



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✘ **December 13, 2015** ✘

Second Sunday

before the Nativity

The Holy Forefathers

St. Herman of Alaska (1837)

Come, let us all faithfully celebrate
the Fathers before the Law!
Our yearly commemoration
of Abraham and those with him!
Let us rightly honor the tribe of Judah,
and praise the Youths in Babylon
who quenched the flames of the furnace
for they were an image of the Trinity!
With them, let us praise Daniel,
and holding fast to the predictions
of the Prophets!
With Isaiah let us cry aloud:
Behold, a Virgin shall conceive
in her womb and bear a Son,
Emmanuel, Who is God with us!
- Matins of Forefathers

✘ **Tomorrow: Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm**

✘ **Wednesday, December 16, 6:30pm ~ Akathist to St. Herman**

✘ **Nativity Schedule** ✘

✘ **Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 24:**

✘ **10:00am Royal Hours of the Nativity**

✘ **Christmas Eve Supper 3:00pm Church Hall**

✘ **Nativity Eve Vigil – 6:00pm Compline & Matins**

✘ **Christmas Day, Friday, December 25:**

✘ **Nativity Divine Liturgy ~ 10:00am** ✘

➤ **Parish Christmas Party – Friday, Jan. 1 @ Nicholas & Macrina Wells'**



Remembered today: +Fr. Alexander Schmemann (+ Dec. 13, 1983)

Fr. Alexander Schmemann was born on September 13, 1921 in Tallinn, Estonia, into a family of White (Anti-Communist) Russian émigrés. His grandfather had been a senator and a member of the State Council and his father an officer of the Imperial Life-Guards. When he was a child his family moved to France, where he was educated in Russian schools and at a French lycee before becoming a student at the University of Paris (1940–1945), where he wrote a thesis on theocracy and the Eastern Roman Empire. In 1943 he married Juliana Osorguine, before completing his theological studies in 1945 at the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris (where he studied with the noted Russian theologian, Father Sergei Bulgakov, amongst others).

In 1946 Schmemann was ordained to the priesthood of the Orthodox Church. From 1946–51 he taught Church history at St. Sergius Institute. He was invited to join the faculty of Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, then in New York City, where he taught from 1951 onwards. When the seminary moved to its present campus in Crestwood, New York in 1962, Father Alexander assumed the post of dean, which he would hold until his death.

He also served as adjunct professor at Columbia University, New York University, Union Theological Seminary and General Theological Seminary in New York. Much of his focus at St Vladimir's was on liturgical theology, which emphasizes the liturgical tradition of the Church as a major sign and expression of the Christian faith. His best-known works include "For the Life of the World," "Great Lent," and "The Eucharist."

On the Approach of the Nativity

+ Metropolitan Anthony Bloom



Time is hurrying on and we are moving fast towards the date of Christmas, or the Nativity, towards one of the greatest, the most shaking events of human history. When a child is born into a family, with what awe, what expectation, what sense of exhilaration, and at the same time of fear, one expects the coming of this child. A child is coming, a new destiny is entering into the world, someone unknown hitherto; and this person will be the heir of all the past and carry the weight of all the present and shape the future.

This is true of every child that is born; and we are expecting a child to enter into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only begotten Son of God, the Son of Mary the Virgin. He is a Child of the total human family, and all the human family can receive him and see this new destiny that has come. Looking at him we can see two things which seem to be incompatible, and yet which are fused in one Person.

On one hand we can see in Him the vulnerability of God. God in his frailty, God given to us, helpless, God loving us to the extent that he is prepared not to defend himself, not to protect himself, against anything which mankind has gradually made of itself, and which mankind will do to Him. And on the other hand, perhaps more through this frailty of God revealed to us, the frailty of love, we can see its greatness and we can fall down on our knees like the Magi, like the Shepherds, like the Angels of God, and adore the Almighty, adore the Living God, the Holy One of Israel Who for our sakes gives Himself so unreservedly, so sacrificially to us.

