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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Theology

EARLIEST GREEK PATRISTIC ORATIONS ON THE NATIVITY: A STUDY INCLUDING TRANSLATIONS

a dissertation

by

BETH ELISE DUNLOP

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May, 2004

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BOSTON COLLEGE

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Dissertation Abstract

Earliest Greek Patristic Orations on the Nativity: A Study Including Translations

by Beth Dunlop

Advisor: Margaret Schatkin

The celebration of the Nativity on December 25 originated in the West, and spread to Eastern Christendom in the late fourth century. The four orations included in this study are: Gregory of Nazianzus' *For God's Appearing*, preached in Constantinople on December 25, 380; Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nativity of the Savior*, preached c.386; John Chrysostom's *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ*, preached in Antioch c.387; and Amphilochius of Iconium's *On the Nativity of Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ,* probably preached several years later. This dissertation contains a new translation of these four homilies, two of which had not been translated into English previously. The homily of Gregory Nazianzus, which existed in an English translation from *Patrologia Graeca*, is translated from a critical edition in the present study. Five extensive introductory chapters to these translations explore the historical background of the new Nativity celebration, and the particular circumstances of these orations, placing them in their proper context. While the development of the emerging festal cycle forms the backdrop for the preaching of these orations, the present study focuses on the historical circumstances and rhetorical methods of their preaching. This dissertation applies rhetorical analysis to aid in the understanding of these festal sermons, focusing on

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the genre of each oration. Following the rhetorical analysis of each oration, a section on theological content explores the Christology, soteriology and Mariology of each. A concluding section in each of these introductory chapters presents an ethical analysis. This dissertation utilizes some of the methods of rhetorical analysis that can be gleaned from New Testament and classical studies, and applies them to Patristics.

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Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AIO	Amphilochii Iconiensis Opera
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CUAP	Catholic University of America Press
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality
FC	Fathers of the Church
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera
JLW	Jahrbuch für Lirtugiewissenschaft
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PS	Patristic Studies
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RSR	Revue des Sciences Religieuses
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SP	Studia Patristica
SVSP	St. Vladimir's Seminary Press
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowlege
TS	Theological Studies

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Background on the Nativity Celebration

This dissertation is a study of the earliest extant liturgical sermons delivered on the celebration of the Nativity in Cappadocia, Constantinople and Antioch. The four homilies of this study were delivered by Gregory of Nyssa, Amphilochius of Iconium, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. Although these orations vary quite a bit in their style, purpose and approach, they share many common characteristics. They are liturgical sermons delivered in the context of the celebration of the birth of Christ, and as such, exhort the people to participate in the reality made present liturgically—the birth of the Son of God. Secondly, they all include some degree of teaching about the Nativity, whether it is how the birth of Christ fulfills prophecy, or why it is proper to celebrate the day on December 25, or how to refute the pagans and heretics who do not believe in the incarnation. Thirdly, these sermons exhort the people to live according to what has been given to humanity in the incarnation of the Word.

John Chrysostom in *On the Day of the Nativity* says that this day had been "well known among those dwelling in the West from the beginning."[1] A reference to the archives at Rome is central to his argument, so those investigating the origins of the feast from before the time of Usener[2] have looked to Rome for evidence of its earliest celebration, and in fact the earliest evidence to date for the liturgical remembrance of the Nativity on December 25

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[1] PG 49:351.22-23.

[2] Hermann Usener first published his *Das Weihnachtsfest* in 1889, which set forth the History of Religions hypothesis for the origin of the feast, was generally positively received. It has been edited by Hans Lietzmann, and a second edition was published in 1911, a third edition in 1969.

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is a Roman document, the *Chronograph* of 354.[3] Three parts of the *Chronograph* contain evidence for the recognition of December 25 in the liturgical and civil calendars of Rome.[4] The first part of the document relevant to our question is the *Fasti consulares*, a chronological listing of the consuls of Rome, which interjects "Christ is born during the consulate of C. Caesar Augustus and L. Aemilianus Paulus on 25 December, a Friday, the 15th day of the new moon."[5] The second part of the Chronograph that provides evidence for the December 25 is the *Depositio martyrum*, a calendar of the death dates of martyrs which begins with "Christ is born on the eighth of the Calends of January, in Bethlehem of Judea."[6] If this line is authentic, it seems to provide evidence that an ecclesial commemoration of the Nativity had joined the celebration of martyrs' deaths, which were considered as their birth into heaven. The third piece of evidence in the Chronograph, which is probably the most convincing and from which we can assign a *terminus ad quem* of 336 for the commemoration of December 25 in Rome, is the *Depositio episcoporum*, a calendar of the death dates of Roman Bishops from 255 to 352.[7] The calendar begins on December 26, not mentioning the birth of Christ, but leading us to believe that December 25 had become significant enough to be the beginning of the Church year in Rome. More importantly, the calendar lists the departed Bishops of Rome strictly according to the days

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[3] For the origins of the Nativity celebration in the West and East, see Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991) and Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, Liturgia Condenda 5 (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995).

[4] Roll, pp.83-86.

[5] Roll, p.84. Roll notes that the authenticity of this reference has been challenged on several points. As she notes the birth of Christ seems incongruous in a list of consuls for the city of Rome, and she refers to further doubt raised by K. A. Heinrich Kellner, *Heortologie, oder das Kirchenjahr und die Heiligenfeste in ihrer geschichlichen Entwicklung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1901), pp.92-94.

[6] Roll, p.84. Roll also notes that questions could be raised on whether this is an interpolation of the text, citing Kellner, p.92, again, but she concludes by saying that most twentieth century liturgical scholars cite this as "reliable testimony to a 354 commemoration of the birth of Christ without comment, pro or con, concerning its authenticity."

[7] Roll, p.85.

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commemorating their deaths until the last two entries, Marcus, who died in October 336, and Julius, who died in March 352. It can be concluded that these two were added to an original source that had existed in 336. Therefore by the year 336, December 25 had become an important enough day to be the starting point of the Church calendar in Rome.

Gottfried Brunner has presented possible evidence for an earlier year for the first celebration of the Nativity on December 25 in Western Christendom.[8] It is based on the fact that Augustine complains about the Donatists of North Africa not celebrating Epiphany with the rest of the Church.[9] One may suppose from Augustine's silence on the matter that they did in fact celebrate the Nativity on December 25. Since a sect at odds with the rest of the Church would not be likely to adopt a new celebration that the main Church had just adopted, one may conclude that the Nativity had to have been celebrated in Western Christendom before 311, the date of the Donatist schism. However, this argument can be challenged on the grounds that argument "from silence" makes a weak case.

An earlier year for the introduction of the Nativity in Rome would challenge the common assumption that Constantine introduced the December 25 celebration in a syncretistic fashion—the Christian celebration either merging or competing with a pre-existent celebration of the Unconquered Sun. That Constantine introduced the celebration of the Nativity can be challenged, since the second half of his reign was spent away from

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[8] Talley, p.86-87.

[9] G. Brunner first presented this in "Arnobius ein Zeuge gegen das Weihnaschtsfest?" JLW 13 (1936): pp.178-181. The passage in Augustine can be found in Thomas Comerford Lawler, trans., *St. Augustine: Sermons for Christmas and Epiphany*, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 15 (Westminster, MD: 1952), p.170.

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Rome, and the December 25 celebration was only introduced at a later date in Constantinople, the city that Constantine had consciously established as "Christian."[10]

Although John Chrysostom speaks with the conviction that December 25 is the actual birthday of Christ, modern scholars, noting the distinct lack of interest in birthdates on the part of the Church authors from the first couple of centuries of Christianity, propose other explanations for the origin of the date. The main two hypotheses of the last three centuries are the History of Religions hypothesis[11] and the Calculation hypothesis.[12] Although the seeds of the History of Religions hypothesis are present in the work of earlier scholars such as Paul E. Jablonski,[13] the hypothesis finds its first full presentation in the work of Hermann Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*. According to Usener, celebration of the Nativity on December 25 was adopted to replace or co-opt elements from the pagan celebration of the cult of the Invincible Sun, *Sol Invictus*.[14] Although there had been dedication to the Sun in Rome earlier, the celebration of the Unconquered Sun, *Sol Invictus*, on December 25 had been established in Rome by Aurelian in 274 A.D.[15] While some details of Usener's original work have been corrected in later editions of his book and by subsequent scholars,[16] the History of Religions hypothesis, modified slightly, still stands as a viable explanation of the origins of the celebration of Christmas in Rome. A more carefully nuanced statement of the History of Religions hypothesis can be found in the work of Bernard Botte. In a paper presented at the Institute at St. Sergius in Paris in 1967 he says:

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[10] Roll, pp.116-117.
[11] In German called Apologetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Hypothese. Roll, p.127.
[12] In German called Berechnungshypothese, spekulativ-kalendarische or Komputationshypothese. Roll, p.87.
[13] Roll, p.130.
[14] Roll, pp.132-133 cites Usener, 2nd ed., pp.348-368.
[15] Talley, p.88.
[16] See Roll, pp.131-164.

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> Christmas and Epiphany appeared at the beginning of the fourth century. These feasts have been compared to the pagan solemnities of the winter solstice and that was right. It has been said that the Church had Christianized pagan feasts, and that was wrong. The pagan feasts were able to serve as the point of departure and as a stimulus. But Christmas and Epiphany did nothing more than to develop elements which were authentically Christian and Biblical, and these feasts gave to the liturgical year all of its dimension and balance.[17]

Another hypothesis, however, about the origins of the celebration of the Nativity has come to the forefront in this century, known as the Calculation hypothesis. Louis Duchesne originally posited it as an alternative to the History of Religions hypothesis. He proposed that the December 25 celebration was derived from the date of Christ's passion, which was believed to be on March 25, combined with a conviction that the passion had occurred on the same day as Christ's conception.[18] Although Duchesne's work met with criticism by Botte and others, Hieronymus Engberding and Thomas J. Talley have made the Calculation hypothesis a competitive alternative to the History of Religions hypothesis.

According to the Jews of Christ's time, there were two major cultic turning points of the year: the months of Nisan and Tishri.[19] Nisan is the month during which Passover falls and Tishri the month of the New Year, Succoth and the Day of Atonement. Both these months were associated with the creation and with eschatological expectations.[20] Although Judaism was cautious about setting a definitive time for the consummation of all things, a second century debate between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua is recorded in the tractate *Rosh Hashanah.* Rabbi Joshua held that it was in Nisan that the world was created, and

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[17] Bernard Botte, "Maranatha: Noël, Epiphanie, retour du Christ," Lex Orandi 40 (Paris: Cerf, 1967), p.42.
[18] Louis Duchesne, *Origines du culte chrétien* (Paris: Thorin, 1st ed., 1889; Fontemoing, 5th ed., 1920).
[19] Talley, p.81.
[20] Ibid.

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redemption would come.[21] Rabbi Eliezer, however, held that the critical time was in Tishri, nearly matching Rabbi Joshua's claims word for word:

> In Tishri the world was created; in Tishri the Patriarchs were born; in Tishri the Patriarchs died; on Passover Isaac was born; on New Year Sarah, Rachel and Hannah were visited; on New Year Joseph went forth from prison; on New Year the bondage of our ancestors in Egypt ceased; in Nisan they were redeemed and in Tishri they will be redeemed in the time to come.[22]

A look at these rabbinic sources demonstrates that the time from the beginning of creation to the end of the world was conceived of as being measured by a perfectly integral number of years.[23] In addition, the Patriarchs were thought to have lived a perfectly integral number of years, and their births and deaths were associated with the spring and fall equinoxes.[24] If this approach was also present in early Christendom, it is a small step to see that Christ's conception could have been calculated to correspond to his death.

Such a numerological approach to dates can be found in the Christian document *De Pascha Computus* from 243, which working from March 25 as a date for the Passion, assigns March 25, the spring equinox, as the day of the Creation of the world, and March 28, the fourth day on which the sun was created, as the day of Christ's birth.[25] Another document which supports the existence of this line of reasoning in early Christianity is *De solstitiis et aequinoctiis,* a work believed to be from the fourth century, found in a tenth century manuscript grouped with homilies by John Chrysostom.[26] This text identifies the

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[21] Talley, p.81.
[22] Talley, pp.81, 155 n.3-4. Talley cites Tal. Bab., *Rosh Hashanah* 10b-11a, stating that the English translation published by Soncino Press, London has an error. Talley's text is based on the older German version of Goldschmidt and the help of Prof. Lawrence Hoffman of Hebrew Union College.
[23] Talley, p.82.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Roll, pp.81-82. Talley, pp.90-91.
[26] Roll, pp.97-99. Talley, pp.92-96. André Wilmart first drew attention to this piece of evidence in "La collection des 38 homélies latines de Saint Jean Chrysostome," JTS xix (1917-1918): pp. 305-327. For a

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conception of John the Baptist with the autumn equinox, and his birth with the solar solstice; likewise it identifies Jesus' conception with the spring equinox, and his birth with the winter solstice. It also connects Christ's conception with his passion.[27] The most important contributions it makes to the Calculation hypothesis are two-fold: it adds proof that a parallel approach to the rabbinic calculations also existed in Christendom; and it shows that a correspondence in date had not only been drawn between Christ's birth and death, but also between his conception and death.

Nearly all scholars advocating the Calculation hypothesis today take a more nuanced approach that leaves open the possibility of multiple forces in the origins of the celebration.[28] Talley admits a certain caution in rejecting the History of Religions hypothesis saying, "We must be impressed with the fact that there was a Roman public festival on December 25 by the time of our clear historical evidence for the Christian festival at the same place on that same date."[29] Yet he adds that this fact should not blind us to the evidence in favor of the Calculation hypothesis.

Despite Chrysostom's characterization—that the December 25 celebration "from the beginning … became very manifest and famous with those living from Thrace to Gades,"[30] and that it "was announced by messengers sent everywhere so quickly,"[31]—the spread of the Nativity from Western to Eastern Christendom was neither quick nor uniform. The earlier practice in the East was to celebrate Christ's Nativity, often, but not always, combined with

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critical edition of the text, see Bernard Botte, *Origines de la Noël et de l'Epiphanie*, Textes et Etudes liturgiques 1 (Louvain: Mont César/ Keizersberg Abbey, 1932), pp.88-105.

[27] Roll, p.89.

[28] Ibid, p.106.

[29] Talley, p.102.

[30] PG 49:352.5-6.

[31] PG 49:352.12-13.

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his Baptism on January 6. In Basil's sermon *In Christi Generationem*, we have evidence that he had still celebrated of the Nativity on the January 6 date.[32] In 430, Jerome's attempt in Jerusalem to alter the liturgical practice of celebrating the Nativity on January 6 was met with opposition.[33] Sometime afterwards there, the celebration reverted to January 6 and only was reinstated during the reign of Justinian II (565-578).[34] Non-Chalcedonians in Jerusalem resisted the shift to celebrate the Nativity on December 25,[35] and today the Armenian Church still keeps it on January 6. Epiphanius in his *Refutation of All Heresies* states that the practice of celebrating the Nativity on January 6 was not limited to Palestine, but also was the current practice in the Syrian Church. He says,

> The wise Ephrem testified to the Syrians in his commentary, saying that 'thus was established the parousia of our Lord, his birth according to the flesh, that is his perfect incarnation which is called Epiphany, at 13 days interval from the augmentation of the light.'[36]

Several of Ephraem's hymns combine the themes of the Nativity and Theophany.[37] The December 25 celebration was finally adopted at Alexandria between 418 and 432,[38] perhaps as a response to the Christological concerns addressed at the Council of Ephesus.[39]

In broad outline there appear to be three main waves of promulgation of the December 25 celebration in the East: the first, in Constantinople, Antioch and Cappadocia between 376 and 388; the second, in Alexandria between 418 and 432, and abortively in

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[32] PG 31:1457-1476.
[33] Roll, p.199.
[34] Roll, p.200.
[35] Talley, pp.139-140.
[36] Talley, p.104. *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhundert, Epiphanius, 2e Bd.*, ed. Karl Holl (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1980), *Panarion haereses* 51.22.7-8.
[37] Talley, p.117.
[38] Talley, pp.140-141.
[39] Talley, p.141.

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Jerusalem between 424 and 451;[40] and the third when Jerusalem finally adopted the December 25th celebration sometime between 568 and 570.[41] It is perhaps no accident that these time periods correspond to periods in which various Christological heresies were combated. Although it is clear that that Nativity celebration provided a forum for proclaiming orthodox doctrine, one must be careful before assigning a rhetorical motivation behind the spread of the feast. It is also necessary to separate the question of what led to the December 25 celebration's introduction in Rome from what led to its adoption by the East. We must resist the temptation in liturgical theology to search for something equivalent to a "unified field theorem" in physics.

The homilies of this dissertation represent a sample of preaching from some of the first celebrations of the Nativity in the East. They may be arranged in an approximate chronological order beginning with Gregory of Nazianzus' *For God's Appearing*, preached on December 25, 380, probably the first or second celebration of the Nativity in Constantinople, and ending with Amphilochius of Iconium's *On the Nativity of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ*, most likely preached in the late 380's or early 390's. Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nativity of the Savior* and John Chrysostom's *On the Day of the Birth of Our Savior Jesus Christ* were delivered between 386 and 388. While an understanding of the newness of the December 25 celebration sheds light on these orations, this dissertation analyzes their rhetorical, theological and ethical aspects also.

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[40] Talley, p.139.
[41] Talley, pp.139-140.

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Gregory of Nazianzus'

For God's Appearing

Background and Dating

Gregory of Nazianzus is the only one of the fourth century Church Fathers to be granted the title "the Theologian," which had first been used to describe the Evangelist John. He was a close friend of St. Basil the Great and came from a family that belonged to the landed gentry in Cappadocia. His father was converted by his wife St. Nonna from a heretical sect known as the Hypsistarii some years before Gregory's birth, and became Bishop of Nazianzus. We can gain insights into the holy life of this family by reading Gregory's funeral orations for his brother St. Caesarius, his sister St. Gorgonia and his father St. Gregory the Elder. As with St. Gregory of Nyssa, family and friends provided Gregory of Nazianzus with a formation that fostered his love for the ascetic life.

Gregory the Theologian first struck up a friendship with Basil the Great during their education in Caesarea of Cappadocia. This friendship, which developed further in Athens, was to be deeply influential in Gregory's life. In his funeral oration for Basil, Gregory ascribed to him "...all the inconsistency and difficulty which have befallen my life, and the hindrances in the way of philosophy...."[1] At Athens one of their fellow students was Julian the future Emperor, who later in life was given the epithet "the Apostate" because of his attempt to bring about a pagan revival in the Empire. In Gregory's description of their time in Athens, we get a picture of Basil's and Gregory's

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[1] *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 42-43,* intro... Jean Bernardi SC 384 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1992), *Or.* 43.25, ln.14-17 ; English translation from *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen,* NPNF, series 2, v.7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p.404.

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budding team-work in the face of competition and temptation at Athens, as well as of their difficulties foreshadowed in Gregory's disappointment at being left behind by Basil.

Shortly upon finishing his education, Basil dedicated himself to a "life of philosophy," under the influence of his sister St. Macrina. "Philosophy," for the fourth century Fathers of the Church was an ascetic way of life practicing the "love of Wisdom," i.e. Christ. Gregory of Nazianzus returned from Athens about a year later to his parents' home, and in 358 visited Basil, who had settled into a life of ascetic retirement on his own family estate on the Iris River in Pontus. Together they edited writings from Origen, collected verses from the Holy Scriptures applicable to the ascetic life, and began the work that would produce Basil's *Monastic Rules*. When later, by his service to the Church, Gregory was geographically separated from Basil and the ascetic life of retirement, his desire for the brotherhood between them in the ascetic life was expressed in one of his letters to Basil in quite intimate terms:

> But do you come to me, and conspire with me in virtue, and co-operate with me, and aid me by your prayers to keep the profit which we used to get together, that I may not perish by little and little, like a shadow as the day draws to its close. I would rather breathe you than the air, and only live while I am with you, either actually in your presence, or virtually by your likeness in your absence.[2]

Gregory's desire to live a life with Basil is in its kernel a desire to live the philosophical life in fellowship with another or others with the same goal.

Gregory was ordained to the priesthood against his will in the winter of 361/362 by his elderly father, who needed help because of his declining health. Gregory fled to

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[2] *Lettres [par] Grégoire de Nazianze,* intro ... Paul Gallay, Collection des universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964), VI.7-8. The numbering differs in the English collection: *Epistle* II, 6 from NPNF, ser.2, v.7, p.448.

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Basil, but only to return by Pascha of the next year to accept the priestly ministry to which he had been ordained. In 371, Gregory was similarly consecrated Bishop of Sasima against his will by Basil, in Basil's countermove to the Arian subdivision and appropriation of part of Cappadocia. Gregory, instead of accepting his see at Sasima, remained in Nazianzus, helping his father administer that diocese. It seems that Basil's forcing Gregory to be consecrated as Bishop of Sasima was the cause for a rift in their friendship, for there is no existing record of any correspondence between them after Gregory's return to Nazianzus.[3]

Shortly after his parents died in 374, Gregory distributed most of his wealth to the poor and took up a life of retirement first at Arianzus, and then in Seleucia in Isauria. There Gregory lived for three short years the philosophical life that had seemed to elude him since his ordination. On January 1, 379, his good friend Basil died, not seeing the fruit of his work in the victory of the upcoming council. Gregory was not initially able to be at Basil's funeral because of illness, but delivered his brilliant funeral panegyric a year later on the anniversary of Basil's death.

It was probably in late 378 due to an edict of Gratian, which promised free assembly to all Christian groups, that Gregory was called by the small flock of remaining Orthodox in Constantinople from his life of ascetic retirement in Seleucia to Constantinople. The churches there had been under the control of the Arians for almost 40 years, and Gregory is credited with the revival of Orthodoxy in this city through his famous *Theological Orations*, which were delivered in the house-church called

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[3] *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Robert Appleton Company, 1910), s.v."Gregory of Nazianzus."

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Anastasia–dedicated to the Resurrection. Gregory's *Theological Orations* make it clear that there were many types of heresy troubling the Church at this time, from the anomoians to the *pneumatomachoi*.

The sermon *For God's Appearing* was delivered in Constantinople during these years of the Church's return to Orthodoxy in 379-381. In November 380, the Emperor Theodosius returned the Church buildings in the capital city to the Orthodox. There is fairly firm evidence that this homily, despite its title, was preached on December 25 and not on January 6, since Gregory says, "A little later then, you will see: Jesus being purified in the Jordan for my purification . . . ."[4] One might challenge that Gregory is merely referring to the sequence of events in Christ's life, and not to an upcoming feast. However, this supposition is unlikely because Gregory concludes the paragraph: "How many feasts are there for me (to celebrate) concerning each of mysteries of Christ."[5] This indicates that Gregory is thinking primarily of feasts linked to events in Christ's life. If this is true, and this sermon had occurred on Jan. 6, then the Baptism of Christ would be something that the people were celebrating that very day and not in the future.

There still remains, however, debate over whether this homily was preached in December of 379 or December of 380. Those in favor of the earlier date[6] cite Gregory's self-description as "a foreigner" and "someone from the country,"[7] as evidence for his newness to Constantinople. They also interpret Gregory's exhortation to the people to

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[4] *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38-41,* intro. Claudio Moreschini, trans.Paul Gallay, SC 358 (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), Discours 38, 16, ln.1-2.
[5] SC 358:38.16.18-19.
[6] Gallay (pp.16-22) discusses this debate thoroughly between those in favor of the earlier date of 379: Usener, Sinko and Gallay, and those who dispute the necessity of the earlier date: Rauscher, Bernardi and himself.
[7] SC 358:38.6.13-14.

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accept suffering as Christ suffered as reflecting the attacks of the Arians,[8] which occurred before Theodosius' return of church buildings to the Orthodox. However, it is likely that Gregory was using a formula of modesty when he called himself a foreigner and someone from the countryside, as he does in Discourses 36 and 42, which were delivered after 380. Those in favor of the latter date also point out that references to the suffering that the Orthodox received at the hands of the Arians would still be appropriate a year later. Claudio Moreschini, who edited and wrote part of the introduction to the critical edition of our text, accepts as a hypothesis the later date.[9] His notes to the critical edition remark that the passage, "If He delays in Egypt, call him out of Egypt, though He is worshipped well there,"[10] is a reference to the orthodoxy of the Patriarch Peter in Egypt—a reference which would only make sense after the reconciliation of Gregory with Peter—placing the year of the sermon in 380.[11] Gregory's reference to the orthodoxy of Patriarch Peter in Egypt provides solid evidence that the oration was preached December 25, 380. It is highly important to keep in mind that the sermon was delivered either in the midst of or shortly after the struggle against the Arians in Constantinople.

