

## SERMON 188 ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Date: uncertain

### **Small wonder if we cannot explain in words the Word through which all things were made**

1. If we were really to make the effort to praise the Son of God just as he is with the Father, equal to him and coeternal; the one in whom all things were established in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; the Word of God, and God, the life and light of the human race; then it's small wonder that no human thoughts, no words would be adequate. After all, how can our tongues have the capacity fittingly to praise one whom our hearts still lack the capacity to see, our hearts in which he put the eyes that he could be seen with if they were purged of their iniquity and healed of their infirmity, and blessed would be the pure of heart, because they shall see God? It's small wonder, I repeat, that we cannot find the words with which to speak the one Word, by which it was decreed that we should be, and that we should speak something about him.

These words, you see, that we think and utter are formulated by our minds; but our minds are formulated by that Word. Nor do we make words in the same sort of way as we ourselves were made through the Word; because neither did the Father beget the one and only Word in the same way as all things were made through the Word. God certainly begot God; but begetter and begotten are together one God. On the other hand, God made the world; the world passes away, God remains. And just as the things that were made did not, of course, make themselves; so also the one through whom they could all be made, was not made by anyone. Small wonder therefore, if we human beings, who are among all the things that were made, cannot explain in words the Word through which all things were made.

### **The eternal day**

2. So for a few moments let us direct our ears and thoughts to this following point, and see if we are capable of saying something fitting and suitable, not exactly on the subject of In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1); but on the subject of the Word became flesh; see if perhaps we can say by what means he dwelt among us (Jn 1:14); see if perhaps there is something sayable at the point where he willed to be visible. That, after all, is the reason why we are celebrating this day on which he saw fit to be born of the virgin, a begetting of his which he certainly had men tell the tale of; as for that eternity in which as God he was born of God, his begetting, who shall tell the tale of? (Is 53:8). There the day is not one to be annually and solemnly celebrated; after all, it doesn't pass and return with the yearly round, but abides without any sunset, because it didn't begin with a sunrise.

So that one and only Word of God, that life, that light of men (Jn 1:4), is indeed the eternal day; while this day, on which he was joined together to human flesh and became like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber (Ps 19:5), is now today and tomorrow will become yesterday. Nevertheless this day brings to our notice the eternal day born of the virgin, because the eternal day born of the virgin has consecrated this day.

What praises, then, should we be singing to God's love, what thanks should we be expressing! I mean, he loved us so much that for our sake he came to be in time, though all times were made through him; and he was prepared to be younger in age than many of his servants in the world, though he is older in eternity than all the world. He loved us so much

that he became man though he had made man; that he was created from a mother whom he had created, carried in arms he had fashioned, sucked breasts which he himself filled; that he lay squalling in a manger wordless in infancy, though he is the Word without whom human eloquence would be at a loss for words.

#### **The only thing which could lift you up was divine humility**

3. Observe, O man, what God became for you; acknowledge the teaching of such incalculable humility, even coming from a teacher not yet able to speak. You, once upon a time in paradise, were so fluent that you gave names to every living, animate, creature; yet for your sake your Creator was lying there, a speechless infant, and didn't even call his mother by her name. You there, in the broad acres of groves of fruit trees, lost yourself by neglecting obedience; he out of obedience came as a mortal to a cramped and crowded lodging house, in order by dying to look for you who were dead. You, though you were a man, wished to be God, and so got lost; he, though he was God, wished to be a man, and so find what had been lost. Human pride pressed down on you so heavily, that the only thing which could lift you up was divine humility.

#### **The virgin holy Church**

4. So let us celebrate with joy the day on which Mary bore the Saviour, a married woman the creator of marriage, a virgin the chief of virgins; Mary who both had been given to a husband, and was a mother not by her husband; a virgin while with child, a virgin while breast feeding. The almighty Son certainly did not in any way deprive his holy mother of her virginity by being born, seeing that he had specifically chosen her to be born of. Yes, fruitfulness in marriage is certainly a good thing, but integrity in the consecrated state is a better one. So the man Christ, who could grant both as God (the same person, of course, as man and as God), would never have given his mother the good thing that married people value, in such a way that he deprived her of the better one for whose sake virgins decide against being mothers.

And so the virgin holy Church celebrates today the child-bearing of the virgin. It is to the Church, you see, that the apostle says, I have attached you to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor 11:2). How could it be a chaste virgin in so many communities of either sex, among so many, not only boys and girls, but also married fathers and mothers? How, I repeat, could it be a chaste virgin, except in the integrity of faith, hope, and charity? Hence Christ, intending to establish the Church's virginity in the heart, first preserved Mary's in the body. In human marriage, of course, a woman is given to her husband so that she ceases to be a virgin anymore; the Church on the other hand could not be a virgin unless she had found that the husband she had been given to was the son of a virgin.