A family expecting the birth of a child is full of awe and of expectation; are we? And yet nothing greater has ever happened to mankind, to the whole cosmos, indeed, nothing greater is happening through His presence: God in our midst, God - part of humanity and part of the whole cosmos - through His flesh. God in our midst, frail and saving us as love saves us from hatred, from greed, from all things that divide and kill.

Are we waiting for this coming of the Lord with an open heart, with a tremulous and tender heart? A family expecting a child makes such preparations — are we preparing for the coming of the Lord? And I am not speaking of preparing ourselves in a pious way, in a churchly way, but with all the depth and perceptiveness of human hearts and human lives, ready to receive Him, ready to make Him welcome, ready to protect this frail and given love against all that can bruise and break it and make it suffer.

And there is much in each of us that can bruise the Divine love as it bruises the love, the friendship, the closeness of our friends, of those who love us. We should have a look at our own selves and ask; is there within us a place where the Lord can rest, a home for him? On the first Christmas night all doors were shut to Him, nothing but the cave was offered, nothing was prepared; is He coming in to the world to find each of our hearts as barren, as closed - or as open as the cave where He can rest however poor the cave, but welcoming and warm and open, and longing to receive him? Let us reflect on that, and let us wait for the Child to be born into the world, into human history, into the vastness of the world, but also into the unfathomable depth of each of our souls.

HOW DO WE MEET GOD?

Elder Porphyrios: Testimonies and Experiences, by Klitos Ioannides.

In our question of "How can we, who live in the world, in the bustle, turmoil and schizophrenia of contemporary life, meet God," Elder Porphyrios told us the following story, presented here in brief:

Shortly after he was appointed chaplain to the Church of St. Gerasimos in the Athens Polyclinic, by *Omonia Square*, he had a problem at the time of the Liturgy. Directly across the street from the Church was a store that sold gramophones and records. The shopkeeper played records on the gramophone in order to attract customers. He played them so loudly, however, that Elder Porphyrios could not bear it. He had reached the point where he thought of resigning even though he wanted the post very much.

In this situation, as throughout his whole life, Elder Porphyrios did not put his own wants first, but with much prayer and humility, asked God to show him what he should do.

Therefore, following three days of fasting and prayer he found a notebook that belonged to the son of a Church council member, in the corner of the Church. He was a student at the University. It was a physics notebook, -Lord, we always marvel at your works- which gave Elder Porphyrios the solution to his problem.

Leafing through the pages, he found some notes that referred to acoustic waves. Studying it, he had a thought. If you throw a pebble into a lake, the water is disturbed and circles form. If, on the other hand, you threw a rock into another section of the lake, new bigger circles are created which neutralize the first circles.

This was the answer from God that Elder Porphyrios was waiting for. The next day, he tried to concentrate all his spiritual and mental powers into the prayers and the acts of the Divine Liturgy. Thus, on the basis of the reasoning he had done about the lake, he formed circles in his mind and his heart that canceled out the circles that were formed by the gramophone. It no longer disturbed nor distracted him from the Divine Liturgy.



It is a great art to succeed in having your soul sanctified. A person can become a saint anywhere. He can become a saint in *Omonia Square*, if he wants. At your work, whatever it may be, you can become a saint through meekness, patience, and love. Make a new start every day, with new resolution, with enthusiasm and love, prayer and silence—not with anxiety so that you get a pain in the chest.

St. Porphyrios (+1991)

THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Source: Orthodox Word, Vol. 3, //16-17, 1967.

The Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ has been celebrated with all solemnity and joy since the very earliest period of the Church. Until the fourth century this Feast was kept on January 6th, when the Church also remembered the baptism of our Lord in the river Jordan. It was called the Theophany and was dedicated especially to the manifestation of God in the flesh.

The early Church knew that there was a mystical relationship between the first and the Second Adam, between the one that brought death into the world and the One Who brought life and salvation. According to very ancient tradition, Christ, the *Second Adam*, was born on the same day on which Adam, the first-created one, was born, that is, on the "Sixth Day," which corresponded to the sixth day of the first month (January 6th on the Julian Calendar).

