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Incarnation of the Logos

Homilies of the Church Fathers on the Feast
of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ



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His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

117th Pope, Patriarch and Archbishop of Alexandria and the
See of St Mark the Apostle.



His Grace Bishop Daniel

Bishop of the Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions.

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“On the Incarnation”

By Saint Athanasius

For the solitary of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Logos' indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when a great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses. Because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honoured and enemies and robbers cease to bother it. Even so is it with the King of us all. He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many. In consequence, the enemy's plans against mankind have been foiled and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have completely perished if the Lord and Saviour of us all, the Son of God, had not come among us to put an end to death.

This great work was, indeed, supremely worthy of the goodness of God. When a king establishes a city, and it is attacked by robbers due to the carelessness of its inhabitants, he does not neglect it. But he avenges it and saves it from destruction – for he cares more about his honour than the neglect of the people. Then, the Logos of the All-good Father was even more concerned of the human race that He established that by offering His own body, He abolished the death that resulted and corrected their neglect by His own teaching. Thus, by His own power He restored the whole nature of man.

The Saviour's own inspired disciples assure us of this. We read in one place, *“For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge that, if One died on behalf of all, then all died, and He died for all that we should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died and rose again from the dead, even our Lord Jesus Christ”* [2 Cor. 5:14]. And again another says, *“But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone”* [Heb. 2:9].

“Emmanuel”

By Saint Cyril of Alexandria.

Unless the Son was God by Nature, He would not have been called, *“God With Us,”* which took place when He was born through a woman, assuming likeness with us. Not at all of an angel or of any other generate being is the word, *Emmanuel*, the invention, but the Father thus names the Son. And the holy prophet will be our witness, sayng of the Divine Offspring, *“And they shall call His name that new Name which the Lord shall give Him”* [Is. 62:2, LXX]. For a new name verily to the Son is Emmanuel, that is, *“God with us.”* For before His Presence in the world with flesh, He was and was called merely God; after the Birth from the Virgin, no longer merely God, but, *with us*, ie. God made man. Since therefore the Father calls His own Son God, let them blush who impiously and unlearnedly say that He was made. For what is by Nature God, is not a creature.

“He Took What Is Ours And Gave Us What Is His”

By Saint Cyril of Alexandria.

He took what was ours to be His very own so that we might have all that was His. *“He was rich but He became poor for our sake, so that we might be enriched by His poverty.”* [2Cor.8:9]. When they say that the Logos of God did not become flesh, or rather did not undergo birth from a woman according to the flesh, they bankrupt the economy of salvation. For if He who was rich did not impoverish Himself, abasing Himself to our condition out of tender love, then we have not gained His riches but are still in our poverty, still enslaved by sin and death, because the Logos becoming flesh is the undoing and the abolition of all that fell upon human nature as our curse and punishment.

If the Logos has not become flesh then neither has the dominion of death been overthrown, and in no way has sin been abolished, and we are still held captive in the transgressions of the first man, Adam, deprived of any return to a better condition; a return which I would say has been gained by Christ the Saviour of us all, for God was in humanity. He who was above all creation was in our human condition. The invisible One was made visible in the flesh. He who is from the heavens and from on high was in the likeness of earthy things. The immaterial One could be touched. He who is free in His own nature came in the form of a slave. He who blesses all creation became accursed. He who is all righteousness was numbered among the transgressors. Life itself came in the appearance of death. All this followed because the body which tasted death belonged to no other but to Him who is the Son by nature.

“He Suffered In The Flesh”

By Saint Cyril of Alexandria

It was then the aim of the Incarnate Word to show clearly that He really put about Him flesh and has been made man, not casting away the being God the Word: for it was not possible that the human race should in other way be saved. Yet lest any hearing that He has been made flesh should suppose that the Unchangeable Word of God has been transformed and become ought else than He was from the beginning, needs does He at one time utter words befitting man, at another displays deeds belonging to Godhead alone, in order that both together (τό συναμφότερον) may be conceived of Sin, as sinless and unknowing to have it He rightly rejects, but suffers His body and His human nature to suffer what belong to the nature itself, as a proof that He really and truly bears flesh and was made man, according to the Scriptures. But since (as we said above) it behoved Him to be shown forth as God even in flesh, He works sometimes what belong to God and says to them who see Him, *If you believe not Me*, i.e. by reason of looking on a man, *yet believe My works, that you may know and believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me*. Hence the things said and wrought in God-befitting wise shows that the Saviour is God: and again the things said and

done humanly shows that He is of a truth man. For this is the force of the mystery.

