

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Christmas Day

Epistle: Galatians 4:1-7

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

The Fullness of Time

Paul said, “When we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Galatians 4:3-5).

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

Ambrose of Milan noted¹ that Christ was unique, eternal in His Deity long before the Law, yet human, made of a woman after the Law was in place.

“‘When the fullness of time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law’ (Galatians 4:4). The Son of God was not as one of many, and was not in common with another. In saying ‘His Son’, Paul showed that it is of the Son’s nature that His generation is eternal. Paul affirmed that He was afterwards ‘made’ of a woman, in order that the making might be understood to be not of the Godhead, but of the putting on of a body — ‘made of a woman’. By taking on flesh, He was ‘made under the Law’ through the observance of the Law. His spiritual generation was before the Law was; His taking on flesh occurred after the Law was in place.”

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¹ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, I, xiv, 94.

John Cassian stated² that a son is defined with respect to a father; so it is with Christ. Mary was the first (and only) person to give birth to someone Who pre-existed before her. She gave birth to the One Who was the Creator and the author of her being. It was as simple for God to bring about birth for Himself as it was for Him to create man in the beginning.

“Learn first of all from Paul the teacher of the whole world, that He who is without beginning, God, the Son of God, became the Son of man at the end of the world, i.e., in the fullness of the times. He says, ‘But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law’ (Galatians 4:4). Tell me then, before the Lord Jesus Christ was born of His mother Mary, had God a Son or had He not? You cannot deny that He had, for never yet was there either a son without a father, or a father without a son. A son is so called with reference to a father, so is a father so named with reference to a son.”

“When Paul says that God sent His Son, it was His own Son to use the actual words of Paul, ‘His own Son’ that God sent. It was not someone else’s Son that He sent, nor could He send Him at all if He who was sent had no existence. He sent then, ‘His own Son, made of a woman’ (Galatians 4:4). No one ever yet gave birth to one who had already existed before. Had not the Lord a pre-existence before Mary? Was not the Son of God existent before the daughter of man? In a word did not God Himself exist before man. You see then that I do not merely say that Mary gave birth to one who had existed before her, but one who was the author of her being, and that in giving birth to her Creator, she became the mother of Him who gave her being. It was as simple for God to bring about birth for Himself as for man and as easy for Him to arrange that He Himself should be born of mankind, as that a man should be born.”

John Chrysostom stated³ that Paul gave two effects of the Incarnation: deliverance from the curse of the Law and promotion to son-ship, which had been promised to Abraham. There are two modes for this: we have put on Christ and we have received the Spirit of adoption.

“Paul states two objects and effects of the Incarnation: deliverance from evil and supply of good, things which none could accomplish but Christ. They are these: deliverance from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10), and promotion to son-ship (Galatians 4:7). Fitly does he say, that we might ‘receive’, i.e. be paid; implying that it was due; for the promise was of old made for these objects to Abraham, as Paul has himself shown at great length. How does it appear that we have become sons? He has told us one mode, in that we have put on Christ who is the Son (Galatians 3:27); and now he mentions another, in that we have received the Spirit of adoption” (Galatians 4:5).

“Had not we been first made sons, we could not have called Him Father. If then grace has made us freemen instead of slaves, men instead of children, heirs and sons instead of aliens, is it not utter absurdity and stupidity to desert this grace, and to turn away backwards?”

² John Cassian, Seven Books on the Incarnation of the Lord, IV, 1-2.

³ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 4, vv. 4-7.

John of Damascus stated⁴ that the demons were aware of Isaiah's prophecy that predicted the virgin birth, but they were deceived in their own craftiness by Mary, who had been given in marriage to Joseph. Just as Eve was formed from Adam without a human father, so Christ was formed from Mary without a human father. Although Mary's pregnancy was a normal, human 9-month pregnancy, her birth-giving itself was special. Since Mary gave birth to God in His humanity, she must be called 'Mother of God'.

"The enemy of our salvation was keeping a watchful eye on virgins, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, who said, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bare a Son and shall call His name Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, "God with us"' (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). In order that He who takes the wise in their own craftiness (1 Corinthians 3:19, Job 5:13) may deceive him who always glories in his wisdom, the maiden was given in marriage to Joseph by the priests. But the marriage was both the protection of the virgin and the delusion of him who was keeping a watchful eye on virgins (Isaiah 29:11). When the fullness of time was come, the messenger of the Lord was sent to her, with the good news of our Lord's conception (Luke 1:26-36). Thus she conceived the Son of God, the hypostatic power of the Father, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man (John 1:13), that is to say, by connection and seed, but by the good pleasure of the Father and co-operation of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). She ministered to the Creator in that He was created; she ministered to the Fashioner in that He was fashioned; and she ministered to the Son of God and God in that He was made flesh and became man from her pure and immaculate flesh and blood, satisfying the debt of the first mother. Just as Eve was formed from Adam without connection, so also did Mary bring forth the new Adam, who was brought forth in accordance with the laws of human child-birth and above the nature of generation."

"He, who was of the Father, yet without mother, was born of woman without a father's co-operation. So far as He was born of woman, His birth was in accordance with the laws of human child-birth; so far as He had no father, His birth was above the nature of generation. In that it was at the usual time (for He was born on the completion of the ninth month when the tenth was just beginning), His birth was in accordance with the laws of human child-birth, while in that it was painless it was above the laws of generation. For, as pleasure did not precede it, pain did not follow it, according to the prophet who says, 'Before she that travailed brought forth, before the travail-pain came on, she escaped *it* and brought forth a male' (Isaiah 66:7 LXX). The Son of God incarnate, therefore, was born of her, not a divinely-inspired man but God incarnate, not a prophet anointed with energy but by the presence of the anointing One in His completeness. The Anointer became man and the Anointed was God, not by a change of nature but by union in subsistence. For the Anointer and the Anointed were one and the same, anointing in the capacity of God Himself as man. Mary must therefore be called 'Mother of God' since she bore God incarnate! Assuredly she who played the part of the Creator's servant and mother is in all strictness and truth in reality God's Mother and Lady and Queen over all created things. But just as He who was conceived kept her who conceived still virgin, in like manner also He who was born preserved her virginity intact, only passing through her and keeping her closed (Ezekiel 44:2

⁴ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 14.

LXX). The conception was through the sense of hearing, but the birth through the usual path by which children come.”

Irenaeus of Lyons stated⁵ that Christ’s coming at the fullness of time was to trample the head of the serpent that had caused all man’s misery. This scenario duplicated the one in the Garden, where it was again a man against the demons. This time the man defeated the demons.

“Christ has summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam. Christ trampled on his head, as you can perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall be on guard for His heel’ (Genesis 3:15 LXX). From that time, He who should be born of a woman, namely from the Virgin, after the likeness of Adam, was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent. This is the seed of which Paul says in Galatians, ‘that the Law of works was established until the seed should come to whom the promise was made’ (Galatians 3:19). This fact is exhibited in a still clearer light, where Paul speaks: ‘But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law’ (Galatians 4:4). Indeed the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished, unless it had been a man born of a woman who conquered him. It was by means of a woman that our enemy got the advantage over man at first, setting himself up as man’s opponent. Therefore the Lord professes Himself to be the Son of man (Matthew 13:37-41, et al), comprising in Himself that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned, in order that as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one. As through a man death received the palm of victory against us, so again by a man we may receive the palm against death.”

