this, let the heterodox address His Expression, the Light and the Power; let it do violence to these as in the case of Reason and Radiance, imagining what it will. If such extravagance is impossible for them, are they not greatly beside themselves, presumptuously intruding into what is higher than things originate and their own nature, and speaking about impossibilities?’”

Attacks on Christ Detract from the Father

The Arian statements about Christ had an effect on what they claimed about the Father also. If Christ is not eternal, neither is the Father. Christ said that He was “the Way, the Truth and the life”; if Christ is not eternal, there was once a time when the Father was without Truth. To say that there was a time when Christ was not the Brightness of the Father is to say that there was a time when the Father was without Light. These are serious gaps in the teachings of the Arians.

Athanasius of Alexandria took apart²⁴ the Arians’ claim that Christ was not eternal, but was created out of nothing. If Christ is “the Brightness of *His* Glory and the Express Image of His Person” (Hebrews 1:3), He has to be eternal, or He ceases being an Image. Christ said that He is the Truth; if He was created, then there was a time when the Father did not have Truth. If the Arians say that the Son was the Image in name only, then they detract from the Father.

²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, vi, 20-21.

“What is proper to the Father’s essence, we have found this to be the Son; what daring is it in the Arian heresy to say that ‘This comes from nothing,’ and that ‘It did not exist before it was generated,’ but was not inherent with the Father, and it can at some time cease to be again. Let a person only dwell upon this thought, and he will discern how the perfection and the plenitude of the Father’s essence is impaired by this heresy. We will see this problem still more clearly, if we considers that the Son is the Image and Radiance of the Father (Hebrews 1:3), and Expression, and Truth. For if, when Light exists, there is its Image, namely Radiance, and a Subsistence; there is of it the entire Expression. If the Father exists, there is His Truth (namely the Son); let them consider what depths of heresy they fall into, who make time the measure of the Image and Form of the Godhead. If the Son did not exist before His generation, Truth was not always in God, which it is a sin to say. Since the Father was, there was always in Him the Truth, which is the Son, who says, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life’ (John 14:6). If the Subsistence of the Godhead exists, of course there was its Expression and Image (Hebrews 1:3); for God’s Image is not delineated from outside the Godhead²⁵, but God Himself has begotten it. In seeing Himself, the Father has delight, as the Son Himself says, ‘I was daily *His* delight, rejoicing always before Him’ (Proverbs 8:30). When then did the Father not see Himself in His own Image? When did He not have delight, that a man should dare to say, ‘the Image was created out of nothing,’ and ‘The Father did not have delight before the Image was created’? How should the Maker and Creator see Himself in a created and originated essence? For such as is the Father, such must be the Image.”

“Let us proceed to consider the attributes of the Father, and we shall come to know whether this Image is really His. The Father is eternal, immortal, powerful, light, King, Sovereign, God, Lord, Creator, and Maker. These attributes must be in the Image, to make it true that ‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). If the Son is not all this, but, as the Arians consider, created, and not eternal, this is not a true Image of the Father. Will they say then that the title of Image, given to the Son, is in name only? But this, you enemies of Christ, is not an Image, nor is it an Expression. How can the likeness of things created out of nothing even compare to Him who brought what was nothing into being?”

Athanasius of Alexandria preserved²⁶ the writings of Dionysius²⁷, Bishop of Alexandria, who the Arians claimed was in support of their heresy. Dionysius, like Athanasius, compared the Son to the Father as the Brightness to the Source of light. To say that Christ is not the Brightness is to say that the Father is not light.

²⁵ Athanasius argues that for an Image to be really such, it must be an Expression from the Original, not an external and detached imitation.

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Extracts from the Refutation and Defense”, 15 On the Opinion of Dionysius.

²⁷ Dionysius lived from 190 to 265 AD, and was also head of the Alexandrian Catechetical School. At one time, he made statements that could be interpreted as making Christ a lesser God than the Father, but he quickly corrected himself. Arius may have quoted Dionysius’ former statements and ignored his corrections.

“There never was a time when God was not a father. Christ is forever, being Word, Wisdom and Power. For it is not to be supposed that God, having at first no such issue, afterwards begot a Son, but that the Son has His being not of Himself but of the Father. But being the brightness, the brightness must exist always as well. It is by the fact of its shining that the existence of light is perceived, and there cannot be light that does not give light. Let us come back to our examples. If there is sun, there is sunlight and there is day. If there is neither sunlight nor day, it is quite impossible for there to be sun. If then the sun were eternal, the day also would be unceasing. But in fact, as that is not so, the day begins and ceases with the sun as the earth rotates. But God is light eternal, never beginning nor ceasing. The brightness then lies before Him eternally, and is with Him without beginning and ever-begotten, shining in His Presence, being that Wisdom which said, ‘I was beside Him *as* a master craftsman; and I was daily *His* delight, rejoicing always before Him’ (Proverbs 8:30). Dionysius continues, ‘The Father then being eternal, the Son is eternal, being Light of Light; for if there is a parent there is also a child. But if there were not a child, how and of whom can there be a parent? But there are both, and that eternally.’ Then again he adds, ‘God then being light, Christ is brightness; and being Spirit, for ‘God is Spirit’ (John 4:24). In like manner Christ is called the breath, for He is the ‘breath of the power of God’” (Wisdom 7:25).

The Arian Arguments Are Not an Honest Quest for Truth

Few people object to answering questions posed by someone who is on an honest quest to seek out the truth. But this is not the case with the Arians. The Arians were not seeking, but trying to maintain their own opinions largely by force of argument against someone who they could easily overpower with words. When they had to deal with someone who didn’t agree with their out-of-context quotes, they had more difficulty, and they tried various means to win the argument. Finally Alexander of Alexandria had enough and stated that there just can be no communion between the Orthodox and the Arians. Paul seemed to anticipate the Arians in his Epistle to the Hebrews (see for example Acts 20:28-31). Gregory the Theologian stated²⁸ that the Arians were just willfully malicious in their arguments.

Ambrose of Milan summarized²⁹ the Arian arguments as follows: They say that Christ is unlike the Father, that He was created and had a beginning in time. They deny His goodness, His omnipotence and that He is truly Son of God. They say that Christ is not one with the Father and they seek to maintain this by force of subtle disputation. All of this falls like a house of cards when one examines the details.

“The Arians say that the Son of God is unlike His Father. To say that a man is unlike his father³⁰ would be an insult.”

“They say that the Son of God had a beginning in time³¹, whereas He Himself is the source and ordainer of time and all that is therein (Hebrews 1:2).

²⁸ Gregory the Theologian, The Third Theological Oration, XXIX, 17.

²⁹ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, I, v, 35-42.

³⁰ That is, suggesting that a man was a bastard.

³¹ Because of this, the Arians were anathematized by the Council of Nicaea.

We are men, and we don't like to be limited to time. We began to exist once, and we believe that we shall have a timeless existence after the Resurrection. We humans desire immortality — how, then, can we deny the eternity of God's Son, Whom God declares to be eternal by nature, not by grace?"

"They say that He was created. But who would reckon an author with his works, and have him seem to be what he himself has made?"

"They deny His goodness. Their blaspheming is its own condemnation, and so they cannot hope for pardon."

"They deny that He is truly Son of God; they deny His omnipotence, in that while they admit that all things are made by the ministry of the Son, they attribute the original source of their being to the power of God. But what is power, except perfection of nature?"

"Furthermore, the Arians deny that in the Godhead, Christ is One with the Father. Let them annul the Gospel, then, and silence the voice of Christ. For Christ Himself has said: 'I and My Father are one' (John 10:30). It is not I who say this; Christ has said it. Is He a deceiver, that He should lie? (Numbers 23:19) Is He unrighteous, that He should claim to be what He never was. But of these matters we will deal with severally, at greater length, in their proper place."

"Seeing, then, that the heretic says that Christ is unlike His Father, and seeks to maintain this by force of subtle disputation, we must cite the Scripture: 'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'" (Colossians 2:8-9).

"They store up all the strength of their poisons in dialectical disputation³², which by the judgment of philosophers is defined as having no power to establish anything, and aiming only at destruction³³. But it was not by dialectic that it pleased God to save His people; 'for the kingdom of God consists in simplicity of faith, not in wordy³⁴ contention'" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

Alexander of Alexandria outlined³⁵ why there can be no communion between the Arians and the Orthodox. The Arians deliberately twisted the truth and mixed it with obvious falsehood that doesn't even make sense logically.

"Since those about Arius speak their heresies and shamelessly maintain them, we, coming together with the Bishops of Egypt and Libya, nearly a hundred in number, have anathematized them, together with their followers. But those about Eusebius of Nicomedia have received them, earnestly endeavoring to mix up falsehood with truth, impiety with piety. But they will not prevail; for the truth prevails, and there is no communion between light and darkness, no concord between Christ and Belial. For whoever heard such things? Or who, now hearing them, is not astonished, and does not stop his ears lest the pollution of these words

³² That is, the Method of Elenchus or Socratic Debate. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method.

³³ The "destruction" comes about in that everything is questioned and nothing is absolute. Revelation from God is irrelevant and the best debater wins the argument.

³⁴ The way Paul stated this is, "the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

³⁵ Alexander of Alexandria, Catholic Epistle, II, 3.

should touch them? Who that hears John saying, ‘In the beginning was the Word’ (John 1:1), does not condemn those who say there was a time when He was not? Who that hears these words of the Gospel, ‘the only-begotten Son’ (John 1:18); and, ‘All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made’ (John 1:3), will not hate those who declare He is one of the things made? How can He be one of the things made by Himself? Or how can He be the only-begotten who, as they say, is reckoned with all the rest, if indeed He is a thing made and created? How can He be made of things which are not, when the Father says, ‘My heart overflowed with a good Word’ (Psalm 45:1 OSB); and, ‘I have begotten thee from the womb before the morning’ (Psalm 110:3 LXX). Or how is He unlike the substance of the Father, who is the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of the Father’s person (Hebrews 1:3), and who says, ‘He that has seen Me has seen the Father?’ (John 14:9) How, if the Son is the Word or Wisdom and Reason of God, was there a time when He was not? It is as if they said, that there was a time when God was without reason and wisdom. How can He be changeable and mutable, who says by Himself: ‘I am in the Father, and the Father in Me’ (John 14:10), and, ‘I and My Father are one’ (John 10:30); and by the prophet, ‘I am the Lord your God, I have not changed’ (Malachi 3:6 LXX). For even though one saying may refer to the Father Himself, yet it would now be more aptly spoken of the Word, because when He became man, He changed not; but, as says the apostle, ‘Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8). Who has induced them to say, that for our sakes He was made; when Paul says, ‘for whom are all things, and by whom are all things?’” (Hebrews 2:10)

John Chrysostom stated³⁶ that Paul, in Hebrews, anticipated the arguments of the heretics that were to come centuries later. It is as if Paul had read the twisted minds of Marcion, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius and Arius and drafted his Epistle to defeat their contentions against God.

“Throughout the whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews Paul is fighting against the heretics who were to come later. When Paul said, ‘the brightness of His glory’ (Hebrews 1:3), listen also to Christ Himself saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’ (John 8:12). Therefore Paul uses the word ‘brightness’, to show that this was said in the sense of ‘Light of Light’. He has also enlightened our souls, and has Himself manifested the Father. By ‘the brightness’ he has indicated the nearness of the Being of the Father and the Son. Notice the subtlety of his expressions. He has taken one essence and subsistence to indicate two subsistences. Paul also does this in regard to the knowledge of the Spirit, ‘God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

“Paul adds that Christ is ‘the express image of His person’ (Hebrews 1:3). For the ‘express Image’ is something other than its Prototype; yet not Another in all respects, but as to having real subsistence. Here also the term, ‘express

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, II, 2.

image', indicates there is no variation from that whereof it is the 'express image'; it has similarity in all respects. When Paul calls Christ both Form, and express Image, what can the heretics say? 'Yes', says one, 'but man is also called an Image of God' (Genesis 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 11:7). What then! Is man an image of the Father as the Son is? No, they say but because the term, image, does not show resemblance. And yet, in that man is called an Image, it shows resemblance, as in man. For what God is in Heaven, that man is on earth; I mean as to dominion. As man has power over all things on earth, so also God has power over all things which are in heaven and which are on earth. But otherwise, man is not called 'Express image', he is not called Form; this phrase declares the substance. Therefore just as Christ being in 'the form of a slave' (Philippians 2:6-7) expresses no other thing than a man without variation from human nature, so also 'the form of God' expresses no other thing than God. Notice what Paul is doing. Having said, 'Who being the brightness of His glory' (Hebrews 1:3), he added, 'He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3); nowhere did Paul find a name for the Substance. Neither 'the Majesty', nor 'the Glory' sets forth the Name, which he wishes to say. Often we think something, and are not able to express it; since not even the word God is a name of substance, nor is it at all possible to find a name of that Substance."

Gregory the Theologian summarized³⁷ the Arian controversy very succinctly. The things about Christ that are lofty, apply to His Godhead; those that are lowly apply to His humanity. Everything can be explained if we seek answers honestly and are not willfully malicious.

"Every one of the points brought up by the Arians, taken separately, may very easily, if we go through them one by one, be explained to you in the most reverent sense. The stumbling-block of the letter can be cleaned away — that is, if your stumbling at it is honest, and not willfully malicious. To give you the explanation in one sentence: What is lofty you are to apply to the Godhead, and to that Nature in Christ which is superior to sufferings and incorporeal; but all that is lowly you are to apply to the composite condition of Him who for your sakes made Himself of no reputation and was Incarnate -- yes, for it is no worse thing to say, was made Man, and afterwards was also exalted. The result will be that you will abandon these carnal and groveling doctrines, and learn to be more sublime, and to ascend with His Godhead. You will not remain permanently among the things of sight, but will rise up with Him into the world of thought, and come to know which passages refer to His Nature, and which to His assumption of human nature."

Substitution of "Ungenerate" for God the Father

The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD began as a debate over the meaning of the Scriptures that describe God. The Arians claimed that the Scriptures describe Christ as a man, not as God. The Orthodox looked at the same Scriptures that the Arians quoted and pointed out that the Arians were quoting out of context things that refer to Christ's human nature, and that they were ignoring clear statements regarding Christ's Divine Nature. Embarrassed at this, the Arians then

³⁷ Gregory the Theologian, The Third Theological Oration, XXIX, 17.

began to refer to the Father as the “Ungenerate One” or the “Unoriginate” One, meaning that He was begotten of no one. The strategy was first to get the Orthodox to agree to “Unoriginate” as a term to describe the Father; then they would try to apply the term “Originate” to refer to the Son. However, the Orthodox saw right through this ruse and confronted the Arians on returning to the same old arguments that had already been debunked. As a result, the Arians quit presenting any more arguments out of fear that they would be defrocked. They signed the decree of the Council of Nicaea – even though they disagreed with it – and then began a campaign of slander and character assignation to get rid of those people who had embarrassed them at the Council.

Gregory of Nyssa looked at³⁸ the word games the Arians played³⁹ where they wanted to use the term “ungenerate” for God the Father. The implication was to disconnect the Son from the Father so that they could later claim that the Son was a created being.

“We will examine Eunomius’ statement to find in what sense he accepts the meaning of ‘generation’. ‘Very Son’, he says, ‘not ungenerate, truly begotten before the worlds’. One may pass quickly over the violence done to logical sequence in his distinction, as being easily recognizable by all. Who does not know that while the proper opposition is between Father and Son, by saying generate and ungenerate, he passes over the term ‘Father’ and sets ‘ungenerate’ in opposition to ‘Son’, whereas he ought, if he had any concern for truth, to have avoided diverting his phrase from the due sequence of relationship, and to have said, ‘Very Son, not Father’? In this way due regard would have been paid to piety and to logical consistency, as the nature would not have been rent asunder in making the distinction between the persons. But he has exchanged in his statement of his faith the true and scriptural use of the term ‘Father’, committed to us by the Word Himself, and speaks of the ‘Ungenerate’ instead of the ‘Father’. By separating Him from that close relationship towards the Son which is naturally conceived of in the title of Father, he places the Son on a common level with all created objects, which equally stand in opposition to the ‘ungenerate’. ‘Verily begotten’, he says, ‘before the worlds’. Let him say of Whom He is begotten. He will answer, of course, ‘Of the Father’. But since it is impossible to detach the eternity of the Son from the eternal Father, seeing that the term ‘Father’ by its very signification implies the Son, for this reason it is that he rejects the title Father and shifts his phrase to ‘ungenerate’. The meaning of this name has no sort of relation or connection with the Son, and by thus misleading his readers through the substitution of one term for the other, into not contemplating the Son along with the Father, he opens up a path for his sophistry, paving the way of impiety by slipping in the term ‘ungenerate’. They who according to the ordinance of the Lord believe in the Father, when they hear the name of the Father, receive the Son along with Him in their thought, as the mind passes from the Son to the Father, without treading on an unsubstantial vacuum interposed between them. But those who are diverted to the title ‘ungenerate’ instead of

³⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II, 9.

³⁹ This same argument was played out at the Council of Nicaea, where the Arians wanted to use the term “ungenerate” for God the Father so that they could later apply “generate” to the Son and “prove” that the Son had a beginning and was a created being. However the Orthodox saw right through this strategy.

Father, get a bare notion of this name, learning only the fact that He did not at any time come into being, not that He is Father.”

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out⁴⁰ the obstinacy and variability of the Arians when confronted on their heresy. They used the term “Unoriginate” of the Father so that they could refer to the Son as “Originate”. However, calling the Father such detracts from His Fatherhood and dishonors the Son.

“If Arians have confidence in their own positions, they should stand by them, and not change about so variously; but this they will not do, from an idea that success is easy if they just shelter their heresy under color of the word ‘unoriginate’. Yet this term is not used in connection with the Son, but with things created. A similarity may be found in the words ‘Almighty’, and ‘Lord of the Powers’. The Son is called ‘Almighty’, and ‘Lord of the Powers’ over those things which through the Son came to be, and over which He exercises power and mastery through the Word. Therefore the Unoriginate is specified not by contrast to the Son, but to the things which through the Son came to be. We notice that God is not like things originated, but is their Creator and Framer through the Son. Just like the word ‘Unoriginate’ is specified relative to things originated, so the word ‘Father’ is indicative of the Son. He who names God Maker, Framer and Unoriginate regards and apprehends things created and made; and he who calls God Father, thereby conceives and contemplates the Son. One might marvel at the obstinacy which is added to their heresy, that, whereas the term ‘unoriginate’ has the aforesaid good sense, and admits to being used religiously. But they, in their own heresy, bring it forth for the dishonor of the Son, not having read that ‘all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him’ (John 5:23). If they had any concern at all for reverence and the honor due to the Father, it becomes them to acknowledge and call God Father, rather than to give Him this name. In calling God unoriginate, they are calling Him from His works, and as only Maker and Framer, supposing that later they may signify that the Word is a work after their own pleasure. He who calls God Father, signifies Him from the Son being well aware that if there is a Son, of necessity through that Son all things originate were created.”

Basil the Great spoke⁴¹ of the relationship of the Son to the Father. If the Son is fashioned according to His Father’s properties, then “Unbegotten” can no longer be said of only the Father. Paul’s words in Hebrews address a different topic, however. Paul’s goal was to show that the Father and the Son are inseparable, just as radiance is inseparable from the light that emits it. When we see the form of the Son, we behold also the Father as Christ said.

“Paul said concerning the Lord that He is ‘the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person’ (Hebrews 1:3). If it is confessed that in the case of the Father something is contemplated as proper and peculiar, whereby He alone is known, this same thing is also believed about the Only-begotten. How then does Scripture in this place ascribe the name of the Son as a form of the Father,

⁴⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, ix, 33.

⁴¹ Basil the Great, Letters to His Brother Gregory, XXXVIII, 6-8.

and designated not by His own proper notes, but by those of the Father? If the property of the Father is confined to the unbegotten being, and the Son is fashioned according to His Father's properties, then the term unbegotten can no longer be predicated exclusively of the Father. The existence of the Only-begotten is denoted by the distinctive note of the Father."

"My opinion is, however, that in this passage Paul's argument is directed to a different end; and it is to this end that he uses the terms 'brightness of glory', and 'express image of person'. The object of the apostolic argument is not the distinction of the Father and the Son; it is rather the understanding of the natural, inseparable, and close relationship of the Son to the Father. He does not say, 'Who being the glory of the Father' (although in truth He is). He omits this as admitted; He defines the glory of the Only-begotten as the brightness of the glory of the Father, and, by the use of the example of the light, causes the Son to be thought of in indissoluble association with the Father. The brightness is emitted by the flame, and the brightness is not after the flame, but at one and the same moment the flame shines and the light beams brightly. So Paul means the Son is to be thought of as deriving existence from the Father; yet the Only-begotten is not to be divided from the existence of the Father by any intervening extension in space; the caused will be always conceived of together with the cause. Precisely in the same manner, and with the object of guiding us to the conception of the invisible by means of material examples, he speaks also of 'express image of person'. Paul thinks that even if the doctrine of the faith represents the Father and the Son as distinct persons, he is bound by his language to set forth also the continuous and concrete relation of the Only-begotten to the Father. The result is that he, who with his soul's eyes fixes his gaze earnestly on the express image of the Only-begotten, is made perceptive also of the Father. Yet the proper quality contemplated in them is not subject to change or mixture, in such wise as that we should attribute either an origin of generation to the Father or an origin without generation to the Son. If we could understand the impossibility of detaching one from the other, the mere name implies the Father, and it is not possible that anyone should even name the Son without apprehending the Father."

"The Lord said, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father' (John 14:9); on this account he says that the Only-begotten is the express image of His Father's person (Hebrews 1:3). That this may be made still plainer Paul calls the Son 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15) and Solomon calls Him 'an image of His goodness' (Wisdom 7:26 LXX). This is not because the image differs from the Archetype according to the definition of indivisibility and goodness, but that it may be shown that it is the same as the prototype, even though it is different. For the idea of the image would be lost were it not to preserve throughout the plain and invariable likeness. He therefore that has perception of the beauty of the image is made perceptive of the Archetype. So he, who has, mental apprehension of the form of the Son, prints the express image of the Father, beholding the latter in the former. He does not behold the reflection of the unbegotten being of the Father, for if that were so, there would be complete identity and no distinction; he gazes at the unbegotten beauty in the Begotten. He who looks in a mirror beholds the reflection of the form as plain knowledge of the

face he sees; he who has knowledge of the Son, through his knowledge of the Son receives in his heart the express image of the Father's Person. For all things that are the Father's are beheld in the Son, and all things that are the Son's are the Father's; because the whole Son is in the Father and the Son has all the Father in Himself (John 14:11). Thus the knowledge of the Son becomes as it were form and face of the knowledge of the Father, and the Father is known in the form of the Son."

The Arian Arguments Were Just Nonsense

The arguments presented by the Arians to maintain that Christ was a created being and not like the Father amounted to nonsense, and Gregory of Nyssa pointed that out in many of his writings. There were logical gaps and a confused muddle in their logic; and their arguments would change depending on the situation. They claimed that the Father was God, and that Christ was a lesser being; but Gregory pointed out that the logical consequence of their arguments was that the Father was not God either.

Gregory of Nyssa pointed out⁴² how Eunomius (an Arian) referred to Christ as "the seal of the Father's works, words and counsels". Yet Eunomius admits that all creation was created by the Son and he said that the Son is a work of the Father. This is a very confused muddle where the Son is both a work and a seal of the same work; Gregory concluded that Eunomius obviously does not understand what he is arguing about.

"Paul says that the Son is 'the Power of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24); Eunomius calls Him 'the seal of a power', not the Power. He calls Him 'seal of the Father's works, words and counsels'. To what works of the Father is He like? He will say, of course, the world, and all things that are therein. But the Gospel has testified that all these things are the works of the Only-begotten (Matthew 11:20-23, 13:54-58). To what works of the Father, then, was He likened? Of what works was He made the seal? What Scripture ever entitled Him 'seal of the Father's works'? But if anyone should grant Eunomius the right to fashion his words at his own will, as he desires, even though Scripture does not agree with him, let him tell us what works of the Father there are of which he says that the Son was made the seal, apart from those that have been wrought by the Son. All things visible and invisible are the work of the Son; in the visible are included the whole world and all that is therein; in the invisible, the celestial creation. What works of the Father, then, are remaining to be contemplated by themselves, over and above things visible and invisible, whereof he says that the Son was made the 'seal'? Will he perhaps, when driven into a corner, return once more to the fetid vomit of heresy, and say that the Son is a work of the Father? How then does the Son come to be the seal of these works when He Himself, as Eunomius says, is the work of the Father? Does he say that the same Person is both a work and the likeness of a work? Let this be granted: let us suppose him to speak of the other works of which he says the Father was the creator, if indeed he intends us to understand likeness by the term 'seal'. But what other 'words' of the Father does Eunomius know, besides that Word Who was ever in the Father, Whom he calls a

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 12.

‘seal’ — Him Who is and is called the Word in the absolute, true, and primary sense? To what counsels can he possibly refer, apart from the Wisdom of God, to which the Wisdom of God is made like, in becoming a ‘seal’ of those counsels? Look at the lack of discrimination and circumspection, at the confused muddle of his statement, how he brings the mystery into ridicule, without understanding either what he says or what he is arguing about. He Who has the Father in His entirety in Himself, and is Himself in His entirety in the Father, as Word, Wisdom, Power and Truth, as His express image and brightness, Himself is all things in the Father. He does not come to be the image, seal and likeness of certain other things discerned in the Father prior to Himself.”

Gregory of Nyssa examined⁴³ the statements of the Arians of his day and concluded that they were talking nonsense. They confused Christ’s Divine nature with His human nature. At His Incarnation, His human nature had a beginning; but His Divine nature had existed from eternity past along with the Father. This is similar to Adam and Abel: Adam was not generated (or born); he was created as an adult. Abel was generated (born) from Adam; but they both have the same human nature. The same is true with the Father and the Son from eternity past.

