

LIGHT VERSUS DARKNESS THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER

April 16, 2017
Revision D
Pascha

Gospel: John 1:1-17
Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

Background

Easter Sunday is referred to in the Orthodox Church as Pascha, which is Greek for “Passover.” The date for Pascha in the early Church was determined using the Old Testament formula for Passover and fell on the 14th of Nisan (Exodus 12:6) no matter what day of the week it was. The First Ecumenical Council in 325 AD decided to celebrate Pascha on a Sunday and always after the vernal equinox. However, differences in “paschal cycles” developed in the 5th Century between the Roman calculation and the Alexandrine calculation and Pascha in the East vs. The West has been on different days ever since. In the West, Pascha began to be called Easter in the 8th Century as it superseded an old Anglo-Saxon (pagan) festival¹.

In the West, Gospel readings for Easter Sunday center on the historical events at the tomb early in the morning of Easter Sunday. In the Eastern Lectionary, these events are read on Holy Saturday while the Pascha readings center on a broader perspective of light vs. darkness and the Word made flesh. Today’s readings are used in the West for Christmas Day.

To understand more fully the significance of the victory of light over darkness described in today’s readings, one needs to understand the significance of Holy Week and especially Holy Saturday and Christ’s descent into hell. Pascha is seen as the victory celebration; the battle has already been won on Holy Saturday.

Today’s Epistle reading (Acts 1:1-8) is used in the West for Ascension Day. In the Eastern Lectionary, an expanded version of today’s Epistle lesson is used for Ascension Day, which is the Thursday of the Sixth Week of Pascha.

Gospel: John 1:1-17

The Greek text for John 1 starts out, “In beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was *in beginning with God*” (italics mine). There is no definite article “the” associated with beginning in the Greek text indicating that the Word

1. was God before creation (that is, He eternally existed),
2. is a distinct person from God the Father and
from verse 3 was a co-creator of all things with the Father.

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¹ See Cross, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd ed. pp. 437, 1037.

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The next thought John presents is the subject of light versus darkness. This parallels the account in Genesis 1:1-5 where the initial state described for the earth was darkness. “Darkness was over the surface of the deep” as the Spirit of God moved over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-13 is one of the Old Testament readings for Holy Saturday Vespers.)

In the Genesis 1 account, the “light” that was created on the first day had no embodiment until the fourth day when God created the sun, moon and stars. This is reminiscent of the days of the New Jerusalem when the sun, moon, lamps and lights will not be needed because the glory of God is all the illumination needed (Revelation 21:23, 22:5, Isaiah 60:19-20). Yet on the first day, God separated the light from the darkness. How is this possible? There is no embodied light!

From our Gospel lesson, ‘In Him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it’ (John 1:5). The darkness spoken of here takes on an evil dimension as the forces of darkness. John mentions this again ‘...men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil’ (John 3:19).

Darkness is spoken of throughout Scripture as the eternal abode of the ungodly. For example, speaking of Cain, Balaam, Korah and others: for them, ‘The gloom of darkness is reserved forever’ (Jude 13, 2 Peter 2:17). Those who are judged unrighteous at the Last Judgment are said to be ‘cast into the outer darkness’ (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30), where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Even today, ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the rulers of the darkness of this age’ (Ephesians 6:12). In doing so, we have become sons (and daughters) of light and are

not of the darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5, John 12:35-36). In fact, we have been delivered out of darkness into the light of God (1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 5:8, Colossians 1:13).

John Chrysostom reasoned² that if Christ gave light to all men, and some remain unenlightened, it's their own fault.

“If Christ ‘gives light to all men that come into the world’ (John 1:9), how is it that so many continue unenlightened? Not all have known the majesty of Christ. How then does He give light to all men? He gives light to all as far as in Him lies. But if some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that Light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the Light, but from their own wickedness, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift. The grace is shed forth on all, turning itself back neither from Jew, Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, free, bond, male, female, old nor young, but admitting all alike, and inviting with an equal regard. Those who are not willing to enjoy this gift ought in justice to impute their blindness to themselves. If when the gate is opened to all, and there is none to hinder, anyone willfully remaining evil outside, they perish through none other, but only through their own wickedness.”

Old Testament Readings

As a prelude to the Gospel for Pascha, two Old Testament passages that deal with light vs. darkness are read for Holy Saturday Vespers: We need to review these before proceeding.

The Saints Clothed in Brightness: Isaiah 61:10-62:5:

This Reading from the Old Testament is also used in the Orthodox Church for:

1. Holy Saturday³
2. The Feast Day of Ss. Constantine and Helen
3. The Feast Day of the Relics of Alexander Nevsky⁴ on August 30th.

In the West, this Old Testament Reading is used for either Christmas or Epiphany⁵.

There are several points to the theme from Isaiah's prophecy as follows.

1. The people of God will be called by a new name; that is, “Christian”.
2. The people of God will stand out among the Gentiles as blessed of God.
3. The people of God will be adorned as a bride due to their righteousness.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, VIII, 1.

³ Holy Saturday is the day between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection at Pascha (Easter Sunday). During the three days that Christ was in the Tomb, He descended into Hades and led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-9). This was a great blessing on those who were held captive in Hades. For more details, see the Study for Holy Saturday.

⁴ Alexander Nevsky was a military hero of 13th century Russia who provided similar benefits for the Russian people as Constantine provided in the 4th century.

⁵ Christmas and Epiphany are widely recognized in the East and West as a revealing of the Son of God, both at His Birth from the Virgin Mary and at His Baptism. At both occasions, there is a great blessing on mankind as a result of His revealing.

Isaiah wrote, “Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring in the midst of peoples; everyone that sees them shall take notice of them, that they are a seed blessed of God. They shall greatly rejoice in the Lord. Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for he has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy. He has put a mitre on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride. As the earth putting forth her flowers, and as a garden its seed, so shall the Lord, *even* the Lord, cause righteousness to spring forth, and exultation before all nations.”

“For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as light, and my salvation burns as a torch. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and kings your glory; and one shall call you *by* a new name, which the Lord shall name. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be called Forsaken; and your land shall no more be called Desert. For you shall be called My Pleasure, and your land Inhabited; for the Lord has taken pleasure in you, and your land shall be inhabited. As a young man lives with a virgin, so shall your sons dwell in *you*; it shall come to pass *that* as a bridegroom will rejoice over a bride, so will the Lord rejoice over you” (Isaiah 61:9-62:5 LXX).

Called by a New Name

There have been a number of people in the Scripture whom the Lord has called by a new name. For example there was Jacob called Israel (Genesis 32:28), and Saul called Paul (Acts 13:9). However, Isaiah is not referring to an individual, but to a number of people. This prophecy refers to the name “Christian” that was applied to the people of God in Antioch (Acts 11:26); however, the name “Christian” was a term of derision until the time of Constantine. Constantine made the name “Christian” to be a name of honor throughout the world.

Ignatius of Antioch stated⁶ that the new name of the people of God is “Christian”, where this name was coined in Antioch in c. 50 AD by Evodius⁷, the 2nd Bishop of Antioch, while Peter and Paul were there.

“Let us not, therefore, be insensible to His kindness. Were He to reward us according to our works, we should cease to be. Consider, ‘if You, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?’ (Psalm 130:3 LXX) Let us therefore prove ourselves worthy of that name which we have received. For whoever is called by any other name besides this, he is not of God; for he has not received the prophecy which speaks thus concerning us: ‘The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name’ (Isaiah 62:2). This was first fulfilled in Syria; for ‘the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch’ (Acts 11:26), when Paul and Peter were laying the foundations of the Church. Lay aside, therefore, the evil, the old, the corrupt leaven (1 Corinthians 5:7), and be changed into the new leaven of grace. Abide in Christ, that the stranger may not have dominion over you. It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. Christ is one, in whom every nation that believes, and every tongue that confesses, is gathered to

⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, 10.

⁷ Sometimes spelled “Euodius”

God. Those that were of a stony heart have become the children of Abraham, the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23); and in his seed all those have been blessed (Genesis 28:14) who were ordained to eternal life in Christ.”

Cyril of Jerusalem pointed out⁸ that the Jews never had a new name; they have been always called either “Jews” or “Israelites”. The name “Jew” comes from the tribe of Judah. Jacob, as an individual, was renamed “Israel” by God Himself, and his descendants took that name also. The name of “Christian”, however, identifies a group of people with the Son of God and reaches to the ends of the earth.

“This is Jesus Christ who came ‘as High-Priest of the good things to come’ (Hebrews 9:11); who for the bountifulness of His Godhead imparted His own title to us all. Kings among men have their royal style which others may not share; but Jesus Christ being the Son of God gave us the dignity of being called Christians. Someone will say, the name of ‘Christian’ is new, and was not in use before; and new phrases are often objected to. Isaiah made this point saying, ‘But My servants shall be called by a new name, which shall be blessed on the earth’ (Isaiah 65:15-16 LXX). Let us question the Jews: Are you servants of the Lord, or not? Show then your new name. You were called Jews and Israelites in the time of Moses, in the days of the other prophets, after the return from Babylon, and up to the present time; where then is your new name? Since we are servants of the Lord, we have that new name; new indeed, and the new name, which shall be blessed on the earth. This name caught the world in its grasp; for Jews are only in a certain region, but Christians reach to the ends of the world. It is the name of the Only-begotten Son of God that is proclaimed.”

Cyril of Jerusalem continued⁹ that it was because of the abundance of the grace of the Holy Spirit in Antioch that the new name of “Christian” was first applied there.

“In Antioch, a most renowned city of Syria, when the preaching of Christ took effect, Barnabas was sent there to help the good work. Being a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith (Acts 11:24), he saw a great harvest of believers in Christ, and brought Paul from Tarsus to Antioch as his fellow-combatant. When crowds had been instructed by them and assembled in the Church, it came to pass that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The Holy Spirit bestowed on the believers that new Name, which had been promised before by the Lord. And the grace of the Spirit was shed forth by God more abundantly in Antioch.”

Hilary of Poitiers pointed out¹⁰ the effects of the new name of “Christian” on the world. We are named after Christ Himself and this is our reward and our blessing on earth. This is part of our confession of Faith to be named after God Himself. That the Gentiles would receive this was predicted by both Moses and Isaiah.

“Isaiah said, ‘My servants shall be called by a new name, which shall be blessed on the earth’ (Isaiah 65:15-16). Here everything is in the future. If ever

⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, X, 16.

⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 28.

¹⁰ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, V, 29-31.

in past ages there had been a blessing on the name 'Christian', it would not have been a new name. But if this hallowed name of our devotion towards God is new, then this new title of 'Christian', awarded to our faith, is that heavenly blessing (Ephesians 1:3) which is our reward on earth."

"Thus Isaiah's prophecy, taken with its whole context, clearly describes as God both Him, Whom we serve for the new name's sake, and Him through Whom the new name is blessed on the earth. It tells us Who it is that is blessed as true God, and Who people swear by as true God. This is the confession of faith, made in the fullness of time, by the Church in loyal devotion to Christ her Lord. We can see how exactly the words of prophecy conform to the truth."

"Could a dishonest attempt to suppress the truth be more completely exposed, or the Speaker in the prophecy be more distinctly revealed as true God¹¹, than here? Who was it that appeared to people that didn't ask for Him; Who was found by people who didn't seek Him? What nation is it that formerly didn't call on His name? Who is it that stretched out His hands¹² all day to a disobedient and contradicting people? (Isaiah 65:1-2 LXX) God had declared in His wrath against those that are not gods, that He would move the unbelievers among His people to jealousy against those that are not a nation and anger them with a nation void of understanding (Deuteronomy 32:21 LXX). Conclude for yourself: Who is it that makes Himself clear to those that didn't know Him? Who, though one people are His own, becomes the possession of strangers? Who it is that stretches out His hands before a disobedient and contradicting people? But yet He nails to the cross the writing of the former sentence against us!" (Colossians 2:14)

The Garment of Salvation

The illustration is used throughout the Scripture of the righteous being clothed in white. For example:

1. Of the Saints in heaven: "Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed" (Revelation 6:11).
2. Of the Old Testament priests: "Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Your saints shout for joy" (Psalm 132:9).
3. Of the Old Testament Patriarchs: "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice *was* like a robe and a turban" (Job 29:14).
4. Of the Saints on earth: "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments" (Revelation 3:4-5).

Isaiah 61:10 is also used in the Orthodox Church during every Divine Liturgy during the vesting of the Bishop or the priest. The Divine Liturgy gives us a foretaste of the Kingdom of

¹¹ Hilary was writing during the Arian Controversy, where the Arians claimed that Christ was not really equal to the Father. Hilary's point is that the Speaker in Isaiah's prophecy is the Son of God, who is in fact equal to the Father.

¹² That is, when Christ was stretched out on the Cross.

God in glory and it is modeled after the worship in heaven as seen in the visions of the Apostle John (Revelation 4-5). As the Bishop or priest vests, he puts on a white robe representing the garment of salvation (Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 4:4, 6:11). As he does this he says,

“They shall greatly rejoice in the Lord. Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for he has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy: he has put a miter on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride” (Isaiah 61:10 LXX).

John Chrysostom stated¹³ that the garment of salvation has to do with our life and works, and not just with our baptism. This is clothing that we never take off, and we put it on in order that we might be made like God. By putting on this clothing, its attributes slowly become part of us.

“Why does Paul say to those who are already clothed: ‘Put on the new man’ (Ephesians 4:24)? He is speaking of that clothing which comes from life and good works. Previously, the clothing comes from Baptism, whereas now it is from the daily life and from works; no longer ‘according to deceitful lusts’, but ‘according to God’ (Ephesians 4:22-24). The word ‘holiness’ here means that which is pure, that which is due.”

“Our part then is, never to put off the garment of righteousness, which Isaiah calls, ‘the garment of salvation’ (Isaiah 61:10), so that we may be made like God. He indeed has put on righteousness; this garment lets us put it on. Now the word, ‘put on’, plainly declares nothing else, than that we should never put it off. Listen to David, ‘As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; as he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, so let it enter his body like water, and like oil into his bones’ (Psalm 109:17-18). And again, ‘O Lord my God, You are very great; You have clothed Yourself with praise and honor; who robe Yourself with light as with a garment, spreading out the heaven as a curtain’ (Psalm 104:1-2). It is usual with us to speak concerning men, such a one has ‘put on’ such an one. We don’t do this just for a few days; He would have us always arrayed in virtue, and never stripped of this garment. A man is not so disfigured when he is stripped of his clothing, as when he is stripped of his virtue. In the former case his fellow-servants see his nakedness; in the latter his Lord and the Angels see it. If ever you happen to see anyone going out naked through the public square, are you not distressed? When you go about stripped of this garment, what shall we say? Do you see those beggars whom we call strollers, how they roam about, how we pity them? Nevertheless they are without excuse. We do not excuse them when they have lost their clothes by gambling; how then, if we lose this garment, shall God pardon us? Whenever the demons see a man stripped of his virtue, they immediately drive him to great distress.”

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹⁴ that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost provided for the Apostles and the women a garment of salvation, filling soul and body. We also receive this garment, but not as dramatically.

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIII, v. 24, Moral.

¹⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 15.

“In order that men should not be ignorant of the greatness of the mighty gift coming down to Apostles, there sounded as it were a heavenly trumpet. Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind (Acts 2:2), signifying the presence of Him who was to grant power to men to seize with violence the kingdom of God; that both their eyes might see the fiery tongues, and their ears hear the sound. It filled the whole house where they were sitting; for the house became the vessel of the spiritual water; as the disciples sat within, the whole house was filled. Thus they were entirely baptized according to the promise, and invested soul and body with a divine garment of salvation. There appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them (Acts 2:3-4); and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They partook of fire, not of burning but of saving fire; of fire which consumes the thorns of sins, but gives luster to the soul.”

John Chrysostom continued to point out¹⁵ that while Christ has clothed us with a garment of salvation, we have the opportunity to clothe Him also. As we do this to “the least of these His brethren” (Matthew 25:40), we do it to Him; in doing so, we put on our garment of salvation. Only the priest or the Bishop is allowed to serve Christ’s Body and Blood as the Eucharist; but we get to serve Christ Himself when we give a cup of cold water to one of His brethren.

“When servants ask their masters to come to a meal, they account themselves not to be giving but receiving. But here the contrary has taken place; the Lord has first asked the servant to come to His own table; do we object to inviting Him after this? He first has introduced us under His own roof; do we not take Him in later? He clad us, being naked; do we not even after this receive Him as a stranger? He first gave us to drink out of His own cup, and do we not give to Him so much as cold water? He has made us drink of the Holy Spirit, and do we not even soothe His bodily thirst? He has made us drink of the Spirit when we deserved punishment; and do we neglect Him even when He’s thirsty; and this when it is out of what He has provided us, that we are to do these things? Do we consider how great a thing it is to hold the cup out of which Christ is to drink, and to put it to His lips? Only the priest alone is allowed to give the cup of His blood. Consider to whom we are giving drink and tremble. We have become a priest of Christ, giving with our own hand, not flesh but bread, not blood, but a cup of cold water. He clothed us with a garment of salvation, and clothed us by Himself; can we at least by our servant clothe Him? He made us glorious in Heaven; can we deliver Him from shivering, nakedness, and shame? He made us a fellow-citizen of angels; can we give to Him at least of the covering of our roof, at least as much as we give to our own servants? He does not refuse this lodging, having opened to us the whole of Heaven. He has delivered us from a really bad prison; if we would look on Him only when He’s bound, this suffices for His refreshment. When we were dead, He raised us; could we just visit Him when He’s sick?