Adoption as Sons

Paul said, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5)

His purpose in doing so was that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:5). This was the second part of the unfolding of the mystery hidden in God from the beginning of the ages (Ephesians 3:9). As a result of the crucifixion and resurrection, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs with the Jews in one body and partakers of His promise (Ephesians 3:6). This was not known in previous ages as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5). In doing this God has joined man to Himself in one New Man, the Church (Ephesians 2:13-18, Colossians 3:10). He has given us the Holy Spirit as a down-payment⁶ (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:14) and given this New Man the ability to trample on serpents and scorpions -- that is, Satan (Luke 10:19). Small wonder that Satan would not have crucified the Lord if he had known this would result.

⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, V, xxi, 1.

⁶ A pledge was something of value given to guarantee that the full payment was to come.

Basil the Great stated⁷ that the adoption of sons comes from the imitation of Christ, which is necessary. We imitate both His life by our behavior and His death by our baptism. Our old life is cut off as we are buried with Him and baptism symbolically signifies the putting off of the works of the flesh.

“The dispensation of our God and Savior concerning man is a recall from the fall and a return from the alienation caused by disobedience to close communion with God. This is the reason for the sojourn of Christ in the flesh, the pattern of life described in the Gospels, the sufferings, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection. Man, who is being saved through imitation of Christ, receives that old adoption. For perfection of life the imitation of Christ is necessary; not only that we may imitate His gentleness, lowliness, and long suffering as in His life, but also that we may imitate His actual death. So Paul, the imitator of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1), says, ‘that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead’ (Philippians 3:10-11). How then are we made in the likeness of His death (Romans 6:4-5)? In that we were buried with Him by baptism. What then is the manner of the burial; and what is the advantage resulting from the imitation? First of all, it is necessary that the continuity of the old life be cut off. This is impossible unless a man is born again, according to the Lord’s word (John 3:3); for the regeneration is a beginning of a second life. Before beginning the second, it is necessary to put an end to the first. How do we achieve the descent into hell? By imitating, through baptism, the burial of Christ! For the bodies of the baptized are buried in the water. Baptism then symbolically signifies the putting off of the works of the flesh; as Paul says, you were ‘circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism’ (Colossians 2:11-12). There is a cleansing of the soul from the filth (1 Peter 3:21) that has grown on it from the carnal mind, as it is written, ‘Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow’” (Psalm 51:7).

Basil the Great also spoke⁸ of how our adoption of sons includes our restoration to Paradise, ascension to the Kingdom of Heaven, being partakers of the grace of Christ and our sharing in eternal glory. Baptism in water is just a beginning; we are also baptized by the Holy Spirit and with fire at the last Judgment.

“Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons. This includes our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, and our sharing in eternal glory. In a word, this also includes our being brought into a state of all ‘fullness of blessing’ (Romans 15:29), both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, as we await the full enjoyment. If this is the down payment, what is the perfection? If such is the first fruits, what is the complete fulfillment? From this too may be apprehended the difference between the grace

⁷ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XV, 35.

⁸ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XV, 36.

that comes from the Spirit and the baptism by water; where John baptized with water, but our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. 'I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Matthew 3:11). Here He calls the trial at the judgment the baptism of fire, as Paul says, 'Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is'" (1 Corinthians 3:13).

John Cassian, quoting Abbot Chaeremon, stated⁹ that true adoption of sons generates love for everyone, the just and the unjust, in imitation of God. Those who have the adoption of sons do not sin in a mortal sense, but they may have faults that are not unto death. Cassian explains what this means.

"In what can a weak and fragile human nature be like Him, except in always showing a calm love in its heart towards the good and evil, the just and the unjust, in imitation of God. By doing good for the love of goodness itself, arriving at that true adoption of the sons of God, of which John speaks, 'Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God' (1 John 3:9); and again, 'We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him' (1 John 5:18). This must be understood not of all kinds of sins, but only of mortal sins. If anyone will not extricate and cleanse himself from these, for him John tells us that we ought not even to pray, saying: 'If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that' (1 John 5:16). But of those which he says are not unto death, from which even those who serve Christ faithfully cannot, with whatever care they keep themselves, be free, of these John says, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1:8); and again, 'If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us' (1 John 1:10). For it is an impossibility for any one of the saints not to fall into those trivial faults which are committed by word, thought, ignorance, forgetfulness, necessity, will, and surprise. These are quite different from that sin which is said to be unto death; yet the saints still cannot be free from fault and blame."

John Cassian, quoting Abbot Chaeremon, stated¹⁰ that there are two stages of fear: one for beginners and another for those who have received the adoption of sons and who cry, "Abba Father". Those of the second stage have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. Christ Himself, in His manhood, lived in this second stage; it filled His whole mind, and this is the fear belonging to perfection.

"If the beginning of wisdom consists in fear, what will its perfection be except in the love of Christ which, contains in it the fear which belongs to perfect love, and is called not the beginning but the treasure of wisdom and knowledge?"

⁹ John Cassian, "1st Conference of Abbot Chaeremon", in Conferences, XI, 9.

¹⁰ John Cassian, "1st Conference of Abbot Chaeremon", in Conferences, XI, 13.

Therefore there is a twofold stage of fear. The first is for beginners, i.e., for those who are still subject to the yoke and to servile terror; of which we read: ‘A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master’ (Malachi 1:6 LXX). Also in the Gospel: ‘No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you’ (John 15:15). Therefore ‘A slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever’ (John 8:35). He is instructing us to pass on from that penal fear to the fullest freedom of love, and the confidence of the friends and sons of God. Finally Paul, who had by the power of the Lord’s love already passed through the servile stage of fear, scorns lower things and declares that he has been enriched with good things by the Lord, ‘For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind’ (2 Timothy 1:7). Those also who are inflamed with a perfect love of their heavenly Father, and whom the Divine adoption has already made sons instead of servants, he addresses in these words: ‘For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father’ (Romans 8:15). It is of this fear too, that the prophet spoke when he would describe that sevenfold spirit, which according to the mystery of the Incarnation descended on the God man: ‘the Spirit of God shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and godliness shall fill him; the spirit of the fear of God.’ (Isaiah 11:2-3 LXX). In the last place he adds as something special these words: ‘And the Spirit of the fear of God shall fill Him’. Where we must in the first place notice carefully that he does not say ‘and there shall rest upon Him the Spirit of fear’, as he said in the earlier cases, but he says ‘there shall fill Him the Spirit of the fear of God’. Such is the greatness of its richness that when once it has seized on a man by its power, it takes possession not of a portion but of his whole mind. And not without good reason! For as it is closely joined to that love which ‘never faileth’, it not only fills the man, but takes a lasting, inseparable and continual possession of him in whom it has begun, and is not lessened by any allurements of temporal joy or delights, as is sometimes the case with that fear which is cast out. This then is the fear belonging to perfection, with which we are told that the God-man, who came not only to redeem mankind, but also to give us a pattern of perfection and example of goodness, was filled. For the true Son of God ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’ (1 Peter 2:22), could not feel that servile fear of punishment.”