Rhetorical Analysis

The field of rhetoric is relatively new for most patristic scholars, but one that has demonstrated its worth in related fields, such as New Testament studies. Jaroslav Pelikan

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[8] SC 358:38.18.11-22. A mob of Arians attacked Gregory during a Baptismal service on Pascha of 379. Moreschini and Gallay, p.82.
[9] Moreschini and Gallay, p.22.
[10] SC 358:38.18.5-7.
[11] SC 358, p.147, n.2.

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in his recent book *Divine Rhetoric*[12] has shown how an understanding of rhetoric can help in the analysis of patristic texts. A notable element in the sermons of this collection is the love for rhetoric displayed by their authors. All of these authors were influenced by the instruction of Libanius the pagan teacher of rhetoric. Libanius' impact on the fathers of the fourth century was quite considerable, and Gregory of Nazianzus received instruction from him. Libanius belonged to a group of rhetoricians, who were originally called "the Sophists." In the study of classical rhetoric, this group of traditionalists has come to be called "the Second Sophistic," to differentiate them from the Sophists of ancient Athens whom Socrates had critiqued.[13] Libanius was a devout Greek pagan, who refused to worship the Roman gods,[14] and attempted to defend pagan temples from being destroyed during the reign of Theodosius.[15] Pelikan, focusing on the solution to the Socratic dilemma of rhetoric and virtue, says that Libanius believed that "eloquence ... is the helpmate of justice."[16] For our homilists, we can perhaps modify this statement to say that for them eloquence became the helpmate of the "Sun of Righteousness."[17]

The earliest language of Christianity was rather simple. The Gospels were written in *koine* Greek, and are for the most part devoid of the stylistic sophistication that marked rhetoric in late Antiquity. The rustic background of the fishermen-Apostles has perhaps sometimes been overly stressed, and Pelikan points out that St. Paul's epistles and

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[12] [12] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount as Message and as Model in Augustine, Chrysostom and Luther* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001).
[13] Pelikan, p.16.
[14] Ibid.
[15] "Oration 30: To the Emperor Theodosius, for the Temples," *Libanius: Selected Works*, LCL, trans. A.F. Norman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp.100-157.
[16] Pelikan, p.17; *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Works,* LCL 478, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1992), p.221.
[17] AIO 1.89, Mal.3.20; GNO X, 2: 242.10-11; PG 49:351.

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speeches as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles have been classified by scholars as examples spanning all three genres of classical rhetoric: deliberative, judicial and epideictic.[18] The early Christian pride in simplicity was especially present during the period of persecution, when Christianity was much at odds with the surrounding culture. However, even in the period of persecution, there arose the Apologists, learned Christians defending the faith to the surrounding pagan culture—for example, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Perhaps the dangers of such an endeavor are exhibited in Origen's posthumous condemnation. The early Christian preference for simplicity dovetailed nicely with the high value that classical rhetoricians placed on clarity as a stylistic virtue.[19] It was Origen, however, who was such a great inspiration to Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. The Cappadocians were willing to put what they had received from their secular education to the service of the Church. Gregory of Nazianzus applies the not completely positive metaphor of the medicinal use of the poison of snakes to describe Christian use of pagan literature:

> As we have compounded healthful drugs from certain of the reptiles; so from secular literature we have received principles of enquiry and speculation, while we have rejected their idolatry, terror, and pit of destruction.[20]

Gregory's willingness to use what he had learned under Libanius, and at Athens, may be seen in his ability to adapt rhetoric, the art of persuasion, to his use in fighting heresy.

Gregory of Nazianzus' oration can be classified as an *encomium* or panegyrical sermon. The word "*encomium*" was first applied to choral hymns celebrating a person

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[18] Pelikan, p.19.
[19] Galen O. Rowe, "Style," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), p.123.
[20] *Or.* 43.11. *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 42-43*, texte ... Jean Bernardi, SC 384 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992); *Gregory of Nazianzus,* NPNF ser.2, v.7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 reprint), pp.398-399.

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rather than the gods in the context of the revelry after a banquet.[21] The word has come to more generally to describe eulogies, and has come to mean in English, "a formal or high flown expression of praise."[22] *Encomium* in this general sense of the meaning is practically synonymous with panegyric. With an original meaning perhaps more appropriate to our topic, the genre of panegyric was oratory first associated with festivals to the gods. Panegyrics or *encomia* are examples of oratory from a broader category known as epideictic oratory, or oratory "for show,"[23] which included speeches of praise delivered at festivals, funerals and other occasions. Epideictic oratory can be contrasted with forensic oratory (for law-courts) and deliberative or political oratory.[24]

Folker Siegert's article, "Homily and Panegyrical Sermon," provides further background for the study of the genre of *encomium* or panegyric.[25] Siegert distinguishes between "homily" and "sermon:" a "homily" describing an informal communication made privately or in a classroom; and a "sermon" describing a more formal communication directed to the masses. According to Siegert's classification, Gregory's Nativity oration would be classified as a panegyrical sermon. Although Siegert's classification system, which distinguishes between homily and sermon, is useful for analyzing the level of formality in our works, his classification has not generally been

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[21] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M.C. Howatson 2nd ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), s.v. "Encomium."
[22] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, v.3 (Oxford University Press, 1933), s.v. "Encomium."
[23] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, s.v. "Epideictic oratory."
[24] Ibid.
[25] Folker Siegert, "Homily and Panegyrical Sermon," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), pp.421-443.

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adopted by Patristic scholars.[26] Siegert also claims that the distinction between sermon and homily is useful for not only determining the nature of the audience, but also for determining the orator's "commitment to Hellenistic culture."[27] Although simplicity in style was highly valued in Christian discourse, the Cappadocians were willing to adopt whatever style was useful in finding expressions appropriate for God.[28] Even Chrysostom, who out of all the fourth century Fathers tends the most towards a plain style, had said, "Since we are weak, the sermon must be varied and embellished; it must contain comparisons, examples, elaborate periods, and the like, so that we may select what will profit our soul."[29] We may see in the Cappadocians' withdrawal from secular life a critique of the surrounding culture, but we must also admit that they did not despise the skills they had gained in training for secular careers. They employed rhetoric, one of the chief of these skills, in service to the Church. Gregory of Nazianzus expresses his attitude towards the secular education they had received in his *Panegyric on Basil*:

> I take it as admitted by men of sense that the first of those things at our disposal that are good is education; and not only this our more notable form of it which disregards rhetorical ornament and glory and holds to salvation and beauty in the objects of contemplation, but even that external culture which many Christians ill-judgingly abhor as treacherous and dangerous and keeping us far from God.[30]

Although Gregory later in this same panegyric raises the issue of the danger of idolatry of God's creation, and more specifically the idolatry and misuse of education, he concludes,

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[26] In fact, he notes that Melito's "Paschal Homily" is not a homily in the sense defined in his study and a quick glance through Quasten's *Patrology* demonstrates that many orations Siegert would define as panegyrical sermons are commonly called homilies.
[27] Siegert, p.425.
[28] Wolfgang Kinzig, "The Greek Christian Writers," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), p.639.
[29] Kinzig, p.640, quoting Chrysostom, *De prophetiarum obscuritate* 1:1 (PG 56:165).
[30] Kinzig, p.640, quoting Gregory Nazianzus, SC 384:43.11.

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"We must not then dishonor education, because some men are pleased to do so, but rather suppose such men as to be boorish and uneducated."[31] Education is put on the same level as the good things in God's creation, neither to be despised nor worshipped. For a feast such as the Nativity, as appropriate, Gregory would speak in the more elevated style of a panegyrical sermon. Thus an elevated style displays, not so much his "commitment to Hellenism," as a willingness to attempt to find, in the art of rhetoric, words appropriate for the Word.

Gregory's Nativity oration begins with a festive exordium, bordering on hymnography. The opening words of this oration were, in fact, later borrowed by St. Cosmos for his canon on the Nativity.[32] The sermon quickly moves to the theme of light, presenting Christ's incarnation as the dissolution of darkness.[33] Then Gregory presents an explanation of the two names that the feast bore: Theophany and Nativity, explaining that the former refers to God's appearing, and the latter to God's birth. The oration then sets forth the proper way to celebrate the festival, not in revelry, debauchery and intemperance, but by listening to and feasting upon the Word of God. Gregory characterizes the former ways of celebrating as pagan, and prepares his audience to attend to the material he is about to present. Such a preparation of the audience is a recognized rhetorical figure and called *proparaskeue*.[34] The next two chapters deal with God's inner Trinitarian life, what is properly termed theology. Gregory here directly challenges the

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[31] Ibid.
[32] PG 98:459A.
[33] SC 358:38.2.1.
[34] *Proparaskeue* is "when the speaker prepares the audience to attend, in a special way, a course of argument that he is about to present." Galen O. Rowe, "Style," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.—400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), p.146.

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semi-Arian, anomian and pneumatomachian heresies. The oration moves from theology to economy in recounting God's creation of the invisible angelic realm and the visible creation, culminating in the creation of humankind. Gregory then recounts humanity's fall and all the ways God worked to eradicate evil, ending with the incarnation.

Gregory's oration turns to address directly the heretics in chapter 14. Although Gregory's oration is a panegyrical sermon, its central message is a condemnation of those who had been troubling the Orthodoxy of the Church in Constantinople. Gregory's challenge, "In answer to this, what say the slanderers to us, the bitter cipherers of divinity …,"[35] is a clear allusion to the Eunomians who used the logic developed by Eunomius' teacher Aetius to justify anomoian doctrine. Eunomius had reasoned with sophisticated logic that if the Son is begotten of the Father, he is not unoriginate, and therefore could not be divine. Although the Eunomian heresy taught that the Son could not be divine but was the first-born of creation (it was not a heresy about the incarnation *per se* as docetism had been), [36] Gregory seems to perceive in this reworking of Arianism some reluctance to view God as being humbled. Gregory senses behind such rationalizations a Platonic reflex that could not accept the divine having direct association with creatures.

Some parts of this section of the panegyric border on diatribe. Diatribe was a method of teaching that had been developed by the Cynic and Stoic philosophers. It uses imaginary dialogue to lead its listeners to realize their lack of knowledge and virtue.[37]

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[35] SC 358:38.14.1-2.
[36] *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, trans. Richard Paul Vaggione (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp.150-155; *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), s.v."Aetius of Antioch" and "Eunomius of Cyzicus."
[37] Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1994), p.162.

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Some characteristics of diatribe are the creation of an imaginary interlocutor[38] to create an imaginary fully developed dialogue, and a sudden turning from 3rd person to 2nd person in a figure known as *apostrophe,* the turning in speech to address a new subject either real or imaginary.[39] Although Gregory does not allow even an imaginary dialogue with his opponents, he asks, "Do you reproach God for this, his kindness? Is He small for the reason that He is humbled for your sake?"[40] This change from third person plural to second person singular is an indication of that this section may be influenced by diatribe, which is marked by *apostrophe*. Although Gregory does not create or allow an answer from his opponent in this long section of rhetorical questions,[41] and therefore one cannot say there is a fully developed dialogue here, his questions are meant to force the conclusion that the anomoians are wrong in denying the divinity of the Word. There is another indication in this oration that Gregory's approach may be influenced by diatribe. Diatribe often criticized the worthiness of the imaginary interlocutor by criticizing his manner of life and showing the inconsistency of his life with his claim to philosophy.[42] If we recall Gregory's criticism of pagan ways of celebrating festivals, we may suspect that Gregory is trying to imply that the Arianizing Christians also had a low standard of morality. While Gregory's challenge to the opponents of Orthodoxy cannot properly be called diatribe in that it lacks the fully developed dialogues that mark diatribe,[43] there are

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[38] Cf. Stowers, p.16.
[39] Stowers, p.144.
[40] SC 358:38.14.5-6.
[41] The only place the imaginary interlocutor is allowed an opening is in the small question, "Of what sort?"—Τί τοῦτο (SC 358:38.14.29), which Gregory uses to further his explication of the errors of Eunomianism.
[42] Stowers, pp. 145-147, 163-164.
[43] Stowers, p. 162.

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indications that Gregory was influenced by the methods of diatribe in constructing his attack against the Eunomians.

After Gregory's aggressive ridicule of the anomoians' position, he offers a more positive approach in a section that describes the life of Christ according to both his full humanity and divinity. Less frequently in this section, he still utilizes *apostrophe*, addressing those he is trying to correct: "You state the things which lessen (him), but overlook the things which exalt (him), and you hold that He suffered, but do not add that it was voluntary."[44] After blaming such heretics for causing continuing sufferings for the Word, and asking a rhetorical question about whom God will be more angered—at the modalists or the anomoians, Gregory again turns to the second person in *apostrophe*:

> Do you take offence at the flesh? The Jews also (do) this. Or do you also call (him) a Samaritan, and the next which I shall pass over in silence. Do you disbelieve in (his) divinity? Not even the demons (do) this. Oh, you who are both more unbelieving than the demons and more ungrateful than the Jews! [45]

Gregory exclaims forcibly, "But you—you neither accept the equality nor confess the divinity,"[46] emphasizing that the anomoians he is addressing are worse than the demons and the Jews. Although Gregory has not allowed his imaginary interlocutors to answer these charges, he draws his reasoning to a ridiculous conclusion, showing his opponents how untenable their position is: "It would have been better for you to be circumcised and possessed by a demon (to say something quite ridiculous!), than to be evilly and atheistically disposed in circumcision and health."[47]

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[44] SC 358:38.15.11-12.
[45] SC 358:38.15.18-23.
[46] SC 358:38.15.24-25.
[47] SC 358:38.15.25-27.

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As Gregory's panegyrical sermon draws to a close, it decreases in the use of *apostrophe*, and in fact, the presence of opponents becomes almost imperceptible in the oration. In chapter 16, there is only one use of apostrophe in an exclamation: "Would that I might give life to you too who have become dead through false belief!"[48] In chapter 18, although there is no *apostrophe*, there is mention of Orthodox worship of Christ in Egypt,[49] and a reference to the persecution of the Orthodox at the hands of the anomoians in Constantinople the previous year.[50] As Gregory's use of diatribal techniques decreases, the oration returns to the formal and even style of a panegyric, ending with an exhortation to participate in all aspects of the life of Christ.

Theological analysis

Gregory took the opportunity to rhetorically mine the vein of the feast, finding a wealth of material to use against the heresies that were troubling the Church in Constantinople. As Susan Roll has carefully pointed out, the Eunomians would not have had any difficulty with the humbler aspects of the Nativity celebration—the Word taking on full humanity.[51] What would have troubled them, and what Gregory is insistent upon, is that the Word who took on full humanity was at the same time fully divine. Gregory begins by summarizing the incarnation in a series of short statements, "The one who has no flesh takes on flesh; the Word becomes material; the invisible one is seen; the intangible one is touched; the timeless one makes a beginning...."[52] This homily does **not**

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[48] SC 358:38.16.9-10.
[49] SC 358:38.18.6-7.
[50] SC 358:38.18.11-13.
[51] Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, Liturgia condenda 5 (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), p.174-177.
[52] SC 358:38.2.16-18.

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yet assert that "the one who has no flesh," "the Word," "the invisible one," "the intangible One," or "the timeless one" is divine with the same divinity as the Father, but it soon will. This series of sentences, however, would be heard by the Nicenes to express Christ's full divinity and humanity. Gregory's oration then challenges the heretics with the Church's joyful celebration of the incarnation, classifying them along with the Jews and pagans, saying "Let the Jews be scandalized, let the Greeks mock, let the heretics blaspheme."[53] The sermon then expresses the Nicene faith in a manner that would more directly challenge the heretics, saying, "For God has appeared to men through birth: on the one hand, existing and being eternal, from the One who eternally is, above cause and reason; on the other hand, on account of us born later...."[54] The incarnation provides a perfect opportunity for Gregory to express the faith articulated at Nicea.

Gregory held that Christ's full divinity and humanity was critical to humanity's renewal. In Gregory's later battle with Apollinarianism, he writes, "That which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."[55] Here in Gregory's Nativity oration, we read, "This, we celebrate today, the sojourning of God with humans, so that we might travel to God—or return, for to speak thus is more suitable...."[56] Gregory's fight for the Nicene faith is based on his belief that what was expressed at Nicea is necessary in order that humanity be healed. God's incarnation is intrinsically linked to humankind's salvation, sanctification and deification.

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[53] SC 358:38.2.20-21.
[54] SC 358:38.3.3-6.
[55] *Lettres théologiques,* Paul Gallay avec Maurice Jourjon, SC 208 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1974), I, 32. English translation of Letter 101, *To Cledonius*, from NPNF ser.2, v.7, p.440.
[56] SC 358:38.4.1-3.

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There is a marked similarity in the contents of Gregory's Nativity oration and his five *Theological Orations* preached against the remaining Eunomians in Constantinople. The first of his *Theological Orations* stresses the necessity of a life of purification for the pursuit of theology; his Nativity oration exhorts his audience to celebrate the feast—not with adornments, revelries, excesses in eating and drinking—but rather by feasting upon the Word.[57] Gregory presents his own discourse as such a feast, and asks his listeners to purify their minds, hearing and understanding in preparation to feast on the discourse he was about to present them about God.[58]

At this point in the sermon, Gregory articulates the Orthodox belief about God's inner Trinitarian life, without reference yet to creation. His oration emphasizes that God is beyond not only time, but also every human conception. The truth that God is beyond any conception was important in the defeat of Eunomianism, a heresy based on the concept that "unbegotten" defined divinity. In Gregory's *Theological Orations* he had undermined the heretics' false-logic, saying that they misapplied the conception of human begetting to God's begetting:

> For you cannot say what (God) is, even if you are very reckless, and excessively proud of your intelligence. First, cast away your notions of flow and divisions and sections, and your conceptions of immaterial as if it were material birth, and then you may perhaps worthily conceive of the Divine Generation.[59]

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[57] SC 358:38. 5-6.
[58] SC 358:38.6.16-18.
[59] SC 250:29.8.19-24; NPNF, ser.2, v.7, p.303.

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According to the Cappadocians, God is only sketchily known by God's attributes, activities or energies.[60] Another of the *Theological Orations* says that God is sketched in the mind from the things "around God" (traditionally known as God's attributes):

> But sketching the things proper to God from the things around him, we gather an impression—somewhat faint and weak and one gathered from another—and our best theologian is he who has not indeed discovered the whole, for our present bondage does not allow of our seeing the whole, but seen to a greater extent than another, and gathered in himself more of the image of the truth—or a shadow, or whatever we may call it.[61]

The verbal similarity of this oration to Gregory's Nativity oration is striking:

> (God can be) ... depicted sketchily by the mind only, and this exceedingly faintly and within due limits, not from the things proper to him, but from the things around him—one impression gathered from one thing, another from another, into some image of the truth, which flees before being laid hold of, and escapes before being apprehended, lighting up our reason (and this, if we have been cleansed) as much as a flash of lightning illuminates even our sight, not staying its velocity.[62]

The similarity of Gregory's concepts and words from his *Theological Orations* and Nativity oration demonstrate that the battle with the heretics was still fresh in his mind during the Festal celebration. Gregory's teaching that God is beyond any human conception, and his careful articulation of the limitlessness of God, were ammunition against the Eunomians who had been troubling the Church in Constantinople.

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[60] See also Gregory of Nyssa's Letter "On 'Not Three Gods' to Ablabius," *Gregorii Nysseni: Opera Dogmatica Minora, pars 1,* GNO III, 1, ed. Fridericus Mueller (Leiden: Brill, 1958), pp.42-47; NPNF, ser.2, v.5.

[61] Ἀλλ ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν σκιαγραφοῦντες τὰ κατ' αὐτόν,
ἀμυδράν τινα καὶ ἀσθενῆ καὶ ἄλλην ἀπ' ἄλλου φαντασίαν συλλέγομεν ...
καὶ πλεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῷ συναγάγῃ τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἴνδαλμα, ἤ ἀποσκίασμα, ἤ ὅ τι καὶ ὀνομάσομεν. SC 250:30.17.11-16.

[62] νῷ μόνῳ σκιαγραφούμενος, καὶ τοῦτο λίαν ἀμυδρῶς καὶ μετρίως, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν κατ' αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτόν, ἄλλης ἐξ ἄλλου φαντασίας συλλεγομένης εἰς ἕν τι τῆς ἀληθείας ἴνδαλμα .... SC 358:38.7.8-14.

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At this point in the oration Gregory says that he is going to quit speaking about God's inner Trinitarian life and turn to the subject of God's economy, but he lingers a little longer on the theology of the Trinity. Perhaps unable to leave the subject without making himself quite clear, Gregory interrupted his movement to the topic of the incarnation saying,

> But when I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit, since divinity is neither spilled out beyond these, lest we introduce a mob of gods, nor limited within fewer than these, lest we be condemned for poverty of divinity, either by reason of the monarchy becoming Judaizers, or by reason of abundance pagans . . .. [63]

Here Gregory was using what had become a standard defense against those who would accuse the Nicenes of modalism or tritheism. Similar phraseology is found in several places in the Cappadocians' writings. St. Basil had said, "As he who fails to confess the community of the essence or substance falls into polytheism, so he who refuses to grant the distinction of the hypostases is carried away into Judaism."[64] Even though *For God's Appearing* is in the form of a panegyrical sermon for the feast of the Nativity, it contains much of the same content as more polemical orations against the heretics.

In the next few sections, Gregory presented an account of the creation of the intelligible and sensible natures, culminating in an account of the creation of the human being as a mediator between the two. This section of Gregory's homily unfolds according to the account in Genesis and a traditional statement of salvation history. When Gregory comes to the incarnation, he again takes the opportunity to underline the divinity of the incarnate Word by saying,

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[63] SC 358:38.8.14-19.
[64] *Saint Basile lettres,* Yves Courtonne, t.2 (Paris: Société d'édition: "Les Belles Lettres, 1961), 210, 5, ln.25-28; NPNF ser.2, v.8, p.251.

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> The "I AM" comes to be; and the Uncreated is created; and the Uncontainable is contained, by the intermediary of the intelligent soul which mediates between divinity and the thickness of the flesh; and the one who bestows riches becomes poor, for He is poor in my flesh that I might be rich in his divinity . . .. [65]

Gregory in the above passage stressed the link between God becoming fully human and humanity's deification. Gregory's careful wording about "the intermediary of the intelligent soul" can be understood as addressed against the Apollinarian heresy, which denied that Word Incarnate had a human mind. Again we are brought back to the important tenet of Gregory's that what is not assumed by God cannot be healed.

Gregory took up again an offensive approach against the Eunomians with his invective, "In answer to this, what say the slanderers to us, the bitter cipherers of divinity, the accusers of what is praised, who are in the dark concerning the light, who are uneducated concerning wisdom, for whom "Christ died in vain," the unthankful creatures, moldings of the Evil One?"[66] The epithet, "cipherers of divinity" is directed against Eunomius' attempt to prove by logic his conviction that the Son is not divine. Gregory discerned in the Eunomians a reluctance to view **God** as being humbled. In Chapter 14, Gregory asked his audience a series of rhetorical questions to the effect: "Does God become small on account of the self-abasement of the incarnation?" Gregory pointed out the ridiculousness of such a position by reminding his audience that no one brings charges against the physician for bending low to heal the diseased person.[67]

While Arians often stressed the humility and abasement of Christ's life on earth to draw their conclusion that the Word was merely a creature, the Nicenes tended to

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[65] SC 358:38.13.28-32.
[66] SC 358:38.14.1-5.
[67] SC 358:38.14.29-33.

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distinguish two categories of activities in Christ's life: those which pointed towards his humanity in his abasement and humility, and the others which pointed towards his divinity.[68] Section 15 of Gregory's Nativity oration contains many such statements, which during the Christological controversies of the next century would be called "division of the Evangelical sayings," and identified with an Antiochene Christology. Although we should not project the issues of the fifth century back into the fourth, it is pleasing to notice that Gregory maintained a unity of subject throughout this section. Holding together Christ's human and divine attributes, Gregory attacked the Arians saying, "You state the things which lessen (him), but overlook the things which exalt (him), and you hold that He suffered, but do not add that it was voluntary."[69] With further invective against the heretics, Gregory exclaimed, "Do you take offence at the flesh? The Jews also (did) this ....Do you disbelieve in (his) divinity? Not even the demons (do) this."[70] Gregory called the heretics that rejected the full teaching on the incarnation "more unbelieving than the demons and more ungrateful than the Jews."[71]

The next section begins with an anticipation of the celebration of Christ's Baptism. This gave Gregory an opportunity to focus more on Gospel events and activities that manifest Christ's Divine authority. Gregory could not help but interject another stab against the heretics when he said, "(You will see him)...giving life to the dead. Would that I might give life to you too who have become dead through false belief!"[72] This section concludes with another statement connecting the incarnation with its salvific and

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[68] Moreschini points this out in his introduction to the critical edition, SC 358, p.24.
[69] SC 358:58.15.10-12.
[70] SC 358:38.15.18-21.
[71] SC 358:38.15.21-22.
[72] SC 358:38.16.8-10.