When His gifts are so great, and His demands exceedingly easy, and we do not supply even these; what depth of hell must we not deserve? Justly shall we depart into the fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels, being more senseless than any rock! How great senselessness is it for us who have received,

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XLV, 3.

and are to receive so much, to be slaves of money, from which we shall in a little while be separated even against our will? Others have given up even their life and shed their blood; do we not even give up our excesses for Heaven's sake, for the sake of so great crowns?

Adorned as a Bride

Isaiah had stated of the people of God, "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring in the midst of peoples. Everyone that sees them shall take notice of them, that they are a seed blessed of God; and they shall greatly rejoice in the Lord. Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for he has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy. He has put a miter¹⁶ on me as on a bridegroom; He adorned me with ornaments as a bride" (Isaiah 61:9-10 LXX). Similarly, the Apostle John in his vision of the New Jerusalem, wrote, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2)

Early Christian tradition made¹⁷ a close connection between the administration of the people of Israel and the government of the Church. The Bishop took the place of the High Priest and the Church was seen as a bride adorned for the Lord God. Prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings took the place of animal sacrifices and the Eucharist took the place of first-fruits and offerings. Presbyters took the place of priests and deacons took the place of the Levites.

"Listen, you of the laity; you are the elect Church of God. The people were formerly called 'the people of God', and 'a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5-6, Hebrews 12:23). You, therefore, are the holy and sacred Church of God, 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people' (1 Peter 2:9), a bride adorned for the Lord God, a great and faithful Church. Listen attentively now what was said formerly: oblations and tithes belong to Christ our High Priest, and to those who minister to Him. Tenth of salvation are the first letter of the name of Jesus. Listen, you who have escaped the ten plagues, received the Ten Commandments, and learned the Law. You have kept the faith, have believed in Jesus, have believed in the iota which is the first letter of the name of Jesus, are named after His name, and are established and shine in the consummation of His glory. Those which were then the sacrifices now are prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings. Those which were then first-fruits, tithes, offerings, and gifts, now are oblations, which are presented by holy bishops to the Lord God, through Jesus Christ, who has died for them. These are your high priests, as the presbyters are your priests, and your present deacons take the place of the Levites. There are also the readers, singers, porters, deaconesses, widows, virgins, and orphans; but He who is above all these is the High Priest."

¹⁶ The miter worn by a bridegroom was an ornate turban that resembled a crown. During the wedding, the bride and groom looked like and acted like a queen and her king. See Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 66.

¹⁷ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, II, iv, 25.

John Chrysostom described¹⁸ how the Lord looks at the Church in similar terms to Isaiah's prophecy and John's revelation. He realizes where she has come from and what her problems have been. But He also knows what He has done for her.

“The people of God were both foolish and of an evil tongue; and yet though so many were her blemishes, yet Christ gave Himself up for her in her deformity, as for one in the bloom of youth, as for one dearly beloved, as for one of wonderful beauty. It was in admiration of this that Paul said, ‘Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:7-8). Though we were like this, He took us, He arrayed us in beauty, and washed us, and gave Himself for us.”

“That He might sanctify the Church and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word; that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish’ (Ephesians 5:26-27). By the washing or laver He washes her uncleanness. He blesses her by the word, ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19). Not simply has He adorned her, but has made her ‘glorious, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing’. Let us then also seek after this beauty ourselves, and we shall be able to create it. The Church has obtained all things from her Lord's hands. By Him she was made glorious; by Him she was made pure; by Him she was made without blemish.”

The Light Has Come: Isaiah 60:1-16:

This Old Testament Reading is also used in the Orthodox Church for:

1. Holy Saturday¹⁹
2. The Feast Day of Ss. Constantine and Helen
3. The Exaltation of the Cross on September 14th (vv. 11-16).
4. The Procession of the Cross on August 1st (vv. 11-16).
5. The Feast Day of the Relics of Alexander Nevsky²⁰ on August 30th.

In the West, part of this Old Testament Reading (vv. 1-6) is commonly used for Epiphany²¹.

Isaiah prophesied in Judah prior to the Babylonian Captivity; some of his prophecies speak of the coming Captivity, such as “darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2 DSS²²). Not so clear are Isaiah's prophecies concerning what follows the Captivity. These prophecies that follow the Babylonian Captivity could refer to:

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX, vv. 26-27.

¹⁹ Holy Saturday is the day between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection at Pascha (Easter Sunday). During the three days that Christ was in the Tomb, He descended into Hades and led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-9). This was a great blessing on those who were held captive in Hades. For more details, see the Study for Holy Saturday.

²⁰ Alexander Nevsky was a military hero of 13th century Russia who provided similar benefits for the Russian people as Constantine provided in the 4th century.

²¹ Epiphany is widely recognized in the East and West as a revealing of the Son of God at His Baptism. The result of His Baptism is a great light for mankind and a looking forward to His Second Coming.

²² The quotes in this section come from the Dead Sea Scrolls in an effort to be as precise as possible about the original text. This is possible since the Scroll for Isaiah in the DSS Collection is essentially complete; other

- a. The return of the Exiles from Babylon.
- b. The Coming of Christ and the sending out of the Apostles.
- c. The Reign of Constantine and the Expansion of the Church.
- d. The Second Coming of Christ.
- e. All of the above

The Light of God Came at Various Times: Isaiah 60:1-3

The Reading from Isaiah begins: “Arise, shine; for your light has come! The glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For see, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the people; but the Lord will arise upon you and His glory will appear over you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings before your dawn” (Isaiah 60:1-3 DSS).

What time period does this part of Isaiah’s prophecy refer to? There was darkness at noon during the Crucifixion of Christ. The Apostles occasionally spoke to kings, and many Gentiles came to their light; but the focus was equally on the Jews. This seems more applicable to the days of Constantine, where Gentiles were prominent, both during his days and after, in coming to the light of the people of God. This will also be the case at the Second Coming of Christ.

Tertullian quoted²³ Isaiah saying that the Law and the Gospel would proceed from Jerusalem in a way similar to what happened in the days of Constantine²⁴. Minds, which once were fierce and cruel, would be changed into good dispositions productive of good fruit. This happened during the days of the Apostles, but more so during and following the days of Constantine. It will also occur at the Second Coming of Christ.

“Isaiah declared that ‘Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge among the Gentiles, and shall rebuke many people’ (Isaiah 2:3-4); meaning not those of the Jewish people only, but of the Gentiles which are judged by the new Law of the Gospel and the new word of the Apostles, and are among themselves rebuked for their old error as soon as they have believed. As the result of this, ‘They beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears (which are a kind of hunting instruments) into pruning-hooks’ (Isaiah 2:4); that is to say, minds, which once were fierce and cruel, are changed by them into good dispositions, productive of good fruit²⁵. Again, ‘Listen to me, my people, and you kings, listen to me; for a Law shall proceed from Me, and My judgment for a light to the Gentiles’ (Isaiah 51:4 LXX). He had determined and decreed that the Gentiles also were to be enlightened by the Law and the word of the Gospel. This will be that Law which, according to David, is blameless, because ‘perfect, converting souls’ (Psalm 19:7) from idols to God. This likewise

books among the DSS Collection are just fragments. See Abegg, Flint & Ulrich, The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible, HarperCollins Publishers, San Francisco, 1999

²³ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 1.

²⁴ The Church is always in the present reality; this is why one can so widely quote from sources that are hundreds, even thousands of years apart. In the life of the Church the reality is present just as Jesus’ Passion is present and His birth and His baptism.

²⁵ Tertullian wrote before the days of Constantine, but this describes Constantine and the emperors who followed after him. Given a choice they would not go to war, unlike at any other time in history.

will be the word concerning which Isaiah says, 'For the Lord will make a decisive work in the land' (Isaiah 10:23). The New Testament is compendiously short, and freed from the minute and perplexing burdens of the Law."

John Chrysostom stated²⁶ that the Gentiles, at the coming of Christ, sat in darkness, meaning error, ungodliness and the shadow of death. Men's condition was at its worst point prior to Christ. This is also true about the years before Constantine, where preceding emperors were models of ungodliness.

"When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed for Galilee' (Matthew 4:12). Notice how the Prophet distinguishes that place, saying, 'The land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness, have seen a great light'. By 'darkness' here He means men's errors and ungodliness, not that which is sensible. Therefore he also added, 'On those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned' (Matthew 4:15-16, Isaiah 9:1-2). Neither the light nor the darkness which he speaks of are sensible; he called it not merely light, but 'a great light', which elsewhere he expresses by the word, True (John 1:9); and in describing the darkness, he termed it, 'a shadow of death'".

"This implies that they did not of themselves seek and find, but that God showed Himself to them from above; therefore he said to them, 'Light has dawned'; that is, the light of itself sprang up and shone forth; it was not that they first ran to the light. The condition of men was at the worst before Christ's coming. They more than 'walked in darkness'; they 'sat in darkness'; a sign that they did not even hope to be delivered. They did not even know where to put a step forward; so they sat, overtaken by the darkness, not being able so much as to stand anymore."

Cyprian, in addressing the Novatian heresy, stated²⁷ that the light coming to the Gentiles was so significant that the enemy changed his tactics. Instead of demon-promoted idols, he now promoted heretics that had the name of Christian. Outwardly they were called "Christian", but inwardly they were treacherous antichrists walking in darkness -- like the Arians.

"Beloved brethren, not only must we beware of what is open and clear, but also of what deceives by the craft of subtle fraud. What can be more crafty, what more subtle, than for this enemy, detected and cast down by the advent of Christ, after light has come to the Gentiles, and saving rays have shown for the preservation of men. The deaf receive the hearing of spiritual grace; the blind open their eyes to God; the weak grow strong again with eternal health; the lame run to the church; the dumb pray with clear voices and prayers. Seeing his idols forsaken, and his temples deserted by the huge crowd of believers he devises a new fraud under the very title of the Christian name to deceive the incautious. He has invented heresies and schisms, whereby he might subvert the faith, corrupt the truth, and divide the unity. Those whom he cannot keep in the darkness of the old way, he circumvents and deceives by the error of a new way. He snatches men from the Church itself; while they seem to themselves to have already approached

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XIV, 1.

²⁷ Cyprian, Treatises, I, 3.

to the light, and to have escaped the night of the world, he pours over them again, in their unconscious new darkness. Although they do not stand firm with the Gospel of Christ and with the observation and Law of Christ, they still call themselves Christians, and, walking in darkness, they think that they have the light. The adversary is flattering and deceiving, who according to the apostle's word, transforms himself into an angel of light, and equips his ministers as if they were the ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). They maintain night instead of day, death for salvation, despair under the offer of hope, treachery under the pretext of faith, antichrist under the name of Christ. While they feign things like the truth, they make void the truth by their subtlety. This happens, beloved brethren, so long as we do not return to the source of truth, as we do not seek the head nor keep the teaching of the heavenly Master."

Generally the Light Coming referred to in Isaiah 60 contains mixed imagery of Christ's First and Second Coming. The theme is "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (v.1). A condensed summary goes on to say that:

- Darkness will cover the earth (v.2)
- The Lord will rise upon His people and His glory will appear to them (v.2)
- The Gentiles will come to your light (v.3)
- The wealth of the Gentiles will come to you (v.5; see Revelation 21:26)
- They will bring gold and frankincense (v.6; see The Magi, Luke 2:11)
- The Holy One of Israel has glorified you (v.9)
- Jerusalem's gates will be open continually (v.11; see Revelation 21:25)
- All the rulers of the earth will serve the Lord and bow down before the Lord's people (vv.11-14; see Revelation 21:24).

From the close parallel with Revelation 21, both the First and Second Coming are being celebrated in the victory of light over darkness. There may have been times when Light appeared for a while, such as at the Transfiguration and at other times, but the most prominent time is at the Second Coming of Christ.

Genesis 1 Versus John 1: Genesis 1:1-13 "The Creation"

John introduced his Gospel with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

There are many parallels between Genesis 1 and John 1, and the Reading prescribed for Pascha is John 1:1-17. Just as Holy Saturday and Pascha go together hand-in-hand, so these two Readings go hand-in-hand. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote²⁸ of this connection as follows, where the testimony of Creation has benefit to those who never heard of Christ, but are inclined to see the hand of the Creator in His works.

"Creation testifies of its Creator and is itself a revelation of God, especially in the order and harmony pervading the whole. God being good and loving to mankind, but having His being beyond all created existence, mankind

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Prolegomena III, 35.

was likely to miss the way to the knowledge of Him. For this cause God, by His own Word, gave the universe the order it has in order that men might be enabled to know Him by His works even though He is by nature invisible and incomprehensible. Even in human works, the artist is known by his works even when he is not seen”.

“For the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Romans 1:20).

In John 1 as in Genesis 1, one of the themes is the subject of light versus darkness. The initial state described for the earth was darkness. When God created the heavens and the earth, the Father spoke to the Son, “Let there be light!” (Genesis 1:3), and the Son created light as the Holy Spirit moved over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2). “All things were made through the Son, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). Christ originally “formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7).

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

- Day One: Light was separated from the darkness that was over the waters.
- Day Two: The waters were separated into those above the horizon and those below the horizon. [Included here is water vapor, seas and underground aquifers per Genesis 2:6.]
- Day Three: The waters were gathered into one place so that dry land could appear; sprouting of vegetation.

On each of these three days, there was 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 (embodied) light yet. What was He separating?

John gives the answer, “In Him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5). The darkness spoken of here takes on an evil dimension as the forces of darkness. John mentions this again “Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Darkness is spoken of throughout Scripture as the eternal abode of the ungodly. For example, speaking of Cain, Balaam, Korah and others: for them, “The gloom of darkness is reserved forever” (Jude 13, 2 Peter 2:17). Those who are judged unrighteous at the Last Judgment are said to be “cast into the outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30), where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A similar situation will occur at the end of time, where there will be no sun or moon because the Glory of God will illumine everything (Revelation 21:23, Isaiah 60:19, 20). At that time, the light and the darkness will already be separated.

Even today, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the rulers of the darkness of this age” (Ephesians 6:12). In doing so, we have become sons (and daughters) of light and are

not of the darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5, John 12:35-36). In fact, we have been delivered out of darkness into the light of God (1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 5:8, Colossians 1:13).

The wisdom of this world and the heretics of the ages have seen the Creation but have misinterpreted it, accepting the ideas of Plato and others who state that matter is uncreated and therefore co-eternal with God. A modern rephrase of this would state that matter or its equivalent energy is uncreated in conjunction with the First Law of Thermodynamics.

If matter is uncreated, God then becomes either a mechanic working on matter external to Himself, or a material god, if matter was part of His essence. The heretics supposed that Christ was a secondary god and a part of creation, not the Creator Himself. The Church Fathers were adamant about the Father and the Son being co-operators in creating the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and the words of the Nicene Creed were chosen very carefully to reflect this.

Gregory of Nazianzus stated²⁹ that in creating the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), God first created the heavenly and angelic powers out of an invisible nature. This was a work fulfilled by His Word, and perfected by His Spirit. Then when His first creation was in good order, He conceived a second world, material and visible. This is a compound of earth and sky, and all that is in the midst of them — an admirable creation indeed, when we consider the harmony and the unison of the whole.

When God spoke during the six days of Creation, the Father addressed the Son, saying, “Let there be light”, as the Spirit moved over the waters (Genesis 1:2-3). Basil the Great stated³⁰ that God spoke and creation appeared instantaneously as a vast nature and an elaborate system. Thus David quotes the Father addressing the Son, “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).

The Son is called “the brightness of His Glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3), and “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). In this regard, Christ said, “I and My Father are one”, and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 10:30, 14:9). It is then to Christ, the Image of God, that the Father said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). The Son then created man with both a visible nature (i.e. from matter) and an invisible nature (i.e. his soul) as He breathed into him the breath of life. Man was created as part earthly and part heavenly, and able to live in either realm. Clement of Alexandria stated³¹:

“The other works of creation He made by the word of command alone, but man He framed by Himself, by His own hand, and breathed into him what was peculiar to Himself”.

Gregory of Nyssa linked³² the Creation to the Resurrection of the Dead, and one of the major themes for Pascha is a return to Paradise for those who had been expelled.

²⁹ Gregory of Nazianzen, Oration on the Theophany, 38

³⁰ Basil the Great, Hexaemeron I:6, V:6, V:10

³¹ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor I, 3

³² Gregory of Nyssa, On the Making of Man, 23, 17.

“It is helpful in understanding the Creation to also understand the end of time, since the end must be like the beginning. He who admits a beginning of motion surely does not doubt also as to its having an end, and vice versa. We must use the same faith as to the Word of God when He foretells the necessary stoppage of existing things. Those who deny the Creation often deny the Resurrection. The resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state. The grace we look for is a certain return to the first life, bringing back again to Paradise him who was cast out from it”.

John Chrysostom stated³³ that all men receive “light” from God, but some close their eyes to it. Their “darkness” arises from their own wickedness. This has direct bearing on Christ’s purpose in descending into Hades. There were those in Hades who had responded to His Light, but who didn’t have the opportunities of those living in Israel.

“If He ‘gives light to all men that come into the world’ (John 1:9), how is it that so many continue unenlightened? Not all have known the majesty of Christ. How then does He give light to all men? He gives light to all as far as in Him lies. But if some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that Light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the Light, but from their own wickedness, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift”.

Ambrose of Milan noted³⁴ that just as Aaron the High Priest did not take the priesthood upon himself neither did Christ. The true meaning of Melchizedek’s lack of genealogy is the prefiguring of Christ. As Melchizedek was described as without father and mother, so Christ was without (human) father in His humanity and without mother in His Deity.

