

**CHAPTER VII.  
ON THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY  
OF THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER:  
A SERMON OF OUR FATHER AMONG THE SAINTS, TARASIVS,  
ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE,  
ON OUR MOST HOLY LADY, THE MOTHER OF GOD,  
ON THE OCCASION WHEN SHE WAS INTRODUCED  
INTO THE TEMPLE.  
BLESS, FATHER.  
FIRST SERMON.**

Radiant and most glorious is the present holiday; it is the Entry of the Ever-virgin into the Temple which has inspired to hymnody the love of those who cherish the feasts. Today heaven and earth keep a common feast; for they both glorify their Maker, Who from all earthly creation chose this virginal maiden of God to be His dwelling-place. Today she who is a mystery foreordained before all ages, which was to appear in the latter days, is made ready as a dwelling most beautiful and glorious. Today she who was born of a promise to Joachim and Anne is brought by them as a precious gift to Him Who would afterwards be well-pleased to be born of her. Today the beginning of grace is led to the Temple at the age of three, and virgins accompany her with candles. Today she who is the liberation from the curse of barrenness and the gift of a blessing is led into the holy of holies. Today she who was announced by the prophets is led by the prophet and chief priest Zechariah into that unseen adytum, whither he himself reverently went but once a year, but wherein her nobility would sit day and night unhindered. Who will not marvel at this most glorious wonder? Who will not be amazed to see Mary immaculate sitting in the sanctuary, which was inaccessible to the [ordinary] priests? Behold, the inception of the Lord's union with us. Behold, the design for unity between men and angels. Behold, the sign of our being recalled. Behold, the abolition of the thorny way of life [which resulted] from our original condemnation, when it was said: Cursed is the ground in thy labours; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread.<sup>1</sup> Behold, a definite

disavowal of the words: I will greatly multiply thy pains and thy groanings; in pain thou shalt bring forth children.<sup>2</sup> Behold, let us, the faithful, celebrate an all-honourable holiday, a splendid festival, scintillant with divine radiance, illuminated by noetic brightness, one which pours upon the world the divine light of the knowledge of God, which teaches [us] of One Almighty Godhead in Three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus, now that we have stated our subject, taking as its beginning the introduction of the Virgin to the Temple, let us commence; having pointed out the fulfillment of the Law, let us speak of the growth of grace and the gift of fruit. She who is the holy of holies, the undefiled bridal chamber of the Word, the flower of virginity, the ark of holiness, the holy mountain, the tabernacle containing God, the unburnt bush, the fiery chariot of God, the pure dove, the vessel so spacious as to hold the divine Word, the divinely-luminous cloud, the beautifully- adorned queen descended from the seed of David, was reserved by David's Creator and God to be His own dwelling. Joachim, a man rich and righteous among the twelve tribes of Israel, used to offer his gifts to God before all else; but then, since he had no issue, being childless, the priests excluded him from the Temple of the Lord, saying: It is not meet for thee to bring offerings to God, because thou hast not raised up seed in Israel.<sup>3</sup> He departed from the Temple of the Lord overwhelmed by sorrow and sadness. When he was alone on a hill-top, he straightway prayed to God with a contrite heart and an afflicted soul, crying out and saying: O Lord, Who seest our hearts; Who art the Maker of things visible and invisible; Who hast stretched out the sky like a curtain;<sup>4</sup> Who hast established the sun to illumine the day and hast shaped the moon and the stars to shine upon the night; Who hast commanded the clouds to water the air with rain and summonest the blowing of the winds; Who hast bridled the sea with sand and hast filled it with all kinds of fish; Who hast covered the dry land with irrational animals, a multitude of beasts and birds, and feedest them by Thy will and Thy command; Who causest grass to spring up on the face of the earth and hast made all trees comely in appearance: Hearken Thou unto me, O Merciful One, and grant me a child. Give me a pledge of fruitfulness, that those deceitful lips may be silenced which speak iniquity against me, Thy servant, with arrogance and contempt.<sup>5</sup> such

were the words of this righteous man; such were the supplications of this forefather [of Christ]; such were the pain-filled sighs of Joachim's soul. What, then, of Anne? It is well to recall her words also. She had lived chastely with her husband, and by now the flower of youth had turned to old age, but she had remained barren throughout her life. The way of women had come to a close for her, according to the natural order of things, and she was reckoned as one who was childless. Thus, when she saw that her husband had gone away, she [went] into her vegetable garden, like a dove that loves the wilderness and is faithful to its mate, and she cried out with fervent prayers to her Maker and Creator, saying: O righteous Lord of Sabaoth, Who sittest upon the cherubim and art glorified by the seraphim; Who art served by myriads upon myriads of angels and art adored and worshipped by thousands upon thousands of armies; Who with Thy hand didst fashion Adam, and didst give him life, and from his rib didst form woman by Thy life-giving command; Who in Thy wise good pleasure didst make for him a helper, uniting the twain as one, as it is said: They two shall be one flesh;<sup>6</sup> Who, despite the old age and barrenness of Sarah, didst bestow a son, Isaac, upon the patriarch Abraham, who was pleasing to Thee, and didst make him the father of many nations; Who didst bestow upon my kinswoman and namesake, Anna, a good child, Samuel the priest, as a divine answer to her prayer, born to rebuke falsehood and hatred: Look down from Thy holy dwelling-place, O Most High, and open my womb for the begetting of children. Remove from me the grief of barrenness, and free me from the obstacles to childbirth, that I, Thy handmaid, may bring to Thee the offspring born of me, whether male or female, as a gift, as fragrant incense, as a pure offering, as a precious present, as a sacred oblation, as a divine dwelling, as an unblemished she-lamb or a first-born he-lamb, as a new Isaac. While both of them were thus calling [upon God], an angel of the Lord appeared unto them, heralding the Conception of the all-pure one and saying: The Most High has heard your supplication, and in a little while ye will give birth to a daughter who is chosen to be God's dwelling-place. After the angel had made this joyous announcement, Joachim came down from the mountain with joy and gladness in his heart because of the revelation that a barren and unproductive womb would beyond all expectation carry a

child conceived by the desire of the flesh and by the seed of man. When Anne's womb perceived that the space of nine months had passed, she gave birth to the most pure Virgin Mother of God, Mary, the joy of all the world. Let no teacher of the Church accept the opinion that the Virgin was born after [only] seven months. I have heard such things from many foolish people, such as like to prate and quibble, and I regard them as worse than unbelievers. Such things are sins against the Church; such things are foreign to the Orthodox Church. The Virgin, the godly maiden Mary, remained within Anne's womb until the ninth month, as human nature requires. Unable to find fault in any other way, the mouths of the unwise, those who do not think correctly, put such words into the sacred books, which should not be accepted even by the most simple folk. Those, however, who are wise in mind and in faith [know] that this opinion is unheard of, because they [can] expound with godly understanding those things which they read in the scriptures. When, in [reading] the scriptures, they come across some prickly thistle planted by the enemy, they cut it down completely, being children of the Church. But let us return to the matter at hand; and while going through it, we shall also mention her Nativity. Words and acts reached their fulfilment; the immaculate and ever-virginal maiden was born of the righteous Joachim and Anne, and they hastened to fulfill their vows. What a sight it was to see Anne, wise in the things of God, rejoicing and exulting, as she happily said to the infant Virgin: Who would have said that from me would come such a daughter as thou, who art uniquely blessed among all generations? Who, seeing thee nursed in my bosom, will not glorify Him Who bestowed thee on me, a woman childless and barren? Who, seeing milk flow from a breast that never gave milk, will not exalt Him Who from rough-hewn rock made water flow for His thirsty people? Go, then, my daughter, to Him Who gave thee to me. Go, thou ark of holiness, to the kind-hearted Master. Go, thou door of life, to the merciful Giver. Go, thou bridal chamber of the Word, to the Temple of the Lord. Enter into the house of the Lord, thou joy and gladness of the world. Take thy delight in the beauty of Him Whom thou wilt, after a short time, bear as Man. Blessed am I to be called the mother of such a daughter. Rejoice with me, ye tribes of Israel, because after being barren, I am now a mother, and I am nursing a child who is to