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deifying objective, as Gregory exclaimed, "How many feasts are there for me (to celebrate) concerning each of the mysteries of Christ. My perfection, remaking, and return to the first Adam are the one main point of all of these."[73] This restates how important the full divinity and full humanity of Christ is to effecting the restoration and perfection of the image of God in humankind. In his conclusion, Gregory exhorts his listeners, "Journey blamelessly through all the ages and abilities of Christ, as a disciple of Christ."[74] This is not only a call to the imitation of Christ, but also an assertion that it is possible to participate in Christ's resurrection and glorification: ". . . in order that you might also rise with him, be glorified with him, and reign with him, beholding God and being beheld as much as it is possible. . . ."[75] To the very end of his oration, Gregory asserts that the incarnation is what makes possible humanity's restoration and glorification.

Liturgical content

The content of *For God's Appearing,*[76] preached in 380, combined with evidence from Gregory's Discourse 39 on the Feast of Lights, indicates that the Nativity and the Baptism of Christ were celebrated as separate feasts that year.[77] Some scholars propose that this was the first celebration of the Nativity on December 25 in Constantinople.[78] Usener thought Gregory's homily represented the first celebration of the Nativity on

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[73] SC 358:38.16.17-19.
[74] SC 358:38.18.7-8.
[75] SC 358:38.18.22-24.
[76] Cf. SC 358:38.16.1-6.
[77] I.e., on December 25 and January 6 respectively.
[78] Moreschini goes over the history of this debate in his introduction in SC 358, pp.14-15. More currently, Thomas J. Talley also argues in favor of Gregory's introduction of the December 25 celebration in *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1986), p.138.

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December 25 in Eastern Christendom.[79] Much of the debate depends upon the interpretation of the Greek word "ἔξαρχος," which Gregory used to describe himself in Discourse 39: "We have previously celebrated the Nativity as is meet, both I, the "exarchos" of the feast, as well as you...."[80] This Greek word has two meanings: first "the initiator/introducer" and secondly "the leader/presider at a religious ceremony." Moreschini in his introduction says that "exarchos" has the meaning of "presider," and specifically that the word "exarchos" was used in the Iliad to connote the one who intoned the funeral chant.[81] Those who argue that this was the first celebration of the December 25 feast interpret Gregory to mean that he introduced the feast to Constantinople, and understand Gregory's instruction on the terms "Theophany" and "Nativity"[82] to be an introductory instruction to the people on the festival. However, it is not necessary to conclude that Gregory was introducing the feast for the first time, because Gregory similarly explains the name and content of the Feast of Lights in Discourse 39, 1-17, even though Theophany was not a new celebration.[83] In conclusion, there is not enough **internal** evidence in the two orations to say definitively that Gregory introduced the celebration of the Nativity on December 25.

The interpretation of *exarchos*, however, in Thomas J. Talley's words "becomes somewhat academic," since it would be unlikely that the Arianizing Christians in control of Constantinople before Gregory would have initiated a feast that had its origins in the

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[79] Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, pp.261-262, 269.
[80] SC 358:39.14.
[81] Moreschini and Gallay, pp.14-15.
[82] Cf. SC 358:38.3.1-4, 9-10.
[83] Moreschini and Gallay, p.15.

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West (given that Rome had mostly maintained an opposition to the anomoians and semi-Arians). Moreover there is no evidence that Constantine initiated the celebration of the feast in Constantinople.[84] We are left with three other possibilities: Constantine may have actually introduced the December 25 celebration, even though we have no evidence to attest to the fact; the December 25 celebration may have been introduced in one of the brief episodes of Orthodoxy in Constantinople between Constantine and Theodosius; or finally, the December 25 celebration may have been kept at an earlier time by the Orthodox remnant in the capital and only celebrated openly on December 25, 380. Without any evidence to support these three possibilities, we must return to the original proposition as the most likely. Gregory could have meant by "exarchos" that he was introducing a new celebration to the capital city—one that the East, finally free from the control of Arianism, was able to receive from their Orthodox brothers and sisters of the West. Given this context, it may be possible that Gregory or others actually introduced the December 25 celebration in solidarity with the West to demonstrate an opposition to the remaining Arians in Constantinople. The good relationship which the Eastern holders of the Nicene faith had with the West suggests that this would have been a good or likely time for cross fertilization of liturgical practices.

Gregory perhaps alludes to the increase of light present at the Winter Solstice early in the oration saying: "Again the darkness is dissolved; again the light takes shape."[85] There is no evidence that the December 25 feast was introduced to Eastern

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[84] Talley, p.138.
[85] SC 358:38.2.1-2.

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Christendom out of competition or trying to co-opt pagan sun cult festivities,[86] but Gregory uses the occurrence in nature as an opportunity to stress in his sermon a theme already present in Scripture: that Christ is the light to those sitting in darkness.[87] Gregory's scant references to light at the beginning of the oration can all be traced to Biblical allusions. While Gregory does not develop the theme of the Winter Solstice as Gregory of Nyssa does, his mention of it shows sensitivity to the resonance between Scriptural references to Christ as light and the Nativity occurring when the physical light was on the increase.

Gregory's Nativity oration also can give us insight into the developing festal cycle of the Church, and how the emerging celebrations of the feasts were experienced by the faithful. Gregory describes the experience of a ritual suspension of time and place. He uses no verbs in the exordium of his discourse, "Christ (is) born; glorify (Him),"[88] stressing the presence of the Nativity to his audience. Gregory exhorts his listeners to "prostrate yourself before the manger,"[89] treating his congregation as though they are present in place and time to the birth of Christ. When he later anticipates the upcoming feast of Theophany, he speaks as though his congregation will be present at the event: "A little later then, you will see: Jesus being purified in the Jordan for my purification...."[90] As Gregory goes through the events in Christ's life successively, he speaks of his listeners as active observers of each, and concludes, "How many feasts are there for me

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[86] As is one hypothesis given about its origins in the West. See chapter 1.
[87] Cf. Is 9.2.
[88] SC 358:38.1.1-2.
[89] SC 358:38.17.7.
[90] SC 358:38.16.1-2.

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(to celebrate) concerning each of the mysteries of Christ!"[91] His use of the term "mystery" here is important in that "mystery" is that into which one may be led; something in which one may become a participant. In addition, the "mysteries of Christ" may now be experienced through the festal cycle. The events of Christ's life, unique and distant in time and place, are now accessible through the celebration of feasts of the Church.

Exhortation

Gregory says that the Nativity should not be celebrated pompously, as the pagans celebrate their feasts. He identifies the pagan method of celebrating feasts with the structures of this world, saying, "Therefore indeed let us keep the festival, not pompously but divinely; not in a worldly, but a heavenly manner...."[92] The word which is translated "pompously" here is "πανηγυρικῶς" which could mean more literally, "after the manner of pagan festivals." Gregory lists many activities common to our celebration of holidays, saying in a manner perhaps more reminiscent of St. John Chrysostom that we should not celebrate in this manner. In answer to his own question to how we should celebrate, he says,

> Let us not wreath the front doors, let us not put together choruses, nor adorn the streets, nor let us feast the eye, nor charm the ear with flute-playing, nor make effeminate the sense of smell, nor prostitute the sense of taste, nor gratify the sense of touch, with those ready roads and entrances of sin for evil; let us not be softened through raiment that is delicate and flowing and most beautiful in its uselessness, nor through the radiance of gems, nor with the glistening of gold, nor by the artifices of colors, falsifying the natural beauty and invented contrary to the image;[93] (let us not be softened) with "reveling and drunkenness" with which I

[91] SC 358:38.16.17-18.
[92] SC 358:38.4.12-14.
[93] That is, the image of God in which we are made. Cf. Gn 1.26-27.

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> know that "debauchery and licentiousness" are closely united, since the lessons of evil teachers (are) evil, or rather the fields of bad seeds are bad. Let us not pile high couches for reclining at meals, as a habitation of dainties for the belly; let us not prize the bouquet of wines, the trickery of cooks, the expensiveness of perfumes; let not the earth and sea bring to us as a gift the costly dung, for so I know how to esteem luxury. Let us not be zealous to gain victory one over another in intemperance. For to me everything that is excessive and above need is intemperance, and especially when others hunger and are in need, who are of the same clay and mixture.[94]

Gregory concludes saying that we will leave these ways of celebrating to the pagans, and pagan pomps and festivals. Here we find a strong anti-pagan polemic, but one must understand this polemic in context. Given the historical context, Gregory sees paganism as identified with the *status quo*. The government's sanction of Christianity is relatively new. To get an idea of how new the growth of Christianity is, one may look at the life of Gregory the Wonderworker,[95] who had been a great influence on Basil's and Gregory of Nyssa's grandparents. Gregory of Nyssa describes Gregory the Wonderworker's transformation of Caesarea from a completely pagan city with only seventeen Christians to a predominantly Christian region with only seventeen pagans. During the lifetime of Gregory, his fellow classmate from Athens, Julian the Apostate, tried to restore Greek pagan philosophy to the forefront by his pro-pagan policies, and depicted Christians as simplistic, uneducated and ignorant, and not capable of teaching the classics. Gregory of Nazianzus' homily was preached in 380,[96] barely twenty years after Julian had threatened Christians with his reforms.

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[94] SC 358:38.5.1-21.
[95] PG 46:893-958. *Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works*, trans. Michael Slusser, FC 98 (Washington, D.C.: CUPA, 1998).
[96] SC 358, p.147, n.2.

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Gregory characterizes the pagan way of celebrating as "worldly." For him such pagan celebration is identified with the structures of the world. In Gregory's context, abstinence from holiday revelry becomes a sort of abstinence from "this world's structure." He sees immoderation as an indulgence that, even more egregiously, takes away the necessities for life from those who hunger and are in need. He concludes by reminding his congregation that those in want are "of the same clay and mixture" as themselves, that they are all formed by God from the same earth.[97] We find a challenge in Gregory's connection of his listeners with the earth; his identification of them with the poor; and his reminder of their common, contingent human nature. While Gregory's call to a sober celebration of the Nativity might seem a bit overly somber to us, and perhaps more proper to our present period of preparation than to the feast itself, we can see that it is an excellent example of withdrawal from the structures of the surrounding environment to participate in the mystery of the feast.

Gregory's exhortation in the Nativity oration is in agreement with his insistence that a life of purification is necessary for the pursuit of theology, found in his *Theological Orations*. In these orations, Gregory had implied that the abundance of heretical teachings in the city was a result of the idle speculation of non-serious persons. In the

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[97] Peter Brown's recent book *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire: Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (University Press of New England, 2001) perhaps provides a challenge to my thesis. He corrects an over-emphasis by previous scholars on the radical nature of care for the poor on the part of the Cappadocians. Brown provides important historical background showing how "care for the poor" grew out of a pre-existent expectation for leaders in pre-Christian antiquity to show "care for the city." "Care for the poor" would be then associated with "structure," in that the Emperor and government officials who had entrusted the Church with tax exemptions and donations expected this "care of the poor" by the Bishop. However, perhaps the radical element remains in the shift from "care of the city" to "care of the poor," And Brown's work should not be seen as negating that of previous scholars, only providing a correction.

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first of his *Theological Orations*, Gregory laid the foundation for Orthodox doctrine by stressing the importance of a serious life seeking purification:

> Not to every one, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about God; not to every one; the Subject is not so cheap and low; and I will add, not before every audience, nor at all times, nor on all points; but on certain occasions, and before certain persons, and within certain limits. Not to all men, because it is permitted only to those who have been examined, and are passed masters in meditation, and who have been previously purified in soul and body, or at the very least are being purified, . . . they to whom the subject is of real concern, and not they who make it a matter of pleasant gossip, like any other thing, after the races, or the theatre, or a concert, or a dinner, or still lower employments. [98]

In the context of the Cappadocians, "to philosophize" does not mean to discuss idly philosophies about God. Rather, philosophy involved an asceticism that challenged one to virtue.[99] Philosophy was considered to be a life in accordance with love of Wisdom, and Wisdom was identified with God, and often more particularly, Christ.[100]

In the Nativity oration Gregory also presents himself modestly, as a person of low status and education. Although his claims to low birth and simple speech could be seen as a common rhetorical device to catch the sympathies of his audience, we must recognize his humility at this point as not completely feigned. Gregory says that, if one is to partake of luxury or fare sumptuously during the feast, it should be on the Word of God. Then as the "host" of the feast, he offers his audience what "fare" he can provide. Modestly he says he will try his best,

> . . .in order that you might know how a foreigner is able to feed the local people; someone from the country, those from the city; one who does not live in luxury,

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[98] *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 27-31 (Discours Théologiques),* intro ... Paul Gallay, SC 250 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978), Discours 27, 3, ln.1-7, 15-18. English translation from NPNF, ser.2, v.7, p.285.

[99] G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), s.v. "φιλοσοφία."

[100] Lampe, s.v. "σοφία."

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> those who live luxuriously; and how the common laborer and homeless (can feed) those illustrious in abundance.[101]

We must hold in mind that while Gregory was not of an aristocratic family, he was of the gentry and had received a full classical education. The people in Constantinople would see Gregory as sophisticated and educated. As evidence of the erudition of the Cappadocians, we recall that Gregory's younger brother Caesarius was sought by the Emperor Constantius to hold a position in court, and Caesarius even, if we can trust his brother's approbations, bested Julian the Apostate in a public debate. What we have here then is a great personage being humbled in a ritual context—or rather, humbling himself. Gregory even identifies himself with day laborers who earned barely enough day-to-day to support themselves, and homeless persons.

If we connect this moral exhortation with Gregory's insistence that those who engage in theology must be undergoing a process of purification, perhaps Gregory is criticizing the way of life of the Eunomians in Constantinople. With the rapid spread, and one might even say popularization, of Christianity perhaps there was a correspondence between the Arianizing Christianity and a popular and easy Christianity that did not engage in asceticism and concern for the poor. In any case, it seems that Gregory wants to imply such a connection. For Gregory, the belief that God humbled himself to our humanity has a profound implication for our way of life: that we should humble ourselves for others.

The sermon draws to a close with two sections of exhortation, chapters 17-18. The first is an exhortation to celebrate the feast with joyful reverence. The next section

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[101] SC 358:8.6.12-16.

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calls the audience to participate in the self-emptying of Christ, so that they might also participate in the glorification of Christ. The context of the Orthodox Christians who had so recently suffered at the hands of the Arians in Constantinople adds light to this passage. Gregory himself came close to being stoned by an angry mob of Arians in 379 on Pascha.[102] This event adds meaning to the words, "Receive stoning, if it is necessary to suffer this. You will escape those throwing stones, well I know; you will also flee through the midst of them, as God. For the Word is not stoned."[103] Gregory's exhortation to participate in the sufferings of Christ was not self-inflicted masochism, but rather the reality experienced by him and other Nicene Christians at the time that faithfulness to the Word sometimes came at the price of bearing abuse for the truth. Gregory assured his audience that this sort of participation in Christ's sufferings would be accompanied by participation in his resurrection, glorification and reign.

Conclusions

Gregory of Nazianzus' sermon *For God's Appearing* was delivered on December 25, 380 in Constantinople, very likely on the first occasion of the separate celebration of the Nativity in Constantinople. It may have been introduced to Constantinople from the West, demonstrating the solidarity that those faithful to Nicea in Eastern Christendom shared with the West at this time. It belongs to the genre of a panegyrical sermon, although one may find in it some elements of diatribe. Gregory used the birth of Christ as an opportunity to expound Orthodox Trinitarian faith. Even though, on the surface, the semi-Arians and anomoians could have used the Nativity as an opportunity to expound

[102] Moreschini and Gallay, p.82.
[103] SC 358:38.18.11-13.

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their doctrine that Christ was not fully divine by stressing the humble aspects of his birth, Gregory did not shrink back from declaring Christ's full humanity and divinity through the feast. Gregory also stresses in his homily the necessity of an ascetic life for the practice of theology. Many of the themes found in Gregory's *Theological Orations* recently preached at Constantinople are also present in his panegyric of the Nativity.

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Gregory of Nyssa's

On the Nativity of the Savior

Background and Dating

As the younger brother of Basil the Great, Gregory was somewhat in Basil's shadow while he was alive. Although Gregory did not receive the education at Athens that his brother received, he learned at home from Basil and Macrina his older sister. From Gregory's *Life of Macrina*[1] and *On the Soul and the Resurrection*,[2] we get an image of the intimacy between brother and sister, and the great influence she had over his life, and the life of their entire family.

One of the passages in *On the Nativity of the Savior* dealing with Herod's slaughter of the innocents is particularly sensitive to the plight of women and children suffering violence. The question of whether Gregory of Nyssa at one time had a wife named Theosebia[3] has been well debated and is perhaps impossible to answer, but nevertheless it is clear that women played an important role in Gregory's formation. His grandmother Macrina the Elder, his mother Emmelia and his sister Macrina the Younger were instrumental in his education in the life of the Church. One must be careful not to project our conception, formed from centuries of coenobitic monasticism, back into his

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[1] *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, texte ... Pierre Maraval, SC 178 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1971), which can be found in numerous English translations including *Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical works,* trans. Virginia Woods Callahan, FC 58 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967).

[2] *S. Gregorii Episcopi Nysseni De anima et Resurrectione,* ed. J. G. Krabinger (Leipzig, 1837) may be found in English translation in *Gregory of Nyssa: On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine Roth (Crestwood, New York: SVSP, 1993).

[3] Gregory of Nazianzus expressed in his *Ep.* 197 condolences to Gregory of Nyssa on the death of Theosebia, whom he calls Gregory's sister and σύζυγος. See NPNF, series 2, v.7, pp.461-462. The latter term, which means "yokefellow" could be used to speak of a spouse as well as a fellow worker, and has been interpreted by the Benedictine editors of PG to simply mean that she was a deaconess in the Church in Nyssa.

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family's retreat to the "philosophical life" at Annesi.[4] When this family took up a life of virginity, it was within the context of family. As the *Life of St. Macrina* written by her brother Gregory recounts, Macrina was pledged early in life by her parents to marry, but her betrothed died of a fever. She argues that it is out of faithfulness to her betrothed, whom she knew to be living with God, that she would not marry another.[5] She convinced her mother to enter into a common life with their servants on their estate. It is likely that the servants of the estate were also initially in family groups. Sensitivity to family life can also be seen in Gregory's description of how his mother took the news of her son Naucratius' death:

> She was perfectly schooled in virtue, but nature won out even over her. She became breathless and speechless on the spot and fainted, reason giving way to passion, and she lay there under the impact of the terrible news like a noble athlete felled by an unforeseen blow.[6]

Other details of Macrina's life challenge us to see her family's "life of philosophy" within the context of family, especially in the role that Macrina played in caring for her younger siblings. Gregory recounts Macrina's care for the youngest brother Peter:

> Macrina... took him almost immediately from his nurse's breast and reared him herself and led him to all higher education, exercising him from babyhood in sacred learning.... She became all things to the boy: father, teacher, attendant, mother, the counselor of every good....[7]

Upon the deaths of members in the family, Macrina instructed both her mother and Gregory that natural grieving must give way to the Christian hope in the resurrection. Whether Gregory of Nyssa was prevented from taking up the life of virginity by marriage

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[4] Cf. Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea: The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* (University of California Press, 1994), p.63.
[5] Cf. *St. Gregory: Ascetical Works*, p.166
[6] SC 178:9.16-22; *St. Gregory: Ascetical Works,* p.169.
[7] SC 178:12.6-14; *St. Gregory: Ascetical Works* pp.171-172.

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or not, we see that he was sensitive to family life, women and children. This sensitivity can be seen in Gregory's description of Herod's slaughter of the innocents in Gregory's oration.

Gregory's older brother Basil changed the course of Gregory's life by involving him actively in the defense against Arianism. In 371, in a counter-move against the Emperor Valens' putting part of Cappadocia under the Arian Anthimus, Basil had Gregory made Bishop of Nyssa. Basil's younger brother did not have the political shrewdness of his older brother and was perhaps somewhat of an embarrassment to him. The Arians that had an interest in the region were disappointed in Basil's move to reassert Orthodox control in the area and accused Gregory of being irregularly elected and misappropriating Church funds. The governor of Pontus ordered Gregory to be arrested, and a predominantly Arian council convened in 376 to depose him. During his arrest, he suffered harsh treatment at the hands of the soldiers, prompting him to escape.[8] He was in exile until the new emperor Gratian published an edict of toleration, allowing him to return to his see in 378.

In January 379, Gregory's older brother Basil passed away, and we begin to see Gregory come into his own. He finishes some of Basil's uncompleted works; moreover, his own writing projects begin to show maturity. During this period Gregory comes more into the forefront as a defender of the faith. In 381 Gregory was present at the Second Ecumenical Council and contributed to putting an end to the Arian crisis. On several occasions Gregory was called upon to preach at Constantinople: at the enthronement of

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[8] *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Robert Appleton Co: 1910), s.v."Gregory of Nyssa."

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Gregory of Nazianzus to the see of Constantinople; at the death of Bishop Meletius of Antioch during the Council; at the funeral of the Princess Pulcheria; and the funeral of her mother Flacilla.[9] Gregory had become known as someone with rhetorical ability, or at least the ability to deliver a stirring panegyric.

While Usener doubted the authenticity of *On the Nativity of the Savior* because of his own incredulity at the possibility that Gregory would make use of apocryphal sources,[10] scholars have generally accepted the subsequent defense of Gregory's authorship by Holl. [11] Given the fact that much of the apocryphal material from the *Protevangelium Jacobi* did subsequently enter into the preaching of the fathers and liturgical services of the Church, it is not hard to believe that Gregory of Nyssa would be comfortable with using such material. The oration, as we shall see, bears very much the imprint of Gregory's thought, especially in its similarity to *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, that its authenticity is beyond doubt.

The occasion of the pilgrimage made by Gregory to Jerusalem is important for the dating of several of his works, including the sermon of this study. The cave in Jerusalem is a theme common to the works that J. Daniélou places this period of Gregory's life. The impact of having seen the cave is present in his Christmas oration, so the date of his trip falls before the sermon in this study. In 379 Gregory was sent to Antioch to try to heal the Meletian schism there, and H. Leclercq tentatively places his visit to Jerusalem soon after

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[9] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology,* v. 3 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1983), p.255.
[10] Hermann Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, 3rd ed. (Bonn: H. Bouvier & Co. Verlag, 1969), pp.254-255.
[11] Karl Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu dem grossen Kappadoziern* (Tübingen, 1904), p.231.

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that synod.[12] Daniélou, however, dates Gregory's journey to the Holy Land to after 382, in which a council sent Gregory to Arabia to help calm troubles in the Church there.[13] In Gregory's encomium for Basil, which according to Daniélou, was delivered at Caesarea in 381, he had mentioned a recent major celebration, possibly pointing to a Nativity celebration in Caesarea on December 25 as early as 381.[14] Although Daniélou admits that *On the Nativity of the Savior* could have been preached in the winter of 383, he places it more definitively in 386. Daniélou bases the 386 date on the Nativity sermon's connection with the sermon *On St. Stephen*,[15] which is dated 386 by Bardenhewer.[16]

Unfortunately, the difficulty in dating Gregory's works and the paucity of information about his life mean that it is difficult to provide more details concerning the circumstances of its preaching. It seems likely that Gregory is addressing other "shepherds," meaning Bishops or Presbyters—perhaps visiting or at a local synod—when he says:

> For if we are really shepherds and keep a watchful eye over our own flock, the voice of the angels, which brings the good news of this great joy, is certainly for us. So let us look up to the heavenly host; let us behold the choir of angels; let us listen to their divine singing of praise.[17]

It is possible here that Gregory is using the plural of modesty. Then he would be saying that the voice of the angel was addressed to himself alone, but this does not seem consistent with the ending exhortation: "So let us look up to the heavenly host; let us

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[12] *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Robert Appleton Co: 1910), s.v. "Gregory of Nyssa."
[13] J. Daniélou, "La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," *RSR* 29 (1955): pp. 346-372.
[14] PG 36:787-788. J. A. Stein, "Encomium of St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, on his Brother St. Basil, Archbishop of Cappadocian Caesarea. A Commentary, with a Revised Text, Introduction and Translation," *PS* 17 (1928).
[15] May be found in GNO X, I.
[16] Bardenhewer, *RSR* 29 (1955): pp.365-367.
[17] GNO X, 2:250.15-251.3.