“Christ did not honor Himself to be made a High Priest, but He honored Him Who spoke to Him. The Father said, ‘You are My Son, this day have I begotten You’. He also said, ‘You are a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek’ (Hebrews 5:5-6). Since He was the type of all future priests, He took our flesh upon Him, that ‘in the days of His flesh He might offer prayers and supplications with a loud voice and tears. By those things which He suffered, though He was the Son of God, He might seem to learn obedience, which He taught us, that He might be made to us the Author of Salvation?’ (Hebrews 5:8-9) And at last when His sufferings were completed, as though completed and made perfect Himself, He gave health to all and He bore the sin of all”.

“And so He Himself also chose Aaron as priest, that not the will of man but the grace of God should have the chief part in the election of the priest (Numbers 16:40). Aaron did not voluntarily offer himself, nor take it upon himself; this was the vocation from heaven that he should offer gifts for the sins of those who sinned, for He Himself, it is said, bears our weakness (Hebrews 5:2). No one ought to take this honor upon himself, but they are called of God, as was Aaron (Hebrews 5:4), and so Christ did not demand, but received the priesthood”.

“The succession derived through family descent from Aaron, and contained heirs of the family rather than sharers in his righteousness. There came, after the likeness of that Melchizedek, the true Melchizedek, the true King of

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, VIII,

³⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Epistles, LVIII, 47-49.

peace, the true King of righteousness. This is the interpretation of the Name, 'without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life' (Hebrews 7:3), which also refers to the Son of God, Who in His Divine Generation had no mother, and was in His Birth of the Virgin Mary without a father. He was begotten before the ages of the Father alone, born in this age of the Virgin alone, and certainly could have no beginning of days seeing He 'was in the beginning' (John 1:1-2). And how could He have any end of life, Who is the Author of life to all? He is 'the Beginning and the Ending'" (Revelation 1:8).

"But this also refers to Him as an example: a priest ought to be without father and without mother, since in him it is not nobility of family, but holiness of character and pre-eminence in virtue, which is elected".

Gregory of Nyssa stated that the heretics of his day cited Proverbs, "The Lord created me in the beginning of His ways, for His works" (Proverbs 8:22 LXX) to say that Christ was created by the Father, and is therefore a lesser God. Besides quoting this out of context (the "creating" was from eternity past), Gregory pointed out³⁵ that Solomon was addressing the Incarnation³⁶, the "creating" of the human flesh of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And it is not mere human wisdom that built a house. "Wisdom" refers to God as something eternal, not something Christ acquired as either created or imported.

"In saying, 'Wisdom has built herself a house' (Proverbs 9:1), he refers in these words to the preparation of the flesh of the Lord. Wisdom did not dwell in another's building, but built for Itself that dwelling-place from the body of the Virgin. Both are made one, the house and the Wisdom which built the house; that is, the Humanity and the Divinity that was commingled with man. To each of these he applies suitable terms, as in the Gospels, where the more lofty phraseology indicates the Godhead, and that which is humble and lowly indicates the Manhood. Solomon, prophetically moved, delivers to us in its fullness the mystery of the Incarnation. For we speak first of the eternal power and energy of Wisdom; and the evangelist, to a certain extent, agrees with him in his words. As the evangelist proclaimed Him to be the cause and Maker of all things (John 1:3), so Solomon says that by Him were made those individual things which are included in the whole (Proverbs 3:19-20). For he tells us that God by Wisdom established the earth, and in understanding prepared the heavens, and all that follows these in order, keeping to the same sense. That he might not seem to pass over without mention the gift of excellence in men, he goes on to say, speaking in the person of Wisdom, the words, 'I made counsel my dwelling-place, and knowledge, and understanding' (Proverbs 8:12 LXX), and all that relates to instruction in intellect and knowledge. After recounting this, he proceeds to introduce his teaching concerning the dispensation to man, why the Word was made flesh".

³⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, III, 2.

³⁶ For other teaching on the same subject, see:

Leo the Great, Letter to Flavian, XXVIII, 2.

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, Chapter 2.

Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, xix, 44, 47, 50.

For example, Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, had a good concise statement³⁷ of the relationship of Christ's humanity to His Deity. This was something that the Arians of his day just could not comprehend.

“This union of God and man, whereby the Creator is joined to the creature, Arian blindness could not see with the eyes of intelligence. Not believing that the Only-begotten of God was of the same glory and substance with the Father, they spoke of the Son's Godhead as inferior, drawing its arguments from those words ‘the form of a slave’ (Philippians 2:7). In order to show that ‘the form of a slave’ belongs to no other person in Himself, the same Son of God with the same form, says, ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28), just as He says with the same form, ‘I and my Father are one’ (John 10:30). For in ‘the form of a slave’, which He took at the end of the ages for our restoration, He is inferior to the Father. But in the form of God, in which He was before the ages, He is equal to the Father. In His human humiliation He was ‘made of a woman, made under the Law’ (Galatians 4:4); in His Divine majesty He remains the Word of God, ‘through whom all things were made’ (John 1:3). Accordingly, He Who in the form of God made man, in the form of a slave was made man. For both natures retain their own proper character without loss; as the form of God did not do away with the form of a slave, so the form of a slave did not impair the form of God. And so the mystery of power united to weakness, with respect to the same human nature, allows the Son to be called inferior to the Father. But the Godhead, which is One in the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, excludes all notion of inequality. For the eternity of the Trinity has nothing temporal, nothing dissimilar in nature. Its will is one, Its substance identical, Its power equal, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God; because it is a true and inseparable unity, where there can be no diversity. Thus in the whole and perfect nature of true man was true God born, complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours. And by ‘ours’ we mean what the Creator formed in us from the beginning, and what He undertook to repair. For what the deceiver brought in, and what man, when deceived, committed, had no trace in the Savior. Even though He partook of man's weaknesses, He did not share our faults. He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the divine. The ‘emptying of Himself’ (Philippians 2:7), whereby the Invisible made Himself visible, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power”.

When the Lord created Adam and Eve, not only were they created in the Image of God, but God commanded light to shine out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6) through them. John Chrysostom comments³⁸ on this to say that Christ Himself became Light at the Incarnation to restore the light in men.

“Where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the creation; for He says, ‘Darkness was on the face of the deep. And God said, let there be light, and there was light’ (Genesis 1:2, 3). Then, He

³⁷ Leo the Great, Sermons, XXIII, 2.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VIII, 3.

said, 'Let it be, and it was'; but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. He did not say, 'has now commanded light', but 'has Himself shined' (2 Corinthians 4:6). Therefore, we do not see tangible objects by the shining of this light, but we see God Himself through Christ. Of the Spirit, he says, 'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18). Of the Son He says, 'That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them' (2 Corinthians 4:4). And of the Father, He says 'He that said Light shall shine out of darkness shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ'" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Paul also spoke of the work of Creation as having been the work of Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit:

"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 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).

His Life was the Light of Men

John said, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4-5).

Ambrose of Milan spoke³⁹ of the three persons of the Trinity working together, where each person is Light. The Father is the Fount of Light and the Son is the Light and the Son conveys the Light of the Holy Spirit when He says, "Receive the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit is not only Light, but also Fire, such as at the Burning Bush.

"The Father is Light; so too, the Son is Light and the Holy Spirit is Light? Which certainly pertains to the power of God. As John said, 'For God is Light, and in Him is no darkness'" (1 John 1:5).

"But the Son, too, is Light, because 'the Life was the Light of men' (John 1:4). John, that he might show that he was speaking of the Son of God, says of John the Baptist, 'He was not light, but was sent to be a witness of the Light. That was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into this world' (John 1:8-9). So then, since God is Light and the Son of God is the true Light, without doubt the Son of God is true God."

"And you find elsewhere that the Son of God is Light, 'The people that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death have seen a great Light' (Isaiah 9:2 LXX). What is still more clear, it is said, 'For with You is the fountain of Life, and in Your Light we shall see Light' (Psalm 36:9 LXX). This means that with You, O God the Father Almighty, Who are the Fountain of Life, in Your Son Who is the

³⁹ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, I, xiv, 160-165.

Light, we shall see the Light of the Holy Spirit. As the Lord Himself shows saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22), and elsewhere, ‘Power went out from Him’” (Luke 6:19, 8:46).

“But who can doubt that the Father is Light, when we read of His Son that He is the Brightness of Eternal Light? For of Whom but of the Father is the Son the Brightness, Who both is always with the Father, and always shines with the same radiance.”

“Isaiah shows that the Holy Spirit is not only Light but also Fire, saying, ‘And the light of Israel shall be for a fire’ (Isaiah 10:17). So the prophets called Him a burning Fire, because we see more intensely the majesty of the Godhead; since (1) to sanctify is of the Godhead, (2) to illuminate is the property of fire and light, and (3) the Godhead tends to be pointed out or seen in the appearance of fire. ‘For our God is a consuming Fire’ (Deuteronomy 4:24), as Moses said.”

“For he himself saw the fire in the bush, and had heard God when the voice from the flame of fire came to him saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ (Exodus 3:6). The voice came from the fire, and the voice was in the bush, and the fire did no harm. For the bush was burning but was not consumed, because in that mystery the Lord was showing that He would come to illuminate the thorns of our body, and not to consume those who were in misery, but to alleviate their misery. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire (Matthew 3:11), that He might give grace and destroy sin. So in the symbol of fire God keeps His intention.”

Peter linked three things: the Transfiguration, the Prophetic Word confirmed, and a light that shines in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19). The dark place is the world and the Transfiguration illustrates the focus of the Prophets: God becoming incarnate. Jesus is referred to on several occasions as the morning star⁴⁰ or day-star - one that is so bright that it can be seen in the daytime (Revelation 2:28, 22:16). The prophet David spoke of Christ’s eternal generation from the Father using the illustration of the Morning Star: “From the womb before the Morning Star have I begotten You” (Psalm 110:3 LXX). David went on to link Christ’s eternal generation to the Melchizedek priesthood (Psalm 110:4), and to His judgment of the world at the Last Day (Psalm 110:1-2, 5-7). John of Kronstadt comments⁴¹ on this:

“It shines even in the darkness of sin, but sinful human darkness, or rather, the men living in the darkness of sin, do not understand it, ‘comprehend it not’ (John 1:5); they do not guess that the light which is in their souls is from Christ and think that it is their own natural light, that they themselves, by means of their natural intellect, their own sagacity and judgment, have attained to a certain truth, have accomplished certain work; they do not think that it is only by the light of Christ that they see every light (Psalm 36:9), the light of every noble science, of every noble art and of everything.”

The Saints as Light to the World (Ephesians 5:6-14)

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, encouraged the saints to be imitators of God, offering themselves as an offering for a sweet-smelling aroma (Ephesians 5:1-2). Paul had similarly

⁴⁰ Another phrase used in this vein is the “Dayspring” or Dawn from on High (Luke 1:78).

⁴¹ John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ.

encouraged the Roman Church to do so (Romans 12:1). On the other hand, the world around them was involved in other uses for their bodies: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, etc. (Ephesians 5:3-4). Paul reminded them not to be partakers with them (Ephesians 5:7) since

- No one who does these things has any inheritance in the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:5).
- Don't let empty words deceive you about this (Ephesians 5:6).
- Because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 5:6).

The context implies that some of the believers in the Ephesus area were involved with the things mentioned (Ephesians 5:3-5). Paul thus encouraged the saints to walk as children of light since they now are light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). Christ, the Head of the Body, had come as Light overcoming darkness (John 1:4-9). If the saints are to imitate Him, they need to be light also. In being light, all they need do is exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: good works, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9); this is well pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:10). Part of this is remembering our baptism (Romans 6) and that we were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23).

One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, namely truth, involves the responsibility not to ignore the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11), but reprove them. Paul said not to have any fellowship with them, but don't just ignore them either. Speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) was a major factor in the maturity of the Church. Speaking the truth with one's neighbor (Ephesians 4:25, Zechariah 8:16) was supposed to be part of the Old Covenant and is of major importance now that we are members of one another (Ephesians 4:25) in the Body of Christ.

John the Baptist Bore Witness to the Light

John stated that John the Baptist bore witness to the Light. "There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light" (John 1:6-8).

A number of the Twelve Apostles were first disciples of John the Baptist. For sure John the Apostle and Andrew were (John 1:40) and probably also Peter, James the son of Zebedee, Philip and Nathanael (John 1:40-45). John the Baptist pointed to Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 33-34, 36) When he did this, a number of John's disciples began to follow Jesus. This did not bother John because John recognized his cousin Jesus as "He who comes after me has become ranked before me because He existed before me" (John 1:15).

John was a "burning and shining lamp and people were willing for a time to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35). Even Herod rejoiced in John's light for a while (Mark 6:20). Yet John stated that he, himself, was not that true Light that gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:9). John did not understand everything. For example, he did not understand why he should baptize Jesus rather than vice versa (Matthew 3:14-15). While in prison, John also did not understand the direction and purpose of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 11:2-6). But John obeyed what he knew and was referred to by the Lord as the greatest of the Prophets (Luke 7:28).

As the forerunner of the Light, John the Baptist gave light himself, as his father prophesied, “You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:76-79). John the Baptist “came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light” (John 1:7-8).

John Chrysostom stated⁴² that Christ’s coming did not need a witness, such as John the Baptist, but He trusted John with this role for the salvation of many, since Faith would be more easily received this way. John didn’t add anything to the Master; his role was to point people to the Master.

“It was as though Christ had said, ‘I am God, and the really-Begotten Son of God, and am of that Simple and Blessed Essence; I need none to witness to Me. Even though none would do so, yet I am not by this diminished in any way in My Essence; but because I care for the salvation of the many, I have descended to such humility as to commit the witness of Me to a man’. By reason of the groveling nature and infirmity of the Jews, the faith in Him would in this way be more easily received, and more palatable. Since He clothed Himself with flesh, he might not, by encountering men with the unveiled Godhead, destroy them all. Similarly He sent forth a man for His herald, that those who heard might at the hearing of a kindred voice approach more readily. He had no need of that (herald’s) testimony; it would have sufficed that He should only have shown Himself for Who He was in His unveiled Essence, and have confounded them all. But this He did not so that He didn’t annihilate them all, since none could have endured the encounter of that unapproachable light. Therefore He put on flesh, and entrusted the witness of Himself to one of our fellow-servants; since He arranged everything for the salvation of men, He did not look only to His own honor, but also to what might be readily received by, and be profitable to, His hearers. He glanced at this when He said, ‘I say these things’ for your sake, ‘that you may be saved’ (John 5:34). The Evangelist John used the same language as his Master; after saying, ‘to bear witness of the Light’, adds, ‘that all through him might believe’ (John 1:7). He all but said, Think not that the reason why John the Baptist came to bear witness, was that he might add anything to the trust worthiness of his Master. No; he came that by his means beings of his own class might believe. For it is clear from what follows that he used this expression in his anxiety to remove this suspicion beforehand.”

The Light of God Comes to Us

John wrote, “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, VI, 1.

them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:9-13).

The True Light

John wrote, “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9).

When the Light of God (John 1:4-5) exposes sin in peoples’ lives (John 1:9-11) and they reject the light because they love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-21), they open themselves up for demonic activity. Sometimes, as in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, being given over to the demonic activity produced a gratitude for the things of God. King Nebuchadnezzar was given over to demons for seven years and lived like an animal, eating grass like a cow. Following that seven years, he repented and his kingdom was restored to him (Daniel 4:28-37). Similarly, Paul delivered one of the men of Corinth over to Satan in order that his spirit might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The man repented and was restored to the Church (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). In other cases, however, the demonic activity only produced blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:24, 31-32, Matthew 12:14, 1 Corinthians 2:8) and a continued zeal to establish one’s own righteousness apart from God (Romans 10:3).

Basil the Great pointed out⁴³ that “in Spirit” means leading us to the full knowledge of God. This leads to truth, where the Spirit shows the glory of the Only Begotten, from the One Spirit through the One Son to the One Father.

“By means of the power that enlightens us, we fix our eyes on the beauty of the image of the invisible God, and through the image are led up to the supreme beauty of the spectacle of His Majesty. Then the Spirit of knowledge is with us inseparably, in Himself bestowing on them, that love the vision of the truth, the power of beholding the Image, not making the exhibition from without, but in Himself leading on to the full knowledge. ‘No man knows the Father except the Son’ (Matthew 11:27). And so, ‘no one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 12:3). It is not said through the Spirit, but by the Spirit; and ‘God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:24). As it is written ‘in Your light we shall see light’ (Psalm 36:9 LXX); namely by the illumination of the Spirit, ‘the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world’ (John 1:9). The result is that in Himself He shows the glory of the Only Begotten, and on true worshippers He in Himself bestows the knowledge of God. Thus the way of the knowledge of God lies from One Spirit through the One Son to the One Father. Conversely the natural Goodness, the inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit. Thus there is acknowledgment of the hypostases, and the true teaching of the Monarchy is not lost.”

⁴³ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XVIII, 47.

The World Did Not Know Christ or Us

John said, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:10-11).

The Apostle John spoke about “Cleansing” (1 John 2:4-6, 3:1-3): “He who says he abides in Him ought to walk as He walked” (1 John 2:6). This world does not know us because it didn’t know Him (1 John 3:1, John 1:10). That’s why we separate ourselves. The world won’t have anything to do with us; we’ll just get blackened or dirtied by the world.