Ambrose of Milan stated¹¹ that the grace of adoption is a spiritual inheritance not a carnal inheritance. We are sealed with the Spirit after baptism that we may possess His brightness, His image and His grace and become partakers of the nature of God.

“Do we live in the water or in the Spirit? Are we sealed in the water or in the Spirit. For in Him we live and He Himself is the down payment of our inheritance, as Paul says, ‘In Whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance’ (Ephesians 1:13-14). So we were sealed by the Holy Spirit, not by nature, but by God, for it is written: ‘He Who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, Who

¹¹ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, I, vi, 78-80.

also has sealed us, and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

“We were then sealed with the Spirit by God. For as we die in Christ, in order to be born again, so, too, we are sealed with the Spirit, that we may possess His brightness, His image and His grace, which is undoubtedly our spiritual seal. For although we were visibly sealed in our bodies, we are in truth sealed in our hearts, that the Holy Spirit may portray in us the likeness of the heavenly image.”

“Who, then, can dare to say that the Holy Spirit is separated from the Father and the Son, since through Him we attain to the image and likeness of God, and through Him, as the Apostle Peter says, are partakers of the divine nature? (2 Peter 1:4) In this there is certainly not the inheritance of carnal succession, but the spiritual connection of the grace of adoption. In order that we may know that this seal is rather on our hearts than on our bodies, the prophet David says: ‘The light of Your countenance has been manifested toward us, O Lord; You have put gladness in my heart’” (Psalm 4:6-7 LXX).

John Cassian, describing Abbot Isaac’s view on the Lord’s Prayer, stated¹² that we profess that we have been called from being slaves to adopted sons when we say “Our Father”. We shun lingering in this present life and hasten to that country where our Father dwells. As good sons, we spend all our energy on our Father’s glory and not on our own profit.

“By addressing God as ‘Our Father’, we enter a sublime and exalted condition which is brought about by the contemplation of God alone and by fervent love. The mind, transporting and flinging itself into love for Him, addresses God most familiarly as its own Father with a piety of its own. That we ought earnestly to seek after this condition the formula of the Lord’s prayer teaches us. When we confess with our own mouths that the God and Lord of the universe is our Father, we profess that we have been called from our condition as slaves to the adoption of sons. By adding ‘Who art in heaven’ (Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2), we shun with the utmost horror all lingering in this present life. We pass upon this earth as on a pilgrimage; what separates us by a great distance from our Father, we would rather hasten to cross with all eagerness to that country where we confess that our Father dwells. We do not want to allow anything, which would make us unworthy of this our profession and the dignity of an adoption of this kind, to deprive us as a disgrace to our Father’s inheritance, and make us incur the wrath of His justice and severity. To which state and condition of son-ship when we have advanced, we shall forthwith be inflamed with the piety which belongs to good sons. We shall bend all our energies to the advance not of our own profit, but of our Father’s glory, saying to Him: ‘Hallowed be Your name’ (Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2), testifying that our desire and our joy is His glory. We become imitators of Him who said: ‘He who speaks of himself, seeks his own glory. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him (John 7:18).’”

¹² John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Isaac, I, ix, 18.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹³ that some people said that Jesus was just a man and not also God; these are still dead and have not received the adoption of sons. Those who have received the adoption of sons have been promoted into God as sons.

“Those who assert that Christ was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph, remain in the bondage of the old disobedience, are in a state of death, have been not yet joined to the Word of God the Father, and have not received liberty through the Son, as He Himself declares: ‘If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’ (John 8:38). Being ignorant of Him who from the Virgin is Emmanuel, they are deprived of His gift, which is eternal life (Romans 6:23). They have not received the incorruptible Word; they remain in mortal flesh; and they are debtors to death, not obtaining the antidote of life. To them the Word says, mentioning His own gift of grace, ‘I said, You are gods and all of you are children of the Most High; but you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes’ (Psalm 82:6-7). He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. It was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. By no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons?”

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

No Longer Slaves, But Sons

Paul said, “Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7).

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁴ that Christ applied the name “babes” to us; we readily accept salvation compared to the wise of the world. We are encouraged to be babies when it comes

¹³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III, xix, 1.

¹⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, I, 6.

to malice, but mature when it comes to understanding what God wants for us. The Law treated people like babies to train them in the right way; this was Paul's life prior to his conversion. After his conversion, he was able to understand like a man. Similarly, people who are under fear and sins are like children, but those who are under faith are mature and sons of God.

“Jesus, rejoicing in the spirit, said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and revealed them to babes’ (Luke 10:21). The Master and Teacher applied the name babes to us, who are readier to embrace salvation than the wise in the world, who, thinking themselves wise, are inflated with pride. He exclaimed in exultation and exceeding joy, as if lisping with the children, ‘Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight’ (Luke 10:21). Therefore those things which have been concealed from the wise and prudent of this present world have been revealed to babes. Truly, then, are we the children of God, who have put aside the old man, and stripped off the garment of wickedness, and put on the immortality of Christ. We became a new, holy people by regeneration, and may keep the man undefiled. A babe, as God's little one, is cleansed from fornication and wickedness. With the greatest clarity the blessed Paul has solved for us this question in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. ‘Brethren, do not be children in understanding. In malice be babes; but in understanding be mature’ (1 Corinthians 14:20). The expression, ‘When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child’ (1 Corinthians 13:11), points out his mode of life according to the Law, according to which, thinking childish things, he persecuted, and speaking childish things he blasphemed the Word. He had not yet attained to the simplicity of childhood, but as being in its folly, for the word *nepion* has two meanings¹⁵. ‘When I became a man, I put away childish things’ (1 Corinthians 13:11). It is not incomplete size of stature, a definite measure of time, or additional secret teachings in things that are manly and more perfect, that Paul, who himself professes to be a preacher of childishness, alludes to when he sends it, as it were, into banishment. He applies the name ‘children’ to those who are under the Law, who are terrified by fear as children are by imaginary goblins. He applies the name ‘men’ to us who are obedient to the Word and masters of ourselves, who have believed, and are saved by voluntary choice, and are rationally, not irrationally, frightened by terror. Of this Paul himself testifies, calling the Jews heirs according to the first covenant, and us heirs according to promise. ‘Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons’ (Galatians 4:1-5) by Him. Notice how He has admitted those to be children who are under fear and sins; but has conferred manhood on those who are under faith, by calling them sons, in contradistinction from the children that are under the Law. ‘Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ’ (Galatians 4:7). What, then, is lacking to the son after inheritance? The expression, ‘When I was a child’, may be elegantly expounded

¹⁵ That is simple or innocent as a child, and foolish as a child.

thus. When I was a Jew (for he was a Hebrew by extraction) I thought as a child, when I followed the Law; but after becoming a man, I no longer entertain the sentiments of a child, that is, of the Law, but of a man, that is, of Christ, whom alone the Scripture calls man. ‘I put away childish things’ (1 Corinthians 13:11). But the childhood which is in Christ is maturity, as compared with the Law.”

John Chrysostom noted¹⁶ that the Mosaic Law was made for mortals, but grace was made for angels. Under the Mosaic Law, people were called sons of God, but they remained slaves. We are called to a higher calling through the spirit of adoption and we are thoroughly remade. We are called to holiness not by just refraining from certain vices, but to a rule of life far more comprehensive. Even then, our “holiness” does not match up to that of the angels or to Divine holiness.