become the mother of the Most High. Go in procession before me and this maiden of God, ye candle-bearing virgins. Extol her with high praise; play your harps in her honour. Raise your voices in spiritual song; acclaim her on the ten-stringed psaltery. O David, thou forebear of God, laud this maiden who has come from thy tribe, and sing in a great voice the words of the hymn: Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thine own people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty.<sup>7</sup> These and similar words were spoken by Anne, whose very name bespeaks joy, as she carried the treasure of the Trinity, the Virgin Theotokos who was but three years old, and brought her to the Temple of the Lord. Together with Joachim she offered up hymns of thanksgiving and assembled a choir of virgins carrying candles, and thus they arrived at the holy of holies. The two venerable parents, their lips elated and their mouths overjoyed, called out with joy to their kinsman Zechariah, who was a priest, a prophet and a servant of the covenant of the Law, as they cried: Receive, Zechariah, the undefiled tabernacle. Receive, O priest, the unsullied bridal chamber. Receive, O prophet, the censer [which will hold] an immaterial coal. Receive, O righteous one, the spiritual incense. Receive, O all-venerable one, the fiery chariot of God on high. Receive, O blameless one, the beautiful vine which will bear the grapes of everlasting life. Lead her into the inner precincts of the Temple of the Lord. Bring her to the holy place which the Most High has made to be His dwelling. Take her into the adytum, since she is to carry in her womb the invisible God. Bless her who has brought blessedness to the inhabitants of the earth. Exalt her who is the divinely-written book of the great deeds of God. Receive her who has annulled for us the curse [incurred by] our first mother Eve. Kiss her who has joined us to God by love and has taken us away from the enmity of the serpent. Prophecy of her who has come to be the fulfilment of the prophets and the recapitulation of God's promises to man; the table of the divine Bread; the wine of gladness; the inexhaustible nourishment; the pure dove; the living heaven; the candelabrum of many lights; the divinely-watered olive tree; the divine chariot of Christ's economy; the holy tabernacle; the divinely-wrought lamp; the rational ewe; the mercy-seat of God; the undefiled vessel; the most noble treasure; the divinely-sounded trumpet; the mountain

of butter and curds; the divine fleece; the divinely-formed cloud; the precious garment; the noetic curtain; the divinely-hewn stone; the chariot of the King; the ladder whereby the creator will appear to those on earth; the holy couch; the receiver of goodness; the abyss of miracles; the fountain of blessings; the never-ending wealth; the maiden who is called by many names and many figures - the Ever-Virgin. Take her into the holy of holies. Present her to the King as a most precious gift. Hymn her as the queen of [all] creatures; sing songs to her as the secure guardian of all virgins. Let her dwell in this temple which was built by human hands, since she is to become the living temple of Him Who wrought all things by His word [alone]. Such were the joyful outpourings of praise [uttered by] Joachim and Anne; such were their words of thanksgiving and praise; such were their unaffected declarations to the prophet Zechariah. Thereupon that priest and prophet of God, one who shared in the service of the holy of holies, seeing the comely countenance [of the child Mary], her praiseworthy tongue, her noble soul, her unblemished life, her steadiness of gait, her virtuous behaviour, her admirable appearance and the beauty of her virginity, was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed: O undefiled maiden! O unblemished virgin! O most fair girl! O beauty of womankind! O finest of daughters! Thou art blessed among women; thou art most illustrious in purity; thou art sealed in thy virginity. Thou art the undoing of the curse of Adam; thou art the most pure offering of Abel. Thou art the blameless sacrifice of the first priest; thou art the excellence of Seth, and the painless conception of the sons of God.<sup>8</sup> Thou art the unashamed trust in God of Enosh; thou art the approbation of Enoch and his translation to an immaterial life. Thou art the rational ark of Noah, and the amity with God of the second regeneration. Thou art the priestly kingship of Melchisedek, and his outstanding eminence. Thou art the assurance of Abraham, and his obedient submission as to the promise of offspring. Thou art the new sacrifice of Isaac, and a rational whole-burnt offering. Thou art the cause of Jacob's climbing the ladder, and the sign of the blessings of the twelve tribes to which he gave rise. Thou art a daughter of the tribe of Judah. Thou art the chastity of Joseph. Thou art the downfall of ancient Egypt; that is, of the Jewish synagogue, O most pure one. Thou art the patience of Job in his trials, and his

restoration, the twofold return of his wealth, and his profitable state. Thou art the divinely-written book of Moses the lawgiver, in which was written the story of the creation of the world, and the Law was handed down, traced on tablets by the finger of God as on Mount Sinai; through thee the newly-revealed Israel will be freed from the bondage of Egypt, even as the people in the wilderness were once given their fill of manna and of water from the rough-hewn rock: and that Rock was Christ,<sup>9</sup> Who is to come from thy womb, like a bridegroom from his chamber. Thou art Aaron's rod which blossomed. Thou art that which made Joshua the son of Nun triumphant in the midst of his enemies. Thou art that daughter of David who was arrayed in garments of gold and many colours. Thou art Solomon's bed of gold, which is surrounded by the sixty mighty men of the divinely-wrought Scriptures, which herald God with the sound of musical instruments. Thou art the rising of Elijah at his ascension, and thou wast the downfall of a noetic Jezebel. Thou art the double blessing which Elisha received with the mantle [of Elijah], whereby he divided the currents of the Jordan and passed over it without getting wet, and also healed the water of barrenness, making it potable. Thou art the salvation of Jonah in the whale, and the repentance of the Ninevites, and their complete pardon. Thou art the mirror of the prophets, and art revealed to be the fulfilment of their words. It is thou whom Ezekiel meant by the gates which were shut, through which no man could pass, but only God alone, Who would keep the gates closed. It is thou whom the magniloquent Isaiah wrote of as being the rod of Jesse, from whence would come a flower, Christ, Who is to uproot the gardens of wickedness and plant the field of divine knowledge. It is thou whom Jeremiah proclaimed, [saying], Behold, the day cometh when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers;<sup>10</sup> [thus] he foretold the coming of the birth of thy Son, calling people from [all] nations and from the ends of the earth to worship [Him]. It is thou whom Daniel, the man of [divine] desires, proclaimed as a great mountain, from which Christ, the cornerstone, would be hewn, Who is to break up and destroy the image of the multiform serpent. It was thou of whom the three youths in Babylon had an image, when, knowing of the advent of thy Son, they escaped [harm]

from the furnace which had been fired up sevenfold and exulted in the midst thereof as if in a bridal chamber. It is thou whom Habakuk calls the mountain of the south, whence the sceptres of the kingdom will arise with power, and the tents of the Ethiopians and the tabernacles of the land of Madiam will be dismayed.<sup>11</sup> I glorify thee who art the undefiled Virgin. I laud thee who art full of grace. I praise thee who hast appeared as the bride [chosen] from all the ages. I hymn thee, the new heaven, yet to be revealed. I present thee as a pure treasure in the Temple of the Lord. I magnify thee, the new testament, which the Messiah, Christ, will write; for the letter of the Law will be abrogated, and baptism will shine forth the call of grace; the shadow which was circumcision will end, and the presence of the Spirit will remain with those on earth. Having festooned the Blessed [Virgin] with these sacred words, the prophet led her into the sanctuary and presented her to the Lord God. Her parents, Joachim and Anne, returned from the Temple, marvelling at her intelligence, her modesty and her calmness. Afterwards, the young child, surpassing even those words which had been prophesied of her, served the Almighty in solitude. She used to receive food from heaven through an angel, and thus she spurned the food of men. She was always present in the Temple, and she regarded worldly ways as cobwebs. She longed for the wealth of heaven, and rejected earthly riches. She constantly saw the joy of the angels, and was therefore above all earthly cares. She beheld the Holy Spirit at all times, and she put to flight invisible armies of spirits. What, then, did the Virgin do while she remained in the holy of holies? She would receive angelic food from an angel; she preserved her virginity, like a pure dove; and she prayed to the Architect of the temple of heaven and earth, saying with gratitude and a confident heart: I sing to Thee, O Almighty and Most High, because Thou hast taken away the reproach of my ancestress Eve; and on account of Thine ineffable compassion Thou wilt send Thine Only-begotten Son to earth and dwell with men; therefore shall I be a dwelling pure and unspotted. Where sin abounded, grace will much more abound.<sup>12</sup> It was through a woman that we acquired death, and by means of a woman wilt Thou make all things new again. From the serpent we took food that was bitter to taste, but by Thee we shall again be filled with the food of immortality. [Our] great-grandmother



