

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

December 25, 2008

Revision A

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

EPISTLE:

Christmas Eve:	Hebrews 1:1-12	The Eternal Son
Christmas Day:	Galatians 4:4-7	The Fullness of Time

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. For each of the “Hours”, there is one Psalm that is repeated from Christmas Eve to Epiphany Eve to Good Friday.

THE NATIVITY AND INCARNATION	393
THE ETERNAL SON.....	397
Epistle: Hebrews 1:1-12	397
The Eternal Son from the Psalms, Genesis and Isaiah	399
THE FULLNESS OF TIME	400
Epistle: Galatians 4:1-7.....	400
THE POOR HEAR THE GOSPEL	402
Gospel: Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 1:18-25.....	402
The Shepherds Hear the Gospel	403
Parables From the Psalms About the Poor	405
THE GENTILES SEEK THE KING OF THE JEWS	406
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12	406
Who Were the Magi?.....	406
The Star That the Magi Followed.....	407
The Gifts That the Magi Brought	408
How Much Did the Magi Know?	412
What Did the Magi Learn from the Star?.....	414
What Induced the Magi to Visit a King in a Far-Away Country?.....	415
Why Did Herod and the Jews Overlook the Benefits of Christ?.....	415
The Nativity Created an Immediate Conflict	416
Herod's Bizarre Behavior.....	417
The Star Gave the Magi Great Reverence for Christ	419
The Devotion of the Magi	422
The Perspective of the Visit of the Magi.....	425
APPENDIX I	430
THE ETERNAL SON IN THE PSALMS	430
Psalm 22: He will be Crucified.....	430
Psalm 45: His Relationship with His Queen	430
Psalm 46: Our Refuge and Strength	430
Psalm 132: His Zeal for the Lord's House	430
Psalm 91: His Relationship with His Father.....	431
Psalm 110: His Place at the Right Hand of Power	432
Psalm 111: His Relationship with His Church	432
APPENDIX II.....	433
THE ETERNAL SON FROM GENESIS AND ISAIAH.....	433
Genesis 1:1-13: The First Three Days.....	433
Isaiah 9:6-7: A Son is Given.....	433
Isaiah 7:10-16: The Virgin Will Conceive	434
APPENDIX III.....	435
PARABLES FROM THE PSALMS ABOUT THE POOR	435
Psalm 5: Prayers of the Hours	435
Psalm 67: The Blessings of God	436
Psalm 51 - Repentance	438
Psalm 86 - The Poor and Downtrodden.....	439
Psalm 72: The Poor in Spirit	440

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 First Century and were also followed by the First 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

December 25, 2008

Epistle: Hebrews 1:1-12

It is important to remember and consider just Who it is whose birth we celebrate on Christmas. Hebrews begins 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 (vv.1-2). Concerning His Son:

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

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

- He is before all things (Colossians 1:17)
- In Him all things consisted (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"? (v.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 (v.5, 2 Samuel 7:14)
 - Of the Son, the Father said, "Let all the angels worship Him (v.6, Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX)
 - The angels are spirits (not humans); they are liturgists and a flame of fire (v.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).

In the Epistle for 6th Hour Prayers, Hebrews quoted Psalm 45, one of the readings for 1st Hour Prayers, where the Father spoke to the Son saying, "Your throne, O God, is forever and

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ever” (Psalm 45:6, Hebrews 1:8). In the Epistle for 6th Hour Prayers, Hebrews applied Psalm 102 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, Hebrews quoted from Psalm 110 (one of the readings for 9th Hour Prayers), 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).

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 (v.10).

The Epistle for 9th Hour Prayers (which is also the Epistle for the Feast Day of the Annunciation) 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” (v.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.

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’ (v.16) thus showing that their race is great and honorable. Therefore in all things, He had to be made like His brethren” (v.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 Chrysostom said, “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, to bear everything for His sake” (Homily iv on Hebrews 2).

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

The readings for the 1st, 3rd, 6th, 9th Hours and Vespers give more details regarding the mission of the Eternal Son.

These Psalms 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

The readings from Genesis and Isaiah 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.

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

December 25, 2008

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-payment¹ (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.

¹ A pledge was something of value given to guarantee that the full payment was to come.

THE POOR HEAR THE GOSPEL

December 25, 2008

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 stated² 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, this 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).

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 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).

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² Sulpitius Severus, Sacred History, II, 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 cloths, 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 wages may have been at the whim of his employer (Genesis 31:38-41). For a good account of the life of shepherds, see Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 132-144.

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

- 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 (v.13), probably with similar appearance, praising God and saying (v.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: euaggelizo³ = 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 (v.15), and found Joseph and Mary quickly (v.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 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 (v.18)? It seems much more likely that the shepherds saw 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 (vv.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" (v.18).

³ 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.

Mary's reaction to all this was to keep considering them and pondering them in her heart (v.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 and 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).

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 III for a discussion of these Psalms.

THE GENTILES SEEK THE KING OF THE JEWS

December 25, 2008

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.

