

## THE POOR HEAR THE GOSPEL

THE POOR HEAR THE GOSPEL .....	1812
Gospel: Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 1:18-25.....	1812
The Shepherds Hear the Gospel.....	1814
Abraham Saw Christ Also.....	1816
God in Terms of Light.....	1817
A Perspective on What Has Just Happened at the Nativity of Christ.....	1818
The Two Natures of Christ.....	1821
Some Men Are Like the Angels.....	1824
Christ Was Preparing His Kingdom.....	1824
The Essence of God.....	1825
Mary's Humility.....	1826
Parables From the Psalms About the Poor.....	1827

### Christmas Eve

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

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

Herod the Great began his reign in Judea in 37 BC. The historian Sulpitius Severus stated<sup>1</sup> that Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup> in the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of the reign of Herod the Great, during the consulship of Sabinus and Rufinus.

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

Just as they arrived at sunset, Mary, who was riding a donkey, asked to be helped down since her labor was starting. Joseph helped her down and led her to a nearby shepherd's cave for shelter. Joseph then left Mary with some of the extended family while he went to find a midwife. Returning to the cave with Zelomi and Salome (Mary's first cousin), the three noticed a luminous cloud over the cave and found out that Mary had already given birth. In their post-natal care of Mary, the midwives were amazed that Mary's hymen was undisturbed - indicating a true virgin birth. Joseph may have explained to them how the child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Wrapping the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes, Mary nursed Him and laid Him in a manger (Luke 2:7). According to tradition<sup>2</sup>, the manger Jesus was laid in was located between the stalls for an

---

<sup>1</sup> Sulpitius Severus, Sacred History, II, 27.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints\\_view?contentid=352](http://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints_view?contentid=352).

ox and a donkey. This fulfilled the words of Isaiah, “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; *but* Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (Isaiah 1:3). Also the words of Habakkuk, “You shall be known between the two living creatures” (Habakkuk 3:2)

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

Copyright © Mark Kern 2015

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

### **The Shepherds Hear the Gospel**

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

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

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

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

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

For a shepherd caring for someone else’s sheep (and goats), the shepherd shared in what the herd produced (1 Corinthians 9:7-10). This was part of his “wages”; the balance of his wages<sup>3</sup> may have been at the whim of his employer (Genesis 31:38-41).

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

---

<sup>3</sup> For a good account of the life of shepherds, see Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 132-144.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>4</sup> The noun form of the same Greek word is euaggelistes and is usually translated evangelist. In other places, the verb form euaggelizo is translated to preach the Gospel.

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

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

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

### **Abraham Saw Christ Also**

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

Irenaeus of Lyons explained<sup>5</sup> how Abraham could rejoice to see Christ's day. First he saw it through the spirit of prophecy, and then he saw it through his descendants. In "Abraham's Bosom" (Luke 16:22-31), Abraham then saw Christ through the fellowship of those saints like Simeon.

"Abraham, knowing the Father through the Word, who made heaven and earth, confessed Him to be God. Having learned, by an announcement made to him (Genesis 17:1-19), that the Son of God would be a man among men, by whose advent his seed should be as the stars of heaven, he desired to see that day, so that he might himself also embrace Christ. Seeing it through the spirit of prophecy<sup>6</sup>, he rejoiced (Genesis 17:17). Simeon also, one of his descendants, fully carried out the rejoicing of the patriarch, and said, 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples; a light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel' (Luke 2:29). The angels, in like manner, announced tidings of great joy to the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night (Luke 2:8). Moreover, Mary said, 'My soul magnifies

---

<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV, vii, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Moses wrote, "Abram fell upon his face, and laughed; and spoke in his heart, saying, 'Shall there be a child to one who is a hundred years old, and shall Sarah who is ninety years old, bear?'" (Genesis 17:17) Irenaeus seems to be interpreting this reaction of Abraham as rejoicing and not as ridiculing. Since God does not rebuke Abraham for this, but He does rebuke Sarah for doing what may seem to be the same thing (Genesis ), Irenaeus' interpretation may be correct.

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

### **God in Terms of Light**

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

Gregory the Great presented<sup>7</sup> God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in terms of Light that is beyond human comprehension. Springing from this Light are angels and man. Light was also the first commandment to the first man, and the whole of the written Law. Light also glorified Moses' face, appeared to Moses at the burning bush, appeared as a pillar of fire to Israel, carried Elijah to heaven, shown around the shepherds in Bethlehem, illumined the way of the Magi, appeared at the Transfiguration and converted the Apostle Paul. We will shine with this Light at the Resurrection, and we get a foretaste of this Light in Holy Baptism. To sin is human, and we are given help for this in Baptism, in order that we might not despair.