Eve gave birth to Cain, the originator of malice and murder, but [Thine] Only-begotten Son will be the firstfruits of life and resurrection. O most glorious wonder! O new marvel! O unutterable wisdom! What, then, shall we call Mary? Heaven? For she contained within her womb the Maker of heaven and earth. Sun? For she is seven times seven times more resplendent than the sun, having received the Sun of righteousness. Moon? For she possesses incomparable beauty, and has given birth to Christ, Who is comely in beauty.<sup>13</sup> Cloud? For she carried in her arms Him Who sits upon the clouds. Candlestick? For she has made light shine upon them sat in darkness and the shadow of death. Throne? For she received Him Who, though [by the power of] the Holy Spirit He confined Himself to a place, yet invisibly sits as an equal on the throne of the Father. Pearl? For she has obtained the most precious Pearl for those on earth. Paradise? For she opened Eden to those who had ben condemned [to exile] and returned them to the kingdom. Ark? For she held in her embrace Him Who has given us everything. Mountain? For she commodiously contained Him Who makes the mountains smoke.<sup>14</sup> Earth? For she painlessly carried Him Who makes the earth tremble.<sup>15</sup> Temple? For she supported in her hands Him Who rests upon the cherubim. Sea? For she kissed with her lips Him Who gathers the waters together into one system. <sup>16</sup> Table? For she maternally nursed Him Who gives us our food. Who will not wonder? Who will not marvel? Who will not glorify the greatness of the mystery? If things that took place before [the coming of ] grace were such as to surpass our minds and thoughts, who will presume to speak of what was revealed after [the coming of] grace? If things pertaining to the shadows and the antiquated Law were most glorious, what word can describe things which shone forth after them? Let the children of the heretics be put to shame, who blaspheme against the Virgin with sacrilegious lips and filthy mouths and poisoned tongues. Most glorious is Mary, the Mother of God, who held the Lord and Creator in the flesh and gave birth to Him in human form; therefore, we freely kiss her sacred likeness, and, since she was the mother of Him Who held converse with us in the flesh, we venerate her image also. We do not worship matter - let no such thing be said; rather, we send up honour to the prototype, as we believe with divine faith. We do not paint a picture of the Deity, as ye blindly and wickedly

allege; rather, we draw the likeness of Him Who spoke to us in the flesh, Who suffered and Who rose again as the firstborn from the dead. If God asked of Abraham a three-year-old heifer and a three-year-old goat<sup>17</sup> for fleshly purification, was not the Virgin honourable, pure and undefiled, a blameless offering of human nature, inasmuch as she was foreordained from the foundation of the world, chosen from among all generation as a spotless dwelling-place and presented in the holy Temple to the Almighty? O synagogue of the Jews, if ye do not accept as Theotokos the Virgin who shone forth from your own race, and if, moved by envy, ye blaspheme and slander her with unworthy and unclean words, how will ye accept her Son, the Father's eternal Son Who was born of her? Ye have forfeited her glory and that of her Son. It was not that ye were moved by hatred of some enemy; no, ye were torn away by malice, and ye lost your minds by the wickedness of your vanity, and thus ye lost a twofold glory and were deprived of any reward. The evil methods of your madness, both then and afterwards, have become apparent to all the world. The Word of the Father says of you: Amen, amen, I say unto you, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.<sup>18</sup> And in another place He says: Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust; for he wrote of me.<sup>19</sup> As for us who celebrate the Entry of the Virgin into the Temple, we are the people of God, a holy nation,<sup>20</sup> a large assembly, the choir of the Orthodox, the sons of the font, the children of grace. With pure souls, undefiled lips and eloquent tongues let us raise our voices in psalms to this holiday of hers, which is a radiant feast, a great festival, the joy of angels and the glory of men. With fear and joy let us greet her with Gabriel's greeting: Hail, thou good will of the Father, whereby the true knowledge of God has been spread to the ends of the earth. Hail, thou dwelling of the Son, from whom He came forth clothed with flesh. Hail, thou imperishable abode of the Holy Spirit. Hail, thou cause of much praise among the incorporeal powers. Hail, thou who art more glorious than the cherubim. Hail, thou who art more spacious than the heavens. Hail, thou who art more resplendent than the sun. Hail, thou who art more luminous than the moon. Hail, thou star of manifold brightness. Hail, thou light cloud that

waterest those dwelling on earth with the heavenly Rain. Hail, thou lightning that softly illuminatest the faces of the faithful. Hail, thou spiritual thunder that noiselessly informest the ears of earthly men. Hail, thou holy breath that sweepest away the spirits of evil from the earth. Hail, most glorious proclamation of the prophets. Hail, world-wide preaching of the apostles. Hail, most honourable witness of the martyrs. Hail, praise-filled doxology of the patriarchs. Hail, most excellent praise of godly monks. Hail, truest delight of the righteous. Hail, most precious glory of virgins. Hail, orb and sceptre of kings. Hail, lofty service of high priests. Hail, invincible refuge of sinners. Hail, indestructible rudder of those that sail [the sea.] Hail, uplift for them that fall. Hail, healing freely given to the sick. Hail, sure raising of the fallen. Hail, cause of salvation for all. Hail, ineffable joy for the world. Hail, Queen and Mediatrix of reconciliation. Hail, most priceless ornament of mothers. Hail, capacious container of the Word. Hail, powerful advocate of the old. Hail, divine education of the young. Hail, renowned guardian of infants. Hail, intercessor for everyone under heaven. Hail, restoration of the whole universe. Hail, most splendid jubilation of heaven and earth. Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, Who is also before thee and from thee, and Whom we hymn together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

**ON THE SAME DAY:  
A SERMON OF GEORGE THE EXARCH  
IN PRAISE OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY,  
THE MOTHER OF GOD AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY,  
ON THE OCCASION WHEN SHE WAS PRESENTED  
BY HER PARENTS IN THE TEMPLE  
AT THE AGE OF THREE.  
BLESS, FATHER.  
SECOND SERMON.**

Well does the reason for beginning [this discourse], the present feast, show [us] the entrance of the good. It has prepared good paths; it has built steps for an entry, and now it directs our words upwards to its subject. Then, having raised it to the highest heights of praise, it elevates by means of grace; going from step to step, from glory to glory, it offers praise. Because, however, it is unthinkable to be raised to its heights by way of material things -- for one must not imagine that one can in a short space of time transcend the profundity of what lies surrounded by darkness at the summit of the inquiry -- let us labour with the matter, and, putting aside the heaviness of our bodies, let us be lifted up on intellectual wings together with the feast, in order to find a place within the hidden recesses known to the all-venerable [Virgin], and let us hasten to follow [her]. Next, removing ourselves from all deceptive external influences, let us step up to the threshold of our subject. Unlike the beauty of flowers, which is pleasant to those who approach from the outside, but does not allow them to be present within, the fragrant paradise of the Virgin affords an entry to those who avidly desire it. This flower is a field of flowers, which regale those who reap them with various fragrances and incorruptibility, not merely with the colours of a flower. Flowers have a beauty that easily withers, but that which exudes the fragrance of grace perfumes the senses and delights the minds of those who perceive it with sweetness. In the case of the former, the senses take their fill and have less appreciation for the beauty of those that appear afterwards; with the latter, their fragrance has lingered with those who touch them, so that when they leave they long for it even more. The appearance of the former furnishes a fair sight which fades together with the summer, whereas