Fighting Errors

In the fourth century many errors were being taught, especially by the followers of Arius. They denied that Jesus was of the same substance as God; they believed that He was only the highest of created beings (a false teaching—also fashionable in our own days). According to this error, Orthodox Christians could not celebrate the birth in flesh of God Himself (which is called the Doctrine of the Incarnation), but only the birth of a very special creature who was not in reality God...

In order to combat this heresy it was agreed that the commemoration of the Birth of the Son of God should be separated from the feast of His Baptism: the Church intended by this to make even clearer the truth about the incarnation. Many different dates were suggested for the celebration of Christmas, but in order to remove a temptation from the Christians of that time it was decided to use December 25th.

The Romans had a pagan festival on this day called *dies natalis Solis invicti*, a celebration of the return of the sun to summer, as if renewing itself. The Romans used this day as an excuse for unbridled merry-making and immorality (much as it has again become in the 20th century). Since the Church had already decided to establish a separate feast day for the Nativity of Christ, December 25th was chosen in order to preserve the faithful from the temptation to participate in pagan revels. The Church Fathers also wanted to make use of the symbolism of the sun on that day, thinking to enoble or elevate the pagan feast to a Christian understanding because Christ is often spoken of in the New Testament as the *Sun of Justice*, *The Light of the World*, etc. (The fact that the early Church deliberately chose a pagan feast for the celebration of Christmas has been confused in the minds of many modern sectarians—viz., Jehovah's Witnesses—who do not understand the authority of the Church, and are themselves latter-day Arians.)

By establishing the Feast of the Lord's Birth on December 25th, the Church did two things; first, She clearly rejected pagan ideas about life, death, birth, etc., and showed that Christ had come to replace those lifeless and gloomy teachings; secondly, the Church confessed Her undying faith in a great dogma: that God had taken flesh from a woman and come to dwell among and save men.

In the center is the cave in which the Saviour was born; the two animals fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah (1:3): *The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know Me, and the people has not regarded Me.* Surrounding the cave, the whole of creation offers what it can in thanksgiving to the new-born Saviour: *Angels their song, the heavens a star, the Magi gifts, the shepherds wonder, the earth a cave, the wilderness a manger, and we the Virgin Mother.* (Christmas Vespers). At the bottom are two details handed down in iconographic tradition: two women wash the Child and St. Joseph is tempted to doubt the Virgin Birth by the Devil disguised as a shepherd.

At the same time, by means of special hymns and prayers on this day, Orthodoxy instructs the world in ways of holiness and morality, wishing to kindle in the hearts of people a determination to be reborn from a life of sin to a life pleasing to God. As one writer explains: *"Not in glory and magnificence, but in poverty, wretchedness and humiliation does the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth appear in the world; not a luxurious palace, but a humble cave, receives the King of those who reign and the Lord of those who rule. By this we are shown the greatness of humility, poverty, meekness and simplicity, and the ruinousness of pride, riches, vainglory and luxury ... By this it is suggested to us that the Lord receives all and everyone: He is pleased by unlettered simplicity, when it is united to faithful fulfillment of one's calling, to purity of conscience and life; and He does not reject human wisdom, when it knows how to submit itself to illumination from above and make use of its learning for the glory of God and the benefit of one's fellow men."*

The Spirit of Christmas

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas in a manner directly opposed to the way in which it is kept by the world. While western countries are involved in weeks of partying and eating, from Thanksgiving on, Orthodox Christians are deep in a preparatory fast of 40 days. We do not participate in Christmas parties before the Feast itself because we are trying to understand what it must have been like for the righteous ones of the Old Testament, who waited so many generations for the coming of the Messiah. This fast period is of very early origin and was universally known at the time of the great