While we are in the world, we, like Christ and the Holy Spirit, are not of the world. We are made holy or sanctified (Greek: *hagiazō*) by the Word (Greek: *logos*) which is Truth (John 17:14-19). By contrast, what the world offers is lawlessness, darkness, worthlessness, and delusion. Ezekiel put it: “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezekiel 36:24-25). The whole point of the Mosaic Law’s focus on clean vs. unclean was not to exclude Gentiles but to focus on holiness and avoid the filthiness of demons and idols. Seen in this light, the Mosaic Law really makes sense.

Moses experienced rejection by the world when he was in Egypt. When Moses lived as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, he was commander of the Egyptian army and was sent to fight the invading Ethiopians. After Moses returned as a conquering hero, the magicians in Pharaoh’s service entertained a greater hatred of him than before⁴⁴, and were able to sway Pharaoh to beware of him as a military force to be reckoned with. At this same time, the incident occurred where Moses saw an Egyptian taskmaster unjustly beating a Hebrew. Moses struck down the Egyptian and killed him, and buried him in the sand. (From the above accounts, it is apparent that Moses was strong and skilled with military weapons and movements!). The next day, he came upon two Hebrews fighting. Trying to act as a peacemaker, Moses spoke to them. But one of them replied, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses realized that the event had become known. When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, knowing that his general had now identified with the Hebrews as his magicians said he would. However, Moses left Egypt before Pharaoh could find him (Exodus 2:11-15).

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁵ that the “reproach of Christ” that Moses received was that spoken by his own people: “Who made you a prince or a judge over us?” (Exodus 2:14). By his rank (heir to the throne, general in the Egyptian army), they should have welcomed him with open arms as a prince and a judge. Chrysostom compared this to the reproach Christ received from His own: “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). After they crucified Him, “those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, saying, ‘if You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross’” (Matthew 27:39-40). Thus Moses and Christ suffered alike. Moses and Christ alike looked to the reward mentioned (Hebrews 11:26, 12:2).

⁴⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xi, 1.

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXVI, 4.

We Have the Right to Become Sons of God

John said, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

Irenaeus spelled out⁴⁶ the relation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to each other. The Father is above all, through all and in all, but it is the Holy Spirit that is in us all. The Son grants the Holy Spirit to all as the Father wills. The Father is the head of Christ and Christ is the head of the Church. Christ created all things as the Father spoke. Those who receive Christ are given the right to become sons of God.

“The Father bears the creation and His own Word simultaneously, and the Word borne by the Father grants the Spirit⁴⁷ to all as the Father wills. To some He gives by creation what is made; to others He gives by adoption, namely generation. Thus one God the Father is declared, who is above all, and through all, and in all. The Father is indeed above all, and He is the Head of Christ; but the Word is through all things, and is Himself the Head of the Church. The Spirit is in us all and He is the living water (John 7:39), which the Lord grants to those who rightly believe in Him, love Him, and who know that ‘there is one Father, who is above all, and through all, and in us all’ (Ephesians 4:6). John bears witness to these things, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made’ (John 1:1-3). Then John said of the Word Himself, ‘He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, to those who believe in His Name’ (John 1:10-12). Showing His human nature, John said, ‘The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us’. Continuing he said, ‘We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten by the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14). He thus plainly points out to those willing to hear, to those having ears, that there is one God, the Father over all, and one Word of God, who is through all, by whom all things have been made. This world belongs to Him, and was made by Him, according to the Father’s will, and not by angels; nor by apostasy, defect, and ignorance.”

As sons of God, we are subject to Christ and Christ is subject to God. Paul said, ‘When all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28). Ambrose of Milan stated⁴⁸ that all things are not now subject to Christ, but they will be at some time. The Lord Himself has said, ‘Take My yoke upon you’ (Matthew 11:29). It is not the fierce that bears the yoke, but the humble and the gentle. All things were not made subject before, for they had not yet received the wisdom of God, nor did they yet wear the easy yoke of the Word on the neck as it were of

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, xviii, 2-3.

⁴⁷ Some have argued that Irenaeus is saying here that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, as the Western Churches have added to the Nicene Creed. But there is nothing here about procession, only about the mission of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁸ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, xiii, 166-169.

their mind. ‘But as many as received Him’, as it is written, ‘to them He gave the right to become children of God’ (John 1:12).

“Someone might say that Christ is now made subject, because many have believed. Not so! Christ’s subjection lies not in a few but in all. I am not brought into subjection, if the flesh in me still lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:17). I am in part subdued; the whole Church is the one body of Christ; we divide Christ as long as the human race disagrees. Therefore Christ is not yet made subject, for His members are not yet brought into subjection. But when we have become one spirit, not many members, then He also will become subject, in order that through His subjection ‘God may be all and in all’”.

“Since Christ is not yet made subject, the work of God is not yet perfected; for the Son of God said, ‘My food is to do the will of My Father that sent Me, and to finish His work’ (John 4:34). Because I myself am not yet perfect, I make the work of God to be unfinished. That is not a matter of me doing something wrong; it is a matter of a lack of grace. In so far as we are made subject, it is to our profit that we are made subject to the Law, that we are made subject to grace. The wisdom of the flesh was at enmity with God, for it is not subject to the Law” (Romans 8:7).

Born of God

John said, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

John Chrysostom stated that we can get to heaven by understanding Jacob’s ladder and taking it one step at a time. The ladder is a riddle indicating a gradual ascent by means of virtue. We attain to heaven, not using material steps, but by improvement and correction.

“Let us learn⁴⁹ then, and having reckoned up our faults, let us accomplish their correction in time, and let us determine to correct one this month, another next month, and a third in that which follows. And so mounting as it were by steps, let us get to heaven by a Jacob’s ladder. For the ladder seems to me to signify in a riddle by that vision the gradual ascent by means of virtue, by which it is possible for us to ascend from earth to heaven, not using material steps, but improvement and correction of manners. Let us then lay hold on this means of departure and ascent, that having obtained heaven, we may also enjoy all the blessings there”.

Chrysostom also stated⁵⁰ that upward movement on the ladder results in greater understanding of the mysteries of God, such as the Incarnation. The lower rungs describe the birth of children to barren women in the Old Testament, which foreshadowed the Virgin birth at higher rungs. The lower rungs also speak of a plurality in the Godhead (Genesis 1:26); this foreshadows the Incarnation, where God begot by Himself.

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXIII, 5.

⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, V, v. 5.

“Even the things of old stood in need of forerunners and types. For as in a ladder, the first step leads to the second, and from the first it is not possible to step to the fourth. It is not possible to get to the second before the first”.

“Observe the signs of signs, and you will discern this in the ladder which Jacob saw. ‘The Lord stood at the top, and underneath angels were ascending and descending’ (Genesis 28:13). It was prophesied that the Father had a Son; it was necessary this should be believed. Because He begets without passion⁵¹, for this reason barren women began conceiving. In order that people might understand that He begot of Himself, things happen obscurely, as in type and shadow, but still they happen, and as they go on they become somehow clearer. A woman is formed out of man alone, and the man remains whole and entire (Genesis 2:21-23). Again, it was necessary there should be some sure sign of the Conception of a Virgin. So the barren bear, not once only, but a second time and a third, and many times (Genesis 21:1-8, 30:22-23, 1 Samuel 1:11-20). Of His birth of a Virgin, the barren is a type, that sends us forward to faith, and implies that God is able to beget alone. For if man is required, and birth takes place without him, in a more excellent way, One is begotten by God. There is still another generation, which is ours by the Spirit. The barren is a type of this again, from the fact that it is not of blood (John 1:13), but pertains to the generation from above. The Virgin Mary, as also the types, shows that the generation is without passion and that it proceeds from One above”.

The Word Became Flesh

John stated, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me’” (John 1:14-15).

In the Gospel text, Jesus, the Son of God, is referred to as “the Only Begotten of the Father” (John 1:14; see also John 3:16, 1 John 4:9, Isaiah 9:6). He is referred to as “Only Begotten” because He is the only one who was eternally born of the Father, making Him God of God. During Creation Week, all things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3, Hebrews 1:8-12). The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). Both the Son’s begotten-ness and the Holy Spirit’s procession are mysteries that are unknowable by human wisdom. However, both the Son and the Holy Spirit are described in the Scriptures as God (2 Corinthians 3:17, 18, John 15:26, 1 John 5:6, Ephesians 4:3-6, John 1:32-34, Matthew 1:18).

John Chrysostom used⁵² a good analogy to describe the eternal begotten-ness of the Son and showed what the implications of denying this are: The rays of the sun cannot exist without the body of the sun, and the rays exist at the same time as the sun; where the sun is akin to God the Father and the rays are akin to Christ. Both always exist at the same time, and there cannot

⁵¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, viii, 28.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IV, 2.

be one without the other. Those like the Arians, who tried to assign a beginning to the Son of God in His Deity, by implication, also imply a beginning for the Father.

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

“But if in any case you say that you have found a beginning to the Son, see whether by the same reason and argument you are not compelled to reduce the Father also to a beginning, earlier indeed, but still a beginning. For when you have assigned to the Son a limit and beginning of existence, do you not proceed upwards from that point, and say, that the Father was before it? Clearly you do. Tell me then, what is the extent of the Father’s prior subsistence? For whether you say that the interval is little, or whether you say it is great, you equally have brought the Father to a beginning. For it is clear, that it is by measuring the space that you say whether it is little or great. Yet it would not be possible to measure it, unless there was a beginning on either side; so that as far as you are concerned you have given the Father a beginning, and henceforth, according to your argument, not even the Father will be without beginning. Do you see that the word spoken by the Savior is true, and the saying everywhere discovers its force? And what is that word? It is, (John 5:23) ‘He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father’” (John 5:23).

Gregory the Great stated⁵³ that Christ is called the Word, because He is related to the Father as word to mind. This relation might be compared to that between the definition and the thing defined. He who has mental perception of the Son has also perceived the Father; and the Son is a concise demonstration and easy setting forth of the Father’s nature. Everything that is begotten is a silent word of Him who begot it. He is also called Wisdom, as the knowledge of things divine and human. He is similarly called Power, Truth, the Image, Light, Life, Righteousness and Redemption.

“Christ is called Son because He is identical with the Father in Essence; and not only for this reason, but also because He is of Him. He is called Only-Begotten, not because He is the only Son and of the Father alone, and only a Son; but also because the manner of His Son-ship is peculiar to Himself and not shared

⁵³ Gregory the Great, Fourth Theological Oration, XX

by bodies. He is called the Word, because He is related to the Father as Word to Mind; not only on account of His passionless Generation, but also because of the Union, and of His declaratory function. Perhaps too this relation might be compared to that between the Definition and the Thing defined⁵⁴ since this also is called 'Logos'. For, it says, he that has mental perception of the Son, for this is the meaning of Has Seen (), has also perceived the Father. The Son is a concise demonstration and easy setting forth of the Father's Nature. Everything that is begotten is a silent word of him that begat it. If anyone should say that this Name was given Him because He exists in all things that are, he would not be wrong. For what is there that consists but by the word? He is also called Wisdom, as the Knowledge of things divine and human. For how is it possible that He Who made all things should be ignorant of the details of what He has made? And Power, as the Sustainer of all created things, and the Furnisher to them of power to keep themselves together. And Truth, as being in nature One and not many for truth is one and falsehood is multiple. He is also called the pure Seal of the Father and His most unerring Impress. He is also called the Image as of one substance with Him, and because He is of the Father, and not the Father of Him. This is of the Nature of an Image, to be the reproduction of its Archetype, and of that whose name it bears; but there is more here. In ordinary language an image is a motionless representation of that which has motion; but in this case it is the living reproduction of the Living One, and they are more exactly alike than was Seth to Adam, or any son to his father. Such is the nature of simple Existences, that it is not correct to say of them that they are Like in one particular and Unlike in another; but they are a complete resemblance, and should rather be called Identical than Like. Moreover He is called Light as being the Brightness of souls cleansed by word and life. If ignorance and sin is darkness, knowledge and a godly life will be Light. He is called Life, because He is Light, and is the constituting and creating Power of every reasonable soul. For in Him we live and move and have our being (), according to the double power of that Breathing into us. We were all inspired by Him with breath, as many of us as were capable of it, in so far as we open the mouth of our mind, with God the Holy Spirit. He is Righteousness, because He distributes according to that which we deserve, and is a righteous Arbiter both for those who are under the Law and for those who are under Grace, for soul and body. He is Sanctification, as being Purity, that the Pure may be contained by Purity. He is Redemption, because He sets us free, who were held captive under sin, giving Himself as a Ransom for us, the Sacrifice to make expiation for the world. He is Resurrection, because He raises up from here, and brings to life again us, who were slain by sin."

John Chrysostom added⁵⁵ that the Word made flesh does not mean that God changed. God is perfect and any change would be for the worse. The Word made flesh refers to its dwelling and inhabiting, not to any change to the unchangeable nature.

"God is Omnipotent as long as He continues to be God. But if He admits to change for the worse, how could He be God? Change is far from that simple

⁵⁴ Logos means

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XI, 2.

Nature. Therefore the Psalmist said, ‘They shall all grow old as a garment; and as vesture shall you fold them and they shall be changed. But You are the same and Your years shall not fail’ (Psalm 102:27 LXX). For that Essence is superior to all change. There is nothing better than He, to which He might advance and reach. Not even equal to, or the least approaching Him. It remains, therefore, that if He changes, He must admit a change for the worse; and this would not be God. But let the blasphemy return upon the heads of those who utter it. To show that he uses the expression, ‘the Word was made flesh’ () only that you should not suppose a mere appearance, hear from what follows how he clears the argument, and overthrows that wicked suggestion. For what does he add? ‘And dwelt among us’. All but saying, ‘Imagine nothing improper from the Word ‘was made’; I spoke not of any change of that unchangeable Nature, but of Its dwelling and inhabiting. But that which dwells cannot be the same with that in which it dwells, but different; one thing dwells in a different thing, otherwise it would not be dwelling; for nothing can inhabit itself. I mean, different as to essence; for by a Union and Conjoining God the Word and the flesh are One, not by any confusion or obliteration of substances, but by a certain union ineffable and past understand.”

The effect on us is this: with the Holy Spirit in us, Jesus is not as ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). In fact, He refers to us as part of His Body and as His members just like the limbs of a body are members of that body (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). Thus we have become sons and daughters of God also, and we address Him as such in the Lord’s Prayer, “Our **Father**, Who art in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9-13).

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁶ that we have the right to become sons of God, but it doesn’t come automatically or to anyone. We need to choose to accept it and we need to take pains to keep it.

“Why then did he say not that ‘He made them sons of God’, but that ‘He gave them the right to become sons of God?’ (John 1:12) To show that we need much zeal to keep the image of son-ship impressed on us at Baptism, all through without spot or soils; and at the same time to show that no one shall be able to take this power from us, unless we are the first to deprive ourselves of it. For if among men, those who have received the absolute control of any matters have well-nigh as much power as those who gave them the charge; much more shall we be, who have obtained such honor from God. At the same time too he wishes to show, that not even does grace come upon man irrespectively, but upon those who desire and take pains for it. For it lies in the power of these to become His children since if they do not first make the choice themselves, the gift does not come upon them, nor have any effect.”

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, X, 2.

Athanasius of Alexandria added⁵⁷ that Christ's human body is not co-essential with the Father as is His Deity. Just as He was made flesh, so He became a curse for us. He did not Himself become a curse in His Deity, but took it on in His humanity on our behalf.

“The body in which the Word was is not co-essential with the Godhead, but was truly born of Mary, while the Word Himself was not changed into bones and flesh, but came in the flesh. What John said, ‘The Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14), has this meaning, as we may see by a similar passage. Paul wrote, ‘Christ has become a curse for us’ (Galatians 3:13). Just as He has not Himself become a curse, but did so because He took on Him the curse on our behalf, so also He has become flesh, not by being changed into flesh, but because He assumed living flesh on our behalf, and has become Man. To say ‘the Word became flesh’, is equivalent to saying ‘the Word has become man’. According to what is said in Joel: ‘I will pour forth of My Spirit on all flesh’ (Joel 2:28); the promise did not extend to the irrational animals, but is for men, on whose account the Lord has become Man”.

Athanasius also stated⁵⁸ that the Arians of his day were in error to call Christ a creature, created by God. Just as Christ put on flesh at the Incarnation, so also He became sin and a curse for us. These things affected His humanity, not His Deity.

“The Lord, knowing His own Essence to be the Only-begotten Wisdom and Offspring of the Father, says in love to man. ‘The Lord created me a beginning of His ways’ (Proverbs 8:22), as if to say, ‘My Father has prepared for Me a body, and has created Me for men in behalf of their salvation’. When John says, ‘The Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14), we do not conceive the whole Word Himself to be flesh, but to have put on flesh and become man. On hearing, ‘Christ has become a curse for us,’ and ‘He has made Him sin for us who knew no sin’ (Galatians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 5:21) we do not simply conceive this, that the entire Christ has become curse and sin. He has taken on Him the curse, which was against us. As Paul has said, ‘Has redeemed us from the curse’ (Galatians 3:13); as Isaiah said, ‘has carried our sins’ (Isaiah 53:4); and as Peter has written, ‘has borne them in the body on the wood’ (1 Peter 2:24). So, if it is said in the Proverbs ‘He created,’ (Proverbs 8:22) we must not conceive that the entire Word is in nature a creature”.

No One Has Seen God at any Time

John said, “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*” (John 1:16-18).

Irenaeus stated⁵⁹ that when the prophets saw their various visions of God and the Throne of God, they did not actually see God Himself, but the likeness of God. On the other hand,

⁵⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Letter to Epictetus”, Personal Letters, LIX, 8.

⁵⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, xix, 47.

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xx, 10-11.