the beauty of the latter brings the soul everlasting bliss. As they who have gained admittance to the porches of royal palaces tell outsiders of the inner furnishings which they have not actually discerned with their senses, marvelling at things that surpass their comprehension, so also that which takes place at the very beginning of panegyrics seems to be above us all, because, I think, it does not allow for discussion. The beginnings are set quite high, [but] the subject which is illuminated itself reveals the beauty which lies within, since it possesses facets which are diverse in splendor and loveliness. It remains for us to lift up our eyes a little towards the entrance, and to see, as far as we are able, the beauty which lies hidden within, even though it is beyond our power to convey all its magnificence. Draw near, then, and let us enter with our words, pointing to tomorrow, to the kingdom yet to come. Yet even now I can see, by the limitless light of divinity, a dazzling celebration; my mind is illumined, and I am moved to exult [in it]. I am also overcome with awe as I see the things that transpire; for the angels also are exulting. Everything seems as strangely beautiful as the original creation here, as the grace of the object of our praise is brought into the midst and fills the entire assembly with gladness, bestowing [upon all] an inexhaustible gift. Having drawn near, then, with hope in these things, and after each one has rendered what is due, let us all enter together, speaking our words and listening to what we hear intelligently. Let him whose service is the fulfillment of all that is necessary direct the procession for its entrance, and let them go ahead, keeping the rest of their words to themselves. The glorious parents of the maiden have already brought her to the doors, while angels round about are bearing gifts and all the supermundane powers are rejoicing; for though they did not know the ineffable form that the mystery would take, they, being servants, attended her Entry at their Master's order. First they gained understanding, in that they beheld her to be a precious vessel of virtue, bearing an images of the most complete purity, with a body that was supernaturally free from any flaw; and then they obeyed their orders and carried out their service. Bright candles illumined her Entry in that hour, and the whole Temple was inadequate and was moved to rejoice; I would say that even inanimate objects rejoiced with the angels, and I also must join in their exultation. Great was the voice of

one who came at that time to speak and to declare to the Temple, and words such as these were spoken, as he says: Make room in the courtyard to receive her who is revealed to be more spacious than all visible and invisible creation, her in whom the Uncontainable was contained, covering and restraining the expanse of evil. Kindle a bright candle, and light the entrances. Erect a lamp in the highest place as a beacon, and direct the attention of the whole world to thyself, that it may behold the bright cloud, that it may receive a ray of light from her, that it may see the wellspring of light which flows from her. Open wide thy gates and give entry to the noetic door, through which the Divine Word alone passed, keeping it sealed, as He knows, fulfilling His mission and yet not harming the seals of virginity. Draw aside the curtain, that behind it may be placed the spiritual curtain of the Word, she who hid the Deity within her and remained unburnt by the fire of His physical nature. Receive the candlestick gilded by the Spirit, her whose radiance shines to the ends of the earth, and by whom the seven gifts of the Spirit were enkindled to illumine the earthly orb. Receive the life-bearing table, on which is served the Bread of our life, feeding them that partake thereof with immortality, and from which the cup of wisdom pours the pure and clear drink of knowledge. Decorate the holy of holies and the most holy tabernacle to take up her who contains Him Who by nature is fleshless, her who rebuilt our fallen house and who re-erected the lost temple of our forefather David, her through whom our members, which had been paralysed by sin, regained their integrity. Lift up the all-golden censer, wherein the Word placed the incense of [His] flesh, filling the universe with fragrance, and wherein the sins of disobedience were consumed by fire, the air was relieved of the foulness of filth and the sweet savour of the Spirit was inhaled. Bring in the ark of holiness, her who contained within herself the very Giver of the Law, her who bore the heavenly Manna, her who rescued our nature from the deluge of sin, her who is the treasure of the New Covenant, the glorious vessel, the divinely-traced tablets, on which the Divine Word is written, surpassing the writing of the words of the Law and replacing a semblance with the light [yoke] of the Spirit. Receive the priestly rod, which, though never watered, produced the unfading flower of the Lord; her who is the longed-for holy land from which truth and righteousness shone forth, [the ground]

on which it is forbidden to walk with covered feet -- I mean a mind covered by duplicity and unbelief; her who is the overshadowed mountain, in which the Word chose to dwell, in which [our] nature found rest and refuge from the burning fire of sin, and from which was taken the Stone not hewn by human hands, Which became the cornerstone and crushed the idol of the enemy, smashing it to smithereens. Receive the fruitful olive tree, from which the Anointer prepared oil to anoint creation; her who is the glorious throne, the royal seat on which was seated the Word in His flesh, when He came forth from the holy Sion which the Creator had chosen, and which He had prepared before the ages by the design of His providence, in order to be born of her in the flesh; coming forth from her, He crushed the forces of iniquity. Embrace the couch of Solomon, around which gifts are carried by the sixty mighty men<sup>21</sup> of the divinely-inspired Scriptures of infallible prophecy, by which they proclaimed the idea of the divine Nativity; her who is the oracle<sup>22</sup> upon which was written the Word, Who mightily crushed the tyrannical power of the enemy. She was prefigured by the tongs<sup>23</sup> of the prophet, which carried the coal held by a seraph, as made known by the Holy Spirit. She was heralded by the sealed book,<sup>24</sup> which could be read by none of the men learned in letters, but by Him Who sealed it and preserved it in a manner beyond words. She [was foreshadowed by] the most precious scroll,<sup>25</sup> upon which was inscribed the Word, Which, when written, ripped up the writings of delusion. She is the queen<sup>26</sup> who stands at God's right hand and draws near Him in her beauty and brilliance, being noble by birth and possessing no flaws; she comes from the Lebanon<sup>27</sup> of virginity, fragrant with myrrh, dripping with sweetness, to remedy the ancient bitterness of the tree. Her lips are sweeter than honey, and her tongue flows with gladness; the scent of her garments is more pleasant than all earthly perfumes. Escort her inside like a bride, whose beauty is unutterable and whose glory is ineffable; the light of her eyes outshines the rays of the sun. She is a garden enclosed,<sup>28</sup> in which the divine Plant grew up without cultivation, the filth-loving tree of the ancient curse was uprooted from life and withered, and in its place the blessing bloomed. She is truly a fountain sealed,<sup>29</sup> from which pure waters flow and water the whole world; in which no trace of muddy murkiness is to be found; and out of which

emerges the river of grace to travel throughout the world. Receive the cloud that traverses the air, on which He Who sits upon the clouds of the heavens brought to nought the work of the Egyptians. Lead in the spiritual city of God, which is made glad by the rushings of its river;<sup>30</sup> her who is the consecrated building, the glorious temple, the indestructible church, whose image and pattern thou thyself hast been while awaiting its appearance. Now it has arrived; take it in, and give way to it as to something superior. Henceforth leave behind that which is only an image, and give up that which is concealed in enigmas. How long wilt thou bedeck thyself in the letter [of the Law]? Behold, grace has begun to shine. Behold, the letter is exchanged for the spirit. Thou hast [long] laboured in serving things which are but types. Behold, He Who makes them new is coming. Change over, then, from the Law which has grown old to the grace of the Word, which is yet young. Why dost thou linger in [thine old ways], as thou receivest the means of their fulfilment? Why dost thou continue to be sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices and to be filled with the smoke of their fat, instead of receiving Him Who gave the commandments concerning these things? As the Word said to the Father: Sacrifice and offering hast Thou not desired, but a body hast Thou perfected for me.<sup>31</sup> He is coming to effect a change in nature by His Blood, not simply to blot out the sins of physical defilement. Deliverance is at the doors; its proclamation is at thy gates. Let in her who goes before thee with prior knowledge; she carries within her the fulfilment of those things which have been proclaimed. It is she whom Isaiah heralded when he said: Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.<sup>32</sup> It is she whom Ezekiel called the door of God. It is she whom David called the ark of holiness. It is she whom the bush prefigured to Moses on the mount, when it burned but was not consumed. Receive her with rejoicing; run with haste to render her homage; for she is higher than all creation, both visible or invisible. Embrace the maiden who is a most holy habitation. Show in the undefiled dwelling, and show out the murderous assembly of the Jews. Too loudly do they demand the killing of the prophets; too openly do they call for blood. Why dost thou sully thyself with the defilement of blood and provoke the anger of the Creator yet more? Stay the wrath of Him Who has power over life and death; inflame no



