

The Gospel According to St. Luke 2:1-20

- 1 And it came to pass that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled.**
- 2 This enrolling was first made by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria.**
- 3 And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city.**
- 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David.**
- 5 To be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child.**
- 6 And it came to pass that when they were there, her days were accomplished that she should be delivered.**
- 7 And she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn.**
- 8 And there were in the same country shepherds watching and keeping the night watches over their flock.**
- 9 And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them and the brightness of God shone round about them: and they feared with a great fear.**
- 10 And the angel said to them: Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people:**
- 11 For, this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.**
- 12 And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.**
- 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying:**
- 14 Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will.**
- 15 And it came to pass, after the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another: Let us go over to Bethlehem and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath shewed to us.**
- 16 And they came with haste: and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.**
- 17 And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child.**
- 18 And all that heard wondered: and at those things that were told them by the shepherds.**
- 19 But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.**
- 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.**

Hymns on the Nativity
St. Ephraem (Ephraim), d. 373

Hymn IV (excerpt)

...Joseph caressed the Son as a Babe; he ministered to Him as God. He rejoiced in Him as in the Good One, and he was awe-struck at Him as the Just One, greatly bewildered.

"Who hath given me the Son of the Most High to be a Son to me? I was jealous of Thy Mother, and I thought to put her away, and I knew not that in her womb was hidden a mighty treasure, that should suddenly enrich my poor estate. David the king sprang of my race, and wore the crown: and I have come to a very low estate, who instead of a king am a carpenter. Yet a crown hath come to me, for in my bosom is the Lord of crowns!"

With rival words Mary burned, yea she lulled Him, saying, Who hath given me, the barren, that I should conceive and bring forth this One, that is manifold; a little One, that is great; for that He is wholly with me, and wholly everywhere?

The day that Gabriel came in unto my low estate, he made me free instead of a handmaid, of a sudden: for I was the handmaid of Thy Divine Nature, and am also the Mother of Thy human Nature, O Lord and Son! Of a sudden the handmaid became the King's daughter in Thee, Thou Son of the King. Lo, the meanest in the house of David, by reason of Thee, Thou Son of David, lo, a daughter of earth hath attained unto Heaven by the Heavenly One!

How am I astonied that there is laid before me a Child, older than all things! His eye is gazing unceasingly upon Heaven. As for the stammering of His mouth, to my seeming it betokens, that with God its silence speaks. Who ever saw a Child the whole of Whom beholdeth every place? His look is like one that orders all creatures that are above and that are below! His visage is like that Commander that commandeth all.

How shall I open the fountain of milk to Thee, O Fountain? Or how shall I give nourishment to Thee that nourishest all from Thy Table? How shall I bring to swaddling clothes One wrapped round with rays of glory?

My mouth knows not how I shall call Thee, O Thou Child of the Living One: for to venture to call Thee as the Child of Joseph, I tremble, since Thou art not his seed: and I am fearful of denying the name of him to whom they have betrothed me. While Thou art the Son of One, then should I be calling Thee the Son of many. For ten thousand names would not suffice Thee, since Thou art the Son of God and also the Son of man, yea, David's Son and Mary's Lord.

Who hath made the Lord of mouths to be without a mouth? For my pure conception of Thee wicked men have slandered me. Be, O Thou Holy One, a Speaker for Thy Mother. Show a miracle that they may be persuaded, from Whom it is that I conceived Thee!

For Thy sake too I am hated, Thou Lover of all. Lo! I am persecuted who have conceived and brought forth One House of refuge for men. Adam will rejoice, for Thou art the Key of Paradise.

Lo, the sea raged against Thy mother as against Jonah. Lo, Herod, that raging wave, sought to drown the Lord of the seas. Whither I shall flee Thou shalt teach me, O Lord of Thy Mother.

With Thee I will flee, that I may gain in Thee Life in every place. The prison with Thee is no prison, for in Thee man goes up unto Heaven: the grave with Thee is no grave, for Thou art the Resurrection!...

Hymn V

At the birth of the Son, there was a great shouting in Bethlehem; for the Angels came down, and gave praise there. Their voices were a great thunder: at that voice of praise the silent ones came, and gave praise to the Son.

Blessed be that Babe in whom Eve and Adam were restored to youth! The shepherds also came laden with the best gifts of their flock: sweet milk, clean flesh, befitting praise! They put a difference, and gave Joseph the flesh, Mary the milk, and the Son the praise! They brought and presented a suckling lamb to the Paschal Lamb, a first-born to the First-born, a sacrifice to the Sacrifice, a lamb of time to the Lamb of Truth. Fair sight to see the lamb offered to The Lamb!

The lamb bleated as it was offered before the First-born. It praised the Lamb, that had come to set free the flocks and the oxen from sacrifices: yea that Paschal Lamb, Who handed down and brought in the Passover of the Son.