Christ came to declare the Father (John 1:18), and he who has seen Christ has seen the Father (John 14:9).

“The prophets saw the dispensations of God in part, but not actually God Himself. For Ezekiel saw the vision of God, and the cherubim, and their wheels, and he recounted the mystery of the whole of that progression. He beheld the likeness of a throne above them, and upon the throne a likeness as of the figure of a man, and the things which were upon his loins as the figure of amber, and what was below like the sight of fire. He set forth all the rest of the vision of the thrones, but lest anyone might happen to think that in those visions he had actually seen God, he added, ‘This was *the appearance of the likeness* of the glory of God’” (*italics mine*).

“Then neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Ezekiel, who all had many celestial visions, saw God; but what they saw were similitudes of the splendor of the Lord, and prophecies of things to come. It is manifest that the Father is indeed invisible, of whom also the Lord said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18, 14:9, 1 Timothy 6:16). But His Word, as He Himself willed it, and for the benefit of those who beheld, did show the Father’s brightness, and explained His purposes. The Lord said, ‘The only-begotten God, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him’ (John 1:18)”.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁰ that we must listen carefully and attentively to statements in the Scriptures describing God, to avoid misinterpreting references to His humanity as references to His Deity. David and the sons of Korah titled some of their Psalms “For Contemplation” (Psalm 32, 42) and Solomon urges “seeking out Wisdom as silver and as hidden treasure” (Proverbs 2:2-4, 3:13-15). As we contemplate Him, we will come to understand that only the Son beholds the Essence of God, and it is the Son who reveals God to mankind.

“For if anyone listens to what is said in the Scriptures without inquiring into the meaning, he will suppose many unseemly things of God. He may think that He is a man, that He is made of brass, is wrathful, is furious, and many opinions yet worse than these (Revelation 1:15). He may think that God has a bosom (John 1:18), a thing proper to bodily substances, yet no one is so insane as to imagine, that He who is without body is a body. In order then that we may properly interpret these passages according to its spiritual meaning, let us search it through from its beginning”.

“Christ said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’. What then shall we answer to Isaiah, when he says, ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up’ (Isaiah 6:1); and to John testifying of Isaiah, that ‘he said these things when he had seen His glory?’ (John 12:41)

Ezekiel too beheld Him sitting above the Cherubim (Ezekiel 1 and 10). Daniel said, ‘The Ancient of days did sit’ (Daniel 7:9). Moses himself said, ‘Show me Your Glory, that I may see You so as to know You’ (Exodus 33:18, 13). Jacob took his name from this very thing, being called “Israel”; for Israel is ‘one that sees God’ (Genesis 32:26-30). How then does John say, ‘No man has seen God at any time?’ (John 1:18) It is to declare that all these were instances of His condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. For had they

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 1.

seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms. It does not sit, or stand, or walk; these things all belong to bodies. How He is, only He knows. And this He declared, saying, 'I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes by the hands of the prophets' (Hosea 12:10); that is, 'I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was'".

"For since His Son was about to appear in the flesh, He prepared them from old time to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It. But what God really is, not only haven't the prophets seen, but not even angels or archangels. If you ask them, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, 'Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good will towards men' (Luke 2:14). If you desire to learn something from the Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that 'heaven and earth are full of His glory' (Isaiah 6:3). If you inquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. 'Praise Him', said David, 'all His hosts' (Psalm 148:2). But only the Son beholds Him, and the Holy Spirit. The attribute of being incorporeal and uncreated belongs not to the Father only, but also to the Son. Paul declares this point, that He 'is the Image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15). When Paul said, 'God was manifested in the Flesh' (1 Timothy 3:16); this means that the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to His Essence".

Tertullian pointed out⁶¹ what the Scriptures say about the Father and the Son. The Father was never seen; it was always the Son that was seen. The Father acts by mind and thought; while the Son, who is in the Father's mind and thought, gives effect and form to what He sees. Thus all things were made by the Son, and without Him was not anything made.

"The Scriptures say, 'No one has seen God at any time' (John 1:18). What God does he mean? He has already said: '*Him* we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life' (1 John 1:1). It is of course the Father, whom no man has seen or can see (1 Timothy 6:16), with whom the Word was, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, and has Himself declared Him (John 1:18). He was both heard and seen and, that He might not be supposed to be a phantom was actually handled. Paul saw Christ also; but yet he didn't see the Father. 'Have I not seen *Jesus Christ our Lord?*' (1 Corinthians 9:1) Paul expressly called Christ God, saying: 'whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God' (Romans 9:5). The Son of God, which is the Word of God, is visible, because He who became flesh was called Christ. Of the Father, however, he says, 'Whom no man has seen or can see'. He continues the description, 'Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see' (1 Timothy 6:16). It was of Him, too, that he had said, 'Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to the only God' (1 Timothy 1:17); so that we might apply the contrary qualities to the Son Himself — mortality, accessibility. Paul testifies that 'He died according to the Scriptures', and that 'He was seen by himself last of all' (1 Corinthians 15:3, 8). He was seen by means of the light which was accessible,

⁶¹ Tertullian, Against Praxeas, II, vii, 15.

although it was not without imperiling his sight that he experienced that light (Acts 22:11). If Peter, John, and James were unable to endure the glory of the Son, they must have died then and there if they had seen the Father at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:6). ‘No man shall see God, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). This being the case, it is clear that He was always seen from the beginning, who became visible in the end; He was not seen in the end who had never been visible from the beginning; thus there are two — the Visible and the Invisible. It was the Son, who was always seen, and the Son who always conversed with men, and the Son who has always worked by the authority and will of the Father. ‘The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do’ (John 5:19). The Father acts by mind and thought; while the Son, who is in the Father’s mind and thought, gives effect and form to what He sees. Thus all things were made through the Son, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3).

Leo the Great stated⁶² that one of the rewards of the age to come is the ability to see God face to face. This is what Paul said, “that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man”.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). Great is the happiness, beloved, of him for whom so great a reward is prepared. What, then, is it to have the heart pure, but to strive after those virtues which are mentioned above? How great the blessedness of seeing God, what mind can conceive, what tongue declare? Yet this shall come when man’s nature is transformed, so that no longer ‘in a mirror’, nor ‘in a riddle’, but ‘face to face’ (1 Corinthians 13:12) it sees the very Godhead ‘as He is’ (1 John 3:2), which no man could see (Exodus 33:20, John 1:18, 1 Timothy 6:16). Through the unspeakable joy of eternal contemplation we obtain that ‘which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man’ (Isaiah 64:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9). Rightly is this blessedness promised to purity of heart! The brightness of the true light will not be able to be seen by the unclean sight. That which will be happiness to minds that are bright and clean, will be a punishment to those that are stained”.

Once Christ became incarnate, people had no difficulty looking at Him, including unbelievers, because His humanity veiled His Deity. On the mountain of Transfiguration, Jesus’ humanity shone with the uncreated Light of His Deity, and Peter, James and John had difficulty looking at Him. When the Apostle John stated that ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18), this refers to seeing Him in His Deity. In His transfigured state, even His humanity becomes difficult to behold.

John Chrysostom stated⁶³ that “seeing God” and “knowing God” are related to knowledge of the Son of God. Philip tried to press Jesus on this issue, and was rebuked as trying to know the Father apart from the Son.

⁶² Leo the Great, Sermons, XCV, 8.

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIV, 1.

“Consider the exact meaning of the words, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and have you not known Me, Philip?’ Philip replied, ‘Are You the Father after whom I inquire?’ (John 14:8-9) ‘No’, He said. On this account He didn’t say, ‘have you not known Him’, but, ‘have you not known Me’, declaring that the Son is no other than what the Father is, yet continuing to be a Son. But how did Philip come to ask this question? Christ had said, ‘If you had known Me, you should have known My Father also’ (John 14:7), and He had often said the same to the Jews. Peter and the Jews had often asked Him, ‘Who is the Father?’ (John 5:16-47, 8:13-20). Thomas had asked Him (John 14:5-6), but no one had understood. Philip, in order that He might not seem to trouble Him by asking in turn after the Jews, added, ‘Show us the Father and it is sufficient for us’ (John 14:8). Yet Christ had said, “If you had known Me, you should have known My Father also’ (John 14:7), and by Himself He declared the Father. But Philip reversed the order, and said, ‘Show us the Father’, as though he knew Christ exactly. But Christ did not put up with him, but set him right, persuading him to gain the knowledge of the Father through Himself, while Philip desired to see Him with these bodily eyes, having perhaps heard concerning the Prophets, that they ‘saw God’. But those cases, Philip, were acts of condescension. Wherefore Christ said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18); and again, ‘Every man that has heard and has learned from God comes to Me’ (John 6:45). ‘You have not heard His voice at any time and you have not seen His shape’ (John 5:37). In the Old Testament, ‘No man shall see My face, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). What did Christ say? Very reprovably He said, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and have you not known Me, Philip?’ He said not, ‘have you not seen Me’, but, ‘have you not known Me’”.

John Chrysostom pondered⁶⁴ the seeming contradiction of no man ever “seeing God” at any time (John 1:18), and yet others “saw Him” in some way. In all cases, those who “saw God”, including the angels, saw some condescension where He made Himself visible to them. No one has seen His Essence, including the angels! The one work of the angels is to praise God, not to behold Him. Only the Son beholds Him. Everyone else can only behold Him in a vision as He allows.

“By what connection of thought does the Apostle come to say, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18)? After showing the infinite difference between the gifts of Christ and those ministered by Moses, he adds the cause of the difference. Moses, as being a servant, was minister of lower things, but Christ being Lord and King, and the King’s Son, brought to us things far greater, being ever with the Father, and beholding Him continually; wherefore He said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’. What then shall we answer to Isaiah when he says, ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up’ (Isaiah 6:1); and to John himself testifying of Him, that ‘Isaiah said these things when he had seen His glory’? (John 12:41) What about Ezekiel; for he too beheld Him sitting above the Cherubim (Ezekiel 1, 10)? What about Daniel; for he too said, ‘The Ancient of days did sit’ (Daniel 7:9)? What about Moses himself, ‘Show me Your Glory, that I may see You so as to know You’ (Exodus 33:13, LXX, paraphrased)?

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 1-2.

Jacob took his name from this very thing, being called 'Israel'; for Israel is 'one that sees God'. How then did John say, 'No man has seen God at any time'?"

"It is to declare, that all these were instances of His condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. Had they seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms, since His Essence is simple, without form, or parts, or bounding lines. It does not sit, stand, or walk; these things all belong to bodies. But how He is, He only knows. This He has declared by the prophet Hosea saying, 'I have multiplied visions, and used similitude by the hands of the prophets' (Hosea 12:10); that is, 'I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was'. For since His Son was about to appear in the flesh, He prepared them from old to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It. But what God really is, not only have not the prophets seen, but not even angels or archangels".

"If you ask the angels, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, 'Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good will towards men' (Luke 2:14). If you desire to learn something from Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that 'heaven and earth are full of His glory' (Isaiah 6:3). If you inquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. 'Praise Him', said David, 'all His hosts' (Psalm 148:2). But the Son only beholds Him, and the Holy Spirit. How can any created nature ever see the Uncreated? If we are absolutely unable clearly to discern any incorporeal power whatsoever, even though created, as has been often proved in the case of angels, much less can we discern the Essence which is incorporeal and uncreated. Therefore Paul said, 'Whom no man has seen, nor can see'" (1 Timothy 6:16).

"Does then this special attribute belong to the Father only, not to the Son? It belongs also to the Son; and to show that it does so, hear Paul declaring this point, and saying, that He 'is the Image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15). Now if He is the Image of the Invisible, He must be invisible Himself, for otherwise He would not be an 'image'. And wonder not that Paul said in another place, "God was manifested in the Flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16); because the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to His Essence. Besides, Paul shows that He is invisible, not only to men, but also to the powers above. For after saying, 'was manifested in the Flesh', he adds, 'was seen of angels'. So that even to angels He then became visible, when He put on the Flesh; but before that time they did not so behold Him, because even to them His Essence was invisible".

"How then did Christ say, 'Despise not one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven'? (Matthew 18:10) God does not have a face. He also said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8), He means that intellectual vision which is possible to us, and the having God in the thoughts. So also in the case of angels, we must understand that by reason of their pure and sleepless nature they do nothing else, but always image to themselves God. Therefore Christ said that 'No man knows the Father, except the Son' (Matthew 11:27). We are not all in ignorance of God; but no one knows Him as the Son knows Him. Many have

seen Him in the mode of vision permitted to them, but no one has beheld His Essence. So many of us know God, but what His substance can be none knows, except only He that was begotten of Him. For by 'knowledge' He here means an exact idea and comprehension, such as the Father has of the Son. 'As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father'" (John 10:15).

Cyril of Jerusalem generalized⁶⁵ to say that the incorporeal couldn't be subject to bodily sight. Human eyes simply cannot see God; but by His works, we can attain some appreciation for Him.

"To look upon God with eyes of flesh is impossible; for the incorporeal cannot be subject to bodily sight. The Only begotten Son of God Himself has testified, saying, 'No man has seen God at any time' (John 1:18). If according to that which is written in Ezekiel anyone should understand that Ezekiel saw Him, yet what did the Scripture say? 'He saw the likeness of the glory of the Lord' (Ezekiel 1:28); not the Lord Himself, but the likeness of His glory, not the glory itself, as it really is. When he saw merely the likeness of the glory, and not the glory itself, he fell to the earth from fear. Now if the sight of the likeness of the glory brought fear and distress on the prophets, anyone who should attempt to behold God Himself would to a certainty lose his life, according to the saying, 'No man shall see My face and live' (Exodus 33:20). For this cause God of His great loving-kindness spread out the heaven as a veil of His proper Godhead that we should not perish. The word is not mine, but the Prophet's. 'If You shall tear open the heavens, trembling will take hold of the mountains at Your sight, and they will flow down' (Isaiah 64:1 LXX). Why do you wonder that Ezekiel fell down on seeing the likeness of the glory?"

"The Divine Nature then is impossible to see with eyes of flesh. But from the works, which are Divine, it is possible to attain to some conception of His power, according to Solomon, who says, 'By the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionately the Maker of them is seen'" (Wisdom 13:5).

Irenaeus of Lyons stated⁶⁶ that when Moses desired to see openly Him, Who had spoken with him, the vision from the cleft of the rock foretold the end times; i.e. the Transfiguration was the fulfillment of the promise to Moses to see God face to face. The prophets did not behold the actual face of God, but saw mysteries through which man should afterwards see God in the flesh. Christ in the flesh declared the Father with His brightness and His purpose.

"The Word spoke to Moses, appearing before him, 'just as anyone might speak to his friend' (Numbers 12:8). But Moses desired to see Him openly who was speaking with him, and was thus addressed, 'Stand in the deep place of the rock, and with My Hand I will cover you. But when My splendor shall pass by, then you shall see My back parts, but My face you shall not see. For no man sees My face, and shall live' (Exodus 33:20-23). Two facts are thus signified: that it is impossible for man to see God; and that, through the wisdom of God, man shall see Him in the last times, in the depth of a rock, that is, in His coming as a man. For this reason did the Lord confer with him face to face on the top of a

⁶⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IX, 1-2.

⁶⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xx, 9-11.

mountain⁶⁷, Elijah being also present (Matthew 17:1-9), He thus making good in the end the ancient promise”.

“The prophets, therefore, did not openly behold the actual face of God, but they saw the dispensations and the mysteries through which man should afterwards see God. He said to Elijah, ‘You shall go forth tomorrow, and stand in the presence of the Lord. And, behold, a wind great and strong, which shall tear up the mountains, and break the rocks in pieces before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a scarcely audible voice’ (1 Kings 19:11-12). By such means was the prophet, who was very indignant because of the transgression of the people and the slaughter of the prophets, both taught to act in a gentler manner. The Lord’s advent as a man was pointed out, that it should be subsequent to that Law which was given by Moses, in which He would neither break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax (Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20). The mild and peaceful repose of His kingdom was indicated likewise. After the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, comes the tranquil and peaceful times of His kingdom, in which the spirit of God increases mankind in the gentlest manner. Ezekiel made this clearer still, that the prophets saw the dispensations of God in part, but not actually God Himself. He saw the vision of God (Ezekiel 1:1ff), and the cherubim, and their wheels, and had recounted the mystery of the whole progression. He beheld the likeness of a throne, and upon the throne a likeness as of the figure of a man, and his loins as the figure of amber, and what was below like the sight of fire. He set forth all the rest of the vision of the thrones; and lest anyone might happen to think that in those visions he had actually seen God, he added, ‘This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God’” (Ezekiel 2:1).

“Neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Ezekiel, who had all many celestial visions, saw God. What they did see were a similitude of the splendor of the Lord, and prophecies of things to come. It is clear that the Father is indeed invisible, of whom also the Lord said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18). But His Word, as He Himself willed it, and for the benefit of those who beheld, showed the Father’s brightness, and explained His purposes. As the Lord said, ‘The only-begotten God, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him’ (John 1:18). He also interprets the Word of the Father as being rich and great. Not in one figure, nor in one character, did He appear to those seeing Him, but according to the reasons and effects aimed at in His dispensations”.