more the anger of the Creator. Vengeance is rendered in proportion to the multitude of sins, and it is all the more terrible to the impudent, when it brings them to unbearable torment and no longer directs them to delight. She has come to be received by thee; she has been given thy glory in greater measure, since she has attained the end for which thou hast existed. She has revealed the fulfilment of those things whose images thou didst display. Even as substance supplants shadows, and the truth [is superior to] an enigma, and deeds [are greater than] words, and realities [exceed] their images, so hast thou need of her light. Thou art held in honour by thine own nation alone, whereas she will receive the highest honour from all creation. Thou hast the mercy seat overshadowed by God, but it will not be long before thou, by His permission, wilt be forsaken; but she will receive the indestructible Person of the Word by a [divine] overshadowing, and will abide for ever, never to be deprived of His glory. Depart hence, therefore, making way for better things. Though thou wilt not endure, it remains for thy servants to be responsible for thy departure. Such words [are addressed to] the Temple; it is not fitting for me to speak thus to that which has faith in the things seen henceforth, and I think that they who are listening without tiring will weigh the matter and accept it as referring to punishment; because when that habitation more spacious than the heavens was brought in, the rites of the Temple [received] an image of their abolition. She immediately beheld a special glory coming towards her, and the very things that were being stripped [of this glory] always recognised her. Then Zechariah, who was carrying out the duties of the priesthood, was inspired by the gift of prophecy; rejoicing at the Virgin's arrival, he gazed upon something that the soul could not fathom, hidden in a female form. He perceived in the pure [maiden] a supernatural sign, though her external appearance was normal; for there was something inexpressible about her manner, and she led a virtuous life. Whenever she entered, therefore, gifts were spread before her with spiritual joy. Moreover, she conversed with angels, and was a recipient of divine revelations. While she was living, according to her wont, in the innermost precincts [of the Temple], Zechariah used to see some stranger speaking with her and giving her food; it was the apparition of an angel. His mind was amazed, and his thoughts were such as

these: What is this truly strange sight, one not in keeping with the customs of this place, bearing the appearance of an angel and speaking to the young maiden? Is it a bodiless being in bodily form that brings food? Is a fleshless creature offering creaturely honour to a woman? It used to be that angels would come to this place only to visit a priest, appearing not often, but only when commanded to do so, and not to such as are responsible for the fall. It is completely extraordinary that such an apparition as I have seen now should come to a woman, and one of such an age, so young in years. If it were a woman who is the spouse of a husband, one who by the defect of barrenness is unable to bear children, and she sought with offerings and supplications to obtain that which is proper to spouses, and the word of life came [to her], she would have a clear resolution [of her problem] by [divine] dispensation; so it happened with Anne, but it is not a frequent occurrence among us. It is not for such reasons that the Virgin has come now, yet the apparition comes often. Why is this? The fact causes me great awe and amazement, while doubts about the mystery disappear. But what does it mean? What has the angel come to declare? What is the food which he brings? From what storehouses has it been taken? Who has arranged for it? Whose hands have made the bread that is here? It is not the duty of angels to take care of physical wants. There have been many other instances of men being fed by angels, but the food was already prepared beforehand, and the bodiless powers rendered bodily service, just as if they were servants, since the one who gave the command was sufficiently powerful. The angel who ministered to Daniel<sup>33</sup> did not carry out the orders of others himself, but took Habakkuk as his instrument, so that he who was fed would not be overwhelmed by the unaccustomed and formidable sight of the extraordinary delivery of food by an angel. The raven that served Elijah<sup>34</sup> acted not on his own, but was taught by an angel; and I think that the food was brought from nowhere else but from some conveniently located storehouse, since the [bodiless] one who gave the order could not furnish his own private supply. How is this so? By the word of Him Who brought all things [into being], and Who bestows their use according to need. Thus His providence ordered matters on those occasions, but now in our very midst an angel comes to a maiden, and she does not submit to earthly thoughts. The young

maiden has been endowed with such gifts that angelic attendants are subject to her. But why does she have such an abundance of gifts? What has the Virgin done with such merit that she has surpassed all previous generations in purity? The sign has been clearly proven by the reality, and custom has come to an end. But what reason is to be found for her having received so many benefactions? The Virgin is shown to us as the intermediary of so many blessings, by which she receives the divine within herself. Is not, then, the fulfilment of the prophecies taking place? Is not the realisation of our hopes being accomplished? Is He Who is to be born for our reformation going to come from her? Such a mystery was proclaimed long ago, and the word seeks one who will serve [for its fulfilment]. Has any other woman been chosen for such service but the Maiden whom we see here? I perceive an unheard-of purity of virtue hidden in her, and by the manifestation of the divine favour towards her she reveals what is hidden. She is the divine house of Israel, from which has come such a great radiance. She is the blessed root of Jesse, from which has sprung this blossoming rod which will bear the flower of the world's salvation. She is the most glorious memory of mothers, and filled with every blessedness. Blessed am I for having been favoured with such sights, for having enjoyed such gifts, in honouring such a virgin and bride. I shall offer thee everlasting gratitude, O temple of the Lord, because through serving thee I have now obtained that which all the righteous desired. Today I have been granted greater joy than all other priests; today I have found greater glory than all the prophets; for I am seeing the beginning of that truth, of which they saw but shadows. These things were truly strange for Zechariah to consider, and surpassing nature, as he thought about the most glorious things [being wrought] in the Virgin, because they were true. O the amazing manner of [these] unutterable wonders! O the grace of health for the body ... which I receive from her pure and radiant soul which, in a manner surpassing nature, is in a body still growing ... ! Her smallness has not hindered her from reaching the heights of virtue; her youth has not kept her from union with God. Who has ever seen or heard of anyone so exalted? She remains bodily in the holy of holies; she is brought gifts by an angel and is given food most pure. Even if some souls, in communion with angels, attain complete freedom from

passions, they are still not given to enjoy angelic food; nor does sinless scripture mean angelic food. Here, however, hands of flesh receive a food that is not temporal, and thereby an immaculate soul is replenished with gifts. How great her purity! How she transcends her age! She is like a ladder of purity reaching the heights of heaven, whereby the Word descended to us in His strange condescension, and whereby the body of our nature which lay below mounted up to the heavenly spheres. And when thou hearest of the Maiden's strange dwelling in the Temple, be not doubtful. Do not seek to probe with thine understanding that which is beyond understanding; do not subject the inexplicable to explanation. Seeing the strange ordering of nature, dost thou yet doubt it? Seeing the very Word of God Himself ineffably take up His dwelling within her, dost thou dispute about whether the incorporeal food was true? Seeing the Spirit of the Father's counsel which overshadowed her, dost thou question the ministrations of angels? There is nothing incredible about the Virgin, nothing that does not befit her greatness; everything is true and certain. It was fitting for the divine dwelling-place to grow up amidst such ascents; it was fitting for the undefiled ewe-lamb to take joy in such a feast. It would have been fitting for her to have been brought up for her first years not in the holy of holies, but in the heaven of heavens, inasmuch as she is more spacious than they and surpasses them in purity. It would have been fitting for her to have been served not by one angel only, but to have been brought gifts by myriads of myriads, inasmuch as she supernaturally contained in her womb Him upon Whom they cannot look. Him Who clothes Himself with light as with a garment she clothed within her womb; Him Who holds all things in the hollow of His hand she embraced in her arms. Understanding these things, who would not be exalted about his nature? Because of them, who would not elevate his mind to the heights, and consider himself to be above all things? For the matter is more than weighty, and it is more mysterious than all purity. Consider to what heights our nature has ascended, it being a compound of exaltation and humility. We were fallen through sin, and were unworthy of the care of Him Who made us. Our nature lay under [the effects of] the fall, and could find no defence against the deceit [of the enemy]. It had to be lifted up, and this [needed to be] done by One for