“The first Laws God gave men were made as for mortals; the second Laws God gave men were made as for angels. The first is the honor of a name; in the second the thing goes with it. Of the first the Prophet Asaph says, ‘I said, you are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High’ (Psalm 82:6); but of the second, that they ‘were born of God’. How, and in what way? By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit! Then, even after they had received the title of sons, they retained the spirit of slavery; for while they remained slaves they were honored with this appellation. But we being made free, received the honor, not in name, but in deed. Paul declared this, ‘You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father”’ (Romans 8:15). Having been born again, and, as one may say, thoroughly remade, we are called ‘sons’. If one considers the character of the holiness, what the first was and what the second is, we will find there also great difference. Then when they did not worship idols, commit fornication or adultery, they were called by this name; but we become holy, not by refraining from these vices merely, but by acquiring things greater. This gift we obtain first by means of the coming upon us of the Holy Spirit; and next, by a rule of life far more comprehensive than that of the Jews, ‘that we may be holy both in body and in spirit’ (1 Corinthians 7:34). ‘Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord’ (Hebrews 12:14); and, ‘Perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ (2 Corinthians 7:1). The word ‘holy’ does not have the force to give the same meaning in every case to which it is applied; since God is called ‘Holy’, though not as we are. What, for instance, does the Prophet say, when he heard that cry raised by the flying Seraphim? ‘Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips’ (Isaiah 6:5); though he was holy and clean. If we are compared with the holiness which is above, we are unclean. Angels are holy; Archangels are holy; the Cherubim and Seraphim themselves are holy; but of this holiness again there is a double difference; that is, in relation to us, and in relation to the holiness of God.”

John of Damascus summarized¹⁷ the consensus of his day regarding Christ’s humanity. He is called a servant, but He is also God the Word, which makes His flesh life-giving. Servitude and

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIV, 2.

¹⁷ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, III, 21.

mastership are relative terms. In His flesh, Christ is known as a servant; in His Deity, He is Lord of all. Therefore we don't usually speak of Christ as a servant, except as a title for His passion among us.

“Christ assumed our ignorant and servile nature. It is man's nature to be the servant of God, his Creator, and he does not possess knowledge of the future. On account of the inseparable union of Christ's Deity and His humanity the soul of the Lord was enriched with the knowledge of the future as also with the other miraculous powers. The flesh of men is not in its own nature life-giving. The flesh of our Lord which was united in subsistence with God the Word Himself, although it was not exempt from the mortality of its nature, yet became life-giving through its union in subsistence with the Word. We say that it was and is forever life-giving; in like manner His human nature does not in essence possess the knowledge of the future. But the soul of the Lord through its union with God the Word Himself and its identity in subsistence was enriched with the knowledge of the future as well as with the other miraculous powers.”

“Observe further that we do not speak of Him as servant. The words servitude and mastership are not marks of nature but indicate relationship to something, such as that of fatherhood and son-ship. For these do not signify essence but relation.”

“In connection with ignorance, if you separate with subtle thoughts, that is, with fine imaginings, the created from the uncreated, the flesh is a servant, unless it has been united with God the Word. But how can it be a servant when it is once united in subsistence? Since Christ is one, He cannot be His own servant and Lord. These are relative terms. Whose servant, then could He be? His Father's? The Son would not have all the Father's attributes, if He is the Father's servant and yet in no respect His own son. Besides, how could Paul say concerning us who were adopted by Him, ‘You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ’ (Galatians 4:7), if indeed He is Himself a servant? The word servant, then, is used merely as a title, though not in the strict meaning; but for our sakes He assumed the form of a servant and is called a servant among us. Although He is without passion, yet for our sake He was the servant of passion and became the minister of our salvation. Those, then, who say that He is a servant divide the one Christ into two, just as Nestorius did. But we declare Him to be Master and Lord of all creation, the one Christ, at once God and man, and all-knowing. For in Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the hidden treasures.”

John of Damascus summarized¹⁸ why we are sons and not servants by first outlining how thoroughly people were servants under the Old Covenant. The Law was flexible, and its entire purpose was to obtain time to worship God in order that both servant and beast of burden might devote a very small share to Him and be at rest. With the coming of Christ and the adoption of sons, we are less concerned about the body and the letter and more concerned about dedicating the entire span of our life to Him.

“The Law is not made for a righteous man but for the unrighteous. Moses was the first to fast with God for forty days and again for another forty, and thus afflicted himself with hunger on the Sabbaths although the Law forbade self-

¹⁸ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 23.

affliction on the Sabbath. Elijah the Thesbite accomplished a journey of forty days on one meal. By thus afflicting himself on the Sabbaths not only with hunger but with the forty days' journeying, he broke the Sabbath: and yet God, Who gave the Law, was not angry with him, but showed Himself to him on Horeb as a reward for his virtue. Daniel spent three weeks without food! All Israel circumcises a child on the Sabbath, if it happened to be the 8th day after birth. All Israel holds the great fast¹⁹ which the Law enjoins if it falls on the Sabbath. The priests and the Levites profane the Sabbath in the works of the tabernacle and yet are held blameless. If an ox should fall into a pit on the Sabbath, he who draws it out is blameless, while he who neglects to do so is condemned. All Israel surrounded the walls of Jericho carrying the Ark of God for seven days, in which the Sabbath was included. All this was done for the purpose of securing leisure to worship God in order that both servant and beast of burden might devote a very small share to Him and be at rest. The observance of the Sabbath was devised for the carnal that were still childish and in the bonds of the elements of the world, and unable to conceive of anything beyond the body and the letter. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Only-begotten Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law that we might receive the adoption of sons. For to as many of us as received Him, He gave power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on Him. So that we are no longer servants but sons; no longer under the Law but under grace; no longer do we serve God in part from fear, but we are bound to dedicate to Him the whole span of our life. This causes that servant, I mean wrath and desire, to cease from sin and bids it devote itself to the service of God, always directing our whole desire towards God and arming our wrath against the enemies of God. Likewise we hinder that beast of burden, that is the body, from the servitude of sin, and we urge it forwards to assist to the uttermost the divine precepts."

"These are the things which the spiritual Law of Christ commands us, and those who observe that become superior to the Law of Moses. When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When the covering of the Law, that is, the veil, is torn in half through the crucifixion of the Savior, and the Spirit shines forth with tongues of fire, the letter shall be done away with. Bodily things shall come to an end; the Law of servitude shall be fulfilled; and the Law of liberty shall be bestowed on us."

Augustine of Hippo commented²⁰ on this as follows: "There is no need to fear that God should seem to suffer constraint in the tiny body of a child; for God is not in size, but in power. That power, without changing for the worse, took to itself the rational soul, the human body and the whole man to change it for the better. In condescension, He took from it the name of humanity; in generosity, He bestowed on it the name of divinity". He existed in the form of God and deemed it not robbery to be equal with God; but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave and becoming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7).

¹⁹ That is, the Day of Atonement.