The shepherds came near and worshipped Him with their staves. They saluted Him with peace, prophesying the while, "Peace, O Prince of the Shepherds." The rod of Moses praised Thy Rod, O Shepherd of all; for Thee Moses praises, although his lambs have become wolves, and his flocks as it were dragons, and his sheep ranged beasts. In the fearful wilderness his flocks became furious, and attacked him. Thee then the Shepherds praise, because Thou hast reconciled the wolves and the lambs within the fold; O Babe, that art older than Noah and younger than Noah, that reconciled all within the ark amid the billows!

David Thy father for a lamb's sake slaughtered a lion. Thou, O Son of David, hast killed the unseen wolf that murdered Adam, the simple lamb who fed and bleated in Paradise.

At that voice of praise, brides were moved to hallow themselves, and virgins to be chaste, and even young girls became grave: they advanced and came in multitudes, and worshipped the Son.

Aged women of the city of David came to the daughter of David; they gave thanks and said, "Blessed be our country, whose streets are lightened with the rays of Jesse! Today is the throne of David established by Thee, O Son of David."

The old men cried, "Blessed be that Son Who restored Adam to youth, Who was vexed to see that he was old and worn out, and that the serpent who had killed him, had changed his skin and had gotten himself away. Blessed be the Babe in Whom Adam and Eve were restored to youth."

The chaste women said, O Blessed Fruit, bless the fruit of our wombs; to Thee may they be given as first-born. They waxed fervent and prophesied concerning their children, who, when they were killed for Him, were cut off, as it were first-fruits.

The barren also fondled Him, and carried Him; they rejoiced and said, Blessed Fruit born without marriage, bless the wombs of us that are married; have mercy on our barrenness, Thou wonderful Child of Virginitly!

Hymn XI (The Virgin Mother to her child)

I Shall not be jealous, my Son, that Thou art with me, and also with all men. Be Thou God to him that confesses Thee, and be thou Lord to him that serves Thee, and be Brother to him that loves Thee, that Thou mayest gain all!

When Thou didst dwell in me, Thou didst also dwell out of me, and when I brought Thee forth openly, Thy hidden might was not removed from me. Thou art within me, and Thou art without me, O Thou that makest Thy Mother amazed.

For when I see that outward form of Thine before mine eyes, the hidden Form is shadowed forth "in my mind," O holy One. In Thy visible form I see Adam, and in Thy hidden form I see Thy Father, who is joined with Thee.

Hast Thou then shown me alone Thy Beauty in two Forms? Let Bread shadow forth Thee, and also the mind; dwell also in Bread and in the eaters thereof. In secret, and openly too, may Thy Church see Thee, as well as Thy Mother.

He that hates Thy Bread is like unto him that hates Thy Body. He that is far off that desires Thy Bread, and he that is near that loves Thy Image, are alike. In the Bread and in the Body, the first and also the last have seen Thee. Yet Thy visible Bread is far more precious than Thy Body; for Thy Body even unbelievers have seen, but they have not seen Thy living Bread. They that were far off rejoiced! their portion utterly scorns that of those that are near.

Lo! Thy Image is shadowed forth in the blood of the grapes on the Bread; and it is shadowed forth on the heart with the finger of love, with the colors of faith. Blessed be He that by the Image of His Truth caused the graven images to pass away.

Thou art not so the Son of Man that I should sing unto Thee a common lullaby; for Thy Conception is new, and Thy Birth marvellous. Without the Spirit who shall sing to Thee? A new muttering of prophecy is hot within me.

How shall I call Thee a stranger to us, Who art from us? Should I call Thee Son? Should I call Thee Brother? Husband should I call Thee? Lord should I call Thee, O Child that didst give Thy Mother a second birth from the waters? For I am Thy sister, of the house of David the father of us Both. Again, I am Thy Mother because of Thy Conception, and Thy Bride am I because of Thy sanctification, Thy handmaid and Thy daughter, from the Blood and Water wherewith Thou hast purchased me and baptised me.

The Son of the Most High came and dwelt in me, and I became His Mother; and as by a second birth I brought Him forth so did He bring me forth by the second birth, because He put His Mother's garments on, she clothed her body with His glory.

Tamar, who was of the house of David, Amnon put to shame; and virginity fell and perished from them both. My pearl is not lost: in Thy treasury it is stored, because Thou hast put it on. The scent of her brother-in-law slunk from Tamar, whose perfume she had stolen. As for Joseph's Bride, not even his breath exhaled from her garments, since she conceived Cinnamon. A wall of fire was Thy Conception unto me, O holy Son.

The little flower was faint, because the smell of the Lily of Glory was great. The Treasure-house of spices stood in no need of flower or its smells! Flesh stood aloof because it perceived in the womb a Conception from the Spirit.

The woman ministers before the man, because he is her head. Joseph rose to minister before his Lord, Who was in Mary. The priest ministered before Thy

ark by reason of Thy holiness. Moses carried the tables of stone which the Lord wrote, and Joseph bare about the pure Tablet in whom the Son of the Creator was dwelling. The tables had ceased, because the world was filled with Thy doctrine.

Hymn XII (excerpt)

The Babe that I carry carries me, saith Mary, and He has lowered His wings, and taken and placed me between His pinions, and mounted into the air; and a promise has been given me that height and depth shall be my Son's...