whom resurrection was not something foreign to His command or dispensation, according to the testimony of past ages. In His love towards mankind, He did not subject the angels to resurrection, but sent Himself for that mission. Not only did He reform [our nature], but He took it up, and He set what had been so low on the throne of the Father. How can I comprehend this ineffable love towards mankind? With what numbeless words can I extol this condescension? With what praises can I laud the Virgin, through whom the transaction was made, and through whom what was fallen was raised up again? What homage can be rendered that would equal the purity of her whose Creator and Lover made her His temple, her in whom He did not disdain to dwell, her in whom He fulfilled His Father's will, her on whom the most pure Spirit rested? What glory can fittingly be given to her whom the Maker showed to be greater than all but Himself? O most honourable bestowal of every honour! O beautiful beauty made more beautiful than all! O Mother of God, greatest adornment of all that is fair! By thy childbirth which is beyond words thou hast rectified our fall from our ancient state of grace. With thy beauty thou hast beautified the tarnished appearance of our original image. By thy childbirth thou hast turned the pain and sadness of our first mother into joy and triumph. Through thee our exiled race has returned to its home. Through thee we have received the undying delight of paradise. Through thee was turned away the sword which turned every way.<sup>35</sup> Through thee the closed gates of paradise were opened for entry. Through thee the hope of the prophets came true in fact; in thee their words found their conclusion. Through thee we possess infallible images of our resurrection. Through thee we hope to obtain the kingdom of heaven. Thee have we acquired as a help towards salvation. Thee we have as an advocate to aid us. Thee we put forward as the voice of our defence. Thee do we bear about as the emblem of our salvation. Thee have we found to be a firm bulwark for a multitude of Christians. Thee do faithful rulers keep as a powerful weapon. By thee the disturbances of wars are put down. By thee they are given a image of victory. O Mother of God, spurn not the prayers of thy constant suppliants. Stretch forth thy hand to those who are suffering. Betake thyself to those who are drowning. Calm the waves of war. Strike down the spirits who disturb the peace. Grant an

appropriate answer to every petition as it is able to be fulfilled. As a mother thou hast unhindered freedom of access to thy Son. Thou hast invincible power; thou hast unconquerable might. Let not the multitude of [our] sins outweigh thine incalculable loving-kindness, nor our wicked works drive away thine inexpressible mercy. No matter how often [anyone] encounters a multitude of unknown [difficulties], each receives a ready solution, if thou wishest it. Nothing can resist thy power; nothing can contend with thy might. All things are subject to thy command; all things comply with thy behest; all things obey thine authority. He Who was born of thee has made thee to be higher than all creatures and all creation. This He has shown for certain by the glorious deeds [which] He works in thee. Thou obtainest [such favours] without difficulty; thou conversest with the Creator without any intermediary. He is glad to hear thy requests; He rejoices to see thee consoled. He does not hesitate to fulfill them, because He regards thy glory as His own. As a Son, He finds joy in thee, and He dutifully carries out thy requests. Placing my trust in such limitless power and love towards mankind, O Lady, I have offered [my words as] the fruit of lips which are poor; for, although I have no worthy contribution to make, my great desire [to do so] has overcome me. Though my powers are not equal to my desire, its expectations obtain great things. Accept [it], then, and regard not the work itself, but receive the zeal [with which it is offered]. Thou wilt surely accept [it], since thou art well-disposed [towards us], rewarding [us] with the remission of our sins, and vouchsafing [us] the kingdom of heaven, and obtaining mercy [for us] from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One Godhead, one in kingship and ineffable in power and might; to Whom are due glory, honour and worship, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

**ON THE SAME DAY:  
A SERMON OF OUR HOLY FATHER  
EUTHYMIUS THE MONK  
ON THE ENTRY  
OF THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD  
INTO THE TEMPLE.  
BLESS, FATHER.  
THIRD SERMON.**

Whenever a collection of godly sermons is read, it fills those who have gathered [to hear them] with joy from [its] spiritual treasures and divinely-flowing fountains. That which is now the subject of praise, however, is especially illustrious, more so than all others, and it provides ample inspiration, since it now sets before us the most excellent divine Maiden. It is like a bountiful annual feast, put forth in purity, which, however, requires its guests to be free from wickedness. If ye will follow me willingly and assiduously, and put on clean and bright festive robes, we shall hasten forth to gather the fresh flowers of our luminary, the Mother of God, whose beauty exceeds that of all their colours, as if to fill a censer with the fragrance of a bouquet of roses. As Solomon says in his Song, so beautifully composed: Who is this that comes up from the wilderness as pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders [of the perfumer]? Come from Libanus, my bride, come from Libanus.<sup>36</sup> Let us outrun one another in our haste, as we are all inspired by this gathering in honour of the Mother of God, which is salutary and unto salvation. Entering the sanctuary, we see a maiden going toward the second curtain - Mary, the most pure Mother of God, who has ended a childless barrenness, and by the grace of Him Who was born [of her] has broken down the wall of the letter of the Law. Today, being but three years old, she comes to the Temple of the Law and is given to God, that she, being without blemish, may belong solely to the High Priest and Finisher of all things, God, and, by shining rays of her divinely-lit light, may dispel the darkness which is in the written Law. Today there is presented to the priest who presides over purification a young child, who, in a manner that surpasses human understanding, will hold in her arms the great High Priest, God, Who for our sakes

became an Infant, though only in His flesh, and will present Him [to the priest] when He is forty days old. Today a new, clean and unstained scroll, not covered with handwriting, but made golden by the Spirit, she who is hallowed by the blessings of the Law, is brought as a thank-offering. Today Joachim, freed from the reproach of childlessness, walks openly through the streets with great praise, showing off His child, and he becomes once again a hierophant of the priesthood of the Law. Today Anne, vindicated of the continual disgrace of childlessness by the birth of a beautiful child, knows blessedness and unfeigned joy, and, holding at her bosom her who is more spacious than the heavens, she makes an offering that will bear fruit for all ends of the earth. Today the doors of the Temple of God are opened wide to allow for the Entry of the sealed gate that looks toward the east.<sup>37</sup> Today the Temple's table of purity begins a process of enlightenment, as it receives with godly homage and affectionate greetings the [holy] table of the spiritual Bread of heaven<sup>38</sup> Which will replace [its victims] with bloodless sacrifices. Today an altar is brought forth, which is she who became a pure vessel not made by human hands, and her wealth is invisible. Her inexhaustible food affords perfect satisfaction to all at her feasts and festivals, [where] the meal is unendingly pleasant. Hence there are countless reasons to offer praise, which originate with her. We are drawing from an inexhaustible fountain which never runs dry; no matter how much is drawn from it, it redoubles its flow a hundredfold and even more than we can measure, so that it never ceases [to give drink] to those who draw from it. In its pellucid water there wells up a mystery which surges up to transcend even the minds of the immaterial and incorporeal intellects; [it is the mystery] of the most blessed and most pure Maiden, whom her parents offered to God when she had turned three years old. The number three, moreover, is important and highly honoured; everywhere examples can be found to support this assertion. Thus, with three stones<sup>39</sup> and a sling a man of God, David by name, beat the proud Goliath, worshipping the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and it was one Person of the indivisible Trinity, namely He Who became incarnate of [the Virgin], Who prefigured her in [various] images and [then] fulfilled [them]. Out of three orders of water Elijah the Tishbite of old found fire and rekindled faith, as heavenly flames