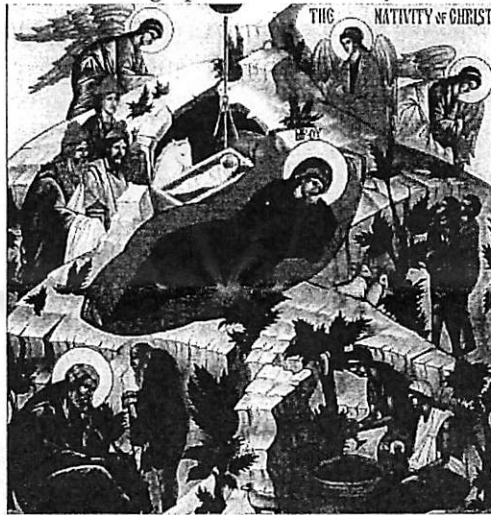
Church Councils. We do not break this fast from meat and dairy products until after receiving Holy Communion on Christmas Day itself, although the Feast actually begins with Divine Services after the appearance of the first star on Christmas Eve. Furthermore, since many of our Orthodox brethren still observe the Julian Calendar (which is 13 days behind the civil calendar), Christmas is celebrated on January 7th by them, according to the latter; after the world has removed its tinsel, then these Orthodox Christians are able to meet the Feast of the Nativity in peace and true spiritual joy much more akin to the first Christmas in Bethlehem.

The celebration of the Birth of Christ begins at nightfall on December 25th and continues for three days. With the exception of Pascha (Easter), it is the greatest of all Church Feasts; St. John Chrysostom calls it *the mother of all feasts.* On this day we also celebrate the memory of the Three Magi (who later received baptism from the Apostle Thomas) and the simple shepherds who were the first of the Chosen People to learn of the Birth of the long awaited Messiah.

The second day of Christmas is dedicated to the honor and memory of the one from whom our Redeemer took His flesh: the Most Holy Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, whom Orthodox call by the dogmatic title *Theotokos* (*She who gave birth to God*), and for whom all true Christians have had immense reverence, love and feelings of closeness since the beginning

of Her Son's ministry.

Lastly, the word *incarnation*, as applied to the Birth of Christ is worthy of a special note: the dictionary defines the word as "a manifestation or the act of making manifest in bodily form." It comes from the Latin *incarnare*, to make flesh: *in-* (to cause or make) + *carn-* (from the stem, *caro*, flesh). Our word "carnal" comes from the same root, as does "carnage," "carnival" (festival of flesh), "carnivorous", etc. Thus, God, Who is pure being and pure spirit, took flesh from a woman, uniting Himself to human nature, and made His tabernacle among men in a human body.



Everyone who speaks contrary to what has been prescribed, even if he fasts, even if he is a virgin, even if he prophesies, even if he works miracles, you should see him as a wolf in sheep's clothing, who is contriving the destruction of the sheep.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

HOMILY ~ About the Day of Christ and How Isaiah Prophetied It

"Therefore My people shall know in that day that I am He that does speak: behold, it is I."

(Isaiah 52:6)

Brethren, our God is the God of Truth. Even on the sun there are spots of darkness but on our God, there is not a spot of untruth. Every word spoken by God through the Prophets came true. When the Word [Logos] of God became Incarnate in Jesus Christ our Lord, then all the prophecies which referred to Him and which, for the Jews until then were dark enigmas, were revealed as clear as the sun.

In the Holy Gospel it is said: "And the Word was made flesh" (St. John 1:14), the Pre-eternal word of God, the eternal Wisdom of God and the Son of God, the Word of God made flesh, every word of prophesy is revealed in bodily form. Until the Lord Christ came in the flesh to visit mankind, the scribes and readers of Holy Scripture could think of many words of the Prophets, long and long unfulfilled, that those are only the words of the Prophets as men and not words from God. But God did not permit anyone to think lowly of His Prophets, that is why He said that men shall know "... in that day that I am He that does speak". Therefore, God wanted to give importance to every word of the Prophets and wanted to teach men patience, to patiently await "that day", that wondrous day when the manifestation of the Lord on earth in the flesh will clearly cry out in every ear: "Behold, it is I!" He who recognized the Lord Jesus as God in the flesh, that one recognized in Him, simultaneously, that one Who spoke through the Prophets.

