



LORD'S VOICE

ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ

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AFTER THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Flight to Egypt and incarnation. After the departure of the Magi, Joseph the betrothed, following the Angel's command, took the divine infant and his mother, the ever Virgin Mary, and proceeded to Egypt. There they remained till Herod's death. The sacred Chrysostom observes that the flight to Egypt was provided by God, in order to very manifestly prove the fact of the incarnation of the Son of God. The Word of God really and not seemingly became man. If He had not fled to Egypt, but remained in Palestine and rejected Herod and his soldiers in a divine manner, He would give the impression that He is not a true human but only God. Also, the sacred Father observes, if, even though He left from Herod's wrath and quite a few other times He acted in a human manner, some people dared to maintain that the incarnation of God is a myth, to what degree of impiety would they have reached, if Christ did everything only in a God-befitting manner and according to His divine power?" So for this reason also He did not become man in an automatic manner, but He was carried in the womb for nine months previously and a birth occurred, He subsequently was fed with milk and He himself did not begin working miracles manifestly from His childhood age, but He awaited the age which befits man, so that the miracle of His incarnation could become very manifest and easy to accept.

Christian life and temptations. The flight to Egypt comprises an important lesson for every Christian. Our Lord immediately after He was born encountered temptations, and furthermore very great ones. He ended up face to face with the mania of the tyrant Herod and there was need, while he was still in swaddling clothes, to flee together with His all-immaculate mother to a foreign land, in order to escape certain death. Likewise every Christian, as soon as he is born spiritually in the baptismal font, stirs up the mania of the man-killing tyrant devil. So for this reason he cannot avoid having afflictions in his life. The apostle Paul stressing this truth was saying: "through many afflictions must we enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

With this reality as the cause, St. Chrysostom teaching his listeners was saying that they also when they are granted to minister in some spiritual work, and then they see themselves suffering the worst things and they undergo infinite dangers, they must not be shaken up, nor be scandalized. But on the contrary, having in their mind the example of the Lord, they ought to face everything with a brave train of thought, knowing well that this mainly is the sequence of matters in the spiritual life, in

other words, in all actions, temptations are also mixed in together. In this world we are in constant battle with the man-hating Satan. So for this reason, the greater the successes we make, the more rage he will be fighting us with. Perfect comfort and crowns are not in the present life but in the future one.

The prophetic character of the events. The departure of the Magi, the flight to Egypt, the slaughter of the infants, the return to Palestine and the settling in Nazareth, are events sunk in the prophetic character of the energies of God. This furthermore occurs in all the Lord's work upon the earth and in all the actions of our God. Babylon and Egypt were burning up from the fire of idolatry and of impiety. The return of the Magi to Babylon and the flight of the Lord to Egypt comprise a presaging of the spreading of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Palestine persecutes the Lord, whereas Egypt accepts Him and preserves Him. This comprises a type and pre-image of the crucifixion of the Lord and of the persecution of the apostles on the part of the Judeans, as well also of the favorable reception of the Gospel by the Gentiles and their repentance and salvation. So already from the prelude the Lord coming into the world reveals the world historic changes which will occur.

Simultaneously He fulfills in His person ancient prophecies. Matthew reminds us of the "from Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1), the prophecy of Jeremiah about the slaughter of the infants (Jer. 31:15 – 16) and the prophecy that the Messiah would be called the Nazarene. Referring to the two first prophecies, the following must be clarified. The Jews, as the Golden-tongued Saint notes, maintain that the "from Egypt I called my son" refers to them. In other words, to their exit from Egypt with Moses. They ignore, however that a very basic prophetic law is that which is said about someone very often being fulfilled in another person. A characteristic example is Levi and Simeon, about whom Jacob prophesied that he would scatter them in Israel. However he did not scatter them but the tribes which came from them. Likewise the prophecy of Noah about Canaan that he would become a slave to his brothers was realized in his long descendents the Canaanites, and specifically the Gabaonites, whom the Israelites enslaved. Also, the blessings of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not fulfilled in them themselves but in their descendents, and mainly in the descendent whom they were awaiting, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the above saying of the prophet Hosea is not fulfilled so much in the old Israel, as in the real and by nature Son of God, Jesus Christ. In the same manner is understood also the prophecy about the slaughter of the infants. Finally about the prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene, the Fathers of the Church comment that it belonged to a prophetic book which has been lost. We know from the Old Testament that in periods of the flaring up of idolatry in ancient Israel, very many sacred books were burned and destroyed. To one of these very likely the present saying belonged, which had been preserved by the oral tradition up to the days when the Gospel was written.