²⁰ Augustine of Hippo, Letters, 137.8

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

Paul stated, "Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith that would afterward be revealed" (Galatians 3:23). John Chrysostom stated²¹ that the effect of this was a security "which like a fortress fenced them round with fear and a life conformable to itself, and so preserved them in the Faith." "Now the tutor (*pedagogus*) is not opposed to the Schoolmaster, but cooperates with Him, ridding the youth of all vice, and having the leisure to prepare him for receiving instructions from his Schoolmaster. But when the youth's habits are formed, then the tutor leaves him".

The Law, then, was our tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24) in the same way as the *pedagogus* function was to bring the child to the Schoolmaster, prepared to learn without all kinds of moral impediments. "But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor or *pedagogus*" (Galatians 3:25). The Schoolmaster is Faith and comes from the Holy Spirit in us.

Chrysostom stated²² it like this: "The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, (the Law) continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary; for if it confines those who ought to go forward to grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day, from the Sun, it would not only cease to benefit, but would injure us; and so does the Law if it stands between us and greater benefits. Just so a tutor or *pedagogus* makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure".

Abba Father

Paul said, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:6) What does this mean?

The word "Abba" is a variation of the Hebrew word "*Ab*", meaning "Father". Paul's words here mean that we are calling God our father in a very familiar sense somewhat like the English word "Papa".

John Chrysostom stated²³ that the spirit of adoption changed from being in name only to being much more with the coming of Christ. We do not find people praying to God by the Name in the Old Testament like we find in the New Testament. Just like with the spirit of prophecy, the spirit of adoption calls God "Father" as moved by the Spirit. "Abba Father" comes from the Hebrew and is a special sign of true-born children to their fathers, where the Spirit Itself bears witness with our spirit.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3, Verse 23, 24.

²² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3, Verse 25-26.

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XIV, vv. 15-16.

“In Old Testament times the honor of adoption was one of name only²⁴, but in the New Testament times the reality followed also: the cleansing of Baptism, the giving of the Spirit, the furnishing of the other blessings. There are several other points besides, which go to show our high birth and their low condition. After intimating all these by speaking of the Spirit and the adoption, he gives a fresh proof again of having the Spirit of adoption. Now what is this? That ‘we cry, Abba, Father!’ (Romans 8:15) How great this is, the initiated know, being with good reason asked to use this word first in the Prayer of the initiated. Did not the Jews also call God Father? Listen to Moses, when he says, ‘You forsook the God that made you’ (Deuteronomy 32:15 LXX). Listen to Malachi reproaching them, saying, ‘Did not one God create you?’, and ‘Have you not all one father?’ (Malachi 2:10 LXX). Still, if these words and others besides are used, we do not find them anywhere calling God by the Name, or praying in this language. But we all, priests and laymen, rulers and ruled, are ordered to pray like this. If in any other instances they so called Him that were only of their own mind. But those in the state of grace do it through being moved by the in-working of the Spirit. For as there is a Spirit of Wisdom, after which they that were unwise became wise, and this discloses itself in their teaching. There is also a Spirit of Power, whereby the feeble raised up the dead, and drove out demons; a Spirit also of the gift of healing, a Spirit of prophecy, a Spirit of tongues, and a Spirit of adoption. We know the Spirit of prophecy, in that he who has it foretells things to come, not speaking of his own mind, but moved by the Grace. So too is the Spirit of adoption, whereby he that is gifted with it calls God, Father, as moved by the Spirit. Wishing to express this as a most true descent, he used also the Hebrew tongue, for he does not say only, ‘Father’, but ‘Abba, Father’, which name is a special sign of true-born children to their fathers. Paul first mentions the diversity resulting from their conversation, that resulting from the grace which had been given, and that from their freedom. Then Paul brings forward another demonstration of the superiority which goes with this adoption. Now of what kind is this? ‘The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (Romans 8:16). For it is not from the language merely, he says, that I make my assertion, but from the cause out of which the language has its birth; since it is from the Spirit suggesting it that we so speak. He has put into plainer words, ‘God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”’ (Galatians 4:6). And what is that, ‘Spirit bears witness with our spirit?’ The Comforter, he means, with that Gift, which is given to us. It is not of the Gift alone that it is the voice, but of the Comforter also who gave the Gift, He Himself having taught us through the Gift so to speak.”

Basil the Great stated²⁵ that the Holy Spirit in our soul is similar to the health of our body. If we are unstable, sometimes feverish, sometimes healthy, the Spirit won’t remain if we reject the grace which we have received. There are great benefits of the Spirit as He cries out in our hearts, Abba Father, and He is like reason in our soul.

“In our bodies can be health or fever, or generally their variable conditions; so very frequently is the Spirit in the soul. He does not abide with those who, on

²⁴ That is, they were called by the Name of the Lord as the people of God.

²⁵ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XXVI, 61.

account of the instability of their will, easily reject the grace which they have received. An instance of this is seen in Saul (1 Samuel 16:14), the seventy elders of the children of Israel (Numbers 11:25-28), and generally any one similar to these in character. The Holy Spirit is like reason in the soul, which is at one time the thought in the heart, and at another speech uttered by the tongue. This appears when He 'bears witness with our spirit' (Romans 8:16), and when he 'cries out in our hearts, Abba, Father' (Galatians 4:6), or when He speaks on our behalf, as it is said, 'It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you' (Matthew 10:20). The Spirit is conceived of in relation to the distribution of gifts, as a whole in parts. We all are 'members of one another, having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us' (Romans 12:5-6). Therefore 'the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you"' (1 Corinthians 12:21), but all together complete the Body of Christ in the Unity of the Spirit, and render to one another the needful aid that comes from the gifts. 'But God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased' (1 Corinthians 12:18). But 'the members have the same care for one another' (1 Corinthians 12:25), according to the inborn spiritual communion of their sympathy. Therefore, 'if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it' (1 Corinthians 12:26). As parts of the whole, we are individually in the Spirit; because we all 'were baptized in one body into one spirit'" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Athanasius of Alexandria described²⁶ how we are "begotten"; first we are created or made, then when we are born of the Spirit, we are begotten anew. In this way, God becomes our Father and we pray, "Abba Father". We are not sons by nature, but only because of the second birth.

"God not only created us to be men, but called us to be sons, as having begotten us. The term 'begat' is here as elsewhere expressive of a Son, as David says, 'God has greatly exalted the sons of men' (Psalm 12:8). Generally, when Scripture wishes to signify a son, it does so, not by the term 'created,' but by that of 'begat.' And this John seems to say, '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). Here the cautious distinction is well kept up, for first he says 'become,' because we are not called sons by nature but by adoption; then he says 'were begotten,' because we too had received the name of son. But the people, says Isaiah, 'rebelled against' their Benefactor (Isaiah 1:2). But this is God's kindness to man, of them according to grace He afterwards becomes Father also. This is when men, His creatures, receive into their hearts, as Paul says, 'the Spirit of His Son, crying, Abba, Father' (Galatians 4:6). These are they who, having received the Word, gained power from Him to become sons of God; for they could not become sons, being by nature creatures, other than by receiving the Spirit of the true Son."

"This passage also proves that we are not sons by nature, but only because of the Son who is in us; and again, that God is not our Father by nature, but of that Word in us, in whom and because of whom we 'cry, Abba, Father' (Galatians 4:6) And so in like manner, the Father calls them sons in whomever He sees His own

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, xxi, 59.