Paul somewhere says of the Son of God, "*Who being in the form of God did not consider it to be equal with God a thing to seize but emptied Himself, taking servant's form and found in fashion as a man.*" Therefore, the Word of God has been made man; He came not into a man like as He was in the prophets, but has been made in truth this which we too are, without only sin. He is therefore God in that He is Word of the Father, and the own of His Essence; man, in that He has been made flesh as it is written, and put about Him our flesh. The faith respecting our Lord Jesus Christ having this definition, let the words [spoken] of Him be discerned according to the ratio befitting them; and if you hear, *I and the Father are One*, view the One Godhead of the Son and of the Father and conceive of the Son as God out of the Essence of the Father. If again you hear of Him that He wept, was grieved, was in fear, and began to be in sore distress, conceive of Him again as being man along with being also God and attribute to the human nature what is due thereto. For since He took a body, mortal, subject to decay and liable to such suffering, He needs to make its sufferings with flesh His own. And when [the flesh] endures [these sufferings], Himself is said to be enduring them. For thus do we say that He was both crucified and died, the flesh suffering this, not the Word apart and by Himself, for He is Impassible and Immortal. Hence we shall orthodoxy receive what is said, allotting to the Godhead the God-befitting, attributing to the flesh the things spoken of because of it and as it were forth of it through the natural motions that are in us: of which the mind having the perception, gushes up through the tongue the things voicelessly whispered in the depth out of sight.

"Truly The Son Of God"

By Saint Cyril of Alexandria

What then will they say who contend against the Truth and follow only their own likings, when they see the whole choir of the holy Apostles together worshipping the Son as God and saying with an oath that *Truly He is the Son of God*? For, if according to their unlearning He is one of the creatures how is He *truly Son of God*? For it were impossible that one who has not by nature come forth out of any, and who has not the own (τὸἴδιον) of the essence of him who begat him, be truly son. And how if the disciples made a mistake in saying this, was the Saviour silent, albeit He did not disregard them when they made mistakes? And verily to Peter when on one occasion he answered not aright, He says, "*Get behind Me Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God but of man*" [Mt. 16:23]. But since He was silent, when called "*truly the Son of God*," [Mt. 14:33] in that He rebuked them not as mistaken, it is clear that He accepts them as saying aright. Seeing then that the holy Apostles say that He is Son and *truly* so, and that Christ Himself assents to it, who will endure them who bruit something else?

What did the most wise disciples, esteeming Him as Son not as creature? For when stepping on edge of wave, encumbering beneath His Feet with ineffable might the moist and soon-dissolving nature of the waters, He coursed the wide expanse, and gave the holy disciples an unwonted wonder, and at length of His own will vent with them and sailed in their little skiff, albeit He might most easily, had He willed to do it, have been borne on the waves themselves: they in astonishment and reflecting on that resistless authority, began to worship saying, *Truly You are Son of God*. Will they then, doing this with an oath and saying that He is *truly Son of God*, be reasonably accused of falsehood and be taken and convicted of aberration from the truth? For if He is not Son, sprung of the Essence of Him Who begat Him, but a creature, gilded with the glory of sonship and having the appellation in mere words, why did they worship Him? Why did the initiators and heralds of the Truth call Him Son?

“The Great Mystery Of The Nativity”

By Saint John Chrysostom.

I behold a new and wondrous mystery! My ears resound to the shepherd’s song, piping no soft melody, but loudly chanting a heavenly hymn! The cherubim resound their joyful praise! The seraphim exalt His glory!

All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth and man in heaven. He who is above now, for our salvation, dwells here below; and we, who were lowly, are exalted by divine mercy.

Today Bethlehem resembles heaven, hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices and, in the place of the sun, witnessing the rising of the Sun of Justice!

Ask now how this was accomplished, for where God wills the order of nature is overturned. For He willed He has the power. He descended. He saved. All things move in obedience to God.

Today, He Who is born. And He Who Is becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man – while not relinquishing the Godhead that is His.