“Thus said the Lord that formed Me from the womb to be his Own Servant’ (Isaiah 49:5); so He said also by Solomon, ‘The Lord created Me as the beginning of His ways for His works’ (Proverbs 8:22 LXX). All creation, as Paul says, is in servitude (Romans 8:21). Therefore He Who was formed in the Virgin’s womb is the servant, and not the Lord; that is to say, the man according to the flesh, in whom God was manifested. In the other passage, He Who was created as the beginning of His ways is not God, but the man in whom God was manifested to us for the renewing again of the ruined way of man’s salvation. So that, since we recognize two things in Christ, one Divine, the other human (the Divine by nature, but the human in the Incarnation), we accordingly claim for the Godhead that which is eternal, and that which is created we ascribe to His human nature. He was formed in the womb as a servant, so also, He was revealed in the flesh by means of this servile creation. But when the Arians say, ‘if He was, He was not begotten, and if He was begotten He was not’, let them learn that it is not fitting to ascribe to His Divine nature the attributes which belong to His fleshly origin. Bodies which at one time did not exist, are generated, and God makes those things to be which one time did not exist; but He does not Himself come into being from nothing in His Divinity. For this reason Paul calls Him ‘the brightness of glory’ (Hebrews 1:3), that we may learn that as the light from the lamp is of the nature of that which sheds the brightness, and is united with it (for as soon as the lamp appears the light that comes from it shines out simultaneously). So in this place Paul would have us consider both that the Son is of the Father, and that the Father is never without the Son. It is impossible that glory should be without radiance, as it is impossible that the lamp should be without brightness. But it is clear that as His being brightness is a testimony to His being in relation with the glory (for if the glory did not exist, the brightness shed from it would not exist). So, to say that the brightness ‘once was not’ is a declaration that the glory also was not, when the brightness was not; for it is

⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, Treatise On the Faith, To Simplicius.

impossible that the glory should be without the brightness. As therefore it is not possible to say in the case of the brightness, 'If it was, it did not come into being, and if it came into being it was not'; so it is in vain to say this of the Son, seeing that the Son is the brightness. Let those who speak of 'less' and 'greater', in the case of the Father and the Son, learn from Paul not to measure things that are not measurable. Paul says that the Son is the express image of the Person of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). It is clear then that however great the Person of the Father is, so great also is the express image of that Person; for it is not possible that the express image should be less than the Person contemplated in it. The great John also teaches this when he says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). In saying that he was 'in the beginning' and not 'after the beginning', he showed that the beginning was never without the Word. In declaring that 'the Word was with God', he signified the absence of defect in the Son in relation to the Father; for the Word is contemplated as a whole together with the whole being of God. If the Word were deficient in His own greatness so as not to be capable of relation with the whole being of God, we are compelled to suppose that that part of God which extends beyond the Word is without the Word. But in fact the whole magnitude of the Word is contemplated together with the whole magnitude of God; consequently in statements concerning the Divine nature, it is not admissible to speak of 'greater' and 'less'".

"As for those who say that the begotten is in its nature unlike the unbegotten, let them learn from the example of Adam and Abel to avoid talking nonsense. Adam himself was not begotten according to the natural generation of men; but Abel was begotten of Adam. Now, surely, he who was never begotten is called unbegotten, and he who came into being by generation is called begotten. Yet the fact that he was not begotten did not hinder Adam from being a man, nor did the generation of Abel make him at all different from man's nature, but both the one and the other were men, although the one existed by being begotten, and the other without generation. So in the case of our statements as to the Divine nature: the fact of not being begotten, and that of being begotten, produce no diversity of nature, but, just as in the case of Adam and Abel the manhood is one, so is the Godhead one in the case of the Father and the Son."

Gregory of Nyssa pointed out⁴⁴ that Eunomius claimed that at Incarnation, Christ took on only human flesh, not a human soul. This is not what the Scriptures say. The Lord came 'to seek and to save that which was lost' (Luke 19:10). Now it was not the body merely, but the whole man, soul and body, that was lost; indeed, if we are to speak more exactly, the soul was lost sooner than the body. For disobedience is a sin, not of the body, but of the will; and the will properly belongs to the soul, from which the whole disaster of our nature had its beginning in the Garden. In the day that Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, death attached to the act; their bodies didn't die immediately, but they were immediately alienated from God; this is death of the soul. When the Good Shepherd seeks the lost sheep (John 10:14-15), he carries home the whole sheep, not just the skin. He wants to make the man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17), united to the deity in body and in soul. He Who was in

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 13.

all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin (Hebrews 4:5), left no part of our nature which He did not take upon Himself. Now the soul is not sin though it is capable of admitting sin into it as the result of being ill-advised. This Christ sanctified by union with Himself for this end, that so the lump may be holy along with the first-fruits (Romans 11:16). The Angel, when informing Joseph of the destruction of the enemies of the Lord, said, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's ⁴⁵life are dead', (Matthew 2:20). The Lord said to the Jews, 'You seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this' (John 8:40). Now by 'Man' is not meant the body of a man only, but that which is composed of both, soul and body. Again, He said to them, 'Are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?' (John 7:23) What He meant by 'completely whole', He showed in the other Gospels, when He said to the man who was let down through the roof, 'Your sins are forgiven you', which is a healing of the soul, and, 'Rise up and walk' (Luke 5:20-23), which has regard to the body. He liberated the soul from its own malady after He had given health to the body, where He said, 'See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you' (John 5:14); that is, you have been cured in both soul and body.

Gregory of Nyssa looked at⁴⁶ the Arian arguments of Eunomius and traced their logical consequences. If the Son of God did not exist before He was begotten of the Father, and He is Light, Life, Power, Truth as well as the Brightness and Express Image of the Father, then the Father did not exist then either. This renders the Arian arguments either atheist or suggests that they maintain that God is not eternal and that the Father was created by someone else.

"Let us now examine Eunomius' statement once more. 'Christ did not exist,' he says, 'before His own generation'. Let him declare the Divine names by which He Who, according to Eunomius, 'once was not', is called. He will say, I suppose, 'light', 'blessedness', 'life', 'incorruptibility', 'righteousness', 'sanctification', 'power', 'truth' and the like. He who says, then, that 'Christ did not exist before His generation', absolutely proclaims this — that when He 'was not' there was no truth, no life, no light, no power, no incorruptibility, no other of those pre-eminent qualities which are conceived of Him. What is still more marvelous and still more difficult for impiety to face, there was no 'brightness', no 'express image'. For in saying that there was no brightness, there is surely maintained also the non-existence of the radiating power, as one may see in the illustration afforded by the lamp. He who speaks of the ray of the lamp indicates also that the lamp shines, and he who says that the ray 'does not exist' signifies also the extinction of that which gives light. So that when the Son is said not to exist, thereby is also maintained as a necessary consequence the non-existence of the Father. If the one is related to the other by way of conjunction, according to the Apostolic testimony — the 'brightness' to the 'glory', the 'express image' to the 'Person,' the 'Wisdom' to God — he who says that one of the things so conjoined 'does not exist', surely by his abolition of the one abolishes also that which remains. So that if the 'brightness' 'did not exist', it is acknowledged that neither did the illuminating nature (i.e. God the Father) exist, and if the 'express image' had no existence, neither did the Person imaged exist, and if the wisdom

⁴⁵ Literally "soul"

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, VIII, 5.

and power of God ‘did not exist’, it is surely acknowledged that He also did not exist, Who is not conceived by Himself without wisdom and power. If, then, the Only-begotten God, as Eunomius says, ‘did not exist before His generation’, and Christ is ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:24), and the ‘express image’ and the ‘brightness’ (Hebrews 1:3), neither surely did the Father exist, Whose power, wisdom, express image and brightness the Son is. It is not possible to conceive by reason either a Person without express image, or glory without radiance, or God without wisdom, or a Maker without hands, or a Beginning without the Word, or a Father without a Son. All such things, alike by those who confess and by those who deny, are manifestly declared to be in mutual union and by the abolition of one, the other also disappears with it. Since the Arians maintain that the Son (that is, the ‘brightness of the glory’) ‘did not exist’ before He was begotten, and since logical consequence involves also, together with the non-existence of the brightness, the abolition of the glory, and since the Father is the glory whence came the brightness of the Only-begotten Light, let these men who are wise over-much consider that they are clearly supporters of the Epicurean doctrines, preaching atheism under the guise of Christianity. The logical consequence is shown to be one of two absurdities: Either we should say that God does not exist at all, or we should say that His being was not unoriginate⁴⁷. Let them choose which they like of the two courses before them — either to be called atheist, or to cease saying that the essence of the Father is unoriginate. They would avoid, I suppose, being reckoned atheists. It remains, therefore, that they maintain that God is not eternal. If the course of what has been proven forces them to this, what becomes of their varied and irreversible conversion of names? What becomes of that invincible compulsion of their syllogisms, which sounded so fine to the ears of old women, with its opposition of ‘Generate’ and ‘Ungenerate’?”

Knowing the Father through Christ

Since Christ is “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3), we can know the Father through Christ. If we see Christ working, we also see the Father working. Some heretics interpreted this to mean that Christ WAS the Father, but this is not true. The Father never had a human body and the Father was not crucified. Christ showed His exact likeness to the Father, which means that Christ had everything that He has (in His Deity) from eternity past. His human nature, however, He acquired from the Virgin Mary.

Hippolytus of Rome pointed out⁴⁸ that since Christ is the Image of the Father, if we know Christ, we also know the Father.

The Lord said, ‘Philip, have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). By which He means, ‘If you have seen me, you may know the Father through me’. For through the image, which is like the original, the Father is made readily known. But if you have not known the image, which is the Son, how do you seek

⁴⁷ That is, that God the Father was created by someone else.

⁴⁸ Hippolytus, Against the Heresy of One Noetus, 7.

to see the Father? That this is the case is made clear by the Scriptures, which signifies that the Son who ‘has been set forth (Romans 3:25) was sent from the Father (John 8:16), and goes to the Father’ (John 14:12).

John Chrysostom noted⁴⁹ that the words and works of the Father were also Christ’s own. If we see Christ working, we also see the Father working, since there is no gap between them.

“Jesus taught, you have seen the Father; do not seek to see more; for in Him you have seen Me. If you have seen Me, don’t be over-curious; for you have also in Me known Him. Jesus said, ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?’ (John 14:10) That is, ‘I am seen in that Essence’. ‘The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works’ (John 14:10). Notice the exceeding nearness, and the proof of the one Essence!”

“Notice also how Paul begins with words, yet comes to works! That which naturally followed was, that Jesus should say, ‘the Father speaks the words’. But He puts two things here, both concerning doctrine and miracles. How does the Father do the works? In another place Christ had said, ‘If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me’ (John 10:37). How then did he say here that the Father does them? To show this same thing, that there is no gap between the Father and the Son. What He said is this: ‘The Father would not act in one way, and I in another’. In another place both He and the Father work; ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’ (John 5:17); showing the lack of variation of the works and the identity of the works. If the obvious meaning of the words denotes humility, don’t marvel; for after having first said, ‘Do you not believe?’, He then spoke thus, showing that He so modeled His words to bring them to the Faith; for He walked in their hearts.”

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out⁵⁰ from the Scriptures that Christ was not the Father – which some heretics claimed. As heir of all, Christ shows His exact likeness to the Father and that what He has, He has had eternally.

“If a man perceives that the Son has all that the Father has, from the exact likeness and identity, what if he should wander into the heresy of Sabellius and consider Christ to be the Father. To guard against this, Christ has said ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ (Matthew 28:18) ‘I have received from My Father’ (John 10:18) and ‘All things have been delivered to Me by My Father’ (Matthew 11:27) only to show that He is not the Father, but the Father’s Word, and the Eternal Son. Because of His likeness to the Father, He has eternally what He has from Him, and because He is the Son, He has from the Father what He has eternally. Moreover that ‘Was given’ and ‘Were delivered,’ and the like, do not impair the Godhead of the Son, but rather show Him to be truly Son, we learn from the passages themselves. If all things are delivered to Him, first, He is other than that which He has received. Next, being Heir of all things, He alone is the Son according to the Essence of the Father. For if He were one of many, then He were not ‘heir of all,’ (Hebrews 1:2) but everyone had

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIV, 2.

⁵⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxvii, 36.

received according as the Father willed and gave. But now, as receiving all things, He is other than them all, and alone proper to the Father. Moreover that 'Was given' and 'Were delivered' do not show that once He didn't have them, we may conclude from a similar passage. For the Savior Himself says, 'As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself' (John 5:26). Now from the words 'Has given,' Christ signifies that He is not the Father; but in saying so, He shows the Son's natural likeness and similarity towards the Father."

The Sitting at the Right Hand

Paul stated, "who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). When we consider this, it has everything to do with Christ's equality with the Father.

John Chrysostom noted⁵¹ that when Christ sat down at the Right Hand of the Father, He was not commanded to sit down. The sitting together indicates that Christ and the Father are equals. If there was any hint of inferiority of Christ to the Father, it would have been the left hand, not the right hand, where Christ sat.

"For in saying, 'When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3) — though he had put us in mind of the Cross, he quickly added the mention of the resurrection and ascension. Notice Paul's unspeakable wisdom: he didn't say, 'He was commanded to sit down', but 'He sat down'. Then again, lest we should think that Christ stands, Paul adds, 'For to which of the angels did He ever say, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"' (Hebrews 1:5)."

"'Christ sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high'. What is this 'on high'? Does Paul enclose God in a place? Away with such a thought! But just as when Paul said, 'on the right hand', he did not describe Him as having figure, but showed His equal dignity with the Father. So, in saying 'on high', he did not enclose Him there, but expressed the being higher than all things, and having ascended up above all things. That is, He attained even to the very throne of the Father; as the Father is on high, so also is He. The 'sitting together' implies nothing else than equal dignity. But if they say, that the Father said, 'Sit', we may ask them, 'Did the Father speak to Christ while Christ was standing?' Paul didn't say that the Father commanded Christ; it is evident from the place of Christ's sitting. Had Paul intended to signify inferiority, he would not have said, 'on the right hand', but on the left hand."

In the Christmas readings, there is another aspect to the Lord's Glory: "We see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the Grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9). He did this that He might bring many sons to glory, being made perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10).

⁵¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, II, 2.

Better than the Angels

Paul said, “Christ sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.⁵ For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’? And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’? (Hebrews 1:3-5). Does this refer to Christ’s humanity or to His Divinity?

John Chrysostom pointed out⁵² that from the Name “Son of God” alone, we infer a great deal, especially since the angels – the highest order of created beings – are never referred to like this.

“From what viewpoint does Paul reason so confidently? From the Name! Notice that the name Son tends to declare a true relationship! If Christ were not a true Son (‘true’ means nothing else than ‘of the Father’), how does Paul reason confidently from this? If He were a Son only by grace, He not only is not ‘more excellent than the angels’, but is even less than they. How? Because righteous men too were called sons; and the name son, if it is not a genuine son, does not show the ‘excellency’. Paul continued to point out that there is a difference between creatures and their maker.”

Chrysostom also noted⁵³ Paul’s introduction to Hebrews, where Paul was trying show the Hebrews how much Christ had done for them. Paul was quick to point out what was due to Christ’s human nature and what was due to His Divinity. The comparison “better than the angels” has to do with Christ’s humanity, not His Divinity.

“Notice by how many steps Paul led them up, and placed them near the summit of the Faith, and then before they grew dizzy, he led them lower down, and allowed them to take a breath, saying, ‘He spoke to us by His Son, whom He appointed Heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2). Notice how he says it: ‘Whom He appointed heir of all things’; this is a humble statement regarding the Son of God. Then he placed them on the higher step, adding, ‘by whom He made the worlds’ (Hebrews 1:2). Then on a higher plane still, and after which there is no other, ‘who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person’ (Hebrews 1:3). Truly Paul has led them to unapproachable light, to the very brightness itself. And before they get blinded, notice how he gently leads them down again, saying, ‘and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty’ (Hebrews 1:3). He did not simply say, ‘He sat down’, but ‘after the purifying, He sat down’, for he has touched on the Incarnation, and his utterance is again lowly. Then having made a little offhand remark (for he says, ‘on the right hand of the Majesty on high’), he turns again to what is lowly; ‘being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they’ (Hebrews 1:4). After this, Paul spoke of that which is according to the flesh, since the phrase ‘being made better’ does not express His Essence according to the Spirit. His Essence was not ‘made’ but ‘begotten’; Paul is

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, II, 2

⁵³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, I, 3.

speaking according to the flesh. What Paul says here is not about being called into existence. Just as John the Baptist said, ‘He that comes after me, is preferred before me’ (John 1:15, 30), that is, higher in honor and esteem; so also here, ‘being made so much better than the angels’. That is, higher in esteem and better and more glorious, ‘by how much He has obtained by inheritance a more excellent name than they’. Do we understand that he is speaking of that which is according to the flesh? For this Name, God the Word always had; He did not afterwards ‘obtain it by inheritance’; nor did He afterwards become ‘better than the Angels, when He had purged our sins’; but He was always ‘better’, and better without any comparison. For this is spoken of Him according to the flesh.”

Ambrose of Milan commented⁵⁴ on “The Lord created Me” in Proverbs. “The Lord created me in the beginning of his ways for his works.²³ He established me in the beginning before time, before he made the earth,²⁴ before he made the depths; before the going forth of the fountains of water,²⁵ before the mountains were created, and before all hills, he begot me” (Proverbs 8:22-25). Ambrose stated that this refers to the Incarnation of Christ, where prophecy looks ahead as if things had already happened.

“You might ask how I came to cite, as referring to the Incarnation of Christ, the place, ‘The Lord created Me’, seeing that the creation of the universe took place before the Incarnation of Christ? But consider that holy Scripture speaks of things to come as though already past; it intimates the union of two natures, Godhead and Manhood, in Christ, lest any should deny either His Godhead or His Manhood.”

“In Isaiah, for example, you may read, ‘Unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given’ (Isaiah 9:6); so here also [in the Proverbs] the prophet sets forth first the creation of the flesh, and joined thereto the declaration of the Godhead, that you might know that Christ is not two, but One, being both begotten of the Father before the worlds, and in the last times (Hebrews 1:2) created of the Virgin. Thus the meaning is: ‘I, Who am begotten before the worlds, am He Who was created of mortal woman, created for a set purpose’”.

“Immediately before the declaration, ‘The Lord created Me’, He says, ‘I declare to you the things that daily happen; I will also remember to recount the things of old’ (Proverbs 8:21), and before saying, ‘He begot’, He premised, ‘He established me in the beginning before time, before he made the earth, before he made the depths; before the going forth of the fountains of water, before the mountains were created, and before all hills’ (Proverbs 8:22-25). In its extent, the preposition ‘before’ reaches back into the past without end or limit, and so ‘Before Abraham was, I AM’ (John 8:58) clearly need not mean ‘after Adam’, just as ‘I have begotten You from the womb before the Morning Star’ (Psalm 110:3 LXX) need not mean ‘after the angels’. But when He said ‘before’, He intended, not that He was included in anyone’s existence, but that all things are included in His, for thus it is the custom of Scripture to show the eternity of God. Finally, in another passage you may read: ‘Before the mountains existed, and *before* the earth and the world were formed, even from age to age, You are” (Psalm 90:2).

⁵⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, III, ix, 59-62.

“Before all created things, then, is the Son begotten; within all and for the good of all is He made; begotten of the Father, above the Law, as Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28); yet brought forth of Mary, born under the Law” (Galatians 4:4).

Let All the Angels of God Worship Him

Paul said, “But when He again brings the Firstborn into the world, He says, ‘Let all the angels of God⁵⁵ worship Him’ (Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX). And of the angels He says, ‘Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire’ (Psalm 104:4). But to the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom (Psalm 45:6). You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions” (Hebrews 1:6-9).

In other places, after Jesus’ temptation by the devil, “angels came and ministered to Him” (Matthew 4:11). At the end of time, Christ “will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31). Angels, then, are the servants of Christ.

On the other hand, John said, “All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23). Angels are not honored like the Son of God. For our sake, the Son of God humbled Himself a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:7-9, Psalm 8:5), and has consequently been crowned with glory and honor in His humanity.

The expression, “brings the Firstborn into the world” refers to the Incarnation of Christ in the flesh by the Virgin Mary, as noted⁵⁶ by John Chrysostom:

“Paul calls it a Coming in, from the metaphor of those who come to an inheritance and receive any portion or possession. The saying, ‘But when He again brings the Firstborn into the world’, means this, ‘when he puts the world into His hand’. When Christ was made known, then also He obtained possession of the whole world; Paul didn’t say these things concerning God The Word, but concerning that which is according to the flesh. If according to John, ‘Christ was in the world, and the world was made through Him’ (John 1:10), how is He ‘brought in’, otherwise than in the flesh?”

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁷ that Paul was careful to note that all the heavenly powers worship Christ in the flesh. Paul could have stated this differently and stated that the Son is not God; but he didn’t. He made it a point to state that Christ was God.

⁵⁵ This verse from Deuteronomy is clearly present in the oldest copies of the Septuagint (found in the Dead Sea Scrolls), but it is missing from the oldest extant copies of the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy (~10th century AD). Since there was considerable revision of the Hebrew texts by the Jewish Scribes in the late 1st and early 2nd century to delete obvious references to Christ, this may explain the omission. To their credit, the Masoretic Jewish Scholars restored most of these deletions in the 10th century AD. But this seems to be one they missed.

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, III, 1.

“Paul was about to say something great and lofty, but he prepared it beforehand, in that he represents the Father as ‘bringing in’ the Son. He had already said that ‘He spoke to us not by prophets but by His Son’ (Hebrews 1:1-2); that the Son is superior to angels; and he established this from the name ‘SON’. Here he establishes this from another aspect: from worship. Paul showed how much greater Christ is, as much as a Master is than a slave. Just as anyone introducing another into a house immediately commands those in charge to do him reverence. Thus saying with regard to Christ’s flesh, ‘Let all the Angels of God worship Him’” (Hebrews 1:6).

“Is it then Angels only? No; listen to what follows: ‘Of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire”. But to the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever”’ (Hebrews 1:7-8). Notice the greatest difference! They are created, but He is uncreated. While of His angels He said, who ‘makes’; but of the Son He did not say, ‘Who makes’. He could have expressed it as follows: ‘Of His Angels He said, “Who makes His Angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire” (Psalm 104:4, Hebrews 1:7), but of the Son, “The Lord created me in the beginning of his ways for his works. He established Me in the beginning before time, before He made the earth” (Proverbs 8:22-24 OSB); and “God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ”’ (Acts 2:36). Paul did not say that the Son was created. Neither did he say that ‘Lord and Christ’ referred to His Deity, but concerning the flesh. When he desired to express the true difference, he no longer included angels only, but the whole company of the heavenly powers above. Notice how he distinguishes, and with how great clearness, between creatures and Creator; ministers and Lord; the Heir and true Son, and slaves?”

John Chrysostom pointed out⁵⁸ in advance the answers to many 3rd and 4th century heresies as well as the heresies of the 1st century Jews. Each of these heresies had some confusion about Christ: two Natures (God and man), but one person. As God, He has eternal existence; as man he had a beginning with the Virgin Mary. As God, He is not created; as man he is created. As God He was not anointed; as man He was.

“What does it mean for Christ to be anointed by ‘Your God’? Why, after Paul has uttered a great word, does he qualify it? Here Paul was addressing in advance the heresies that would arise from both the Jews, the followers of Paul of Samosata, the Arians, Marcellus, Sabellius and Marcion. He addressed the Jews by his indicating the two Natures of Christ, both God and Man. The other Jews, I mean the followers of Paul of Samosata, Paul addressed by discoursing concerning Christ’s eternal existence and uncreated essence; by making a distinction between the words, ‘He made’, Paul said, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’ (Hebrews 1:8). Against the Arians there is both this same thing, and also that Christ is not a slave; if he were a creature, He would be a slave. Against Marcellus and the others, Paul wrote that these are two Natures, distinguished in reference to their subsistence. Against the Marcionites, Paul wrote that the Godhead is not anointed; only the Manhood is anointed.”

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, III, 1.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, III, 2

“Next Paul said, ‘Above Your fellows’. But who are these His ‘fellows’ other than men? That is, Christ in His humanity did not receive ‘the Spirit by measure’. ‘He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure’ (John 3:34). Notice how with the doctrine concerning Christ’s uncreated nature Paul always joins that of the ‘Economy’ i.e. Christ becoming man for our sake. What can be clearer than this? Notice how what is created (Christ’s humanity) and what is begotten are not the same. Otherwise Paul would not have made the distinction, nor in contrast to the word, ‘He made’ [etc.], have added, ‘But to the Son *He says*: “Your throne, O God⁵⁹, is forever and ever’ (Hebrews 1:8). Nor would Paul have called the name, ‘Son’, a more excellent Name, if it is a sign of the same thing. What is the excellence? If that which is created, and that which is begotten are the same, and the Angels were made, what is there in Him that is ‘more excellent’ than the angels?”

The “Anointing” of Christ

Paul said, “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions” (Hebrews 1:9). The Arians claimed that the anointing implied that Christ was a lesser God; the Orthodox taught that the “anointing” applied to Christ’s humanity, not His Deity.

Athanasius of Alexandria dispelled⁶⁰ some of the fog created by the Arians about Christ’s “anointing”. They claimed He was anointed as a reward for what He did. In fact, His humanity was anointed so that He could do what He did for us.

“The Arians take advantage of the word ‘therefore’ in the Psalm, ‘Therefore God, even Your God, has anointed You’ (Psalm 45:7) for their own purposes. Let these novices in Scripture and masters in irreligion know, that the word ‘therefore’ does not imply reward of virtue or recompense for what Christ did; instead it implies the reason why He came down to us, and the Spirit’s anointing which took place in Him for our sakes. Paul doesn’t say, ‘Therefore He anointed You in order that You might be God, Son or Word’; for so He was before and is forever. But rather, ‘Since You are God and King, therefore You were anointed, since none but You could unite man to the Holy Spirit. You are the Image of the Father, in which we were made in the beginning; for Yours is the Spirit’. For the nature of things originate could give no guarantee for this. There was need of God and the Word is God; that those who had come under a curse might be set free by Him. If He was created out of nothing, He would not have been the Christ or Anointed, being one among others and having fellowship as the rest. But since He is God, as being Son of God, everlasting King, and exists as Radiance and Expression of the Father (Hebrews 1:3), therefore fitly is He the expected Christ, whom the Father announced to mankind, by revelation to His holy Prophets. Since through Him we have come to be, so also in Him all men might be redeemed from their sins, and by Him all things might be ruled. This is the cause of the anointing which took place in Him, and of the incarnate presence

⁵⁹ That is, Paul refers to the Son as God, saying “Your throne, O God” (ὁ Θεός)

⁶⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, xii, 49.

of the Word. The Psalmist foresaw and celebrated this: first His Godhead and kingdom, which is the Father's, in these tones, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom' (Psalm 45:6 LXX). Then the Psalmist announced His descent to us: 'Wherefore God, even Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your fellows'" (Psalm 45:7 LXX)

Athanasius of Alexandria spelled out⁶¹ what it means for Christ to be "highly exalted", where this doesn't apply to Deity, only to humanity. When Christ humbled Himself to be born as a man, then He was exalted in His humanity. This "exaltation" of Christ is not spoken of before He became man, but afterward. Similarly the door of Paradise was never shut to Him; only to us. He is not exalted as being Himself in need, but it is we who are exalted in that Righteousness which He is.

