

The Good Word

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BALAAM'S PROPHECIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

From a *SERMON ON BALAAM AND THE MAGI*
by Caesarius, Archbishop of Arles (c. 468-542)¹

"If God's prophecies were inserted in the sacred books by Moses, how much more so were they copied by men who then lived in Mesopotamia, for they considered Balaam splendid and certainly were disciples of his art! After his time the profession and instruction of the seers is said to have flourished in parts of the Orient. Possessing copies of everything which Balaam prophesied, they even have it written: *A star shall advance from Jacob, and a man shall rise from Israel.* The Magi kept these writings more among themselves, and so when Jesus was born they recognized the star and understood that the prophecy was fulfilled more than did the people of Israel who disdained to hear the words of the holy prophets. Therefore, only from the writings which Balaam had left, they learned that the time was approaching, came, and immediately sought to adore him. Moreover, in order to show their great faith, they honored the little boy as a king." ❖ ❖ ❖

So, let us first look at what Moses had to say about Barlaam and his prophecies

Numbers 22:1 (Third Millennium Bible Translation)²

And the children of Israel went forward, and pitched camp in the plains of Moab on this side of the Jordan by Jericho. 2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. 4 And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, "Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt. Behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. 6 Come now

therefore, I pray thee, curse for me this people; for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."

7 And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand, and they came unto Balaam and spoke unto him the words of Balak. 8 And he said unto them, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word back, as the LORD shall speak unto me." And the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

9 And God came unto Balaam and said, "What men are these with thee?" 10 And Balaam said unto God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, 11 `Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, who covereth the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to overcome them and drive them out.'"

12 And God said unto Balaam, "Thou shalt not go with them. Thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed."

13 And Balaam rose up in the morning and said unto the princes of Balak, "Get you into your land, for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you." 14 And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak and said, "Balaam refuseth to come with us." 15 And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honorable than they. 16 And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor: `Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me; 17 for I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me. **Come therefore, I pray thee, curse for me this people.**'"

18 And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God to do less or more. 19 Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what more the LORD will say unto me." 20 And God came unto Balaam at night and said unto him, "If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do."

21 And Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 And God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. 23 And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way and his sword drawn in his hand. And the ass turned aside out of the way and went into the field, and Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way. 24 But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side and a wall on that side. 25 And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the

1. Caesarea of Arles, *Sermon 113.2*, as quoted in Lienhard, Joseph T., S.J. (editor), *Commentary on Numbers, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament III: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2001, pp. 248-9,

2. The Third Millennium Bible (TMB), New Authorized Version TM, is an updating of the full and complete text of the Authorized (King James) Version of the Holy Bible, first published in A.D. 1611. Online at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/tmba/>



wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; and he smote her again. 26 And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. 27 And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

28 And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, "What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" 29 And Balaam said unto the ass, "Because thou hast mocked me. I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee."

30 And the ass said unto Balaam, "Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?" And he said, "Nay." 31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

32 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, "Why hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me. 33 And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times. Unless she had turned from me, surely now also I would have slain thee and saved her alive."

34 And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again."

35 And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, "Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that shalt thou speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. 36 And when Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost border. 37 And Balak said unto Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? Why camest thou not unto me? Am I not able indeed to promote thee to honor?"

38 And Balaam said unto Balak, "Lo, I have come unto thee. Have I now any power at all to say anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." 39 And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjathuzoth. 40 And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent some to Balaam and to the princes who were with him. 41 And it came to pass on the morrow that Balak took Balaam and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people.

Numbers 23:1 And Balaam said unto Balak, "Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams." 2 And Balak did as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. 3 And Balaam said unto Balak, "Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatsoever He showeth me I will tell thee." And he went to a high place. 4 And God met Balaam; and he said unto Him, "I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram.

THE FIRST PROPHECY OF BALAAM

5 **And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth** and said, "Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak." 6 And

he returned unto him, and lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he and all the princes of Moab. 7 **And he took up his parable and said: "Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east [mountains of Bashan?], saying, 'Come, curse for me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.' 8 How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the LORD hath not defied? 9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. 10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"**

11 And Balak said unto Balaam, "What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast blessed them altogether."

12 And he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?"

13 And Balak said unto him, "Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place from whence thou mayest see them. Thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all; and curse them for me from thence." 14 And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. 15 And he said unto Balak, "Stand here by thy burnt offering while I meet the LORD yonder."