"Behold, it is I!" thus speaks Christ today. "I am He" Who speaks through all the created universe. "I am He" Who spoke through the Prophets. "I am He" Who, through the lips of the body spoke the words of eternal salvation. "I am He" Who spoke through the Apostles, Saints and teachers. "I am He" Who speaks and Who will continue to speak through My Holy Church until the end of time. "I am He" Who speaks and "I am He" about Whom it is spoken.

O Lord, to Thee be glory and thanks always! Amen.

REFLECTION

A story of the Divine Christ-child: Both great Prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophetied that the Lord would come to Egypt and that His presence would shake the pagan temples and destroy the idols. Isaiah wrote: *Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence* (Isaiah 19:1, cf. Jeremiah 43:12-13). When the divine refugees came to the city of Hermopolis (Cairo), they approached a pagan temple, and all the idols in that temple suddenly fell down and were shattered.

St. Palladius writes of this in his *Lausiac History*: "We saw the pagan temple there, in which all the carved idols fell to the ground at the coming of the Savior." In a certain place called Sirin there were 365 idols. When the Most-Holy Virgin entered that temple with the Divine Child in her arms, all these idols fell down and were shattered. All the idols throughout Egypt fell in the same manner. The Holy Prophet Jeremiah, living in Egypt in old age, had prophetied to the pagan priests of Egypt that all the idols would fall and all the graven images would be destroyed at the time when a Virgin Mother with a Child, born in a manger, would come to Egypt. The pagan priests remembered well this prophecy. In accordance with it, they carved out a representation of a Virgin as she lay on a bed and, next to her in a manger, her young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes; and they venerated this representation. King Ptolemy asked the pagan priests what this representation meant, and they replied that it was a mystery, foretold by a prophet to their fathers, and that they were awaiting the fulfillment of this mystery. And, indeed, this mystery was fulfilled, and revealed not only in Egypt but also in the entire world.

The Middle Way

Virtues are in the middle, the royal way about which the saintly elder (Saint Basil the Great) said, "Travel on the royal way and count the miles." As I said, the virtues are at the midpoint between excess and laxness. That is why it is written, "Do not turn to the right or to the left" (Prov. 4:27) but travel on the "royal way" (Num. 20:17). Saint Basil also says, "The person who does not allow his thought to incline towards excess or deprivation but directs it to the midpoint, that of virtue, is upright in heart." *St. Dorotheos of Gaza, Practical Teaching on the Christian Life*

The Hieromartyr Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria (remembered Nov. 25) and his vision of Christ, concerning Arius

St. Peter was a disciple and successor of St. Theonas, Archbishop of Alexandria, and was for a time a teacher at Origen's famous school of philosophy. He ascended the archiepiscopal throne in the year 299, and died a martyr's death in 311, beside the grave of the Holy Apostle Mark. He governed the Church in a most difficult era, when assaults were being made against the faithful by unbelievers from without, and by heretics from within. During his time, 670 Christians suffered in Alexandria. Often, whole families were led to the scaffold and executed. At the same time, the ungodly Arius was confusing the faithful with his false teaching.

It is said of St. Peter that he never climbed the steps and sat on the Patriarchal throne in church, but rather stood or sat before the steps of the throne. When the faithful complained that their hierarch did not sit in his place, he replied: "Whenever I approach the throne, I see a heavenly light and power upon it, and that is why I do not dare climb and sit on it."

Beside this vision, St. Peter had another, yet more wondrous vision. While he was in prison, the impious heretic Arius hypocritically pretended that he had repented of his heresy, and sent word to the captive Peter that he had renounced his heresy, with an appeal to Peter to receive him into the Church again. Arius did this only because he thought that Peter would be martyred, and he could then acquire the patriarchal throne and disseminate and strengthen his heresy.

Before he gave any reply, Peter prayed to God in the prison. During prayer, a mystical light illumined the prison, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him as a twelve-year-old boy, shining brighter than the sun, so that it was not possible to look at Him directly. The Lord was clothed in a white tunic, rent down the front from top to bottom. He clutched the garment around Himself with His hands, as though to hide His nakedness.