"David said, 'He shall continue as long as the sun, and before the moon forever, from one generation to another' (Psalm 72:5, 17 LXX). How did He receive what He always had, even before He now received it? How is He exalted, being before His exaltation the Most High? How did He receive the right of being worshipped, who before He now received it, was always worshipped? It is not a dark saying but a divine mystery⁶². 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1); but for our sakes afterwards the 'Word became flesh' (John 1:14). The term in question, 'highly exalted,' does not signify that the essence of the Word was exalted, for He was always and is 'equal to God' (Philippians 2:6); but the exaltation refers to the manhood. Accordingly this is not said before the Word became flesh; it is plain that 'humbled' and 'exalted' are spoken of His human nature. Where there is humble estate, there too may be exaltation; and if because of His taking flesh 'humbled' is written, it is clear that 'highly exalted' is also said because of it. Man's nature was in need because of the humble estate of the flesh and of death. The Word, being the Image of the Father and immortal, took the form of the servant, and as man underwent for us death in His flesh, that thereby He might offer Himself for us through death to the Father. Therefore, as man, He is said because of us and for us to be highly exalted, that as by His death we all died in Christ, so again in the Christ Himself we might be highly exalted, being raised from the dead, and ascending into heaven. This is where the forerunner Jesus has entered for us, not into copies of holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 6:20, 9:24). If now for us the Christ has entered into heaven itself, though He was before and always Lord and Framer of the heavens, for us that present exaltation is written. As He Himself, who sanctifies all, says also that He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes, not that the Word may become holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us. As He says, 'For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that

⁶¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, I, xi, 41.

⁶² Dark sayings can be understood by wise men (Proverbs 1:5-6), but Divine mysteries can be understood by no one. Of Christ, Solomon said, "The Lord made me the beginning of his ways for his works. He established me before time *was* in the beginning, before he made the earth" (Proverbs 8:22-23 LXX). No one but God can explain this.

they also may be sanctified by the truth' (John 17:19). In like manner we must take the phrase, 'He highly exalted Him,' not that He Himself should be exalted, for He is the highest, but that He may become righteousness for us⁶³. We are exalted in Him; that we may enter the gates of heaven, which He has also opened for us. The forerunners say, 'Lift up your gates, you princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in' (Psalm 24:7). It is not on Him the gates were shut, as being Lord and Maker of all, but this is written because of us, to whom the door of paradise was shut. Therefore in human relations, because of the flesh which He bore, it is said of Him, 'Lift up your gates,' and 'shall come in,' as if a man were entering. In a divine perspective on the other hand it is said of Him, since 'the Word was God,' that 'He is the Lord' and the 'King of Glory'. Our exaltation was announced beforehand by the Spirit saying, 'In Your good pleasure shall our horn be exalted, for You are the boast of their strength' (Psalm 89:17 LXX). And if the Son is Righteousness, then He is not exalted as being Himself in need, but it is we who are exalted in that Righteousness, which He is (1 Corinthians 1:30)

Athanasius of Alexandria answered⁶⁴ the Arians' claims that Christ is called "First-born" from the Father; therefore He is a creature like us. The Arians quoted Scripture, "The Lord created Me the beginning of His Ways for his works", but left out the following verse, "He established Me in the beginning before time, before He made the earth" Proverbs 8:22-23). Two issues are present: one is when Christ came to be; the other is why He is called "First-born". The first is clearly answered by the Scriptures: Christ was begotten of the Father in Eternity past. His mission in the salvation of man designated Christ "First-born", since the first way was through Adam, but man lost it and inherited death. Christ put on flesh and became the "First-born" of the new and living way, that man might not walk any longer according to that first creation.

"Christ was not called 'First-born' because He was from the Father, but because in Him the creation came to be. Before the creation He was the Son, through whom was the creation, so also before He was called the First-born of the whole creation, the Word Himself was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1). The Arians do not understand this but say, 'If He is First-born over all creation, it is plain that He too is one of the creation'. If He is simply 'First-born over all creation', then He is other than the whole creation; for Paul doesn't say, 'He is First-born above the rest of the creatures,' lest He be reckoned to be as one of the creatures. But it is written, 'over all creation,' that He may appear other than the creation⁶⁵. Even concerning the Lord Himself Paul doesn't say, 'that He may become First-born of all,' lest He be thought to bear a body other than ours. Instead 'that He might be the firstborn among many brethren' (Romans 8:29), because of the likeness of the flesh. If then the Word also were one of the creatures, Scripture would have said of Him that He was First-born of other creatures. But in fact, Paul says that He is 'First-born over all creation'

⁶³ "Exaltation" is not something that applies to God, only to men. Exaltation regarding Christ therefore only applies to His humanity.

⁶⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, xxi, 63-65.

⁶⁵ According to Schaff & Wace, *Post-Nicene Fathers*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, Volume 4, p. 382, Note 2, Athanasius here is translating the Greek idiom correctly.

(Colossians 1:15); the Son of God is plainly shown to be other than the whole creation and not a creature.”

“For so it is written, ‘But when He again brings the First-born into the world, He says: “Let all the angels of God worship Him”’ (Hebrews 1:6). His coming into the world is what makes Him called ‘First-born’ of all; and thus the Son is the Father’s ‘Only-begotten,’ because He alone is from Him, and He is the ‘First-born over all creation’, because of this adoption of all as sons⁶⁶. As He is First-born among brethren and rose from the dead ‘the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Corinthians 15:20); so ‘that in all things He may have the preeminence’ (Colossians 1:18), therefore He is created ‘the beginning of His ways’ (Proverbs 8:22 LXX). We, walking along it and entering through Him who says, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life’ (John 14:6) and ‘I am the Door’ (John 10:1-9), and partaking of the knowledge of the Father, may also hear the words, ‘Blessed are the undefiled in the Way’ (Psalm 119:1), and ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’” (Matthew 5:8).

“Truth declares that the Word is not by nature a creature; it is fitting now to say, in what sense He is ‘the beginning of His ways’. When the first way, which was through Adam, was lost, in place of Paradise we inherited death. We heard the words, ‘Earth you are, and to earth you shall return’ (Genesis 3:19 LXX); therefore the Word of God, who loves man, put on Himself created flesh at the Father’s will. Whereas the first man had made the flesh dead through the transgression, He Himself quickened it in the blood of His own body, and opened ‘a new and living way which He consecrated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh’ (Hebrews 10:20). Paul signified this elsewhere, ‘Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new’ (2 Corinthians 5:17). But if a new creation has come to pass, someone must be first of this creation. A man, made of earth only, such as we have become from the transgression, he could not be. For in the first creation, men had become unfaithful, and through them that first creation had been lost; there was need of someone else to renew the first creation, and preserve the new which had come to be. Therefore out of love for man, the Lord, the ‘beginning’ of the new creation, is created as ‘the Way,’ and says, ‘The Lord created me the beginning of his Ways for his works. He established Me in the beginning before time, before He made the earth’ (Proverbs 8:22-23). That man might walk no longer according to that first creation. Since there is as it were a beginning of a new creation, and with the Christ ‘the beginning of His Ways,’ we might follow Him henceforth, who says to us, ‘I am the Way’. Paul teaches, ‘He is the Head of the body, the Church, who is the Beginning, the First-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence’” (Colossians 1:18).

The Re-Creation of the World by Christ

Paul said, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a

⁶⁶ Thus Athanasius considers that “First-born” is mainly a title, connected with the Incarnation, and also connected with Christ’s role at Creation.

garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail” (Hebrews 1:10-12, Psalm 102:25-26).

John Chrysostom noted⁶⁷ that Paul applied to Christ what the 4th century heretics applied only to the Father. He also pointed out Paul’s words describing Christ’s eternal nature and how Christ will use this to change the world.

“When Paul said, ‘But when He again brings the Firstborn into the world’, some heretics thought that this described a Gift afterwards super-added to Christ. Paul both corrected this beforehand, and again further corrects, saying, ‘in the beginning’; not now, but from the first. Notice how Paul anticipates both the heresies of Paul of Samosata and Arius, applying to the Son the things which relate to the Father⁶⁸. He has also intimated another thing by the way, greater even than this. Paul has incidentally pointed out also the transfiguration of the world, saying, ‘They will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed’ (Hebrews 1:11-12). Paul also said this in another place that Christ shall transfigure the world. ‘The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Romans 8:21) Showing how easy it will be for Christ to do this, Paul adds as if a man should fold up a garment so shall Christ both fold up and change the world. But if He with so much ease works the transfiguration and the creation to what is better and more perfect, did Christ need someone else for the inferior creation we have today? How far does their shamelessness go? At the same time too this is a very great consolation, to know that things will not be as they are, but they shall all receive change, and all shall be altered, but He Himself remains ever existing, and living without end. For Paul said, ‘You are the same, And Your years will not fail’” (Hebrews 1:12).

Bringing Many Sons to Glory

In the Christmas readings, there is another aspect to the Lord’s Glory: “We see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the Grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). He did this that He might bring many sons to glory, being made perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10).

The Epistle for 9th Hour Prayers⁶⁹ (Hebrews 2:11-18) goes into more detail about this. The reading begins by saying that He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). Then follows a quote from Psalm 22, “I will announce Your Name to My brethren; in the midst of the Church (Hebrew: assembly) I will sing praise to You” (Hebrews 2:12, Psalm 22:22). This passage quotes almost verbatim from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament c. 200 BC) and uses *ekklesia*, which is translated “church” everywhere else in the New Testament. The Psalm records David’s words speaking to God, but Hebrews interprets that to have Christ speaking to the Father on behalf of His brethren.

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, III, 3.

⁶⁸ That is, Christ is equal to the Father in His divinity.

⁶⁹ This is also the Epistle for the Feast Day of the Annunciation.

The reading goes on to say that “He does not latch onto (or grasp) angels, but He does latch onto (or grasp) the seed of Abraham” (v.16). Chrysostom stated, “He did not take on an angel’s nature, but a man’s. He did not grasp that nature which belongs to angels, but ours. This expression “grasp”, or “latch onto” (Greek epilambano) is derived from the figure of persons pursuing those who turn away from them, and doing everything to overtake them as they flee, and to take hold of them as they are bounding away. For when human nature was fleeing from Him, and fleeing far away (Ephesians 2:13), He pursued after and overtook us. For it is a great and wonderful thing, and full of amazement, that our flesh should sit on high and be adored by angels and archangels, by Cherubim and Seraphim. For God has great zeal on behalf of our nature.”

“Moreover, he said not simply ‘of men He latches onto’ but of the ‘seed of Abraham’ (Hebrews 2:16) thus showing that their race is great and honorable. Therefore in all things, He had to be made like His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17). This goes both ways also. Just as He was made like us in the Incarnation, so we will be made like Him in the Resurrection. He did not lose His deity in taking on humanity; just so, we will not lose our humanity when we take on immortality. But “the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43, Daniel 12:3). Moses and Elijah have already tasted of this in the Transfiguration; we will join them at the Resurrection. This is a great salvation that is foolish to neglect by drifting away. Instead, it is something worth paying attention to every minute of every day. As John Chrysostom said⁷⁰, “If He who is worshipped by angels, for our sake endured to have a little less than the angels, much more ought we, who are inferior to angels, bear everything for His sake”.

Christ enthroned between the Cherubim in heaven wasn’t available to help us in the misery of our sins. For the Law required that the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23), and God can’t die (Hebrews 1:12). Therefore God needed to become man so that He could satisfy the penalty of the Law on our behalf. And that is where the Christmas story begins: Almighty God took on humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

The Eternal Son from the Psalms, Genesis and Isaiah

For Christmas Eve, there are readings for the 1st, 3rd, 6th, 9th Hours and Vespers, which give more details regarding the mission of the Eternal Son.

The Psalms, which are used at various times for Christmas Eve, can be summarized as follows:

- Psalm 22 He will be crucified
- Psalm 45 His relationship with His queen
- Psalm 46 Our refuge and strength
- Psalm 132 His zeal for the Lord’s house
- Psalm 91 His relationship with His Father
- Psalm 110 His place at the Right Hand of Power
- Psalm 111 His relationship with His Church

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 3.

Readings from Genesis and Isaiah are also used for Christmas Eve; these can be summarized as follows:

- Genesis 1:1-13 The First Three Days of Creation
- Isaiah 9:6-7 A Son is Given
- Isaiah 7:10-16 The Virgin Will Conceive

See **Appendix I and II** for a discussion of these readings.

APPENDIX 1: Scriptures Used by the Arians and the Orthodox at the Council of Nicaea

A. The Arians said that Christ is a Created Being.

The Arians said:

1. Quoting one⁷¹ of the Seventy Apostles, “First of all, believe that there is one God who created and finished all things, and made all things out of nothing”, the Arians claimed⁷² that Christ was one of the things that were made out of nothing. They consider⁷³ that the Son has this prerogative over others, and therefore is called Only-begotten, because He alone was brought to be by God alone, and all other things were created by God through the Son.
2. 1 Corinthians 8:6 “Yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*”. The Arians claimed⁷⁴ that the term “from God” applied equally to us as to Christ; therefore Christ had a beginning.

The Orthodox Countered:

1. Psalm 110:3 “I have begotten Thee from the womb before the Morning Star”. This refers⁷⁵ to the Father begetting the Son in Eternity past.
2. John 8:42 “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me’”. Thus Jesus is⁷⁶ of the Father’s Essence.
3. John 6:46 “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father”. Thus Jesus is⁷⁷ equal to the Father.
4. John 10:30; 14:10 “I and My Father are one”; “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?” This is equivalent⁷⁸ to saying, ‘I am from the Father, and inseparable from Him.
5. John 1:18 “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*”. “In the bosom” intimates⁷⁹ the Son’s genuine generation from the Father.
6. John 1:3 “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”. The Arians claimed⁸⁰ this occurred in thought only where Christ originated

⁷¹ Hermes, The Shepherd, II, 1

⁷² Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 18.
Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 7, from Eustathius.

⁷³ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 3, 7.

⁷⁴ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 19.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 7, from Eustathius

⁷⁵ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 3, 13; 5, 21, 26; Deposition of Arius, 3.

⁷⁶ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 21.

Athanasius, To the Bishops of Egypt, Chapter 1, 9.

⁷⁷ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 21.

⁷⁸ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 21, 26; Deposition of Arius, 3.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople; I, 7 from Eustathius; II, 6 from the Council of Sardica

⁷⁹ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 21.

⁸⁰ Athanasius, On the Opinion of Dionysius, 2; Deposition of Arius, 3.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople; II, 6 from the Council of Sardica.

from nothing; the Orthodox claimed that this speaks of the Trinity together creating the world.

7. Colossians 1:16 “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him”. The Arians claimed⁸¹ that the artificer of all things is a creature, and that He is a created thing in whom all things created have come into being and subsist.

B. The Arians said that We Are Like Christ; therefore Christ is a Created Being.

The Arians said:

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”. Therefore, the Arians said⁸², we are like Christ.
2. 1 Corinthians 11:7 “For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God”. Therefore, the Arians said⁸³, man is like Christ.
3. 2 Corinthians 4:11 “For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh”. The Arians read this as “we who live are always in Him”. Therefore we are like Christ.
4. Acts 17:28 “For in Him we live and move and have our being”. Therefore⁸⁴ we are like Christ.
5. Romans 8:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” i.e. Nothing shall separate us. Therefore⁸⁵ we are unalterable like Christ.

The Orthodox Countered:

1. Proverbs 8:22 “The Lord made me the beginning of his ways for his works”. The Father set the Son over the works that the Son already had created. The Arians interpreted⁸⁶ this as saying that God created the Son first, then everything else. Athanasius stated⁸⁷, Christ is called also in the Scriptures, ‘servant,’ and ‘son of a handmaid,’ and ‘lamb,’ and ‘sheep,’ and it is said that He suffered toil, thirst, was beaten, and has suffered pain. But there is plainly a reasonable ground why such representations as these are given of Him in the Scriptures; it is because He became man and the Son of man, and took upon Him the form of a servant, which is the human flesh: for ‘the Word,’ says John, ‘became flesh.’ (John 1:14) As, being Word and Wisdom of the Father, He has all the attributes of the Father, His eternity, His unchangeableness, and the being like Him in all respects and in all things. He is co-existent with the Father, and is the very form of the Godhead; He is the Creator, and is not created. Since He is in essence like the Father, He cannot be a

⁸¹ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 18.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople.

⁸² Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 19.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 7, from Eustathius.

⁸³ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 20.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 7, from Eustathius.

⁸⁴ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 20.

⁸⁵ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 20.

⁸⁶ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 3, 13, 14, 26.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 5, from Eusebius of Nicomedia’s letter to Paulinus of Tyre.

⁸⁷ Athanasius, To the Bishops of Egypt, Chapter II, 17.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 7 Arius refuted by Eustathius.

Athanasius, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, 16-22.

creature, but must be the Creator, as Himself has said, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’ (John 5:17). So being made man, and bearing our flesh, He is necessarily said to be created and made. Wherefore the Fathers were with reason and justice indignant, and anathematized this most impious heresy; which these persons are now cautious of and keep back, as being easy to be disproved and unsound in every part of it.

2. Deuteronomy 32:6 “Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? *Is* He not your Father, *who* bought you? Has He not made you and formed you?” Christ could not be⁸⁸ a creature like man if He Himself created man.
3. Proverbs 8:25 “Before the mountains were settled, and before all hills, he begat Me”. In many passages⁸⁹ of the divine oracles is the Son said to have been generated, but nowhere to have come into being; which clearly convicts those of misconception about the Lord’s generation, who presume to call His divine generation a making.
4. Hebrews 11:3 “By faith we understand that the ages were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible”. The Word⁹⁰ created everything out of nothing.

C. The Arians said that Other Physical Created Things Are Called “Power of God”; therefore Christ Can’t Be that Great

The Arians Said:

1. Joel 2:25 “So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army (power *dunamis* LXX) which I sent among you”. The caterpillar and locust are called “great power”; therefore⁹¹ Christ as the Power of God is not saying much.
2. Exodus 12:41 “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years -- on that very same day -- it came to pass that all the armies (powers *dunamis* LXX) of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt”. The Arians read⁹² this as saying that the people of God are called the “Power of God”; Christ can’t be that great.
3. Psalm 46:7 “The Lord of hosts (powers *dunameon* LXX) *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge”. The Arians read⁹³ this saying that the people of God have the power of God.

The Orthodox Countered:

1. 1 John 5:20 “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life”. The Arians, as if in contradiction

⁸⁸ Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 6, 26.

⁸⁹ Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 3, 13.

Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople.

⁹⁰ Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 5, 18

⁹¹ Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 5, 20.

Athanasius, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, II, 16.

Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 7, from Eustathius

Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, ix, 32; xviii, 37-42; xviii, 37

⁹² Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 5, 20.

⁹³ Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 5, 20.

Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 7, from Eustathius.

to this, allege⁹⁴ that Christ is not the true God, but that He is only called God, as are other creatures, in regard to His participation in the divine nature.

2. The Fathers used⁹⁵ the illustration of the Light and the Radiance to describe the relationship of the Father to the Son. If the Father is the sun, the Son is the beam of the sun, one cannot speak of the sun without its sunbeams. The light and the radiance are one, and the one is shown in the other; the radiance is in the sun, so that whoever sees the radiance sees the sun also. The Arians tried to twist this to speak of the heat generated by the sun; that is something different; that is the effects of the sun, not the sun itself.

D. The Arians Claimed that the Word and Wisdom Refer to the Father Only.

The Arians stated:

1. John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word” and 1 Corinthians 1:24 “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”. The Arians said⁹⁶ that the Word and the Wisdom which is in God is distinct from that one of which John and Paul spoke of. That is, only the Father is Word and Wisdom.
2. Psalm 14:7 “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity: therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy fellows”. Thus the Arians stated that the Father anointed Christ with “deity”.

The Orthodox Countered:

1. The Orthodox countered with “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*” (John 1:18), where there never was a time⁹⁷ when He was not
2. Hebrews 1:3 “Who being the brightness of His glory the very image of His subsistence”. The Arians dare⁹⁸ to separate them, and to say that Christ is alien from the essence and eternity of the Father; and impiously to represent Him as changeable, not perceiving, that by speaking thus, they make Him to be, not one with the Father, but one with created things. Who does not see that the brightness cannot be separated from the light, but that it is by nature proper to it, co-existent with it, and is not produced after it?
3. When the Father says, ‘This is My beloved Son’ (Matthew 17:5) and when the Scriptures say that ‘He is the Word’ of the Father, and ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth’ (Psalm 33:6) and in short, ‘All things were made by Him’ (John 1:3); these inventors⁹⁹ of new doctrines and fictions represent that there is another Word, and another Wisdom of the Father, and that He is only called the Word and the Wisdom conceptually on account of things endued with reason, while they don’t perceive the absurdity of this.
4. Hebrews 2:10 “For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect

⁹⁴ Athanasius, To the Bishops of Egypt, Chapter II, 13.

⁹⁵ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 23, 24, 27.

⁹⁶ Athanasius, On the Opinion of Dionysius, 25.

Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 3, 6, 28, 32.

Athanasius, To the Bishops of Egypt, II, 13.

⁹⁷ Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople.

⁹⁸ Athanasius, To the Bishops of Egypt, Chapter II, 13; Deposition of Arius, 3.

Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople; I, 7 from Eustathius..

⁹⁹ Athanasius, To the Bishops of Egypt, Chapter II, 13.

through sufferings”. If all things¹⁰⁰ that were made by the will of God were made by Him, how can He be Himself one of the things that were made? How can these men say, that we were not made for Him, but He for us? If it be so, He ought to have said, ‘For whom the Word was made;’ but He didn’t say this, but, ‘For whom are all things, and by whom are all things,’ thus proving these men to be heretical and false.

5. Matthew 11:27 “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*”. And again, ‘Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father’ (John 6:46). Are not these indeed enemies of God¹⁰¹ which say that the Father is neither seen nor known of the Son perfectly? The Lord says, ‘As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep’ (John 10:15).

E. The Sequence of Arian Arguments.

The sequence in the Arians’ logic was as follows. When they were proven to be wrong in the first point, they shifted to the second; then the third, etc.

- a. In showing that the Word is not a work, it has been also shown that He is not a creature. For it is the same to say work or creature, so that the proof that He is not a work is a proof also that He is not a creature. Whereas one may marvel at these men, devising excuses to be unscriptural, and were not daunted at the refutations which meet them upon every point. First they set about deceiving the simple by their questions, ‘Did He who is made from that which was not, one that was not or one that was; and, ‘Had you a son before begetting him?’
- b. And when this had been proved worthless, next they invented the question, ‘Is the Unoriginate one or two?’
- c. Then, when in this they had been confuted, immediately they formed another, ‘Has He free-will and an alterable nature?’
- d. But being forced to give up this, next they set about saying, ‘Being made so much better than the Angels’.
- e. When the truth exposed this pretense, they collected themselves all together and recommended their heresy by referring to ‘work’ and ‘creature’. They thus repeated the same things over again, and are true to their own perverseness, putting into various shapes and turning the same errors over and over, as if to deceive some by that variability.

F. The Drama and Deceit by the Arians.

Athanasius stated¹⁰², “Now it happened to Eusebius of Nicomedia and his fellows in the Nicene Council as follows: while they stood out in their unscriptural statements, and attempted their fight against God, the terms they used were replete with unscriptural statements; but the 300 some assembled Bishops mildly and charitably required of them to explain and defend themselves on their religious beliefs. Scarcely did they begin to speak, when they were condemned, and one differed from another; then perceiving the bind in which their heresy lay,

¹⁰⁰ Athanasius, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, Chapter II, 12, 15.

¹⁰¹ Athanasius, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, Chapter II, 16.

Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 3, from Alexander of Alexandria’s letter to Alexander of Constantinople.

¹⁰² Athanasius, *De Decretis*, Chapter 2, 3.

they remained silent, and by their silence confessed the disgrace which came upon their heterodoxy. On this the Bishops, having rejected the terms they had invented, published against them the sound and ecclesiastical faith; and, as all subscribed to it, Eusebius and his fellows subscribed to it also in those same words, of which they are now complaining. I mean, “of the essence” and “one in essence,” and that “the Son of God is neither creature or work, nor numbered among things originated, but that the Word is an offspring from the substance of the Father.”

When the Arians had been thus cornered at the Council of Nicaea, they brought up the term “Unoriginate” (borrowed from the pagan Greeks) to refer¹⁰³ to the Father, expecting that they could then apply the term “originate” to the Son. Athanasius pointed out that the Greeks referred to intellect and the soul as also being “Unoriginate”, implying that man was also “Unoriginate”. Greek philosophers define this term as (1) what has not yet, but may, come to be; (2) what neither exists, nor can come into being; (3) what exists indeed, but was neither originated nor had origin of being, but is everlasting and indestructible. Using definition (3), this argument is just another way of stating the Arian heresy: that the Son is a created being. Using the term “Unoriginate” is just cloaking their perverseness like their father the devil. They have broached the term “Unoriginate” that they might pretend to speak piously of God, yet might cherish a concealed blasphemy against the Lord, and under a veil might teach it to others. In addition, the term “Unoriginate” refers to things created, not to things begotten; if an architect is referred to as “Unoriginate”, the city he designs is referred to as “originate”; but the architect’s son is not referred to as “originate”, but as “begotten”.

This explains what was done in the Council; but I know that the contentious among Christ’s foes will not be amenable to change even after hearing this, but will always search about for other pretenses. As the Prophet speaks, ‘If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, then will they be willing to think scripturally, who have been instructed in unscriptural statements’ (Jeremiah 13:23)? If these men say that the Lord is a creature, and worship Him as a creature, how do they differ from the Gentiles?

¹⁰³ Athanasius, De Decretis, Chapter 5, 28-29.

THE POOR HEAR THE GOSPEL

December 25, 2015

Gospel: Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 1:18-25

Most authorities place the time of the Lord's birth at about 4 BC (and not 0 AD). The Emperor Octavian, called Caesar Augustus, had ordered a world-wide census for the purpose of taxation beginning about 6-5 BC. In Israel, this meant everyone had to return to "his own city" (v.3). To each person, this was the area of Israel that represented the inheritance of his tribe and family as the land was distributed after the conquest by Joshua. Land could not be sold permanently, and title to the land reverted every 50 years (the Year of Jubilee) to the family of its original inheritor at the time of Joshua (Leviticus 25:8-28). In case of disputes, genealogical records were kept in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Herod the Great began his reign in Judea in 37 BC. The historian Sulpitius Severus stated¹⁰⁴ that Jesus was born on December 25th in the 33rd year of the reign of Herod the Great, during the consulship of Sabinus and Rufinus.