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behold the choir of angels; let us listen to their divine singing of praise."[18] It is more likely that Gregory is including some or all of his audience in the "us" of this passage. Moreover, Gregory uses the term "shepherds" again later in the oration to modify the first person plural pronoun: "Let us the shepherds speak the utterance of the prophet."[19] If other clergy were in attendance, it would also add significance to Gregory's opening, "Let us also fulfill the law and become trumpeters of the sacred month."[20] St. Athanasius of Alexandria had associated the trumpeting, or announcing, of feast days with the ministry of the apostles in the first of his *Festal Letters*.[21] The horn in antiquity was not primarily a musical instrument as we think of it today, but rather a way of amplifying the human voice. Gregory in this oration associates trumpeting, or clearly announcing, the day with the prophets and apostles: "On account of this came the trumpets of the prophets and the apostles—which the Law says are made of horns because their construction is out of the true Unicorn."[22] Gregory associates trumpeting the day of the Nativity with the apostles, and inasmuch as their ministry is apostolic, the bishops and priests have a special task in announcing clearly that day. It appears likely that there were other clergy in attendance during Gregory's oration; given the paucity of evidence it is impossible to determine whether they were in attendance because of some special event such as a local council.

Rhetorical Analysis

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[18] GNO X, 2:251.1-3.
[19] GNO X, 2:256.16-17.
[20] GNO X, 2:235.6-7.
[21] Cf. *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, NPNF series 2, v.4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971 reprint), p.507.
[22] GNO X, 2:237.9-10.

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Gregory of Nyssa's oration can be classified as an *encomium* or panegyrical sermon.[23] Since Gregory did not receive an education outside the home, Basil's teacher Libanius is the orator that figures most directly in the life of Gregory. Gregory says in his *Letter X, To Libanius*: "For if Basil was the author of our oratory, and if his wealth came from your treasures, then what we possess is yours, even though we received it through others."[24] Quasten is critical of Gregory's rhetorical abilities saying, "He never became a master of the art. His style remains very often without charm."[25] He even accuses Gregory in his funeral orations of falling "into exaggerated pathos and bombast." The present translator, however, is not able to detect this defect. Gregory's style is not as ornate as that of Amphilochius, but he does lapse into the embellishment of allegory in places, and into a horrific representation of Herod's slaughter of the innocent children under two years of age. While Gregory does not display a high level of artificiality of rhetorical style, we may find a few rhetorical figures of ornamentation, especially in the bridge sections and conclusion of his Nativity sermon.

A few examples of Gregory's use of rhetorical figures should be sufficient to note the presence of ornamentation as well as the limited emphasis Gregory places on this type of embellishment. Our first example is from a section in Gregory's oration where he inquires into why the Nativity occurred on the Winter Solstice. As he comes to the conclusion of this section, Gregory uses the ornamentations of anaphora, beginning

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[23] For a full background on panegyrical sermons, see Folker Siegert, "Homily and Panegyrical Sermon," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), pp.421-443.
[24] *Gregory of Nyssa,* NPNF ser.2, v.5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994 reprint), p.533. "Lettre XIII.6," *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres,* SC 363 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1990).
[25] Quasten, p.255.

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successive clauses with the same word or words, and of homoioptoton, repeating similar case endings especially for words in parallel positions:[26]

> But it was necessary that the lawlessness of the Israelites also appear; it was necessary that the rule of the Assyrians and the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar, still smoldering, become manifest in life. It was necessary that the blood-guiltiness against the pious shoot up like a kind of wicked and thorny branch from the evil root of the devil. It was necessary that the rage of the Jews against the holy ones of God be revealed, they who killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent, and finally the crime which they committed in the case of Zechariah, "between the sanctuary and the altar."[27]

Even in this example, a closer look at the Greek will demonstrate in the gradual lengthening of clauses an absence of isocolon. In addition, the first two clauses also do not begin exactly as the third and fourth. Such a lack of over-embellishment exhibits a restraint in style, more appropriate to prose, that was absent in Amphilochius' oration. In the next paragraph, the oration also exhibits anaphora in a sequence of temporal clauses:

> Then just as St. Paul says to the Athenians, God arrives "in these last days," "overlooking the times of ignorance," when there was no one understanding and seeking for God, "when all strayed (and) together have been corrupted," when "all things were consigned to sin," when lawlessness became more than enough, when the darkness of evil grew to (its) most extreme measure–then Grace showed itself, then the Ray of the true Light rose, then "the Sun of righteousness" gave light "to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." Then He crushed the many

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[26] Galen O. Rowe, "Style," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), pp.131, 138.

[27] ἀλλ' ἔδει καὶ τῶν 'Ισραηλιτῶν τὴν παρανομίαν ἀναφανῆναι·

ἔδει καὶ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων τὴν βασιλείαν καί τοῦ Ναβουχοδονοσὸρ τὴν ὑπερηφανίαν ὑποσμύχουσαν ἔτι τῷ βίῳ φανερὰν γενέσθαι·

ἔδει τὴν κατὰ τῶν ὁσίων μιαιφονίαν οἷόν τινα πονηρὸν καὶ ἀκανθώδη βλαστὸν τῆς κακῆς τοῦ διαβόλου ῥίζης ἀναδραμεῖν·

ἔδει τὴν τῶν 'Ιουδαίων κατὰ τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ θεοῦ φανερωθῆναι λύσσαν τῶν τοὺς προφήτας ἀποκτεινάντων καὶ λιθοβολούντων τοὺς ἀπεσταλμένους καὶ τέλος μεταξὺ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ θυσιαστηρίου τὸ κατὰ τὸν Ζαχαρίαν ἄγος ἐργασαμένων.
GNO X, 2:241.5-15.

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> heads of the dragon, treading them underfoot by means of the human flesh, crushing them against the earth and trampling them underfoot.[28]

The repetition of πάντες and πάντα in lines 5 and 6, and well as the repetition of ἐπεφάνη and ἐπέφανεν in lines 8 and 9 help add to the coherence of this well balanced period.[29]

The final section of Gregory's Nativity oration exhibits more ornamentation. As before,[30] Gregory combines the figures of anaphora, beginning successive clauses with the same word or words, and of homoioptoton, repeating similar case endings especially for words in parallel positions:

> As good, He loved the rebel. As wise, he contrived the design of the restoration of those who had been enslaved. As just, he does not do violence to the one who enslaved, who justly acquired (us) for a price, but he gives himself as an exchange for those held captive, in order that even as a guarantor transferred the debt to himself, he might free the captives from those in power. As mighty, he was not mastered by Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.[31]

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[28] τότε, καθώς φησι πρὸς Ἀθηναίους ὁ Παῦλος,
Τοὺς χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν παραγίνεται,
ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ συνίων καὶ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν,
ὅτε πάντες ἐξέκλιναν ἅμα ἠχρειώθησαν,
ὅτε συνεκλείσθη τὰ πάντα εἰς ἁμαρτίαν,
ὅτε ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἀνομία,
ὅτε πρὸς τὸ ἀκρότατον μέτρον ὁ τῆς κακίας ηὔξησε ζόφος,
τότε Ἐπεφάνη ἡ χάρις,
τότε ἡ ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς ἀκτὶς ἐπανέτειλε,
τότε ἐπέφανεν ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἥλιος τοῖς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένοις,
τότε τὰς πολλὰς κεφαλὰς τοῦ δράκοντος συνέθλασεν ἐπιβὰς τῷ ποδὶ διὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης
σαρκὸς καὶ τῇ γῇ προσθλάσας καὶ καταπατήσας.
GNO X, 2:242.2-13.

[29] See Rowe, pp.151-152, on "The Period and it Basic Parts."

[30] GNO X, 2:241.5-15.

[31] ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὸν ἀποστάτην ἠγάπησεν.
ὡς σοφὸς ἐπίνοιαν τῆς ἐπανόδου τῶν καταδεδουλωμένων ἐμηχανήσατο.
ὡς δίκαιος οὐ βιάζεται τὸν καταδουλωσάμενον,
τὸν ὠνῆς δικαίως κτησάμενον,
ἀλλ' ἑαυτὸν δίδωσιν ἀντὶ τῶν κεκρατημένων ἀντάλλαγμα,

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In this example, not only do the beginnings of clauses contain similar case endings, but near the end of the sequence the ends of clauses also contain similar sounding inflections. Another passage near the end of Gregory's panegyrical sermon also contains an extended example of the rhetorical figure antimetabole, "the confrontation of a thought and its reverse through the repetition of the same words with switched grammatical functions."[32]

> The Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not overcome it." For the gloom vanishes in the presence of the ray; the sun is not eclipsed by the nether gloom. The mortal is swallowed up by life, just as the Apostle says; life is not extinguished by death. That which has been corrupted is saved with the help of the incorruptible one, but corruption does not touch incorruptibility.[33]

While Amphilochius' sermon bordered on poetry, Gregory's does not. It does not exhibit an overly embellished style, but rather a more restrained Attic style. Gregory saves elaborate figures of speech for conclusions—for emphasizing a point or drawing his thoughts to a close.

While ornamentation of style is not an overwhelming feature of Gregory's panegyric, a more striking feature of this Nativity sermon is the variety of directions it

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ἵνα καθάπερ τις ἐγγυητὴς εἰς ἑαυτὸν μεταθεὶς τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐλευθερώσῃ τῶν κρατούντων τὸν κατεχόμενον.
ὡς δυνατὸς οὐκ ἐνεκρατήθη τῷ ᾅδῃ οὐδὲ ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ εἶδε διαφθοράν.
GNO X, 2:268.5-12.

[32] Rowe, p.143.

[33] ὅτι Τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἔλαμψεν,
ἡ δὲ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.
ἀφανίζεται γὰρ τῇ παρουσίᾳ τῆς ἀκτῖνος ὁ ζόφος,
οὐκ ἐναμαυροῦται τῷ ζόφῳ ὁ ἥλιος.
τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς καταπίνεται,
καθώς φησιν ὁ ἀπόστολος,
οὐκ ἐνδαπανᾶται ἡ ζωὴ τῷ θανάτῳ.
τὸ κατεφθαρμένον τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ συνδιασῴζεται,
ἡ δὲ φθορὰ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας οὐ προσάπτεται.
GNO X, 2:269.1-7.

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takes in various sections. Some of these sections may even be considered digressions, and Gregory seems to recognize them as such.[34] Yet these digressions are still held together within the whole oration, and not without a purpose—they serve to make specific theological points important to the feast.

The oration can be divided into five major sections.[35] The exordium is an exhortation to celebrate the incarnation as the fulfillment of the Old Testament feast of Tabernacles, using verses from the psalms as a rallying call: "Sound the trumpet at the new moon!"[36] There was a precedent for the use of this psalm verse for the announcing of a Christian feast in St. Athanasius' *Festal Letter* of 329.[37] Athanasius interpreted the proclamation by trumpet of the feasts in the Old Testament as a type that is fulfilled in the seasonable celebrations of the feasts of the Church.[38] Athanasius associated the proclamation of feasts with the prophets and apostles;[39] Gregory makes their relationship to Christ even more explicit saying that on account of the entrance of sin, "came the trumpets of the prophets and the apostles—which the Law says are made of horn because of their construction is out of the true Unicorn."[40] While Athanasius applied the Old Testament blowing of trumpets as a type for the announcing of the dates of Pascha and the beginning of the fast,[41] Gregory seems to extend Athanasius' thought in his search for an Old Testament type for the celebration of the Nativity.

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[34] Cf. GNO X, 2:245.3; 250.15; and 256.12.
[35] (1) 235.1 to 238.8 (2) 238.8 to 245.3 (3) 245.3 to 256.12 (4) 256.12 to 264.1 (5) 264.1 to 269.13.
[36] Ps 80.4.
[37] NPNF series 2, v.4, pp.506-510.
[38] NPNF series 2, v.4, par. 3, p.507.
[39] NPNF series 2, v.4, par. 3-4, p.507.
[40] GNO X, 2:237.9-11.
[41] NPNF series 2, v.4, par. 4, on p.507.

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Gregory presents the feast of Tabernacles as an Old Testament type fulfilled by the incarnation saying, "And the basis of the present feast is the mystery of the authentic feast of Tabernacles."[42] Gregory supports this type by an ornate allegorical interpretation on the psalm verses "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! ... Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar!"[43] The allegorical method of interpreting sacred texts has pre-Christian roots in Platonic and Neoplatonic demythologization of pagan religion and poetry,[44] and in Philo's attempt to make the Septuagint applicable to the life of Jews in diaspora.[45] Origen, who had a strong theological influence on Gregory's family, was unequalled as the master of the allegorical method of interpretation. A theological analysis of how the Old Testament feast of Tabernacles is fulfilled the incarnation may found in a later section, but it is important to a rhetorical understanding of this sermon to note that Gregory employs both typological and allegorical methods in applying Ps 117.26-27 to the feast of the Nativity.

The second part of the sermon uses "This is the day which the Lord has made...."[46] as a point of departure to discuss the spiritual significance of the day of the Nativity falling on December 25, on which the darkness begins to decrease as the days lengthen again. In this section Gregory uses the physical phenomenon of the Winter Solstice as a kind of "text" to interpret allegorically. Gregory interprets the physical

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[42] GNO X, 2:236.7-8.
[43] Ps 117.26-27.
[44] See *Porphyry on the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. Robert Lamberton (Barrington, NY: Station Hill Press, 1983) and Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Readings and the Growth of Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).
[45] See Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadephia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp.5-8 and David Winston, "Scriptural Exegesis," *Philo of Alexandria*, CWS (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), pp.79-85.
[46] Ps 117.24.

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occurrence of the darkness reaching its greatest extent and the light beginning to take back the darkness as an image for the spiritual reality that sin, which Gregory says had reached its greatest extent in history, begins to be overcome by the coming of Christ, "the Ray of the true Light" and "the Sun of righteousness."[47] An important principle in the allegorical interpretation of texts is that because of the Divine authorship of the text there are no accidents or details without meaning; Gregory sees the Divine author of creation as arranging events in creation as a "text" that can yield spiritual meaning in its details. In the first section of the oration, Gregory presented Tabernacles as pointing to and being fulfilled by the incarnation; in the second section of the oration, Gregory shows that the physical phenomenon of the increase of light at the Winter Solstice points towards and is fulfilled by the incarnation.

The third part of the sermon focuses on the virginal birth as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and as the beginning of incorruptibility for humanity. A large part of this section consists of a narration of Mary's life drawn from the *Protevangelium Jacobi.* Gregory presents the narrative from the perspective of one who has done research:

> But first let us hear from those who record her history who she is and whence she came. Thus I heard an apocryphal account, adducing the narrative concerning her as follows....[48]

The participle that Gregory uses when he speaks of "those who record her history" is from the verb *historeō*, which means to inquire about and to historically narrate, so Gregory presents the story he is about to recount as from those who have done historical

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[47] GNO X, 2:242.10.
[48] GNO X, 2:251.17- 252.2.

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research, as we would say. Gregory uses the narrative about Mary to present her as one who was prepared for the incarnation from her birth. Gregory's history of Mary, although drawn from an apocryphal account, has much in common with narratives of the New Testament and apocalyptic literature, in that it presents God breaking into the historical course of human events and bringing about a change in the relationship between God and humanity.

In the fourth section of the oration, Gregory develops the theme that the circumstances surrounding Christ's birth inaugurate the salvation of humanity. Gregory uses typology and allegory to present the details of Christ's birth (the time of enrollment, the cave, the manger) as not occurring by chance, but rather as signs of Christ's mission. Contrasting the worship of the Magi with the destructiveness of Herod, Gregory paints a horrific tableau in words of the slaughter of the innocents.

The passage in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nativity of the Savior* that deals with Herod's slaughter of the innocents stands out quite remarkably from the rest of the sermon. We are led to wonder why this section is written in this style and why it is so fully developed. The theme of opposition to Christ from his very birth is present in the Gospels, but the degree to which Gregory develops the description of the slaughter borders on morbidity. Given the paucity of information about his life, it is difficult to answer the question of whether Gregory ever witnessed such a slaughter of civilians by soldiers. Gregory presents this tableau in a reflective manner:

> Who could describe the calamities in speech? Who could bring before (one's) sight the sufferings through the narrative, that commingled lamentation, the

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> mournful concord of children, mothers, fathers and kinsfolk crying out pitiably at the threatening of the executioners?[49]

When Gregory describes the plight of families at the slaughter of their infants and toddlers in his passage on the Holy Innocents, he uses a tragic description to heighten our natural abhorrence of such a slaughter. Children are torn from their mothers' breasts. Toddlers cling to their mothers. Mothers shield infants with their own arms. Gregory even says that some mothers may have two children under the age of two, so that the loss is double, and they are torn as to which child to defend first. Gregory drives home the uselessness of the slaughter.

Upon what rhetorical models or methods is Gregory drawing in this extended description? To describe his own method Gregory uses the verb *tragōidēseie*, which shares the same root as our modern word "tragedy: "Who might portray as in a tragedy the diverse variety of the calamity?"[50] In Shaw's article on "War and Violence" in the volume *Late Antiquity*, he notes that realistic description of war was **not** the norm during this period. He says that most of the accounts of war by the historians Ammianus (c.330-395) and Procopius (500-?) depend on rhetorical devices and stereotypical scenes adopted from earlier historians.[51] There were several genres of Hellenistic history writing, one of which was the "tragic," which "sought to present the events pictorially and graphically."[52] From nearby Bithynia one and a half centuries before Gregory, a

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[49] GNO X, 2:261.6-10.
[50] GNO X, 2:262.3-5.
[51] Brent D. Shaw, "War and Violence," *Late Antiquity: a guide to the postclassical world*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown & Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p.133.
[52] Stephan Rebenich, "Historical Prose," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), p.287.

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historian named Cassius Dio Cocceianus wrote his *Roman History*, which contained elements of the "tragic" style. Cassius Dio felt a need to engage his audience "who expected colourful and vivid descriptions of catastrophes and battles, appealing character sketches and dramatic scenes."[53] Gregory's work as a whole is not a history, but of the genre panegyrical sermon.[54] Gregory of Nyssa, however, along with his brother Basil the Great "maintained that... Christians could use all literary genres and styles as long as they were appropriate (πρέπον, οἰκεῖον and πρόσφορον) to the subject, and the listener profited from it."[55] Gregory has included a tragic historical portrayal in his sermon, since it was useful and appropriate to a point he was making.

We can gain a clearer grasp of the genre of Gregory's horrific portrayal of slaughter of the innocents by looking at the practice of declamation. "Declamation" was the preparing and delivering of mock speeches based on mythological, historical or fictitious situations by students of rhetoric. Declamation often involved "creating an imagery[56] world, peopled with ravished maidens, pirates, tyrants, fathers who disown sons, wicked stepmothers, and other lurid characters, exciting to adolescent minds...."[57] Greek orators of the Second Sophistic, which was at its peak during the time of Gregory, have been said to have "developed (declamation) into a performance art in its own

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[53] Rebenich, pp.300-301.
[54] See Folker Siegert, "Homily and Panegyrical Sermon," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), pp.421-443, on genres of Christian preaching.
[55] Wolfram Kinzig, "The Greek Christian Writers," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), p.639.
[56] Kennedy does indeed use the word "imagery," here and not "imaginary."
[57] George Kennedy, "The Genres of Rhetoric, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), p.40.

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right."[58] Declamation had a profound effect on other genres, such as poetry and panegyric. According to Ruth Webb, who writes about the effect of rhetoric on poetry in the Hellenistic Period, Christians both in poetry and oratory adopted the "use of vivid description or narration to paint a word-picture of events, making them come alive before the eyes of the audience as in the rhetoricians' definition of *ekphrasis*."[59] *Ekphrasis* is a "rhetorical exercise taking the form of a description of a work of art."[60] Webb discusses the Christian poets Paulinus of Nola (353-431) and Prudentius, showing how their works are filled the methods and conventions of rhetoric. Particularly pertinent to our discussion on Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nativity of the Savior* is Paulinus' invective against the persecutors of Saint Felix (reminding us of Gregory railing against Herod) and Prudentius' vivid painting-like description of the martyrdom of Hippolytus (reminding us of the tableau of the Slaughter of the Innocents).[61] Verbally expressing events as though they were depicted in a painting is a device that can be found among other prose writers of the Second Sophistic including Philostratus and Asterius of Amasea. Of particular interest is Asterius' work on the martyrdom of St. Euphemia, since Asterius was a Greek Christian writer contemporaneous with Gregory.[62]

While Gregory is drawing upon rhetorical practices such as the use of *ekphrasis* in description of Herod's murder of the innocents, Gregory's motivation for using such a

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[58] Ruth Webb, "Poetry and Rhetoric," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), pp.349-350, n. 42. Webb's main focus is to trace the effect of rhetoric on poetry, but she also deals with its effect in prose.,
[59] Webb, p. 365.
[60] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M.C. Howatson, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), s.v."Ekphrasis."
[61] Webb, p.365.
[62] F. Halkin, *Euphémie de Chalcédoine : légendes byzantines* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1965).

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vividly tragic depiction was not for mere display, however, but to make a theological point. For Gregory, the incarnation is intrinsically linked with Pascha—the Passion and the resurrection. Given the context, Gregory is presenting the slaughter of the innocents as a contrast to the worship of the Magi, showing two opposite responses to Christ: worship and antagonism. Although Gregory does not explicitly say it, his audience knows that the antagonism displayed by Herod heralds the antagonism that led to the crucifixion. That antagonism in turn serves as an exhortation to the Christians listening to be found worshipping not persecuting Christ in their contemporary circumstances.

In the fifth section, Gregory concludes his sermon drawing more clearly the connection between the Nativity and Pascha. He defends the celebration of the Nativity, saying:

> And let no one suppose that such a thanksgiving befits only the mystery of Pascha. For let them take into account that Pascha is the end of the economy. And how could the end have happened, if the beginning had not led the way? Which is more primary than the other? Clearly the nativity is more primary than the economy of the passion.[63]

Having prepared the way with the account of Herod's slaughter of the innocents, Gregory is able to draw the connection between the Nativity and the Passion very clearly. In words that perhaps seem more appropriate to Pascha, he announces that as a result of the incarnation, "Now … the bronze gates of death are shattered, the iron bars are broken in two, by which formerly the human race had been confined in the prison of death."[64]

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[63] GNO X, 2:265.14-266.2.
[64] GNO X, 2:264.15-18.

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Theological content

Although *On the Nativity of the Savior* was delivered after the Second Ecumenical Council, and the defeat of the anomoians and semi-Arians who had been troubling the East, Gregory still engages in polemics against Arians in his sermon. While the proponents of these heresies had no difficulty in affirming the humility of the incarnation of the Word, they were reluctant to ascribe full divinity to the Word. For the Eunomians, the Word who took on our humanity was at best the first-born of creation,[65] but nevertheless a creature. The celebration of the incarnation provided an excellent opportunity to hold the full divinity and full humanity of the incarnate Word together. The celebration also was an opportunity to affirm that Christ was fully divine at his birth, not, for example, becoming the Son of God later at his Baptism, foiling any adoptionist heresies as well.

The strongest section of polemic against Arianism in this sermon is near its conclusion. Gregory exhorts his audience to rejoice in the feast, "not fearing the reproach of human beings and not being defeated by their contempt."[66] He is remarkably vehement, considering this is the first mention of such opponent we have in the sermon. He characterizes the opponents as those "who scoff at the doctrine of the economy, as if it were not appropriate for the Lord to have put on bodily nature and through human birth to have mingled himself with human life."[67] In a series of questions reminiscent of

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[65] *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, trans. Richard Paul Vaggione (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp.150-155; *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), s.v. "Aetius of Antioch" and "Eunomius of Cyzicus."
[66] GNO X, 2:267.1-3.
[67] GNO X, 2:267.3-6.

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Gregory of Nazianzus' diatribe against the Eunomians,[68] Gregory asks, "Why do you legislate the form of the good deed to (your) benefactor?"[69] Gregory of Nyssa also uses a similar example to Gregory of Nazianzus' of the physician,[70] challenging that the heretics are acting "just as if someone would blame the physician for his beneficence, because he effected the healing not in this way but otherwise."[71] Gregory concludes by explaining that divinity does not only possess some good attributes, but as exemplified by the incarnation all of them: goodness, wisdom, righteousness and might.[72]

Interspersed earlier throughout the sermon are other references to the fully divinity of the incarnate Word: "The Lord . . . graciously gave the manifestation of his divinity to human life at the end of time;"[73] "God arrives 'in these last days;'"[74] "God mixes with human nature, in order that humanity may be elevated to the sublimity of God;"[75] "The (magi) present frankincense as to God;"[76] and "a bush prefigured the God-bearing body of the Virgin."[77] This last statement, while about the Virgin, asserts the full divinity of the one whom she bore.

