



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

December
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Chancellor's Update

Children of God

Over many years we have reserved the December issue of the Updates to cover some part of the life of Christ or His Nature. We have covered His Two Natures, His calling of the Apostles, His Kingdom and discussed His Divine Person. This month in response to new people coming to Christ through our Order we have been asked to explain the meaning in John's gospel 1 v. 9-14 in the third Mass of Christmas Day.

Please note how brilliantly and explicitly St. Augustine explains this passage. One just marvels at the profound meanings he elucidates in explaining this passage. This is true of all the Doctors and Fathers of the Church. (The following sections are taken from *Catena Aurea* Vol 1, p. 107 -154)

And how do they become the children of God? *Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* They are born of God, when they have received the power to become the sons of God. Note carefully; they are born of God; *not of blood*, as was their first birth; as was that unhappy birth, springing from unhappiness. But they who are born of God, what were they? Whence were they first born? From blood. From the commingling blood of male and female, by the commingling of male and female flesh; thence were they born. From whence are they now born? *They are born of God.* The first birth is from a male and a female; the second from God and from the Church.

Behold they are born of God. How does it arise that they are born of God, who first were born of men? How has this come to be? How? *And the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.* Wondrous exchange! He is made flesh; they become spirit. What is this? What honor is this, my brethren? Lift up your heart to the possession and the enjoyment of higher things. Do not stick fast in earthly cravings. You have been purchased at a price: for your sake the Word was made flesh. He Who was the Son of God, for you has become the Son of man, so that you who were children of men, might become the children of God. What was He; what became He? What were you; what have you become? He was the Son of God. What did He become? The Son of man. You were the sons of men. What have you become? Children of God. That He might give us of His good things, He shared with us our infirmities.

But He, even by that through which He became the Son of man, is still far removed from us. We are children of men, by means of the concupiscence of the flesh. He is the Son of man, because of the faith of a virgin. The mother of every man commingles and conceives; each one of us is born of a father from men, and of a mother from men. Christ is born from the Holy Ghost, and from the Virgin Mary. He came unto us, departing but little from Himself; nay, from Himself as God He never departed: but joined that which He was, to our nature. He drew close to that which He was not; he surrendered not that which He was. He became the Son of man, without ceasing to be the Son of God.

Through this He is Mediator between both. Between both, what means this? Neither above, nor below. How neither above, nor below? Neither above, being flesh; nor below, being sinless. Yet above always,

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since He is God. For not so came He amongst us, as to leave the Father. He went from us, Yet He leaves us not. He will come again to us, and will not depart from Him, Who liveth and reigneth, world without end, Amen. As children of God, how do we respond to the Incarnation of Christ?

V. 15. Luke 2. *The shepherds said one to another: let us go over to Bethlehem.* . . Geometer from Cat. of G.F.: What they had seen and heard so astonished the shepherds that they, forgetful of their flocks, set off in the night for Bethlehem, to find out concerning the meaning of this light of the Savior. Hence is said *one to another . . . and let us see this word.* Bede: As being truly vigilant they did not say: *let us see this child*, but, *this word that is come to pass*; that is, let us see how the Word, Which always was, has become flesh; since this *word* is the Lord, for there follows on: *Which the Lord has made and showed to us*; that is, let us see how the Word has made Himself, and has shown to us His flesh.

V. 16. *And they came with haste; and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in a manger.* Ambrose, in Luke Ch. 2: See how the Scriptures weigh carefully the meaning of each word. For when the Flesh of the Lord is seen, the Word is seen, which is the Son. Do not let it seem to you but an indifferent proof of your faith, this that the persons of the shepherds are lowly. Simplicity is aimed at here, grandeur is not desired. Hence follows: *And they came with haste*; no one comes seeking Christ in sloth. Origen, Hom. 13 in Luke: Because they came in haste, not leisurely, it then follows that: *they found Mary*, who, without pain, had brought forth Jesus, *and Joseph*, that is, the Protector of the Divine Infancy; *and the infant laid in a manger*, namely the Savior Himself.

V.17 and 18. *And seeing, they understood of the word . . . And all that heard, wondered.* Bede: Right order demands that having fittingly commemorated the Incarnation of the Word, we raise our minds to the Glory of the Word; hence: *And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child.* Photius, in Cat. G.F.: The joyful things that had been seen and heard they tell, not alone to Mary and Joseph, but to others, and what is more, they impressed them deeply, *for, all that heard, wondered.* How could it be other than wondrous to see a Heavenly Being among men, and earth at peace with heaven, and that Ineffable Child uniting celestial Majesty and earthly humanity, and in His own Person sustaining this wondrous harmony.

Gloss: Nor did they wonder only at the mystery of the Incarnation, but at such testimony from the shepherds, who would not know how to invent such unheard of things, but would only proclaim in simple language what was true.

V. 19. *But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.* Ambrose, Bk. 2 in Luke: Do not despise the words of the shepherds; for from the Shepherds Mary enriched her faith. Hence there follows: *But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.*

V. 20. *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God . . .* Athanasius, in Cat. G.F.: One by one they exult in the Birth of Christ, not however after the manner of men, as men rejoice at the birth of a child; but as in the presence of Christ, and in the glory of divine light; hence follows: *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard.* Bede, in Nat. Dom.: Let all the faithful, following the example of the shepherds, fittingly celebrate the Incarnation of Christ.

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