For Joseph, returning to "his own city" meant Bethlehem, since he was of the house and lineage of David (v.4). Probably traveling with Joseph and Mary were members of an extended family from the area of Nazareth. When Joseph, Mary and their extended families arrived in Bethlehem to be registered or enrolled, Bethlehem was crowded. Every house was full with guests from outlying areas, as was the inn (Luke 2:7).

Just as they arrived at sunset, Mary, who was riding a donkey, asked to be helped down since her labor was starting. Joseph helped her down and led her to a nearby shepherd's cave for shelter. Joseph then left Mary with some of the extended family while he went to find a midwife. Returning to the cave with Zelomi and Salome (Mary's first cousin), the three noticed a luminous cloud over the cave and found out that Mary had already given birth. In their post-natal care of Mary, the midwives were amazed that Mary's hymen was undisturbed - indicating a true virgin birth. Joseph may have explained to them how the child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Wrapping the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes, Mary nursed Him and laid Him in a manger (Luke 2:7). According to tradition¹⁰⁵, the manger Jesus was laid in was located between the stalls for an ox and a donkey. This fulfilled the words of Isaiah, "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; *but* Israel does not know, My people do not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). Also the words of Habakkuk, "You shall be known between the two living creatures" (Habakkuk 3:2)

Newborn babies were washed and rubbed with salt after their umbilical cord was cut and wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes (Ezekiel 16:4). The swaddling clothes were strips about 4 inches wide and 15-20 feet long, much like the wrapping of a mummy. It was customary for the mother to breast-feed her baby for the first two or three years (2 Maccabees 7:27, 1 Samuel

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¹⁰⁴ Sulpitius Severus, Sacred History, II, 27.

¹⁰⁵ http://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints_view?contentid=352.

1:24). Today, most mothers who breast-feed their babies quit doing so after the baby develops his first teeth (6-9 months). Nursing a baby for several years would probably result in a stronger bond between mother and child (compare Luke 11:27).

The Shepherds Hear the Gospel

“Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord stood before them and the Glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them: ‘Do not be afraid, for behold I announce to you (literally evangelize you) great joy which will be to all people. For there was born to you today in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth, lying in a manger! And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of a heavenly army praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest places and on earth peace among men of goodwill’ “(Luke 2:8-14).

Normally, shepherds don’t spend the night with their flocks in the fields during the winter: it’s usually too cold and wet. But this flock was to be used as part of the animal sacrifices in nearby Jerusalem and therefore required special care to be sure none were injured. Any blemish or injury to an animal disqualified it from being sacrificed (Leviticus 22:17-25, Deuteronomy 15:19-21). So to those caring for the sacrificial lambs, angels announced the birth of The Sacrificial Lamb. In hurrying to see what the angel had spoken of, they brought some things from their flock (milk, etc.) for Joseph, Mary and the baby.

Shepherds were considered one of the lowest of occupations. They worked long hours under rough conditions for little pay. For example, the Egyptians let Jacob and his family live apart in Goshen because they considered shepherds and keepers of livestock to be loathsome (Genesis 46:28-34). And why not? The shepherds tend to smell like their animals!

In family herds, the youngest child often served as shepherd while the older children took on more demanding tasks: this was the case with young David (1 Samuel 16:11). Sheep (and goats) provided a number of benefits to a household as follows:

- Milk (3 quarts per goat per day)
- From milk, cheese, butter, and yogurt were made
- Sheep’s wool was used for clothing
- Goats hair was used for tents and pillow stuffing
- Skin was used for leather: clothes, sandals, water containers

For a shepherd caring for someone else’s sheep (and goats), the shepherd shared in what the herd produced (1 Corinthians 9:7-10). This was part of his “wages”; the balance of his wages¹⁰⁶ may have been at the whim of his employer (Genesis 31:38-41).

When the angel first stood before them (Luke 2:9), they were petrified, and the angel literally lit up the field with a brightness beyond that of the noonday sun. Without a doubt, the angel was more in appearance like the angel that appeared to Daniel (Daniel 10:5-6) than the angel that

¹⁰⁶ For a good account of the life of shepherds, see Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 132-144.

appeared to the women at the tomb (Mark 16:5) looking like a young man. That is, the angel probably had the appearance of:

- A face like lightning
- torches for eyes
- arms and feet like polished bronze
- a voice like a roaring waterfall

very similar to the Resurrected Christ (Revelation 1:12-17). After speaking to the shepherds, there appeared with the angel a multitude of other angels (Luke 2:13), probably with similar appearance, praising God and saying (Luke 2:14)

**Glory to God in the Highest
And on earth peace, among men of goodwill!**

As this multitude of angels sang the glory of God, each having a voice like a roaring waterfall, the ground vibrated from the intensity of their voices.

When the first angel spoke to the shepherds, he announced good tidings (Greek: euaggelizo¹⁰⁷ = preach the Gospel) of great joy which will be to all people: the long expected Messiah has been born (compare Acts 8:12, Ephesians 3:8, 4:11). Then the angel gave the shepherds a sign (Greek: *semeion* = a sign, portent or omen, compare Matthew 16:1-4, 24:24) by which they would know this was true:

- You will find the baby in Bethlehem
- Wrapped in swaddling clothes
- Lying in a feed trough

There are other occasions in the Scriptures where angels preach the Gospel; another occasion is at the end of time when Messiah returns in glory (Revelation 14:6). The shepherds were thus the first people to be evangelized for the Lamb of God.

At night it was probably difficult to check this out since most people had shut their doors for the night (Luke 11:5-8). Besides there were probably at least 1,000 babies in Bethlehem young enough to wear swaddling clothes. While there were probably very few using a feed trough for a cradle, they went immediately (Luke 2:15), and found Joseph and Mary quickly (Luke 2:16). The shepherd's cave may have been the only place not closed up for the night, but there is another aspect worth considering. If there was a luminous cloud over the shepherd's cave similar to the luminous cloud that appeared over the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the location of the Divine birth would be very easy to pinpoint. Further, if all that the shepherds saw was a cute manger scene and a very poor couple with a newborn Child, would all have marveled at what the shepherds told them (Luke 2:18)? It seems much more likely that the shepherds saw

¹⁰⁷ The noun form of the same Greek word is euaggelistes and is usually translated evangelist. In other places, the verb form euaggelizo is translated to preach the Gospel.

what Israel saw in the wilderness (Exodus 40:38) and the vision of angels bore witness to what had happened -- and this is what everyone marveled at.

After the shepherds found Mary, Joseph and Jesus, they confirmed what the angel had announced and began their own evangelism (Luke 2:17-20, compare Ephesians 6:15, Acts 4:18-20). They may have spoken to Joseph and Mary and inquired concerning how Mary and Joseph knew the baby was Messiah. Mary may have shared, very humbly, the angel Gabriel's visit (Luke 1:26-38) and Joseph may have shared the angel's words to him in a dream (Matthew 1:18-25). But the shepherds were certainly impressed; "and all those who heard about it marveled at those things that were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:18).

Mary's reaction to all this was to keep considering them and pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19). She knew that she was in for a wild ride through life; but exactly what it all meant, she probably wasn't sure. Just as Jacob knew there was something significant about Joseph's dreams (Genesis 37:3-11), Mary kept all these events in mind. After the Ascension when the 120 were gathered in the upper room for prayer, fasting and awaiting the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14), Mary probably began sharing all the things she had been pondering as the disciples began piecing everything together (compare Luke 24:13-35).

Abraham Saw Christ Also

Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (). How did this happen? There are several aspects to this.

Irenaeus of Lyons explained¹⁰⁸ how Abraham could rejoice to see Christ's day. First he saw it through the spirit of prophecy, and then he saw it through his descendants. In "Abraham's Bosom" (Luke 16:22-31), Abraham then saw Christ through the fellowship of those saints like Simeon.

"Abraham, knowing the Father through the Word, who made heaven and earth, confessed Him to be God. Having learned, by an announcement made to him (Genesis 17:1-19), that the Son of God would be a man among men, by whose advent his seed should be as the stars of heaven, he desired to see that day, so that he might himself also embrace Christ. Seeing it through the spirit of prophecy¹⁰⁹, he rejoiced (Genesis 17:17). Simeon also, one of his descendants, fully carried out the rejoicing of the patriarch, and said, 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples; a light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel' (Luke 2:29). The angels, in like manner, announced tidings of great joy to the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night (Luke 2:8).

¹⁰⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, vii, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Moses wrote, "Abram fell upon his face, and laughed; and spoke in his heart, saying, 'Shall there be a child to one who is a hundred years old, and shall Sarah who is ninety years old, bear?'" (Genesis 17:17) Irenaeus seems to be interpreting this reaction of Abraham as rejoicing and not as ridiculing. Since God does not rebuke Abraham for this, but He does rebuke Sarah for doing what may seem to be the same thing (Genesis), Irenaeus' interpretation may be correct.

Moreover, Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior’ (Luke 1:46). The rejoicing of Abraham descended upon those who sprang from him, — those, namely, who were watching, who beheld Christ, and who believed in Him. On the other hand, there was a reciprocal rejoicing which passed backwards from the children to Abraham, who did also desire to see the day of Christ’s coming. Rightly, then, did our Lord bear witness to him, saying, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad’” (John 8:56).

God in Terms of Light

Just as Abraham was enlightened to see Christ, so God is presented to mankind in terms of Light in many ways.

Gregory the Great presented¹¹⁰ God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in terms of Light that is beyond human comprehension. Springing from this Light are angels and man. Light was also the first commandment to the first man, and the whole of the written Law. Light also glorified Moses’ face, appeared to Moses at the burning bush, appeared as a pillar of fire to Israel, carried Elijah to heaven, shown around the shepherds in Bethlehem, illumined the way of the Magi, appeared at the Transfiguration and converted the Apostle Paul. We will shine with this Light at the Resurrection, and we get a foretaste of this Light in Holy Baptism. To sin is human, and we are given help for this in Baptism, in order that we might not despair.

“God is Light (1 John 1:5): the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable that can neither be conceived in the mind nor uttered with the lips (1 Timothy 6:16), and gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:9). He is in the world of thought, what the sun is in the world of sense; He presents Himself to our minds in proportion as we are cleansed; and He is loved in proportion as He is presented to our mind. He is conceived in proportion as we love Him; Himself contemplating and comprehending Himself, and pouring Himself out upon what is external to Him. That Light is contemplated in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Whose riches is their unity of nature, and the one out-leaping of Their brightness. A second Light is the Angel, a kind of outflow or communication of that first Light, drawing its illumination from its inclination and obedience thereto. A third Light is man; a light which is visible to external objects. We call man light, because of the faculty of speech in us. The name is applied again to those of us who are more like God, and who approach God more nearly than others. I also acknowledge another Light, by which the primeval darkness was driven away or pierced. It was the first of all the visible creation to be called into existence; and it irradiates the whole universe, the circling orbit of the stars, and all the heavenly beacons.”

“Light was also the firstborn commandment given to the firstborn man¹¹¹; although the envious darkness crept in and wrought wickedness. A Light typical and proportionate to those who were its subjects was the written Law,

¹¹⁰ Gregory the Great, The Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 5-7.

¹¹¹ Note that the commandment of the Law is a lamp and a light (Proverbs 6:23); and again, because Your judgments are a light upon the earth (Psalm 119:105).

foreshadowing the truth and the sacrament of the great Light, for Moses' face was made glorious by it (Exodus 34:30). And, to mention more Lights — it was Light that appeared out of Fire to Moses, when it burned the bush indeed, but did not consume it (Exodus 3:2), to show its nature and to declare the power that was in it. It was Light that was in the pillar of fire that led Israel (Exodus 13:21) and tamed the wilderness. It was Light that carried up Elijah in the chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11), and yet did not burn him as it carried him. It was Light that shone around the Shepherds when the Eternal Light was mingled with the temporal (Luke 2:9). It was Light that was the beauty of the Star that went before to Bethlehem to guide the Wise Men's way (Matthew 2:9), and to be the escort of the Light that is above us, when He came among us. Light was that Godhead Which was shown on the Mount to the disciples — and a little too strong for their eyes (Luke 9:32-34). Light was that Vision which blazed out on Paul, and by wounding his eyes healed the darkness of his soul (Acts 9:3). Light is also the brilliancy of heaven to those who have been purified here, when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun (Matthew 13:43), and God shall stand in the midst of them (Wisdom 3:7 LXX), gods and kings, deciding and distinguishing the ranks of the Blessedness of heaven. Light beside these in a special sense is the illumination of Baptism of which we are now speaking; for it contains a great and marvelous sacrament of our salvation."

"To be utterly sinless belongs to God, and to the first and uncompounded nature (for simplicity is peaceful, and not subject to dissension). I venture to say also that it belongs to the Angelic nature too; or at least, I would affirm that nature to be very nearly sinless, because of its nearness to God. To sin is human and belongs to the Compound on earth (for composition is the beginning of separation); therefore the Master did not think it right to leave His creature unaided, or to neglect its danger of separation from Himself. On the contrary, just as He gave existence to that which did not exist, so He gave new creation to that which did exist, a diviner creation and a loftier than the first, which is to those who are beginning life a Seal. To those who are more mature in age He gave both a gift and a restoration of the image which had fallen through sin. The aim is that we may not, by becoming worse through despair, and ever being borne downward to that which is more evil, fall altogether from good and from virtue, through despondency and having fallen into a depth of evil, despise Him (Proverbs 18:3 LXX). Like those who in the course of a long journey make a brief rest from labor at an inn, we should be enabled to accomplish the rest of the road fresh and full of courage. Such is the grace and power of baptism; not an overwhelming of the world as of old, but a purification of the sins of each individual, and a complete cleansing from all the bruises and stains of sin."

A Perspective on What Has Just Happened at the Nativity of Christ

It is important to comprehend what was going on at the Nativity of Christ. This was not just a cute baby being born. This was the Son of God who created the universe taking on human flesh. This is a pre-eminent wonder that was addressed repeatedly in ancient prophecy. Mary nourished with her milk Him who imparts sustenance to everything that has breath. She wrapped

Him in swaddling-clothes who binds the whole creation with His word. She laid Him in a manger who rides seated upon the cherubim. A light from heaven shone round about Him who lights up the whole creation. The hosts of heaven attended Him who is glorified in heaven from before all ages. A star with its beam guided them who had come from the distant parts of earth toward Him who is the true Orient.

Gregory the Wonder-Worker¹¹² gave a perspective¹¹³ on what was really happening when Christ was born in the stable-cave. This is He who is covered with light and who made every creature. He who slept with dumb beasts came to provide men the opportunity to avoid living like beasts. In a feed-trough for animals was laid the heavenly Bread. The angels sang of glory in heaven and peace on earth.

“Joseph went up from Galilee, unto a city of Judea which is called Bethlehem, to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child, because they were of the house and family of David. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered; and she brought forth her son, the first-born over all creation (Colossians 1:15), and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn’ (Luke 2:4-7). She wrapped in swaddling-clothes Him who is covered with light as with a garment (Psalm 104:2). She wrapped in swaddling-clothes (Luke 2:7-12) Him who made every creature (Hebrews 1:2). She laid in a manger Him who sits upon the cherubim (Psalm 80:1), and is praised by myriads of angels (Psalm 148:2). In the manger set apart for dumb brutes did the Word of God repose, in order that He might impart to men, who are really irrational by free choice, the perceptions of true reason. In the board from which cattle eat was laid the heavenly Bread (John 6:41), in order that He might provide participation in spiritual sustenance for men who live like the beasts of the earth. Nor was there even room for Him in the inn. He found no place, who by His word established heaven and earth; ‘for though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich’ (2 Corinthians 8:9); He chose extreme humiliation on behalf of the salvation of our nature, in His inherent goodness toward us. He who fulfilled the whole righteousness of the economy in an unutterable mystery in heaven in the bosom of the Father, and in the cave in the arms of the mother, reposed in the manger. Angelic choirs encircled Him, singing of glory in heaven and of peace upon earth. In heaven He was seated at the right hand of the Father; and in the manger He rested, as it were, upon the cherubim. Even there was in truth His cherubic throne; there was His royal seat. Holy of the holy, and alone glorious upon the earth, and holier than the holy, was that wherein Christ our God rested.

Gregory the Wonder-worker continued to say¹¹⁴ that Christ called Israel by grace, which is the whole mystery of the economy. The Virgin Mary played a key part in this. She nourished with her milk Him who imparts sustenance to everything that has breath. She wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes who binds the whole creation with His word. She laid Him in a manger who

¹¹² “Thaumaturgus” means “wonder-worker”

¹¹³ Gregory Thaumaturgus, “On the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary”, in Four Homilies, I.

¹¹⁴ Gregory Thaumaturgus, “On the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary”, in Four Homilies, II.

rides seated upon the cherubim. A light from heaven shone round about Him who lights up the whole creation. The hosts of heaven attended Him who is glorified in heaven from before all ages. A star with its beam guided them who had come from the distant parts of earth toward Him who is the true Orient. The holy mother of God kept these words, and pondered them in her heart, like one who was the receptacle of all the mysteries.

“Christ who was born of the Virgin, and who is our God, has given over the whole inheritance of divine blessings to the Gentiles. ‘He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of *His* mercy’ (Luke 1:54). Not any Israel in general, but His servant, who in deed maintains the true nobility of Israel. And on this account also did the mother of God call Him servant (Son) and heir. For when He had found Israel laboring painfully in the letter and the law, He called him by grace. It is such an Israel, therefore, that He called and hath helped in remembrance of His mercy. ‘As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever’ (Luke 1:55)! In these few words is comprehended the whole mystery of the economy. With the purpose of saving the race of men, and fulfilling the covenant that was made with our fathers, Christ has ‘bowed the heavens and come down’ (Psalm 18:9 LXX). Thus He shows Himself to us as we are capable of receiving Him, in order that we might have power to see Him, and handle Him, and hear Him when he speaks. On this account did God the Word deem it fitting to take to Himself the flesh and the perfect humanity by a woman, the holy Virgin. He was born a man, in order that He might discharge our debt, and fulfill even in Himself the ordinances of the covenant made with Abraham, in its rite of circumcision, and all the other legal appointments connected with it. After she had spoken these words the holy Virgin went to Nazareth; and from that a decree of Caesar led her to come again to Bethlehem; and so, as proceeding from the royal house, she was brought to the royal house of David along with Joseph her espoused husband. There ensued the mystery which transcends all wonders, — the Virgin brought forth and bore in her hand Him who bears the whole creation by His word. ‘There was no room for them in the inn’ (Luke 2:7). He found no room who founded the whole earth by His word. She nourished with her milk Him who imparts sustenance and life to everything that has breath. She wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes who binds the whole creation fast with His word. She laid Him in a manger who rides seated upon the cherubim (Psalm 80:1 LXX). A light from heaven shone round about Him who lights up the whole creation. The hosts of heaven attended Him with their doxologies who is glorified in heaven from before all ages. A star with its beam guided them who had come from the distant parts of earth toward Him who is the true Orient. From the East came those who brought gifts to Him who for our sakes became poor. The holy mother of God kept these words, and pondered them in her heart, like one who was the receptacle of all the mysteries. Your praise, O most holy Virgin, surpasses all laudation, by reason of the God who received the flesh and was born man of you. To you every creature, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, offers the fit offering of honor.”

Methodius of Olympus spoke¹¹⁵ of how the birth of Christ was a pre-eminent wonder and that the Virgin Mary was addressed repeatedly in ancient prophecy because of this. Proof of this is the song of the angels to the shepherds, which is totally unique in human history. Mary was

¹¹⁵ Methodius of Olympus, Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna on the Day That They Met in the Temple, V.

like the Ark of the Covenant, which was veiled off to all but the priests to conceal the sacred mystery connected to her. If such honor was paid to the Ark by God, where the Ark was an image of her sanctity, what honor is now due to her as a queen by us? She is the living Ark of God and the heaven that contained the uncontainable. The benefits we have in the Church were obtained through the cooperation of Mary with her Son.

“Tremendous is the mystery connected with you, O virgin mother, you spiritual throne, glorified and made worthy of God. You have brought forth, before the eyes of those in heaven and earth, a pre-eminent wonder. It is a proof of this, and an irrefutable argument, that at the novelty of your supernatural child-bearing, the angels sang on earth, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men’ (Luke 2:14), by their threefold song bringing in a threefold holiness¹¹⁶. Blessed are you among the generations of women (Luke 1:28, 42), O you of God most blessed, for by you the earth has been filled with that divine glory of God. ‘Blessed *be* the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! And blessed *be* His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory. Amen and Amen’ (Psalm 72:18-19). Isaiah said, ‘The posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke’ (Isaiah 6:4), by which is signified the veil of the temple drawn before the Ark of the Covenant, which typified you. This was done that the truth might be laid open to me, and also that I might be taught, by the types and figures which went before, to approach with reverence and trembling to do honor to the sacred mystery which is connected with you. By means of this prior shadow-painting of the Law, I might be restrained from boldly and irreverently contemplating with fixed gaze Him who, in His incomprehensibility, is seated far above all (1 Timothy 6:15-16). For if to the ark, which was the image and type of your sanctity, such honor was paid of God that to no one but to the priestly order only was the access to it open, or ingress allowed to behold it, the veil separating it off, and keeping the vestibule as that of a queen, what sort of veneration is due to you from us who are of creation the least, to you who are indeed a queen. You are the living ark of God, the Lawgiver; you are the heaven that contains Him who can be contained by none! Since you, O holy virgin, have dawned as a bright day upon the world and have brought forth the Sun of Righteousness that hateful horror of darkness has been chased away. The power of the tyrant has been broken, death has been destroyed, hell swallowed up, and all enmity dissolved before the face of peace. Noxious diseases depart now that salvation looks forth; and the whole universe has been filled with the pure and clear light of truth. Solomon alludes to this: ‘My beloved is mine, and I am His; He feeds His flock among the lilies until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away’ (Song of Solomon 2:16-17). Since then, the God of gods has appeared in Zion, and the splendor of His beauty has appeared in Jerusalem. ‘Light is sprung up for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart’” (Psalm 97:11 LXX).

¹¹⁶ That is, as in “Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3) Methodius links the song of the Seraphim (Isaiah 6) to the song of the angels (Luke 2).

The Two Natures of Christ

It is important to realize that Christ is one person, yet He has two natures: He is God from eternity past, but He is also a man born of the Virgin Mary. In His 1st nature, He has no beginning; in His 2nd nature, He has a birthday. His two natures don't get mixed up. He died with His human nature, but rose from the dead with His Divine nature. Therefore the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest" for His birth and "Peace on earth to men of good will for His work on earth in building up the heavenly Jerusalem.

Leo the Great wrote¹¹⁷ about Christ's twofold nativity: begotten from the Father in eternity past, and born of the Virgin Mary during the reign of Herod the Great. There are great contrasts between Christ's two natures, and the Scriptures address one or the other at various places. It is important to understand which is which. The "Tome of Leo" (of which this quote is a part) was written for the 2nd Council of Ephesus¹¹⁸ in 449 AD, but the heretical followers of Eutyches did not allow it to be read at the Council. Finally it was read and acclaimed by everyone at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

"The Son of God entered these lower parts of the world, descending from His heavenly home and yet didn't leave His Father's glory; He was begotten in a new order by a new nativity. In a new order, because being invisible in His own nature, He became visible in ours, and He whom nothing could contain was content to be contained. He who existed before all time, began to be in time; the Lord of all things, He obscured His immeasurable majesty and took on Him the form of a servant. Being God that cannot suffer, He willingly became a man that can; immortal as He is, He subjected Himself to the laws of death. The Lord assumed His mother's nature without any fault of hers. In the Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin's womb, the wonderfulness of His birth makes His nature like ours. For He who is true God is also true man; in this union there is no pretending, since the humility of manhood and the loftiness of the Godhead both meet there. God is not changed by the showing of pity; so man is not swallowed up by the dignity. Each form does what is proper to it with the co-operation of the other; that is, the Word performing what appertains to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what appertains to the flesh. One of them sparkles with miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. The Word does not cease to be equal to His Father's glory; so the flesh does not forego the nature of our race. It must again and again be repeated that one and the same is truly Son of God and truly son of man. God in that 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1); man in that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). God in that 'all things were made through Him, and without Him was nothing made that was made' (John 1:3); man in that 'He was born of a woman, born under the Law' (Galatians 4:4). The nativity of the flesh was the manifestation of human nature; the childbearing of a virgin is the proof of Divine power. The infancy of a babe is shown in the humbleness of its cradle (Luke 2:7); the greatness of the Most High is proclaimed by the angels' voices (Luke 2:13-

¹¹⁷ Pope Leo the Great, Letters, XXVIII, 4, called "The Tome of Leo".

¹¹⁸ Because of this controversy, the 2nd Council of Ephesus is not considered Ecumenical.

14). He whom Herod treacherously endeavors to destroy is like us in our earliest stage; but He whom the Magi delight to worship on their knees is the Lord of all. So too when He came to the baptism of John, His forerunner, lest He should not be known through the veil of flesh which covered His Divinity, the Father's voice thundering from the sky, said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17). Thus Him whom the devil's craftiness attacks as man, the ministries of angels serve as God. To be hungry and thirsty, to be weary, and to sleep, is clearly human. To satisfy 5,000 men with five loaves, to bestow on the woman of Samaria living water, drafts of which can secure the drinker from thirsting any more, to walk upon the surface of the sea with feet that do not sink, and to quell the risings of the waves by rebuking the winds, is, without any doubt, Divine. It is not part of the same nature to be moved to tears of pity for Lazarus, His dead friend (John 11:33-35), and when the stone that closed the four-day dead grave was removed, to raise that same friend to life with a voice of command (John 11:43-44). It is not part of the same nature to hang on the cross yet turn day to night and to make all the elements tremble (). It is not part of the same nature to be pierced with nails and yet open the gates of Paradise to the robber's faith (). So it is not part of the same nature to say, 'I and My Father are one' (John 10:30), and to say, 'My Father is greater than I' (John 14:28). Although in the Lord Jesus Christ God and man is one person; yet the source of the degradation, which is shared by both, is one, and the source of the glory, which is shared by both, is another. His manhood, which is less than the Father, comes from our side; His Godhead, which is equal to the Father, comes from the Father."

Leo the Great stated¹¹⁹ that Christ's human nature was not swallowed up by His Divinity nor was His Divinity diminished by His humanity. He died with His human nature and rose with His Divine Nature. His birth from the Virgin Mary did not corrupt her purity, but His birth became the Power of God and the Wisdom of God. Therefore the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest" for His birth and "Peace on earth to men of good will for His work on earth in building up the heavenly Jerusalem.