Expression of a theology concerning Mary increased during the fourth century, a phenomenon attested to by the Nativity sermons in this study.[78] The increase in

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[68] SC 358:38.14-15.
[69] GNO X, 2:267.12-13.
[70] SC 358:38.14.30-32.
[71] GNO X, 2:267.13-14.
[72] GNO X, 2:267.16-268.1.
[73] GNO X, 2:240.1.
[74] GNO X, 2:242.3.
[75] GNO X, 2:251.14.
[76] GNO X, 2:259.16.
[77] GNO X, 2:247.17-18.
[78] Gambero's work recently translated into English, also testifies to this increase of Mariology in the fourth century: Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999).

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Mariology, however, is in reality an expression of Christology. The lengthy section in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nativity of the Savior* emphasizing Mary's virginity focuses on her giving birth to the Christ, rather than on virginity in and of itself. This may seem like a bold statement, considering Gregory's high regard for the life of virginity.[79] Gregory begins his lengthy teaching on Mary by quoting from the Septuagint version of Isaiah, "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel (which means, God with us)."[80] The importance of the use of Isaiah as prophecy for the coming of God can be seen in several places in these Nativity homilies.[81] Isaiah 7.14, quoted by Gregory here, had been interpreted as early as the Gospel according to St. Matthew as a prophecy fulfilled by Christ's birth. The continued use of this passage in the early Church depends on the Septuagint translation of Isaiah, which used the Greek word *parthenos*—"virgin"—to render an ambiguous Hebrew word that could mean either "virgin" or "maiden." The difference between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint reading was crucial in the famous argument between Justin Martyr and Trypho.[82] Gregory follows what had become, by his time, a standard Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7.14 in seeing Mary's virginity as the fulfillment of a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah.

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[79] *Traité de la virginité*, texte ... Michel Aubineau, SC 119 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1966). Although doctoral dissertation of Mark Hart (Boston College) has challenged the usual face-value interpretation of Gregory's work, there is still great evidence for Gregory's high regard for virginity in Gregory's other works—for example, in his lives of St. Gregory the Wonderworker and St. Macrina.

[80] Is 7.14; Mt 1.23; GNO X, 2:246.12-15.

[81] In particular, Is 7.14 also occurs in Amphilochius' panegyric: AIO 1.60-62. Is 9.5 also occurs in three out of four of the homilies: SC 358:38.13-15; GNO X, 2:246.7; and AIO 1.65-67.

[82] *Iustini Martyris: Dialogus cum Tryphone*, Miroslav Marcovich, PTS 47 (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1997), pp.66-67. English translation: *Saint Justin Martyr: The first apology, The second apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, The monarchy; or the rule of God*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, FC 6 (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948), pp.253-254.

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In addition, Gregory sees Mary's virginity as pointing towards the renewal of creation. He says, "Oh the wonder! The Virgin becomes a mother and remains a virgin. Do you see the making anew of nature?"[83] Dwelling on the paradox of the combined virginity and motherhood of Mary, Gregory reasons that such a paradox is the sign of our nature being remade. He reasons, "For it was fitting that the one who came into human life for the incorruptibility of the universe make a beginning of incorruptibility from the one ministering to his birth."[84] We should take care in reading this passage not to inject a primarily moral interpretation into the concept incorruptibility. In Greek, the word "incorruptibility," *aphtharsia,* has a constellation of meanings: immortality, incorruption, immortality, and integrity.[85] Although the one born of Mary will bring freedom from sin to humanity, Gregory also emphasizes here that Christ will bring freedom from corruption in the tomb. The fruit Mary bears is the author of incorruption, for he himself will not decay in the tomb and he will bring freedom from the curse of death to humanity. Mary's virginity here serves as a sign of the resurrection.

Gregory also presents Moses' vision of the bush burning and not consumed as a type for the Virgin who "gives birth to the Light and is not corrupted."[86] Although Gregory's oration does not, precisely speaking, call the Virgin "Theotokos," there is reference to her *Theotokon sōma*, or her "God-bearing body," at this point in the homily.[87] The term Theotokos, "Birth-giver of God," had been used by several Church

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[83] GNO X, 2:246.15-16.
[84] GNO X, 2:247.3-5.
[85] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), s.v."ἀφθαρσία."
[86] GNO X, 2:247.16-17.
[87] GNO X, 2:247.17-18.

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fathers[88] before the famous controversy between St. Cyril and Nestorius. A frequently quoted passage from Gregory of Nazianzus is: "If anyone does not believe that Holy Mary is the Theotokos, he is severed from the Godhead."[89] Just as the controversy to come in 431 would be principally a Christological controversy, these Nativity orations use Mary to underline the full meaning of the incarnation. Gregory is well aware of the possibility for scandal such a term may cause. He quickly answers any objections with an enigmatic sentence, which associates the flesh with sin:

> But if the bush prefigures the God-bearing body of the Virgin, do not be ashamed of the sign. For all flesh, because of the reception of sin, in this very respect, only that it is flesh, is sin. And sin is denoted in Scripture by the name "thorn."[90]

Gregory seems to be saying here that flesh through the reception of sin, becomes flesh *merely for the sake of flesh*, thus failing to fulfill God's purpose in creating it, or "missing the mark."

Gregory further develops the theme of Mary's virginity, saying that Zechariah suffered martyrdom on account of his witness to it. Gregory, following Origen and Basil,[91] identified John the Baptist's father Zechariah with the Zechariah, son of Barachiah, referred to by Christ in Mt 23.35, who had been murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Gregory says that Zechariah was murdered because, being led by

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[88] Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistola I ad Alexandrum episcopum Constantinoplitanum* 1.12, PG 18:568; Athanasius, *Contra Arianos, Oratio* III, 14.19.33; *Vita Antonii* 36; *De Incarnatione et Contra Arianos* 22; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.*101, SC 208:1.14-15; also found in the fourth century hymn "Beneath Thy compassion." See "*Sub tuum Praesidium" e il titolo Theotokos nella tradizione egiziana,* Marianum 31 (1969): pp.350-358. Cf. "Theotokos," *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[89] *Ep.*101, *to Cledonius,* SC 208:1.14-15; *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen,* NPNF ser.2, v.7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996 reprint), p.440.

[90] GNO X, 2:247.17-248.4.

[91] Cf. Gambero, p.157 who cites Origen, *In Matthaeum comment.*, series 25, GCS 38:42-43; PG 13:1631A-B and Basil, *On the Holy Generation of Christ* 5; PG 31:1468C-1469A.

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the spirit of prophecy, he did not remove Mary from the place in the Temple appointed for virgins after her conception:

> Thus he teaches the Jews that the maker of existing things and king of all creation subjects human nature, along with everything else, to himself, leading it to the discretion of his will, since he himself is not dominated by it, so that it is in his power to fashion a new birth, which will not will not deprive one who has become a mother from being a virgin.[92]

The ultimate meaning of Zechariah's martyrdom for Gregory is a witness to the Mary's giving birth and remaining a virgin, and the meaning of the virginal birth is that the Word is remaking nature as he becomes incarnate. The Word can only renew nature in this way because he remains fully divine while completely sharing in our humanity. Mary's virginal birth-giving is ultimately a Christological statement.

Following his explanation of the murder of Zechariah, which Gregory characterizes as a digression,[93] he returns to the Nativity itself, recalling the angelic proclamation: "Glory to God in the highest."[94] Gregory's explanation of the meaning of the angelic proclamation holds the preceding section about the witness of Zechariah together with the following section about God's preparation of Mary. For Gregory, "Peace upon earth" is God who has appeared by being born on earth. Gregory takes up the theme of the "thorn" he had introduced earlier. He says, "The (earth), which was formerly cursed, bearing thorns and thistles, the place of war, the banishment of the condemned, is the very spot to have received Peace."[95] The thorn, which Gregory earlier associated with the flesh, has no prick because Peace is now dwelling upon the earth.

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[92] GNO X, 2:249.18-250.6.
[93] Cf. GNO X, 2:250.15.
[94] Lk 2.14; GNO X, 2:251.3-4.
[95] GNO X, 2:251.7-9.

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Gregory associates the virgin with the bush that springs from the ground of our common humanity saying: "The earth of humanity has yielded such fruit of itself...."[96] Mary's humanity provides an occasion to linger upon the full humanity of Christ. This paragraph concludes with a classic statement of the patristic doctrine of theosis: "God mixes with human nature, in order that the humanity may be elevated to the sublimity of God."[97]

Before interrupting with a new digression, Gregory seems as if he is going to focus the audience's attention on Bethlehem: "Let us see the new sight, how the virgin exults in the birth, how the unwedded one suckles the infant."[98] Mary's combination of virginity and birth-giving is a paradox signifying the novelty of the event. Gregory then begins his long narration of the details surrounding Mary's background, from the *Protevangelium Jacobi*. Permeating Gregory's narrative is a sense of God's preparation of Mary for the virginal birth. Mary's own birth from the barren Anna is the setting for her consecration to God, just like that of Samuel from the Old Testament.[99] Gregory says of Anna: "She became a suppliant of God (and begs) not to fall outside the laws' blessing . . . but to become a mother and to consecrate the child to God."[100] He adds, "And when the girl was grown, so she no longer needed to nurse, (Anna) gave (her) back to God and fulfilled her promise and brought (her) to the Temple."[101] Gregory indicates clearly that Mary's mother consecrated her to God in a manner that imitated the mother of Samuel. Mary's dedication to the Temple results in her virginity. According to Gregory, when

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[96] GNO X, 2:251.11-12.
[97] GNO X, 2:251.13-14.
[98] GNO X, 2:251.16-18.
[99] Cf. 1 Kg 1.12f; GNO X, 2:252.7-8.
[100] GNO X, 2:252.9-12.
[101] GNO X, 2:252.16-18.

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Mary had grown to the age of young adulthood, the priests of the Temple had to decide what to do about her. It would be out of the question to allow a mature woman to live in the Temple precincts. On the other hand, it would be sacrilegious to allow her who had been dedicated to God to be yoked to a man in marriage.[102]

Gregory presents Mary's life of virginity and consequent betrothal (not consummated in marriage) to Joseph as a result of her mother's original consecration of her to God. Although perhaps Gregory may be using the account to promote fourth century monasticism, Gregory's main point in recounting the story is not to present a prototype for those in the fourth century wishing to take up the life of virginity, but rather to present Mary's consecration to God as a preparation for a new kind of birth. Just as God at the opportune time in salvation history had prepared Israel to receive the Sun of righteousness,[103] God prepared Mary's "God-bearing body." Gregory also acknowledges Mary's active role in keeping her virginity. According to Gregory, in her answer to the angel Gabriel, "(Mary) clings to virginity, judging sexual integrity to be more highly honored than the angelic manifestation."[104] Gregory even says that Mary's response to the angel Gabriel was, "Sexual intercourse has been forbidden to me," or, "I have renounced sexual intercourse."[105] Even though Gregory presents Mary's virginity as a vow initiated by the her mother's special dedication of Mary, and maintained by Mary's active participation, virginity is not presented as an end in itself but is linked intrinsically to Mary's preparation for the mystery of the incarnation.

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[102] GNO X, 2:253.1-10.
[103] Cf. GNO X, 2:240.16 -241.17.
[104] GNO X, 2:254.13-16.
[105] GNO X, 2:254.16-17.

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The incarnation of God from Mary challenges any radically negative view of the body or of the flesh. Gregory even praises the God-bearing flesh of the Virgin saying:

> Oh, the blessedness of that flesh, which has won for itself the good things of the soul through (its) exceeding purity! For in the case of all others, scarcely would a pure soul receive the presence of the Holy Spirit, but here the flesh becomes a receptacle of the Spirit.[106]

Gregory seems to be struggling to break free of the philosophical presupposition that the immaterial soul is more akin to the Deity than the material flesh. Mary's prepared body becomes God-bearing by the reception of the Holy Spirit. In Gregory's lengthy section about Mary in *On the Nativity of the Savior*, Mariology is Christology: Mary's virginity is presented as fulfillment of the prophecy that "a virgin will conceive," and as the beginning of the incorruptibility of the resurrection; Zechariah's murder is interpreted as a witness to the remaking of nature that is marked by virginal birth-giving; and Mary's special way of life and virginity are seen as preparation for her bearing God.

Another important theological aspect of *On the Nativity of the Savior* is Gregory's development of the theme of Tabernacles as a type for Christ's incarnation and resurrection. While the Gospel according to John says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt[107] among us,"[108] Gregory alludes to this text only indirectly, if at all.[109] The starting point for his bringing in the feast of Tabernacles is rather from the Psalms. This sermon on the feast of the Nativity is rich in allusions to Israel's older cultic celebration of the feast of Tabernacles. Gregory sees Israel's celebration of the "covering with branches" as

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[106] GNO X, 2:255.14-16.
[107] Literally, "tabernacled." Greek: ἐσκήνωσεν.
[108] Jn 1.14.
[109] GNO X, 2, p.236, ln.7-8.

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being fulfilled in the incarnation. The two psalms that predominate the beginning of *On the Nativity of the Savior* may be categorized "enthronement psalms," which were used to celebrate the Hebrew New Year.[110] The first line of the sermon, "Sound the trumpet at the new moon," was a call to begin the New Year's religious festivities. New Year's Day was also known the "day for sounding horns."[111] As Gregory points out, the Law prescribed the sounding of horns as part of the cultic celebration of Tabernacles. The celebration culminated in a procession with branches. Many of the themes from the Hebrew celebration of Tabernacles—the rebuilding of the Temple, God's manifestation and coming, and God's victory over his enemies[112]—are present in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Nativity of the Savior*. Truly as Gregory says, the law "depicts the truth in advance by the foreshadowing of Tabernacles."[113]

Gregory of Nyssa is not presenting a completely new idea, in seeing Tabernacles as fulfilled in Christ. The New Testament itself, especially the Gospel of John, presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the expectations of Israel as they were manifested in the cultic life of the Jewish people.[114] In particular, the setting for Christ's proclamation, "If anyone thirst, let that one come to me and drink,"[115] was the feast of Tabernacles, in which water was carried for seven days in a golden pitcher from the holy spring of Gihon to the

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[110] Information on the enthronement psalms and their use in Israel's celebration of the feast of Tabernacles has been gleaned from Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, v.1, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967). Also helpful on the importance of the King and enthronement in the Psalms is Paul Nadim Tarazi, *The Old Testament: an Introduction,* v. 3—*Psalms and Wisdom* (Crestwood, New York: SVSP, 1996).
[111] yôm hassôphar. See Ps 47.6; 98.6. Mowinckel, p.122.
[112] Mowinckel, pp.118-130.
[113] GNO X, 2:236.5.
[114] Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance, Studies in Biblical Theology, no.10 (London: SCM Press, 1962).
[115] Jn 7.37.

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Temple and poured over the altar.[116] Many exegetes also set Christ's proclamation, "I am the light of the world,"[117] in the context of the feast of Tabernacles, which called for a ritual lighting of fire and a procession with lights.[118] The Gospel of John, therefore, presents Christ as proclaiming that He is the fulfillment of the events remembered in these rituals, of the rock from which water gushed and of the pillar of fire that was with the Israelites in the desert.

St. Gregory of Nyssa does not cite these passages from the Gospel according to John and does not seem to feel the need to justify associating the feast of Tabernacles with the incarnation, perhaps because several Patristic authors had used the theme of Tabernacles in their writings.[119] The Old Testament feast of Tabernacles had primarily been interpreted eschatologically in authors before Gregory. There is evidence that early Judaism interpreted Tabernacles in light of the Last Day. At Dura-Europos there is a fresco that associates Tabernacles with the dwelling of the just in the age to come.[120] In the Roman period, the palm branch characterizing the procession of Tabernacles had an eschatological meaning in Jewish funerary symbolism.[121] Irenaeus of Lyon had associated Tabernacles with the resurrection of the body of Christ, following Acts in seeing the passage, "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen,"[122] as a

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[116] Is 12.3. See Mowinckel, p.131.
[117] Jn 8.12.
[118] Ps 117.27. See Mowinckel, p.131.
[119] On the patristic interpretation of Tabernacles see J. Daniélou, "La fête des tabernacles dans l'exégèse patristique" (*SP*, I, 1): pp.262-279.
[120] Daniélou, p.263.
[121] Ibid. Daniélou cites *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-roman Period IV*, p.163, Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels II,* pp.50-59, and St. John Thackeray, *The Septuagint and Jewish Worship*, pp. 61-79.
[122] Am 9.11; Ac 15.16.

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prophecy fulfilled by Christ.[123] Methodius identified the true feast of Tabernacles with the resurrection of our bodies: "Then will all our Tabernacles be established, when our bodies rise again, their bones once more fixed and compacted with flesh. Then shall we celebrate to the Lord the day of joy in a pure manner, receiving now eternal tabernacles, never more to be dissolved into the earth of the grave."[124] For Origen, the whole journey of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land served as an allegory, for the soul's restoration. Tabernacles, by remembering the sojourn in the wilderness, also served as an allegory for the soul's return: "...When the soul has returned to its rest, that is, to the fatherland in paradise, it will be taught more truly what the meaning of its pilgrimage was."[125]

While he shares an eschatological interpretation with Methodius and Origen, Gregory's uniqueness lies in that he presents Tabernacles' fulfillment as being inaugurated Christ's birth. The New Testament already had connected the incarnation with eschatology, since the coming of the Messiah was associated with the Last Days. Gregory is pulling together material from the New Testament and the early Church fathers in his interpretation. Although Gregory avoids the extremes of millenarianism and *apokatastasis* that accompany Methodius and Origen's interpretation of Tabernacles, he does apply his own allegorical interpretation.

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[123] *Irénée de Lyon : Démonstration de la prédication apostolique,* texte ... Adelin Rousseau, SC 406 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 38, 62.
[124] *Méthode d' Olympe: Le banquet*, texte ... Herbert Mursurillo, trans. Victor Henry Debidour, SC 95 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963), 9, 2, ln.17-22. English translation in *St. Methodius: The Symposium: A treatise on Chastity*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (New York: Newman Press, 1958), p.134.
[125] Hom. XXVII.4.1from *Homélies sur les Nombres*, texte latin ... W. A. Baehrens, SC 461 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001). English translation in *Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p.250.

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Many details of Gregory's interpretation of Tabernacles, found in *On the Nativity of the Savior*, are also present in his dialogue with Macrina reported in *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Although this deathbed dialogue with Gregory's sister has been considered by many to be artificially constructed after the form of Socratic dialogue,[126] one does disservice to Macrina to assume that she was incapable of the having a conversation of such substance. Gregory portrays her as a teacher of the members of their family. While Gregory may have taken his time to compose *On the Soul and the Resurrection* after Macrina's death in 379, it is quite possible that a woman of her stature was capable of such a serious conversation. In this conversation, Macrina presents Tabernacles as a type for the incarnation, in that the incarnation inaugurates the future restoration of our bodies in the resurrection. She says that the Old Testament celebration was a type for the "True Tabernacle (that) had not yet been pitched."[127] Continuing, she explains what this pitching of the True Tabernacle accomplishes: "The God and Lord of all revealed Himself to us in order to inaugurate for human nature the feast of the tabernacle of our destroyed dwelling, which again would be covered with a body when the elements should come back together."[128] Macrina's purpose here is a defense of the resurrection of the body, but she sees the restoration of our destroyed dwellings as being initiated by the incarnation. Macrina also interprets the word "covering" to mean "garment and adornment" as Gregory does in *On the Nativity of the Savior* saying, "For

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[126] Cf. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, v.3 (Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), p.261. Catharine P. Roth, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Soul and the Resurrection* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1993), pp.10-11 is perhaps more generous towards Macrina.
[127] PG 46:132B; Roth, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, pp.104-105.
[128] PG 46:132B; Roth, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p.105.

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to be thickly covered is like being dressed or clothed, as those who know this interpret these things."[129]

Some of the more elaborate allegorical details from *On the Nativity of the Savior* are also found in *On the Soul and the Resurrection.* Macrina interprets "inaugurate a feast with a covering up to the horns of the altar"[130] saying, "This seems to me to foretell symbolically that one feast is being established for all the rational creation, the inferior joining with the superior...."[131] Macrina explains that different degrees of access to the Temple in the Old Testament functioned as a type for different degrees of approaching God. One must first be prepared for approach by confessing God, and by Baptism. Those who have further cleansed themselves by purifications and chastity are able to approach more closely. Macrina described the angelic powers around the altar:

> Some of the rational powers are seated like the holy altar in the inaccessible sanctuary of the Godhead; others again of them appear prominently set in front like horns; and others around them are first and second according to some order of rank. The race of men, however, because of the evil which has entered us, has been driven outside the divine precinct. Only those who are cleansed by the purifying bath may come inside.[132]

In *On the Nativity of the Savior* Gregory includes a similar description of the angelic powers arrayed before the heavenly altar, "the powers shining forth and standing in front around the altar above."[133] Macrina had finished her discourse from her deathbed by saying that in the true feast of Tabernacles, "the middle partitions are going to be destroyed... so that one and the same joy will be set before all. No longer will rational

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[129] GNO X, 2:238.5-7.
[130] Ps 117.27.
[131] PG 46.132C; Roth, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p.105.
[132] PG 46.133B-C; Roth, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p. 106.
[133] GNO X, 2:237.14-16.

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beings be divided by different degrees of participation in equally good things."[134] In his Nativity oration Gregory describes a similar restoration to the original unity of worship of all creatures.

Scholars still debate to what extent or in what manner Gregory of Nyssa held the doctrine *apokatastasis tōn pantōn,* or "the universal restoration of all." While Gregory did not teach that souls would return to a purely spiritual state at the resurrection, in the same sense that Origen had proposed, some have seen in Gregory "a reluctance to accept the view that the punishment of sinners will be eternal."[135] Quasten comments that Gregory's views on the universal restoration are present in several of his works and explains: "He simply erred in the attempt to conquer the heights of speculation where but few mortals dare to tread."[136] Daniélou proposes that our inadequate notions of infinity make it difficult to understand Gregory of Nyssa's teaching on the subject.[137] Although *apokatastasis tōn pantōn* is not stated explicitly several passages in the oration *On the Nativity of the Savior* may best be understood in light of Gregory's teaching on this subject. According to Gregory, the concelebration of human nature and the rest of creation was destroyed by the entrance of sin;[138] this harmonious celebration is restored by the incarnation,

> … in order that, when the faculty of hearing, which had been stopped up by sin, has been opened, there might be one harmonious feast during the thick covering of the feast of Tabernacles, as the creation here below joins in chorus with the powers shining forth and standing in front around the altar above. [139]

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[134] PG 46:133C-D; Roth, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p.106.
[135] Callahan, p.196.
[136] Quasten, p.290.
[137] J. Daniélou, "L'apocatastase chez Grégoire de Nysse," *RSR* 30 (1940): pp.328-347.
[138] Cf. GNO X, 2:237.3-7.
[139] GNO X, 2:237.13-16.

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Humanity joins with the principalities, authorities, thrones and dominions in the harmonious celebration of the feast, because human nature has been restored through the incarnation and resurrection. Gregory speaks of a future condition when

> ... the complete destruction of evil will come about, when all have been recalled to life through the resurrection, after the just are immediately transported to the appointed place on high, those loaded down with sins to be purified by the fire of Gehenna.[140]

Gregory's account of Macrina's defense of the resurrection has helped us understand more fully what might otherwise have been seen as an obscure allegorical and spiritual interpretation of Tabernacles in *On the Nativity of the Savior*. Seen in light of Macrina's teaching, the Nativity sermon emphasizes the return to unity of all rational creatures effected by the incarnation.

Liturgical Aspects

The connection between the Savior's Nativity and the Jewish feast of Tabernacles may not be obvious to most people today, but for St. Gregory of Nyssa it was an important point with which to open his sermon. Perhaps the use of Tabernacles as an Old Testament type in his oration indicates the relative newness of the celebration of the Nativity. Gregory may have been casting about for an Old Testament precedent for the celebration.

Thomas Talley notes that in Judaism there were "two points ... especially important as turnings of the year, the months of Nisan and Tishri ... and both creation

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[140] GNO X, 2:244.13-245.1.

