

SERMON 186 ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Date: after 400

A virgin for ever

1. Let us rejoice, brothers and sisters; let the nations be glad and exult. It is not this visible sun, but its invisible creator, who has consecrated this day, when the virgin mother gave birth from her fertile and unimpaired womb to the one who became visible for us, by whom in his invisibility she herself was created; a virgin in conceiving, a virgin in giving birth, a virgin when with child, a virgin on being delivered, a virgin for ever. Why be astonished at these things, O man? That is how he made her, who was himself made from her. He already was, you see, before he was made; and being almighty, he was able to be made, while remaining what he already was. He made a mother for himself, while he was still with the Father; and when he was made from his mother, he remained in the Father. How could he cease to be God on beginning to be man, when he enabled his mother not to cease to be a virgin when she gave him birth?

Hence that the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14), does not mean that the Word passed into flesh by perishing, but that flesh was attached to the Word to prevent flesh itself from perishing; with the result that just as man is soul and flesh, so Christ would be God and man. The same one God who is man, the same one man who is God; not by a compounding of nature, but by unity of person. In a word, the one who as Son of God is coeternal with his begetter and always from the Father, is identical with the son of man who began to be at a particular time from the virgin. And thus humanity was indeed added to the divinity of the Son; and yet this did not result in a quaternity or foursome of persons, but the Trinity or threesome remains.

One who was God became man

2. So please don't go along with the opinion of some people, who don't pay enough attention to the rule of faith and the oracles of the divine scriptures. They say, you see: what happened is that the son of man became the Son of God, not that the Son of God became the son of man. What made them say this was consideration of something true, but they didn't have the ability to state the full truth. What they considered, you see, is that it was possible for human nature to be changed for the better, but not for the divine nature to be changed for the worse. That is certainly true; but so is this: that without in any way being changed for the worse, the Word still became flesh. Nor does the gospel say, after all, "The flesh became Word," but it says the Word became flesh. But the Word is God, because the Word was God (Jn 1:14.1). And what is meant by flesh, but man? Human flesh in Christ, after all, was not without a soul; which is why he said, My soul is sorrowful unto death (Mk 14:34). So if the Word is God, and flesh is man, what else is the Word became flesh but "One who was God became man"?

And thus the one who was the Son of God became the son of man by the taking on of the lower element, not by the changing of the principal one; by accepting what he was not, not by losing what he was. I mean, how could we confess in the rule of faith that we believe in the Son of God who was born of the virgin Mary, if it wasn't the Son of God but the son of man who was born of the virgin Mary? Would any Christian deny, after all, that the son of man was born of that woman; but that all the same God became man, and only in this way did man become God? The Word, you see, was God, and the Word became flesh. What we have to confess, therefore, is that the one who was the Son of God, in order to be born of

the virgin Mary, took on the form of a servant, and became the son of man, while still remaining what he was and taking on what he was not; beginning to be that which made him less than the Father, and always remaining that by which he and the Father are one.

The Word of God became flesh

3. Well, if the one who is always the Son of God did not himself become the son of man, how can the apostle say about him, Who while he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God; but he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and found in condition as a man (Phil 2:6-7)? It wasn't, after all, someone else, but he himself, equal to the Father in the form of God, who is of course the only-begotten Son of God, that emptied himself, being made in the likeness of men. Nor was it somebody else, but again he himself, equal to the Father in the form of God, who humbled, not somebody else but himself, becoming obedient to the death, death indeed on the cross (Phil 2:8). The Son of God only did all this in the form in which he is the son of man. Again, if the one who is always the Son of God did not himself become the son of man, how can the apostle say to the Romans, set apart for the gospel of God,⁶ which he had promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures about his Son, who was made for him of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:1-3)? There you have the Son of God, which of course he always was, made of the seed of David according to the flesh, which he wasn't always. Again, if the one who is the Son of God was not himself made son of

man, how is it that God sent his Son, made of a woman (Gal 4:4)? This word, by the way, according to Hebrew usage, does not deny the honour of virginity, but simply indicates the sex of femininity. Who, after all, was sent by the Father, but the only-begotten Son of God? Born of the Father without any time-measured day, born of his mother on this day; this day, I mean, which he created, on which he chose to be created, just as he was made of a mother whom he made. Because this very day, from which the daytime from now on receives an increase of light, represents the work of Christ, by whom our inner self is being renewed from day to day (2 Cor 4:16). It was indeed proper for the creator, when created in time, to have that day as his birthday which marked creation as bound by time.

SERMON 187 ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Date: before 411

The greatness and the humility of Christ

1. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord (Ps 51:15); of that Lord through whom all things were made (Jn 1 :3), and who was himself made among all things; who is the revealer of the Father, creator of his mother; the Son of God from the Father without mother, the son of man from his mother without father; great as the day of the angels, little in the day of men; the Word, God before all times, the Word, flesh at the appropriate time; the maker and placer of the sun, made and placed under the sun; marshaling all the ages from the bosom of the Father, consecrating this day from the womb of his mother; remaining there, coming forth from here; producer of heaven and earth, appearing on earth under heaven; unspeakably wise, wisely speechless as an infant; filling the world, lying in a manger; directing the course of the stars, sucking his mother's breasts; so great in the form of God, so small in the form of a servant, in such a way that neither the greatness was diminished by the smallness, nor the smallness overwhelmed by the greatness.