"Therefore the Word of God, Himself God, the Son of God who 'in the beginning was with God' (), through whom 'all things were made' and 'without whom was nothing made' (), with the purpose of delivering man from eternal death, became man. Bending Himself to take on our humility without decrease in His own majesty, yet remaining what He was and assuming what He was not, He united the true form of a slave to that form in which He is equal to God the Father. He joined both natures together by such a compact that the lower should not be swallowed up in its exaltation nor the higher impaired by its new associate. Without detriment therefore to the properties of either substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength took on weakness, eternity took on mortality. For the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition, inviolable nature was united with passible nature, and true God and true man were combined to form one Lord. As suited the needs of our case, one

¹¹⁹ Pope Leo the Great, Sermons, XXI, 2.

and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and rise again with the other.”

“Rightly therefore did the birth of our Salvation impart no corruption to the Virgin’s purity, because the bearing of the Truth was the keeping of honor! Such then beloved was the nativity which became the Power of God and the Wisdom of God even Christ, whereby He might be one with us in manhood and surpass us in Godhead. Unless He were true God, He would not bring us a remedy; unless He were true Man, He would not give us an example. Therefore the exulting angel’s song when the Lord was born is this, ‘Glory to God in the Highest’, and their message is, ‘peace on earth to men of good will’ (). For they see that the heavenly Jerusalem is being built up out of all the nations of the world. Over that indescribable work of the Divine love, how ought the humbleness of men rejoice, when the joy of the lofty angels is so great?”

Some Men Are Like the Angels

The word translated “angel” in both Hebrew and Greek means “messenger”. The angels who sang at the birth of Christ were announcing to the world the beginning of a new age. There are also men in this life who have served as messengers to announce the things of God.

John Chrysostom stated¹²⁰ that the angels that sang at the Birth of Christ are like those saints among men who think nothing of this present life, but only about the eternal welfare of others. God Himself leads them in their prayers.

“Let us inquire what the difference is between the rest of the angels and this company of them who on earth sing, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men’ (Luke 2:14). Their clothing is suitable to their manliness. They are not dressed like those with trailing garments (i.e. royalty), but like those blessed angels: Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, the Apostles; their garments being made for them of goat’s hair, of camel’s hair, or buckskins alone, and these worn for a long time. Then, after they have said those songs, they bow their knees, and entreat the God who was the object of their hymns for things that some do not easily even think about. They ask nothing of things present, for they have no regard for these, but that they may stand with boldness before the fearful judgment-seat, when the Only-Begotten Son of God is come to judge living and dead; instead they ask that no one may hear the tearful voice that says, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:23). With a pure conscience and many good deeds they pass through this toilsome life, and sail over the angry sea with a favorable wind. He, who is their Father and their ruler, leads them in their prayers. After this, when they have risen up and finished those holy and continual prayers, the sun being risen, they depart each one to their work, gathering a large supply for the needy.”

Christ Was Preparing His Kingdom

¹²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 3.

While the angels sang “peace on earth to men of good will”, Christ announced another aspect to “peace on earth”, since not everyone is peaceable. The enemies of God may also talk about peace, but they may be guided by the demons, and use “peace” as a subterfuge for something else. To differentiate between these, the Lord prepared His people to understand this.

John Chrysostom commented¹²¹ on Christ’s words, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). The Apostles, prophets and angels all announced peace; why would Christ do the opposite? He was preparing His body, the Church, to contend against His enemies and to show clearly the difference between His enemies and the truth.

“Why then did Christ command the Apostles to pronounce peace on entering each house (Matthew 10:12-15)? Again, why did the angels say, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace’ (Luke 2:14)? And why did all the prophets publish peace¹²² for good tidings? Because this more than anything is peace, when the diseased is cut off, when the mutinous is removed. Thus it is possible for Heaven to be united to earth. The physician in this way preserves the rest of the body, when he amputates the incurable part; similarly the general, when he has brought to a separation those who agreed in rebellion. Thus it came to pass in the case of that famous tower (of Babel); for their evil peace at the Tower of Babel was ended by their good discord, and peace was made thereby (Genesis 11:7-8). Paul also divided those that were conspiring against him (Acts 23:6-7). In Naboth’s case that agreement by Jezebel was worse than any war (1 Kings 21). Concord is not in every case a good thing, since even robbers agree together.”

“The war is not then the effect of His purpose, but it has to do with the temperament of His enemies. His will was that all should agree in the word of godliness; but because they fell into dissension, war arises. Yet Christ did not say this; but what did He say? ‘I did not come to bring peace but a sword’ (Matthew 10:34); comforting them. This is as if He said, ‘don’t think that you are to blame for these things; it is I who order them so, because men are so disposed’. Therefore don’t be confounded, as though the events happened against expectation. To this end I have come, to send war among men; for this is my will. Therefore don’t be troubled, when the earth is at war, as though it were subject to some hostile endeavor. When the worst part is torn away, then after that Heaven is knit to the better part. These things Christ said, as strengthening them against the evil suspicion of the multitude.”

The Essence of God

The Essence of God – that is His Divinity – has never been seen by men and perhaps not even by angels. His Essence does not have a human body that sits stands or walks. At

¹²¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XXXV, 1.

¹²² See for example: Isaiah 9:7, 26:3, 52:7; Jeremiah 33:6; Ezekiel 37:26; Daniel 10:19; Haggai 2:9; Zechariah 9:10, among others.

Christmas we celebrate the occasion, called the fullness of time (), when the Essence of the Son of God took on human nature from the Virgin Mary

John Chrysostom pointed out¹²³ that the Essence of God has never been seen by men or by angels. His Essence does not sit, stand or walk; these things belong all to bodies. Since He was about to appear in flesh, He prepared His people beforehand as far as it was possible. Throughout Scripture, the heavenly powers never speak about His Essence; they only worship Him. Only the Son and the Holy Spirit can behold the Essence.

“John said, ‘No one has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18). This declares that all previous visions were instances of His condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. Had they seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms, since His Essence is simple, without form, parts or boundary lines. It does not sit, stand or walk; these things belong all to bodies. But how He Is, He only knows. This He has declared by Hosea, ‘I have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets’ (Hosea 12:10); that is, ‘I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was’. Since His Son was about to appear in flesh, He prepared them from old time to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It. But what God really is, not only have the prophets not seen, but not even angels or archangels. If you ask them, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, ‘Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men’ (Luke 2:14). If you desire to learn something from Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that ‘The whole earth is full of His glory!’ (Isaiah 6:3). If you inquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. ‘Praise Him’, said David, ‘all His hosts’ (Psalm 148:2). Only the Son Beholds Him, and the Holy Spirit! How can any created nature even see the Uncreated? If we are absolutely unable clearly to discern any incorporeal power whatever, even though created, as has been often proved in the case of angels, much less can we discern the Essence which is incorporeal and uncreated. Therefore Paul said, ‘Whom no man has seen or can see’ (1 Timothy 6:16). This special attribute belongs to the Father and the Son. To show that it does so, listen to Paul declaring this point, that Christ ‘is the Image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1:15). Now if He is the Image of the Invisible, He must be invisible Himself, for otherwise He would not be an ‘image’. Do not wonder that Paul said, ‘God was manifested in the flesh’ (1 Timothy 3:16); because the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to His Essence. Besides, Paul shows that He is invisible, not only to men, but also to the powers above; for after saying, ‘was manifested in the Flesh’, he adds, ‘was seen of angels’”.

Mary’s Humility

¹²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 1

All Jewish women wanted to be the mother of the Messiah, since this was a great honor and privilege. Yet the Virgin Mary's reaction to this honor was a noticeable humility as she pondered all these things in her heart ().

Ambrose of Milan pointed out¹²⁴ the Virgin Mary's humility after her conception of Christ and her great kindness toward her cousin Elizabeth. Later as miracles became commonplace, Mary was not moved by them but kept all these things in her heart.

“Holy Scripture points out how modest Mary was towards her neighbors. She became more humble when she knew herself to be chosen of God, and went hurriedly to her kinswoman Elizabeth in the hill country, not in order to gain belief by anything external, for she had believed the word of God. ‘Blessed’, Elizabeth said, ‘are you who didst believe’ (). Mary stayed with Elizabeth three months. Now in such an interval of time it is not that faith was being sought for, but kindness was being shown. This was after the child, John the Baptist, leaped in his mother's womb, greeting the mother of the Lord, and attaining to reason before birth.”

“In the many subsequent wonders, the barren bore a son, the virgin conceived, the dumb spoke, the wise men worshipped, Simeon waited, the stars gave notice. Mary, who was moved by the angel's entrance, was unmoved by the miracles. ‘Mary kept all these things in her heart’ (); though she was the mother of the Lord, yet she desired to learn the precepts of the Lord, and she who brought forth God, yet desired to know God.”

Parables From the Psalms About the Poor

A number of the Psalms from the 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th Hour Prayers give more details regarding the Lord's view of the poor. These can be summarized as follows:

Psalm 5: Prayers of the Hours

Psalm 67: The Blessings of God

Psalm 51: Repentance

Psalm 86: The Poor and Downtrodden

Psalm 72 The Poor in Spirit

See Appendix IV for a discussion of these Psalms.

¹²⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Virgins, II, ii, 12-13.

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

**Christmas Day
December 25, 2015**

Epistle: Galatians 4:1-7

The fullness of time refers to more than just the Incarnation. Prior to the Incarnation, the wisdom of God was hidden in a mystery. This mystery was so deep that had the rulers of this age (i.e. Satan and his legions) known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). The Messiah (i.e. the Anointed One) had been promised since the days of Adam (Genesis 3:14-15), but there was a dual imagery: the Messiah was to come as a conquering King (Psalm 2, 46; Isaiah 11), but also as a suffering servant (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22). The Incarnation was the first part of the unfolding of this mystery.

In order to first satisfy the penalty of the Law (which was death), the Messiah needed to be born under the Law to redeem those who were under the Law (vv.4-5). So the Almighty God came as a helpless child in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The entire Trinity was involved: the Holy Spirit came upon Mary; the power of the Highest (i.e. God the Father) overshadowed her; and therefore the Holy One that was born was called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Because of this, we rightly refer to Mary as the mother of God -- not in His divinity, but in His humanity.

Augustine of Hippo commented on this as follows: “There is no need to fear that God should seem to suffer constraint in the tiny body of a child; for God is not in size, but in power. That power, without changing for the worse, took to itself the rational soul, the human body and the whole man to change it for the better. In condescension, taking from it the name of humanity; in generosity, bestowing on it the name of divinity” (Letters, 137.8). He existed in the form of God and deemed it not robbery to be equal with God; but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave and becoming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7).

The Epistle reading for 3rd Hour prayers includes Paul’s instructions to the Galatians about the Law being our tutor. The illustration Paul used was that of the “*pedagogus*” or tutor who was frequently a superior slave, and who was entrusted with the moral supervision of the child. His office was quite distinct from the Schoolmaster (such as Gamaliel was to Paul; see Acts 5:34, 22:3), both in his inferior rank and in the instruction he gave. He enforced discipline, but did not convey an appreciable amount of higher learning.

Paul stated, “Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith that would afterward be revealed” (Galatians 3:23). John Chrysostom (4th Century) stated that the effect of this was a security “which like a fortress fenced them round with fear and a life conformable to itself, and so preserved them in the Faith.” “Now the tutor (*pedagogus*) is not opposed to the Schoolmaster, but cooperates with Him, ridding the youth of all vice, and having the leisure to prepare him for receiving instructions from his Schoolmaster. But when the youth’s habits are formed, then the tutor leaves him” (Commentary on Galatians, chapter 3).

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The Law, then, was our tutor to bring us to Christ (v.24) in the same way as the *pedagogus* function was to bring the child to the Schoolmaster, prepared to learn without all kinds of moral impediments. “But after faith has come (this is the Schoolmaster, the Holy Spirit in us!), we are no longer under a tutor or *pedagogus*” (v.25).

Chrysostom stated it like this: “The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, (the Law) continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary; for if it confines those who ought to go forward to grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day, from the Sun, it would not only cease to benefit, but would injure us; and so does the Law if it stands between us and greater benefits. Just so a tutor or *pedagogus* makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure” (Ibid.).

All this applies to the Nativity of Christ because He, too, was born under the Law (Galatians 4:4). To redeem us who were under the Law (v.5). He can sympathize with our weaknesses because He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

His purpose in doing so was that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:5). This was the second part of the unfolding of the mystery hidden in God from the beginning of the ages (Ephesians 3:9). As a result of the crucifixion and resurrection, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs with the Jews in one body and partakers of His promise (Ephesians 3:6). This was not known in previous ages as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5). In doing this God has joined man to Himself in one New Man, the Church (Ephesians 2:13-18, Colossians 3:10). He has given us the Holy Spirit as a down-payment¹²⁵ (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:14) and given this New Man the ability to trample on serpents and scorpions -- that is, Satan (Luke 10:19). Small wonder that Satan would not have crucified the Lord if he had known this would result.

One of the readings for 3rd Hour speaks of this also: Psalm 87. The subject of the Psalm is Mt. Zion and the City of God (vv.1-3). Not only has the Highest (i.e. God) founded Mt. Zion, but people from all over the earth were born there: Rahab and people from Babylon, Tyre, Philistia and Ethiopia (vv.4-6). This obviously refers to the second birth (John 3:3ff) and the Psalm was written in prophetic anticipation of the Fullness of Time. The Psalm concludes with “The dwelling of all within you (i.e. Zion) is as the dwelling of those that rejoice” (v.7), where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28).

Because we are sons of God and heirs of God through Christ (Galatians 4:6-7), we have access to the Father by the Spirit through Christ (Ephesians 2:18). By the Spirit of adoption we cry out, “Abba, Father” as the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16). This is how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: Abba, Father (Mark 14:36). This is how we can pray also as we exercise our role as a kingdom of priests to God the Father (Revelation 1:6). Thus, “the fullness of time” means more than just a good time to do something. It means that the fullness of God has come into time in the Incarnation.

¹²⁵ A pledge was something of value given to guarantee that the full payment was to come.

THE GENTILES SEEK THE KING OF THE JEWS

December 25, 2014

Revision A

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

This Gospel lesson for Christmas Day in the East is used universally in the West for Epiphany. The subject of the visit of the Magi is an extraordinary chapter in the history of the people of God. Coming from a culture that was one of the world centers of idolatry, they came to know God. They had very little information to go on, but they made the most of what they had. Coming a long way to worship a Baby indicates that they had a good measure of faith. From the gifts that they offered, we can understand that they recognized the Baby as God. Who were these extraordinary people that visited Christ as a Baby?

Who Were the Magi?

According to tradition, the Wise Men or Magi came from Persia. They were descendants of the Prophet Daniel and knew something about God from Daniel's writings. Daniel had predicted that there would be 483 years from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah came (i.e. 69 x 7 years; Daniel 9:25). Having access to the records in Babylon, they knew about what year to expect Messiah. Following Daniel, there was a Jewish presence in Persia from among the descendants of the captives taken by Nebuchadnezzar. This is illustrated by the activities of the Book of Esther. But the Magi were not Jewish and they didn't have any direct link to what was happening in Jerusalem.

Daniel had been promoted in Babylon in the 6th century BC to be chief of the soothsayer priests, conjurers, master astrologers and diviners (Daniel 5:11). This was a position of technical and priestly duties. But Daniel and his three co-workers also had political responsibilities with Daniel as prefect and Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in administration (Daniel 2:48-49, 5:29). It had become widely known that Daniel's God was a revealer of mysteries (Daniel 2:47) and that Daniel possessed "the wisdom of the gods" (Daniel 5:11-12, 6:1-3). And Daniel's God was even proclaimed to be above all others (Daniel 6:25-28).

The result of all this was a ruling class of Magi in Persia who ran the government, appointed the kings and performed the religious functions. Three of these Magi led the entourage over the 800-mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. According to tradition, their names were Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar; in later centuries, the relics of these three Magi were very highly honored both in Constantinople and later in Medieval Europe.

Origen stated¹²⁶ that the Chaldeans were a divinely-inspired nation from the very earliest times, from whom the delusive system of astrology has spread abroad among men. The Magi are in the same category, from whom the art of magic derived its name and has been transmitted to other nations, to the corruption and destruction of those who employ it.

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¹²⁶ Origen, Against Celsus, VI, 80.

Jerome stated¹²⁷ that among the Persians there are three kinds of Magi, the first of whom, those of greatest learning and eloquence, take no food except grains and vegetables.

Adding to the “troubling” of Jerusalem at the arrival of the Magi was the fact that fifty years prior to their arrival, the Persians had defeated the Romans (in the Battle of Carrhae). But Herod’s father (Antipater) had re-established Roman rule in Palestine, defeating the Persians. And now they’re back! Thus the three Magi coming to town with an entourage that included a small army commanded instant respect and very careful negotiations. All Jerusalem was troubled that a foreign army was in town (Matthew 2:3), especially a foreign army that had conquered Jerusalem within the lifetime of some of the residents of Jerusalem.

The Star That the Magi Followed

The Magi claimed to be following a star all the way from the East (Matthew 2:2). This was no ordinary star, and the Magi knew it! As the star moved, they moved; finally the star stopped over the house that Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living in (Matthew 2:9). Some people have tried to link this star with several planets; I’m not sure that’s possible (due to Matthew 2:9). Many of the Church Fathers suggested that the star was supernatural: a very luminous angel.

John of Damascus stated¹²⁸ that the sun, moon and stars can be used to predict weather patterns, but not to predict human affairs. If they did, freewill wouldn’t exist and God would be unjust for giving good things to some and afflicting others. Comets or other celestial events can be indicative of certain human events that occur. The “star” that the Magi followed moved in a very special way, first leading them East toward the Mediterranean, and then South toward Jerusalem.

“It often happens that comets arise. These are signs of the death of kings, and they are not any of the stars that were made in the beginning, but are formed at the same time by divine command and again dissolved. Not even that star which the Magi saw at the birth of our Lord, Who became flesh for our sake, is of the number of those that were made in the beginning. This is evidently the case because sometimes its course was from east to west, and sometimes from north to south; at one moment it was hidden, and at the next it was revealed, which is quite out of harmony with the order and nature of the stars.”

The Prophet Balaam (15th century BC), from Babylon, had prophesied concerning a star in connection with the coming Messiah (Numbers 24:17). That the Magi made the connection between the star they followed and 15-century-old prophecies indicates that their enlightenment was quite advanced.

¹²⁷ Jerome of Bethlehem, “Against Jovinianus”, Treatises, II, 14.

¹²⁸ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, II, 7.

A traditional source records¹²⁹ details of the words of the Magi to King Herod, “We have seen a star of great size shining among these stars, and obscuring their light, so that the stars did not appear; we thus knew that a king has been born to Israel, and we have come to worship him.”

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they must have known they were close. But the star had disappeared for a while (either intentionally or due to cloud cover); otherwise Herod’s soldiers could have followed the star also. John Chrysostom reached¹³⁰ this conclusion also. After leaving Herod’s palace, the Magi “rejoiced with exceedingly great joy when they saw the star” again (Matthew 2:10). This indicates that the star reappeared to them.

Leo the Great stated¹³¹ that the Magi are one of the fulfillments of God’s promise to Abraham of an innumerable succession. Abraham had been promised more descendants than the stars of heaven; to fulfill this, a star of heaven leads the way.

“The revelation of the unspeakable mercy of God came to pass when Herod held the royal power in Judea. The legitimate succession of Kings had failed and the power of the High-priests had been overthrown; alien-born Herod had gained the sovereignty. The rising of the true King had been attested by prophecy, ‘A prince shall not fail from Judah, nor a leader from his loins, until He comes for whom it is reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles’ (Genesis 49:10 LXX). An innumerable succession was once promised to the Patriarch Abraham to be begotten not by fleshly seed but by fertile faith. It was compared to the stars in multitude that as the father of all the Gentiles, he might hope not for an earthly but for a heavenly offspring. For the creating of the promised posterity, the heirs designated under the figure of the stars are awakened by the rising of a new star. A star more brilliant than the other stars arouses wise men that dwell in the Far East, and from the brightness of the wondrous light these men, skilled in observing such things, appreciate the importance of the sign. This was brought about in their hearts by Divine inspiration, in order that the mystery of so great a sight might not be hid from them; and what was an unusual appearance to their eyes, might not be obscure to their minds. They scrupulously set about their duty and provided themselves with such gifts that, in worshipping the One, they may at the same time show their belief in His threefold function. With gold they honor the Person of a King; with myrrh, that of Man; with incense, that of God.”

The Gifts That the Magi Brought

When the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, “and when they had come into the house, where Jesus was living, they saw the young Child, with Mary His mother. They fell down and worshiped Him” (Matthew 2:11). In contrast to this, when Jesus was born, His mother Mary wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger (Luke 2:7). According to

¹²⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Protevangelium of James”, 21, Apocrypha of the New Testament, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

¹³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 3.

¹³¹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Third Sermon on the Feast of Epiphany, XXXII, 2

tradition¹³², the place of Jesus' birth was a shepherd's cave, where animals are kept for the night. By the time of the arrival of the Magi, the family had moved into a house. According to Ephraim the Syrian¹³³, Jesus was a little over one year old when the Magi arrived.

The treasures the Magi gave to the baby Jesus were gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). It was common for kings to present gifts to other kings when they visited, where there was often some significance to the actual gifts presented. When the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon, she was very impressed by all he did and by his wisdom. Therefore she presented him with 120 talents (4 1/2 tons) of gold plus a great deal of spices and precious stones (1 Kings 10:1-10). The gold in the Magi's gifts thus represents earthly royalty visiting heavenly royalty.

Frankincense was a costly gum-resin from plants that grew in certain parts of Arabia. It was to be used only in connection with the things of God and was customarily beaten very finely (Exodus 30:36). For example, it was used:

- As part of the Holy Incense of the Holy Place (Exodus 30:34-36)
- As part of the Grain Offering (Leviticus 2:1-2, 14-16, 6:14-18)
- As a topping for the Loaves of Showbread (Leviticus 24:5-9)
- Never as part of a Jealousy Offering (Numbers 5:15)
- Never as part of personal use perfumes (Exodus 30:37-38)

For the Magi to give frankincense to Jesus indicated they knew something about His deity and holiness.

Myrrh was made from the gum of an Arabian tree (Balsamodendron Myrrha). It was used:

- As part of the Holy Anointing Oil (Exodus 30:22-33)
- In the beautification of royal women (Esther 2:12)
- As part of the fragrance of Messiah (Psalm 45:8)
- For embalming (John 19:39)

The Magi giving myrrh to Jesus indicated that they knew He was Messiah and that He planned to give His life for mankind.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹³⁴ the meaning of the gifts that the Magi brought. These gifts demonstrated to some degree what the Magi knew about Christ.

“Balaam prophesied regarding Emmanuel's star, ‘A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a man shall spring out of Israel’ (Numbers 24:17 LXX). But Matthew says that the Magi, coming from the east, exclaimed, ‘For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him’ (Matthew 2:2). Having been led by the

¹³² Roberts and Donaldson, “The Protevangelium of James”, 18-19, Apocrypha of the New Testament, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior”, 2-3, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

¹³³ Ephraim the Syrian, Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ, XIX, 2.

¹³⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III, ix, 2.

star into the house of Jacob to Emmanuel, they showed, by the gifts which they offered, who it was that was worshipped. They offered myrrh, because it was He who should die and be buried for the mortal human race; gold, because He was a King, 'of whose kingdom is no end' (Luke 1:33); and frankincense, because He was God, who also 'was made known in Judea' (Psalm 76:1), and was 'declared to those who sought Him not'" (Isaiah 65:1).

Ambrose of Milan concurred¹³⁵ with Irenaeus' interpretation of the meaning of the gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold represents royalty; frankincense represents divinity; and myrrh represents burial and implies resurrection.

"The Magi, when they worshipped the Lord, brought out gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). By gold they acknowledged the power of a king; they venerated God by the frankincense; and by myrrh they acknowledged the resurrection of the body. We too have this treasure if we look into ourselves; 'For we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Corinthians 4:7). We have gold which we can give, for God does not exact of you the precious gift of shining metal, but that gold which at the Day of Judgment the fire shall be unable to consume. Nor does He require precious gifts, but the good odor of faith, which the altars of our heart sends forth and the disposition of a faithful mind exhales."

Leo the Great summarized¹³⁶ the understanding of the three Magi, and the grace of God that gave them this understanding. Herod would have been happy if he had imitated the Magi's faith. As seen by their gifts, the Magi understood that Christ was both God and man, which was a huge revelation to the world.

"Christ was unwilling that the days of His birth should be concealed within the narrow limits of His mother's home; He desired to be recognized by all, seeing that He condescended to be born for all. To three wise men, therefore, in the region of the East, a star appeared of new splendor, which was brighter and fairer than the other stars. This star easily attracted the eyes and minds of those that looked on it; the star's appearance was not meaningless, since it had so unusual an appearance. He who gave the sign, gave to the beholders an understanding of it; he caused inquiry to be made about what He had caused understanding, and after inquiry, He offered Himself to be found."

"These three men followed the leading of the light above, and obeyed the indications of the guiding splendor. They were led to the recognition of the Truth by the brilliance of Grace, for they supposed that a king's birth was notified in a human sense, and that it must be sought in a royal city. He who had taken a slave's form, and had come not to judge, but to be judged, chose Bethlehem for His nativity, Jerusalem for His passion. Herod, hearing that a prince of the Jews was born, suspected a successor, and was in great terror. To plot the death of the Author of Salvation, he pledged himself to a false reverence. How happy he would have been if he had imitated the wise men's faith, and turned his deceit to a pious use. What blind wickedness came from foolish jealousy; to think he can

¹³⁵ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Widows, V, 30.

¹³⁶ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, First Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXI, 1-2.

overthrow the Divine plan by his frenzy! The Lord, who offers an eternal Kingdom, doesn't seek a temporal one.”

“The Wise men, therefore, fulfilled their desire, and came to the Child, the Lord Jesus Christ, the same star going before them. They adored the Word in flesh, the Wisdom in infancy, the Power in weakness, the Lord of majesty in the reality of man. By their gifts they made open acknowledgment of what they believed in their hearts, that they may show the mystery of their faith and understanding. The incense they offer to God, the myrrh to Man, the gold to the King, consciously paying honor to the Divine and human Nature in union.”

Hilary of Poitiers pointed out¹³⁷ the significance of the long journey (over 800 miles) of the Magi to Jerusalem and how the Magi fulfilled a prophecy of Solomon.