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and eschatological expectation were associated with each."[141] The Jewish celebration of Tabernacles occurred on 15 Tishri, in September or October, so the Nativity celebration cannot be linked to it in the same way, for instance, as Pascha is linked to the Passover, or Christian Pentecost is linked to the Pentecost of the Old Testament. Bradshaw comments that a recent hypothesis set forward, that the January 6 celebration was a Christianization of Tabernacles, has not received acceptance.[142] While one would be in error to try to see the Nativity celebration as a Christianization of the Jewish celebration of Tabernacles, Gregory presents the Old Testament celebration of Tabernacles as a type for the incarnation. This sense of connectedness may add further proof for the existence in the fourth century of the mindset proposed by the proponents of the Calculation Hypothesis.[143]

Gregory does not seek to justify December 25 as the day of Christ's birth, but accepts it as an example of how the Lord arranges the creation to reflect the reality of what is taking place at his birth. According to Gregory, God has fashioned an image in creation of what is accomplished by the Nativity: just as the darkness begins to decrease at the Winter Solstice, sin which had reached its greatest extent in history is now destroyed by the coming of Christ, "the Ray of the true Light" and "the Sun of righteousness."[144] Gregory's use of light imagery has its source in Scripture, and there is

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[141] Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986), p.81.
[142] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.189; Merja Merras, 'Die Licht-Erscheinung bei der Taufe Jesu und der Ursprung des Epiphaniefestes. Eine Untersuchung griechischer, syrischer, armenischer und lateinischer Quellen,' *Oriens Christianus* 78 (1994): pp.177-229.
[143] Cf. Talley, pp.81-85, 91-99 or chapter 1 of this dissertation for a brief overview of this hypothesis.
[144] GNO X, 2:242.10.

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no evidence in the oration that he is competing with worship of the sun. The Word's arranging the day of his own birth on the Winter Solstice is presented along with his arranging the unique star that marks his birth as proof of his full divinity and control over nature,[145] even as he becomes fully human.

On the Nativity of the Savior also gives evidence for the progressive growth of the festal cycle, and the use of the term "mystery" to describe not only the sacraments of the Church, but the feast days themselves. At first, the primary feast or "mystery" celebrated in the Church year was Pascha. In fact, Gregory of Nyssa had to defend the celebration of the Nativity, saying,

> And let no one consider that such a thanksgiving is only appropriate to the mystery belonging to Pascha. For let them take into account that Pascha is the end of the economy. And how did the end happen, if the beginning did not lead the way? Which is more primary than the other? Clearly the birth is more primary than the economy according to the passion.[146]

This passage is quite similar to what Amphilochius says when he calls the Nativity: "the unbreakable groundwork and unshakeable foundation stone and saving source and all-holy summit."[147]

Exhortation

One may pose the question of whether Gregory was anti-Jewish[148] in some parts of *On the Nativity of the Savior*. There is strong anti-Jewish language in another work often attributed to Gregory, *In luciferam sanctam Domini Resurrectionem,* in which Jews are called:

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[145] GNO X, 2:238.14-239.5; 260.9-10.
[146] GNO X, 2:265.14-266.2.
[147] AIO 1.11-12.
[148] Anti-Semitic is perhaps a misnomer, since people of Arabic descent are Semitic also.

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> Murderers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, adversaries and haters of God, those who show contempt for the law, foes of grace, enemies of their father's faith, advocates of the devil, brood of vipers, informers, slanderers, those whose minds are in darkness, the leaven of the Pharisees, assembly of demons, accursed, wicked, stoners, and enemies of all that is beautiful.[149]

As horrible as this passage is, Johannes Quasten says that it seems not to be by Gregory.[150] The fact that this homily may not have been originally by Gregory does not decrease the tragedy that its attribution to Gregory probably in some people's eyes sanctioned anti-Semitism.

There are two passages in his Nativity oration that must be examined closely. First, when Gregory describes why God was incarnate at the particular point in history in which he was born, he explains that God waited for the full extent of evil to shoot up.[151] At the culmination of this history of increase in evil, Gregory presents the example of the murder of Zechariah:

> But it was necessary that the lawlessness of the Israelites also appear; it was necessary that the rule of the Assyrians and the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar, still smoldering, become manifest in life. It was necessary that the blood-guiltiness against the pious shoot up like a kind of wicked and thorny branch from the evil root of the devil. It was necessary that the rage of the Jews against the holy ones of God be revealed, they who killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent, and finally the crime which they committed in the case of Zechariah, "between the sanctuary and the altar."[152]

To be fair to Gregory, without dismissing the seriousness of the question, one must consider that what may be construed as an anti-Jewish statement is at a long list of statements against the evil that had shot up in other peoples as well. Gregory also spoke

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[149] GNO X, 2:317.4-10.
[150] Quasten, p.277.
[151] GNO X, 2:240.1-3.
[152] GNO X, 2:241.5-15.

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of the fact that in the times of Noah "all flesh had been corrupted by unrighteousness."[153] He lists the "unbridled evil of the Egyptians," "the rule of the Assyrians" and "the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar"[154] among the manifestations of evil to be seen throughout salvation history. The primary purpose of the passage is to show that God, as a skillful physician, had awaited the full manifestation of evil in humanity before working a cure. The Jews are not singled out as especially evil, but put alongside other nations. Since the examples Gregory is drawing are Biblical, he is showing that in the course of salvation history, in which the Israelites admittedly play a central role, God allowed evil to manifest itself most fully before the incarnation.

Having examined the meaning of this passage in context, it is also important to note how Gregory is using material found in Matthew 23.29-39. The Gospel according to Matthew, however, is more specific than Gregory, in that the "woes" of this pericope in Matthew are directed towards some of the "scribes and Pharisees,"[155]—particularly those who are hypocrites—rather than the Jews in general. Likewise the quote Gregory alludes to in Matthew reads: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those sent,"[156] personifying Jerusalem as the agent of the actions of some of thee Jerusalem authorities, rather than blaming the entire city. While these passages in Matthew reflect an increasing tension between the followers of Christ and the Jewish authorities and people during the time of its composition, the Gospels do not accuse the Jewish nation as a whole for killing the prophets, stoning those who had been sent or the murder of

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[153] GNO X, 2:240.16-17.
[154] GNO X, 2:241.2-3, 6-7.
[155] See note on Mt 23.13 of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger & Roland E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.35 NT.
[156] Mt 23.37.

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Zechariah. Gregory of Nyssa, however, makes a subtle but important change in the way he uses the material from Matthew. While the Gospel blames particular Jewish teachers, authorities or officials, Gregory attributes these actions more generically to "the Jews." Although realizing that Gregory is alluding to New Testament passages might initially mitigate the sense that he is being anti-Jewish, a closer look actually provides evidence for a creeping increase in anti-Semitism among Christians. After the separation of Christians from the synagogue in the first century, Christians often lost sight of the distinctions preserved in the New Testament, and saw the Jewish people as a whole to blame for the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

Another passage in this oration that has an anti-Jewish tone is the passage in which the worship of the Magi is contrasted with Herod's murder of the children:

> The Christ rises for us from the tribe of Judah, just as the apostle says, but the Jew is not illumined by the one who has dawned. The magi (are) "strangers from the covenants of promise" and foreigners to the blessing of the fathers, but they anticipate people of Israel in knowledge . . . The latter bear presents; the former plot against (him). The latter worship, while the others persecute.[157]

Gregory is building a strong rhetorical contrast between those who respond to Christ's birth by worship and those who respond to Christ's birth by persecution. Gregory does not trouble himself with the fact that both Josephus and Eusebius had not considered King Herod a Jew, but a foreigner.[158] Rather Gregory identifies Herod with the Jews. Strengthening this identification is Gregory's allusion to Mt 2.3: "But Herod, after he

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[157] GNO X, 2:259.2-10.

[158] Josephus, *Ant.* XIV.1.3 and 7.3; *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine*, NPNF, series 2, v.1, Bk. 1, Ch.6, 1-4, pp.89-90.

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heard the report, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."[159] Gregory even goes so far as not to single out Herod as an individual, but to include others, "all of Jerusalem," in the massacre of the innocents:

> The ones present frankincense as to God and honor the royal office with gold, at the same time as they indicated the economy of the passion . . . by the myrrh. The others pass a sentence of utter destruction upon all the youth of a populous.[160]

While Gregory does not possess a remarkable body of texts that are problematic as concerns the issue of anti-Semitism, as does Chrysostom for example,[161] one may see in his Nativity oration a couple of remarks that demonstrate that he was not immune to the fault, increasingly found in Christians, of characterizing Jews as a single stereotyped body, responsible for the actions of a few persons. Getting this more accurate look at the extent of Gregory of Nyssa's anti-Semitism is not meant to minimize the terrible mar that the sin of anti-Semitism has had on the history of the Church, nor to excuse Gregory, or those who used his name, for contributing to the horrendous acts perpetrated against Jews in this century or in others.

Gregory of Nyssa's oration has several themes important to the ethical life. First of all is Gregory's understanding of the effects of the incarnation. Gregory presents the incarnation as effecting the ultimate victory over evil. He poses a question about the persistence of the existence of evil in this life, saying that someone might protest, "At this very moment murders, thefts, adulteries and all the most vicious acts are boldly

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[159] GNO X, 2:259.14-15.
[160] GNO X, 2:259.15-260.1.
[161] St. John Chrysostom has been accused of anti-Semitism in his discourses that usually bear the title *Adversus Iudaeos*. See Paul W. Harkins' introduction, however, in which he argues against this traditional title as being "somewhat misleading" in *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* FC 68 (Washington, D.C.: CUAP, 1977), pp. xxxi (for his entire argument, see pp. xxviii-xlix).

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undertaken."[162] Gregory's answer uses the image of the killing of a snake: when the head has been destroyed often there is movement left in the tail of the snake for a while afterwards.[163] Gregory goes on to say, "The slayer of the dragon, destroyed the head . . . and has deemed of no account the coils in back, since he left the motion in the dead beast as an occasion for training to successive generations."[164] Gregory presents the death throes of evil, what remains of evil after Christ's incarnation, as having a pedagogical purpose. Gregory presents the Christian struggle against evil in life as an opportunity for training, but for him the ultimate victory against evil has already been accomplished in Christ.

On the Nativity of the Savior presents not only a pedagogical, but therapeutic image of God's approach to evil. According to Gregory, God waited until evil was thoroughly manifest, just as a physician in Gregory's day would wait for the symptoms of a disease to manifest itself completely before beginning treatment.[165] God is a skillful physician who waits for exactly the right time for bringing about the cure of evil, not treating only superficial symptoms but the root causes of the disease:

> In this manner also the one who heals those sick of soul waited for the disease of wickedness, by which human nature was overcome, to be disclosed entirely, so that nothing of what was hidden might remain unhealed, if the physician heals only what was apparent.[166]

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[162] GNO X, 2:243.4-6.
[163] GNO X, 2:243.6-17.
[164] GNO X, 2:243.11-244.1.
[165] GNO X, 2:240.4-16.
[166] GNO X, 2:240.11-16.

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Gregory uses not only disease as an image of evil, but also uses the image of the growth of some kind of pernicious vegetation,[167] and "a wicked and thorny branch from the evil root of the devil."[168] Christ's becomes incarnate destroying evil at its root.

Finally, Gregory sees worship as the initial state of humanity, and the fall as causing a breaking up of worship. Therefore worship takes on an ethical dimension. Gregory describes the primal state of the concelebration of all creation:

> All of creation is pretty much one temple of the Master of creation. But since, with the entrance of sin, the mouths of those who were conquered by evil were shut, and "a voice of exaltation"[169] was silenced, and the harmony of those keeping festival was broken up, when the human creature was not concelebrating with the celestial nature.[170]

Not only were the mouths of humanity shut and no longer offered worship, but according to Gregory humanity's faculty of hearing also had been stopped up by sin.[171] The fall is represented by humanity's inability to hear the heavenly chorus and join in with it. Because of the incarnation, this harmonious chorus is restored, in the unity of humanity celebrating together with the heavenly powers. Gregory says that on account of what is accomplished in the incarnation, "There is shared concord of all creation, as in unison all send up the doxology to the master of creation, every tongue in heaven and on the earth and under the earth."[172] In Gregory's ascetical and mystical perspective, sin and evil are an interruption in worship, a break in communion and harmony, a disease and a bad growth.

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[167] GNO X, 2:240.18-19.
[168] GNO X, 2:241.9-11.
[169] Ps 117.24.
[170] GNO X, 2:237.2-7.
[171] GNO X, 2:237.12-13.
[172] GNO X, 2:269.8-11.

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Conclusions

Gregory's panegyrical sermon does not attempt to defend the celebration of the Nativity on December 25, but rather delves into the inner meaning of the celebration. Each subsection looks at the spiritual meaning of the feast from different perspectives, as the inner meaning of the incarnation is illumined: by prophecy and types from the Old Testament; by its occurrence on the Winter Solstice; by the events that led up to the birth of Christ narrated from apocryphal sources; by an allegorical interpretation of the cave, manger and animals; and by tragically depicting Herod's murder of the innocent children to connect the incarnation with the passion. Gregory of Nyssa's sermon varies from Gregory of Nazianzus' in context: while the latter was preached in an atmosphere of polemical open fire in Constantinople, Gregory of Nyssa's was preached, if we accept Daniélou's date, in 386—six years later. After the victory of the homoousians in 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council, the Arianizing Christians were no longer a threat to Eastern Christendom. Gregory's oration indicates that the memory of the necessity of asserting the full divinity of Christ remained, and was always to remain in the Church, but Gregory is more interested in working out the spiritual and cosmic implications for the incarnation than fighting against a moribund heresy. Gregory's nativity oration is what one might expect from Gregory's later works, such as the *Life of Moses*, in that he is mining the Nativity for spiritual and mystical meaning.

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St. John Chrysostom's

On the Day of the Birth of Our Savior Jesus Christ

Background and Dating

St. John "Chrysostom," or the "Golden-mouthed," departed this life in a state of exile. Suffering from forced marches to his new place of exile at the remote eastern part of the Black Sea, he is said to have breathed his last with the words, "Glory to God for all things." He is perhaps the father of the Eastern Christendom who has been most widely read. His excellence as an exegete is no doubt responsible for anchoring the Antiochian style of exegesis firmly in the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

His exact date of birth is unknown, but his mother St. Anthusa was widowed at age 20 in Chrysostom's infancy.[1] Chrysostom studied rhetoric with Libanius, as did Basil the Great, Amphilochius of Iconium and Gregory the Theologian. He completed studies with Libanius in 367.[2] Chrysostom about this time received Baptism from St. Meletius, who was Bishop at Antioch at the time, and three years later was tonsured as a reader.[3] Diodore of Tarsus, under whom Chrysostom began at this time his study of the Holy Scriptures, was the father of the Antiochian school of interpretation. Chrysostom led an austere life and would have withdrawn completely from worldly affairs, except for his obligation not to abandon his mother, who was a widow. When he was able to withdraw into the nearby mountainous region, he shared the ascetic life with an anchorite for four

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[1] Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, v.1, p.2, trans. M. Gonzaga (Belmont, MA: Notable & Academic Books, 1988), p.3.
[2] J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth : The Story of John Chrysostom Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1995), p.14.
[3] Kelly, pp.297-298 explains this chronology.

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years, and moved into a cave by himself for two years.[4] According to Palladius, "Two years spent without lying down by night or day deadened his gastric organs, and the functions of the kidneys were impaired by the cold."[5] He returned to society to receive the care he needed to recover. Although in later life he warned about the dangers of extreme asceticism and counseled others to take a more moderate approach so as not to ruin their health, his deep love for asceticism can be seen in his inability to play the role expected of him in Constantinople, and in his exhortations to care for the poor.

Meletius ordained Chrysostom to the Diaconate in 381, and Flavian ordained him to the Priesthood early in 386.[6] He delivered his most famous homilies during these twelve years of relative peace serving in Antioch. It is during these early years that he preached *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ*. J. N. D. Kelly comments that his Bishop, Flavian, was scheduled to preach after John, despite Chrysostom's lengthy homily.[7] This is indicated by Chrysostom's words, "... one thing remains to say and I shall close the sermon, making way for the common teacher of greater things."[8] Flavian was in the habit of preaching after Chrysostom, and Chrysostom often spoke of his Bishop with such an affectionate deference.[9] Five days before his Nativity sermon,

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[4] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, v.3* (Utrecht/ Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), p.425.
[5] Ibid. See *Palladius: Dialogue sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome, ...* Anne-Marie Malingrey avec Philippe Leclerq, SC 341 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1988), 5, ln.25-28.
[6] Quasten, p.425.
[7] Kelly, p.68.
[8] PG 49:358.32-34.
[9] Baur, pp.390-395.

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Chrysostom had also made way for Flavian to speak more in detail about Philogonius, a previous Bishop of Antioch whom they were commemorating.[10]

Scholars are divided as to whether this sermon was preached in 386, 387 or 388.[11] The basis of establishing a date for this homily rests on Chrysostom's statement near the end of his third proof: "And the same feast is kept by the Jews about the end of the month of Gorpiaios (September) just as you also witness; for we spend that time on the many long discourses to the Jews,[12] arguing against the unseasonableness of their fast."[13] Chrysostom was speaking about the Day of Atonement (10 Tishri) and/or Tabernacles (15 Tishri).[14] This sentence means that 10-15 Tishri occurred at the end of September (rather than, for example, in October) in the year in which Chrysostom preached his Nativity homily. Eduard Mahler has argued quite convincingly for a 387 date on the basis of the calendar of the Jewish community in Antioch at the end of the fourth century.[15] Mahler's article argues that the Jews of Antioch at that time used a calendar based on the

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[10] Evangelos Theodorou, "Saint Jean Chrysostome et la Fête de Noël," *Noël, Epiphanie: Retour du Christ*, ed. André-Marie Dubarle, Bernard Bott, Klaus Hruby, Lex Orandi 40 (Paris: Cerf, 1967), p.195.

[11] In support of 388, see Hermann Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, 2nd ed. (Bonn, 1911), pp.244-245, and the subsequent revision of his chronology by Leitzmann, pp.382-383. According to G. Rietschel in "Weihnachten," *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3e éd. (Liepzig, 1908) the following scholars argue for other years: Clinton, in favor of 387; Montfaucon, Tillemont, and Duchesne, in favor of 388. Kelly, p.67, simply places it without question in 386.

[12] Chrysostom's reference here to "discourses to the Jews" (πρὸς Ἰουδαίους ... λόγους) very likely refers to what has come down to us under the name Λόγοι κατὰ Ἰουδαιῶν, translated into English in *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul Harkins (CUAP, 1979). See Harkins, p.xxxi, n.47, for a defense of the title *Against Judaizing Christians* and Robert L.Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983) for a more thorough look at the purpose of these discourses.

[13] PG 49:358.2-4.

[14] Chrysostom confuses Tabernacles with the Day of Atonement. See n.44 in this translation of *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.*

[15] Eduard Mahler, "Zur Chronologie der Predigten des Chrysostomos wegen der Weihnachtsfeier," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* (1921, Nr.3/4): pp.59-63.

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astronomically observed full moon.[16] Criticizing Usener's, Lietzmann's, and Schwartz's chronologies, this article concludes that Chrysostom's Nativity homily was preached in December, 387.

At that time, Chrysostom would have served only a year as a priest, but would have been well respected. Five days prior to the preaching of this homily, Chrysostom had preached another panegyric, one dedicated to Bishop Philogonios, who had been one of Flavian's predecessors. In his panegyric for Philogonios, Chrysostom prepared the people for the upcoming celebration of the feast of the Nativity, and called the Nativity "the most august and venerable of all the feasts."[17] In the section "Liturgical Content" this introduction will cover the implications of both these orations for the date of the first celebration of Christmas on December 25 in Antioch.

Rhetorical Analysis

St. John's Chrysostom's homily on the Nativity is quite different in tone and content from the other homilies in our study. After an initial exhortation in praise of the feast, which easily could begin any of the panegyrics we have studied thus far, Chrysostom takes up the controversy caused by the celebration on December 25, saying, "I know well that many still even now argue with one another—some accusing, others defending … this day."[18] Chrysostom's use of the word "defending"—*apologoumenoi*—signals the beginning of his apology. The Apologists had widened the genre *apologia* from the defense of a person on trial to the defense of Christianity on trial—even to the

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[16] Mahler, p.62.
[17] PG 48, 703; Theodorou, pp.196-197.
[18] PG 49:352.1-2. In Greek: οἱ μὲν ἐγκαλοῦντες, οἱ δὲ ἀπολογούμενοι.

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exhortation to take up the Christian life. In a similar manner Chrysostom stretches the genre *apologia*—in using an apology to defend the day that was a source of controversy, and to exhort the people to its proper observance.

Chrysostom's oration, even before presenting its three demonstrations, appeals to the antiquity of observance of the day in the West. Chrysostom stated that December 25 had been "well known by those dwelling in the West from the beginning,"[19] and that "from the beginning it became very manifest and famous with those living from Thrace to Gades."[20] This appeal to the antiquity of the day can be understood as the calling forth of ancient witnesses to testify to the accurateness of the day.[21] In addition, the homily draws upon the *pathos*[22] of the audience saying, "For as the subject of dispute enjoys so much good will from us, if it should become more well-known, it is very clear that it will enjoy greater zeal by far, when exposition concerning the teaching produces in you a greater disposition about it."[23] As well as having prepared his audience for the demonstration by pointing out that they already have a good feeling about the day, Chrysostom also has revealed the goal of his defense of the day. He hoped that his clear argument (*logos*)[24] by way of proof would evoke a greater feeling (*pathos*) for the day and, in turn, a greater observance of the day. In this sense, the goal of his *apologia* was to

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[19] PG 49:351.22-23.
[20] PG 49:352.5-6.
[21] Aristotle presented ancient witnesses as one of the more reliable pieces of evidence that the orator could bring forward. See *Rhetoric* 1.15, from *The Complete Works of Aristotle, v.2*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984), p.2191.
[22] Aristotle listed three modes of persuasion that the speaker can use: persuading the audience that the speaker is credible (*ethos*); the stirring of the emotions of the audience (*pathos*); and proving the truth or apparent truth by persuasive argument (*logos*). See *Rhet.* 1.1-2, p.2152.
[23] PG 49:352.7-9.
[24] *Rhet.* 1.2, p.2155.

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change the future behavior of his audience, and to that extent his defense served a deliberative function.

After its appeal to the antiquity of the observance in the West and to the good feeling already surrounding the day, the homily begins it argument (*logos*) by presenting three proofs (*apodeixeis*) of the validity of the day.[25] The first proof can be categorized as a proof based on example, using inductive reasoning.[26] It recalls a general principle voiced by Gamaliel recounted in the Acts of the Apostles: If something is from humankind, it will be destroyed; but if something is from God, one will not be able to destroy it. The oration gives an example of this general principle: the preaching of the Apostles had spread everywhere even though they were only fishermen, "unlettered and commoners."[27] The demonstration then applies this general principle to the December 25 celebration, saying that since it is indeed Christ's birthday, its celebration has not been destroyed, but has increased each year.[28]

Chrysostom admitted that a disputative person might not accept this first proof, and he provided a second demonstration. This second proof uses Luke as a reliable ancient witness. The Gospel according to Luke says that Christ was born during the first enrollment, and Chrysostom claimed that it was possible at that time to find the public records of this enrollment in Rome. There is no extant record in Rome today of a census such as the one recorded in Luke.[29] Although one may reasonably doubt whether such a

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[25] PG 49:352.10.
[26] *Rhet.* 1.2, p.2156.
[27] PG 49:352.20.
[28] PG 49:352.17-18.
[29] Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, Liturgia Condenda 5 (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), pp.100-101.

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census record existed in Rome during Chrysostom's life, Justin Martyr[30] and Tertullian[31] had referred to the existence of such documents. Given Tertullian's knowledge of Roman jurisprudence one cannot lightly dismiss the existence of such records at the time.

