

**THE PASCHA OF THE LORD
(IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD: CHRIST IS RISEN!)
MARCH 26/APRIL 8, 2007**

ACTS 1:1-8

ST. JOHN 1:1-17

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PASCAL HOMILY BY ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John bare witness of Him, and cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.

And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

...

In Him, being the God-man, there was created and preserved in the most ideal way an equilibrium between the Divine and the human; and preserved together with this was the autonomy of what is of man and nature, as well as the autonomy of what is of God and Divine...

[St. Athanasius the Great, *On The Incarnation*, cited on p. 11 of 20, St. John the Forerunner Parish, Canberra, Australia, at <http://www.rocor.org/au/stjohntheforerunnerchurch/saints/may-week1.html>.]

...

66. The mystery of the Incarnation of the Logos is the key to all the arcane symbolism and typology in the Scriptures, and in addition gives us knowledge of created things, both visible and intelligible. He who apprehends the mystery of the Cross and the Burial apprehends the inward essences of created things; while he who is initiated into the inexpressible power of the Resurrection apprehends the purpose for which God first established everything.

[St. Maximos the Confessor in *The Philokalia* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Macarios of Corinth), Volume Two (tr. from the Greek and ed. by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware), Faber and Faber, 1981, paperback edition, 1990, p. 127.]

Who and What is the Godhead? St. John's Emphasis

On Resurrection Day (Pascha), it is fitting we consider *who and what* our Saviour Christ was, and is. No one has explained it as spiritually or as well as the Beloved Disciple. The Apostle John wrote the most spiritual of the Gospels, His account is particularly esteemed by the Orthodox. This does not mean that John's Gospel contradicts in any way the other three, or vice-versa. Nothing within the Gospels contradicts itself, everything can be explained and has been by the Fathers of the Church through the centuries. Matthew, Mark and Luke are also spiritual Gospels, but their emphases are somewhat different from that of John.

John concentrates on the Godhead, what Christ, Son of God (Man), the 'New Adam,' is, the Divinity of the Only-Begotten Son. The other Evangelists also declared the Lord's Divinity, but not in such a complete way, "not at length".¹ John does not neglect the Father. Father and Son are indeed inseparable in the sense that the Father is spoken of whilst speaking of the Son. John tells us about the Son "for the Father was already known from the Old Testament,"² but speaks of Them together. It is from John that Christ's eternal existence so vividly strikes us. Christ, the Son, the Word, exists co-eternally with the Father, the Father was never without the Son.

The Son *Is* the Word

It is not possible that God is ever without word and reason, without wisdom, or without power. Therefore, since the Son is the Word (Logos), the Wisdom, and the Power of God, we believe that He always was with God, meaning, with the Father.³

There Never Was a Time When He Was Not

The Son did *not* come after the Father. He took flesh (the Incarnation), but He is the Father's Only-Begotten Son from the beginning:

In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.⁴

St. John says "In the beginning was the Word." There is no difference between *this* beginning and the Genesis account. The Word is eternal. The Word is the Son. The Word "was begotten of the Father without passion".⁵

Why Is He Called the Word?

Christ is called the Word because He was begotten of the Father without passion; to illustrate He is co-eternal with the Father; and because "Christ the Word proclaimed to us the things of the Father".⁶

Different Person But Not in Kind

“The Word was with God *and* the Word was God.” Since the Word was *with* God, the Word and the Father are different from each other; that is, in their persons, but *not in kind*. They are two persons (hypostases) but alike in that “They share the same Divine nature.”⁷ There was never a time They were separated:

God the Word never was separated from God the Father.⁸

All Things Were Made by Him

The Word is not our speaking in which words are merely transitory and once spoken die away; rather,

The Word is the Maker of everything, both that which is perceived by the mind and that perceived by the senses.⁹

When St. John says that the Son made all things,

... he shows that the Father used Him, as it were, as an intermediary in the creating, *not* (emphasis supplied) as someone *inferior* to Himself, but, on the contrary, as One of *equal* (emphasis supplied) power, able to carry out such a great command.¹⁰

See that John states that “all things” were made by the Son. However, the Son did *not* create the Holy Spirit since It is not a thing, but, rather, the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father alone.¹¹ The procession, the Holy Spirit’s ultimate/original source, is different from ‘sending’. Anything of a created nature was made by the Son (too). Since the Holy Spirit is “*not* (emphasis supplied) part of created nature,” the Son didn’t make It:¹²

8. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets.¹³

The Holy Spirit continuously proceeds from the Father.¹⁴

His Is the Everlasting Light

The Lord is the Light of everything (everyone), a noetic (spiritual) light “which enlightens the soul itself”. His light is not restricted to certain people; He has created and spiritually enlightened all of us. We have received *both* mind and reason from our Creator, the Word (Logos). The Divinely-created ‘reason’ lights our way guiding us “into what we ought, and ought not, to do”.¹⁵ His light shines “in the darkness,” meaning even in death and deception. In death, He conquered it completely, and His preaching shines unextinguished among “the deception of the pagan Greeks”. The ‘darkness not comprehending it’ means that His Light is immune to the machinations of evil, which oppose His Light.¹⁶

