

The Good Word

PUBLISHED WITH THE BLESSING OF BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND



THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND FOR CIRCUMCISION

Genesis 17:1 (KJV) And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, *I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. 8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. 9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; **Every man child among you shall be circumcised. 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. 12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations,** he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. **14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.**

Deuteronomy 10:10 And I stayed in the mount, according to the first time, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also, and the LORD would not destroy thee. 11 And the LORD said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give unto them.

12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, 13 To keep the commandments of

the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?

14 Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. 15 Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.

16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. 17 For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: 18 He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. 19 Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

20 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. 21 He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.

22 Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude.

JOSHUA 5:1 And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.

2 At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, **Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time.** 3 And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. 4 And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt.

5 Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. 6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that He would not shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that He would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. 7 And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way. 8 And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole.

9 And the LORD said unto Joshua, *This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal [i.e., rolling] unto this day.*

Jeremiah 4:1 *If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove. 2 And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.*

3 *For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*



“THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION”

BY ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA (c. AD 376-444)

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived In the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the LORD; (as is written in the law of the LORD;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the LORD, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons (Luke 2: 21-24).




Very numerous indeed is the assembly, and earnest the hearer -- for we see the Church full -- but the teacher is but poor. He nevertheless Who giveth to man a mouth and tongue, will further supply us with good ideas. For He somewhere says Himself, *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it (Psalm 80:9).* Since, therefore, ye have all come together eagerly on the occasion of this joyous festival of our LORD, let us with cheerful torches brightly celebrate the feast, and apply ourselves to the consideration of what was divinely fulfilled, as it were, this day, gathering for ourselves from every quarter whatsoever may confirm us in faith and piety.

But recently we saw the Emmanuel lying as a babe in the manger, and wrapped in human fashion in swaddling bands, but extolled as God in hymns by the host of the holy angels. For they proclaimed to the shepherds His birth, God the Father having granted to the inhabitants of heaven as a special privilege to be the first to preach Him. And today too we have seen Him obedient to the laws of Moses, or rather we have seen Him Who as God is the Legislator, subject to His own decrees. And the reason of this the most wise Paul teaches us, saying, *When we were babes we were enslaved under the elements of the world; but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem them that were under the law (Gal. 4:3).* Christ, therefore, ransomed from the curse of the law those who being subject to it had been unable to keep its enactments. And in what way did He ransom them? By fulfilling it. And to put it in another way: in order that He might expiate the guilt of Adam's transgression. He showed Himself obedient and submissive in every respect to God the Father in our stead; for it is written *That as through the disobedience of the One man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the One, the many shall be made just (Rom. 5:19).* He therefore yielded His neck to the law in company with us, because the plan of salvation so required; for it became Him to fulfill all righteousness. For having assumed the form of a slave, as being now enrolled by reason of His human nature among those subject to the yoke, He once even paid the half shekel to the collectors of the tribute, although by nature free, and as the Son not liable to pay the tax. Then therefore, thou seest Him keeping the law, be not offended; nor place the free-born among the slaves, but reflect rather upon the profoundness of the plan of salvation.

Upon the arrival, therefore, of the eighth day, on which it was customary for the circumcision in the flesh to be performed according to the enactment of the law. He receives His Name, even Jesus; which by interpretation signifies, the Salvation of the people. For so had God the Father willed that His Son should be named, when born in the flesh, and not of one only, but of many, or rather of every nations, and of the whole world. He received His name, therefore, on the same occasion on which He was circumcised.

But come and let us again search and see, what is the riddle, and to what mysteries, the occurrence directs us. The blessed Paul has said, *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing (1 Cor. 7:19).* To this it is probable that some may object. Did the God of all



then command by the all-wise Moses a thing of no account to be observed, with a punishment decreed against those that transgressed it? Yes, I say: for as far as regards the nature of the thing, of that, I mean, which is done in the flesh, it is absolutely nothing, but it is pregnant with the graceful type of a mystery, or rather contains the hidden manifestation of the truth. For on the eighth day Christ arose from the dead, and gave us the spiritual circumcision. For He commanded the holy Apostles: *Having gone, make ye disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19)*. And we affirm that the spiritual circumcision takes place chiefly in the season of holy baptism, when also Christ makes us partakers of the Holy Spirit. And this again, that Jesus of old [Jesus son of Navi/Joshua son of Nun], who was captain after Moses, was a type. For he first of all led the children of Israel across the Jordan; and then having halted them, immediately circumcised them with knives of stone. So when we have crossed the Jordan, Christ circumcises us with the power of the Holy Spirit, not purifying the flesh, but rather cutting off the defilement that is in our souls.