“Let us call to mind how the Magi of the East worshipped and paid tribute to the Lord; let us estimate the weariness of that long pilgrimage to Bethlehem of Judah. In the weary journey of the Magi princes we see the labors of Egypt to which the prophet alludes as follows.”

“When the Magi executed, in their material way, the duty ordained for them by the power of God, the whole heathen world was offering in their person the deepest reverence of which its worship was capable. These same Magi presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11) from the merchandise of the Ethiopians and Sabeans; a thing foretold by another prophet: ‘The Ethiopians shall fall down before His face, and His enemies shall lick the dust. The Kings of Tarshish¹³⁸ shall offer presents, the Kings of the Arabians¹³⁹ and Sabeans shall bring gifts, and there shall be given to Him of the gold¹⁴⁰ of Arabia?’ (Psalm 72:9-10, 15) The Magi and their offerings stand for the labor of Egypt and for the merchandise of Ethiopians and Sabeans; the adoring Magi represent the heathen world, and offer the choicest gifts of the Gentiles to the Lord Whom they adore.”

Tertullian noted¹⁴¹ that the gifts that the Magi brought had been predicted by the prophets, where gold refers to power over nations.

“Christ was to receive ‘the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria in the presence of the king of the Assyrians’ (Isaiah 8:4 LXX); this is a wondrous sign. Keep to the limit of (the infant’s) age, and the prophecy becomes intelligible by the relation of its fulfillment. Let those Eastern magi be believed, endowing the infancy of Christ as a king with gold and incense; and the infant has received ‘the power of Damascus’ without battle. Everyone knows that the ‘power’ of the East tends to abound in gold and incense, certainly the Scriptures

¹³⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IV, 38.

¹³⁸ Tarshish is a name that changes designation with time. The word “Tarshish” is a Phoenician word meaning smelting plant or refinery. When Solomon wrote this Psalm, he had fleets of ships that brought smelted raw materials to Israel, especially from Spain. These ships were called “Tarshish Ships”, and the source of the ore also came to be called “Tarshish”.

¹³⁹ Frankincense and myrrh come from plants that grow in Arabia.

¹⁴⁰ In the ancient world there was a large gold-mining complex at Ophir (1 Kings 9:28, 10:11, 22:48; 1 Chronicles 29:4; 2 Chronicles 8:18, 9:10), which is in Arabia.

¹⁴¹ Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, vii, 9.

regard 'gold' as constituting the 'power' also of all other nations. Scripture says, 'Judah also will fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together, gold and silver' (Zechariah 14:14). David likewise says, 'And to Him shall be given of the gold of Arabia' (Psalm 72:15 LXX); and again, 'The kings of the Arabians and Sabeans shall bring Him gifts' (Psalm 72:10). The East, on the one hand, generally held the magi to be kings; and Damascus, on the other hand, was formerly part of Arabia before it was transferred to Syro-Phoenicia on the division of Syria. The 'power' that Christ 'received' came when He received its distinguishing marks — that is, gold and incense. He received 'the spoils of Samaria' in receiving the magi themselves. On recognizing Him, and honoring Him with gifts, and adoring Him on bended knee as Lord and King, on the evidence of the guiding star, they became 'the spoils of Samaria', that is, of idolatry by believing on Christ. Scripture denoted idolatry by the name of 'Samaria', Samaria being ignominious for she had revolted from God under King Jeroboam."

Justin Martyr stated¹⁴² that the "power of Damascus" refers to a demon that dwelt there. The Magi, who had been serving that demon and others with their sorcery revolted against the demon and came to worship Christ.

"That expression of Isaiah 'He shall take the power of Damascus and spoils of Samaria,' foretold that the power of the evil demon that dwelt in Damascus should be overcome by Christ as soon as He was born. This is proven to have happened. The Magi, who were held in bondage for the commission of all evil deeds through the power of that demon, by coming to worship Christ, shows that they have revolted from that dominion which held them captive. This dominion the Scripture has shown us to reside in Damascus. Moreover, that sinful and unjust power is called in parable, Samaria. None of you can deny that Damascus was, and is, in the region of Arabia, although now it belongs to what is called Syro-Phoenicia."

How Much Did the Magi Know?

The Magi probably saw right through Herod's lies about wanting to worship the new King himself (Matthew 2:8). After all, Herod had no idea that this event had happened in his own backyard and he hadn't noticed the star. The Jewish leaders also were totally unaware of what had happened. The Jewish leaders knew from the Prophet Micah that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2-4). They even used this against Jesus, assuming that He was born in Nazareth since He grew up there (Acts 24:5, John 7:40-43). The Magi, on the other hand, had come 800 miles with a small army carrying treasures (Matthew 2:11) to present to the new King that prophecy spoke of as the turning point of human history.

One might excuse Herod for not knowing, but the Jewish leaders had no excuse at all. If they had missed the announcement by the shepherds, they certainly hadn't missed the proclamation of the Virgin Birth by Zachariah the chief priest and father of John the Baptist. Zachariah had spoken with the midwives who attended the birth of Christ to confirm that Mary

¹⁴² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 78.

was still a virgin following childbirth¹⁴³. At the time of Mary's "purification" 40 days after Jesus' birth, Zachariah was taking his turn as chief priest in the Temple. He had Mary stand in the place reserved for virgins where women with husbands had no right to stand; thus he proclaimed the virgin-birth. The Jewish elders were so bent out of shape by this that they immediately went to Herod to plot Zachariah's death¹⁴⁴. Zachariah was later murdered by Herod's soldiers in front of the Temple during the massacre of the Holy Innocents when he wouldn't disclose the hiding place of his son John. Thirty years later, the Lord laid this murder charge at the feet of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:36).

Ambrose of Milan stated¹⁴⁵ that the Magi believed in one God and that they brought their gifts according to what they understood.

"All nature testifies to the Unity of God, inasmuch as the universe is one. The Faith declares that there is one God, seeing that there is one belief in both the Old and the New Testament. Grace witnesses that there is one Spirit, all holy, because there is one Baptism, in the Name of the Trinity. The prophets proclaim, the Apostles hear, the voice of one God. In one God did the Magi believe, and they brought in adoration, gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Christ's cradle, confessing, by the gift of gold, His Royalty, and with the incense worshipping Him as God. For gold is the sign of kingdom, incense of God, myrrh of burial."

There were some things that the Magi didn't know. Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹⁴⁶ that they didn't know the details of the mystery of the Nativity.

When Herod secretly called the Magi for a private audience (Matthew 2:7), he asked what time the star appeared. Herod figured -- probably correctly -- that the star appeared when Jesus was born. Thus Herod found out how old Jesus was and used this information as part of his murderous plot on the Holy Innocents (Matthew 2:16-18). The Magi probably didn't trust anything Herod said; he had been in power for over 30 years and had a reputation for extreme cruelty. For example, Herod had a number of his own family executed on the merest suspicion; Augustus Caesar was said to have commented "it is better to be Herod's hog than to be his son". Just before he died¹⁴⁷, Herod rounded up and imprisoned a number of the Jewish leaders; then he gave orders that they all be executed the day he died so that no one would rejoice that Herod died. In short, Herod was a monster and Josephus recorded him dying an agonizingly painful death. When the Magi were divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod (Matthew 2:12), they didn't need a lot of persuasion.

When the Magi reached the house where Mary, Joseph, Jesus (and probably James also) lived, they fell down and worshipped Him (Matthew 2:11). Joseph was not wealthy; the offering they gave at the time of their purification was two turtledoves -- the default offering for those too poor to afford a lamb (Luke 2:22-24, Leviticus 12:1-8). Joseph, being a carpenter who built

¹⁴³ Holy Apostles Convent, *The Life of the Virgin Mary*, Holy Apostles Convent and Dormition Skete, 1989, pp. 176-179.

¹⁴⁴ Holy Apostles Convent, *The Life of the Virgin Mary*, Holy Apostles Convent and Dormition Skete, 1989, pp. 235-236.

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, I, iv, 31.

¹⁴⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XII, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, Books 15, 16, 17; *Wars of the Jews*, Book 1, chapters 22-33

houses, had had time to build something to take the place of the cave where Jesus was born. Jesus was about a year old when the Magi arrived.

John Chrysostom posed¹⁴⁸ a series of questions about the visit of the Magi and gave some very detailed answers and observations. These answers and observations are covered in the following subsections. Some of Chrysostom's questions are:

1. What did the Magi learn from the star? Astrology does not pretend to predict who is to be born, but what will happen to them. How did the Magi know that Jesus was born King of the Jews?
2. What induced them to visit a king in a far-away country? What did they hope to gain? They did not expect Him to reign over them in Persia.
3. If Jesus was a king born of a king, they would have paid more attention to the father than the child. Why did they focus exclusively on the Child?
4. Coming to a city under a king looking for another king, this was dangerous for them. Why did they risk this?
5. Why did they worship a baby in diapers (swaddling clothes)? They could not expect that He would even remember their visit when He was older, unless His mother reminded Him of their visit.
6. After worshipping Him, why would they leave immediately?
7. Coming to worship a new king during the reign of a cruel jealous king would expose the new king to being murdered. Why would they do this?

What Did the Magi Learn from the Star?

Astrology does not pretend to predict who is to be born, but what will happen to them. Chrysostom made¹⁴⁹ a number of points concerning the star:

1. The star that the Magi saw was supernatural in some way; it was some invisible power transformed into the appearance of a star.
2. The star outshone the sun in broad daylight. It moved first from East to West as the Magi moved from Persia toward the Mediterranean; then it moved from North to South as the Magi moved down the coast toward Jerusalem.
3. The star appeared, then hid itself, then appeared again (Matthew 2:9-10). On their way to Palestine, it led them; when they set foot in Jerusalem, it hid itself. After they left Herod, it appeared again. This is not the motion of a star but of some power highly endowed with reason. It did not have a course of its own, but it moved when they needed to move. In this way it was just like the pillar and the cloud that led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 14:19).
4. The star pointed out Christ: 'The star went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was' (Matthew 2:9). It is not possible for a star in the distant heavens to focus on such a confined space as a baby sleeping in a cradle.
5. Why did the star appear like this? To reprove the Jews for their willful ignorance! From the beginning, Christ opened the door to the Gentiles. Because the Jews wouldn't listen to the Prophets continually speaking of His advent, He caused the announcement to come first from barbarians speaking a Persian language. This

¹⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 3-4.

was similar to Jonah and the Ninevites (Jonah 1-4) and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13), who will testify against the unbelieving Jews at the Judgment.

6. Why did God do it this way? The Persians would not have listened to Hebrew prophets, to angels or to a voice from heaven. In His exceeding condescension, God called them by the things that are familiar to them¹⁵⁰. He showed a large and extraordinary star, so as to astonish them, both at the greatness and beauty of its appearance, and the manner of its course. He led them by the hand, and set them by the manger; after that it was no longer by a star, but by an angel that He spoke to them. Thus they became better men little by little.

What Induced the Magi to Visit a King in a Far-Away Country?

John Chrysostom asked¹⁵¹ “What did they hope to gain?” They did not expect Him to reign over them in Persia. Their courage in coming to Jerusalem and in speaking to one of the world’s most renowned tyrants is remarkable.

“Why did the Magi come to entertain the thought of visiting Christ, and who it was that stirred them up to this? It does not seem to me to be the work of the star only, but also of God, who moved their soul. This same kind of thing He did in the case of Cyrus, persuading him to let the Jews go (Ezra 1:1-11). He did not destroy their free will, since even when He called Paul from above by a voice; He displayed both His own grace and Paul’s obedience. Did He reveal this to all the wise men of the East? Everyone would not have believed, but these were better prepared than the rest. There were also countless nations that perished, but it was only to the Ninevites that the prophet Jonah was sent; and there were two thieves on the cross, but only one was saved (Luke 23:39-43). Notice the virtue of these men, not only by their coming, but also by their boldness of speech. That they may not seem to be impostors, they tell who showed them the way, and the length of their journey. On their arrival, they had boldness of speech; ‘We have come to worship Him’ (Matthew 2:2). They were not afraid of the people’s anger, or of the tyranny of the king. To me they seem to have been teachers of their countrymen at home. If they did not shrink from saying this here, much more would they speak boldly in their own country, as having received both the oracle from the angel, and the testimony from the Prophet Balaam.”

¹⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 3-4. Chrysostom stated that God did the same thing for the people of Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. The five cities of the Philistines, at the capture of the Ark (1 Samuel 5-6) were struck with a deadly plague, and found no deliverance. The Philistine men called their prophets, gathered an assembly, and sought to discover an escape from this divine scourge. Their prophets said that they should yoke two milk cows to the Ark, cows which had just given birth to their first calves, and let them go their way, with no man to guide them. This way it would be clear whether the plague was from God or whether it happened by chance that the disease came. ‘If they break the yoke in pieces for lack of practice, or if they turn to where their calves are mooring, it is just an accident that has happened. But if they go right on, and don’t depart from the way, and neither the mooring of their young nor their ignorance of the way have any effect on them, it is quite plain that it is the hand of God that has visited our cities’ (1 Samuel 6:9). The inhabitants of those cities obeyed the words of their prophets; God followed up the counsel of the prophets, showing condescension in that instance also, and counted it worthy of Himself to bring to effect the prediction of the prophets. As a result even His enemies bore witness to the power of God.

¹⁵¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 5.

Why Did Herod and the Jews Overlook the Benefits of Christ?

Chrysostom noted¹⁵² that Herod might be uneasy about the birth of a king, but why was Jerusalem troubled? The prophets had foretold this, and now it has even come to the attention of the Persians. The whole earth was going to come under His rule, according to the prophets, and Israel was to be the center of the earth. Yet they still opposed Him. This seems crazy!

“When Herod had heard, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him’ (Matthew 2:3). Herod naturally, as being king, was afraid both for himself and for his children; but why Jerusalem? Surely the prophets had foretold Christ to be a Savior, Benefactor, and a Deliverer from above. Why then should Jerusalem be troubled? From the same feeling which caused them to turn away from God during the Exodus, when He was pouring His benefits on them; they thought only of the pots of meat in Egypt, while enjoying the benefits of great freedom.”

“Notice the accuracy of the prophets! The prophet had foretold this from the beginning, ‘They shall be willing (to be righteous), *even* if they were burned with fire; for unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given’” (Isaiah 9:5-6 LXX).

“Although troubled, the Jews did not seek to see what has happened, neither did they follow the wise men, nor make any particular inquiry. In this way they were both contentious and careless beyond all men. They had reason to pride themselves that the king was born among them, and had attracted the Persians to Himself. They were on the verge of having everyone subject to them, as though their affairs had advanced towards improvement; from the outset Christ’s empire had become so glorious; nevertheless, even for this, they do not become better. They were just delivered from their captivity there; and it was natural for them to think, ‘If the Gentiles tremble before our king at His birth, much more when grown up will they fear and obey Him, and our nation will be more glorious than that of the barbarians’”.

“None of these things awakens them, so great was their dullness. Their envy showed itself instead. Whoever stands in battle against this attitude must be more fervent than fire. Therefore Christ said, ‘I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!’ (Luke 12:49). On this account the Spirit appears in fire” (Acts 2:3-4).

Leo the Great stated¹⁵³ that when the Magi asked where Christ should be born, the Jewish experts didn’t understand what they read. As a result, the fullness of the Gentiles entered into the family of the Patriarchs.

“As the Magi enter the chief city of the Kingdom of Judea, and in the royal city, they asked that He should be shown to them, Whom they had learned was begotten to be King. Herod is perturbed; he fears for his safety; he trembles for his power; he asks of the priests and teachers of the Law what the Scripture has predicted about the birth of Christ. He ascertains what had been prophesied; truth enlightens the wise men, unbelief blinds the experts. Carnal Israel doesn’t understand what it reads, doesn’t see what it points out; it refers to the pages, whose utterances it does not believe. Where is your boasting, O Jew; where is

¹⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 6-7.

¹⁵³ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Third Sermon on the Feast of Epiphany, XXXIII, 3.

your noble birth drawn from the stem of Abraham? Has not your circumcision become uncircumcision? (Romans 2:25) You, the greater serve the less (Genesis 25:23); by the reading of that covenant which you kept in the letter only, you became the slave of strangers, who enter into the lot of your heritage. Let the fullness of the Gentiles enter into the family of the patriarchs, and let the sons of promise receive in Abraham's seed the blessing which his sons, according to the flesh, renounce their claim to. In the three Magi let all people worship the Author of the universe; and let God be known not in Judea alone, but in the entire world, so that everywhere 'His Name' may be 'great in Israel' (Psalm 76:1). While the dignity of the chosen race is proven to be degenerate by the unbelief of its descendants, it is made common to all alike by our belief."

The Nativity Created an Immediate Conflict

John Chrysostom noted¹⁵⁴ the immediate conflict between the Infant Christ and the Jewish leaders. When the Magi arrived, the Jews were compelled against their will to read the writings in favor of the truth. All the events were done in order that the Jews might not say, "We don't know when or where He was born".

"Notice how all things are done to convict the Jews! As long as Christ was out of their sight, the envy had not yet gripped them, and they spoke with truth; but when they saw the glory that came from the miracles, a grudging spirit possessed them, and from then on, they betrayed the truth."

"However, the truth was exalted by all things, and its strength was gathered even by its enemies. In the case of the Magi, both the barbarians and the Jews learn something from one another, and teach one another, which is beyond expectation. The Jews heard from the wise men that a star had proclaimed Christ in the land of the Persians. The wise men, in their turn, were informed by the Jews that this Man, whom the star proclaimed, had been made known from a long time ago by the Hebrew prophets. The enemies of the truth are compelled even against their will to read the writings in favor of the truth, and to interpret the prophecy. Having spoken of Bethlehem, and how that out of it He shall come that should rule Israel, they proceed to add that 'His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting'" (Micah 5:2).

"One might ask, if He was to come from Bethlehem, why did He live in Nazareth after His birth; why obscure the prophecy? He did not obscure the prophecy, but He unfolded it all the more. While His mother had her residence in Nazareth, He was born in Bethlehem to show that the events were a Divine dispensation. He didn't return to Nazareth immediately after His birth, giving opportunity to those that might be inquisitive to examine all things accurately. There were many things to move them to such an inquiry, at least if they had been inclined to pay attention to them."

"Thus at the coming of the wise men the whole city was in a flutter, and together with the city the king. The prophet Micah was brought forward, and a court of high authority was convened; many other things were done there also. Anna, Simeon, Zachariah, the angels, and the shepherds; all these things were

¹⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VII, 1-2.

sufficient to the attentive to give hints for ascertaining what had taken place. If the wise men that came from Persia were not ignorant of the place, much more those, who lived there, might acquaint themselves with these things.”

“He revealed Himself from the beginning by many miracles, but when they would not see, He hid Himself for a while, to be again revealed from another more glorious beginning. It was no longer the wise men or the star, but the Father from above that proclaimed Him at the streams of Jordan (Matthew 3:17). But at the time of the birth, just so many things happened as were fitted quietly to mark out Him that was come. In order that the Jews might not say, ‘We don’t know when or where He was born’ (John 7:27), all these events in which the wise men were concerned were brought about by God’s providence; so that they would have no excuse.”

Herod’s Bizarre Behavior

John Chrysostom stated¹⁵⁵ that Herod’s actions went beyond just madness to extreme stupidity. The events he witnessed should have told him that he was dealing with God, but he still tried to fight it. Herod’s perception was distorted, both of the Jews and the Magi. His logic did not help him but even telegraphed his intentions to those he was trying to subvert.

“Herod’s attempt to slay Christ means that this was not just an act of madness; it also meant that he was an idiot. The events that he witnessed should have been enough to have restrained anyone from any such attempt. What occurred was not after the manner of man. A star called the wise men from heaven; barbarians make a long pilgrimage to worship a Baby in diapers lying in a manger; prophets from of old, proclaimed all this beforehand. These and all the rest were more than human events; but nevertheless, none of these things restrained him! Wickedness is like this, and is always attempting impossibilities. Note the utter folly of Herod’s logic. If on the one hand he believed the prophecy, and regarded it to be unchangeable, it was quite clear that he was attempting impossibilities. If on the other hand he disbelieved, and did not expect that those sayings would come to pass, there was no need to be in fear and alarm, or to form any plot to kill Christ. Either way his craftiness was superfluous.”

“In addition, did Herod think that the wise men would regard him greater than of the Child that was born, for the sake of which they had taken so long a journey? If they were so inflamed with longing for the Child before they even saw Him; after they had seen with their eyes, and been confirmed by the prophecy, how did Herod hope to persuade them to betray the young Child to him? Herod was thinking like an idiot!”

“Herod called the wise men privately and inquired of them (Matthew 2:7). He thought that the Jews would favor the Child; he never expected that they would fall into such madness as to be willing to give up to His enemies their Protector and Savior, and Him who came for the deliverance of their nation. Therefore he both called them privately, and sought the time not of the Child, but of the star. His slaying the children ‘from two years old and under’ (Matthew

¹⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VII, 3.

2:16) was done for the sake of a fuller security, adding to the time he ascertained, so that not one might escape.”

“Having therefore called them, he said, ‘Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also’” (Matthew 2:8).

“Do you see his extreme folly? If he said these things in sincerity, why does he need to inquire privately? But if he intends to plot against Him, how is it he does not perceive, from the fact of their being asked secretly, the wise men will be able to perceive his craftiness? A soul taken captive by wickedness becomes more utterly senseless than anything!”

Leo the Great stated¹⁵⁶ that the Magi could have understood what they needed to know from the prophecies of Balaam, but they found confirmation of their mission in the Scriptures brought forward by the Scribes. Unfortunately both Herod and the Scribes interpreted the Scriptures as referring to a kingdom of this world. Herod would have done well to follow his promises with sincerity instead of keeping his fondness for Jewish blindness.

“Divine condescension made Christ’s Nativity recognizable to the Gentiles; yet the wise men could have understood the wondrous sign from the ancient prophecies of Balaam, and by constant repetition spread abroad. ‘A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a man shall rise out of Israel, who shall rule¹⁵⁷ the nations’ (Numbers 24:17). The three men aroused by God through the shining of a strange star, followed the guidance of its twinkling light, thinking they will find the baby designated at Jerusalem in the royal city. Through the Scribes and teachers of the Jews they learned what the Holy Scripture had foretold of the birth of Christ. Confirmed by a twofold witness, they sought with still more eager faith Him whom both the brightness of the star and the sure word of prophecy revealed. The Divine oracle was proclaimed through the chief priests’ answers. ‘You, Bethlehem, house of Ephratha, are few in number among the thousands of Judah; yet out of you shall One come forth to Me, to be a ruler of Israel; and His goings forth were from the beginning, *even* from eternity’ (Micah 5:2 LXX). How easy and how natural it was that the leading men among the Hebrews should believe what they taught! But it appears that they had a materialistic understanding along with Herod; they reckoned Christ’s kingdom as on the same level as the powers of this world. They hoped for a temporal leader while Herod dreaded an earthly rival. The fear that racked Herod was wasted; in vain did he try to vent his rage on the infant he suspected. His realm cannot hold Christ; the Lord of the world was not satisfied with the narrow limits of Herod’s rule. He, whom Herod did not wish to reign in Judaea, reigns everywhere; and Herod would have ruled more happily himself, if he were to submit to Christ’s command. Why did he not do with sincerity what in treacherous falseness he promised? He should have come with the wise men, to worship the true King. Herod had a great fondness for Jewish blindness, and would not imitate the gentiles’ faith. He directed his stubborn heart to cruel schemes, though he was doomed neither to stop Him whom he feared nor to harm those whom he killed.”

¹⁵⁶ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXIV, 2.

¹⁵⁷ Leo’s quote differs a little from modern texts in the phrase “who shall rule the nations”.

The Star Gave the Magi Great Reverence for Christ

John Chrysostom stated¹⁵⁸ that the Magi had enormous reverence for Christ. This was so pronounced that they couldn't even conceive that Herod would plot against Him. The star that guided them didn't just lead them to the vicinity where Jesus was, but even pointed Him out. This star was no ordinary heavenly body; it actually paused in the heavens to illuminate Christ.

“The wise men did not perceive Herod's plot to kill Christ because of their great reverence for Him. They never could have expected that he could have gone on to such great wickedness, and that he would have attempted to form plots against a dispensation that was so marvelous. They departed suspecting none of these things, but from what they knew they anticipated the benefit for the rest of mankind.”

“The star, which they saw in the East, went before them' (Matthew 2:9). The star had been hidden, that having lost their guide, they might be obliged to make inquiry of the Jews, and so the matter might be made clear to everyone. After they made inquiries, and had Christ's enemies for informants, the star appeared to them again. Notice the excellent order; in the first place, after the star, the people of the Jews and the king received them, and these bring in the prophecy to explain what had appeared. Next, after the prophet, an angel again took them up and taught them all things. For a time they journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem by the guidance of the star, the star again journeying with them from Jerusalem. From this we might learn that this was not one of the ordinary stars, for there is not so much as one star that has this nature. It didn't just move, but 'went ahead of them', drawing and guiding them on in midday.”

“What was the need of this star any more', one may ask, 'when the place was ascertained?' In order that the Child also might be designated! There was nothing to make Him clear, since the house was not conspicuous, neither was His mother glorious or distinguished. There were also many other children in Bethlehem¹⁵⁹. The star was needed then to set the Magi at the place where Jesus was. Therefore the star reappeared on their coming out of Jerusalem, and doesn't disappear, before it has reached the manger. This was marvel on top of marvel; for the Magi worshipping, as the star going before them were strange things. This was enough to attract even people made out of stone. If the wise men had said they had heard prophets say these things, or if angels had spoken to them in private, people might have disbelieved. But when the vision of the star appeared in the heavens, even those that were exceedingly shameless had their mouths stopped.”

“Moreover, the star, when it stood over the young Child, stopped in its course again. This thing itself also was of a greater power than belongs to a star, now to hide itself, now to appear, and having appeared to stand still. From this the Magi also received an increase of faith. For this cause they rejoiced also, that

¹⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, VII, 4.

¹⁵⁹ According to tradition, Herod killed 14,000 children in the neighborhood of Bethlehem. John Chrysostom is asking how are the Magi going to know which one of these 14,000 is the Christ unless the star actually illuminated Him.

they had found what they were looking for; they had been proved to be messengers of truth; their great journey had been fruitful, so great a longing did they have for Christ. First the star came and stood over Christ's head, showing that what is born is Divine. Next standing there, the star leads them to worship Him; they were not simply barbarians, but the wiser sort among all people."