Son, and says, 'I begat;' begetting is significant of a Son, and making is indicative of the works. Thus it is that we are not begotten first, but made; for it is written, 'Let Us make man;' afterwards, on receiving the grace of the Spirit, we are said from then on to be begotten also."

Hilary of Poitiers stated²⁷ that Paul made it very clear that we are children by adoption, but Christ is Son of God by nature. Obedience to the Spirit of God gives us the title of sons of God. 'Abba, Father', is the cry which we raise, not the expression of our nature.

"Christ is the Son of God; so we read, but nothing is said of His adoption, or of His being God's creature. The name expresses the nature; He is God's Son, and therefore the Son-ship is true. Paul's confession asserts the genuineness of the relation. I don't see how the Divine nature of the Son could have been more completely stated. Paul has proclaimed in no weak or wavering voice that Christ is the Son of Him Who, as we believe, is the Father. He has left us no uncertainty, no opening for error in his presentation of the doctrine. He is quite clear upon the Subject of children by adoption; of those who by faith attain so to be and so to be named in his own words: 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."' (Romans 8:14-15). This is the Name granted to us who believe, through the sacrament of regeneration; our confession of the faith wins us this adoption. For our work done in obedience to the Spirit of God gives us the title of sons of God. 'Abba, Father', is the cry which we raise, not the expression of our essential nature. For that essential nature of ours is untouched by that tribute of the voice. It is one thing for God to be addressed as Father; another thing for Him to be the Father of His Son."

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out²⁸ how twisted the Arian teaching was by their calling God the Father "Unoriginate" instead of Father. By doing this they were trying to deny the Deity of Christ; but by saying this, they also affect our relationship with the Father in that He no longer is a personal God.

"It is much more accurate to denote God from the Son and to call Him Father, than to name Him and call Him Unoriginated from His works only. The latter term refers to the works that have come to be at the will of God through the Word, but the name of Father points out the proper offspring from His essence. Just as the Word surpasses things originated, by so much and more also does calling God Father surpass the calling Him Unoriginated. For the latter is non-scriptural and suspicious, as it has various senses; but the former is simple and scriptural, and more accurate, and alone implies the Son. 'Unoriginated' is a word of the Greeks who don't know the Son; but 'Father' has been acknowledged by our Lord. He said, 'I am in the Father, and the Father in Me'; and, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father' (John 14:9-10); and, 'I and My Father are one' (John 10:30); but nowhere is He found to call the Father Unoriginated. Moreover, when He teaches us to pray, He does not say, 'When you pray, say, O God Unoriginated,' but rather, 'When you pray, say, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name"' (Matthew

²⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VI, 44.

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Defense of the Nicene Definition, VII, 31.

6:9, Luke 11:2)'. It was His Will, that the Summary of our faith²⁹ should have the same bearing. He has asked us be baptized, not in the name of Unoriginate and Originate, not into the name of Uncreate and Creature, but into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With such an initiation we too are truly made sons; and using the name of the Father, we acknowledge from that Name the Word in the Father. But if He wills that we should call His own Father our Father, we must not on that account measure ourselves with the Son according to nature. It is because of the Son that the Father is so called by us; for since the Word bore our body and came to be in us, therefore by reason of the Word in us, is God called our Father. For the Spirit of the Word in us names through us His own Father as ours, which is Paul's meaning when he says, 'God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father'" (Galatians 4:6).

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

The Importance of Christ Being Born of Mary

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

Athanasius of Alexandria noted³⁰ how there are two accounts of Christ in the Scriptures. He was always God, but for us He became man taking flesh from the Virgin Mary. As God, the Father said to Him, "Let there be light"; as man, in the fullness of the ages, the Father sent Him to save mankind.

"Now the scope and character of Holy Scripture is this — it contains a double account of the Savior. He was always God, and is the Son, being the Father's Word and Radiance and Wisdom; afterwards for us He took flesh of the Virgin Mary, Bearer of God, and was made man. This scope is to be found throughout inspired Scripture, as the Lord Himself has said, 'You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me' (John 5:39). Anyone beginning with these passages and going through the whole of the Scripture upon the interpretation which they suggest, will perceive how in the beginning the Father said to Him, 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3), and 'Let there be a firmament' (Genesis 1:6) and 'Let us make man in Our image' (Genesis 1:26). But in fullness of the ages, He sent Him into the world, not that He might judge the world, but that the world by Him might be saved. Note

²⁹ That is, the Nicene Creed.

³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxvi, 29.

how it is written ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

Leo the Great described³¹ the Nativity of Christ as a truly spectacular event. The humility of manhood and the loftiness of the Godhead meet in His flesh. The Infinite was content to be contained. Each nature (deity and humanity) does what is proper to it with the co-operation of the other. He does not cease to be on equality with His Father’s glory; yet His flesh does not abandon our nature. His infancy is shown in the humbleness of His cradle; the greatness of the Most High is proclaimed by the angels’ voices.

“The Son of God enters these lower parts of the world, descending from His heavenly home and yet not leaving His Father’s glory, begotten in a new order by a new nativity. In a new order, because being invisible in His own nature, He became visible in ours, and He whom nothing could contain was content to be contained; abiding before all time He began to be in time. The Lord of all things, He obscured His immeasurable majesty and took on Him the form of a servant; being God that cannot suffer, He did not disdain to be man that can, and, immortal as He is, to subject Himself to the laws of death. The Lord assumed His mother’s nature without her faultiness; the wonderfulness of His birth of the Virgin’s womb does not make His nature unlike ours. He who is true God is also true man, and in this union there is no lie, since the humility of manhood and the loftiness of the Godhead both meet there. Each form does what is proper to it with the co-operation of the other; that is, the Word performing what appertains to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what appertains to the flesh. One of them sparkles with miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. As the Word does not cease to be on equality with His Father’s glory, so the flesh does not abandon the nature of our race. It must again and again be repeated that one and the same is truly Son of God and truly son of man. God in that ‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1); man in that ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt in us’ (John 1:14). God in that ‘All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made’ (John 1:3); man in that ‘He was made of a woman, made under Law’ (Galatians 4:4). The nativity of the flesh was the manifestation of human nature; the childbearing of a virgin is the proof of Divine power. The infancy of a babe is shown in the humbleness of its cradle (Luke 2:7); the greatness of the Most High is proclaimed by the angels’ voices (Luke 2:13). He whom Herod treacherously endeavors to destroy (Matthew 2:16) is like ourselves in our earliest stage; but He whom the Magi delight to worship on their knees (Matthew 2:11) is the Lord of all.”

Leo the Great pointed out³² that the Arians could not comprehend the union of God and man. Christ’s words, “The Father is greater than I” and “I and My Father are one” made no sense to them, where one refers to Deity, the other to humanity. To say that both natures retain their own proper character without loss was completely beyond them. Christ’s “emptying of Himself” whereby the Invisible made Himself visible, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power.

³¹ Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Letter to Flavian, XXVIII, 4. This letter is commonly called “The Tome of Leo”.

³² Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermon on the Feast of the Nativity, XXIII, 2.