Who Was Not the Light Bears Witness to the True Light

After St. John's declaration of God the Word's existence "from before the ages," he interjects a discussion of the heralding of Christ by St. John the Baptist, Forerunner of the Lord. John preceded the Lord *in the flesh* by six months, but nevertheless, Christ is to be prefigured by John's own words, because "He was before me." I.e., He was before John "in His Divinity".¹⁷ The Baptist was the last and greatest prophet, whose central role was to precede Christ and prepare His Way. God sent him, and he was called an angel because of his spiritual ministry preaching and announcing Christ. The Forerunner was *not* an angel "by nature," see the words:

There was a *man* (emphasis supplied) sent from God.

Nor did he come down from heaven.¹⁸

God sent him to witness to the Light, which is Christ. John was to be a vehicle by which all men might believe. John drew people to the Light. Not all came to believe through him; however, his relentless preaching provided the opportunity for everyone to believe in the Lord. Some chose not to, but as Bl. Theophylact states:

The sun rises each day for the purpose of giving light to all. *If* a man shuts himself up in a gloomy dwelling and does not enjoy the sun's rays, is the sun at fault? So it is here. John was sent so that *all* might believe. It is not his fault that it turned out otherwise (emphases supplied).¹⁹

Although John the Forerunner was not *the* Light, he certainly was *a* light. However, John's 'light,' as all other saints,' derives from the true Light, Christ. John's light glows because of his spiritual participation in *the* Light!²⁰

Those Who 'Know Him Not'

Bl. Theophylact comments that some people will *not* know Him because they will be "attached to the things of *this* (emphasis supplied) world". Christ was in the world, He made it, but those 'involved' in the world, not spiritually, knew Him not. Those who think and act in an earthly (worldly), not spiritual, manner did not know Him, but the saints and prophets, those who strived and struggled spiritually and achieved sanctification, *knew* Him.²¹

We Can Know Him: But It's Not 'Automatic'

We can know Christ by taking up the Cross. He gave us the *power* to "become sons of God," to be "little Christs," if we *believe* in Him, receive Him through baptism and follow through after baptism to become "sons of God," to remain on the Divine road. We have the power to receive

... the completion and perfection of this grace (of adoption) only in the Resurrection, and we hope to receive at that time the *fullness* (emphasis supplied) of adoption. As Paul says, *Even we are waiting for the adoption*. [Rm. 8:23] For all these reasons, then, the Evangelist did not say, '*As many as received Him*, He made

them sons of God,’ but instead, ‘to them gave He power to become sons of God’, that is, to receive this grace in the age to come.²²

I.e., salvation is not automatic, even for a ‘believer’. As Bl. Theophylact states, St. John does not say it is enough to receive Him. It takes more than baptism if subsequently we did not exercise our “power” to *become* God’s sons.²³

The Word Made Flesh Dwells In Us

We have the potential to become sons of God. How are we able “to be *adopted* (emphasis supplied) as sons of God”? Because the Word was made “flesh,” the latter term meaning that the Lord became “perfect man”. The Word did not attach to the flesh, or appear to be, or imagine to be, flesh. The Son of God “became flesh in truth and in essence, not by phantasy,” the latter being a *false* appearance.

The Word did not abandon His Divinity when being made flesh. Rather, Divinity became what It was not – human, with a body, and rational soul. *If* the Word had not taken flesh, our souls could not be healed. There is no salvation without it:

For what He did not assume, He did not sanctify.²⁴

In Scripture, the usage of the terms “body” or “soul” are interchangeable in the sense that either refers to “the whole man”. “The Word *Himself* (emphasis supplied) became man.” It is crystal clear.²⁵ This does not mean that by becoming flesh, Jesus has *one* nature. No, He has two natures; one, Divine, the other, human, as well as two respective wills:

And the Word was made flesh and *dwelt in us* (emphasis supplied).

The Word Himself became man “and, while being the Son of God, *also* (emphasis supplied) became the Son of a woman who is called the Theotokos, God’s Birthgiver, precisely because she gave birth to God in the flesh.²⁶ “He *dwelt in* (emphasis supplied) us.” Through this spiritual sentence, we believe that Christ has two natures, “both God and man”. These two natures appear in *one* person (hypostasis), the Lord.²⁷

Beholding His Glory

The disciples beheld His glory, His truth, “Who is in Truth the Son of God”. This was made possible through His taking flesh, by the Incarnation. He was full of Truth and Grace. His words of grace and miraculous healings manifested His glory. Whereas, Moses and the Prophets had *foreshadowed* the Truth, but “all that Christ said and did is *full of truth*, for Christ Himself is Grace and Truth...” Not only did the disciples behold His glory on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration, but in everything He spoke or did.²⁸

The Revelation of Grace and Truth

We have received the grace of the New Testament in place of the grace of the Old Testament due to the “old lawgiving” growing old and weak. The old law was given by Moses, a mediator chosen by God, but the New Testament (grace and truth) came *directly* through Christ:

...God graciously bestowed on us not only forgiveness of sins but adoption as sons; truth, because everything which the men of old saw and spoke in type, the New Testament proclaimed in radiant clarity.²⁹

Moses, the servant, gave; Christ, the Master, came!