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

“Light was also the firstborn commandment given to the firstborn man<sup>8</sup>; although the envious darkness crept in and wrought wickedness. A Light typical and proportionate to those who were its subjects was the written Law, foreshadowing the truth and the sacrament of the great Light, for Moses' face was made glorious by it (Exodus 34:30). And, to mention more Lights — it was Light

---

<sup>7</sup> Gregory the Great, The Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the commandment of the Law is a lamp and a light (Proverbs 6:23 ); and again, because Your judgments are a light upon the earth (Psalm 119:105 ).

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

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

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

It is important to comprehend what was going on at the Nativity of Christ. This was not just a cute baby being born. This was the Son of God who created the universe taking on human flesh. This is a pre-eminent wonder that was addressed repeatedly in ancient prophecy. Mary nourished with her milk Him who imparts sustenance to everything that has breath. She wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes who binds the whole creation with His word. She laid Him in a manger who rides seated upon the cherubim. A light from heaven shone round about Him who lights up the whole creation. The hosts of heaven attended Him who is glorified in heaven from before all

ages. A star with its beam guided them who had come from the distant parts of earth toward Him who is the true Orient.

Gregory the Wonder-Worker<sup>9</sup> gave a perspective<sup>10</sup> on what was really happening when Christ was born in the stable-cave. This is He who is covered with light and who made every creature. He who slept with dumb beasts came to provide men the opportunity to avoid living like beasts. In a feed-trough for animals was laid the heavenly Bread. The angels sang of glory in heaven and peace on earth.

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

Gregory the Wonder-worker continued to say<sup>11</sup> that Christ called Israel by grace, which is the whole mystery of the economy. The Virgin Mary played a key part in this. She nourished with her milk Him who imparts sustenance to everything that has breath. She wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes who binds the whole creation with His word. She laid Him in a manger who rides seated upon the cherubim. A light from heaven shone round about Him who lights up the whole creation. The hosts of heaven attended Him who is glorified in heaven from before all ages. A star with its beam guided them who had come from the distant parts of earth toward Him who

---

<sup>9</sup> “Thaumaturgus” means “wonder-worker”

<sup>10</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgus, “On the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary”, in Four Homilies, I.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgus, “On the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary”, in Four Homilies, II.



is the true Orient. The holy mother of God kept these words, and pondered them in her heart, like one who was the receptacle of all the mysteries.

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

Methodius of Olympus spoke<sup>12</sup> of how the birth of Christ was a pre-eminent wonder and that the Virgin Mary was addressed repeatedly in ancient prophecy because of this. Proof of this is the song of the angels to the shepherds, which is totally unique in human history. Mary was like the Ark of the Covenant, which was veiled off to all but the priests to conceal the sacred mystery connected to her. If such honor was paid to the Ark by God, where the Ark was an image of her sanctity, what honor is now due to her as a queen by us? She is the living Ark of God and the heaven that contained the uncontainable. The benefits we have in the Church were obtained through the cooperation of Mary with her Son.

---

<sup>12</sup> Methodius of Olympus, Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna on the Day That They Met in the Temple, V.

“Tremendous is the mystery connected with you, O virgin mother, you spiritual throne, glorified and made worthy of God. You have brought forth, before the eyes of those in heaven and earth, a pre-eminent wonder. It is a proof of this, and an irrefutable argument, that at the novelty of your supernatural child-bearing, the angels sang on earth, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men’ (Luke 2:14), by their threefold song bringing in a threefold holiness<sup>13</sup>. Blessed are you among the generations of women (Luke 1:28, 42), O you of God most blessed, for by you the earth has been filled with that divine glory of God. ‘Blessed *be* the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! And blessed *be* His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory. Amen and Amen’ (Psalm 72:18-19). Isaiah said, ‘The posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke’ (Isaiah 6:4), by which is signified the veil of the temple drawn before the Ark of the Covenant, which typified you. This was done that the truth might be laid open to me, and also that I might be taught, by the types and figures which went before, to approach with reverence and trembling to do honor to the sacred mystery which is connected with you. By means of this prior shadow-painting of the Law, I might be restrained from boldly and irreverently contemplating with fixed gaze Him who, in His incomprehensibility, is seated far above all (1 Timothy 6:15-16). For if to the ark, which was the image and type of your sanctity, such honor was paid of God that to no one but to the priestly order only was the access to it open, or ingress allowed to behold it, the veil separating it off, and keeping the vestibule as that of a queen, what sort of veneration is due to you from us who are of creation the least, to you who are indeed a queen. You are the living ark of God, the Lawgiver; you are the heaven that contains Him who can be contained by none! Since you, O holy virgin, have dawned as a bright day upon the world and have brought forth the Sun of Righteousness that hateful horror of darkness has been chased away. The power of the tyrant has been broken, death has been destroyed, hell swallowed up, and all enmity dissolved before the face of peace. Noxious diseases depart now that salvation looks forth; and the whole universe has been filled with the pure and clear light of truth. Solomon alludes to this: ‘My beloved is mine, and I am His; He feeds His flock among the lilies until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away’ (Song of Solomon 2:16-17). Since then, the God of gods has appeared in Zion, and the splendor of His beauty has appeared in Jerusalem. ‘Light is sprung up for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart’” (Psalm 97:11 LXX).