Chrysostom raised the (probably imaginary) challenge to his argument: no one in Antioch has seen these records, since they were in Rome. This is a standard rhetorical figure called *dialogos*—"the creation (not quotation) of statements, conversations, soliloquies, or unexpressed thoughts attributed to normal persons, real, or imagined."[32] Chrysostom's proof takes this objection into account and builds an enthymeme[33] around it:

> Those who already observe the Nativity on December 25 live in Rome.
>
> Those who live in Rome are able to see the archives that record the enrollment.
>
> Those who already observe December 25 can see the record of the enrollment.
>
> Therefore December 25 is the correct date to celebrate the Nativity. [34]

Chrysostom added an example to strengthen this enthymeme. He reminded people that details of Christ's birth are of no little significance—the place of his birth Bethlehem, as recorded in the enrollment, was arranged by God to fulfill prophecy.[35] The inductive line of reasoning left to the listeners to complete is that if the enrollment provided accurate

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[30] *Apologia Maior* 34, ln.6-8, from *Iustini Martyris: Apologiae Pro Christianis,* ed. Miroslav Marcovich, PTS, Bd. 38 (New York: Walter deGruyter, 1994); for an English translation see *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies,* tr. Leslie W. Barnard (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 1, 34.
[31] *Adversus Marcionem,* CSEL 47 (1906), p.435, ln.10-14; English translation: "Five Books Against Marcion, 4.7," *Tertullian,* ANF 3 (Grand Rapids: MI), p.352.
[32] Galen O. Rowe, "Style," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.,* ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), p.144.
[33] An enthymeme is one of the methods of proof covered by Aristotle and corresponds to a syllogism in logic. See *Rhet.*1.2, p.2156.
[34] PG 49:353.6-10.
[35] PG 49:353.10-22.

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evidence as to the place Christ's birth, Bethlehem, then the enrollment must also provide accurate evidence as to the time of Christ's birth, December 25.

Chrysostom's third proof is the lengthiest and most fully developed. Preparing to expound his argument, Chrysostom used a dialectical figure known as *proparaskeue*— "when the speaker prepares the audience to attend, in a special way, a course of argument that he is about to present."[36] The third demonstration begins, "in order that I might furnish a more clear and more remarkable demonstration for you, I entreat you please to rouse yourselves, for I wish to set in motion a long history and to read aloud the laws of old, so that the argument *(logos)* might become clearer to you from every side."[37] This passage uses the term *logos* in the same sense as found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: the power of proving the truth or apparent truth by argument.[38] The homilist is preparing the audience for a long argument based on reading the Scriptures, which he calls "the laws of old."[39]

Chrysostom's third proof is based on the witness of Old Testament law concerning the Day of Atonement. It quotes at length from Hebrews 9 and Leviticus 16, which describe the Temple at Jerusalem, and in particular, the Holy of Holies. The first logical step in this proof is as follows:

The altar of incense was within the Holy of Holies.[40]

Only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and only once on Tabernacles.[41]

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[36] Rowe, p.146.
[37] PG 49:354.32-35.
[38] *Rhet.* 1.2, p.2155.
[39] PG 49:354.34.
[40] PG 49:355.24-29. This assumption is one of the places in which Chrysostom's proof breaks down. The golden altar upon which incense was daily offered was not within the Holy of Holies, but rather before it. See Ex 30.6; Ex 40.5-6.

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Zechariah was alone burning incense when the angel brought the good news.[42]

Therefore Zechariah was serving as High Priest at the time of Tabernacles when the angel brought him the good news.[43]

That Zechariah was High Priest when the angel brought the good news of Elizabeth's pregnancy to him was, to Chrysostom, not an assumption, but rather a conclusion from the first three propositions. The next step in the argument consists of corollaries from that first conclusion of Chrysostom—that Zachariah was High Priest serving in the Holy of Holies when the angel brought the good tidings.

Elizabeth conceived after Zechariah's service, at the end of September.

Mary conceived six months later, at the end of March.

Therefore Christ's birth was actually at the end of December.[44]

After this third lengthy proof, which used Scriptural passages as reliable witnesses and enthymemes to draw conclusions, Chrysostom considered the issue of the December 25 celebration thoroughly defended.

There are many difficulties in Chrysostom's third and most lengthy demonstration, especially in positing that Zechariah was high priest during his encounter with Gabriel.[45] The more important issue, however, is that Chrysostom was the first

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[41] PG 49:357.1-15. Although Chrysostom cites the Old Testament passage referring to the Day of Atonement, he calls the time the Feast of Tabernacles, which falls five days later.
[42] PG 49:357.28-31. However, the priest burning the daily incense also was alone. See R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Interpreter's Bible, v.9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp.45-46.
[43] PG 49:357.37-358.2.
[44] PG 49:358.23-31.
[45] Modern New Testament scholars generally reject the notion that Zachariah was "High Priest." See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,* The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp.258-259. Brown explains that lots every morning and afternoon determined the priest who would burn

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preacher in Eastern Christendom to try to defend the historical accuracy of the date December 25. While not denying the historical reality of the birth of Christ, the other orators in this study have focused more on the theological meaning and significance of the incarnation. They included details about the circumstances surrounding the birth—Bethlehem, the cave, the animals, the magi, Herod—but these details were included to highlight the theological significance of various aspects of Christ's birth. As the fruit of his Antiochian historical exegetical study, Chrysostom produced the first attempt in the East to justify the December 25 date of celebration by means of historical argument, however inadequately by modern standards.

There are two remaining topics in the homily, however, and their subject matter is not totally unrelated to what has preceded them. Chrysostom spoke as if he was about to graciously give the floor to his Bishop, but then added more: "Well, we have made everything clear to you about the day, but one thing remains to say and I shall close the sermon, making way for the common teacher of greater things."[46] This one remaining thing to say is a defense of the incarnation, and attack of the pagans and Manichean heretics who disparaged the incarnation. Chrysostom was concerned that the objections of pagans to the birth of God the Word in the flesh would disturb the more simple Christians. This section is neatly related to the previous apology, in that it is a defense of the content of the day that has recently been defended. This new defense, or *apologia,* appeals to the *pathos* of the audience by depicting those critical of the incarnation as little

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incense, "fulfill(ing) the command of Ex 30:7-8 that fragrant incense be burned 'by Aaron' morning and evening."

[46] PG 49:358.32-34.

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children, who laugh when something serious is being discussed.[47] Just as the laughter of these children does not affect the seriousness of what the adults are discussing, so the disparagement of the pagans and heretics does not lower the reality of the incarnation, but rather reflects their own ignorance. Appealing not only to his listeners' feelings (*pathos*), Chrysostom also used an enthymeme in his argument (*logos*), working from the assumptions of those criticizing the incarnation. Although Chrysostom denied the validity of their claims that God could dwell in wood or stone (as in the idolatry of the pagans) or throughout the physical universe as in a body (as in the teaching of the Manicheans), his argument used his opponents' assumptions to refute their positions. The enthymeme is as follows:

> (They say:) It is not shameful for god to dwell in stone or wood.
>
> Humanity is more honorable than stone or wood.
>
> Therefore, it is not shameful for God to dwell in humanity. [48]

A corollary can be found in the following defense against the Manicheans, who taught that fragments of the divine were entrapped throughout the entire universe.

> (They say:) It is not shameful for the essence of god to be in animals or murderers.
>
> God can prepare a pure and holy human Temple for Himself.
>
> Therefore it is not shameful for God to dwell in that body, pure and blameless.[49]

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[47] PG 49:359.4-12
[48] PG 49:359.16-19.
[49] PG 49:360.1-4.

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This defense against those who would disparage the incarnation is crowned with the example of the physical sun. According to the theories about light current in Chrysostom's time, if one were to look towards the sun, one would not only be the recipient of its rays, but would also be sending out rays from one's eyes towards the sun.[50] Chrysostom's argument builds upon the observation that the sun is not defiled by its rays having touched all the "mires, defilements, and much other such matter."[51] By induction, Chrysostom reasoned that if this occurs with the physical sun, which is corruptible, then the Sun of Righteousness cannot be corrupted by its converse with humanity.[52]

Following his defense of the incarnation against the pagans and Manicheans, Chrysostom concluded with an exhortation to approach the reception of Holy Communion properly. As we noted earlier, the question of genre can be more complicated in practice than Aristotle's *Rhetoric* sets forth. Since these apologies for the day and for the incarnation were not apologies in the strict sense—delivered before a court of law—Chrysostom did not ask the assembled people to decide "guilty" or "innocent," but rather to respond to the incarnation on December 25 by their proper celebration of the day. Exhorting people to a mindful and proper approach to the reception of the Holy Mysteries on that day, Chrysostom expressed concretely the way he hoped that the feast would begin to produce fruit in the lives of the people. Rather than considering this exhortation a sudden switch in genre, we note that exhortation, while

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[50] See Sidney Perkowitz, *Empire of Light: A History of Discovery in Science and Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), pp.46-47; "Light," *The Gale Encyclopedia of Science*, ed. Bridget Travers (New York: Gale Research, 1996).
[51] PG 49:360.14-16.
[52] PG 49:360.18-20.

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having a deliberative purpose, appears as part of other genres such as epideictic. This exhortation section functions in place of the concluding speech of a defense lawyer.

Chrysostom used the techniques found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in his defense of the December 25 celebration, and in his defense of the incarnation itself. One must add here a note of caution. The Cappadocians had criticized the Eunomians precisely for their misuse of logic in characterizing the Fatherhood of God.[53] The limitations of the use of enthymemes in a field such as theology is evident when one realizes that statements about God are based on conceptions about God, which are at best imprecise and limited. Chrysostom's homily does not use enthymemes to prove statements about God, but rather to prove the correctness of the December 25 date, and to prove the fallacies in the pagan and Manichean's criticisms of the incarnation.

Theological Content

Chrysostom's approach in this homily, so dedicated to finding a historically adequate proof of the date, is true to the theological presuppositions of the Antiochian school. According to this school of Scriptural interpretation, nothing in Scripture is said idly, yet the historical dimension should never be allowed to be lost in finding meaning—as often happened with allegorical interpretation.[54] Robert C. Hill, in his introductions to Chrysostom's commentaries on Genesis and the Psalms, has pointed out the importance of two terms for understanding Chrysostom's approach to Biblical commentary: συγκατάβασις and ἀκρίβεια. The first—συγκατάβασις—has been, according to Hill,

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[53] See, for example, in our own collection, where Gregory of Nazianzus calls such people "bitter cipherers of divinity." SC 358:38.14.1.

[54] See, for example, Joseph W. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation*, Message of the Fathers of the Church 9 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), pp.31-38.

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often translated erroneously as "condescension." Hill calls this rendering "merely a calque," and has argued favorably for the use of a less patronizing and broader term: "considerateness."[55] In Chrysostom's works, the word "considerateness" occurs to describe God's dealing with humanity by way of accommodation—in God's coming to our level in the Incarnation, and by God's speaking on our level in the Scriptures. The term is only used once in the Chrysostom's Nativity homily, to describe the incarnation: "Let us rejoice at our goods and glorify the God made flesh because of such great considerateness, and according to our ability give back to Him what is worthy: honor and recompense."[56]

The second of these terms, ἀκρίβεια, or accuracy, figures more importantly in Chrysostom's homily on the Nativity. It and its adverbial form, ἀκριβῶς, occur several times in the homily. At the end of a lengthy section of his proof, Chrysostom says, "But you clearly understood this accurately."[57] When speaking of the records in Rome, Chrysostom says that it is possible by researching there "to know exactly" the day.[58] He repeats the word, saying that even if those living in Antioch cannot go there to see the codex, "we have received the day from those who know these things accurately and who dwell in that city."[59] He also applies the word to Nathaniel, remarking that he "knew clearly and accurately" that the Christ was to be born in Judah and Bethlehem.[60] Since

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[55] Robert C. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom: Commentary on the Psalms*, v.1 (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), pp.24, 31, 33, 287.
[56] PG 49:360.24-26.
[57] PG 49:356.37.
[58] PG 49:353.4-5.
[59] PG 49:353.7-8.
[60] PG 49:353.27-29.

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nothing in Scripture is said idly, precision should mark our approach to it. This is an approach Chrysostom received from his studies with Diodore of Tarsus. Although the historical methods of inquiry and the emphasis on precision of the school of Antioch should not be confused with modern historical exegetical methods, we must remark that Chrysostom did attempt to use all the information that was available to him to interpret the Word with precision. Chrysostom is the only orator of our study who tries to prove the historical accuracy of December 25 as the day of Christ's birth.

The importance of history for those of the Antiochian school lies in that God has entered human history in the incarnation. Chrysostom begins his homily by reminding the people that they have access to that to which the Patriarchs and Prophets looked forward: the Savior brought forth into the world. Chrysostom also shows an Antiochian approach to Christology in his characterization of the incarnation. He speaks of God preparing a "Temple" for Himself, meaning Christ's body. He says, "God, having prepared a living Temple for Himself by the Holy Spirit, aided the inhabited world through it."[61] Several lines later he almost repeats himself saying, "God, having prepared a holy Temple for Himself, through it introduced the citizenship of heaven into our life."[62] Chrysostom here is defending the teaching of the incarnation from pagans and heretics that find it offensive that God dwelt in a human body. His use of the expression "Temple" to describe the incarnation is indicative of Chrysostom's Antiochian background. In his homily on the Nativity, Chrysostom expresses the Incarnate Word's full humanity by saying that God prepared a Temple for Himself. Chrysostom's emphasis on God's preparation of this

[61] PG 49:359.15-16.
[62] PG 49:359.32-34.

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"Temple" for Himself, and his use of the adjectives "living" and "holy" to describe this "Temple, stress that God does not simply dwell in this "Temple" in the same manner as the pagans and Manicheans view their gods.

There are other works of Chrysostom where he also used the word "Temple" to describe the full humanity of Christ. In his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, Chrysostom expresses the awe appropriate to meditating on the full humanity of Christ:

> How, I pray thee, did the Spirit frame that Temple? How did He take not all the flesh from the womb, but a part thereof, and increased it, and fashioned it? For that He did come forth of the Virgin's flesh, He hath declared by speaking of "that which was conceived in her;" and Paul, by saying, "made of a woman;" whereby he stops the mouths of them that say, Christ came among us as through some conduit. For, if this were so, what need of the womb? If this were so, He hath nothing in common with us, but that flesh is of some other kind, and not of the mass which belongs to us.[63]

In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Chrysostom describes the fullness of the Holy Spirit resting in Christ saying, "All grace, you see, streamed into that temple . . . That temple received the grace in its entirety."[64] As in the passage in his commentary on Matthew, Chrysostom uses the expression "Temple" to affirm Christ's full humanity.

Chrysostom's use of the term "Temple" for the incarnation also provides continuity for the Nativity homily, pulling together themes from its beginning and end. The Jerusalem Temple plays an important role in Chrysostom's proof of the correctness of the day. Going back to God's command to the Israelites that they build a Temple, Chrysostom stresses that the purpose of this Temple was to surpass all other temples on earth, and in particular, the great monumental architecture of Egypt, which they had just

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[63] *Hom.* IV.6 from *John Chrysostom: Homilies on St. Matthew*, NPNF ser.1, v.10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp.22-23.
[64] *In Ps.* 45.3. Translation by Hill, p.261.

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left behind. Not only does Chrysostom speak at length about the historical Temple at Jerusalem and characterize the incarnation as God preparing a Temple for Himself, but also he speaks of Christians being the temple of God. When he exhorts the people to approach the reception of communion properly, Chrysostom reminds the people that each of them is the temple of God, and should act accordingly. Chrysostom, still in the midst of a defense of the incarnation, says that the Sun of Righteousness is not sullied by converse with sinful humanity, but rather purifies us. He reminds the people of the passage: "You are a temple of God and the Spirit dwells in you."[65] Chrysostom quotes the next verse of Corinthians a little later when he is teaching the people that they should draw near to communion peaceably and mindfully. He says, "It is extreme presumption to offer oneself defiled to God. Listen to what the Apostle says about such things: 'If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.'"[66]

Liturgical Content

Chrysostom's sermon is very frequently quoted in studies on the origins of the Nativity celebration in the East, since in it he said, "Although it is not yet the tenth year, from when this day has become clear and well known to us, but nevertheless it has flourished through your zeal, as if delivered to us from the beginning and many years ago."[67] In accordance with Chrysostom's tendency towards a more "historical" exegesis, he spent most of the homily presenting proofs that December 25 was the actual day on which Christ was born. Such proofs and apologetics make Chrysostom's homily sound

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[65] 1 Cor 3.16; PG 49:360.22-23.
[66] PG 49:362.13-15; Cf. 1 Cor 3.17.
[67] PG 49:351.14-17.

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different from the other Nativity orations in our study. These distinctive marks have made Chrysostom's sermon *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ* an attractive source for those seeking to find the earliest date for the celebration of the Nativity on December 25 in Antioch.

There are a number of challenges in using Chrysostom's sermon to find the earliest celebration of the Nativity in Antioch: first, the date of its preaching must be established; secondly, the following passage must be understood correctly—"Although it is not yet the tenth year, from when this day has become clear and well known to us, but nevertheless it has flourished through your zeal, as if delivered to us from the beginning and many years ago."[68] The above section showed that while scholars debate whether the date of preaching occurred in 386, 387 or 388, a look at the calendar used by Jews in Antioch at the end of the 4th century indicates 387 as the most likely year of preaching.[69]

Five days before the preaching of *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ*, in a panegyric dedicated to Bishop Philogonios, Chrysostom had prepared the people for the upcoming celebration, calling the Nativity "the most august and venerable of all the feasts," [70] and saying that one would not miss the mark if they were to call the Nativity the mother city[71] of all feasts. He went on to say that from the birth of Christ according to the flesh, "Theophany, Holy Pascha, Ascension and Pentecost have received their source and foundation."[72] Chrysostom exhorted the people to come and participate

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[68] PG 49:351.14-17.
[69] Mahler, pp.59-63.
[70] PG 48:703; Theodorou, pp.196-197.
[71] Greek: μητρόπολις. PG 48:703.
[72] Ibid.

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in the upcoming Feast "with diligence and zeal."[73] Although some scholars have interpreted this passage to indicate that Chrysostom was introducing a new feast to Antioch,[74] Theodorou's thesis—that a preacher even today might use similar language to prepare the people for the upcoming celebration, even if it were well known[75]—seems more reasonable.

When Chrysostom's panegyric on Philogonios' feast day characterizes the Nativity "the mother city of all feasts" and the "source and foundation" of "Theophany, Holy Pascha, Ascension and Pentecost," this account sounds similar to passages in Amphilochius' and Gregory of Nyssa's sermons, which were probably preached within the same decade. Amphilochius also called the feast of the Nativity "the unbreakable groundwork and unshakeable foundation stone and saving source and all holy summit" of all the mysteries of the Church.[76] In addition, Gregory of Nyssa said that the day of the Nativity is "the beginning of the good things that follow," and, along with Pascha, worthy of praise and thanksgiving.[77] Given the fact that the dates of these sermons fall near the time of the introduction of the feast to the East, one might pose a hypothesis: there was a campaign for the celebration of the Nativity on December 25 in the East. Although Chrysostom's own zeal in promoting the December 25 celebration was remarkable, there is not enough evidence to speculate who—if indeed there even was a single person—might be the origin of this movement. We must turn to the question of whether December 25 had been celebrated as the Nativity in Antioch before Chrysostom's homily.

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Usener, p.225. Bernard Botte, *Les origines de la Noël et de l'Epiphanie* (Louvain, 1932), p.22.
[75] Theodorou, p.198.
[76] AIO 1.10-13.
[77] GNO X, 2:267.1.

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Chrysostom's homily says, "It is not yet the tenth year, from when this day has become clear and well known to us."[78] Usener, Duchesne, Botte, and Kelly[79] have all interpreted this passage to mean that the December 25 celebration was known, but not celebrated in Antioch before Chrysostom's homily. Evangelos Theodorou, however, has interpreted this passage to mean that the Nativity had been celebrated almost ten years in Antioch. The former refer to Chrysostom's allusions to the Feast as "new" and "recently introduced." We must carefully look at the context to find Chrysostom's intended meaning. Chrysostom's homily says:

> For I know well that many still even now argue with one another—some accusing, others defending—and much discussion takes place about this day everywhere: some charging that it is sort of new and recent, and has been introduced now; others defending that it is old and well established.[80]

Chrysostom was presenting the argument here of those who had said that the Nativity celebration on December 25 was an innovation—not necessarily his own opinion on the subject. Also as Theodorou cleverly states, "Toute institution qui n'existe que depuis neuf ou dix ans dans l'histoire de l'Eglise est « nouvelle et récente. »"[81] Liturgical conservatism was not foreign to the early Church. We can see evidence of liturgical conservatism at work in Jerusalem's late adoption of the December 25 celebration.[82] Furthermore, for people to react so strongly to the December 25 day, it must have been celebrated at least once, unless Chrysostom was preemptively fabricating the opposition's

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[78] PG 49:351.15.
[79] Usener, p.239, Botte, pp.23-24. Louis Duchesne, *Origines du culte chrétien* (Paris, 1889), p.248, Kelly, p.70.
[80] PG 49:352.1-4.
[81] Theodorou, p.200.
[82] Jerome attempted to introduce the December 25 celebration to Jerusalem by 430, but its observance did not seem to last until its reintroduction during the reign of Justinian in the 6th century. Roll, pp.199-200.

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argument, but this possibility seems to be excluded by his words, "much discussion takes place about this day everywhere."[83] In an atmosphere of liturgical conservatism, changes may be debated for years, even decades, before being finally accepted by the people as "traditional."

Scholars in favor of the hypothesis that this homily represents the first celebration of the feast in Antioch bring forward another piece of evidence from Chrysostom's homily on Pentecost.[84] Kelly places this homily earlier the same year as the Nativity homily.[85] In it, Chrysostom lists the great feasts of the Church to be Theophany, Pascha, and Pentecost, with no mention of the Nativity.[86] Thomas J. Talley explains that this Pentecost sermon does not preclude a Nativity celebration, since Chrysostom may have been alluding to only the three major feasts of the New Testament that correspond to the Old Testament festivals of Tabernacles, Passover, and Weeks.[87] Moreover, in this same place in his Pentecost oration, Chrysostom did not include the Ascension, another feast mentioned elsewhere in the Pentecost sermon,[88] and for which we have a sermon that Chrysostom preached.[89]

Another piece of evidence perhaps can be drawn from the same Pentecost sermon. In the East, before the establishment of a separate Nativity celebration, Theophany also served as a feast on which the incarnation was celebrated. In his Pentecost sermon,

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[83] PG 49:352.2-3.
[84] PG 50:453-470.
[85] Kelly, p.70.
[86] PG 50:454.
[87] Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1986), p.136.
[88] Ibid.; PG 50:456.
[89] PG 50:441-452.

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Chrysostom said that on Theophany, "God appeared on the earth and lived with men, and thereafter God the only-begotten Child of God was with us, and is so still."[90] Although Kelly characterizes this passage as presenting the theme of Theophany to be "Christ's appearance on earth 'as a child,'"[91] the fuller quote from the text gives the passage better justice. Presence of the theme of the incarnation in the celebration of Theophany may be seen as evidence for the absence of a separate Nativity celebration. Talley, however, basing his argument on a Theophany sermon by Chrysostom,[92] says that Chrysostom taught that Christ was "not revealed to the majority at his nativity" and "that revelation of this his divine identity to all the people came only at his baptism."[93] Therefore we can take this characterization of Theophany not to deny a separate Nativity celebration.[94] We may be dealing, moreover, with a process of liturgical development, in which while the Nativity had been celebrated as a separate feast for a short while, Theophany may have still retained some themes related to the incarnation.

Another passage in *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ* also indicates that Chrysostom's homily did not mark the feast's first celebration in Antioch. Chrysostom spoke of how the celebration of the Feast had quickly sprung up, filling the Church in Antioch. He described the growth in observance of the Feast thus: "It quickly became of like stature as the older days, and reached the same measure in stature with

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[90] PG 50:454.
[91] Kelly, p.70.
[92] PG 49:363-372.
[93] Talley, p.136.
[94] Ibid.

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them."[95] He referred not only to the feast's having been observed in the West "from the beginning,"[96] but also to its more recent observance in the East saying,

> (The day) ... now having been brought to us, and not many years ago, thus shot up at once and bore so much fruit, as is possible to see now—our sacred court filled, and the whole Church crowded by the multitude of those gathering together.[97]

Chrysostom portrayed the feast as a strong tree that had shot up and borne much fruit, as exhibited in the multitude of people attending the service that year. This observation lends credence to the theory that this was not Antioch's first celebration of the feast. Although Chrysostom promoted the feast's celebration with zeal, it is unlikely that he introduced its celebration to Antioch.

To conclude, when Chrysostom said that it was not yet the tenth year since the people in Antioch had known the Nativity, given the context of the entire homily, he meant that the Christians in Antioch had celebrated the feast during this time, but with some debate. Taking into account both Chrysostom's high regard for historical precision and his rhetorical habit of rounding numbers,[98] it is safe to say that "it is not yet the tenth year"[99] indicates the Nativity previously had been celebrated in Antioch for somewhere between five and nine years. Since the most convincing date for the preaching of *On the Day of the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ* is December 387, the first celebration of the Nativity in Antioch was probably sometime between 378 and 382. Given the close connection between Antioch and Constantinople, it is not surprising that this range of

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[95] PG 49:351.19-20.
[96] PG 49:351.22-23.
[97] PG 49:351.23-25.
[98] Kelly, p.298.
[99] PG 49:351.15.