burned in the water.<sup>40</sup> For an equal number of days Jonah was borne about in the bosom of a sea monster, and this is recognised as a great and unmistakable image of [Christ our] God. The same number of youths walked cheerfully over the fire, trampling it down as they were refreshed with heavenly dew. Over a period of three decades Jesus my God cleansed me of the stain of sin, and for three years more He healed every manner of sickness and disease. With the same number of disciples He went up into a mountain showed them a mysterious manifestation of His glory. By His Resurrection on the third day He lifted high those souls which had been confined for ages in the darkness of Hades. And what can be compared to it? We see the number three in that which is yet greater; for it is proper to speak together of the Godhead, Which from the beginning is all-perfect, in terms of three properties, three Hypostases or Persons, [though] One in essence, the perfect number in an unconfused and unmingled unity. We who are chosen to praise Him [do not] incur dishonour because of [the] poverty and insufficiency [of our language], nor do we regard Him as an unnatural and imaginary multiplicity of principles; this is clearly affirmed by Gregory, who is so full of divine theology.<sup>41</sup> Thus, when One of that most holy and beginningless Trinity went to take up His dwelling in the virginal and maternal womb of the virginal Maiden, by the good will of the Father and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, it was also fitting that she be glorified by the same number and walk in its splendor; therefore, she is brought to the Temple at the age of three, her Creator and Offspring having ordered all things carefully and irreproachably, so that she had already been weaned from the earthly nourishment provided by her mother. Her parents performed that which they had previously promised. As it is written, they got their neighbours and the elders together, and they first sent ahead virgins with candles; then they arranged for [their daughter] to follow [these virgins], that, taking delight in the candles, she might proceed without turning back. Before all, Anne, who before had been barren and childless, lifted up her hands to God and exclaimed in a loud voice: Come and rejoice with me, all ye my relatives, as many as have gathered here; [rejoice] all the more now, because she who has come from our womb is being offered as a gift to the Lord and dedicated to God. Draw near, ye who live around us, and form a choir sweetly

singing a new song with timbrels, not led by Miriam [the sister] of Moses [as of old], but leading in [this new Miriam]. Come, thou choir of the prophets, thou chosen company, and when ye have come, compose a hymn which speaks of Christ our God in spiritual songs; for where the words of the voice of the prophets are heard, the blasphemy of the foe is foiled. But let our forefather, the divine ancestor David, bring his most melodious lyre here, striking its spiritual strings, loudly proclaiming with his divinely-inspired lips and offering a clear illustration of this virginal procession, in these words: The virgins that follow after her shall be brought unto the King, those near her shall be brought [unto Thee].<sup>42</sup> Behold, a concourse of young women is arranged into choirs; they are led through the streets to the house of the pure one; that is, to the temple of the King, to joy and gladness. My little girl, she whom thou didst call the daughter of the King, has fulfilled the word which thou spakest, saying: All the glory of the daughter of the King is within; with gold-fringed garments is she arrayed, adorned in various colours,<sup>43</sup> with pure and undefiled virginity, with manifold beauty and comeliness. Similarly, [Solomon] declares, Come now, and walk like the light. Who is this that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, choice as the sun?<sup>44</sup> How much more beautiful are her steps than thy description! How much more delightful and highly adorned is she who is clothed with the sun, who brings forth a new sight under the sun! Come, sonorous Ezekiel, holding a scroll of the life-giving Spirit from God, and loudly proclaim the praises of [her who is] the eastward-looking, divinely-entered and sealed gate. And if there is no one of the priestly rank; that is, of those who behold; let the whole choir raise its voice, seeing the coming of the fulfillment of what was foretold. And what about you, our first parents, who are released from the curse and receive the life of paradise, from which ye were expelled? Will ye not praise with resounding songs and great hymns [her who is] the occasion of your salvation? If it behooves you to cry out, it also behooves me and all creation together to exult with you. Guided by such appropriate thoughts or steps, the chaste Anne herself, together with her dear spouse, accompanied her daughter, as the young virgins walked with candles. They arrived at the Temple, and the gates opened to receive the door of Emmanuel [our] God, while the stairs were sanctified by

Mary's steps. The building was illuminated by candles, or rather its beauty was brilliantly illumined by the shining of a single candle at her Entry. The vestments of the horns of the altar are purpled by the purple of the vestments of the Virgin and her virgins. Zechariah rejoices at being counted worthy to receive the Mother of God. Joachim is overjoyed to announce the fulfillment of prophecy in the fulfillment of his promise. Anne is glad to behold the purification of her child. [Our] doomed first parents exult at their deliverance from imprisonment. The prophets chant praises, and with them the whole age of those who have grace joyfully makes glad. In this way, then, the maiden of God's hand is led in. Her kinfolk stand by and pray for her, while the high priest blesses [her]. Her parents again cry out to the priest: Receive her who doth receive the incorporeal and incomprehensible Fire. Receive her who is to give milk to God alone, the Son and Word of the Father. Take her who has taken away from us the reproach of barenness and childlessness. Lead into the sanctuary her who has resettled us in our original dwelling in paradise. Retain her who by her birth restrained the torment of Hades and the power of death that forcibly held sway over us. Embrace her who covered and dressed our nature which was denuded in Eden. Give back to God her who has given us back the expectation of [our] divinely-inspired hopes. Behold, O Lord, and look upon her whom Thou hast bestowed. Take that which Thou hast given. Accept the fruit which ended our fruitlessness. Accept her, through whom Thou hast rendered judgement against the sterility of the Law. Thou hast delivered us from constant cruel censure through her whom Thou hast so kindly brought forth from us. Accept her whom Thou hast chosen, foreordained and sanctified. Take that which bends over and longs for fragrance, like the flower of a lily which Thou hast picked from the thorns of our unworthiness. Accept the pleasing bloom which is presented to Thee. Behold, we give her back to Thee, and we ourselves back to Thee. Such was the harmonious speech of the righteous pair; such was the rejoicing of the loving couple; such the well-composed dedicatory address of these two forebears of God. As Zechariah received the Maiden, he first spake these words to her parents: O ye who are the occasion of our salvation! What shall I say to you? What words shall I speak? I am beside myself at such a sight.

How have you brought this fruit which is so fair in its purity as to give pleasure to God and to yourselves? No one ever was or ever will be so radiant in perfection. Ye resemble two twofold rivers running from paradise and carrying [her who] in the beauty of her virginity outshines gold and the most precious stones, [watering] the whole earth with dewy brilliance. Ye have appeared as very bright luminaries in the firmament [of the heavens]. Ye are shown to be covers of the noetic ark of God, finer than beaten gold on the vestments of the ark of the New Covenant of Him Who wrote forgiveness on the Cross. Your joy has become the world's glory, and all are heard to rejoice. Ye have been blest to be the parents of such a child. Blessed are ye who have brought such a blessed gift to the Lord. Blessed are breasts which nursed her and the womb which bare her. Come to me now, thou little child higher than the heavens. Come, thou who appearest to be but an infant and yet art a divine censer. Come, sanctify the threshold of the sanctuary; for it does not sanctify thee at thy purification, as is its appointed function, but rather it is more greatly sanctified by thee. Come, go inside the holy of holies, thou awesome treasure who art made to be an unfathomable vessel, not of man's handiwork. Enter through the threshold of the altar, thou who wilt later crush the thresholds of death. Gaze beyond the curtain, thou with thy lightning dost enlighten those who were blinded by a blinding bite [of fruit]. Give me thy hand, and I shall lead thee like a child; hold me by my arm, because I am worn with age and consumed by attention to earthly cares and the bareness of the commandment, and lead me to life. Behold, I hold thee as the staff of old age, the straightening of our nature which was enfeebled by the fall. Behold, I behold thee as [our] restoration, the deliverance of those who have descended to death. Draw near with a reverent bow to the holy table, O thou of whom many prophetic words speak, to become a rational table and to walk without defilement through the whole court of the altar. From thee wafts the scent of incense, more fragrant than myrrh. Thou art recognised and confirmed by God as a divine step, more pleasant than that [ladder] which was shown to the great patriarch Jacob. Sit down, my Lady; for it is fitting for thee to sit on such a step, since thou art a queen, and more noble than all the queens on earth; it is fitting for thee, the throne of the cherubim, to take up thy dwelling in the sacred