Leo the Great stated⁴ that the Magi arrived in Judea on the same day that Jesus rose from the dead 33 years later.

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.

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⁴ Leo the Great, Letter to the Bishops of Sicily, XVI, 2.

Origen stated⁵ 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.

Jerome stated⁶ 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.

Fifty years prior to their arrival in Jerusalem, the Persians had defeated the Romans (in the Battle of Carrhae). But Herod's father (Antipater) had re-established Roman rule in Palestine. 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 stated⁷ 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.

⁵ Origen, Against Celsus, VI, 80.

⁶ Jerome of Bethlehem, "Against Jovinianus", Treatises, II, 14.

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

A traditional source records⁸ 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 reached⁹ 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 stated¹⁰ 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 come for whom it is reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles’ (). 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 progeny. 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 tradition, 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 Syrian¹¹, Jesus was a little over one year old when the Magi arrived.

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

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 3.

¹⁰ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Third Sermon on the Feast of Epiphany, XXXII, 2

¹¹ Ephraim the Syrian, Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ, XIX, 2.

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 stated¹² 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 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).

¹² Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III, ix, 2.

Ambrose of Milan concurred¹³ 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 summarized¹⁴ 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 with 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 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, and 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

¹³ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Widows, V, 30.

¹⁴ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, First Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXI, 1-2.

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 out¹⁵ 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. 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 Tarshish¹⁶ shall offer presents, the Kings of the Arabians¹⁷ and Sabeans shall bring gifts, and there shall be given to Him of the gold¹⁸ 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 noted¹⁹ 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 regards ‘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

¹⁵ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, IV, 38.

¹⁶ 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”.

¹⁷ Frankincense and myrrh come from plants that grow in Arabia.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, I, vii, 9.

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 stated²⁰ 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 was still a virgin following childbirth²¹. 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 death²². Zachariah was later murdered by Herod's soldiers in front of the Temple during the massacre of the Holy Innocents when he

²⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 78.

²¹ Holy Apostles Convent, *The Life of the Virgin Mary*, Holy Apostles Convent and Dormition Skete, 1989, pp. 176-179.

²² Holy Apostles Convent, *The Life of the Virgin Mary*, Holy Apostles Convent and Dormition Skete, 1989, pp. 235-236.

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 stated²³ 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 stated²⁴ 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 died²⁵, 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 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 posed²⁶ 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.
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.

²³ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, I, iv, 31.

²⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XII, 9.

²⁵ Josephus, Antiquities, Books 15, 16, 17; Wars of the Jews, Book 1, chapters 22-33

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 1-2.

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 made²⁷ 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 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 them²⁸. He showed a large and

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 3-4.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 3-4. Chrysostom stated that God did the same thing for the people of Ascalon and Gaza. The five cities of the Philistines, at the coming of the Ark () 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 to the ark untamed heifers, which had just given birth to their first calves, and let them go their way, with no man to guide them. So it would be clear whether the plague was from God or whether it was an accident that brought the disease. ‘If they break the yoke in pieces for lack of practice, or turn where their calves are mooring, it is a chance that has happened. But if they go on right, and err not 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’ (). 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

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 asked²⁹ “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 to the Ninevites only 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.”

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

Chrysostom noted³⁰ 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.

“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, *even* if they were burnt with fire; for unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given’” (Isaiah 9:5-6 LXX).

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.

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 5.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VI, 6-7.

“Although troubled, they did not seek to see what has happened, neither do 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 stated³¹ 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 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 noted³² 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”.

³¹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Third Sermon on the Feast of Epiphany, XXXIII, 3.

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VII, 1-2.

“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 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 stated³³ 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.

³³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, VII, 3.

“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 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 stated³⁴ 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 rule’³⁵ the

³⁴ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXIV, 2.

³⁵ Leo’s quote differs a little from modern texts in the phrase “who shall rule the nations”.

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. When the Divine oracle was proclaimed through the chief priests' answers, 'And 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 his 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, and 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."

The Star Gave the Magi Great Reverence for Christ

John Chrysostom stated³⁶ 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

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VII, 4.

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 Bethlehem. 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 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 reveals³⁷ 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 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."

"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?"

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

"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."

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

³⁷ Ephraim the Syrian, *Fifteen Hymns for the Feast of Epiphany*, XV, 25-52.

“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?”

“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.”

“Do not, I ask you, speak of these things in our land lest they rage, and the kings of the earth join together against the Child in their envy.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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!”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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.”

“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 above all beings is your Son; He is Son of God according to your saying.”

“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!”

“The entire world on high, in one star, has stirred up Persia and she has learnt 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!

“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 impressed³⁸ 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

³⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, VIII, 1-2.

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 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 persuaded him, and deterred him from his wickedness. Going on still further, Herod received a sharper punishment for so great a foolishness.”

John Chrysostom stated³⁹ 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 to 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

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, VIII, 3.

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.”