Ephraim the Syrian in his Christmas Hymns reveals¹⁶⁰ the perspective of the Magi in the form of a conversation between the Magi and the Virgin Mary about why they came and how they knew about Christ. The Magi knew that Christ was the King of kings and that there was nothing that Herod could do to stop Him. Mary was worried that the Jewish elders would try to kill Christ if they found out Who He was, and she asked the Magi to keep quiet about this. The Magi replied that angelic watchmen revealed these things to them and that the Child that was born is the Son of God, Who rules over everything. Mary accepted this and blessed the Magi on their return home. The following paragraphs start with the Magi speaking to the Virgin Mary, and then they alternate between the Magi and the Virgin Mary.

M: "The armies of your Son are above; they ride through the heavens clothed in flames, and one of them it was that came and summoned us; all our country was dismayed."

V: "The Child is a baby; how is it possible He should be King, unknown to the world? Those that are mighty and of renown, how can a baby be their ruler?"

M: "Your baby is aged, O Virgin, the Ancient of Days and exalted above all; Adam beside Him is a baby, in Him all created things are made new."

V: "It is fitting that you, the Magi, should state and defend the mystery, and explain who it is that reveals to you the mystery of my Son, revealing to you in Persia that He is a King."

M: "It is likewise fitting for you, Mary, to accept this; unless the truth had led us we would not have wandered here from the ends of the earth, nor come for the sake of your Son."

V: "The entire mystery as it was worked among you there in your country, reveal you to me now as friends. Who was He that called you to come to me?"

M: "A mighty Star appeared to us that was glorious exceedingly above the stars, and our land by its fire was kindled; that this King had appeared it brought word to us."

V: "I ask you not to speak of these things in our land lest they rage, and the kings of the earth join together against the Child in their envy."

M: "Be not dismayed, O Virgin! Your Son shall bring to nothing all diadems, and set them under his heel; they shall not subdue Him Whom they envy."

V: "Because of Herod I am afraid, that unclean wolf, lest he attack me, and draw his sword and with it cut off the sweet cluster before it is ripe."

M: "Do not fear because of Herod; for in the hands of your Son is his throne placed. As soon as He shall reign it shall be laid low, and his diadem shall fall on the earth beneath."

¹⁶⁰ Ephraim the Syrian, Fifteen Hymns for the Feast of Epiphany, XV, 25-52.

V: "A river of blood is the history of Jerusalem, wherein the excellent ones are murdered; and if Jerusalem perceives Him she will attack Him. In mystery you speak, don't proclaim it abroad."

M: "All torrents, and likewise swords, by the hands of your Son shall be appeased; and the sword of Jerusalem shall be blunted, and shall not desire at all to kill."

V: "The scribes of the priests of Jerusalem pour out blood and don't pay attention. They will arouse murderous fighting against me and against the Child; O Magi, keep quiet about this!"

M: "The scribes and the priests will be unable to hurt your Son in their envy; for by Him their priesthood shall be dissolved, and their festivals brought to nothing."

V: "A Watchman revealed to me, when I received conception of the Baby, that my Son is a King; that His diadem is from on high and is not dissolved, he declared to me just as you do."

M: "The Watchman, therefore, of whom you have spoken is he who came as a star, and was shown to us and brought us good news that He is great and glorious above the stars."

V: "That Angel declared to me in his good news, when he appeared to me, that there shall be no end to His kingdom and the mystery shall not be revealed."

M: "The Star also declared to us that your Son is He that shall keep the diadem. His aspect was something altered, and the Angel didn't make that known to us."

V: "When the Watchman showed himself to me, he called Him his Lord before He was conceived, as the Son of the Highest announced Him to me; but where His Father is he didn't reveal that to me."

M: "Before us he proclaimed in the form of a star that the Lord of the Highest is He Who is born; and over the stars of light your Son is ruler; unless He commands they do not move. In our presence the Star taught us that His Birth is exalted above the world, and your Son is above all beings; He is Son of God according to your saying."

V: "The world on high and the world below bear witness to Him; that is, all the Watchmen and the stars say that He is Son of God and Lord. Carry His fame to your country!"

M: "The entire world on high, in one star, has stirred up Persia and she has learned the truth, that your Son is Son of God, and to Him shall all peoples be subject. The peace of your Son shall carry us in tranquility to our country, as it has led us here; and when His power shall have grasped the whole world, may He visit our country and bless it!"

V: "May Persia rejoice in your good news! May Assyria exult in your coming! And when my Son's Kingdom rises, may He plant His standard in your country!"

The Devotion of the Magi

John Chrysostom was impressed¹⁶¹ with the faith and devotion of the Magi to Christ, and their gifts were given as to God and not to man. They were not offended or put off by Jesus' humble life. Both the Magi and Christ Himself became fugitives because of this. But all this was done for a very far-reaching reason; it was done to emphasize the Incarnation; Christ was really human and had to run for His life.

“What was it that induced the Magi to worship Christ? The Virgin Mary was not conspicuous, nor was the house distinguished; the other things that they saw were not apt to amaze or attract them. Yet they not only worship, but also ‘opened their treasures’ (Matthew 2:11), and ‘offered gifts’. The gifts were not as to a man, but as to God; the frankincense and the myrrh were a symbol of this. What then was their inducement? Both the star and the illumination of God in their mind, guiding them by little and little to the more perfect knowledge! None of the outward circumstances was that great; it was a manger, a shed, and a poor mother. They didn’t approach Christ as mere man, but as a God and Benefactor. They were not offended by anything they saw outwardly, but even worshipped and brought gifts. The Magi came close to the self-devotion of the Church, for it was knowledge, obedience and love that they offered to Him. ‘And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed to their own country another way’” (Matthew 2:11).

“Notice their faith; they were not offended, but are docile and considerate; they are not troubled; they don’t reason with themselves, saying, ‘If this Child is great, and has any strength, why is there need of flight, and a clandestine retreat? How can it be, that when we have come openly and boldly, and have stood against so great a people, and against a king’s madness, the angel sends us out of the city as runaways and fugitives?’ None of these things did they say or think. This most especially belongs to faith, not to seek an account of what is commanded, but merely to obey the commandments laid upon us.”

“When the Magi had departed, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and flee into Egypt” (Matthew 2:13).

“There is something here worth inquiring into, both touching the Magi, and touching the Child. If they were not troubled, but received everything with faith, it is worthy of examination why the Magi and the young Child are not preserved there in Bethlehem, but they go as fugitives into Persia, and He with His mother into Egypt. What is the alternative? Should He have fallen into the hands of Herod, and yet not have been killed? If this happened, He would not have been thought to have taken on flesh; the greatness of the Incarnation would not have been believed.”

“Christ sent the Magi off quickly, both commissioning them as teachers to the land of the Persians, and at the same time intercepting the madness of the king, that he might learn that he was attempting impossible things, and might quench his wrath. By His power He didn’t only subdue His enemies, but also deceived them with ease. Thus He deceived the Egyptians at the Exodus, having power to transfer their wealth openly into the hands of the Hebrews (Exodus 12:36); He did this secretly and with craft; and this made Him an object of terror

¹⁶¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VIII, 1-2.

to His enemies. The people of Ekron, when they had taken the Ark of the Covenant, and were struck with the plague, advised their countrymen not to fight, saying, ‘Don’t harden your hearts, as Pharaoh did when He mocked them, and they let His people go’ (1 Samuel 6:6 LXX). The same thing happened on this occasion also; something sufficient to astonish the tyrant. Consider what it was natural for Herod to feel, and how his breath would be stopped, deceived as he was by the wise men, and thus laughed to scorn. What if Herod did not become better? It is not Christ’s fault, who marvelously ordered all this, but it is the excess of Herod’s madness, not yielding even to those things which should have deterred him from his wickedness. Going on still further, Herod received a sharper punishment for so great a foolishness.”

John Chrysostom stated¹⁶² that the result of the visit of the Magi was the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles, especially those that were really into idolatry. The lesson for us is that we can expect hostility and suffering as we try to be godly.

“Why was the young Child sent to Egypt? In the first place, Matthew mentioned the cause, that it might be fulfilled, ‘Out of Egypt have I called my Son’ (Matthew 2:15). At the same time the beginning of hope was proclaimed to the world. That is, since Babylon and Egypt, most in the whole earth, were burned up with the flame of ungodliness, Christ signified from the beginning that He means to correct and amend this. He induced men to expect His bounties throughout the whole world; therefore He sent the wise men to Babylon, and He Himself visited Egypt with His mother.”

“There is another lesson which we are taught also, namely to look for temptations and plots. This was the case for Christ even from His swaddling clothes! Thus you see at His birth, first a tyrant raging, then Him taking flight, and departure beyond the border; and for no crime His mother is exiled into the land of the barbarians. When you hear these things, you should not be troubled or say, ‘What can this be? I ought to be crowned and celebrated, and be glorious and illustrious for fulfilling the Lord’s commandment’. This supposes that you are thought worthy to serve in some spiritual matter, and then see yourself suffering incurable ills, and enduring countless dangers. Having this as an example, you might bear all things nobly, knowing that this especially is the order of all things spiritual, to have temptations everywhere of the same kind as them. This is the case not only with regard to the mother of the young Child, but also of the Magi; since they retired secretly as fugitives. She, who had never stepped out of her house, is commanded to undergo so long a journey of affliction, on account of this wonderful birth, and her spiritual labor. Observe a wonder again! Palestine plots and Egypt receives and preserves Him that is the object of the plots.”

John Chrysostom commented¹⁶³ on this pointing out the contrast between the Magi and the Jewish leaders:

¹⁶² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VIII, 3.

¹⁶³ John Chrysostom, “Sermon for the Epiphany”, cited by Holy Apostles Covent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, p. 202.

“The Magi sought the Lord Christ, born King of the Jews, among those from whom they knew that Balaam, a prophet from the Gentiles, had prophesied that He would come. The faith of the Magi is the condemnation of the Jews. The Magi believed on the authority of their one soothsayer Balaam and the Prophet Daniel; but the Jews, from the testimony of many prophets, refused to believe. Whereas the Magi acknowledged that the coming of Christ would terminate their profane knowledge and magical acts, the Jews would not accept the Lawgiver’s doing away with their sacrifices and refused to accept the mysteries of the divine dispensation. The Magi confessed a stranger; the Jews rejected their own”.

The Perspective of the Visit of the Magi

The visit of the Magi to the Infant Christ is an event unique in human history. Coming from a culture that was one of the world centers of idolatry, they came to know God. They had very little information to go on, but they made the most of what they had. Coming a long way to worship a one-year old Baby indicates that they had a good measure of faith. Since they recognized the Baby as God, they were not concerned about a possible conflict between the Baby and other earthly kings for two reasons. First, this Baby, Who was a king, came for the benefit of all mankind, and everyone should have been able to recognize this. Second, this Baby was God, and as God He was perfectly capable of defending Himself in any conflict.

Hilary of Poitiers gave¹⁶⁴ a perspective of the visit of the Magi to the Infant Christ. Not only did the angels glorify God to the shepherds, but the royal Magi, after a life devoted to sorcery and vanity, bow their knees before a Baby wrapped in smelly swaddling clothes! In this case, the outward appearance is much different than the inward reality!

“The light of a new star shines for the Magi; a heavenly sign escorts the Lord of heaven. An Angel brings to the shepherds the news that Christ the Lord is born. A multitude of the heavenly host flock together to sing the praise of that childbirth; the rejoicing of the Divine Company proclaims the fulfillment of the mighty work. Glory to God in heaven, and peace on earth to men of good will is announced. The Magi come and worship Him wrapped in swaddling clothes; after a life devoted to mystic rites of vain philosophy they bow the knee before a Baby in His cradle. Thus the Magi stoop to reverence the infirmities of Infancy; its cries are greeted by the heavenly joy of angels. The Spirit, Who inspired the prophet, the heralding Angel, the light of the new star, all gather around Him. In such way it was that the Holy Spirit’s descent and the overshadowing power of the Most High brought Him to His birth. The inward reality is much different than the outward appearance; the eye sees one thing, the soul another. A virgin bears; her child is of God. An Infant wails; angels are heard in praise. There are common swaddling clothes; God is being worshipped. The glory of His Majesty is not forfeited when He assumes the lowliness of flesh.”

¹⁶⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, II, 27.

Leo the Great in his Epiphany¹⁶⁵ Sermons, noted¹⁶⁶ that the Magi just could not neglect the unexpected splendor of this new star. While Israel was still ignorant, the Magi knew of the birth of Christ from 800 miles away through the preaching of the stars of heaven.

“It was a wondrous loving provision of the Divine plan that a nation, which dwelt in the far-off country of the East and was adept in the art of reading the stars, should receive the sign of the birth of the Infant, who was to reign over all Israel. The unexpected splendor of a bright new star appeared to the wise men and filled their mind with such wonder, as they gazed upon its brilliance, that they could not think they ought to neglect what was announced to them with such distinctness. As the events played out, the grace of God was the cause of this wondrous thing. While the whole of Bethlehem was still unaware of Christ’s birth, He brought it to the knowledge of the Gentiles who would believe, and declared that which human words could not yet explain, through the preaching of the heavens.”

Leo the Great also stated¹⁶⁷ that the Magi arrived in Judea on the same day that Jesus rose from the dead 33 years later.

Leo the Great further noted¹⁶⁸ that the Magi were taught by the Holy Spirit and not by earthly wisdom. They knew before they left home that they were seeking God Incarnate, as was shown by their gifts. The witness of the Magi is a strong testimony for us, just like the testimony of the Apostle Thomas, as to Who the Infant Christ really is.

“Led into Bethlehem by obeying the guidance of the star, the wise men ‘rejoiced with very great joy’, and ‘entering the house, found the child with Mary, His mother; and falling down they worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh’ (Matthew 2:10-11). What wondrous faith of perfect knowledge, which was taught to them not by earthly wisdom, but by the instruction of the Holy Spirit! How did it happen that these men, who had left their country without having seen Jesus, and had not noticed anything in His looks to enforce such systematic adoration, observed this method in offering their gifts? There must have been something besides the appearance of the star, which attracted their bodily eyes; the rays of truth taught their hearts that before they started on their journey. They must have understood that He was signified to Whom was owed in gold royal honor, in incense Divine adoration, in myrrh the acknowledgment of mortality. Such an understanding no doubt, as far as the enlightenment of their faith went, might have been sufficient to prevent their using their bodily eyes to inquire into that which they had beheld with their mind’s fullest gaze. Their wise diligence, persevering till they found the child, did good service for future peoples and for the men of our own time. Just as it profited us all that the Apostle Thomas, after the Lord’s resurrection,

¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that already by the mid 5th century, the Church Lectionary has differences between East and West. In the East, the Reading for the visit of the Magi is read on Christmas Day, and the Flight into Egypt is read on the Sunday after Christmas. In Leo’s day, he is dealing with the visit of the Magi on Epiphany just like the Western Church today.

¹⁶⁶ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXIV, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Leo the Great, Letter to the Bishops of Sicily, XVI, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXIV, 3.

handled the traces of the wounds in His flesh, so it was advantageous to us that His infancy should be attested by the visit of the wise men. They saw and adored the Child, small in size, powerless to help others, incapable of speech, and no different than other children. The testimonies were trustworthy which later spoke of Him as having the majesty of invisible Godhead; so it ought to be impossible to doubt that ‘the Word became flesh’ (John 1:14), and the eternal essence of the Son of God took man’s true nature.”

Leo the Great further stated¹⁶⁹ that we should remember and celebrate the journey of the Magi, since the same star guides us. People today are also called out of darkness just like the Magi, and we can offer to God the same kind of gifts that the Magi did.

“The day on which Christ first appeared to the Gentiles must be venerated; those joys must be entertained in our hearts, which existed in the hearts of the three Magi. They were aroused by the sign of a new star, which they believed to have been promised; they fell down in the presence of the King of heaven and earth. The mighty work, which that day revealed, has not passed away; the report of the thing has come down to us for faith to receive and celebrate. By the often-repeated gift of God, our times daily enjoy the fruit of what the first age possessed. The three men, who had neither been taught by the prophets’ predictions nor instructed by the testimony of the Law, came to acknowledge God from the furthest parts of the East. Yet we see this same thing more clearly and abundantly carried on now in the enlightenment of all those who are called. The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, ‘The Lord shall reveal his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation that *comes* from our God’ (Isaiah 52:10 LXX). And again, ‘and those to whom no report was brought concerning him, shall see; and those who have not heard, shall consider’ (Isaiah 52:15 LXX). When we see men devoted to worldly wisdom and far from belief in Jesus Christ brought out of the depth of their error and called to an acknowledgment of the true Light, it is undoubtedly the brightness of the Divine grace that is at work. The new light that illumines the darkness of their hearts comes from the rays of the same star. It should both move with wonder, and going before, lead to the adoration of God the minds which it visited with its splendor. Their threefold kind of gift is also offered by all who come to Christ in faith; it is the same offering repeated in the hearts of true believers. He that acknowledges Christ the King of the universe brings gold from the treasure of his heart. He that believes the Only-begotten of God to have united man’s true nature to Himself, offers myrrh. He that confesses Him in no wise inferior to the Father’s majesty worships Him in a manner with incense.”

Ephraim the Syrian in his Christmas Hymns pointed out¹⁷⁰ some of the contrasts of Christmas. The Magi, who were accustomed to worshipping fire, came to worship the Fire. The gold, frankincense and myrrh, which the Magi had used to serve demons, now worshipped Christ.

¹⁶⁹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sixth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXVI, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Ephraim the Syrian, Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ, XV, 13-14, 17, 27-29.

“The Magi used to worship fire; they quit worshipping fire and worshipped its Lord; they exchanged fire for the Fire. In place of the senseless fire that eats up its own body as fuel, the Magi adored the Fire Who gave His Body to be eaten. The live coal drew near and sanctified the lips that were unclean.”

“The Evil One knew how to harm us; and by lights he blinded us. By possessions he hurt us, through gold he made us poor; by the engraver’s carved images, he made us a heart of stone.”

“The frankincense, which had served demons, worshipped Your Birth. It had sorrowed before in its smoke; it rejoiced when it saw its Lord. Instead of being the incense of delusion, it was an oblation before God!”

“The myrrh worshipped You for itself, and for its sister ointments. The hands that bore its ointment, had anointed abominable carved images. To You the perfume was sweet, from the anointing that Mary anointed You with.”

“The gold, that had been worshipped, now worshipped You, when the Magi offered it. That which had been worshipped in cast images, gave worship to You. With its worshippers it worshipped You; it confessed that You are He that is to be worshipped.”

Ephraim described¹⁷¹ many contrasts that presented themselves at Christ’s Nativity. As man He is a helpless Baby; as God He is controlling all life on earth. As He nursed from Mary as a man, He supplied Mary with milk as God. Even prior to birth for nine months in the womb, as God He fashioned everyone else in the womb.

“When Jesus sucked milk from Mary, He was supplying everyone else with Life. While He was lying in His Mother’s lap, all creatures were lying in His bosom. He was silent as a Baby, and yet He was making His creatures obey all His commands. Without the First-born no man can approach God’s Essence, to which He is equal. The thirty years He was on the earth, He was ordering all creatures; He was receiving all the offerings of praise from those above and those below. He was everywhere in the depths and in the highest! He was everywhere with all things and everywhere with each creature. While His body was forming in the womb, His power was fashioning all members! While the Conception of the Son was fashioning in the womb, He Himself was fashioning other babies in the womb. His body was weak in the womb, but His power was not weak in the womb! His body was feeble by the Cross, but His strength was not feeble by the Cross. On the Cross He raised the dead; His Body didn’t raise them, His Will did. Just as when He was dwelling in the womb, His hidden Will was visiting everyone! Notice how, when He was hanging on the Cross, His Power was making all creatures move! He darkened the sun and made the earth quake; He tore open the graves and brought out the dead! Thus He was entirely in the womb in His Body, while He was wholly in everything! While on the Cross, He raised the dead; so while a Baby, He was fashioning babies. While He was slain, He opened the graves; while He was in the womb, He opened wombs. Listen brethren, concerning the Son of the Secret One that was revealed in His Body, while His Power was concealed! The Power of the Son is a free Power; the womb

¹⁷¹ Ephraim the Syrian, Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ, III.

did not bind it up, as it did the Body! While His Power was dwelling in the womb, He was fashioning infants in the womb! His Power enclosed her that enclosed Him. If He drew in His Power, all things would fall; His Power upholds all things; while He was in the womb, He didn't let go His hold on everything. In His Person He shaped an Image in the womb, and was shaping in all wombs all personalities. While He was increasing in stature among the poor, from an abundant treasury He was nourishing everyone! While Mary was anointing Him, with His dew and His rain He was anointing everyone! The Magi brought myrrh and gold, while in Him was hidden a treasure of riches. The myrrh and spices which He had created, did the Magi bring Him of His own. It was by Power from Him that Mary was able to bear in Her bosom Him that bears up all things! It was from the great storehouse of all creatures, that Mary gave Him everything! She gave Him milk from Himself that prepared it, she gave Him food from Himself that made it! He gave milk to Mary as God; He sucked it from her, as the Son of Man. Her hands carried Him in that He had emptied Himself of His strength; and her arm embraced Him, in that He had made Himself small. Who has measured the measure of His Majesty? Mary wove clothing for Him and clothed Him because He had put aside His glory.”

APPENDIX II

The Eternal Son in the Psalms

Psalm 22: He will be Crucified

Psalm 22 just quoted by Hebrews describes in great prophetic detail the agony of Christ on the Cross satisfying the penalty against us:

- A reproach of men and a scorn of the people (v.6, Matthew 27:28-31)
- Mocked, shaking head at Him (v.7, Matthew 27:39)
- Challenged to let God deliver Him (come down from the Cross (v.8, Matthew 27:41-43)
- Poured out, bones loosened, heart in midst of belly like melting wax. This is what it feels like as one is slowly strangled by His own collarbone (v.14)
- Pierced hands and feet (v.16, John 20:25)
- Parted garments; cast lots for raiment (v.18, Matthew 27:35).

Psalm 45: His Relationship with His Queen

Psalm 45 refers to Christ as “O Mighty One” and calls Him more beautiful than the sons of men, having Grace on His lips (vv. 2,3). The nations will fall under Him and His throne is forever and ever (vv.5,6). His scepter is righteousness and God the Father has anointed Him with the oil of gladness beyond His fellows (vv.6,7; Hebrews 1:8). Yet His garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia (v.8). This is not the formulation of the holy incense (Exodus 30:34), but it is reminiscent of Messiah and His bride (Song of Solomon 4:14) and of the spices used for His burial (John 19:39).

At His Right Hand stood the queen in spectacular clothing (v.9). She was told to listen carefully: forget your people and your father’s house. Because the King has desired her beauty, for He is her Lord (vv.10,11). This has generally been applied to the Virgin Mary who left her father’s house when she was three years old, according to the vow of her parents, to live in the Temple. In addition to the queen, other virgins who are her companions will be brought to the King in the King’s Temple. The children born to these virgins shall be made princes over all the earth (vv.14-16). This refers to the monastic tradition that grew up after the Ascension and the spiritual giants that came out of that tradition.

Psalm 46: Our Refuge and Strength

Psalm 46 begins with the words “God is our refuge and strength” (v.1). We do not need to fear when the earth is troubled, when mountains move, when waters roar, when the gentiles rage, or when kingdoms totter (vv.2,3,6). The City of God containing His Tabernacle and the river of life (Revelation 22:1) shall not be moved (vv.4,5). He will put an end to war and will be exalted in the earth (vv.9-11).

Psalm 132: His Zeal for the Lord’s House

Psalm 132, one of the songs of ascents that were sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, begins by remembering David and how he swore that he would not rest until he found a Tabernacle for the Lord (vv.1-5). Just as zeal for the Lord's house consumed David (Psalm 69:9), so it did Jesus (John 2:17) in throwing out the money-changers twice. The first time occurred around Passover, 27 AD (John 2:14-17), while the second time occurred around Passover, 30 AD just before the Crucifixion (Matthew 21:12-15, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-46).

The Psalm continues "Arise, O Lord, into Your rest; You and the Ark of Your holiness" (v.8). This has been often interpreted as a reference to the Lord dwelling in the Virgin Mary's womb as in a tabernacle for nine months. For more details on this, see the Epistle lesson for the Feast Day of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple.

His priests shall clothe themselves with righteousness (v.9) and their Lord will clothe them with salvation (v.16). His enemies, on the other hand, He will clothe with shame (v.18). These priests are us, the Church, who are called living stones, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), and a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6, 20:6) and the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). As such we have become the Zion that the Lord has chosen for a habitation for Himself (Psalm 132:13).

Psalm 91: His Relationship with His Father

Psalm 91 speaks of the Father's relationship with His Son in His Son's humanity. Satan quoted from vv.11-12 during his temptation of Christ in the wilderness: "He shall give His angels charge concerning You to keep You in all Your ways. They shall bear You up on their hands, lest You dash Your foot against a stone" (Matthew 4:6, Luke 4:10-11).

As part of this relationship, the Son

- Dwells in the help of the Highest
- Sojourns under the shelter of the God of Heaven
- He is His helper and refuge
- He shall deliver Him from the snare of the hunter, (e.g. The Scribes and Pharisees)
- His Truth shall cover Him with a shield
- He shall not be afraid of
 - Terror by night (e.g. The arrest in the Garden)
 - The evil thing that walks in darkness
 - Calamity (calming the wind and the waves)
 - Evil spirits at noonday
 - Thousands being killed nearby (e.g. The innocent children of Bethlehem)
- He shall tread on the asp, the basilisk, the young lion and the dragon

The last item needs some explanation. The word "dragon" is the Hebrew word *tannin* and the Greek (Septuagint) word *drakon*. It is an ocean-going creature (Isaiah 27:1, 51:9-10, Ezekiel 32:2, Genesis 1:21, Psalm 148:7) that is very large and awesomely fearsome (Job 41). Leviathan is called a dragon and a twisted or winding serpent (Isaiah 27:1) and this imagery is used of Satan as a *drakon* (Revelation 12:7-9). The "basilisk" is the Greek word *basiliskos*, and the

Hebrew word used for this is *shachal* meaning lion. A basilisk was a legendary reptile who could kill by the breath of its mouth. The Greek and Hebrew obviously differ in identifying this creature.

To tread on all these creatures requires Divine strength, and Jesus used this same imagery when He sent the Seventy out two by two. He said they “had been given the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19), where their mission was not one of fighting flesh and blood, (Ephesians 6:12). The Lord summarized their mission by saying that He “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Much of this same imagery of the Father’s relationship with the Son and the Son giving authority to the Twelve is also the subject of John 17. See the Gospel lesson for the Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (the 7th Sunday of Pascha) for more details.