On the eighth day, therefore Christ is circumcised, and receives, as I said, His Name; for then, even then, were we saved by Him and through Him, in Whom, it saith, *ye were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands in the putting off of the fleshly body, [but] with Christ's circumcision, having been buried together with Him in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with Him (Col. 2:11)*. His death, therefore, was for our sakes, as were also His resurrection and His circumcision. For He died, that we who have died together with Him in His dying unto sin, may no longer live unto sin; for which reason it is said, *If we have died together with him, we shall also live together with him (II Tim. 2:11)*. And He is said to have died unto sin, not because He had sinned, *for He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth (I Peter 2:22)*, but because of our sin. Therefore, just as we died together with Him when He died, so shall we also rise together with Him.

Again, when the Son was present among us, though by nature God and the Lord of all, He does not on that account despise our measure, but along with us is subject to the same law, although as God He was Himself the legislator. Like the Jews, He is circumcised when eight days old, to prove His descent from their stock, that they many not deny Him. For Christ was expected of the seed of David, and offered them the proof of His relationship. But if even when

He was circumcised they said, *As for This man, we know not whence He is (John 9:28)*; there would have been a show of reason in their denial, had He not been circumcised in the flesh, and kept the law.

But after His circumcision, the rite was done away by the introduction of that which had been signified by it, even baptism; for which reason we are no longer circumcised. For circumcision seems to me to have effected three different ends: in the first place, it separated the posterity of Abraham by a sort of sign and seal, and distinguished them from all other nations. In the second, it prefigured in itself the grace and efficacy of Divine Baptism; for as in old time, he that was circumcised was reckoned among the people of God by that seal, is enrolled into God's adopted family. And, thirdly, it is the symbol of the faithful when established in grace, who cut away and mortify the tumultuous rising of carnal pleasures and passions by the sharp surgery of faith, and by ascetic labors, not cutting the body, but purifying the heart, and being circumcised in the spirit, and not in letter; whose praise, as the divine Paul testifies (*cf. Rom. 2:29*), needs not the sentence of any human tribunal, but depends upon the decree from above.

After His circumcision, she [the Theotokos] next waits for the time of her purification; and when the days were fulfilled, and the fortieth was the full time, God the Word, Who sitteth by the Father's side, is carried up to Jerusalem, and brought into the Father's presence in human nature like unto us, and by the shadow of the law is numbered among the firstborn. For even before the Incarnation the firstborn were holy, and consecrated to God, being sacrificed to Him according to the law. O! How great and wonderful is the plan of salvation. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! (Rom. 11:33)*. He who is in the bosom of the Father, the Son Who shares His throne, and is coeternal with Him; by Whom all things are divinely brought into existence, submitted nevertheless to the measure of human nature, and even offered a sacrifice to His own Father, although adored by all, and glorified with Him. And what did He offer: As the firstborn and a male a pair of turtle[dove]s, or two young doves, according to what the law prescribed. But what does the turtle signify? and what, too, the other, the dove? Come then, and let us examine this. The one, then, is the most noisy of the birds of the field; but the other is mild and gentle. And such did the Savior of all become towards us, showing the world, and filling His own vineyard, even us who believe in Him, with the sweet sound of His voice. For it is



written in the Song of Songs, *The voice of the turtle has been heard in our land* (Cant. 2:12). For Christ has spoken to us the divine message of the Gospel, which is for the salvation of the whole world.

Turtles, therefore, and doves were offered, when He presented himself unto the Lord, and there might one see simultaneously meeting together the truth and the types. And Christ offered Himself for a savor of a sweet smell, that He might offer us by and in Himself unto God the Father, and so do away with His enmity towards us by reason of Adam's transgression, and bring to nought sin that had tyrannized over us all. For we are they who long ago were crying, *Look upon me and pity me* (Psalm 24:16).¹



ON THE MEETING OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE AND THE PURIFICATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY ON FEB 2

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND FOR PURIFICATION

Leviticus 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 *Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.* 3 *And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.* 4 *And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.*

5 *But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days.*

6 *And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: 7 Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female.*

8 *And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle[dove]s, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.*



COMMENTARY ON THE LEVITICAL ASPECTS OF THE PRESENTATION

BY ALFRED EDERSHEIM (1825-1889), A JEWISH CONVERT TO HETERODOX CHRISTIANITY AND HEBRAIC SCHOLAR

... Thus it was ... [that the Theotokos] as a Jewish woman and mother, [had to] fulfill all the requirements of the Law, [for] herself and her child ...

