

St. John Chrysostom's Nativity Sermon

Preacher's Introduction

The first Christmas Sermon captured for the Church was in 386 A.D. by St. John Chrysostom. It was preached at Antioch in Asia Minor—during the first year of his public ministry. Later, he became Bishop of Constantinople and is known as a Doctor of the Church. It was his skillful preaching that earned him the nickname “Chrysostom,” which means “Golden-Mouthed.”

This morning, I want to try something unique and share his Christmas Day Sermon today as our meditation that he delivered in his first year of ordained ministry.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. For you, O Lord, are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Chrysostom's Sermon

BEHOLD {He said} ... a new and wondrous mystery. My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where

God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb ... to be the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. Since therefore all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice – to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival. But I take my part, not plucking the harp, not shaking the staff, now with the music of the pipes, nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ. For this is all my hope, this my life, this my salvation, this my pipe, my harp. And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels, sing: Glory to God in the Highest; and with the shepherds, and on earth peace to men of good will.

This day He Who was ineffably begotten of the Father, was for me born of the Virgin, in a way no tongue can tell. Begotten according to His nature before all ages from the Father: in what manner He knows Who has begotten Him; born again this day from the Virgin, above the order of nature, in what manner knoweth the power of the Holy Spirit. His heavenly generation is true, and His generation here on earth is true. As God He is truly begotten of God; so also as man is He truly born from the Virgin. In heaven He alone is the Only-Begotten of the One God; on earth He alone is the Only-Begotten of the unique Virgin.

Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech. For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend. Nature here is overcome, the boundaries of the established order set aside, where God so wills. For not according to nature has this thing come to pass. Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature. For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could

this corruptible body be glorified, until it had become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! How shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infants bands. But He has decreed that {shame} shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Come, and we shall commemorate the solemn festival. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels. ... Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. Though being the impassible Word, He became flesh; that he might dwell amongst us. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant's food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star.

But what shall I say? What shall I utter? Behold an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. As Eve, being deceived, uttered a word that was the cause of death, so Mary, receiving good tidings, brought forth in the flesh a Word that gave us eternal Life. The word of Eve led to the tree, because of which Adam was driven from Paradise; the Word which the Virgin brought forth, led to the Cross, because of which the Thief, standing in the place of Adam, was led into Paradise. ... Seeing that men, abandoning Him, fashioned for themselves idols, to which, offending God, they gave adoration, for which cause, on this day, the Word of God being truly God, appeared in the form of man, that He might set aright this falsehood; and in a veiled manner, has turned all adoration unto Himself. To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Ghost, we offer all praise, now and for ever. Amen.