### **The Two Natures of Christ**

It is important to realize that Christ is one person, yet He has two natures: He is God from eternity past, but He is also a man born of the Virgin Mary. In His 1<sup>st</sup> nature, He has no beginning; in His 2<sup>nd</sup> nature, He has a birthday. His two natures don’t get mixed up. He died with His human nature, but rose from the dead with His Divine nature. Therefore the angels sang “Glory to God

---

<sup>13</sup> That is, as in “Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3) Methodius links the song of the Seraphim (Isaiah 6) to the song of the angels (Luke 2).

in the highest” for His birth and “Peace on earth to men of good will for His work on earth in building up the heavenly Jerusalem.

Leo the Great wrote<sup>14</sup> about Christ’s twofold nativity: begotten from the Father in eternity past, and born of the Virgin Mary during the reign of Herod the Great. There are great contrasts between Christ’s two natures, and the Scriptures address one or the other at various places. It is important to understand which is which. The “Tome of Leo” (of which this quote is a part) was written for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Ephesus<sup>15</sup> in 449 AD, but the heretical followers of Eutyches did not allow it to be read at the Council. Finally it was read and acclaimed by everyone at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

“The Son of God entered these lower parts of the world, descending from His heavenly home and yet didn’t leave His Father’s glory; He was begotten in a new order by a new nativity. In a new order, because being invisible in His own nature, He became visible in ours, and He whom nothing could contain was content to be contained. He who existed before all time, began to be in time; the Lord of all things, He obscured His immeasurable majesty and took on Him the form of a servant. Being God that cannot suffer, He willingly became a man that can; immortal as He is, He subjected Himself to the laws of death. The Lord assumed His mother’s nature without any fault of hers. In the Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin’s womb, the wonderfulness of His birth makes His nature like ours. For He who is true God is also true man; in this union there is no pretending, since the humility of manhood and the loftiness of the Godhead both meet there. God is not changed by the showing of pity; so man is not swallowed up by the dignity. Each form does what is proper to it with the co-operation of the other; that is, the Word performing what appertains to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what appertains to the flesh. One of them sparkles with miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. The Word does not cease to be equal to His Father’s glory; so the flesh does not forego the nature of our race. It must again and again be repeated that one and the same is truly Son of God and truly son of man. God in that ‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1); man in that ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14). God in that ‘all things were made through Him, and without Him was nothing made that was made’ (John 1:3); man in that ‘He was born of a woman, born under the Law’ (Galatians 4:4). The nativity of the flesh was the manifestation of human nature; the childbearing of a virgin is the proof of Divine power. The infancy of a babe is shown in the humbleness of its cradle (Luke 2:7); the greatness of the Most High is proclaimed by the angels’ voices (Luke 2:13-14). He whom Herod treacherously endeavors to destroy is like us in our earliest stage; but He whom the Magi delight to worship on their knees is the Lord of all. So too when He came to the baptism of John, His forerunner, lest He should not be known through the veil of flesh which covered His Divinity, the Father’s voice thundering from the sky, said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matthew 3:17). Thus Him whom the devil’s craftiness attacks as man, the ministries of angels serve as God. To be hungry and thirsty, to be weary, and to sleep, is clearly human. To satisfy 5,000

---

<sup>14</sup> Pope Leo the Great, Letters, XXVIII, 4, called “The Tome of Leo”.

<sup>15</sup> Because of this controversy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Ephesus is not considered Ecumenical.

men with five loaves, to bestow on the woman of Samaria living water, drafts of which can secure the drinker from thirsting any more, to walk upon the surface of the sea with feet that do not sink, and to quell the risings of the waves by rebuking the winds, is, without any doubt, Divine. It is not part of the same nature to be moved to tears of pity for Lazarus, His dead friend (John 11:33-35), and when the stone that closed the four-day dead grave was removed, to raise that same friend to life with a voice of command (John 11:43-44). It is not part of the same nature to hang on the cross yet turn day to night and to make all the elements tremble ( ). It is not part of the same nature to be pierced with nails and yet open the gates of Paradise to the robber's faith ( ). So it is not part of the same nature to say, 'I and My Father are one' (John 10:30), and to say, 'My Father is greater than I' (John 14:28). Although in the Lord Jesus Christ God and man is one person; yet the source of the degradation, which is shared by both, is one, and the source of the glory, which is shared by both, is another. His manhood, which is less than the Father, comes from our side; His Godhead, which is equal to the Father, comes from the Father."