1. St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, *Homily 3: The Feast of Circumcision*, (trs. R. Payne Smith), *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Studion Press, USA, 1983, pp. 55-58.

The Rabbinic law fixes this at forty-one days after the birth of a son, and eighty-one after that of a daughter ...

For this twofold purpose the Holy Family went up to the Temple, when the prescribed days were completed. The ceremony at the redemption of a firstborn son ... consisted of the formal presentation of the child to the priest, accompanied by two short benedictions -- the one for the law of redemption, the other for the gift of a firstborn son, after which the redemption money was paid.


As regards the rite at the purification of the mother, the scantiness of information has led to serious misstatement. Any comparison with our modern *churching* of women is inapplicable, since the latter consists of thanksgiving, and the former primarily of a sin-offering for the Levitical defilement symbolically attaching to the beginning of life, and a burnt offering, that marked the restoration of communion with God ... The service simply consisted of the statutory sacrifice. ... The sin-offering was, in all cases a turtle-dove or a young pigeon. But, while the more wealthy brought a lamb for a burnt-offering, the poor might substitute for it a turtle-dove, or a young pigeon ... The substitution of the latter for a young lamb was expressly designated *the poor's offering* ...

In the Court of the Women there were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests for pecuniary contributions, called *trumpets*. Into the third of these they who brought the poor's offering, like the Virgin-Mother, were to drop the price of the sacrifices which were needed for their purification. ... At a certain time in the day this third chest was opened, and half of its contents applied to burnt, the other half to sin-offerings. Thus sacrifices were provided for a corresponding number of those who were to be purified, without either shaming the poor, needlessly disclosing the character of impurity, or causing unnecessary bustle and work.

We can now, in imagination, follow the Virgin-Mother in the Temple ... She had entered the Court of the Women, probably by the Gate of the Women, on the north side, and deposited the price of her sacrifices in Trumpet No. 3, which was close to the raised dais or gallery where the women worshipped, apart from the men. And now the sound of the [trumpets], which announced throughout the whole Temple buildings that the incense was about to be kindled on the Golden Altar, summoned those who were to be purified. The chief of the ministrant lay-representatives of Israel on duty (the so-called *station men*) arranged those, who presented themselves before the Lord as offerers of special sacrifices, within the wickets on either side of the great Nicanor Gate, at the top of the fifteen steps which led up from the Court of the Women to that of Israel ... From where they stood they could see it all, share in it, rejoice in it ...

The woman who had given birth to a child was Levitically unclean for forty or for eighty days, according as she had become the mother of a son or daughter. After that she was to offer for her purification a lamb for a burnt-[offering], and a turtledove, or young pigeon, for a sin-offering; in case of poverty, altogether only two turtle-doves or two young pigeons. We remember that the mother of Jesus availed herself of that provision for the poor, when at the same time she presented in the Temple the Royal Babe, her firstborn son.

On bringing her offering, she would enter the Temple through *the gate of the first-born*, and stand in waiting at the Gate of Nicanor, from the time that the incense was kindled



on the golden altar. Behind her, in the Court of the Women, was the crowd of worshippers, while she herself, at the top of the Levites' steps, which led up to the great court, would witness all that passed in the sanctuary.

At last one of the officiating priests would come to her at the gate of Nicanor, and take from her hand the *poor offering*, which she had bought. The morning sacrifice was ended; and but few would linger behind while the offering for her purification was actually made. She who brought it mingled prayer and thanksgiving with the service. And now the priest once more approached her, and sprinkling her with the sacrificial blood, declared her cleansed. Her *first-born* was next redeemed at the hand of the priest, with five shekels of silver; two benedictions being at the same time pronounced, one for the happy event which had enriched the family with a first-born, the other for the law of redemption. And when, with grateful heart, and solemnized in spirit she descended those fifteen steps where the Levites were wont to sing the *Hallel*², a sudden light of heavenly joy filled the heart of one who had long been in waiting, *for the consolation of Israel* [St. Symeon].³