At this, St. Peter was in great fear and horror. He cried out: "Who, O Savior, has torn Thy garment?" The Lord replied: "The madman Arius. He tore it, for he alienated My people from Me, whom I acquired by My Blood. Be careful not to receive him in communion with the Church, for he has cunning and diabolical thoughts against Me and My people."

At this, St. Peter sent word to his priests, Achilles and Alexander, that he could not receive Arius's petition, for it was false and cunning; and the saint pronounced a curse on Arius in both worlds. He also prophesied that Achilles, and then Alexander, would succeed him as patriarch, and so it was.

In this Season of Holy Birth.... Two Babies...

A worried woman went to her gynecologist and said:

'Doctor, I have a serious problem and desperately need your help! My baby is not even 1 yr. old and I'm pregnant again. I don't want kids so close together.'

So the doctor said: 'Ok, and what do you want me to do?'

She said: 'I want you to end my pregnancy, and I'm counting on your help with this.'

The doctor thought for a little, and after some silence he said to the lady: 'I think I have a better solution for your problem. It's less dangerous for you too.'

She smiled, thinking that the doctor was going to accept her request.

Then he continued: 'You see, in order for you not to have to take care of 2 babies at the same time, let's kill the one in your arms. This way, you could rest some before the other one is born. If we're going to kill one of them it doesn't matter which one it is. There would be no risk for your body if you chose the one in your arms.'

The lady was horrified and said: 'No doctor! How terrible! It's a crime to kill a child!

'I agree', the doctor replied. 'But you seemed to be ok with it, so I thought maybe that was the best solution. The doctor smiled, realizing that he had made his point. He convinced the mom that there is no difference in killing a child that's already been born and one that's still in the womb. ... Sounds a lot like the modern version of King Solomon's solution...

On Bible Translations and the Mother of God

How can we find words to describe the holiness, the purity, the sanctity of the one whom God selected to give flesh to the Son of God? St. Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit," (Luke 1:41) cried out, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!" (Luke 1:42). She also called her "the mother of my Lord." (Luke 1:43).

Yet today in our nation many Orthodox Christians do not honor the Mother of the Word. Some even accept the false teaching of all the protestant faiths: that our Lady was not "ever-Virgin." Part of the confusion among our faithful is the result of blatant errors in translating the Greek text into other languages. One such error is found in today's Gospel lesson. At the end of the lesson, a woman in the crowd joyously offers the following Spirit-filled words: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the breasts which nursed Thee," (Luke 11:27). According to all the mainline versions (King James, Revised Standard, etc.), Christ said in reply, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). This sounds as if the Lord is making light of the woman's praise of His mother, or even dismissing it. In actuality, however, He is agreeing with her! The key is the translation of the Greek word "menouge." The correct translation of this word is "of course," or "indeed," *not* rather. It is interesting to note that in two other instances where this word is used, the King James translators chose to give the true meaning:

- 1) "But I say, have they not heard? YES, INDEED." (Romans 10:18)
- 2) "But INDEED I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:8)

Thus, in truth, the Lord is agreeing heartily with the woman's praise of His Mother. In essence, He is saying "Of course, my Mother is blessed! She is the most perfect example of a human being who hears and keeps the word of God."

Beloved! Not only did the Theotokos keep the word of God by her total surrender to His divine will for her (see Luke 1:38), she ALONE: kept THE Word of God within her tiny womb for nine months; gave milk to THE Word of God made flesh for another nine months; was established by THE Word of God as "More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim!" Is it not proper that all of us give honor to her who is "INDEED" honored by her Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ?'

- Fr. Demetrios Carellas, Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Saxonburg, PA

A Question to Elder Paisios:

- Elder, some feel certain of this salvation and others have doubts. What is the proper stance?