Psalm 110: His Place at the Right Hand of Power

Psalm 110 is another Messianic Psalm that addresses the Father’s relationship to the Son. David began, “The Lord said to My Lord, ‘sit at My Right Hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool’ “ (Psalm 110:1). This Psalm is quoted repeatedly in the New Testament. In one of His final confrontations with the Pharisees on Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus posed a question to them: “Whose Son is the Messiah?” They replied “the son of David” (Matthew 22:42). Jesus then quoted Psalm 110:1 and asked “if David calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?” (v.45). The answer was the Incarnation, but they wouldn’t accept that; to do so they would have to acknowledge Christ as God as He said He was (John 10:33, 8:58).

This Psalm is also quoted by Hebrews in a comparison of the Son of God with angels (Hebrews 1:13). While angels may be awesome and majestic (Daniel 10:4-8), they were created by the Son of God (Hebrews 1:7, Psalm 104:4) and “they are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). For more details on this, see the Epistle lesson for the Feast Day of the Archangels, November 8. At the Birth of the Son of God in the flesh, the angels sang from the heavens announcing the Gospel (Luke 2:8-15).

Psalm 110 also mentions the priestly role of Christ that began with the Incarnation: “The Lord (i.e. the Father) has sworn and will not change His mind; You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (v.4). This Psalm is also quoted in Hebrews 5:6. Melchizedek was a Messianic figure who was not descended from Adam (Hebrews 7:3, 6) just as Christ was not descended from Adam in His Deity. Melchizedek, King of Salem, meaning King of righteousness and King of Peace (Genesis 14:18, Hebrews 7:2) was the pre-Incarnate Christ who became our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14ff, 6:20). For more discussion on this see the Epistle lesson for the Feast Day of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, February 2.

Psalm 111: His Relationship with His Church

Psalm 111 speaks of the Lord’s provision for His Body, the Church. It begins “I will give thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly” (v.1). Most of the content of the Psalm then describes the works of the Lord in the Church. His works are:

- Sought out according to His Will (v.2 LXX)
- Worthy of thanksgiving and honor (v.3 LXX)
- Remembered by His people (v.4)
- Food and provision for those who fear Him (v.5)
- Remembrance of His covenant (v.5,9)
- Giving His people the inheritance of the nations (v.6)
- Judgment and Truth forever (vv.7,8)
- Redemption for His people (v.9)

The Psalm concludes: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all who practice this. His praise endures forever” (v.10). This is also the theme of the heavenly hosts around the Throne of God in heaven (Revelation 5:12, 7:12). All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3). This wisdom is unsearchable (Romans 11:33), but is revealed by the Church (Ephesians 3:10).

APPENDIX III

The Eternal Son from Genesis and Isaiah

Some of the other readings for Vespers give additional insight into the Eternal Son whose human birth is being celebrated:

Genesis 1:1-13: The First Three Days

This reading is the account of the first three days of Creation. This has everything to do with the Son as is testified in Hebrews: “But to the Son, He says ‘You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands’ “ (Hebrews 1:8, 10; Psalm 102:25). Also by Paul to the Colossians: “By Him (Christ) all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, lordships, principalities or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16, also Revelation 4:11).

On the first three days of Creation, the following occurred:

- Day One: Separation of light from darkness
- Day Two: Separation of waters above the horizon from waters below the horizon
- Day Three: Separation of dry land; sprouting of vegetation.

On each of these three days, there is not yet any embodied light. That didn’t occur until the creation of the sun, moon and stars on Day Four. One might ask how Christ could separate the light from the darkness if there was no light yet. The answer is given in descriptions of the end of time, where there will be no sun or moon because the Glory of God illumines everything (Revelation 21:23, Isaiah 60:19, 20). For more discussion on the implications of this separation of light and darkness, see the Gospel lesson for Pascha.

The point of reading this account of Creation is that the same God who created heaven and earth is now being born as a man from the Virgin Mary. The Eternal Son takes on the flesh of His Creation.

Isaiah 9:6-7: A Son is Given

This passage is very familiar to us in the West and some of the greatest music of the Western Church has used this passage as its text (e.g. Handel’s Messiah). The passage begins “Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given” (v.6). Ambrose (4th Century) stated that the same Person was both born and given. “For One is the Son of God, both born of the Father and sprung from the Virgin; a man indeed in the body, the Most High in power” (On the Death of Satyrus I, 12). “On the one hand, He is a gift from earth; on the other, a gift from heaven. And both are One Person, perfect in respect of each other, without any changeableness in the Godhead, as without any taking away from the fullness of the manhood. Though born of the Father, yet is He not born but given to us, for as much as the Son is not for our sakes, but we for the Son’s. For indeed He was not born to us, being born before us and the Maker of all things that were created; nor is He now brought to life for the first time, Who was always and was in the beginning” (On the Christian Faith III, viii, 55).

This Child will have the government on His shoulders since “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.” He will reign “on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore” (v.7). The titles this Child is given are translated slightly different from the Hebrew and from the Greek (Septuagint):

Hebrew	Greek
Wonderful, Counselor	Wonderful, Counselor
Mighty God	Mighty One
Everlasting Father	Father of the Age to Come
Prince of Peace	Prince of Peace
	Messenger of Mighty Counsel
	Potentate

Isaiah 7:10-16: The Virgin Will Conceive

In this passage, King Ahaz of Judah was given a message from the Lord by Isaiah that the siege against Jerusalem by King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel would fail. Ahaz didn’t believe it. So the Lord spoke to him again, offering to give him a sign of his choosing to prove His word would come true. Ahaz refused even to ask for a sign. But the Lord gave him a sign anyway: “A virgin will conceive and bear a Son and she will call His Name Immanuel. Yogurt and honey He shall eat when He knows enough to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy shall know enough to reject the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken” (vv.14-16).

Following this prophecy, which was given in c. 734 BC, Aram (whose capital city was Damascus) was overthrown in c. 700 BC and Israel was overthrown in c. 721 BC, both by the

Assyrians. Instead of believing the prophecy and the “sign”, Ahaz took measures into his own hands. He took the silver and gold from the Lord’s house and from the king’s treasury and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria (2 Kings 16:8-9). He also closed the doors of the Lord’s house and built altars and high places for himself in every corner of Jerusalem. He died unlamented in c. 715 BC and was not even given burial with the previous kings of Israel (2 Chronicles 28:24-27).

The reference to the “virgin” is the Virgin Mary and the Name of her Son, Immanuel means “God with us”. Yogurt made from goats milk mixed with honey was a common food for children and was also eaten by adults (Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times p. 51, 131; Unger, Bible Dictionary, p.731).

APPENDIX IV

Parables from the Psalms about the Poor

There were many signs predicted in the Old Testament that were expected to accompany the coming of the Messiah. The Lord summarized these signs for the followers of John the Baptist when John was in prison. John had heard about Jesus’ miracles and sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask: “Are You the Coming One or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3, Luke 7:19). The Lord, who had just finished performing a number of miracles, replied: “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see. The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11:5, Luke 7:22).

The Lord had said the same thing the previous year in the synagogue of Nazareth where He quoted from Isaiah: The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me:

- To evangelize the poor
- To heal the broken hearted
- To proclaim release to the captives
- To proclaim sight to the blind
- To proclaim an acceptable year of the Lord

The above from Luke 4:18, 19 was quoted almost verbatim from Isaiah 61:1, 2, but also added the phrase “To set free the downtrodden (lit: crushed ones)”. In this case the poor, the broken hearted, the captives, the blind and the downtrodden are all grouped together.

A number of the Psalms that are read for the Hours of Prayers on Christmas Eve address some of these same issues:

Psalm 5: Prayers of the Hours

The Prayers of the Hours have a long history going back at least to King David, perhaps further. They were documented in the writings of King David, but may have been in practice by the Prophet Samuel and others at an earlier time.

In Psalm 5, we get a glimpse of King David's prayer life which was similar to the Prayers of the Hours. Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁷² that David arose seven times daily (Psalm 119:164) including during the middle of the night, to give thanks for the righteous judgments of God. When David says "In the morning, O Lord, Thou wilt hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch" (Psalm 5:3), he is referring to the morning prior to dawn in addition to the Prayers of the Hours. 3rd Hour, 6th Hour and 9th Hour Prayers were customary for David (Psalm 55:17), where 3rd Hour and 9th Hour were also the customary times for the morning and evening continual burnt offering (Exodus 29:38-42, Numbers 28:3-8). Daniel followed this pattern also (Daniel 6:10).

The Early Church continued this tradition of the Prayers of the Hours. In this regard, the title of this Psalm is "Concerning He that Inherits" (LXX) referring to the Church. Some examples are Peter and John at home at 9th Hour Prayers (Acts 3:1), Peter away from home at 6th Hour Prayers (Acts 10:9), and Cornelius at 9th Hour Prayers (Acts 10:3). The Lord addressed this also, saying that "men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). He then followed that statement with the parable of the widow vs. the unjust judge where she got her justice by her continual pleading.

This type of prayer can be called a continual prayer from the analogy of the continual burnt offering. Other examples from Paul's writings are:

- Praying always with all prayer and supplication (Ephesians 6:18)
- Always in every prayer of mine making request for you (Philippians 1:4)
- Praying always for you (Colossians 1:3)
- We do not cease to pray for you (Colossians 1:9)
- Continue earnestly in prayer being vigilant (Colossians 4:2)
- Night and day praying exceedingly (1 Thessalonians 3:10)
- Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- A widow continues in prayer and supplication night and day (1 Timothy 5:5)
- Without ceasing, I remember you in my prayers night and day (2 Timothy 1:3).

David's prayer in Psalm 5 is largely a request to be freed from being downtrodden. He spoke of his groaning (Psalm 5:1) and his cry for help (Psalm 5:2) against those who:

- Take pleasure in wickedness (Psalm 5:4)
- Are boastful (Psalm 5:5)
- Speak falsehood (Psalm 5:6, 9)
- Have an open grave for a throat (Psalm 5:9)
- Are flatterers (Psalm 5:9)

David acknowledged that the Lord abhors falsehood and will destroy those who speak falsehood (Psalm 5:6).

One beneficial aspect of the regular prayer referred to in Psalm 5 is that we open up and bare our soul to the Lord. Jerome, in commenting on verse 8, said¹⁷³, "Solomon says, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways

¹⁷² Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, VI, 12.

¹⁷³ Jerome, Dialog Against the Pelagians, III, 8.

acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths' (Proverbs 3:5, 6). Understand what He says: that we must not trust in our wisdom, but in the Lord alone, by Whom the steps of a man are directed. Lastly, we are bidden to show Him our ways and make them known, for they are not made straight by our own labor, but by His assistance and mercy. And so it is written, 'make My way right before Thy Face' (Psalm 5:8 LXX), so that what is right to Him may seem also right to me. Solomon says the same, 'Commit your works unto the Lord and your thoughts shall be established' (Proverbs 16:3). Our thoughts are then established when we commit all we do to the Lord our helper, resting it, as it were, upon the firm and solid rock, and attribute everything to Him". The result is described as follows: "For it is You Who bless the righteous man, O Lord; You surround him with favor as with a shield" (Psalm 5:12). The underlying suggestion in all this is that righteousness is far more important than wealth and that poverty is no big deal.

Psalm 67: The Blessings of God

The blessings of the Lord had some connotations in ancient Israel that are easily missed today. There was an agricultural economy and the harvest of the land was dependent on the peoples' observing the Lord's statutes. For example, every seventh year, the land was to lie fallow with no planting or reaping (Leviticus 25:2-5). If the people observed the Lord's statutes, the sixth year's crops would be extensive enough to carry them for three years, or until the eighth year crop was in (Leviticus 25:18-22). The same was true with the tithe; the more they gave, the more they had.

The same applied to helping the poor. They were to freely open their hand to him and generously lend him sufficient for his needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). To not do so was a sin and the poor man may cry to the Lord against his rich neighbors. In being generous to him, however, "the Lord will bless them in all their work and in everything they do" (Deuteronomy 15:9-11). Following the giving of this third tithe, the people were to say "before the Lord" that they have not withheld any and to ask the Lord for a blessing that they might continue to have a land flowing with milk and honey (Deuteronomy 26:12-15).

The logic behind this was described by Isaiah. He said that the Lord's ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts as much as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8-12). The implication is that the Lord has the foresight to see the long term fruit of one's generosity, very much like a crop that can be harvested. The imagery Isaiah used were rain and snow as compared to the Word of God. The rain and snow come down from heaven, water the earth and make it sprout with seed and thus bread before returning to heaven (as evaporation). So also the Word does not return empty without accomplishing what He desires and succeeding in that which He sent.

Paul used this reference to Isaiah in connection with giving alms and tithes. The seed that we sow, like rain and the Word of God, will return. If we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly; if we sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6). Just as with the 6th year crop, the Lord will see to it that "all grace abounds toward us that...we may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8), and that we "are enriched in everything for all liberality" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

However, God is not a tax collector; we are not forced to do this. God loves a cheerful giver, not one doing so “grudgingly or of necessity” (2 Corinthians 9:7). A cheerful giver is like the camel that passes through the eye of the needle easily because his pack or burden comes off easily (Matthew 19:22-26), where “the eye of the needle” was a small gate next to the main gate of large cities.

Psalms 103 and 104 both start off, “Bless the Lord, O my soul” (Psalm 103:1, 104:1). Psalm 67 starts off with the reverse, “God be gracious to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us” (Psalm 67:1). Augustine of Hippo commented¹⁷⁴ on this: “When God blesses us, we grow, and when we bless the Lord, we grow; it is profitable to us both. He is not increased by our blessing, nor is He lessened by our cursing. He that curses the Lord is himself lessened; he that blesses the Lord is himself increased. There is in us the blessing of the Lord (the Holy Spirit), and the consequence is that we also bless the Lord. The one is the rain; the other, the fruit. Therefore there is rendered as it were fruit to God the Husbandman, raining upon and tilling us”.

Augustine continues on to say¹⁷⁵ that the above is true whether one is rich or poor: “The coffer is emptied of gold; but the heart is full of faith. On the outside, one is poor; but within one is rich, for one carries his riches with him and wouldn’t lose it even if he should escape naked from shipwreck. Evil men, on the other hand, are stricken with greater loss: if the house is empty, the conscience is emptier”.

The Psalm continues: “That Thy way may be known on the earth” (Psalm 67:2) so that “the earth might yield its fruit” (Psalm 67:6), “for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth” (Psalm 67:4).

Augustine likens this to the work of the ant and the honeybee (Proverbs 6:6-11) who work hard to store up provisions for themselves during the summer in order that they might have provisions in the winter. Winter comes to everyone, said Augustine, whether it is a trial of tribulation, a winter of numbness, a tempest of fear, the cold of sorrow, a danger to one’s safety, or dishonor and humiliation. “The ant of God, however, rises day by day and hastens to the Church of God; he prays, he hears public reading (of the Scriptures), he chants hymns, he digests that which he has heard. At home he thinks about this; he stores within himself grain gathered from the threshing floor.” When winter comes, other men pity the ant of God as being miserable and afflicted. But just as the ant is secure in her secret store, so is the ant of God, having a supply that is not apparent to other men¹⁷⁶.

Psalm 51 - Repentance

It is possible for a person to be downtrodden because of his own sins. This also creates a “brokenhearted” condition. Psalm 51 is titled, “A Psalm of David when Nathan the Prophet came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” This is a reference to David’s sin of seducing Bathsheba and then having her husband killed in battle so he could marry her (2 Samuel 11, 12).

¹⁷⁴ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm LXVII, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm LXVII, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm LXVII, 3.

Bathsheba then became the mother of Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24) and was one of the ancestors of Christ (Matthew 1:6).

Intrigue such as this in the palaces of kings was common in those days and still occurs today. But the Lord clearly expected better of David and He sent Nathan the Prophet to confront David. David repented, and the words of this Psalm are some of the songs David wrote in his repentance. The Lord forgave David, but because of the blasphemy caused by his sin (2 Samuel 12:14), He also sent David some reminders of the consequences of his sin:

- The sword shall never depart from your house (2 Samuel 12:10, 2 Samuel 20, 21)
- I will raise up evil from your own household (2 Samuel 12:11; 2 Samuel 13, 15, 17, 18; 1 Kings 1)
- I will take your wives and give them to your companion who will lie with them in broad daylight (2 Samuel 12:11-12, 16:21-23)

The same is true of us: there are always consequences to our sins even after our repentance.

The Psalm also states: “Behold Thou dost desire truth in the innermost parts and in the hidden part Thou wilt make me to know wisdom” (Psalm 51:6). This speaks of the consequences of our sin. Just because we are forgiven does not mean that we suffer no consequences from what we’ve done. And there is wisdom that is learned from seeing the consequences of our own deeds.

Psalm 51 is also used in the Orthodox lectionary as one of the chanted “songs” for Matins prior to the Sunday and Feast Day Liturgy. The heartfelt words of David in response to being confronted with adultery and murder are useful for us also. This Psalm is not speaking of the heathen or of unbelievers, but to the people of God. “All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Therefore, as we approach the Throne of God to receive the Lord’s gifts (the Lord’s Supper), no one need despair; this Psalm shows that even David’s monstrous sin can be forgiven. As Augustine said¹⁷⁷, ‘Many men will to fall with David and will **not** to rise with David. Not then for falling is the example set forth, but, if you shall have fallen, for rising again. For this it was set forth, for this it was written, for this in the Church it is often read and chanted. Let them hear that have not fallen, lest they fall; let them hear that have fallen, that they may rise’”.

An important aspect of repentance is confession, or the setting of our sin before us: ‘My sin is ever before me’ (Psalm 51:3). Before Nathan the Prophet came to David, his sin was hidden. In confronting David, Nathan had David pronounce judgment on himself using the illustration of the poor man’s sheep (2 Samuel 12:1-5). David’s response was to admit his sin and to remove the plank from his own eye, not to try to remove a speck from another’s eye (Matthew 7:5). Similarly in the Orthodox liturgical cycle, there is a time for personal confession prior to receiving the Lord’s gifts, usually at Great Vespers (Saturday) but also at Matins.

¹⁷⁷ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm LI, 3

We note that David said to the Lord, ‘Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight. So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak and blameless when Thou dost judge’ (Psalm 51:4). Just as David confessed his sin to Nathan the Prophet and received forgiveness from God (2 Samuel 12:13), so we confess our sin to the priest and receive forgiveness from God.

The result of God’s forgiveness is described as ‘purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow’ (Psalm 51:7). Hyssop was also used to apply the blood of the Paschal lamb to the doorposts and lintel during the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:7) and every year thereafter (Exodus 12:14). This was done to foreshadow Christ as our Paschal Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7, John 1:29). In addition, Augustine stated¹⁷⁸ that hyssop was a humble herb that was used for healing. Part of the healing is a humbling of ourselves before the Lord as David described (Psalm 51:8-12). In David’s words ‘the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise’ (Psalm 51:17). Only then can we ‘build the walls of Jerusalem’ (Psalm 51:18), that is the New Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 6:16, Revelation 21:2). Then sacrifices are acceptable (Psalm 51:19); then we can present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) and offer the sacrifice of praise with our lips (Hebrews 13:15).

Psalm 86 - The Poor and Downtrodden

There were times in the life of King David when he lived as a fugitive. In this Psalm, he chants: ‘O God, arrogant men have risen up against me, and a band of violent men have sought my life, and they have not set Thee before them’ (Psalm 86:14). This probably refers to the time David was a fugitive from King Saul (1 Samuel 19-31) but could also refer to the time he was a fugitive from his son Absalom, who tried to usurp the throne (2 Samuel 15-18). During this time, David lived sometimes in a cave (1 Samuel 22:1, 24:3), sometimes in the wilderness (1 Samuel 23:14, 24:1), and sometimes hid in a city (1 Samuel 23:7). He was often hungry and destitute and had to depend on sporadic provisions (1 Samuel 25:18, 2 Samuel 16:1); at one time he even ate the consecrated bread from the Temple that only the priests were to eat (Matthew 12:4, 1 Samuel 21:6).

David began this Psalm ‘Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy’ (Psalm 86:1). Along with poverty often comes humility; on the other hand, worldly wealth often generates pride. And ‘the Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’ (1 Peter 5:5, Proverbs 3:34 LXX). Some of the Patriarchs like Abraham and Job were wealthy **and** humble, but this is unusual.

In his poverty, David pleaded that the Lord would preserve his soul, for he was a godly man who trusts in the Lord (Psalm 86:2). This he cried ‘all day long’ (Psalm 86:5) in the Prayers of the Hours. The word “godly” (Hebrew: *chasid* = pious, kind) is not the same as the word that referred to the consecration of the priests (Hebrew: *gadosh* = holy). Regarding the godly (*chasid*), the Lord set them apart for Himself (Psalm 4:3); they are those who made a covenant with Him by sacrifice (Psalm 50:5). They sing to the Lord (Psalm 30:4, 132:9, 16), love the Lord (Psalm 31:23), bless the Lord (Psalm 145:10) and pray (Psalm 32:6); the Lord does not

¹⁷⁸ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm LI, 12.

forsake them (Psalm 37:28), speaks peace to them (Psalm 85:8), speaks in vision to them (Psalm 89:19) and preserves their souls (Psalm 97:10, 116:15).

In his humility before God, David acknowledged the majesty and omnipotence of God:

- There is no one like You among the gods (Psalm 86:8).
- You made all nations (Psalm 86:9).
- All nations will worship and glorify You (Psalm 86:9).
- You perform miracles (Psalm 86:10).

And he asked the Lord to teach him His Way in order that he might walk in His Truth and fear His Name (Psalm 86:11). ‘For You have delivered my soul from the lowest sheol’ (Psalm 86:13). This term ‘lowest sheol’ was called Tartarus and was mentioned by Peter as the place for the angels who sinned (2 Peter 2:4), and was also referred to by Moses (Deuteronomy 32:22).

Psalm 72: The Poor in Spirit

Psalm 72 is titled ‘A Psalm of Solomon’ or ‘For Solomon’ (LXX), but uses Solomon in a prophetic sense. Some aspects of the Psalm apply to Solomon, but there is a figurative aspect that speaks of Christ as the future Son of the King (Psalm 72:1). Solomon means ‘peace-maker’ (Hebrew: Shelomoh) and this term applies to Christ in its fullest sense (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The Psalm begins ‘Give the King Thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness to the King’s Son’ (Psalm 72:1). This applied to David and Solomon, but also to God the Father and His Son; ‘For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son’ (John 5:22), just as a King who arranged a marriage for His Son (Matthew 22:2).

The King’s Son “will judge Your people with righteousness and Your poor with justice (Psalm 72:2). God’s poor are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3). Augustine stated¹⁷⁹ ‘In this poverty even blessed Job was poor, and this was before he had lost those great earthly riches. However, there are certain persons who are more ready to distribute all their goods to the poor, than to become themselves the poor of God. For they are puffed up with boasting, wherein they think their living well should be ascribed to themselves, not to the Grace of God. And therefore now they do not even live well, however great the good works which they seem to do’. A related aspect to this was expressed by Jeremiah: ‘As a partridge that hatches eggs which it has not laid, so is he who makes a fortune, but unjustly. In the midst of his days, it will forsake him, and in the end, he will be a fool’ (Jeremiah 17:11). The term ‘fool’ is better defined in Psalm 49 and in the Gospel lesson for the 9th Sunday of Luke.

This theme continues, ‘He shall judge the poor of the people; He shall save the sons of the needy’ (Psalm 72:4). Augustine commented¹⁸⁰ that He said ‘poor of the people’ and not

¹⁷⁹ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm 72, 3.

¹⁸⁰ Augustine of Hippo, Exposition on Psalm 72, 7.

‘poor people’. The ‘poor of the people’ he linked with the poor in spirit who feed together with the rest of the people as lambs and goats and aren’t separated (Matthew 25:32) until the Last Judgment.

Some of the foregoing could apply to King Solomon, who did judge the poor with wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-28). Beginning in v.5, the Psalm takes on a distinct Messianic dimension beyond that of King Solomon. For example, the King was to be feared:

- As long as the sun endures (Psalm 72:5)
- As long as the moon, throughout all generations (Psalm 72:5)
- Till the moon is no more (Psalm 72:7).

This does not occur until the King comes in glory at the end of time and the sun and moon are not needed any more (Revelation 21:23).

Prior to the Conquest of Canaan, the Lord had promised His people that He would establish their boundaries from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines (the Mediterranean) and from the wilderness (the Negev) to the River Euphrates (Exodus 23:31). These borders were achieved during the reign of Solomon, but shrank shortly thereafter. Psalm 72 uses similar language to refer to Messiah who would be very wise, like Solomon: ‘He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth’ (Psalm 72:8). Zachariah spoke in similar terms: Messiah was to come ‘humble, riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey’. ‘His dominion will also be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth’ (Zechariah 9:9, 10).

Psalm 72 also includes a prophecy regarding the Magi who were to visit Jesus as an infant, ‘Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. And let all kings bow down before Him; all nations serve Him’ (Psalm 72:10,11). ‘And He shall live; and may the gold of Sheba be given to Him’ (Psalm 72:15).

King Solomon was given gold by the Queen of Sheba as a gift (1 Kings 10:10), and he also used ‘the ships of Tarshish’ as part of a merchant marine (1 Kings 10:22). These ‘ships of Tarshish’ were part of commodity trading and carried refined copper, precious metals and other valuables from one port to another. King Solomon was also sought after for his wisdom by all the earth (1 Kings 10:24).

The Magi who visited Jesus as an infant also brought gold from Sheba, which was on the Western side of the Arabian peninsula next to Ophir. This gold was used so that He might live during the Flight to Egypt. According to tradition¹⁸¹, the entourage of the Magi included Melchior from Persia, Gaspar from Arabia (Sheba), and Balthazar, a black man from Egypt (Seba). They came to bow down and to worship Him who was born King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2, 11).

¹⁸¹ Nicholai Velimirovic, Prologue of Ochrid, December 25.

The King, the Son of the King, will deliver the poor and needy and redeem their life from oppression and violence. Precious shall their blood be in His sight (Psalm 72:12-14). This again refers to those who are poor in spirit and to the martyrs throughout the ages. 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints' (Psalm 116:15). As the end gets closer, these martyrs cry out to the Lord to establish His justice and avenge their blood (Revelation 6:10).

Continuing to speak of the martyrs, the Psalm says: 'There will be an abundance of grain on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like (the cedars of) Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth' (Psalm 72:16). The grain is that which had fallen into the earth and died (John 12:24); now it is being revealed how productive it was; some thirty fold, some sixty fold, some a hundred fold (Matthew 13:8). For this, 'all nations shall call Him blessed and they shall bless themselves by Him' (Psalm 72:17). This is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham where all nations of the earth shall be blessed in his Seed (Genesis 22:18). Those blessed are the children of the promise and not just the children after the flesh (Romans 9:8).