“This union, dearly beloved, 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 which are to be referred to the ‘form of a slave’. In order to show that it belongs to no other person in Himself, the same Son of God with the same form, says, ‘My 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). In ‘the form of a slave’ (Philippians 2:6-7), 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 abides the Word of God, where ‘All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was 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; and 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. 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. 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. 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 man-deceived committed, had no trace in Christ; because He partook of man’s weaknesses, He did not therefore share our faults. He took the form of a slave without the stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the divine. That ‘emptying of Himself’ (Philippians 2:7), whereby the Invisible made Himself visible, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power.”

John Cassian stated³³ that a son is defined with respect to a father; so it is with Christ. Mary was the first (and only) person to give birth to someone Who pre-existed. She gave birth to the One Who was the Creator and the author of her being. It was as simple for God to bring about birth for Himself as it was for Him to create man in the beginning.

“Learn first of all from Paul the teacher of the whole world, that He who is without beginning, God, the Son of God, became the Son of man at the end of the world, i.e., in the fullness of the times. For he says, ‘But when the fullness of the times was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law’ (Galatians 4:4). Tell me then, before the Lord Jesus Christ was born of His mother Mary, had God a Son or had He not? You cannot deny that He had, for never yet was there either a son without a father, or a father without a son. A son is so called with reference to a father, so is a father so named with reference to a son.”

³³ John Cassian, Seven Books on the Incarnation of the Lord, IV, 1-2.

“When Paul says that God sent His Son, it was His own Son to use the actual words of Paul, ‘His own Son’ that God sent. It was not someone else’s Son that He sent, nor could He send Him at all if He who was sent had no existence. He sent then, ‘His own Son, made of a woman’ (Galatians 4:4). No one ever yet gave birth to one who had already existed before. Had not the Lord a pre-existence before Mary? Was not the Son of God existent before the daughter of man? In a word did not God Himself exist before man. You see then that I do not merely say that Mary gave birth to one who had existed before her, but one who was the author of her being, and that in giving birth to her Creator, she became the mother of Him who gave her being. It was as simple for God to bring about birth for Himself as for man and as easy for Him to arrange that He Himself should be born of mankind, as that a man should be born.”

Irenaeus of Lyons noted³⁴ how important it was that Christ assumed His humanity from the Virgin Mary. If He didn’t, He would not be a man like us. If Christ were not a man, He would not need to eat and fast like a man, nor would He get weary like a man. He would not have wept, felt sorrow or sweated drops of blood; when He was pierced at His Crucifixion, only a man would produce blood and water.

“Those who allege that Christ took nothing from the Virgin greatly err. In denying Christ’s humanity, they also reject the analogy between Him and Adam. If Adam, who sprang from the earth, had formation and substance from both the hand and workmanship of God, but Christ didn’t, then Christ who was made after the image and likeness of Adam didn’t preserve the connection to man. He was an inconsistent piece of work, having nothing whereby He may show His wisdom. But this also says that He appeared and was commonly accepted as man when He was not man, and that He was made man while taking nothing from man. If He did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being, He neither was made man nor the Son of man. If He was not made what we were, He did no great thing in what He suffered and endured. Everyone allows that we are composed of a body taken from the earth, and a soul receiving spirit from God. This, therefore, the Word of God was made, forming in Himself His own handiwork; on this account He confesses Himself the Son of man, and blesses ‘the meek, because they shall inherit the earth’ (Matthew 5:5). The Apostle Paul, moreover, declares plainly, ‘God sent His Son, made of a woman’ (Galatians 4:4). And again he says, ‘Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,⁴ and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead’” (Romans 1:3-4).

“Superfluous, too, in that case was His descent into the Virgin Mary; for why did He come down into her if He were to take nothing of her? Still further, if He had taken nothing of Mary, He would never have availed Himself of those kinds of food which are derived from the earth, by which that body which has been taken from the earth is nourished. Nor would He have hungered, fasting those forty days, like Moses and Elijah, unless His body was craving its own proper nourishment. Nor would John His disciple have said, when writing of Him, ‘Jesus therefore, being wearied from *His* journey, sat thus by the well’ (John 4:6). Nor would David

³⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III, xxii, 1-2.

have proclaimed of Him beforehand, ‘They persecuted him whom you have smitten; and they have added to the grief of my wounds’ (Psalm 69:27 LXX). Nor would He have wept over Lazarus (John 11:35), nor have sweated great drops of blood (Luke 22:44); nor have declared, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me’ (Matthew 26:38). Nor, when His side was pierced, would there have come forth blood and water. All these are tokens of the flesh which had been derived from the earth, which He had formed in Himself, bearing salvation to His own handiwork.”

John Chrysostom pointed out³⁵ that Jesus had to have been born of Mary and that there are many problems with the heretics’ claims that He was not. Yet we aren’t told exactly how the Infinite came to dwell in a womb and other details. Even Gabriel and Matthew were unable to say anything more than that it was of the Spirit.

“Shame on those, who busy themselves about the generation on high! If this birth, which has witnesses without number, and had been proclaimed so long a time before, and was revealed and handled with hands, can be explained by no man; how mad are they who make themselves busy and curious about that unutterable generation? Neither Gabriel nor Matthew was able to say anything more, but only that it was of the Spirit. But how, of the Spirit, or in what manner, neither of them has explained; for neither was it possible. Don’t think that you have learned everything, by hearing ‘of the Spirit’; for we are ignorant of many things, even when we have learned this. For example, how the Infinite is in a womb, how He that contains all things is carried, as unborn, by a woman; how the Virgin bears, and continues a virgin. How did the Spirit frame that Temple? How did He take not all the flesh from the womb, but a part of it, and increased it and fashioned it? For that He did come forth of the Virgin’s flesh, He has declared by speaking of ‘that which was conceived in her’ (Matthew 1:20). Paul, by saying, ‘made of a woman’ (Galatians 4:4), he stops the mouths of those that say, ‘Christ came among us as through some³⁶ conduit’. If this were so, why did He need the womb? If this were so, He has nothing in common with us, but that flesh is of some other kind, and not of the mass which belongs to us. How then was He of the root of Jesse? (Romans 15:12, Isaiah 11:10) How was He a rod? (Isaiah 11:1) How was He Son of man? (Matthew 12:8, et al) How was Mary His mother? (Matthew 1:18) How was He of David’s seed? (Romans 1:3) How did he ‘take the form of a slave?’ (Philippians 2:7) How ‘was the Word made flesh?’ (John 1:14), and how could Paul say, ‘From whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all?’ (Romans 9:5) Therefore that He was of us, and of our substance, and of the Virgin’s womb, is clear from these things, and from others beside; but how this happened is not clear. Do not then inquire, but receive what is revealed; and don’t be curious about what is kept secret.”

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, IV, 6.

³⁶ For example Valentinian, Basilides, Bardesanes and Harmonius said that Christ was born of Mary, but that He passed through her as water through a channel. They said that He only appeared to be a man, having a phantom like body similar to the one He used when He appeared to Abraham.

John Chrysostom noted³⁷ that things born of the Spirit are spirit. In the case of Christ, it was both the Spirit with the flesh. Nicodemus initially had trouble understanding this, but later came to understand. The Spirit always appears doing the work of God.