And so the kings have come and they have seen the heavenly King that is come upon the earth, not bring with Him angels, nor archangels, nor thrones, nor dominations, nor powers, nor principalities, but treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His incarnation has He ceased being God. And behold the kings have come that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven; women, so that they might adore Him Who was born of a woman so that He might change the pains of child birth to joy;

Virgins, to the Son of the Virgin, **infants** that they might adore Him Who became a little child, so that out of the mouths of infants He might perfect praise; **children**, to the Child Who raised up martyrs through the rage

of Herod; **men** to Him Who became man that He might heal the miseries of His servants; **shepherds** to the Good Shepherd Who has laid down His life for His sheep; **priests**, to Him Who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek; **servants** to Him Who took upon Himself the form of a servant that He might bless our stewardship with the reward of freedom; **fisherman** to the Fisher of humanity; **publicans**, to Him Who from among them named a chosen evangelist; **sinful women** to Him Who exposed His feel to the tears of the repentant woman;

And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they might look upon the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world!

Since, therefore, all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice! I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival! But I take my part, not plucking the harp, nor with music of the pipes nor holding the torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ!

For this is all my hope! This is my life! This is my salvation! This is my pipe, my harp!

And bearing it I come, having from its power received the gift of speech,, I too, with the angels sing: *“Glory to God in the highest,”* and with the shepherds: *“and on earth peace to men of good will.”*

“The Humility In His Nativity”

By Saint Gregory The Wonder Worker.

She wrapped in swaddling-clothes Him who is covered with light as with a garment. She wrapped in swaddling-clothes Him who made every creature. She laid in a manger Him who sits above the cherubim, and is praised by myriads of angels. In the manger set apart for dumb brutes did the Logos 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, in order that He might provide participation in spiritual nourishment 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, for our sakes He became poor,”* and showed extreme humiliation on behalf of the salvation of our nature, in His inherent goodness toward us.

He Who fulfilled the whole administration of unutterable mysteries of the economy 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.

“The Inn And The Virgin”

By Saint Gregory The Wonder Worker.

“And there was no room for them in the inn.” 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. A light from heaven shone round about Him who lightens 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 torch 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.

And the holy Theotokos kept these words, and pondered them in her heart, like one who was the vessel of all the mysteries. Your praise, O most holy Virgin, surpasses all because God took flesh and was born from you. To you every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, offers you honour. Indeed, you are described as the true cherubic throne. You shine as the very brightness of light in the high places of the kingdoms of intelligence.

In you the Father, Who is without beginning, and whose power overshadowed you, is glorified. In you the Son is worshipped, whom you bore according to the flesh. And in you, the Holy Spirit is praised, who effected in your womb the generation of the might King. **Through you, O you who are highly favoured one, the holy and consubstantial Trinity is known throughout the world.** Make us worthy, with yourself, to partake of your perfect grace in Jesus Christ our Lord: with whom, and with the Holy Spirit, be glory to the Father, now and ever, and unto the ages of the ages. Amen

“Creation And Incarnation”

By Saint Augustine

If you desire to continue to be Christians, hold this fast as a firm and settled truth, that God the Father begot God the Son without time, and made Him of a Virgin in time. **The first nativity exceeds times; the second nativity enlightens times. Yet both nativities are marvellous - one without a mother; the other without a father.**

When God begot the Son, He begot Him of Himself, not of a mother; when the Mother gave birth to her Son, she gave birth to Him as a virgin, not by man. He was born of the Father without a beginning; He was born of a mother, as today at an appointed beginning. Born of the Father He made us; born of a mother He remade us. He was born of the Father, so we might be; He was born of a mother, that we might not be lost.

But the Father begot Him equal to Himself, and All Whatsoever the Son is, He has of the Father. But what God the Father is, He has not of the Son. Accordingly we say that the Father is God, of none; the Son, God of God. Wherefore all that the Son does marvellously, all that He says truly, He attributes to Him of whom He is; yet can He other than He of whom He is.

Adam was made a man; he had power to become something other than he was made - for he was made righteous and had power to become unrighteous. But the Only-Begotten Son of God, What He is, this cannot be changed. He cannot be changed into anything else, cannot be diminished. What He was He must be - He must be equal to the Father.

But undoubtedly He who gave all things to the Son by His Birth, gave it to One not needing should; without doubt this very equality too with the Father, the Father gave to the Son. How did the Father give It? Did He beget Him less, and add to Him too complete His form, that He might make Him equal. If he had done this, He would have given it to one in need. But I have told you already what you should most firmly hold fast, that is, by His Birth, not as in need of should. If He gave it to Him by His Birth, and not as in need, then doubtless He both gave Him equality, and in giving Him equality, begat Him equal. And although the One be One person, and the Other Another; yet is not the One one thing, and the Other another; but What the One is, That the Other also. He who is the One, is not the Other; but What the One, That too the Other.