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## **SERMON 189 ON CHRISTMAS DAY**

Date: before 410

### **Who can this day from day be?**

1. This day has been sanctified for us by the day who made all days, about whom the psalm sings, Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord and bless his name; proclaim the good news of the day from day, his salvation (Ps 96: 1-2). Who can this day from day be, but the Son from the Father, light from light? But that day who begot the day which would be born of the virgin on this day; so that day has neither rising nor setting; the day I mean is God the Father. Jesus, after all, would not be day from day, unless the Father were day. What is day but light? Not for eyes of flesh, not the light which is common to human beings and animals, but the light which shines on angels, the light which hearts are cleansed for seeing. This night, you see, is passing, the night in which we are living now, in which the lamps of the scriptures are lit for us; and that is coming, of which another psalm sings: In the morning I will stand by and gaze upon you (Ps 5:3).

### **What justice can there be without faith?**

2. So that day, the Word of God, the day which shines on the angels, the day which shines in the home country we are in exile from, clothed himself with flesh and was born of Mary the virgin. Born in a wonderful way; what could be more wonderful than a virgin giving birth? She conceives, and is a virgin; she gives birth, and is a virgin. The one who created her, you see, was created from her, and he brought her fertility, he did not spoil her integrity. Where did Mary come from? From Adam. Where did Adam come from? From earth. If Adam's from earth, and Mary's from Adam, then Mary too is earth. If Mary is earth, let us realize what we are singing: Truth has sprung from the earth. What sort of benefit has this brought us? Truth has sprung from the earth, and Justice has looked forth from heaven (Ps 85: 1 1). The Jews, you see, as the apostle says, not knowing the justice of God, and wishing to establish their own, did not submit to the justice of God (Rom 10:3). From where can you or anyone get to be just? From yourself? Who is the poor man who can give himself bread? Who, if naked, can cover himself, unless he receives a garment? We didn't have any justice; the only things here were sins.

Where does justice come from? What justice can there be without faith, since the just lives by faith (Rom 1:17) Any who call themselves just without faith are lying. How can they not be lying, when there is no faith in them? If they want to speak the truth, let them turn to the truth. But it was so far away. Truth has sprung from the earth. You were asleep, it came to you; you were snoring, it woke you up. It made you a way along itself, in order not to lose you. So, because truth has sprung from the earth, our Lord Jesus Christ was born of the virgin; Justice has looked down from heaven, in order that people may have a justice which is not their own, but God's.

### **Christ was born that we might be reborn**

3. What infinite consideration! Preceded by what fearful indignation! What was the indignation that preceded it? We were mortal, we were weighed down by sins, we were bearing our punishments. Every single human being, as soon as born, begins with misery. No need to look for a prophet; question the child as it's born, and see how it cries.<sup>6</sup> So with this great indignation of God on the earth, what sort of consideration was

suddenly shown? Truth sprang from the earth. He created all things, he was created among all things; he made the day, he came on the day; he was before all times, he set his seal on the times.

The Lord Christ is for ever, without beginning with the Father. And yet ask what today is; it's a birthday. Whose? The Lord's. Has he really got a birthday? He has. The Word in the beginning, God with God, has a birthday? Yes, he has. Unless he had a human birth, we would never attain to the divine rebirth; he was born that we might be reborn. Let nobody hesitate to be reborn; Christ has been born; born, with no need of being reborn. The only ones in need of rebirth are those who have been condemned in their first birth.

And so let his mercy come to be in our hearts. His mother bore him in her womb; let us bear him in our hearts. The virgin was big with the incarnation of Christ; let our bosoms grow big with the faith of Christ. She gave birth to the Saviour; let us give birth to praise. We mustn't be barren; our souls must be fruitful with God.

#### **The two births of Christ**

4. The birth of Christ from the Father was without mother; the birth of Christ from his mother was without father; each birth was wonderful. The first was eternal, the second took place in time. When was he born of the Father? What do you mean, when? You're asking about "when" there, there where you won't find any time? Don't ask about "when" there. Ask about it here; it's a good question, when was he born of his mother. When was he born of the Father is not a good question. He was born, and he has no time; he was born eternal, from the eternal, coeternal. Why be astonished? He's God. Take divinity into consideration, and any reason for astonishment disappears.

And when we say he was born of a virgin, it's a great thing, you're astonished. He's God, don't be astonished; let astonishment give way to thanksgiving and praise. Let faith be present; believe that it happened. If you don't believe, it still happened, but you remain unbelieving. He agreed to become man; what more do you want? Hasn't God humbled himself enough for you? The one who was God has become man. The inn was crowded and cramped, so he was wrapped in rags, laid in a manger; you heard it when the gospel was read. Who wouldn't be astonished? The one who filled the universe could find no room in a lodging-house; laid in a feeding trough, he became our food.