⁶⁷ I.e. at the Transfiguration, Matthew 17:1-9

THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER

April 16, 2017
Revision C
Pascha
Revision B

Epistle: Acts 1:1-8

In beginning Acts, Luke addresses his account to one Theophilus about whom we know very little. From Luke 1:3-4, we can infer that Theophilus was a prominent Gentile (most excellent Theophilus Luke 1:3) and had been instructed in the Faith (Luke 1:4) already. According to tradition, Theophilus was a governor in Antioch, and was very well known; Luke was also from Antioch. Luke was writing to confirm the certainty of those things Theophilus already had been taught. Luke's Gospel ends with the Ascension in 30 AD and Acts begins with the Ascension and ends with Paul in Rome about 62 AD. Following the end of Luke's record in Acts 28, Luke continued to travel with Paul up until Paul's martyrdom in Rome in about 67 AD (2 Timothy 4:11). After 67 AD, Luke traveled extensively as an evangelist and was martyred in the mid-80s in Egypt. Many authorities date Luke's Gospel as being written after 70 AD and Acts around 75 AD; but this does not make sense. If this were the case, it seems strange that Luke would end the account in Acts and leave out the end of Paul's life and the last 13 years of what happened to Paul. The last chapter of Acts suggests that Luke wrote Acts about 62 AD and that Luke wrote his Gospel a short time earlier.

The Ascension demonstrates the acceptance by God the Father of the Son's work on earth. The Resurrection was the first sign of this acceptance and Pentecost will be the conclusion. As the Son rises and is received by a cloud, we are reminded of the ascending of the smoke of the sacrifice from the altar of God. In this case the sacrifice is accepted and the victim is admitted to God's Presence, behind the veil (Hebrews 9:12). His position in light of the Ascension is at the Right Hand of Power, as mentioned by Deacon Stephen just before his death (Acts 7:55-60).

Overview of the Ascension

The Epistle lesson continues the theme of the Gospel lesson in speaking of Pascha from a broader perspective than just the actual events. In today's reading, Jesus was about to ascend back to the Father to be glorified as He was before He came. And He had told His disciples to wait for the Promise from the Father (which is the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, John 15:26).

From the Gospel lesson, we have seen Jesus described in terms of light vs. darkness. From the Epistle lesson, we see Jesus presented in terms of His Deity preparing to return to the Father after having accomplished His mission.

In taking on human flesh, Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a slave (Philippians 2:7). Yet, prior to that, He was in the form of God and equal to God the Father (Philippians 2:6, John 5:18, 10:33, Colossians 2:9). In becoming a man, born of the Virgin Mary, He took on poverty and laid aside His eternal wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9). He came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28).

In ascending back to the Father, Jesus sat down at the Right Hand of God (Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69, Acts 7:55-56, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22). From there, He will return again at the Right Hand of Power (Mark 14:62, Psalm 110:1, Revelation 19:11-16). From this point of view, we can rejoice that Jesus ascended back to the Father (John 14:28).

As He ascended, He did not go empty handed. He led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-10, Colossians 2:15) and plundered (literally stripped naked or off clothed) the rulers and authorities of Hades. In the Orthodox worship service, we speak of Jesus having plundered Hades, and iconography pictures Adam and Eve as being released from captivity in Hades.

At the Tomb, the angels had told the Myrrh-Bearing Women that “He is going before you into Galilee” (Matthew 28:7). Thus the Eleven “went away into Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (Matthew 28:16). In the Epistle text, He was “seen by them during 40 days and was speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Just prior to His Ascension, He commanded them “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). During these 40 days, His followers’ eyes were opened and they regarded Him in a much different light. For example, at the tomb on Pascha morning, Jesus told Mary Magdalene, “Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to My Father” (John 20:17). That is to say, “You need to regard Me differently now, Mary.”

Cyril of Jerusalem stated⁶⁸ that when Mary met the risen Christ at the Tomb, He had the dead with Him, but she didn’t know it.

“Mary came seeking Him, according to the Gospel, and did not find Him; and presently she heard from the Angels, and afterwards saw the Christ. These things are written in the Song of Songs, ‘On my bed I sought Him whom my soul loved. By night on my bed I sought Him, Whom my soul loved’ (Canticles 3:1, John 20:1-2). Mary, it says, came while it was yet dark. And in the Gospels Mary says, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him’ (John 20:13). But the Angels that were present cure their lack of knowledge; for they said, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ (Luke 24:5) He not only rose, but had also the dead with Him when He rose. But she didn’t know this, and in her person the Song of Songs said to the Angels, ‘Did you see Him, Whom my soul loved? It was but a little that I passed from them’; that is, from the two Angels, until I found Him. I held Him, and would not let Him go” (Canticles 3:3-4).

⁶⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIV, 12.

Gregory of Nyssa commented⁶⁹ on Jesus' words to Mary. The message that He wanted her to communicate back to His brethren was that man was no longer alienated from God, and that they would need to learn to "touch" Him in a new way.

"The orthodox interpretation of these words, the sense in which we have been accustomed to believe that they were spoken to Mary, is I think manifest to all, who have received the Faith in truth. Others, who allege against us such phrases as "being recognized by touch," and "being associated with men by brotherhood," may consider them to be proper either to the Divine or to the Human Nature. For they may see in the Godhead the capacity of being seen and touched, and all the attributes of corporeal nature".

"Christ was discoursing with Mary about His brethren. 'Go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God"' (John 20:17). Yet, the Only Begotten has no brethren; if He had brethren, how could the property of being Only Begotten be preserved? On the other hand, the same Person Who said, 'God is a Spirit' (John 4:24), said to His disciples, 'Handle Me' (Luke 24:39), that He may show that while the Human Nature is capable of being handled the Divinity is intangible. The Divine power is not discoverable by touch (Acts 17:27), but by intelligent contemplation and faith. He Who ate before the eyes of His disciples, and promised to go before them into Galilee and there be seen of them, — whom does He reveal Him to be Who should so appear to them? God, Whom no man has seen or can see? (1 Timothy 6:16, John 1:18) Or the bodily image, that is, the form of a servant in which God was?"

"Now the words addressed to Mary are not applicable to the Godhead of the Only Begotten. But what is the meaning of what He then uttered?"

"He Who is by nature Father of existent things, from Whom all things have their birth, has been proclaimed as one. 'For there is one God and Father, of Whom are all things' (1 Corinthians 8:6). Accordingly human nature did not enter into the creation from any other source, nor grow spontaneously from Adam, but it had for its author none other than the Father of all".

"By the wiles of him that sowed in us the tares of disobedience, our nature no longer preserved in itself the impress of the Father's image, but was transformed into the foul likeness of sin. For this cause it was grafted, by virtue of similarity of will, into the evil family of the father of sin. So that the good and true God and Father was no longer the God and Father of him who had been thus outlawed by his own depravity. But instead of Him, Who was by Nature God, those were honored who, 'by nature were not Gods', (Galatians 4:8) and in the place of the Father, he was deemed father who is falsely so called".

"Since, then, this was the sum of our calamity, humanity was exiled from the good Father, and was banished from the Divine oversight and care. For this cause He, Who is the Shepherd of the whole rational creation, left in the heights of heaven His unsinning and supramundane flock, and, moved by love, went after the sheep, which had gone astray, even our human nature".

"Since then it was impossible that our life, which had been estranged from God, should of itself return to the high and heavenly place, He Who knew no sin

⁶⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, XII, 1.

was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He freed us from the curse by taking on Him our curse as His own (Galatians 3:13). Having taken up, and, 'slain' in Himself 'the enmity' (Ephesians 2:16) which by means of sin had come between God and us, — in fact, sin was 'the enmity' — and having become what we were, He through Himself again united humanity to God. By purity, He brought into closest relationship with the Father of our nature that new man which is created after God (Ephesians 4:24), in Whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). He drew with Him into the same grace all the nature that partakes of His body and is akin to Him”.

“And these glad tidings He proclaimed through the woman, not to those disciples only, but also to all who up to the present day become disciples of the Word. Man is no longer outlawed, nor cast out of the kingdom of God, but is once more a son, once more in the station assigned to him by his God, inasmuch as along with the first-fruits of humanity the lump also is hallowed (Romans 11:16). “For behold,” He says, “I and the children whom God has given Me” (Hebrews 2:13, Isaiah 8:18). Therefore, it was not the intangible, immutable, and invisible God, but the moving, visible, and tangible nature which is proper to humanity, that gave command to Mary to minister the word to His disciples”.

John Chrysostom noted that, “Among those very men who had put Christ to death, they exhibit the proofs of His Resurrection; among those who had crucified and buried Him, in the very town in which the iniquitous deed had been perpetrated; thereby stopping the mouths of all foreign objectors. For when even those who had crucified Him appear as believers (Acts 2:36-41), clearly this proved both the fact of the Crucifixion and the iniquity of the deed, and afforded a mighty evidence of the Resurrection” (Homily I on Acts 1).

Chrysostom also spoke of the fears of the Twelve, being few in numbers, but yet living among the thousands of men who had crucified Christ. The Lord put their fears to rest with the Promise of the Spirit. He also noted, “And how was it, if the Spirit had not yet come, that He said (on the evening of the Resurrection), ‘Receive the Holy Spirit?’ (John 20:22). In order to render them capable and meet for the reception of Him! If Daniel passed out at the sight of an angel (Daniel 10:5-17), much more would these when about to receive so great a grace.”

Chrysostom also noted that the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, that the disciples might not imagine Him inferior (Ibid.).

The Right Hand of Power

At His trial, the Lord had told His accusers, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the Right Hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62). This, the High Priest considered blasphemy and asked for the death sentence (Matthew 26:65, Mark 14:62). At His Ascension, the two angels told the disciples, “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). As He ascended, “a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Daniel spoke of Him coming on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13), and the Lord confirmed this to His disciples (Matthew 24:30).

The Ascension text states, “He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). This is reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22, 14:24). Other encounters with the cloud:

- Moses ascending Mt. Sinai into the cloud to receive the Law (Exodus 24:16-18)
- The pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the Tabernacle to speak to Moses (Exodus 33:9)
- When the Ark entered Solomon’s Temple, the cloud filled the house and the priests could not stand to serve (1 Kings 8:10-11; see also Exodus 40:35)
- At the end of time, smoke similarly fills the Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony in heaven (Revelation 15:5-8)

The term Right Hand of Power comes primarily from the Psalms. For example, the Lord’s Right Hand:

- Is exalted and victorious (Psalm 89:13, 98:1, 118:15)
- Saved David, the anointed king (Psalm 20:6, 60:5, 108:6, 138:7)
- Possessed the Promised Land (Psalm 44:3, 78:54)
- Is majestic in power (Exodus 15:6)
- Seeks out and swallows enemies (Psalm 21:8, Exodus 15:12)
- Went at the right hand of Moses (Isaiah 63:12).

Yet there are other things associated with the Lord’s Right Hand:

- It spread out the heavens (Isaiah 48:13)
- It plants vines; i.e. Churches (Psalm 80:15-17)
- It is full of righteousness (Psalm 48:10)
- It teaches us awesome things (Psalm 45:4)
- It provides support (Psalm 18:35, 63:8, 139:10; Isaiah 41:10)
- It is a place of refuge (Psalm 17:7)
- The Queen Mother sits there (Psalm 45:9, 1 Kings 2:19)

In the Gospel reading, the Lord told His disciples when He met them in Galilee, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-19). In the Epistle lesson, He said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thus, just as “His Glorious Arm went at the right hand of Moses” (Isaiah 63:12), so it did with the Apostles after Pentecost. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also called “The Helper” (i.e., one called alongside to help, John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and Jesus had told His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit at the Last Supper (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit in us is a key element in the coming together of “the city with solid foundations whose craftsman and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). This was covered more extensively two weeks ago on the 5th Sunday of Lent and on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son at the beginning of the Lenten Triodion. With the Holy Spirit at work in us, we are described as containing treasure in earthenware vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). The exterior of our human frailties may be rough, but God has chosen to dwell there.

From this point of view, the question of Jesus' disciples just before He ascended is very timely, "Lord will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The answer was no; the city's not ready yet! The treasure in the earthenware vessels still needs some work.

And that is where we are on Pascha. "It is not for us to know the times or seasons which the Father has put under His own authority" (Acts 1:7). However, by coming through the Fast which we've just done, by using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and by confessing Christ before men, the treasure gets refined and the city gets ready.

The Proof of the Resurrection

Luke wrote, "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the Apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:1-3).

The proofs of Christ's appearances recorded in the Scriptures in order are:

- To Mary Magdalene Mark 16:9-11, John 20:11-18
- To the other women Matthew 28:9-10
- To Luke and Cleopas on Road to Emmaus Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-35
- To Peter Luke 24:34
- To Ten Apostles without Thomas Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25
- To Eleven Apostles including Thomas John 20:26-31
- To Seven Apostles by the Sea of Galilee John 21:1-25
- To 500 at once in Galilee 1 Corinthians 15:6
- To James His brother 1 Corinthians 15:7

But just appearances are not all the proofs. John Chrysostom stated⁷⁰ that all the predictions that Christ had made in the Gospels now come to fruition among the Twelve Apostles as Jesus prepares them to go abroad. The prime motivator among them was the Resurrection of Christ, which they saw firsthand for themselves. The Book of Acts was in fact a Demonstration of the Resurrection. Once this was believed, the rest would come in due course.

"The predictions which in the Gospels Christ utters, here we may see these actually come to pass; and note in the very facts the bright evidence of Truth which shines in them, and the mighty change which is taking place in the disciples now that the Spirit has come upon them. For example, they heard Christ say, 'he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father' (John 14:12): and again, when He foretold to the disciples, that they should be brought before rulers and kings, and in their synagogues they should scourge them, and that they should suffer grievous things, and overcome all (Matthew 10:18): and that the Gospel should be preached in all the world (Matthew 24:14): now all this, how it came to pass

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 1-2.

exactly as it was said, may be seen in the Book of Acts, and more besides, which He told them while yet with them. Here again you will see the Apostles themselves, speeding their way as on wings over land and sea; and those same men, once so timid and void of understanding, all of a sudden become quite other than they were; men despising wealth, and raised above glory and passion and concupiscence, and in short all such affections; moreover, what unanimity there is among them now. Nowhere is there any envying as there was before or any of the old hankerings after the preeminence, but all virtue brought in them to its last finish, and shining through all, with surpassing luster. Then there is that love, concerning which the Lord had given so many charges saying, ‘By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another’” (John 13:35).

“Never mind the Jews; even the disciples often upon hearing the more sublime doctrines were troubled and offended! Therefore Jesus told them, ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now’ (John 16:12). If those could not, who had been so long time with Him, and had been admitted to so many secrets, and had seen so many wonders, how was it to be expected that men, but newly dragged away from altars, idols, sacrifices, cats, crocodiles (for such did the Gentiles worship), and from the rest of their evil ways, should all at once receive the more sublime matters of doctrine? How in particular should Jews, hearing as they did every day of their lives, and having it ever sounded in their ears, ‘The Lord our God is one Lord, and beside Him is none other’ (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 46:9); who also had seen Him hanging nailed on the Cross. Actually they had themselves crucified and buried Him, and had not seen Him risen; when they were told that this same person was God and equal with the Father, how should they, of all men, be otherwise than shocked and revolted? Therefore it is that gently and little by little the Apostles carry them on, with much consideration and forbearance letting themselves down to their low attainments, themselves all the while enjoying in more plentiful measure the grace of the Spirit, and doing greater works in Christ’s name than Christ Himself did. The Apostles needed to be raise up from their groveling apprehensions, and confirmed in the saying, that Christ was raised from the dead. For this, in fact, is just what the Book of Acts is: a Demonstration of the Resurrection. This being once believed, the rest would come in due course.”

Chrysostom pointed out⁷¹ that Christ gave to the Apostles commandments, through the Holy Spirit, during the 40 days after the Resurrection. These were spiritual commandments, and they are not written down anywhere; but we know about them from the writings of others, since the Apostles did speak what they heard.

“These were spiritual words that He spoke to them, nothing human. Do you observe in what low terms Luke still speaks of Christ, as in fact Christ had spoken of Himself? ‘But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matthew 12:28); for indeed the Holy Spirit worked in that Temple. Well, what did He command? ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 1-2.

commanded you' (Matthew 28:19-20). This is a great accolade for the Apostles; to have such a charge entrusted to them, I mean, the salvation of the world! These are words full of the Spirit! This Like hints at in the expression, 'through the Holy Spirit' and John adds, 'The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life' (John 6:63). This leads the hearer on to a desire of learning what the commands were, and establishing the authority of the Apostles, seeing it is the words of the Spirit they are about to speak, and the commandments of Christ. 'After He had given commandments, He was taken up' (Acts 1:2, 9). Luke does not say, 'ascended'; he still speaks as concerning a man. It appears then that Jesus also taught the Disciples after His resurrection, but of this space of time no one has related to us the whole in detail. John and Luke dwell at greater length on this subject than the others; but none has clearly related everything, for they hurried to something else. However, we have learned these things through the Apostles, for what they heard, that did they tell."

Chrysostom also pointed out⁷² that prior to the Resurrection no one asked anything in Christ's Name. After the Resurrection, because of the Holy Spirit, Christ was able to speak plainly with the Apostles.

'Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full' (John 16:24). Christ showed it to be good that He should depart, if until now they had asked nothing, and if then they should receive all things whatever they should ask. 'For do not suppose, because I shall no longer be with you, that you are deserted; My Name shall give you greater boldness'. Since then the words which He had used had been veiled, Christ said, 'These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father' (John 16:25). 'There shall be a time when you shall know all things clearly'. Here Christ speaks of the time of the Resurrection. 'Then, I shall tell you plainly about the Father'. For Christ was with them, and talked with them forty days, being assembled with them, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3, 4). 'Because now being in fear, you pay no attention to My words. But then when you see Me risen again, and converse with Me, you will be able to learn all things plainly, for the Father Himself will love you, when your faith in Me hath been made firm'".