Origen, reflecting the prevailing opinion of his day, stated⁴⁰ that the Magi were familiar with the power of sorcery; but the events surrounding the birth of Christ overshadowed their sorcery, and they knew that someone greater than the demons had come. As a result, they had to see Who this was that Balaam had foretold. By their gifts, they knew that He was both God and man, and that His mission would be to die.

“The Magi were familiar with evil spirits, and invoked them to bring about such results that do not exceed the strength of the evil spirits. Should some greater revelation of divinity be made, then the powers of the evil spirits are overthrown, being unable to resist the light of divinity. It is probable that since at the birth of Jesus ‘a multitude of the heavenly host praised God, saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men’ (Luke 2:14), the evil spirits consequently became feeble, the falsity of their sorcery being clear, and their power being broken. This overthrow was brought about not only by the angels visiting earth on account of the birth of Jesus, but also by the power of Jesus Himself, and His Divinity. The Magi, accordingly, wishing to produce their customary results, which they used to perform by means of certain spells and sorceries, sought to know the reason for their failure, conjecturing the cause to be a great one. Beholding a divine sign in the heaven, they desired to learn its significance. They possessed the prophecies of Balaam, which Moses records, inasmuch as Balaam was celebrated for such predictions, they found the prophecy about the star, and the words, ‘I will show Him, but not now; I bless Him, but He is not near’ (Numbers 24:17 OSB LXX). They conjectured that the man whose appearance had been foretold along with that of the star, had actually come into the world. Having predetermined that he was superior in power to all demons, and to all common appearances and powers, they resolved to worship Him. They came to Judea, persuaded that some king had been born. But they did not know over what kingdom he was to reign, and were ignorant also of the place of his birth. They brought gifts, which they offered to him as one whose nature was both of God and of a mortal man. That is, they gave gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to God; and they brought these offerings after they had learned the place of His birth. Since He was God, raised far above all those angels that minister to men, an angel rewarded the piety of the Magi for their worship of Him, by making known to them that they were not to go back to Herod, but to return to their own homes by another way.”

John Chrysostom commented⁴¹ on this pointing out the contrast between the Magi and the Jewish leaders:

⁴⁰ Origen, *Against Celsus*, I, 60.

⁴¹ 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 capable of defending Himself in any conflict.

Hilary of Poitiers gave⁴² a perspective of the Magi visit 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! 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.”

⁴² Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, II, 27.

Leo the Great in his Epiphany⁴³ Sermons, noted⁴⁴ 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 noted⁴⁵ 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, 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

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXIV, 1.

⁴⁵ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Fourth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXIV, 3.

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 stated⁴⁶ 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 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 out⁴⁷ 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.

“The Magi used to worship fire; they left 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.”

⁴⁶ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sixth Sermon on the Feast of the Epiphany, XXXVI, 1.

⁴⁷ Ephraim the Syrian, Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ, XV, 13-14, 17, 27-29.

“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 described⁴⁸ 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 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 might was not also 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 upon 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 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

⁴⁸ Ephraim the Syrian, Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ, III.

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. 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 I 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 II 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 III 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

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 (4th Century) stated 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 (Easter Festal Letter vi, 12). 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" (v.3), he is referring to the morning prior to dawn in addition to the Prayers of the Hours. Third 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 (v.1) and his cry for help (v.2) against those who:

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

David acknowledged that the Lord abhors falsehood and will destroy those who speak falsehood (v.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 (4th Century) in commenting on verse 8 said, "Solomon says, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways 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" (*Dialog Against the Pelagians*, III, 8). 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" (v.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” (v.1). Augustine of Hippo (4th Century) commented 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” (Exposition on Psalm LXVII, 1).

Augustine continues on to say 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 more empty” (Ibid. 3).

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

Augustine likens this to the work of the ant and the bee (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 be 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 thereon; 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 men (Ibid. 3).

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). 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" (v.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 fall 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 said, "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” (Exposition on Psalm li, 3).

An important aspect of repentance is confession, or the setting of our sin before us: “My sin is ever before me” (v.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.

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” (v.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” (v.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 stated that hyssop was a humble herb that was used for healing (Ibid, 12). Part of the healing is a humbling of ourselves before the Lord as David described (vv.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” (v.17). Only then can we “build the walls of Jerusalem” (v.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” (v.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” (v.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 (v.2). This he cried “all day long” (v.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 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 (v.8).
- You made all nations (v.9).
- All nations will worship and glorify You (v.9).
- You perform miracles (v.10).

And he asked the Lord to teach him His Way in order that he might walk in His Truth and fear His Name (v.11). “For You have delivered my soul from the lowest sheol” (v.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 (v.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” (v.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 (v.2). God’s poor are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3). Augustine stated “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” (Exposition on Psalm 72, 3). 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” (v.4). Augustine commented that He said “poor of the people” and not “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 (Ibid. 7).

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 (v.5)
- As long as the moon, throughout all generations (v.5)
- Till the moon is no more (v.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” (v.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” (vv.10,11). “And He shall live; and may the gold of Sheba be given to Him” (v.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 tradition, (Velimirovic, Prologue, December 25), 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).

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 (vv.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” (v.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” (v.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).