COMMENTARY ON THE PURIFICATION

BY ARCHBISHOP AVERKY (TAUSHEV), 1906-1976

According to the Law of Moses, a woman who gave birth to a firstborn male was considered unclean for forty days (if the firstborn was a girl, the period of uncleanness was eighty days). On the fortieth day, she needed to bring a whole-burnt offering to the temple -- a year old lamb (a sacrifice for sins) and a young dove or pigeon. In case of poverty, two doves or pigeons were acceptable. Fulfilling the Mosaic Law concerning purification, the most holy Virgin Mary and Joseph also brought the Child to Jerusalem, to dedicate the Child as a firstborn to God through the ritual payment of five shekels. This law was kept as a remembrance of the fact that on the night before Israel's flight from Egypt, the angel of the Lord destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, and in recompense every firstborn male child needed to be dedicated to the temple. With time, when service in the temple was allotted only to the tribe of Levi, firstborns of all tribes were allowed to "pay out" their temple service with five shekels of silver (Numbers 18:16). It is clear from the Gospel account that the most holy Virgin Mary and her betrothed brought the sacrifice of the poor -- two doves

Why did the Lord, whose conception and birth was

2. *Hallel* (Hebrew: הלל, 'Praise') is a Jewish prayer, a verbatim recitation from Psalms 113–118 [Masoretic Text, 112-117 Septuagint] which is recited by observant Jews on Jewish holidays as an act of praise and thanksgiving.

3. Alfred Edersheim, *Chapter VII: The Purification of the Virgin and the Presentation in the Temple, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Bk. I, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1986, pp. 191-201.

free of sin, have to be subjected to circumcision? Why did His most pure Mother have to be purified?

First, this was done in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15) and to show an example of complete obedience to God's Law. Second, it was necessary for the future service of the Messiah in the eyes of His people. An uncircumcised man could not be a member of God's chosen people; thus, He could not enter either the temple or synagogues; uncircumcised, He would have no influence over the people, nor be acknowledged as the Messiah. The same is true for His Mother. If She were not ritually purified, in the eyes of the priests and the people, She would not be a true Israelite. The mystery of the immaculate conception and birth was known to no one except the Virgin Mary Herself and Joseph, and so everything required by the law needed to be fulfilled to the letter.⁴




COMMENTARY ON THE PURIFICATION

BY BLESSED THEOPHYLACT, ARCHBISHOP OF OCHRID AND BULGARIA, (C. AD 1050 - C. 1108)

Commandments were given in the law, and anyone who transgressed those commandments was under condemnation. The LORD therefore is circumcised, so that by having fulfilled the law even in this, and by omitting nothing which the law commanded, He might remove the condemnation from us. Let them here be put to shame who say that the LORD only seemed to take flesh. How could He have been circumcised if He had taken flesh in appearance only? Furthermore, it is foolish to question where that portion of His flesh might be that was circumcised. We ought not to ask questions concerning those things on which Scripture is silent, for those things are not for our benefit. But it could be said that when the portion of His flesh was cut away, it touched the earth and made it holy, as did the blood and water which flowed from his side. It may be that the LORD kept this portion of His flesh unharmed, and at the Resurrection He arose, taking back this portion, so that He would be perfect in every respect, even this. For we too at the general resurrection will receive back our bodies perfected. Take note that the LORD was not conceived at the very moment that the angel said, *Behold thou shalt conceive a son*. Instead, the LORD was conceived afterwards, when He so wished. See what the Evangelist says here, *which was so named by the angel before He was conceived in the*

4. Archbishop Averky (Taushev), , *The Coming into the World of the Lord Jesus Christ, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, Volume I: The Four Gospels*, Holy Trinity Seminary Press, Jordanville, NY, 2015, pp.15-16.



womb. The very words themselves show that this is so. The angel did not say, “Behold, thou art conceiving,” but rather, *Behold, thou shalt conceive*. From this it is understood that the LORD was conceived at that hour, not indeed at the very moment in which the angel spoke, but perhaps when he had completed his words. But we do not say this as dogma. *And when the days of their purification were fulfilled according to the law of Moses*. The Evangelist spoke well when he said, *according to the Law of Moses*. In truth the Virgin had no need to await the days of her purification, that is, the forty days after the time that she gave birth to a male child. For it says in the law, *Whatsoever woman shall have received seed and born a male child*.⁵ But the Virgin did not receive seed, but gave birth by the Holy Spirit. Therefore there was no necessity for her to fulfill the law, yet she wanted to do so, and she went up to the temple. Why is it that the law says that if a woman shall receive seed and bear a male child she shall be unclean for seven days, but if she bears a female child she shall be unclean twice seven days?⁶ This is so, because if she bears a male child, she has brought another Adam into the world. But if she bears a female child, the law considered that she has given birth to a second Eve, the weak and deceived vessel which shattered when cracked, and who was the first of mankind to disobey, after whom we all follow. The law said, *Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the LORD*. Only with Christ did this literally occur. He Himself opened the womb of the Virgin at His birth, while all other wombs which have borne a child have been first opened by a man. The law commanded that a pair of turtledoves be offered, to show that the child is the offspring of a chaste union. For it is said that the turtledove is a chaste animal, so much so that when one loses its mate, it does not mate a second time. But if one does not have turtledoves, two young pigeons are to be offered, as a prayer that the young boy, in his lifetime, would have many children, for the pigeon is an animal that has many offspring.⁷