16 And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth and said, "Go again unto Balak, and say thus." 17 And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, "What hath the LORD spoken?"

THE SECOND PROPHECY OF BALAAM

18 **And he took up his parable and said: "Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor. 19 God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good. 20 Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it. 21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel; the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them 22 God brought them out of Egypt; he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn. 23 Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel. According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'What hath God wrought!' 24 Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion; he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey and drink the blood of the slain."**

25 And Balak said unto Balaam, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." 26 But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, "Told not I thee, saying, 'All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do'?" 27 And Balak said unto Balaam, "Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place. Perhaps it will please God that thou mayest curse them for me from thence." 28 And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon. 29 And Balaam said unto Balak, "Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams." 30 And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on



every altar.

Numbers 24:1 And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek out enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

THE THIRD PROPHECY OF BALAAM

3 And he took up his parable and said: "Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said, 4 he hath said, who heard the words of God, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: 5 How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! 6 As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lignales which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. 7 He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. 8 God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn. He shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones and pierce them through with his arrows. 9 He couched, he lay down as a lion. And as a great lion, who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

10 And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together; and Balak said unto Balaam, "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast altogether blessed them three times. 11 Therefore now flee thou to thy place. I thought to promote thee unto great honor, but lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honor."

12 And Balaam said unto Balak, "Spoke I not also to thy messengers whom thou sentest unto me, saying, 13 'If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak'? 14 And now, behold, I go unto my people. Come therefore, and I will warn thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days."

THE FOURTH PROPHECY OF BALAAM

15 And he took up his parable and said: "Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said,

16 he hath said, who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:

17 I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh. There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter³ shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth. 18 And Edom shall be a possession; Scir also shall be a possession for his enemies, and Israel shall do valiantly. 19 Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion,

3. Numbers 24:17 In the *Septuagint Lxx* Greek Bible, the prophecy reads, *A star will dawn out of Jacob and a man* (ἀνθρώπος, *a man*, not ῥαβδὸν *a staff or scepter* as in the Hebrew) *will rise out of Israel*. This makes the Messianic reference clearer.

and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city." 20 And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said: "Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever." 21 And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable and said: "Strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. 22 Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive." 23 And he took up his parable and said: "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! 24 And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever." 25 And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place; and Balak also went his way.

Numbers 25:1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. 2 And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

3 And Israel joined himself unto Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. 4 And the LORD said unto Moses, "Take all the heads of the people and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel."

5 And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, "Slay ye every one his men who were joined unto Baal of Peor." 6 And behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 7 And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. 9 And those who died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.

10 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, 11 "Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. 12 Therefore say: 'Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace. 13 And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.'"

14 Now the name of the Israelite who was slain, even who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites. 15 And the name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur. He was head over a people and of a chief house in Midian.

16 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, 17 "Vex the Midianites and smite them. 18 For they vex you with their wiles wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, who was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake."

Numbers 31:1 And the LORD spoke unto Moses,



saying,

2 "Avenge the children of Israel on the Midianites. Afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people ..."7 And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. 8 And they slew the kings of Midian besides the rest of those who were slain, namely: Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian. **Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword ...** 15 And Moses said unto them, "Have ye saved all the women alive? 16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. 17 Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who hath known a man by lying with him ... ❖ ❖ ❖

CALLING OF THE MAGI, HYMN XV FOR THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY BY ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN (c. 306-373):⁴

1. In the Birth of the Son light dawned,—and darkness fled from the world,—and the earth was enlightened; then let it give glory—to the brightness of the Father Who has enlightened it!

2. He dawned from the womb of the Virgin,—and the shadows passed away when He was seen,—and the darkness of error was strangled by Him,—and the ends of the earth were enlightened that they should give glory.

3. Among the peoples there was great tumult,—and in the darkness the light dawned,—and the nations rejoiced to give glory—to Him in Whose Birth they all were enlightened.

4. His light shone out over the east;—Persia was enlightened by the star:—*His* Epiphany gave good tidings to her and invited her,—“He is come for the sacrifice that brings joy to all.”

5. The star of light hastened and came and dawned—through the darkness, and summoned them—that the peoples should come and exult—in the great Light that has come down to earth.

6. One envoy from among the stars—the firmament sent to proclaim to them,—to the sons of Persia, that they might make ready—to meet the King and to worship Him.

7. Great Assyria when she perceived *it*—called to the Magi and said to them,—“Take gifts and go, honour Him—the great King Who in Judea has dawned.”