John Cassian recorded⁷³ the words of the Desert Fathers regarding what Christ taught the Apostles. True spiritual knowledge cannot be taught by men. Only those who are perfected not by the words of others but by their own actions can attain it. We need to prepare a tabernacle in our hearts by purging ourselves from the stain of sins and ridding ourselves of worldly cares. Being a teacher can result in pride and arrogance; we need to be very careful about that. It is one thing to be able to teach well, and quite another to penetrate into the heart of heavenly utterances and to gaze with pure eye of the soul on profound and hidden mysteries. This can be gained by no learning of man's, or condition of this world; only by purity of soul, by means of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

⁷² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIX, 2.

⁷³ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 9.

“If you are anxious to attain to the light of spiritual knowledge, not wrongly for an idle boast but for the sake of being made better men, you are first inflamed with the longing for that blessedness, of which we read: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). You may also attain to that of which the angel said to Daniel: ‘Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever’ (Daniel 12:3). Keeping up that diligence in reading; endeavor with all eagerness to gain in the first place a thorough grasp of practical, i.e., ethical knowledge. Without this that theoretical purity of which we have spoken cannot be obtained, which those only who are perfected not by the words of others who teach them, but by the excellence of their own actions, can after much expenditure of effort and toil attain as a reward for it. As they gain their knowledge not from meditation on the law but from the fruit of their labor, they sing with the Psalmist: ‘Through Your precepts I understand’ (Psalm 119:104). Having overcome all their passions, they say with confidence: ‘I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way’ (Psalm 101:1-2). For he who is striving in an undefiled way in the course of a pure heart, as he sings the Psalm, understands the words which are chanted. Therefore if you would prepare in your heart a holy tabernacle of spiritual knowledge, purge yourselves from the stain of all sins, and rid yourselves of the cares of this world. It is an impossibility for the soul which is taken up even to a small extent with worldly troubles, to gain the gift of knowledge or to become an author of spiritual interpretation, and diligent in reading holy things. Be careful therefore in the first place, that you may enjoin absolute silence on your lips, in order that your zeal for reading and the efforts of your purpose may not be destroyed by vain pride. This is the first practical step towards learning, to receive the regulations and opinions of all the Elders with an earnest heart, and with lips that are dumb; and diligently to lay them up in your heart, and endeavor rather to perform than to teach them. From teaching comes the dangerous arrogance of vainglory, but from performing, the fruit of spiritual knowledge will flourish. So you should never venture to say anything unless some ignorance that might be injurious or a matter which it is important to know leads you to ask a question. Some who are puffed up with vainglory, pretend that they ask, in order really to show off the knowledge which they perfectly possess. It is impossible for one, who takes to the pursuit of reading with the purpose of gaining the praise of men, to be rewarded with the gift of true knowledge. One, who is bound by the chain of this passion, is sure to be also in bondage to other faults, and especially to that of pride. If he is baffled by his encounter with practical and ethical knowledge, he will certainly not attain that spiritual knowledge which springs from it. Be then in all things ‘let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath’ (James 1:19), lest there come upon you that which is noted by Solomon: ‘Do you see a man hasty in his words? *There is* more hope for a fool than for him’ (Proverbs 29:20); and do not presume to teach anyone in words what you have not already performed in deed. Our Lord taught us by His own example that we ought to keep to this order, as of Him it is said: ‘what Jesus began to do and to teach’ (Acts 1:1). Take care then that you do not rush into teaching before doing, and so be reckoned among the number of those of

whom the Lord speaks in the Gospel to the disciples: ‘whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers’ (Matthew 23:3-4). For if he who shall ‘break one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:19), it follows that one who has dared to despise many and greater commands and to teach men so, shall certainly be considered not least in the kingdom of heaven, but greatest in the punishment of hell. Therefore you must be careful not to be led on to teach by the example of those who have attained some skill in discussion and readiness in speech and because they can discourse on what they please elegantly and fully. They are imagined to possess spiritual knowledge, by those who do not know how to distinguish its real force and character. It is one thing to have a ready tongue and elegant language, and quite another to penetrate into the very heart and marrow of heavenly utterances and to gaze with pure eye of the soul on profound and hidden mysteries. This can be gained by no learning of man’s, or condition of this world; only by purity of soul, by means of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.”

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Luke records, “And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which’, *He said*, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).

As thousands of years of Old Testament history prepared the people of God for Pentecost, the three year public ministry of Jesus prepared His followers for Pentecost, as did the ten days of fasting and prayer in the upper room by the 120 (Acts 1:13-14). At the time of the Ascension, the Apostles and others were waiting for the Day of Pentecost and preparing themselves for this event.

The Day of Pentecost occurred on⁷⁴ either the 5th, 6th, or 7th of Sivan depending on the sighting of the new moon to mark the beginning of the month. In the year 30 AD, this occurred on a Sunday, the first day of the week. Thus there were back-to-back Sabbaths; the weekly Sabbath followed by the Feast of Pentecost, which was also a Sabbath.

Gathered together at this time were the Twelve, most of the Seventy⁷⁵, the Women plus others totaling about 120 (Acts 1:15). They had been meeting in the upper room where the

⁷⁴ A month could have either 29 or 30 days. If both Nisan and Iyyar had 29 days, Pentecost fell on the 5th of Sivan. If both Nisan and Iyyar had 30 days, Pentecost was the 7th of Sivan. If one had 29, the other 30 days, Pentecost was the 6th of Sivan. See Merrill Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p.356.

⁷⁵ Apollos, one of the Seventy, was absent since he didn’t hear about the Holy Spirit until over 20 years later (Acts 18:25).

Twelve had eaten the Passover and Last Supper (Mark 14:15, Acts 1:13). Continuing in prayer and supplication, they were all with one accord in one place (Acts 1:14, 2:1).

Thus, the people we know were involved in the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were:

- The Twelve Apostles
- The Seventy Lesser Apostles
- The Eight Myrrh-Bearing Women

This leaves 30 others unaccounted for. Probably included among the unnamed 30 were:

- Joseph of Arimathea
- Nicodemus
- Simon the Leper
- Lazarus
- Simon of Cyrene and his sons Rufus and Alexander
- Zaccheus

All of these 120 people (Acts 1:15) were filled with the Holy Spirit. And all 120 received languages as of fire that were distributed and sat on each one of them. We don't normally think of the Virgin Mary as receiving this gift of languages, but she was there also. For more details about the Feast Day of Pentecost, see the Study for that event.

John Chrysostom spoke⁷⁶ of the reasons why Christ ascended first, before the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles clung to Christ so tightly and could not bear to part with Him; so He needed to give them a longing desire for the Spirit, since the Spirit would do the greater amount of teaching. As a result of the Coming of the Spirit, it became abundantly obvious that the Spirit is not inferior to Christ.

“Why had the Holy Spirit not yet come before the Ascension? It was fitting that the Apostles should first be brought to have a longing desire for that event, and so receive the grace. For this reason Christ Himself departed, and then the Spirit descended. Had He Himself been there, they would not have expected the Spirit so earnestly as they did. On this account neither did He come immediately after Christ's Ascension, but after eight or nine days. It is the same with us also; for our desires towards God are then most raised, when we stand in need. Accordingly, John the Baptist chose that time to send his disciples to Christ when they were likely to feel their need of Jesus, during his own imprisonment. Besides, it was fit that our nature should be seen in heaven, and that the reconciliation should be perfected, and then the Spirit should come, and the joy should be unalloyed. For, if the Spirit had already come, and Christ had then departed, but the Spirit remained; the consolation would not have been so great as it was. For in fact the Apostles clung to Him, and could not bear to part with Him; to comfort them He said, ‘It is to your advantage that I go away’ (John 16:7). On this account He also waited during those intermediate days, that they might first despond for a while, and be made to feel their need of Him; then they could reap a full and unalloyed delight. But if the Spirit were inferior to the Son, the consolation would not have been adequate; and how could He have said, ‘It is

⁷⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 4-5.

expedient for you?’ For this reason the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, that the disciples might not imagine Him inferior.”

“Consider also how necessary He made it for them to stay in Jerusalem, by promising that the Spirit should be granted them. Lest they should flee away after His Ascension, by this expectation, as by a bond, He keeps them in that spot. But having said, ‘Wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard from Me’ (Acts 1:4), He then adds, ‘For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’ (Acts 1:5). Now He allows them to see the difference there was between Him and John, plainly, and not as before in obscure hints. He had spoken very obscurely, when He said, ‘Among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he’ (Luke 7:28); but now He says plainly, ‘John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’. He no longer uses the testimony, but merely adverts to the person of John, reminding the disciples of what he had said, and shows them that they have now become greater than John; seeing they too are to baptize with the Spirit.”

Cyril of Jerusalem compared⁷⁷ the coming of the Holy Spirit to iron placed in a fire. The iron does not become fire, but it gets hot and glows like it was fire. Similarly our human nature, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit does not become God, but it takes on the characteristics of Divinity as much as humanity can.

“Christ came down to clothe the Apostles with power and to baptize them; for the Lord says, you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now (Acts 1:5). This grace was not in part, but His power was in full perfection; for as he who plunges into the waters and is baptized is encompassed on all sides by the waters, so were they also baptized completely by the Holy Spirit. The water however flows around the outside only, but the Spirit baptizes also the soul within and that completely. Why do you wonder? Take an example from matter. Fire passing in through the mass of the iron makes the whole of it like fire, so that what was cold becomes burning and what was black is made bright. If fire which is a body thus penetrates and works without hindrance in iron which is also a body, why do we wonder that the Holy Spirit enters into the very inmost recesses of the soul?”

“Lest men should be ignorant of the greatness of the mighty gift coming down to them, there sounded as it were a heavenly trumpet. ‘For suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind’, signifying the presence of Him who was to grant power to men to seize with violence the kingdom of God; that both their eyes might see the fiery tongues, and their ears hear the sound. ‘And it filled the entire house where they were sitting’ (Acts 2:2); for the house became the vessel of the spiritual water; as the disciples sat within, the whole house was filled. Thus they were entirely baptized according to the promise, and invested soul and body with a divine robe of salvation (Isaiah 61:10 LXX). And there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). They

⁷⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 14-15.

partook of fire, not of burning but of saving fire; of fire which consumes the thorns of sins, but gives luster to the soul.”

John Chrysostom spoke⁷⁸ of the benefits of having the Gift of the Holy Spirit, but also the penalty for despising so great a Grace. People seeking good positions with the government prepare themselves their whole life long, yet we Christians don't do enough preparation for our roles in the Kingdom. Fasting, prayer, sobriety and watchfulness would help us a lot.

“Our fathers held Baptism to be just the proper curb upon evil concupiscence, and a powerful lesson for teaching us to be sober-minded even in a time of delights. It's as if we are banqueting with Christ Himself, and partaking of His table; let us do nothing at random, but let us pass our time in fasting, prayer, and much sobriety of mind. A man who is destined to enter upon some temporal government, prepares himself all his life long, and that he may obtain some dignity, lays out his money, spends his time, and submits to endless troubles. What shall we deserve, who draw near to the kingdom of heaven with such negligence, and both show no earnestness before we have received, and after having received are again negligent? This is the reason why we are negligent after having received: we did not watch before we received. Therefore many, after they have received, immediately have returned to their former vomit, have become more wicked, and drawn upon themselves a more severe punishment. Having been delivered from their former sins, they have more grievously provoked the Judge, that having been delivered from so great a disease, still they did not learn sobriety. What has happened to them, Christ threatened to the paralytic man, saying, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you’ (John 5:14); He also predicted this of the Jews. ‘Then the demon goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation’ (Matthew 12:45). For *if*, said He, showing that by their ingratitude they should bring upon them the worst of evils, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin’ (John 15:22). The guilt of sins committed after these benefits is doubled and quadrupled, in that, after the honor put upon us, we show ourselves ungrateful and wicked. As a consequence, the Laver of Baptism doesn't help at all to procure for us a milder punishment. Consider: a man has committed grievous sins by committing murder or adultery, or some other crime; *these* were remitted through Baptism. For there is no sin, no impiety, which does not yield and give place to this gift; for the Grace is Divine. A man has again committed adultery and murder; the former adultery is indeed done away, the murder forgiven, and not brought up again to his charge, ‘For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable’ (Romans 11:29). But for those committed after Baptism he suffers a punishment as great as he would if both the former sins were brought up again, and many worse than these. For the guilt is no longer simply equal, but doubled and tripled. For proof that the penalty of these sins is greater, listen to what Paul says: ‘Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 4-5.

punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:28, 29)

Restoring the Kingdom to Israel

Luke wrote, “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’” (Acts 1:6-7).

The question Jesus’ disciples asked just before He ascended about restoring the kingdom to Israel is very timely. The answer was no; the city’s not ready yet! The treasure in the earthenware vessels still needs some work. By using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and by confessing Christ before men, the treasure gets refined and the city gets ready. But Christ did not address that. The Lord’s answer was, ‘It is not for us to know the times or seasons.

Instead of predicting the exact moment of His Second Coming, the Lord instead focused the attention of His disciples on things coming up soon. First, they were to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Second, they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

A few weeks earlier, the Lord had been sitting with His disciples on the same Mount of Olives that He ascended from, teaching them about what to expect prior to the Second Coming. They had asked, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3)

He said that first:

- Many will come in His Name, claiming to be the Messiah (Matthew 24:5, 23, 26).
- There will be wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6)
- Nation will rise against nation; there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matthew 24:7)
- His disciples will be persecuted, hated and killed by all nations for His Name’s sake (Matthew 24:9)
- Many false prophets will come and deceive many (Matthew 24:11, 24)
- Lawlessness will abound; the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12)
- The Gospel will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations before the end (Matthew 24:14)
- Just prior to the end will occur the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel. What this really means will not be clear until it happens (Matthew 24:15, Daniel 9:27)
- A persecution unprecedented in human history will take place (Matthew 24:16-22)
- The Lord’s coming will be like the lightning that comes from the East and flashes to the West, and all will be gathered to Him as eagles gather to a carcass (Matthew 24:27, 28).

All of the above Jesus spoke to His disciples while sitting with them on the Mount of Olives during Holy Week just prior to His Crucifixion. At the Ascension, about 44 days later, when they asked Him about restoring the kingdom to Israel, there was another aspect to His

answer. He had already told them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). They had witnessed His incredible miracles for three years capped by His victory over death itself. Following His Resurrection, they had seen and touched His glorified, but still human body and had witnessed Him pass through solid walls (John 20:19-26) and teleport Himself at will (Luke 24:31). What more could there be? This was what the Prophets had spoken about: The Son of David reigning on His father’s throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16, Luke 1:32, Isaiah 9:7).

Yet the Lord deflected their inquiry with: “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His Own authority” (Acts 1:7). The times and seasons that the Lord was inaugurating were the times of the Gentiles (Romans 9, 10). The kingdom was not to be restored to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles came (Romans 11:25). For the disciples present at the Ascension, this would have been very difficult for them to hear. Even later on, many had difficulty accepting Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18), Peter had to be rebuked in Antioch (Galatians 2:7-16) and a Church Council had to be called regarding Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 15). John Chrysostom stated⁷⁹ that they were asking for things greater than their capacity.

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁰ that Jesus was intentionally putting His disciples off for their own good. They didn’t need to know⁸¹ the exact day of the Lord’s Second Coming. Jesus knew that, but He didn’t want them to ask about it because it would distract them from the business at hand. Instead He gave us many descriptions regarding what it was to be like then.

““But of that day and hour knows no man, not the angels of Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32). By saying, not the angels, He stopped their mouths that they should not seek to learn what these angels don’t know. By saying, ‘neither the Son’, He forbids them not only to learn, but even to inquire. For proof that He said this for this reason, notice after His resurrection, when He saw they were becoming overly curious, how He stopped their mouths more decidedly. He had mentioned infallible signs, many and endless; but then He said merely, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons’. And then that they might not say, we are driven to perplexity, we are utterly scorned, we are not held worthy so much as of this, He said, ‘which the Father had put in His own power’ (Acts 1:7). He did this because He was exceedingly careful to honor them, and to conceal nothing from them. Therefore He refers it to His Father, both to make the thing awesome, and to exclude that of which He had spoken from their inquiry. If this was not the case, but He is ignorant of it, when will He know it? Will it be together with us? But who would say this? The Father He knows clearly, even as clearly as the Father knows the Son; and of the day is He ignorant? Moreover, ‘the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God’ (1 Corinthians 2:10), and does not He know so much as the time of the judgment? How He ought to judge He knows, and of the secrets of each He had a

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, v. 7.

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 1-2.

⁸¹ To emphasize this, Paul wrote, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

full perception; and what is far more common than that, of this could He be ignorant? How, if ‘all things were made through Him, and without Him was not even one thing made’ (John 1:3), was He ignorant of the day? For He who made the worlds, it is quite plain that He made the times also; and if the times, even that day. How then is He ignorant of that which He made?”

“The Son is not ignorant of the day, but is even in full certainty thereof. For this cause, I say when He had told all things, both the times and the seasons, and had brought it to the very doors. ‘Learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near -- at the doors!’ (Matthew 24:32-33) For if you seek after the day and hour, you shall not hear them of me, He said; but if of times and preludes, without hiding anything, I will tell you all exactly. For that indeed I am not ignorant of it, I have shown by many things. He mentioned intervals, and all the things that are to occur, and how short from this present time until the day itself (for this did the parable of the fig tree indicate). He leads us to the very vestibule; and if He does not open the doors to us, this also He does for our good.”