COMMENTARY ON THE PURIFICATION

BY ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA (C. AD 376-444)

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Symeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the

Holy Spirit was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ ["Anointed One"/"Messiah"]. And he came by the Spirit into the Temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law, then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God and said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all nations; the Gentile's light for revelation, and a glory of Thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. And Symeon blessed them and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall go through thy own soul also;) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:25-35).

The Prophet Esaias says, *Beautiful are the feet of them that bring good tidings of good (Isaiah 32:7)*; and what could there be so sweet to learn as that God has saved the world by the mediation of the Son, in that He was made like unto us? For it is written, *that there is one God, and one Mediator of God and men, the Man Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself a ransom for us (1 Timothy 2:5)*. For of His own accord He descended to our poverty, that He might make us rich by our gaining what is His. Behold Him, therefore, as one in our estate presented unto the Father, and obedient to the shadows of the law, offering sacrifice, moreover, according to what was customary, true though it be that these things were done by the instrumentality of His mother according to the flesh. Was He then unrecognized by all at Jerusalem, and known to none dwelling there? How could this be the case? For God the Father had before proclaimed by the holy prophets, that in due season the Son would be manifested to save them that were lost, and to give light to them that were in darkness. By one [also] of the holy prophets He said, *My righteousness approacheth quickly, and My mercy to be revealed, and My salvation shall burn as a torch (Isaiah 62:1)*. But the mercy and righteousness is Christ, for through Him have we obtained mercy and righteousness, having washed away our filthy vileness by faith that is in Him. And what a torch going before them is to those in night and darkness, this has Christ become for those who are in mental gloom and darkness, implanting in them the divine light. For this reason also the blessed prophets prayed to be made partakers of His great grace, saying; *Show us Thy*

5. Leviticus 12:2

6. Leviticus 12:2-5

7. Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria, *The Explanaton by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke*, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 33-34.

mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation (Psalm 84:7).

Christ therefore, was carried into the temple, being yet a little child at the breast; and the blessed Symeon being endowed with the grace of prophecy, takes him in his arms, and filled with the highest joy, blessed God, and said, *Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, Which Thou has prepared before the face of all the nations, the Gentile's light for revelation, and a glory of Thy people Israel* (Luke 2:29-30). For the mystery of Christ had been prepared even before the very foundation of the world, but was manifested in the last ages of time, and became a light for those who in



darkness and error had fallen under the devil's hand. These were they *who served the creation instead of the Creator* (Romans 1:25). Worshipping moreover the dragon, the author of evil, and the impure throng of devils, to whom they attach the honor due unto God; yet were they called by God the Father to the acknowledgment of the Son Who is the true light. Of them in sooth He said by the voice of [Zechariah], *I will make signs unto them, and receive them, because I will ransom them, and they shall be multiplied, as they were many, and I will sow them among the nations, and they who are afar off shall remember Me* (Zechariah

10:8-9). For very many were they that were astray, but were called through Christ; and again they are many as they were before; for they have been received and ransomed, having obtained as the token of peace from God the Father, the adoption into His family and the grace that is by faith in Jesus Christ. And the divine disciples were sown widely among the nations and what is the consequence? Those who in disposition were far from God, have been made near. To whom also the divine Paul sends an epistle, saying, *Now ye who some time were afar off have been made near in the blood of Christ* (Ephesians 2:13). And having been brought near, they make Christ their glorying; for again, God the Father has said of them, *And I will strengthen them in the Lord their God, and in His Name shall they glory, saith the Lord* (Zechariah 10:12). This also the blessed Psalmist teaches, speaking as it were unto Christ the Savior of all, and saying, *Lord, they shall walk in the light of Thy countenance, and in Thy Name shall they exult all the day, and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted, for Thou art the glorying of their strength* (Psalm 88:15). And we shall find also the prophet Jeremiah calling out unto God, *Lord, my strength and my refuge in the day of my evils, to Thee shall the heathen come from the ends of the earth, and say, Our father took unto themselves false idols, in which there is no help* (Jeremiah 16:19).

