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ON CHRISTMAS

THIS IS THE FESTIVAL of the virgin birth! Our address must be exalted therefore in accordance with the greatness of the feast, and enter into the mystery, as far as this is accessible and permissible, and time allows, that something of its inner power might be revealed even to us. Please strive, brethren, to lift up your minds as well, that they may better perceive the light of divine knowledge, as though brightly illumined by a holy star. For today I see equality of honour between heaven and earth, and a way up for all those below to things above, matching the condescension of those on high. However great the heaven of heavens may be, or the upper waters which form a roof over the celestial regions, or any heavenly place, state or order, they are no more marvellous or honourable than the cave, the manger, the water sprinkled on the infant and His swaddling clothes. For nothing done by God from the beginning of time was more beneficial to all or more divine than Christ's nativity, which we celebrate today.

The pre-eternal and uncircumscribed and almighty Word is now born according to the flesh, without home, without shelter, without dwelling, and placed as a babe in the manger, seen by men's eyes, touched by their hands, and wrapped in layers of swaddling bands. He is not a spiritual creature coming into being after previously not existing; nor flesh which is brought to birth but will soon

ON THE PRESENTATION

BEFORE CHRIST WE ALL SHARED the same ancestral curse and condemnation poured out on all of us from our single forefather, as if it had sprung from the root of the human race and was the common lot of our nature. Each person's individual action attracted either reproof or praise from God, but no one could do anything about the shared curse and condemnation, or the evil inheritance that had been passed down to him and through him would pass to his descendants.

But Christ came, setting human nature free and changing the common curse into a shared blessing. He took upon Himself our guilty nature from the most pure Virgin and united it, new and unmixed with the old seed, to His divine person. He rendered it guiltless and righteous, so that all His spiritual descendants would remain outside the ancestral curse and condemnation. How so? He shares His grace with each one of us as a person, and each receives forgiveness of his sins from Him. For He did not receive from us a human person, but assumed our human nature and renewed it by uniting it with His own person. His wish was to save us all completely and for our sake He bowed the heavens and came down. When by His deeds, words and sufferings He had pointed out all the ways of salvation, He went up to heaven again, drawing after Him those who trusted in Him. His aim was to grant perfect

ON EPIPHANY I

REPENTANCE IS THE BEGINNING, middle and end of the Christian way of life, so it is both sought and required before holy baptism, in holy baptism, and after holy baptism. We are asked to express our repentance in words at the time of our baptism, when we are questioned about our good conscience towards God, make a covenant with Him and promise to live a God-pleasing life that bears witness to our love for Him. For, having believed, we promise allegiance to Christ, who is good and surpasses all goodness, renouncing the evil and thoroughly depraved enemy, and we take it upon ourselves to hold with all our strength to God's commandments, which bring about what is good, and to abstain from every evil thought and deed. When asked, we reply, either in person or, as happens in the case of infants being baptized, through our godparents, concerning what we have believed, inwardly accepted and agreed to with our minds. And since, according to the apostle, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10), when we make this good confession with our mouth we receive salvation through the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5).

As it happens that most people are infants at the time of this divine washing and all that accompanies it, and do not recognize

ON EPIPHANY II

YESTERDAY WHEN I WAS IN CHURCH, celebrating with you as you kept the forefeast of the day of Lights, I spoke on such themes as the occasion demanded and said to your charity about Christian baptism, which we have been deemed worthy to receive, that it is both a recognition of God and a promise to God. On the one hand it is faith in, and acknowledgment of, the truth in God; on the other, a covenant and a promise, effected through holy symbols, that our deeds, words and behaviour will be pleasing to God. But we also went on to teach that if we do not put those undertakings into practice, those holy symbols and the verbal promises to God made through them and with them are not only of no benefit, but also rightly bring us under condemnation. Next we expounded the teaching of the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John to the crowds, which also deals with the same baptism. Because, as we have said, baptism is the recognition of God, and the Forerunner and Baptist of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ leads us to recognize Him through his own teaching, showing us that He is pre-eternal and Master of all, Judge of both the living and the dead, who has authority to bring those who are worthy into eternal dwellings, and cast the condemned into hell. And while John bears witness that Christ is

ON THE TRANSFIGURATION I

WE ARE FILLED WITH PRAISE AND WONDER when we see this magnificent work of God, the entire visible creation. The pagan Greek sages also extolled and admired it as they investigated it. But whereas we marvel at it to the glory of the Creator, they did so against His glory, for in their wretchedness they worshipped the creature rather than the Creator (*cf.* Rom. 1:25). In the same way, we elucidate the words of the prophets, apostles and fathers for the benefit of those who read them and in honour of the Spirit who spoke through them. The leaders of any given evil heresy also attempt to interpret their writings, but their purpose is to harm their followers and deny that truth which is in accordance with piety, using the words of the Spirit against the Spirit. The words of the gospel of grace are lofty and suitable for mature ears and minds, but these words too our God-bearing Fathers softened in their own mouths, making them appropriate for those of us who are less than perfect, just as mothers devoted to their children chew solid food and render it serviceable and easy to take for babies still at the breast. The moisture in their mothers' mouth is nourishment for the children, and the thoughts in the hearts of our God-bearing Fathers are suitable food for souls that listen and obey. The mouths of evil, disreputable men, however,