8. The princes of Persia, exulting,—carried gifts from their region;—and they brought to the Son of the Virgin—gold and myrrh and frankincense.

9. They entered and found Him as a child—as He dwelt in the house of the lowly woman;—and they drew near and worshipped with gladness,—and brought near before Him their treasures.

10. Mary said, “For whom are these?—and for what purpose? and what *is* the cause—that has called you to come from your country—to the Child with your treasures?”

11. They said, “Thy Son is a King,—and He binds crowns and is King of all;—and great *is* His power over the

world,—and to His Kingdom shall all be obedient.”

12. “At what time did this come to pass,—that a lowly woman should bring forth a King? I who am in need and in want,—how then could a king come forth from me?”

13. “In thee alone has this come to pass—that a mighty King from thee should appear;—thee in whom poverty shall be magnified,—and to thy Son shall crowns be made subject.”

14. “Treasures of Kings I have not;—riches have never fallen to my lot.—My house is lowly and my dwelling needy;—why then proclaim ye that my Son is King?”

15. “Great treasure is in thy Son,—and wealth that suffices to make all rich;—for the treasures of kings are impoverished,—but He fails not nor can be measured.”

16. “Whether haply some other be for you—the King that is born, enquire ye concerning Him.—This is the son of a lowly woman,—of *one* who is not meet to look on a King.”

17. “Can it be that light should ever miss—the way whereon it has been sent? It was not darkness that summoned and led us;—in light we walked, and thy Son is King.”

18. “Lo! ye see a babe without speech,—and the house of His mother empty and needy,—and of that which pertains to a king nought is in it:—how then in it is a king to be seen?”

19. “Lo! we see that without speech and at rest—*is* the King, and lowly as thou hast said:—but again we see that the stars—in the highest He bids haste to proclaim Him.”

20. “It were meet, O men, that ye should enquire—who is the King, and then adore him;—lest haply *your* way has been mistaken,—and another is the King that is born.”

21. “It were meet, O maiden, that thou shouldst receive it,—that we have learned that thy Son is King,—from the *star* of light that errs not,—and plain is the way, and he has led us.”

22. “The Child is a little one, and lo! he has not—the diadem of a king and of a throne;—and what have ye seen that ye should pay honour to Him,—as to a king, with your treasures?”

23. “A little one, because He willed *it* for quietness’ sake,—and meek now until He be revealed.—A time shall be for Him when all diadems—shall bow down and worship Him.”

24. “Armies he has none;—nor has my Son legions and troops;—in the poverty of His mother He dwells;—why then King is He called by you?”

25. “The armies of thy Son are above;—they ride on high, and they flame,—and one of them it was that came and summoned us,—and all our country was dismayed.”

26. “The Child is a babe, and how is it possible—He should be King, unknown to the world?—And they that are mighty and of renown,—how can a babe be their ruler?”

27. “Thy babe is aged, O Virgin,—and Ancient of Days and exalted above all and Adam beside Him is very babe,—and in Him *all* created things are made new.”

28. “It is very seemly that ye should expound—all the mystery and explain *it*;—who *it* is that reveals to you the mystery of my Son,—that He is a King in your region.”

29. “It is likewise seemly for thee to accept this,—that unless the truth had led us we had not wandered hither from

4. Ephraim Syrus, *Hymns for the Feast of Epiphany*, in Schaff, Philip and Wade, Henry, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 13*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, 287-289.

the ends of the earth,—nor come for the sake of thy Son.”

30. “All the mystery as it was wrought—among you there in your country,—reveal ye to me now as friends.—Who was He that called you to come to me?”

31. “A mighty Star appeared to us—that was glorious exceedingly above the stars,—and our land by its fire was kindled;—that this King had appeared it bore tidings to us.”

32. “Do not, I beseech you, speak of—these things in our land lest they rage,—and the kings of the earth join together—against the Child in their envy.”

33. “Be not thou dismayed, O Virgin!—Thy Son shall bring to nought all diadems, and set them underneath his heel;—and they shall not subdue Him Whom they envy.”

34. “Because of Herod I am afraid,—that unclean wolf, lest he assail me,—and draw his sword and with it cut off—the sweet cluster before it be ripe.”

35. “Because of Herod fear thou not;—for in the hands of thy Son is his throne placed:—and as soon as He shall reign it shall be laid low,—and his diadem shall fall on the earth beneath.”