Chrysostom also stated⁸² that when the Apostles asked Christ about the restored Kingdom, they knew that He had merely declined to tell them earlier. And they weren’t satisfied with that answer. Since they knew that they were about to receive the Holy Spirit, they felt worthy to know now. However, they didn’t know what the Kingdom of God was all about, and they weren’t ready to face danger yet. They were totally impressed with Christ following the Resurrection, but Christ said that it was beyond their capacity to know these things.

“When the Apostles intend to ask anything, they approach Christ together, that by dint of numbers they may abash Him into compliance. They well knew that in what He had said previously, ‘But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only’ (Matthew 24:36), He had merely declined telling them; therefore they again drew near, and put the question. They would not have asked had they been truly satisfied with that answer. For having heard that they were about to receive the Holy Spirit, they, as being now worthy of instruction, desired to learn. Also they were quite ready for freedom; for they had no mind to address themselves to danger. What they wished was to breathe freely again; what had happened to them were no light matters, and the utmost peril was still hanging over them. Without saying anything to Him of the Holy Spirit, they put this question: ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6) They did not ask, ‘when?’, but whether ‘at this time’. So eager were they for that day. To me it appears that they had no clear notion of the nature of that kingdom; for the Spirit had not yet instructed them. They do not say, ‘When shall these things be?’, but they approach Him with greater honor, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6), since Israel was now fallen⁸³. They were still affected towards sensible objects, seeing they had not yet become better than those who were before them. We note, however, that they have high conceptions concerning Christ. Since then

⁸² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, vv. 6-7.

⁸³ Israel was at that time ruled by a non-Hebrew (Herod Antipas), for the first time since the Babylon Captivity.

their minds are elevated, He spoke to them in a higher strain. He no longer tells them, ‘Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’ (Mark 13:32); but He says, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). You ask things greater than your capacity, He would say.”

Chrysostom noted⁸⁴ that this time the disciples asked Christ about the Kingdom, not about the end of the age. But Christ did not speak with them at great length about this after the Resurrection. Christ had shown by His parables that the end was not near, so He directed their attention to the things at hand.

“Just before the Ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, ‘Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6) They so well knew his mildness, that after His Passion also they asked Him, ‘Will you restore?’ He had said to them before, ‘You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet’ (Matthew 24:6), nor shall Jerusalem be taken just yet. But now they ask Him about the kingdom, not about the end. And besides, Christ did not speak at great length with them after the Resurrection. They address then this question, as thinking that they themselves would be in high honor, if this should come to pass. Christ did not say that this restoration was not to be; He didn’t openly declare this; for why would they need to learn this? Hence they do not again ask, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ (Matthew 24:3) They are afraid to say that. But they asked, ‘Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6), for they thought there was such a kingdom. But He, both in parables, had shown that the time was not near, and here where they asked, He answered, ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come⁸⁵ upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). They had heard these things before, and He now reminds them of them just before He was taken up. As He went up into heaven, and a cloud received Him, we note that ‘He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet’ (Psalm 18:9); also, ‘Clouds and darkness surround Him’ (Psalm 97:2). This is declared by the expression, ‘And a cloud received Him out of their sight’ (Acts 1:9); the Lord of heaven, it means. For as a king is shown by the royal chariot, so was the royal chariot sent for Him.”

Chrysostom further stated⁸⁶ that we really don’t need to know when the Last Days will be. The day of our own death is much more important to focus on. If we did know this, our knowledge will not affect unbelievers, since they won’t even accept that there will be an end.

“What would be the advantage for us knowing when the Last Day will be?

Let us suppose that the end would be after twenty, thirty or a hundred years, what is this to us? Is not the end of our own life the consummation to every individual?

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, Recapitulation.

⁸⁵ Chrysostom noted here “Note that Luke wrote ‘Is come upon you’, not, ‘is sent’, to shew the Spirit’s coequal Majesty.”

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, IX, vv. 1-2.

Why are we curious, why do we get worked up about the general end? The case is the same with us in this, as in other things. As in other things, leaving our own private concerns, we are anxious about things in general, saying, ‘Such an one is a fornicator’, ‘such an one an adulterer’, ‘that man has robbed’, another has been injurious; no one takes account of what is his own, but each thinks of anything rather than his own private concerns. So here also, each omitting to take thought about his own end, we are anxious to hear about the general dissolution. Now what concern is that of ours? If we make our own a good end, we will suffer no harm from the other; be it far off, or be it near. This is nothing to us.”

“For this reason Christ did not tell it, because it was not expedient. How, you say, was it not expedient? He who also concealed it knows why it was not expedient. Listen to Him saying to His Apostles, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). Why are you curious? Peter, the chief of the Apostles, and his fellows, heard this said, as if they were seeking things too great for them to know. True, you say; but it were possible to stop the mouths of the Greeks in this way. How? Tell me! Because they say, that this world is a God; if we knew the period of its dissolution, we should have stopped their mouths. Why, is this what will stop their mouths, to know when it will be destroyed, or to know that it will be destroyed? Tell them this, that it will have an end. If they do not believe this, neither will they believe the other.”

Hilary of Poitiers stated⁸⁷ that the Son knows everything the Father knows due to their Unity of Nature. When Jesus said He didn’t know the hour of the Second Coming, He was speaking from His human nature. The Twelve Apostles picked up on this, since they asked Him the same question again after the Resurrection as if He did know. They perceived in the mystery of His ignorance a divine Plan of silence.

“The Son is ignorant of nothing which the Father knows, and it doesn’t follow that because the Father alone knows, that the Son does not know. Father and Son abide in unity of nature, and the ignorance of the Son belongs to the divine Plan of silence seeing that in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The Lord Himself testified this, when He answered the question of the Apostles concerning the times, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). The knowledge is denied them, and not only that, but the anxiety to learn is forbidden, because it is not theirs to know these times. Yet now that He is risen, they ask again, though their question on the former occasion had been met with the reply, that not even the Son knew. They cannot possibly have understood literally that the Son did not know, for they ask Him again as though He did know. They perceived in the mystery of His ignorance a divine Plan of silence, and now, after His resurrection, they renew the question, thinking that the time has come to speak. The Son no longer denies that He knows, but tells them that it is not theirs to know, because the Father has set it within His own authority. If then, the Apostles attributed it to the divine Plan, and not to weakness, that the Son did not know the day, shall we say that the Son knew not the day for the simple reason that He was not God? No

⁸⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IX, 75.

way! Remember, God the Father set the day within His authority, that it might not come to the knowledge of man; and the Son, when asked before, replied that He did not know; but now, no longer denying His knowledge, replies that it is theirs not to know, for the Father has set the times not in His own knowledge, but in His own authority. The day and the moment are included in the word ‘times’; can it be, then, that He, Who was to restore Israel to its kingdom, did not Himself know the day and the moment of that restoration? He instructs us to see evidence of His birth in this exclusive prerogative of the Father, yet He does not deny that He knows. While He proclaims that the possession of this knowledge is withheld from us, He asserts that it belongs to the mystery of the Father’s authority.”

“We must not therefore think, because He said He did not know the day and the moment that the Son did not know. As man He wept, slept and sorrowed, but God is incapable of tears, fear or sleep. According to the weakness of His flesh He shed tears, slept, hungered, thirsted, was weary and feared, yet without impairing the reality of His Only-begotten nature; equally so we must refer to His human nature, the words that He knew not the day or the hour.”

Basil the Great stated⁸⁸ that at the Resurrection, we will go from material comprehension to immaterial comprehension, which is true knowledge of God. While we are bound to this life, we are mingled with clay and limited in our ability. When Christ said, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons”, He meant that this is beyond our ability due to the limits of this life.

“When we no longer know God in mirrors and not immediately, but approach Him as one and alone, then we shall know even the ultimate end. For all material knowledge is said to be the kingdom of Christ; while immaterial knowledge, and the knowledge of actual Godhead, is that of God the Father. But our Lord is also Himself the end and the ultimate blessedness according to the purpose of the Word; for what does He say in the Gospel? ‘I will raise him up at the last day’ (John 6:40). He calls the transition from material knowledge to immaterial contemplation a resurrection, speaking of that knowledge after which there is no other, as the last day. Our intelligence is raised up and roused to a height of blessedness at the time when it contemplates the Oneness and Unity of the Word. But since our intelligence is made dense and bound to earth, it is both mingled with clay and incapable of gazing intently in pure contemplation, being led through adornments related to its own body. It considers the operations of the Creator, and to the end that growing little by little it may one day grow strong enough to approach even the actual unveiled Godhead. This is the meaning, I think, of the words ‘my Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28), and also of the statement, ‘To sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father’ (Matthew 20:23). This too is what is meant by Christ’s ‘delivering up the kingdom to God the Father’ (1 Corinthians 15:24). According to the denser doctrine which is regarded relatively to us and not to the Son Himself, He is not the end but the first fruits. It is in accordance with this view that when His disciples asked Him again, ‘When will you restore the kingdom of Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). That is to say,

⁸⁸ Basil the Great, Letter to the Caesareans, VIII, 7.

the knowledge of such a kingdom is not for them that are bound in flesh and blood. This contemplation the Father had put away in His own power, meaning by 'power' those that are empowered, and by 'His own' those who are not held down by the ignorance of things below. Do not, I beg you, have in mind times and seasons of sense but certain distinctions of knowledge apprehended by mental perception. For our Lord's Prayer must be carried out. It is Jesus Who prayed 'Grant that they may be one in us just as We are one' (John 17:21-22). When God, Who is one, is in each, number is lost in the indwelling of Unity."

Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁸⁹ that Christ did know when the End would be prior to the Crucifixion in His Divinity, but not in His humanity. After the Resurrection, when the Twelve asked again, Jesus couldn't answer from just His humanity, because it was now deified from the Resurrection. So He just told them not to ask. If they did know when the End would be, many people would put off care for their souls until that Day approaches.

"Christ has made known what comes before the end, that, as He said Himself, we might not be startled or scared, when they happen, but from them may expect the end after them. Concerning the day and the hour He was not willing to say according to His divine nature, 'I know' (Acts 1:6-7) but after the flesh, 'I don't know' (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32), for the sake of the flesh which was ignorant; lest they should ask Him further, and then either He should have to pain the disciples by not speaking, or by speaking might act to the prejudice of them and us all. Whatever He does, He does for our sakes, since also for us 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14). For us therefore He said 'No, I don't know'. Neither was He untrue in thus saying, for He said humanly, as man, 'I don't know', nor did He allow the disciples to force Him to speak, for by saying 'I know not' He stopped their inquiries. So in the Acts of the Apostles it is written, when He went upon the Angels, ascending as man, and carrying up to heaven the flesh which He bore, on the disciples seeing this, and again asking, 'When shall the end be, and when will You be present?' He said to them more clearly, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority' (Acts 1:7). And He did not then say, 'No, I don't know,' as He said before humanly (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32), but, 'It is not for you to know.' For now the flesh had risen and put off its mortality and been deified. No longer did it become Him to answer after the flesh when He was going into the heavens; but henceforth to teach after a divine manner, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father had put in His own power; but ye shall receive Power' (Acts 1:8). What is that Power of the Father but the Son? Christ is 'God's Power and God's Wisdom'" (1 Corinthians 1:24).

"The Son then did know, as being the Word; for He implied this in what He said. 'I know but it is not for you to know' for it was for your sakes that sitting also on the mount I said according to the flesh, 'No, the Son doesn't know' (Matthew 24:36), for the profit of you and all. It is profitable to you to hear so much both of the Angels and of the Son, because of the deceivers which shall be afterwards. Though demons should be transfigured as Angels, and should attempt

⁸⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, III, xxviii, 48-49.

to speak concerning the end, you should not believe, since they are ignorant. If Antichrist too, disguising himself, should say, 'I am Christ,' and should try in his turn to speak of that day and end, to deceive the hearers, you, having these words from Me, 'No, not the Son,' may disbelieve him also. Further, not to know when the end is, or when the day of the end, is expedient for man, lest knowing, they might become negligent of the time between, awaiting the days near the end; for they will argue that then only must they attend to themselves. Therefore He had been silent of the time when each shall die, lest men, being elated on the ground of knowledge, should neglect themselves for the greater part of their time."

Cyril of Jerusalem exhorted⁹⁰ his catechumens to pay attention to what is happening. Jesus gave us signs of the Second Coming to look for so that we aren't led astray by heretics. We don't need to know the Day and the Hour if we know the signs of the times. Some of the signs have already come in part at various times.

"The things then which are seen shall pass away, and there shall come the things which we are looking for, things fairer than the present; but as to the time let no one be curious. 'It is not for you', He says, 'to know times or seasons, which the Father has put in His own authority' (Acts 1:7). Don't venture to declare when these things shall be, nor on the other hand fall asleep so as not to notice. He said, 'Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming' (Matthew 24:42). But since we needed to know the signs of the end, and since we are looking for Christ, therefore, that we may not die deceived and be led astray by that false Antichrist, the Apostles, moved by the divine will, addressed themselves by a providential arrangement to the True Teacher, and said, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' (Matthew 24:3) We look for You to come again, but Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); put us therefore on our guard, that we may not worship another instead of You. Christ, opening His divine and blessed mouth, said, 'Take heed that no one deceives you' (Matthew 24:4). You also, my listeners, as seeing Him now with the eyes of your mind, hear Him saying the same things to you; pay attention that no man mislead you. This word exhorts you all to pay attention to what is spoken; for it is not a history of things gone by, but a prophecy of things future, and which will surely come. Not that we prophesy, for we are unworthy; but that the things which are written will be set before us, and the signs declared. Observe which of them have already come to pass, and which yet remain; and make yourself safe."

"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many' (Matthew 24:4-5). This has happened in part: for already Simon Magus has said this, and Menander, and some others of the godless leaders of heresy; and others will say it in our days, or after us."

⁹⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 4-5.

The Mission to the Ends of the Earth

Luke stated, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

John Chrysostom noted⁹¹ that the Apostles first preached the Gospel at the place where they were most afraid to do so; that is, in Jerusalem.

“Notice that the Apostles did preach and fulfill the Gospel! For great was the gift that the Spirit had bestowed on them. In the very place where they were most afraid, that is, in Jerusalem, there they preached first, and afterwards to the uttermost part of the earth. Then for assurance of what He had said, ‘While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight’ (Acts 1:9). Not ‘while they beheld’ did He rise from the dead, but ‘while they beheld, He was taken up’. The sight of their eyes here was not all-sufficient; for in the Resurrection they saw the end, but not the beginning, and in the Ascension they saw the beginning, but not the end. At the Resurrection it was superfluous to have seen the beginning; the Lord Himself Who spoke these things was present to show that He had risen, and the sepulcher showed clearly that He was not there. But at the Ascension, they needed to be informed of the sequel by the word of others. Since their eyes do not suffice to show them the height of heaven, nor to inform them whether He had actually gone up into heaven, notice what follows. That it was Jesus Himself who ascended, they knew from the fact that He had been speaking with them. Had they seen only from a distance, they could not have recognized Him by sight. But that He was taken up all the way into Heaven itself, the Angels had to inform them.”

Chrysostom also compared⁹² the sending out of the Twelve to the ends of the earth to the Lord’s parable of the Wedding Feast. Things happened in the 1st century just as Christ had described in the Parable of the Wedding Feast. God was extraordinarily long-suffering in delaying His wrath for all the grief He was getting from His people. Even at the Ascension, Christ still asked the Apostles to go to the Jews first; but when they had been driven away, then they went to the Gentiles.

“In order that they (the Jewish leaders) may not say, ‘He is an adversary of God, and therefore we do not come’, listen to who is asking them to come; it is the Father who is making the marriage, and it is Christ who is asking them to come.”

“What then did the Father do after these things? Since they were not willing to come, and also killed those that came to them; He burned up their cities, and sent His armies and slew them.”

“These things Christ said, declaring beforehand the things that took place under Vespasian and Titus (66 to 70 AD), and that they provoked the Father also, by not believing in Him; it is the father at any rate who was avenging. For this

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, v. 9.

⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIX, 1.

reason let me add, not immediately after Christ was slain did the capture of Jerusalem take place, but after forty years, that He might show His long suffering. It came when they had slain Stephen, when they had put James to death, when they had spitefully treated the Apostles.”

“Notice the truth of the event, and its quickness! While John was yet living, and many others of them that were with Christ, these things came to pass, and they that had heard these words were witnesses of the events.”

“Notice His extensive care for them! He had planted a vineyard; He had done all things, and finished; when His servants had been put to death, He sent other servants; when those had been slain, He sent the Son; and when He was put to death, He still asks them to come to the marriage. They still would not come; so after this He sent other servants, and they slew these also.”

“Then upon this He slays them, as being incurably diseased. That they were incurably diseased was proven not by their acts only, but by the fact, that even when harlots and tax collectors had believed (Matthew 21:31-32), they did these things. So that, not by their own crimes alone, but also from what others were able to do rightly, these men are condemned.”

“If anyone should say that the Gentiles were not called by Christ, when the apostles had been beaten and had suffered ten thousand things, immediately after the resurrection, Jesus said to them, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19). We would say that both before the crucifixion, and after the crucifixion, they addressed themselves to the Jews first. For both before the crucifixion, Jesus said to them, ‘Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 10:6); and after the crucifixion, so far from forbidding, He even commanded them to address themselves to the Jews. Though He said, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19), yet when on the point of ascending into Heaven, He declared that to the Jews first they were to address themselves. For, ‘you shall receive power, said He, ‘when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). Paul said again, ‘He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles’ (Galatians 2:8). Therefore the apostles also went first to the Jews, and when they had waited a long time in Jerusalem, and then had been driven away by them, in this way they were scattered abroad to the Gentiles.”