Let the two animals approach the manger, the two peoples." The ox, you see, recognizes its owner, and the donkey its master 's manger (Is 1:3). Be in attendance at the manger; don't be ashamed of being the Lord's donkey. You will be carrying Christ, you won't go astray, walking along the way; the way is sitting on you. Do you remember that young donkey that was brought to the Lord? Don't any of you feel ashamed—that's what we are. Let the Lord sit upon us, and take us wherever he wants. We're his mount, we're going to Jerusalem. With him seated on us we aren't weighed down, but lifted up; with him guiding us, we can't go wrong. We are going to him, we are going by him, we are not going off the rails.

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## **SERMON 193 ON CHRISTMAS DAY**

Date: 410

### **Glory to God, and on earth peace**

1 . When the gospel was read, we heard the voices of angels announcing to the shepherds that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of the virgin: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will (Lk 2:14). Festive voices, congratulating not just one woman whose womb had been delivered of offspring, but the whole human race, for whom the virgin had borne the saviour. It was right, you see, and altogether fitting, that the one who carried in her womb the Lord of heaven and earth, and after giving birth to him remained virginally intact, should be hailed in her child-bearing, not by a pack of women with solemn human rites, but by angels with glorious divine praises. Let us too then say, and say with all the jubilation we can muster—because we aren't announcing his birth to shepherds watching their flocks, but celebrating his birthday with his sheep; let us too say, I repeat, with faithful hearts and loyal voices, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. Let us take as close and shrewd a look as we can at these divine words, these praises of God, this exultant joy of the angels, and meditate on it in faith and hope and charity. For in accordance with what we believe and hope and desire, we too will be glory to God in the highest, when with the spiritual body rising again we are snatched up to meet Christ in the clouds; provided that meanwhile, as long as we are on earth, we pursue peace with good will. But all who would have life and love to see good days, let them curb their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn aside from evil and do good (Ps 34: 12-14); and in this way be people of good will. And let them seek peace and pursue it (Ps 34: 14), because on earth peace to people of good will.

### **Christ's mercy gets in ahead of us every single time**

2. But if you say, man, "Look, to will is available to me, but to perform the good I do not find in myself, and if you delight in the law of God according to the inner self, but see another law in your members fighting back against the law of your mind, and taking you prisoner to the law of sin which is in your members; persist in your good will, and cry out what follows: Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death ? The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7: 18.22-25).

He, you see, after the war in which the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that it is not the things you wish that you do (Gal 5:17), is peace on earth to people of good will, because he is our peace, who has made the two into one (Eph 2:14). So let good will persist in standing firm against evil desires, and persist in imploring the help of God's grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The law in the members of the flesh is fighting back against it, and here it is, already being taken prisoner. Let it implore help and not trust in its own powers; and even if weary and in distress, let it at least not be too proud to confess. One will be at hand, don't forget, who said to people that already, as he could see, believed in him, If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will recognize the truth, and the truth will set you free (Jn 8:31-32). Truth will be at hand to set you free from the body of this death. That, for sure, is why Truth, whose birthday we are celebrating, has sprung from the earth (Ps 85: 11), in order to be peace on earth to people of good will.

Is anybody, I mean to say, in a position to have both the will and the ability, unless the one who granted us the will by calling us, also helps us to have the ability by inspiring us? The fact is, his mercy gets in ahead of us every single time; to call us when we were lacking the will, and then to ensure we obtain the ability to do what we will. So let us say to him, "I have sworn and determined to keep the judgments of your justice (Ps 119:106). I have indeed determined, and promised obedience because you have ordered it; but because I can see another law in my members fighting back against the law of my mind, and taking me prisoner to the law of sin which is in my members (Rom 7:23), I have been utterly humbled, Lord; give me life according to your word (Ps 119: 107). Look, to will is available to me (Rom 7: 1 8); therefore, approve, Lord, the voluntary offering of my mouth (Ps 1 19:108), so that your peace may come on earth to people of good will."

Let us say all this, and anything else that loyal devotion, instructed by the holy readings, may suggest, so that we don't come thronging in vain to the celebration of the Lord's birth of the virgin; but rather begin with good will, and end up made perfect with the fullest charity, which is poured into our hearts, not through our own doing, but through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5).

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## **SERMON 194 ON CHRISTMAS DAY**

Date: before 411

### **Love what you believe, proclaim what you love**

1. Listen, children of light, adopted into the kingdom of God; dearest brothers and sisters, listen; listen, and exult, you just, in the Lord, so that praise can befit you, the upright (Ps 33:1). Listen, and hear what you know, reflect upon what you hear, love what you believe, proclaim what you love. Just as we are celebrating the great anniversary of this day, so be eager to hear the sermon that is owing on this day. Christ is born; God from the Father, man from his mother; from the Father's immortality, from his mother's virginity; from the Father without mother, from his mother without father; from the Father timelessly, from his mother seedlessly; from the Father as the beginning of life, from his mother as the end of death; from the Father to regulate every day, from his mother to consecrate this day.