36. “A torrent of blood is Jerusalem,—wherein the excellent ones are slain;—and if she perceives Him she will assail Him.—In mystery speak ye, and noise *it* not abroad.”

37. “All torrents, and likewise swords,—by the hands of thy Son shall be appeased;—and the sword of Jerusalem shall be blunted,—and shall not desire at all to kill.”

38. “The scribes of the priests of Jerusalem—pour forth blood and heed not.— They will arouse murderous strife—against me and against the Child; O Magi, be silent!”

39. “The scribes and the priests will be unable—to hurt thy son in their envy;—for by Him their priesthood shall be dissolved,—and their festivals brought to nought.”

40. “A Watcher revealed to me, when I received—conception of the Babe, that my Son is a King;—that His diadem is from on high and is not dissolved,—he declared to me even as ye *do*.”

41. “The Watcher, therefore, of whom thou hast spoken—is he who came as a star,—and was shown to us and brought us good tidings—that He is great and glorious above the stars.”

42. “That Angel declared to me—in his good tidings, when he appeared to me,—that to His Kingdom no end shall be—and the mystery is kept and shall not be revealed.”

43. “The Star also declared again to us—that thy Son is He that shall keep the diadem.—His aspect was something changed,—and He was the Angel and made *it* not known to us.”

44. “Before me when the Watcher showed himself,—he called Him his Lord before He was conceived;—and as the Son of the Highest announced Him to me:—but where His Father is He made not known to me.”

45. “Before us Me proclaimed in the form of a star—that the Lord of the Highest is He Who is born;—and over the stars of light thy Son *is* ruler,—and unless He commands they rise not.”

46. “In your presence, lo! there are revealed—other mysteries, that ye may learn the truth;—how in virginity I bare my Son,—and He is Son of God; go ye, proclaim Him!”

47. “In our presence the Star taught *us*—that His Birth

is exalted above the world and above all beings is thy Son,—and is Son of God according to thy saying.”

48. “The *world* on high and the *world* below bear witness to Him,—all the Watchers and the stars,—that He is Son of God and Lord.—Bear ye His fame to your lands!”

49. “All the world on high, in one star,—has stirred up Persia and she has learnt the truth,—that thy Son is Son of God,—and to Him shall all peoples be subject.”

50. “Peace bear ye to your lands:—peace be multiplied in your borders!—As apostles of truth may ye be believed—in all the way that ye shall pass through.”

51. “The peace of thy Son, it shall bear us—in tranquillity to our land, as it has led us *hither*;—and when His power shall have grasped the worlds,—may He visit our land and bless it!

52. “May Persia rejoice in your glad tidings!—may Assyria exult in your coming—And when my Son’s Kingdom shall arise,—may He plant His standard in your country!”

53. Let the Church sing with rejoicing,—“Glory in the Birth of the Highest,—by Whom the world above and the world below are illumined!”—Blessed *be* He in Whose Birth all are made glad! ❖ ❖ ❖

“ON THE NATIVITY” BY ST. ROMANOS THE MELODIST
(LATE 5TH CENTURY TO AFTER 555):⁵

Prelude

Today the Virgin givest birth to Him Who is above all being,

And the earth offers a cave to Him Whom no one can approach.

Angels with Shepherds give glory,

And magi journey with a star,

For to us there has been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

1. Bethlehem has opened Eden, come, let us see;

We have found delight in secret, come, let us receive

The joys of Paradise within the cave.

There the unwatered root whose blossom is forgiveness has appeared.

There has been found the undug well

From which David once longed to drink.

There a virgin has borne a babe

and has quenched at once Adam’s and David’s thirst.

For this, let us hasten to this place where there has been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

2. The mother’s Father has willingly become her Son,
The infants’ saviour is laid as an infant in a manger.

As she who bore Him contemplates Him, she says,

“Tell me, my Child, how were You sown, or how were You planted in me?”

I see You, my flesh and blood, and I am amazed

5. St. Romanos, *On the Nativity, On the Life of Christ: Kontakia*: Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 1995, pp. 3-12



because I gave suck and yet I am not married.
And though I see You in swaddling clothes,
I know that the flower of my virginity is sealed,
For You preserved it when, in Your good pleasure,
You were born

a little Child, God before the ages.

3. "High King, what have You to do with beggars?
Maker of heaven, why have You come to those born
of earth?

Did You love a cave or take pleasure in a manger?