We however, seeing the wondrous fulfillment of innumerable prophecies in the person of the Lord, let us glorify God who uses every manner, to guide us and support us in the correct faith and life and to grant us His eternal Kingdom. Amen.

This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth" (Gen. 2:4). In other words, "this is the book which speaks about the creation of heaven and the earth". With these words Genesis is self characterized from the beginning, the first book of the Old Testament, which sets out with the creation of the world. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (Matt. 1:1). In other words, "a book which refers to the birth of Jesus Christ". With these words Matthew begins the first book of the New Testament, which proclaims the joyous message of the recreation of the corrupt world.

The titles which these first books of the Old and New Testament give to themselves do not seem to respond to their content. Genesis doesn't only speak about creation, but also describes the fall of the first created humans and their exile from paradise, it gives information about the first humans, the flood and the Tower of Babel, whereas subsequently it makes an extensive reference to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve patriarchs. Likewise, the Gospel according to Matthew sets out with everything which is related to the birth and coming of Christ in the world and reaches up to His crucifixion and resurrection.

This seeming lack of agreement among the title and the content of the divinely inspired books is not due to some mistake or lack of exactness of their authors. On the contrary, it is a basic part of the Scripture, which the Fathers of the Church repeatedly note, for the beginning to be unbreakably associated with the whole. So, sometimes from the beginning, the whole receives its name, as we saw in these two examples, whereas at other times the whole gives its name to the beginning. So for this reason, the Father, who is the head of the Godhead, from whom the Son is born and the Holy Spirit proceeds, very often in the Scripture is denoted by the word "God". Likewise the Scripture often distinguishes the two genders as "human" and "woman", not of course because it doesn't consider the woman as human, but because the man is the head from which the woman came forth: coessential and equal in value with him.

And we find many other similar examples in the Scripture, which, if we don't know this basic manner with which the Sacred Books express themselves, there is danger that we will misunderstand them and fall into dogmatic mistakes and treat the sacred text unjustly and place our salvation in danger.

Two basic presuppositions

From the first chapter of his Gospel, Matthew certifies to his readers two basic presuppositions which Jesus Christ as the Messiah fulfills in His person. First of all, the Messiah, according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, had to be in the offspring of Abraham, to descend from the tribe of Judah and to come from the royal tribe of David. So for this reason Matthew begins the gospel with the genealogical tree of Jesus Christ proving very amply that Jesus Christ is truly an offspring of David, of Judas, of Abraham.

All the Jews ought to know their genealogical tree, in order to indisputably prove that they belong to the one or the other tribe. So for this reason in the Old Testament we encounter quite a few genealogical catalogues. With the destruction however of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. the genealogical catalogues were lost by the Jews. Commenting on this event St. Nectarios observes that henceforth no other Messiah can be awaited, since the evidence has vanished, in other words the genealogical charts, and consequently, and henceforth it is impossible to be fulfilled, if they were not fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem during Titus.

The second presupposition was the Messiah would be born of a Virgin-in Hebrew "Alma", in other words an unwed young maiden – about which the prophet Isaiah had spoken of about eight centuries before. The angel of the Lord reminded Joseph betrothed about this prophecy, in order to give him explanations about the mystery of the Virgin Mary being with child. According to the prophecy, the son of the Virgin would be named Emanuel, in other words "God is with us". Truly, the Church in all centuries admits and proclaims Jesus Christ as God the Word, who became man for

our sake and indwelt among us and lived among us and He would be with us all the days until the close of the age (Matt. 28:20).

The righteous Joseph

The Scripture characterizes Joseph betrothed as righteous. His righteousness lies in the fact that when he saw that the Virgin was pregnant even though they didn't have carnal relations between them, he did not want to denounce her to the world, as the Mosaic law appointed, in order to stone her as an adulterous – the angel of God had not yet of course appeared to him. With his love he exceeded the law, or rather, he kept the essence and the spirit of the law. So he became similar to the righteous people of the Old Testament, like Moses and David, who, exceeding the law, showed love and forgiveness to the impious people, towards murderers and toward lewd people.

This righteousness we are also called to imitate. Injustice damns us, human righteousness keeps us glued to the earth. Only divine righteousness saves us and sanctifies us, because it is identified with love. One Saint was saying that “for you to love your neighbor as yourself” essentially means for you to love your neighbor more than your own self. So much righteous we will be in our life, as the more we treat our own selves unjustly, favoring what is the truly good and advantage of our fellow men. According to the degree we proceed on this path, we will resemble God and all His righteous ones.

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