Passion Week

Passion Week is the most important spiritual happening of the Church year. It culminates in Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection as prophesied by the Prophets of Old and His words and actions throughout His ministry in the flesh:

All ye who have toiled from the first hour, receive today your due reward. All ye who have come after the third hour, join in the feast today with gratitude and rejoicing. As many as have arrived after the sixth hour, have no doubts. Ye who have tarried until the ninth hour, come without any shame. And if any have delayed their arrival until the eleventh hour, be not afraid because of your lateness and do not be downcast because of it. The Master is kind and merciful in rendering compensation. He receives the last *even as* (emphasis supplied) the first.³⁰

It is fitting we 'close' with the spiritual witness of one of the greatest, if not the greatest, saint [except for the Virgin Mary of course], St. John Chrysostom (+407). The "golden-tongued"

... summarizes the meaning of Christ's feat on the Cross:

The ancient tyranny of the devil is destroyed on the Cross, the Strong is tied and His weapons taken away, sin is ironed out, death is trampled and the curse is removed from men, the obstacle of separation is removed and Paradise is opened, Heaven has become accessible and people have drawn closer to the angels; God has reconciled the heavenly and the earthly.³¹

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Paschal Homily of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople:



Saint John The Baptist
Russian Orthodox Cathedral

<http://www.stjohndc.org/pascha/stjohnc.htm>

The Catechetical Homily of St. John Chrysostom

The Catechetical Homily of our father among the saints, John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, on the holy and light-bearing Day of the most glorious and saving Resurrection of Christ our God.

If any be devout and God-loving, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumph. If any be a good and wise servant, let him enter rejoicing into the joy of his Lord. If any be weary of fasting, let him now receive his reward. If any have labored from the first hour, let him receive today his rightful due. If any have come at the third hour, let him feast with thankfulness. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him in no wise be in doubt, for in no wise shall he suffer loss. If any be delayed even until the ninth hour, let him draw near, doubting nothing, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him not be fearful on account of his lateness; for the Master, Who is jealous of His honor, receiveth the last even as the first. He giveth rest to him that cometh at the eleventh hour, as well as to him that hath labored from the first hour; and to the last He is merciful, and the first He pleaseth; to the one He giveth, and to the other He bestoweth; and He receiveth the works, and welcometh the intention; and the deed He honoureth, and the offering He praiseth. Wherefore, then, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord; both the first and the second, receive ye your reward. Ye rich and ye poor, with one another exult.

Ye sober and ye slothful, honor the day. Ye that have kept the fast and ye that have not, be glad today. The table is full-laden, delight ye all. The calf is fatted; let none go forth hungry. Let all enjoy the feast of faith, receive all ye the riches of goodness. Let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom hath been revealed. Let no one weep for his transgressions, for forgiveness hath dawned from the tomb. Let no one fear death, for the death of the Saviour hath set us free. He hath quench by it, He hath led hades captive, He Who descended into hades. He embittered it, when it tasted of His flesh. And foretelling this, Isaiah cried: "Hades," he saith, "was embittered when it encountered Thee below." It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered. It received a body and encountered God. It received earth, and met heaven. It received that which it saw, and fell to what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and thou art cast down.

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen.

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice.

Christ is risen, and life flourisheth.

Christ is risen, and there is none dead in the tombs.

For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of them that have fallen asleep. To

Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

(Read during the Paschal Matins)

¹ Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint John* [in preparation – tr. by Fr. Christopher Stade], *Gospel for Pascha*, Chrysostom Press, p. 1, <http://www.chrysostompress.org/explanation/pascha1?CPSESSION=a492476d33c2378fe2fe>.

² *id.*

³ *id.*, pp. 1-2.

⁴ Gen. 1:1

⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶ *id.*

⁷ *id.*, p. 2.

⁸ *id.*

⁹ *id.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *id.*

¹¹ St. John 15:26.

¹² Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹³ The Creed, Eighth Article.

¹⁴ Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy, *The Law of God*, (First English Edition), Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y., 1994 (published in 1993 and 1996), p. 467.

¹⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ *id.*

¹⁷ *id.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *id.*, p. 4.

¹⁹ *id.*, p. 5.

²⁰ *id.*

²¹ *id.*

²² *id.*, p. 6.

²³ *id.*

²⁴ *id.*, p. 7.

²⁵ *id.*

²⁶ *id.*, p. 8.

²⁷ *id.*

²⁸ *id.*

²⁹ *id.*, p. 9.

³⁰ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 148.

³¹ Bishop Alexander (Mileant) (tr. by Nicholas Semyanko), *Passion Week*, p. 20 of 24 at http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/passion_week.htm.