Leo the Great stated<sup>16</sup> that Christ's human nature was not swallowed up by His Divinity nor was His Divinity diminished by His humanity. He died with His human nature and rose with His Divine Nature. His birth from the Virgin Mary did not corrupt her purity, but His birth became the Power of God and the Wisdom of God. Therefore the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest" for His birth and "Peace on earth to men of good will for His work on earth in building up the heavenly Jerusalem.

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

"Rightly therefore did the birth of our Salvation impart no corruption to the Virgin's purity, because the bearing of the Truth was the keeping of honor! Such then beloved was the nativity which became the Power of God and the Wisdom of God even Christ, whereby He might be one with us in manhood and surpass us in Godhead. Unless He were true God, He would not bring us a remedy; unless He were true Man, He would not give us an example. Therefore the exulting angel's song when the Lord was born is this, 'Glory to God in the Highest', and their

---

<sup>16</sup> Pope Leo the Great, Sermons, XXI, 2.

message is, ‘peace on earth to men of good will’ ( ). For they see that the heavenly Jerusalem is being built up out of all the nations of the world. Over that indescribable work of the Divine love, how ought the humbleness of men rejoice, when the joy of the lofty angels is so great?”

### **Some Men Are Like the Angels**

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

John Chrysostom stated<sup>17</sup> that the angels that sang at the Birth of Christ are like those saints among men who think nothing of this present life, but only about the eternal welfare of others. God Himself leads them in their prayers.

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

### **Christ Was Preparing His Kingdom**

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

John Chrysostom commented<sup>18</sup> on Christ’s words, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34 ). The Apostles, prophets and angels all announced peace; why would Christ do the opposite? He was preparing His body,

---

<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 3.

<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXV, 1.

the Church, to contend against His enemies and to show clearly the difference between His enemies and the truth.

“Why then did Christ command the Apostles to pronounce peace on entering each house (Matthew 10:12-15)? Again, why did the angels say, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace’ (Luke 2:14)? And why did all the prophets publish peace<sup>19</sup> for good tidings? Because this more than anything is peace, when the diseased is cut off, when the mutinous is removed. Thus it is possible for Heaven to be united to earth. The physician in this way preserves the rest of the body, when he amputates the incurable part; similarly the general, when he has brought to a separation those who agreed in rebellion. Thus it came to pass in the case of that famous tower (of Babel); for their evil peace at the Tower of Babel was ended by their good discord, and peace was made thereby (Genesis 11:7-8). Paul also divided those that were conspiring against him (Acts 23:6-7). In Naboth’s case that agreement by Jezebel was worse than any war (1 Kings 21). Concord is not in every case a good thing, since even robbers agree together.”

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

### **The Essence of God**

The Essence of God – that is His Divinity – has never been seen by men and perhaps not even by angels. His Essence does not have a human body that sits stands or walks. At Christmas we celebrate the occasion, called the fullness of time ( ), when the Essence of the Son of God took on human nature from the Virgin Mary

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>20</sup> that the Essence of God has never been seen by men or by angels. His Essence does not sit, stand or walk; these things belong all to bodies. Since He was about to appear in flesh, He prepared His people beforehand as far as it was possible. Throughout Scripture, the heavenly powers never speak about His Essence; they only worship Him. Only the Son and the Holy Spirit can behold the Essence.

“John said, ‘No one has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18). This declares that all previous visions were instances of His condescension, not the vision of the

---

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

<sup>20</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 1

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

### **Mary's Humility**

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

Ambrose of Milan pointed out<sup>21</sup> the Virgin Mary's humility after her conception of Christ and her great kindness toward her cousin Elizabeth. Later as miracles became commonplace, Mary was not moved by them but kept all these things in her heart.

"Holy Scripture points out how modest Mary was towards her neighbors. She became more humble when she knew herself to be chosen of God, and went hurriedly to her kinswoman Elizabeth in the hill country, not in order to gain belief by anything external, for she had believed the word of God. 'Blessed', Elizabeth said, 'are you who didst believe' ( ). Mary stayed with Elizabeth three months. Now in such an interval of time it is not that faith was being sought for, but kindness

---

<sup>21</sup> Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Virgins, II, ii, 12-13.

was being shown. This was after the child, John the Baptist, leaped in his mother's womb, greeting the mother of the Lord, and attaining to reason before birth."

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

### **Parables From the Psalms About the Poor**

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

Psalm 5: Prayers of the Hours  
Psalm 67: The Blessings of God  
Psalm 51: Repentance  
Psalm 86: The Poor and Downtrodden  
Psalm 72 The Poor in Spirit

See Appendix IV for a discussion of these Psalms.