- The goal is for people to observe God's Commandments. The spiritual person must attain such a spiritual condition that even if God does not grant him Paradise, he will not be disturbed. We must realize well that today we are alive, tomorrow we may be gone, and we must be concerned how to be hear Christ. Those who have by God's Grace realized the vanity of this life have actually received the greatest gift. It is not necessary to be able to foresee the future, for it is enough to have the foresight to prepare for the salvation of the soul, and to take the best possible spiritual measures to be saved.



AS IT IS WRITTEN . . .

by PATRICK HENRY REARDON

The Eternal Son

SEVERAL DECADES AGO a new parishioner remarked that I seemed to have a “high Christology.” Responding to my comment that I had no idea what he was talking about, he explained that a high Christology believes in Jesus’ pre-existence as God’s Son. A “low Christology,” on the other hand, believes that the human being Jesus was adopted as God’s Son, whether at his Baptism, or his Resurrection, or whatever. “Christians,” I asked, “who don’t believe Jesus is God’s eternal Son? How can that be?”

As I have thought about this matter over the years, one idea has become perfectly clear: The early Christians knew nothing about a “low” Christology; even the Arians believed in a pre-existence of Christ!

Our earliest New Testament sources testify to a firm conviction on the pre-existence of God’s Son. Take, for instance, the fragment of the pre-Pauline hymn preserved in Philippians 2:6–8. It speaks of “Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be seized.” In other words, Christ was divine before he became human; he did not start out as a human being whom God adopted as his Son. This (exceedingly high) Christology is what Paul learned when he joined the Church.

TWO KEY VERBS

Two verbs, in particular, testify to this primitive conviction of the Church: First, “send”; God sent his Son. Second, “come”; the Son came into the world.

First, when Paul says that God sent his Son, the context of this expression indicates something quite different from his sending of the prophets. In the reference to God “sending (*pempsas*) his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3), the participle refers to the Son’s new state, his entrance into history. That is to say, the Son existed prior to his Enfleshment as a human being.

The same thesis is affirmed in Galatians 4:4. There we are told, not simply that God sent his Son, but that “God *sent forth* his Son”—*exsapeiteilen* (cf. Acts 13:26). The verb’s prefix implies the Son’s pre-existence.

For Paul, Christ’s pre-existence is presumed in the very concept of the Incarnation; he speaks of the Son in two “states.” Thus, he tells the Corinthians that Christ,



The Ascension of Jesus (detail). iStockphoto

“though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Virtually all interpreters of this text recognize its reliance on the hymnic theology preserved in Philippians: God’s eternal Son emptied himself, humbled himself, and assumed our low estate.

Second, there is the verb, “come,” which appears in various dominical sayings of self-reference; Jesus speaks of himself as someone who has “come” into the world. Indeed, it is hard to explain why Paul and the pre-Pauline Church thought of Jesus as “sent” unless we take at face value Jesus’ assertions that he had “come.”

In the Gospels these dominical logia appear in two forms: In the tradition represented in the Synoptic Gospels, the subject is the “Son of Man”; in the Fourth Gospel, the subject is “I.”

Thus, according to the Synoptics, Jesus proclaimed that the Son of Man came to call sinners, not the righteous (Mark 2:17). He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He came to give his life as a ransom for the many (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). In these sayings, Jesus manifests a self-consciousness of being transcendent to anything merely human.

These declarations demonstrate a remarkably “high” Christology in the Synoptics. I readily agree with Johannes Schneider’s assessment, more than a half-century ago, that they “derive from the Messianic self-awareness of Jesus and are to be explained thereby.”

In the Fourth Gospel, the use of “have come” in the dominical logia is an explicit self-attestation, expressed in the first person singular. Thus, Jesus says, “I came forth (*exselthon*) from God” (8:42); “I have come in my Father’s name” (5:43); “I know where I came from” (8:14); “I have come that they may have life” (10:10); “I have come as a light into the world” (12:46); and “For judgment I have come into this world” (9:39).

Such logia are consistent with the Baptist’s declaration that God’s Son, “who comes after me . . . was before me” (1:15). The Son already existed before he came. ♦