You see, he sent a man ahead of him, John, to be born at the time of year when the days were beginning to diminish, while he himself was born when the days were beginning to grow. This would prefigure what John himself said, He must grow, while I must diminish (Jn 3:30). Human life, you see, has to fade away in itself, gain force in Christ, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for all and rose again (2 Cor 5:15); and that each one of us might say what the apostle says: I live though, no longer I, but it is Christ who is living in me (Gal 2:20). He, you see, must grow, while I must diminish.

### **Both angels and human praise Christ**

2. He is praised just as he ought to be by all his angels, whose eternal food he is, nourishing them on imperishable fare; because he is the Word of God, on whose life they live, on whose eternity they live for ever, on whose goodness they live for ever in bliss. They praise him as he should be praised, God with God, and they give glory in the highest to God. We, though, his people and the sheep of his hands (Ps 95:7), in the measure of our weakness should try to be reconciled by good will and so earn peace. You see, the song of the angels really does belong to today, the song they poured out exultantly when the Saviour was born to us: Glory in the highest to God, and on earth peace to people of good will (Lk 2:14). They then praise him suitably; we should praise him obediently. They are his messengers, we are his cattle. He has loaded their table in heaven, he has filled our manger on earth. He is the fare on their table, because in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1: 1). He is the fodder in our manger, because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). In order that man, you see, might eat the bread of angels, the creator of angels became man. They praise him by living with him, we by believing in him; they by enjoying, we by seeking him; they by grasping him, we by inquiring; they by entering, we by knocking.

### **The treasures of wisdom and knowledge**

3. Is there any human being, after all, that has known all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ, and concealed in the poverty of his flesh? Because for our sake he became poor, though he was rich, that we might be enriched by his poverty (2 Cor 8:9). You see, when he assumed mortality and consumed death, he

showed himself in poverty; but that meant that he promised us riches he was deferring, not that he had lost riches he had forfeited. How multitudinous his sweetness, which he has hidden for those who fear him, but perfected for those who hope in him! For we know in part, until that which is perfect has come.

In order to render us fit for grasping that, he being equal to God in the form of God and made like us in the form of a slave, reforms us to the likeness of God; and having become a son of man though he is the one and only Son of God, he makes many sons and daughters of men into sons and daughters of God; and by rearing slaves on the visible form of a slave, he perfects them as free persons for seeing the form of God. After all, we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. And we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (I Jn 3:2).

I mean, why talk about those treasures of wisdom and knowledge, about those divine riches, if not because they are what suffices us? And why talk about that multitudinous sweetness, if not because it is what satisfies us? So, show us the Father, and it suffices us (Jn 14:8). And in one of the psalms somebody, one of us, or in us, or for us says to him, I will be satisfied when your glory is revealed (Ps 17:15). But he and the Father are one (Jn 10:30); and whoever sees him also sees the Father (Jn 14:9). Therefore, the Lord of powers, he is the king of glory (Ps 24: 10). He will convert us and show us his face, and we shall be saved (Ps 80:4); and we shall be satisfied, and it will suffice us.

#### **Let us celebrate the birthday of the form of a slave**

4. So, let our hearts say to him, I have sought your face; your face, Lord, will I search for; do not turn your face away from me (Ps 27:8-9). And may he answer our hearts, Whoever loves me keeps my commandments; and whoever loves me, will be loved by my Father; and I will love him and show myself to him (Jn 14:21). Those he said this to could of course see him with their eyes, and hear the sound of his voice with their ears, and with their human minds they thought of him as a man; but what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the mind of man, all that is himself, the very self he was promising to show to those who love him. Until this happens, until he shows us what can suffice us, until we drink him, the fountain of life, and are satisfied;" for the time being as we walk by faith and are wandering in exile from him, while we are hungry and thirsting for justice (Mt 5:6), and longing with an ardour beyond words for the beauty of the form of God, let us express our allegiance by devoutly and loyally celebrating the birthday of the form of a slave. We cannot yet contemplate how he was begotten before the daystar by the Father, so let us crowd in to congratulate him on being born of the virgin in the middle of the night. We cannot yet grasp how his name endures before the sun; let us at least acknowledge that he has pitched his tent in the sun. We cannot yet gaze upon the Only-begotten abiding in his Father; let us recall the bridegroom coming forth from his chamber (Ps 19:5). We are not yet fit and ready for our Father's banquet; let us honour the manger of our Lord Jesus Christ.