When he took human limbs to himself, after all, he did not abandon his divine works; nor did he stop reaching mightily from end to end, and disposing all things sweetly. When he clothed himself with the weakness of the flesh, he was received, not locked up, in the virgin's womb; thus the food of wisdom was not withdrawn from the angels, while at the same time we were enabled to taste and see how sweet is the Lord.

The human word and the divine Word

2. Why should all this surprise us about the Word of God, seeing that this sermon I am addressing to you flows so freely into your senses, that you hearers both receive it, and don't imprison or corner it? I mean, if you didn't receive it, you wouldn't learn anything; if you cornered it, it wouldn't reach anyone else. And of course this sermon is divided up into words and syllables; and yet for all that, you don't each take portions and pieces of it, as you would of food for the stomach; but you all hear it all, each of you hears it all.

Nor am I afraid, while I'm talking, that one of you by hearing it may swallow it all, so that another would be left with nothing to eat; but I wish you all to be so attentive, cheating nobody's ears and mind, that each of you may hear it all, and leave all of it for the others to hear too. Nor does this happen at successive times, in such a way that the sermon being delivered first comes into you, then has to go out from you if it is to enter someone else; but it comes simultaneously to all of you, and the whole of it to each of you. And if the whole of it could be retained in the memory, just as all of you have come to hear the whole of it, so you could each go away with the whole of it.

How much more, then, could the Word of God, through which all things were made (Jn 1:3), and which while abiding in itself renews all things (Wis 7:27); which is neither confined in places, nor stretched out through times, nor varied by short and long quantities,⁸ nor woven together out of different sounds, nor ended by silence; how much more could this Word, of such a kind as that, make a mother's womb fruitful by assuming a body, while still not departing from the bosom of the Father; come forth from there to be seen by human eyes, from here continue to enlighten angelic minds; go

forth from there to all the earth, from here to stretch out the heavens;9 from there become man, from here make man?

Thought and Word

3. None of you therefore should believe that the Son of God was converted and changed into a son of man; but rather we must believe that while remaining the Son of God he became the son of man, and that the divine substance was not consumed, while the human substance was perfectly assumed. Just because it says, you see, the Word was God, and the Word became flesh (Jn 1:1.14), it doesn't mean that the Word became flesh in such a way that it ceased to be God; considering that in that very flesh which the Word became Emmanuel was born, God with us (Mt 1:23).

Just as the word which we carry in the mind becomes voice when we utter it from the mouth; and yet it isn't changed into this voice, but remains whole in itself, while the voice is assumed to carry it out to others; and in this way what is to be understood can remain inside, and what is to be heard can sound outside. Yet for all that it's the same thing that is uttered in a sound as had previously sounded in silence; and thus when word becomes voice, it isn't changed into voice, but remaining in the light of the mind, it both goes forth to the listener in the voice of flesh it has assumed, and still does not abandon the one who thought it.

I don't mean the voice which is thought about in silence, and which is either Greek or Latin or any other language; but I mean when the matter itself, before any variety of expression in any language, is so to say naked to the intelligence in the bed-chamber of the mind, and which in order to come out from there is clothed in the voice of the speaker. Each of these, however, both what is being thought of by intelligence and what is sounding out loud in speech, is changeable and dissimilar; the first won't remain when you've forgotten it, nor will the second when you stop speaking. But the Word of the Lord remains for ever (Is 40:8), and abides unchanged and unchangeable.

Christ, God and man.

4. And when from the world of time it took flesh, in order to come forth into our time-bound life, it did not in the flesh lose eternity, but rather on the flesh too bestowed immortality. Thus he like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, exulted like a giant to run his course (Ps 19:5). Who, when he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God; but in order for our sakes to become what he was not, he emptied himself, not losing the form of God, but taking the form of a servant; and through it being made in the likeness of men; not in his own proper substance either, but being found in condition as a man (Phil 2:6-7). All this, you see, that we are, whether in soul or in body, is our nature, but his condition; we, if we weren't this, wouldn't be at all; he, if he weren't this, would still of course be God.

And when he began to be this thing that he was not, he became man while remaining God, so that not just one of the following but each of them could be said with perfect truth: both *since the Father is greater than I* (Jn 14:28), because he has become man; and *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30), because he remained God. Because if the Word had changed into flesh, that is God been converted into man, it's only the Father is greater than I that would be true; while / and the Father are one would be false,

because God and man are not one thing. But perhaps he would be able to say, "I and the Father were one," not "are one." I mean, what he had been and has stopped being, obviously he isn't, but was. As it is, however, he could both truly say The Father is greater than I because of the form of a servant which he had taken, and also truly say *I and the Father are one* because of the true form of God in which he remained.

So he emptied himself among us, not by becoming what he was not in such a way that he would no longer be what he had been; but by concealing what he was and openly displaying what he had become. Accordingly, because the virgin conceived and bore a son, a child is born for us, on account of the manifest form of a servant. But because the Word of God which abides for ever became flesh, in order to dwell among us, on account of the form of God which is hidden but remains, we call his name, as Gabriel announced it, Emmanuel. He became man, you see, while remaining God, in order that the son of man too might rightly be called God with us; not one person being God, another being man.

And so let the world exult in the persons of all believers, for whose salvation the one through whom the world was made has come. The maker of Mary, born of Mary, the son of David, David's Lord (Mk 12:37), the seed of Abraham who is before Abraham (Jn 8:58), the maker of the earth, made on earth, the creator of heaven, created under heaven. He is the day which the Lord has made, and the Lord himself is the daylight of our minds. Let us walk in his light, let us exult and be merry in it (Ps 118:24).