Christ, therefore, became the Gentiles' light for revelation: but also for the glory of Israel. For even granting that some of them proved insolent, and disobedient, and with minds void of understanding, yet is there a remnant saved, and admitted unto glory through Christ. And the first-fruits of these were the divine disciples, the brightness of whose renown lightens the whole world.

And in another sense, Christ is the glory of Israel, for He came of them according to the flesh, though He be *God over all, and blessed for evermore. Amen* (Romans 9:5).

For Symeon also blesseth the holy Virgin as the handmaid of the divine counsel, and the instrument of the birth that submitted not itself to the laws of human nature. But being a virgin she brought forth, and that not by man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit having come upon her.

And what does the prophet Symeon say of Christ? *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against* (Luke 2:34). For the Emmanuel is set by God the Father for the foundations of Sion, *being a stone elect, chief of the corner, and honorable* (1 Peter 2:6).

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Those then that trusted in Him were not ashamed; but those who were unbelieving and ignorant, and unable to perceive the mystery regarding Him, fell, and were broken in pieces. For God the Father again has somewhere said, *Behold I lay in Sion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and He that believeth on It shall not be ashamed; but on whomsoever It shall fall, it will winnow him (Isaiah 28:16/Luke 20:18)*. But the prophet bade the Israelites be secure, saying *Sanctify the Lord Himself, and He shall be thy fear: and if thou trust upon Him, He shall be thy sanctification, nor shall ye strike against Him as on a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense (Isaiah 8:13)*. Because, however, Israel did not sanctify the Emmanuel Who is Lord and God, nor was willing to trust in Him, having stumbled as upon a stone because of unbelief, it was broken in pieces and fell. But many rose again, those, namely, who embraced faith in Him. For they changed from a legal to a spiritual service; from having in them a slavish spirit, they were enriched with That Spirit Which maketh free, even the Holy Spirit; they were made partakers of the divine nature (cf. II Peter 1:4); they were counted worthy of the adoption of sons; and live in hope of gaining the city that is above, even the citizenship, to wit, the kingdom of heaven.

And by the sign that is spoken against, he means the precious Cross; for as the most wise Paul writes, *to the Jews it is a stumbling block, and foolishness to the heathen (1 Corinthians 1:23)*. And again, *To them that are perishing it is foolishness: but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God unto salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18)*. The sign, therefore, is spoken against, if to those that perish it seem to be folly, while to those who acknowledge its power it is salvation and

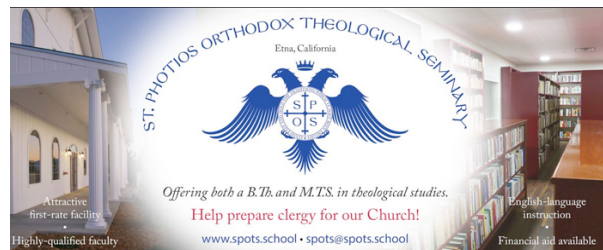
life.

And Symeon further said to the holy Virgin, *Yea, a sword shall go through thy own soul also (Luke 2:35)*, meaning by the sword the pain which she suffered for Christ, in seeing Him Whom she brought forth crucified; and not knowing at all that He would be more mighty than death, and rise again from the grave. Nor mayest thou wonder that the Virgin knew this not, when we shall find even the holy Apostles themselves with little faith thereupon; for verily the blessed Thomas, had he not thrust his hands into His side after the resurrection and felt also the prints of the nails, would have disbelieved the other disciples telling him that Christ was risen, and had showed Himself unto them.

The very wise Evangelist, therefore, for our benefit teaches us all things whatsoever the Son, when He was made flesh and consented to bear our poverty, endured for our sakes and in our behalf, that so we may glorify Him as our Redeemer, as our Lord, as our Savior, and our God; by Whom and with Whom to God the Father and the Holy Spirit be the glory and the power unto ages of ages. Amen.⁸



NEXT ISSUE: EARLY CHRISTIAN HYMNS AND THE BIBLICAL ODES



8. St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, *Homily 4: [Untitled]*, pp. 59-62.

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