precincts. Behold, even as I have reserved [for thee] a place of honour worthy for the Queen of all, do thou raise up them that were cast out. And now I cry to thee together with David: Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thine own people and thy father's house. And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty.<sup>45</sup> Such, then, were the words of praise which the old man had in his mind, if they were not even greater than these. The parents of the Maiden departed, and she remained alone, dedicated to God. Angels with awe performed the duty of serving her food, and the Maiden received physical food, or else food that was spiritual, from an incorporeal power. Thus did the perfect chief ministers of God's creation find fulfillment from God; thus did the child grow and mature, and thus was the curse brought down by the enemy in Eden being undone. Now, therefore, in keeping with this dear feast, let us say to the Virgin, insofar as our childish minds have the ability: Hail; not as if we could praise her feast perfectly, but as declaring our own weakness. It is beyond the power of the lover of God to say enough concerning her; for she surpassed all understanding, being both a virgin and the source of life. Who else has ever given birth while remaining a virgin? Who else has ever given birth while preserving virginity intact? Only thou, O most bounteous Virgin, who without knowing wedlock gave birth to God for us. Hail, divine bride given by God to us vile creatures for the forgiveness of our fall; thou who today, at thine Entry into the holy of holies, hast clothed us with a purple-coloured robe; that is, with the divine cloud of pardon for our sins; whereas we had been stripped of a glorious garment not made by man, when in Eden we ate of the death-dealing and spiritually-blinding food. Hail, thou who today, by the act of thine honourable and illustrious Entry, hast gathered together the whole assembly of the prophets, who exult with divinely-inspired cries of true happiness, to the consolation of all, while musical instruments and fine-sounding cymbals resound. Hail, thou who, by the steps which thou hast undertaken [today], hast trampled down the evil originator of sin, the devil, that serpent who hates goodness and whose ways are wickedness; thou who hast lifted up those that walked with thee, [whose steps] are faulty and inclined to fall, [and hast led them] back to a dwelling which is immaterial, holy and eternal. Hail, thou who, by the brilliance of thine Entry, hast made the daylight

of joy and gladness shine upon those who are in the shadow of death and the dark depths of debility; thou who hast heralded the destruction of darkness and the wonderful things which would be wrought through thee, who art full of grace. Hail, thou who dost send us the noetic and divine Dew; thou luminous cloud who, by thine Entry into the holy of holies, hast set off for them that sit in the shadow of death a divinely-bubbling fountain of the Sun which shines everywhere; whence appear divine rivers, which distribute the clear and glistening water of right belief and eliminate error. Hail, thou who by thy birth didst loose the bonds of barrenness, remove the reproach of childlessness, overcome the curse of the Law and bring in the beginnings of grace. Hail, Mary, thou that art highly favoured, that art holier than the holies, more spacious than the skies, higher than the cherubim and more honourable than the seraphim; thou who at thy splendid and illustrious Entry didst receive the mercy of the Deliverer from the noetic flood, and didst announce to us the calm of salvation; thou beautiful dove, whose wings are covered with silver and whose pinions are of sparkling gold,<sup>46</sup> since thou art sanctified by the most holy and radiant Spirit; thou vessel all of gold, containing the true Manna, the sweetest Sweetness of our souls, namely, Christ. O most holy and most highly lauded [Virgin], thou offering greater than any other created thing, thou ground untouched and field untilled, thou noble grape, thou cup of joy, thou burbling fountain, thou Virgin bearing a child and Mother knowing no man, thou vessel of purity and [its] glorious treasure: By the pleasing beauty of thy maternal prayers to Him Who [came] from thee without a father, [thy] Son and God, the Maker of all, do thou obtain an undisturbed calm for the administration of good order in the Church, one not submerged by assaults; correct false beliefs and scandals; and clothe priests with the splendid robe of reputable and irreproachable righteousness [and] the testimony of pure faith, this being greater than all the colours of purple and gold, [greater than] pearls or precious stones. Grant peace and prosperity to the right-believing rulers<sup>47</sup> who have taken thee as their crown and royal robe, the unassailable ornament of their realm. Lay at their feet and subject [to their authority] those pagan nations who wickedly blaspheme against thee and the God Who was born of thee. Avenge the cause of those that rely on thy help when they do battle [with the pagans].

Preserve this thy city, which has thee as its foundation and pillar; adorn it with the emblems of victory and gird it with strength. Preserve the beauty of the temple wherein God dwells, and ever keep them that praise thee safe from every attack and spiritual sickness. Grant also unto captives a return home, and be the defence of strangers and all who are defenceless. Extend thy helping hand to all creation; that we may meet thy feasts, and [in particular] the present splendid festival which we celebrate, with joy, gladness and contemplation [of their mysteries], in Christ Jesus our Lord; to Him, and to the Father, and to His life-creating Spirit, be glory, honour and adoration, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

## NOTES

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- 1 Gen. 3: 18 - 20.
  - 2 Gen. 3: 17.
  - 3 v. Protev. Jac. 1.
  - 4 Ps. 103: 3, altered.
  - 5 Ps. 30: 18, altered.
  - 6 Gen. 2: 24.
  - 7 Ps. 44: 9 - 10.
  - 8 cf. Gen. 6: 1 - 4, a passage of Scripture which has perplexed generations of scholars. The text apparently considers the "sons of God" to be the godly offspring of Seth.
  - 9 1 Cor. 10: 4.
  - 10 Jer. 38: 31 - 32 (31: 31 - 32 in the A.V.).
  - 11 cf. Hab. 3: 4, 7.
  - 12 Rom. 5: 20.
  - 13 Ps. 44: 2.
  - 14 Ps. 103: 34.
  - 15 *ibid.*
  - 16 cf. Gen. 1: 9 - 10.
  - 17 v. Gen. 15: 9.
  - 18 John 8: 39, 44.
  - 19 John 5: 45,46.
  - 20 1 Pet. 2: 9.
  - 21 cf. Song 3: 7.
  - 22 See the description of the high-priestly vestments in Exodus 28.
  - 23 v. Isa. 6.
  - 24 cf. Isa. 29: 11 - 12.
  - 25 cf. Ezek. 2: 9 - 10.
  - 26 cf. Ps. 44: 8.
  - 27 Song 4: 8. Succeeding phrases continue the description of the Virgin in terms taken from the Song of Songs.
  - 28 Song 4: 12.
  - 29 *ibid.*
  - 30 Ps. 45: 4.
  - 31 Ps. 39: 9.
  - 32 Isa. 7: 14.
  - 33 Bel and the Dragon, 33 - 39; or Daniel 14: 32 - 38 (Douay).
  - 34 3 Kings 17: 2 -6.
  - 35 Gen. 3: 25.
  - 36 Song 3: 6; 4: 8.
  - 37 Ezek. 44: 1 - 2.
  - 38 cf. John 6: 51.
  - 39 v. 1 Kings (1 Sam.) 17; however, verse 40 relates that David chose five smooth stones for his fight with Goliath, and verse 49 states that he killed him with one stone.



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40 v. 3 Kings (1 Kgs) 18: 16 - 39.

41 These two sentences about the Trinity are very unclear in the Slavonic. What the author seems to be saying is better put by Vladimir Lossky thus: " ... the mystery of the number three ... [is that] the deity is neither one nor many; its perfection goes beyond the multiplicity of which duality is the root ... and expresses itself in the Trinity. ... It is the Trinity. ... Two is the number which separates, three the number which transcends all separation: the one and the many find themselves gathered and circumscribed in the Trinity." (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.47.)

42 Ps. 44: 13.

43 Ps. 44: 12.

44 Song 6: 9, expanded.

45 Ps. 44: 9 - 10.

46 cf. Ps. 67: 14.

47 lit., emperors