See, there is no place for Your servant in the inn,

I do not say a place, not even a cave,

For that too belongs to another.

To Sara, when she bore a child,

a vast land was given as her lot. To me, not even a
fox hole.

I used the cavern where willingly You made Your
dwelling,

a little Child, God before the ages."

4. As she spoke such words in secret
And entreated the One Who knows what is hidden,
she heard the magi seeking the babe.

At once, the Maiden cried to them, "Who are you?"

They answered her, "And you, who are you?"

that you have borne such a Child?

Who is your father, who is she who bore you,

that you have become mother and nurse of a Son
without father?

On seeing His star we understood that there had
appeared

a little Child, God before the ages."

5 "For Balaam laid before us precisely
The meaning of the words he spoke in prophecy
When he said that a Star would dawn,

a Star that quenches all prophecies and auguries;

a Star that resolves the parables of the wise,

and their sayings and their riddles,

a Star far more brilliant than the star

which has appeared, for He is the maker of all the
stars,

of Whom it was written of old,

From Jacob, there dawns

a little Child, God before the ages."

6 7 When Mary heard these amazing words,
she bowed low and worshipped the offspring of her
womb and with tears; she said, "Great, My Child,

Great is all that You have done for me in my poverty;

But see, magi are outside seeking You.

The kings of the East

Seek Your face,

And the rich among your people beg to see You,

For truly Your people are those to whom You have
been made known as

a little Child, God before the ages.

7 "So, since they are Your people, my Child, bid
them

Come under your roof that they may see

Rich poverty, precious beggary.

You I have as glory and pride, therefore I am not
ashamed,

You are the grace and beauty

of my dwelling and of me. Nod and let them enter.

My poverty does not worry me;

I hold You as a treasure that the kings have come to
see,

For kings and magi know that you have appeared

a little Child, God before the ages."

8 Jesus the Christ and truly our God

secretly touched His mother's mind

Saying, "Bring in those I have brought by My word,

For it is My word which shone on those who were
seeking Me.

To the senses it is a star,

But to the mind a power,

It accompanied the magi as My minister,

And still stands fulfilling its service

And showing with its rays the place where there has
been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

9 "Therefore now receive, holy Lady -- receive those
who have received Me,

For I am in them as I am in your arms;

I did not leave you and yet I came with them."

She opens the door and receives the company of the
magi.

She opens the door -- she, the unopened

Gate through which Christ alone has passed.

She opens the door -- she who was opened

And yet in no way robbed of the treasure of her
purity.

She opened the door, she from whom was born the
door,

a little Child, God before the ages.

10 The Magi at once hastened into the room

And, seeing Christ, they trembled as they saw

His mother and her betrothed.

And in fear they said, "This is a son without ancestry.

And how is it, O Virgin, that at this moment we see

You betrothed within your house?

Was your conceiving blameless?

Will people not find fault at Joseph's living with you?

You have a multitude of jealous people enquiring



where there has been born
a little Child, God before the ages."

11 "I will tell you," Mary said to the magi,
"Why I keep Joseph in my house:
To refute all those who slander me.
He will tell what he has heard about my Child.
For in his sleep he saw a holy angel
Who told him how I had conceived.
In the night a fiery vision told
the creature of thorn⁶ about the things which grieved
him.

That is why Joseph is with me, to show that there is
a little Child, God before the ages.

12 "He proclaims clearly all he has heard.
He declares openly all that he has seen
In heaven and on earth:
The story of the shepherds, how beings of fire sang
praises with ones of clay,
That of you, magi, how a star hastened before you,
lighting your way and guiding you.
And so, leaving aside all that you said before,
Now recount to us what has befallen you.
Where have you come from, how did you understand
that there had appeared
a little Child, God before the ages."

When the Shining One had spoken thus,
The lamps of the East said to her,
"Do you wish to learn from where we have come
here?
From the land of the Chaldeans, where they do not
say, 'The Lord is God of gods.'
From Babylon, where they do not know
Who is the maker of the things they reverence.
From there it came, the spark from Your Child,
And raised us from the Persian fire;
We have left an all-devouring fire and see a fire
which brings dew;
a little Child, God before the ages.