“When Nicodemus heard the things about Christ, he was troubled; notice how Christ partly opens to him the secret of this mystery, and makes that clear which was for a while obscure to him. ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (John 3:6). He leads him away from all the things of sense. and doesn’t allow him to vainly pry into the mysteries revealed with his fleshly eyes. ‘We speak not of flesh, but of Spirit, O Nicodemus’, (by this word He directs him heavenward for a while). ‘Seek then nothing relating to things of sense; never can the Spirit appear to those eyes, don’t think that the Spirit brings forth the flesh’. ‘How then’, perhaps one may ask, ‘was the Flesh of the Lord brought forth?’ Not of the Spirit only, but of flesh; as Paul declares, when he says, ‘Made of a woman, made under the Law’ (Galatians 4:4). The Spirit did not fashioned Him out of nothing, (for what need was there then of a womb?) but from the flesh of a Virgin. How, I cannot explain unto you; yet it was done, that no one might suppose that what was born is alien to our nature. For if even when this has taken place there are some who disbelieve in such a birth, into what impiety would they not have fallen had He not partaken of the Virgin’s flesh.”

“‘That which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (John 3:6). Notice the dignity of the Spirit! It appears performing the work of God; for above he said of some, that, ‘they were born of God’ (John 1:13); here He said, that the Spirit begets them.”

Serving Those That Are Not Gods

Paul said, “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? (Galatians 4:8-9)

Irenaeus of Lyons stated³⁸ that idols are called “gods” by those that don’t know God; the Antichrist will exalt himself above these idols. Paul stated that these idols are nothing. Similarly Moses was warned not to make idols out of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars, since they are just inanimate objects.

The Apostle Paul said, ‘For though you have served those which by nature are not gods; now you have known God, or rather are known by God’ (Galatians 4:8-9), has made a separation between those that were not gods and Him who is God. Speaking of Antichrist, Paul says, ‘who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He points out here those that are called gods, by such as know not God, that is, idols. The Father of all is called God, and is so; and Antichrist shall be lifted up, not above Him, but above those which are indeed called gods, but are not. Paul himself says that this is true: ‘We know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXVI, 1.

³⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III, vi, 5.

(as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him' (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). He has made a distinction, and separated those which are indeed called gods, but which are none, from the one God the Father, from whom are all things, and, he has confessed in the most decided manner in his own person, one Lord Jesus Christ. But in this clause, 'whether in heaven or in earth', he does not speak of the formers of the world, as these teachers expound it; but his meaning is similar to that of Moses. It was said to Moses, 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image -- any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth' (Deuteronomy 5:8). He explained what are meant by the things in heaven: 'Lest having looked up to the sky, and having seen the sun and the moon and the stars, and all the heavenly bodies, you should go astray and worship them, and serve them' (Deuteronomy 4:19 LXX). Moses himself, being a man of God, was indeed given as a god before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1); but he is not properly termed Lord, nor is called God by the prophets, but is spoken of by the Spirit as 'Moses, the faithful minister and servant of God' (Hebrews 3:5, Numbers 12:7), which also he was.

Irenaeus of Lyons also stated³⁹ that the heretics of his day were worse than the heathen. The heathen may serve the creature and worship beings that are not God; but at least they still ascribe first place to God as Maker of the Universe. The heretics claim that they are god themselves, to their own condemnation.

"Simon Magus was the first who said that he himself was God over all, and that the world was formed by his angels. Those who succeeded him, by their several opinions, still further depraved his teaching through their impious and irreligious doctrines against the Creator. These heretics being the disciples of Simon, render such as assent to them worse than the heathen. The heathen 'worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator' (Romans 1:25), and 'those which are not gods' (Galatians 4:8); however, they still ascribe the first place in Deity to that God who was the Maker of this universe. But the heretics maintain that the Creator of this world is the fruit of a defect, and describe Him as being of an animal nature. They claim that He does not know that Power which is above Him, while He exclaims, 'I am God, and there is none other beside Me' (Isaiah 46:9 LXX). Claiming that He lies, they are themselves liars, attributing all sorts of wickedness to Him. Conceiving of one who is not above this Being as really having an existence, they are thus convicted by their own views of blasphemy against that God who really exists, while they conjure into existence a God who has no existence, to their own condemnation."

Gregory of Nyssa summarized⁴⁰ Christ's entire mission in becoming man by starting with man's state as having revolted from God to serve those that were not gods. We were attached to an evil father falsely so called; to solve this dilemma, Christ became the Prince of Life, the first-fruits and the first born. Having accomplished His mission, He now calls us His brethren.

³⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, II, ix, 2.

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 8.

“Christ became ‘the first-born among many brethren’ (Romans 8:29), and again by having made Himself the first-fruits of the resurrection, He obtained the name of the ‘first-born from the dead’ (Colossians 1:18). Having in all things the pre-eminence, after that ‘old things’, as the apostle says, ‘have passed away’ (2 Corinthians 5:17), He became the first-born of the new creation of men in Christ by the two-fold regeneration. That is, by Holy Baptism and that which is the consequence of the resurrection from the dead, He became for us in both alike the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15), the first-fruits and the first-born. This first-born, then, has brethren, concerning whom He speaks to Mary, saying, ‘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). In these words He sums up the whole aim of His dispensation as Man. Men revolted from God, and ‘served those which by nature are not gods’ (Galatians 4:8), and though being the children of God became attached to an evil father falsely so called. For this cause the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5) having assumed the first-fruits of all human nature, sends to His brethren the announcement of Himself not in His divine character, but in that which He shares with us. He said, ‘I am departing in order to make by My own self that true Father, from whom you were separated, to be your Father, and by My own self to make that true God from whom you had revolted to be your God, for by that first-fruits which I have assumed, I am in Myself presenting all humanity to its God and Father’”.

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁴¹ that the tares of disobedience sowed in us caused our nature to lose the impress of the Father’s image; we honored those who were not gods and humanity was exiled from the Good Father. Therefore the true Shepherd left His other flock and, moved by love, went after the sheep that had gone astray.

“He Who bestowed on all things that are, the power of being, is the God and overseer of what He has Himself produced. But since, 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. It was grafted by virtue of similarity of will into the evil family of the father of sin. 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). In the place of the Father, he was deemed father who is falsely so called. As the prophet Jeremiah says in his dark saying, ‘The partridge utters her voice, she gathers *eggs*⁴² which she did not lay; *so is a man* gaining his wealth unjustly; in the midst of his days *his riches* shall leave him, and at his latter end he will be a fool’ (Jeremiah 17:11 LXX). The sum of our calamity was that 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 un-sinning and supra-mundane flock, and, moved by love, went after the sheep which had gone astray, even our human nature. Human nature, which

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, XII, 1.

⁴² The bird that this refers to is obscure. It may mean pirating a nest like the cuckoo or decoying away the chicks of another bird. See Merrill Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967.

according to the similitude in the parable, through vice roamed away from the hundred rational beings. Since it was impossible that our life, which had been estranged from God, should of itself return to the high and heavenly place, for this cause, as Paul said, ‘He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Galatians 3:13); having taken up and, in Paul’s language, ‘slain’ in Himself ‘the enmity’ (Ephesians 2:16) which by means of sin had come between us and God, — in fact sin was ‘the enmity’. Having become what we were, He, through Himself, again united humanity to God. For having by purity brought into closest relationship with the Father of our nature that new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (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.”