14 "Everything is vanity of vanities.
But there is none among us who thinks this,
for some deceive while others are deceived.
Therefore, Virgin, thanks be to your Offspring,
through Whom we have been freed,
not only from deception but from hardship
in all the countries through which we passed,
of nations unknown, of tongues incomprehensible,
as we wandered through earth and searched it,
with the lamp of the star seeking out where there had
been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

15 "But while we still had this lamp
we journeyed through all Jerusalem,
fitly fulfilling the words of the prophecy.
For we heard that God had threatened to search her
thoroughly,
and with the lamp we wandered,
Wishing to find a great judgment.
But it was not found, because her Ark
had been taken away with all the good things it had
held before.

The things of old have passed away, for he has
renewed all things

a little Child, God before the ages."

16 Mary, Scripture says, said to the faithful magi,
"So, have you journeyed through all Jerusalem,
that city which slays prophets?
How did you pass unharmed through the city
malevolent to all?
How did you avoid Herod,
who breathes out murder, not justice?"
But they answered her, "Virgin,
we did not avoid him, we mocked him.
We met them all and asked where there had been
born

a little Child, God before the ages."

17 When the Mother of God heard this from them,
she said to them, "What did King Herod
and the Pharisees ask you?"
"First Herod, then, as you said, the leaders of your
nation
inquired of us exactly the time
of this star which is now visible.
And when they knew, as though they had not learned,
they had no desire to see the one of whom they
sought to learn
because, for those who seek, there must be seen
a little Child, God before the ages.

18 "They thought us mad, the fools,
And asked, 'From where have you come and when?
And how have you journeyed by unseen paths?'
But we in turn asked them what they already knew,
'But how did you of old journey through
the great desert which you crossed?
He Who guided those who came from Egypt
Himself now guides those who come to Him from
Chaldea;
then by a pillar of fire, now by a star which shows
a little Child, God before the ages."

6. *Thorn* is used of humans especially with fire in St. Romanos [an allusion to the curse on Adam and the earth (*Gen. 3:18*)].

Dr. Seraphim Steger, Editor, THE GOOD WORD

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20 Those things were spoken by the unerring magi,
and they were all sealed by the holy Virgin.

And what both had said was confirmed by the infant;

He left her womb unsullied after childbirth,
and showed their mind, like their steps,
unwearing after their coming.

For none of them had undergone toil,

As Avvakoum had not been wearing when he came to

Daniel. For He who appeared to the prophets was
the same Who appeared to the magi

a little Child, God before the ages.

21 When they had told all their story,

The magi took the gifts in their hands and

worshipped the Gift of gifts; the Myrrh of myrrh.

They brought Christ gold and myrrh and then incense
and cried, "Accept our triple gift,

as you do the Thrice Holy Hymn of the seraphim.

Do not reject them like those of Cain,

but embrace them like Abel's offering, through her

who gave You birth, and through whom You. have
been born for us,

a little Child, God before the ages."

22 When the blameless Virgin saw the magi bringing
new and radiant gifts and worshipping,

the star showing Him, the shepherds praising Him,

she implored the Maker and creator of all these,

saying,

"Accept, My Child, a trinity of gifts,

Grant her who gave You birth three requests.

I pray to You for the seasons

and for the fruits of the earth and for those who dwell
on it.

Be reconciled to all, because through me You have
been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

23 "For I am not simply Your mother, compassionate
Saviour;

it is not in vain that I suckle the giver of milk;
but for the sake of all I implore You.

You have made me the mouth and the boast of all my
race.,

and Your world has me

as a mighty protection, a wall and a buttress.

They look to me, those who were cast out
of the Paradise of pleasure, for I bring them back.

May all things understand that, through me, you have
been born

a little Child, God before the ages.

24 "Save the world, O Saviour. For this You have
come.

Set Your whole universe aright. For this You have
shone on me and on the magi and on all creation.

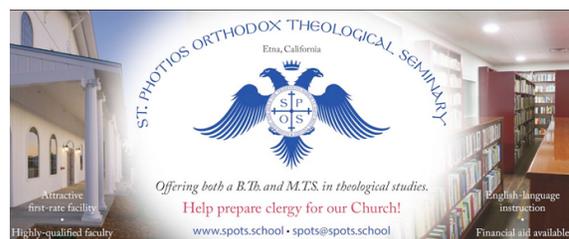
For see, the magi, to whom You have shown the light
of your face,

Fall down before You and offer gifts,
useful, fair, and eagerly sought.

For I have no need of them, since I am about
to go to Egypt and to flee with You and for You,

My Guide, my Son, my Maker, my Redeemer,

a little Child, God before the ages." ❖ ❖ ❖



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