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dates corresponds to the time at which St. Gregory of Nazianzus preached *For God's Appearing* in Constantinople, held by most scholars to mark the first December 25 Nativity celebration in the capital city.

It is necessary here to touch upon another topic relevant to liturgical studies. If drawing the faithful away from the cult of *Natalis Solis Invicti* was a motivating force in the adoption of the Nativity celebration in the West, use of the feast to stamp out heliolatry is at best a tertiary theme in Chrysostom. Early in his homily, Chrysostom did remark that just as his audience would be astounded if the physical sun descended from the heavens and were to run its course upon earth, they should be even more astounded that the Sun of righteousness has come down and sent forth His rays from human flesh.[100] Near the end of the homily Chrysostom also drew on the analogy of the physical sun:

> Do you not see this sun, whose body is sensible, corruptible and perishable?—even if the pagans and Manicheans hearing these things choke ten thousand times? . . . Further, if the sun, being a corruptible body, sends forth its rays everywhere, and approaching the mires, defilements and much other such matter, receives no injury to its purity from the converse with bodies, but even withdraws its rays pure again . . . much more, the Sun of righteousness, the Master of the bodiless powers, having come to pure flesh, not only has not become defiled, but also has made this itself more pure and more holy.[101]

These sections contain an implicit criticism of pagan worship of the sun, but Chrysostom's polemic against those who worship the sun is very low key—on the same level as the polemic against other forms of paganism and against the Manicheans. Criticism of heliolatry is found nowhere else in this lengthy homily, in which the more major themes are the defense of December 25 as Christ's actual birth date and the

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[100] PG 49:351.7-11.
[101] PG 49:360.5-6, 14-20.

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preparation of the faithful to approach the reception of communion properly in observance of the feast.

Exhortation

Chrysostom's homily concludes with a section of exhortation. Chrysostom had expressed his hope at the beginning of the oration that his proofs of the correctness of the feast would inspire a greater observance of it. He even said that affection and eagerness for the Nativity was the greatest sign of love for the One whose birth was being celebrated.[102] The audience is asked to demonstrate their conviction of the validity of Chrysostom's proofs by a change in their lives. As an outcome of being convinced by Chrysostom's defense of the incarnation and defense of the Nativity celebration, Chrysostom asked the people to "contribute everything in (their) power: faith, hope, love, self-control, almsgiving, hospitality,"[103] in gratitude to God.

An integral part of the celebration of the Nativity was (and still is) the reception of the sacrament of Holy Communion, and the last part of Chrysostom's homily is an exhortation to draw near to the reception of the Mysteries properly.[104] According to Chrysostom, the correct response to God who has given such good gifts and undergone such condescension is "to draw near to this fearful and Divine Table and holy participation in the Mysteries . . . with fear and trembling, with a pure conscience, with

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[102] PG 49:351.27-28.
[103] PG 49:360.28-29.
[104] Chrysostom did not discourage people from receiving the Holy Mysteries, but corrected their approach to the reception of them. Hugh Wybrew in *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1990), p.37, traces the beginning of infrequent reception of communion in the East to the late 4th century, citing St. Ambrose of Milan as instructing his catechumens in the 380's not to receive only once a year, "as the Greeks." However, St. Basil in his Letter 93, "To the Patrician Caesaria, about Communion," wrote that it was "an excellent and advantageous practice" to receive communion daily, adding that he partook of communion at least four times weekly. *Saint Basil: Letters*, v.1, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way (Washington, D.C.: CUAP, 1951), pp.208-209.

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fasting and prayer, not making a commotion, nor kicking, nor shoving those nearby."[105] Chrysostom exhorted the people to withdraw from the normal structures of noise and competition and to listen, pray and draw near to communion in quiet, stillness, peace and humility. According to Chrysostom, separation from the normal activities of the world only had a positive meaning if the ones assembled participated correctly. He asked: "For what does it profit, to run here simply and heedlessly, if you learn nothing of use?"[106] Some might characterize the bad behavior Chrysostom described—"making a commotion, kicking" and "shoving"[107]—as indicative of "normal" daily human competition. Chrysostom went as far as to classify the commotion, irascibility and disorder as "sins" and "unreasonable passions."[108] Once engaged in the celebration of communion, people were also tempted to leave quickly. Chrysostom chided the people for being in such a hurry, asking what could be so important that they were rushing off away from communion to something else. Some manuscripts at this point even say that the people, "haste, and having left spiritual things behind, hasten to fleshly things."[109] The shared act of communion, the apex of the Divine Liturgy, was an activity in which all members of the assembly[110] partook equally. Chrysostom's use of the first person plural stressed his unity with the other communicants: "Let *us* . . . shudder; let *us* give thanks; let *us* fall down, confessing *our* faults; let *us* weep, lamenting *our* own evils."[111]

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[105] PG 49:360.31-33.
[106] PG 49:362.5-6.
[107] PG 49:360.33.
[108] PG 49:361.9-12.
[109] PG 49:361.14; cf. n.86 from this translation.
[110] Catechumens and penitents had been dismissed already at this point in the Liturgy.
[111] PG 49:361.16-18 (emphasis added).

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Chrysostom saw the reception of Communion in terms of its consequences for the rest of Christian life. Not only was one supposed to approach the reception of the Holy Mysteries, "to draw near," in the proper manner, but one was supposed to depart in the proper manner. Chrysostom held that the reception of Communion should have ethical consequences. He expected that the reconciliation with God and with one another that was integral to receiving Communion should be manifested in the lives of the faithful:

> Having received the blameless and holy sacrifice, let us kiss, let us enfold with the eyes, let us warm our understanding—that we not assemble unto judgment nor unto condemnation, but for sobriety of soul, for love, for virtue, and reconciliation with God, for sure peace, and a basis of innumerable goods, that we might both consecrate ourselves and edify our neighbors.[112]

Chrysostom's exhortation to the faithful to receive Communion properly was the core of his exhortation that the lives of the faithful be transformed.

Conclusions

Chrysostom preached *On the Day of the Birth of Our Savior Jesus Christ* sometime between 386 and 388. Chrysostom's statement, "It is not yet the tenth year, from when this day has become clear and well known to us,"[113] is best understood as indicating that the Nativity had already been celebrated in the city of Antioch, although for less than a decade. This places the first celebration of the Nativity in Antioch close to the same time as the preaching of Gregory Nazianzus' Nativity oration in Constantinople. At Chrysostom's time much debate still surrounded the celebration of the Nativity on the 25th of December in Antioch.

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[112] PG 49:361.20-362.4.
[113] PG 49:351.15.

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Chrysostom's oration was not an ornate panegyrical sermon on the feast, but rather an apology for the validity of celebrating the feast on this day. Chrysostom's proofs for the day drew upon historical and Scriptural witnesses, and reveal his Antiochene approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures. He is the only orator in this milieu who shows interest in proving historically the validity of the day. Chrysostom's oration concludes with a call to the proper reception of communion. Instead of voting as a jury "yea" or "nay" on the validity of the celebration of the Nativity, Chrysostom is asking the people to respond to his apology by changing their lives—in their approach to the altar, but also in their behavior resulting from the reception of Holy Communion.

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Amphilochius of Iconium's

On the Nativity of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ

Background and Dating

Amphilochius is best known from the *Canonical Letters*[1] that St. Basil the Great addressed to him. In these letters Basil dealt with subjects still of interest today: the penitential discipline of the early Church and the reconciliation of heretics, members of schisms, and unlawful congregations. Basil also dedicated his work *On the Holy Spirit*[2] to Amphilochius. Amphilochius was Gregory of Nazianzus' cousin, and his father, Amphilochius the Elder, was Gregory's first instructor of literature.[3]

Amphilochius received education as a rhetor from Libanius, the famous teacher in the style "second sophistic." Like the other Cappadocians, after the completion of his education and a taste of secular life, Amphilochius withdrew from public life to live a life of ascetic retirement. Gregory of Nazianzus, much to the consternation of Amphilochius the Elder, convinced the Younger to withdraw from secular service, to take up asceticism, and to serve the Church as a hierarch.[4] In Amphilochius' reluctant appointment as Bishop over the province of Lycaonia, we can see an example of the ecclesiastical turmoil that Basil describes so well at the end of his work *On the Holy Spirit*. Students of Church history may recall that in 371 Basil had responded to the Emperor Valens' division of Cappadocia into two parts and appointment of the Arian Bishop Anthimus

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[1]Letters 188,199, 217 can be found in *Saint Basil, lettres*, texte... Yves Courtonne (Paris : Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1961) and in English translation in *Basil : Letters*, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way, notes Roy J. Defarrari (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1965).

[2] *Traité du Saint Esprit*, texte...Benoit Pruche, SC 17 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1947).

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over some of Basil's territory, by appointing his own brother Gregory to Nyssa and his friend Gregory the Theologian to Sasima. A few years later, in a similar move to tip the scales against Arianism, Basil requested that Amphilochius be appointed Bishop of Iconium. In one of his letters to Amphilochius, St. Basil speaks of his appointment to Bishop in terms of being ensnared by God: "He who even now has ensnared you with the inescapable nets of His grace, when, as you yourself admit, you are trying to escape, not us, but the expected call through us."[5] Amphilochius, in fact, took part in the victory over Arianism and attended the second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381.

Even though the later Ecumenical Councils of the Church list Amphilochius as one the Fathers exemplary of Orthodoxy, the sermon *On the Nativity of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ* is one of only several works of his that survive. His known works span many genres: poetry, sermons, treatises, a synodical letter defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and a symbol of faith. Cornelius Datema in his introduction of this sermon's critical edition says that because of Amphilochius' way of characterizing the Nativity as "all-praised,"[6] that Amphilochius' homily must have been preached after the celebration of the Nativity on December 25 had been well-established in the area, and so at least after 380,[7] the date of Gregory of Nazianzus' Nativity oration at Constantinople. This would place our homily later in Amphilochius' episcopacy. The

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[3] John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2001), pp.35-36.
[4] McGuckin, p.8.
[5] Letter 161 from *St. Basil: Letters, v.2,* trans. Roy J. Deferrari, LCL 215 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).
[6] Cornelius Datema, *Amphilochii Iconiensis: Opera* (Turnhout, Brepols: Leuven University Press, 1978), I, ln.82-86.
[7] Datema, p. xii.

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latest this sermon could have been preached would have been the first half of the next decade, since the death date given for Amphilochius is c.394.

Rhetorical Analysis

Amphilochius' *On the Nativity of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ* is a panegyrical sermon, or *encomium*, full of rhetorical flourish. *Encomium* is the word Cornelius Datema uses in his introduction to the critical edition that he edited. Datema uses the word *encomium* to stress the formality and high style of Amphilochius' work, and to analyze its three-fold structure. Datema says that the structure of the homily follows the traditional model for an encomium: in the first part, the orator spends on the significance of the feast; in the central part, he makes an explanation of the Mystery; then he concludes by exhorting the faithful to live according to their convictions.[8]

Of the panegyrical sermons in this study, Amphilochius' sermon is the shortest and perhaps the one closest to poetry. This oration exhibits an Asianic style, in its excessive ornamentation and use of rare and perhaps strange words.[9] Datema sees in Amphilochius' use of the words πανύμνητος[10] and πανσεβάσμιος [11] to describe the feast evidence for dating of the oration,[12] but perhaps these words provide more evidence for the exalted nature of the language of Amphilochius' encomium. There appear other

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[8] Datema, pp. xii-xiii.
[9] Aristotle lists the use of strange words, excessive epithets, and the misuse of compound words as exhibiting bad taste in prose in his *Rhetoric* Book II, Chapter 3 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, v.2, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984).
[10] AIO 1.30, 86.
[11] AIO 1.69.
[12] Datema, p.xii.

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unfamiliar or even made-up words in the panegyric, such as διαμφοτέροις[13] and ἀβρόντητος.[14] While the genre panegyric allowed for the use of more exalted and poetic words, the extent to which Amphilochius uses unfamiliar and poetic words reveals his departure from a more classical Attic style. By the fourth century, large church buildings were being constructed, and the move from house-church to church building had an effect on style. The study of rhetoric also functioned to equip speakers for delivering speeches in a large space without artificial amplification. Siegert says, "The colloquial style was not fit for speaking in a theatre or mastering the acoustic problems of a market place. The contrary holds true for the musical treat of 'Asianic' rhetorical delivery."[15] We could add that the colloquial style may not have been adequate for delivery of sermons in larger church buildings, such as the larger basilicas that Constantine had built. Kinzig says, "Sermons, especially those that displayed the features of an elevated, panegyrical, 'Asian' style, were probably delivered in a tone of voice approximating chanting."[16]

When Amphilochius adopts a *persona* to question Isaiah saying, "I shall speak freely in this part to you (Isaiah), taking up the role (πρόσωπον) of the men of old,"[17] he uses a rhetorical technique known as speech-in-character, *prosopopoiia,* "in which the speaker or writer produces speech that represents not himself or herself but another

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[13] AIO 1.47.
[14] AIO 1.47, 127.
[15] Folker Siegert, "Homily and Panegyrical Sermon," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), p.426.
[16] Wolfgang Kinzig, "The Greek Christian Writers," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), p.651.
[17] AIO 1.27-29.

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person or type of character."[18] The widespread use of speech-in-character in the ancient world can be witnessed to by its occurrence in Cicero, Quintilian, and the elementary rhetorical exercises used by Theon, Hermogenes and Aphthonius.[19] Quintilian explains some of the functions of speech-in-character saying:

> This technique adds wonderful variety and animation to oratory. With this figure we present the inner thoughts of our adversaries as though they were talking with themselves . . . Or without diminishing credibility we may introduce conversations between ourselves and others, or of others among themselves, and give words of advice, reproof, complaint, praise or pity to appropriate persons . . . peoples may find a voice . . . or pretend that we have before our eyes things, person or utterances.[20]

Assuming the role of "the men of old" gives Amphilochius an opportunity to exhibit his solid memory of the past, contributing to his credibility as an authority (*ethos*). It also gives him an opportunity to stress the great difference between the incarnation and the theophanies of old.

Amphilochius' flowery introduction and frequent repetitions exhibit an Asianic style of prose bordering on poetry. His second sentence, which is quite lengthy,[21] draws to a close with a well-balanced set of parallelisms:

> . . . through which both the old things have been prophesied in types
> and the new things have been proclaimed distinctly throughout all the inhabited world,
> through which heaven has been opened
> and earth has been lifted up to Divine height,

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[18] See Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p.16. Further sources Stowers cites on this technique are James R. Butts, "The Progymnasmata of Theon: A New Text with Translation and Commentary" (Ph.D.diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1986), pp.459-60; Josef Martin, *Antike Rhetorik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1974); George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton University Press, 1983), p.64; and D. L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

[19] Stowers, p.17.

[20] Stowers, p. 20 quoting Quintilian, *Ad Herennium* 9.9.30-33.

[21] Beginning on line 6 and continuing through line 21.

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through which Paradise has been given back to humans
and the might of death has been abolished,
through which the power of corruption has been trampled down,
and the destructive worship of the devil has ceased,
through which human passions have been put to death,
a life of angelic mastery renewed,
through which the error of demons has been chased away,
the Wisdom and all pure coming of God has been announced.[22]

Since each of these successive parallel clauses begins with the same couple of words, this is a flawless example of the rhetorical figure known as anaphora.[23] After a short quote from Isaiah, Amphilochius uses the exclamation "O!" with several alpha-privatives[24] to evoke wonder at the foundation of all mysteries of the Church, the Nativity:

O inexpressible wealth of the Divine Gospels!
O indescribable knowledge of the all-wise mysteries!
O indelible treasury of the Divine and unutterable gifts!
O measureless grace of provident love for humanity![25]

Not only do these lines exhibit anaphora, all beginning with the same exclamation, but they also exhibit homoioptoton in repetition of similar case endings, especially for words in parallel position.[26] Repetition continues to carry the rhythm of his oration.[27] His short

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[22] AIO 1.13-21.
[23] Galen O. Rowe, "Style," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), p.131.
[24] An alpha-privative is a word formed by adding the prefix "α" to negate a word, in much the same way that the prefixes in- or un- may be used to negate words in English.
[25] AIO 1.22-25:
Ὢ θείων εὐαγγελίων πλοῦτος ἀμύθητος!
Ὢ πανσόφων μυστηρίων γνῶσις ἀνεκδιήγητος!
Ὢ θείων καὶ ἀφράστων δωρεῶν θησαυρὸς ἀνεξάλειπτος!
Ὢ προνοητικῆς φιλανθρωπίας χάρις ἀναρίθμητος!
[26] Rowe, p.138.
[27] AIO 1.30-37.
μήτε δὲ τοῦ καινοῦ καὶ πανάγνου τοκετοῦ τῆς ἀχράντου παρθένου πεπειραμένων,
μήτε μὴν τὸν οὐράνιον θεασαμένων κήρυκα, φημὶ δὴ τὸν θεοειδέστατον ἀστέρα,
μήτε τὰ τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων ἑωρακότων σκιρπήματα,
μήτε τὰς θείας ἀκηκοότων φωνὰς ἃς πρὸς τοὺς ἱερεῖς ποιμένας ἀνευφημοῦντες τὸν

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repetitious use of "O" and the vocative give the latter part of the sermon a rhythm akin to poetry. "O child more ancient than the heavens! O thrice-blessed son! . . . O child given a great name! . . . O Almighty authority! . . . O day worthy of innumerable hymns! . . . O marvel!"[28] "O Bethlehem, city hallowed and made an inheritor with humanity! O cave, cave, sharing with the Cherubim and equally honored with the Seraphim! . . . O Mary! Mary, having gotten the maker of all things as a first-born! O human nature, which gave bodily substance to the everlasting Word of God and has been preferred to the heavenly and intelligible powers in this respect."[29] Further balanced parallelisms and internal rhyme occur in the exhortation section where Amphilochius says what we ought to do in response to the Nativity:

> We ought to give thanks to the One who has called us, and to present ourselves worthy of the One who grants filial relationship to us, and to be worthy as sons of the One who bestows on us the sonship and has received us to adoption.[30]

This passage when examined closely in the Greek exhibits a combination of assonance and isocolon, adjacent clauses whose lengths are equal or approximate one another.[31] The concluding exhortation is held together by repetition and the rhyme of verbs with imperative endings:

γεγεννημένον σωτῆρα γεγηθότες ἀπήγγελλον,
μήτε μὴν τῶν μάγων τὰ δῶρα συνιέντων καὶ τὴν προσκύνησιν τὴν θεϊκήν·

[28] AIO 1.75-85.

[29] AIO 1.112-119.

[30] AIO 1.130-134:

εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ καλέσαντι ἡμᾶς καὶ παρέχειν
ἑαυτοὺς ἀξίους εἶναι τοῦ παρέχοντος ἡμῖν τὴν ἀδελφότητα
καὶ ὡς υἱοὺς ἀξίους εἶναι τοῦ δωρουμένου ἡμῖν τὴν υἱότητα
καὶ δεξαμένου ἡμᾶς εἰς υἱοθεσίαν.

[31] Rowe, p. 137.

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> Let the universe be astonished (θαυμασάτω) at your virtue . . . See that no one of the nations blasphemes God on account of you; rather let the One who called, sanctified and saved be praised (εὐφημείσθω) because of us. Let the violent and presumptuous wonder (θαυμασάτω) at our mildness and moderation; let the reviler, who is praised in return, be made ashamed (ἐντρεπέσθω).[32]

Similarly, the repetition of the third person singular imperative of "find" – εὑρισκέτω – organizes the concluding exhortation from lines 154-162.

Amphilochius' unusual doxology, "...and glorified by us, the Lord will glorify us with eternal glory, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom is glory unto the ages of ages,"[33] is paregmenon, or repeating a word or its cognates in different inflections,[34] using "glory" and "glorify' in various forms. Amphilochius, though, uses this word-play to express a deeper theological meaning, intentionally grounding it in the Gospel According to John.[35] In the fourth Gospel, Christ's glorification is identified with his being raised up on the cross and his ascension into heaven. Likewise, during the Last Supper in John, Christ teaches his disciples that they can share in his glory when He says, "In this the Father has been glorified, that you may bear much fruit and become my disciples."[36] Amphilochius motivates the people to respond positively to the exhortations he has just made by teaching them that in this way they will participate in Christ's glory.

In its parallelisms, repetitions and other figures, Amphilochius' sermon exhibits in a grand style a panegyric appropriate to the solemnity of the Nativity. He uses rhetoric to educe wonder at the mystery of the Nativity. Finding words appropriate to the

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[32] AIO 1.145-154.
[33] AIO 1.170-172.
[34] Rowe, p.133.
[35] AIO 1.169-170.
[36] Jn 15.8.

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incarnation, Amphilochius underscores the full humanity and full Divinity of the child born of Mary. Although pagan rhetoric was not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, but to be put to the service of the city and its citizenry, the temptation for self-aggrandizement existed in both pagan and Christian settings. Amphilochius, however, instead of using the learned skill of rhetoric for self-aggrandizement, or even putting it at service to the city and its citizenry, instead places persuasive speech at service to the Church.

Theological content

Although at first glance Amphilochius' sermon might seem to lack theological content in its flowery execution of a grand style, in fact it contains some very important theological points on the incarnation. Amphilochius, using speech-in-character,[37] emphasizes the difference between the birth of Christ and theophanies of old. Starting with a quote from Isaiah, "The Lord Himself will have come and will save us,"[38] Amphilochius takes upon himself the role of those of old who might have asked Isaiah how the Lord would come to us. He says that God coming to us was an event that would have astounded those of old and filled them with fear. Amphilochius then goes through the theophanic visions of the Old Testament: Abraham's visitation by the angels; Moses' vision of the bush burning but not consumed; Isaiah's vision of the Seraphim; and Ezekiel's vision of the Cherubim associated with the throne of God. Gregory concludes that all of these were mere visions, but not God-dwelling-with-us, which Baruch had

[37] See preceding section "Rhetorical analysis" for background on this rhetorical device.
[38] Is 63.9.

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prophesied when he said, "He was seen upon earth and lived among humans."[39] Amphilochius goes to great lengths to show that the incarnation is God dwelling with us, and not just another theophany of the Old Testament.

In Amphilochius' Nativity sermon, praise of Mary is a way of expressing wonder at the incarnation. Amphilochius emphasized the uniqueness of the incarnation by stressing that God came and dwelt among us: "A virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son;"[40] and "To us a child is born, to us a son is given.[41] Amphilochius presented the virginal birth as fulfillment of the Septuagint passages of Is 7.14 and 9.5, and an answer to the question of how the Lord comes to us. The paradox of the Almighty One becoming vulnerable and dependent on a woman for existence and nurture is not only a wonderful *topos* for rhetorical show, but is also a profound statement of the Christian mystery. God became fully human to the extent that this dependency upon Mary for human existence was real.

Amphilochius stresses the full Divinity and full humanity of Christ by presenting the paradox of God being born: "The One who holds together all things by a little word is warmed in the bosom by the bent arms of a woman, and the One who freely gave being to all the transcendent powers suckled milk from the pure breasts of the Holy Virgin."[42] Amphilochius intentionally places the strong contrast—of God holding all creation

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[39] Bar 3.38.
[40] AIO 1.61-62; Is 7.14; Mt 1.23.
[41] AIO 1.64-65; Is 9.5.
[42] AIO 1.97-100.

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together and God being radically dependent upon a woman[43] for shelter and nourishment—together in one sentence. Mary is the assurance of the full humanity of Christ, as well as an opportunity to pause and consider the greatness of God becoming fully human.

Amphilochius also depicts the Virgin as the recapitulation of Eve, undoing the damage of Eve: "What is this new and strange mystical teaching? . . . The universe has been freed by a Virgin, which had fall under sin through one before."[44] The Virgin is also described as God's strategy that gains victory over the demonic powers: "What mighty and all-wise stratagem against the devil? . . . Through a virginal birth, so many and so great assemblies of invisible demons have been cast into Tartarus."[45] The themes of the New Eve and victor over the demons, however, find their focus in Christ. Amphilochius expresses wonder at the paradoxical birth saying,

> O cave, cave, sharing with the Cherubim and equally honored with the Seraphim! For the One who, as God, is eternally carried by those thrones, now lies in you in bodily form. O Mary, Mary, having gotten the Maker of all things as your first-born! O human nature, which gave bodily substance to the everlasting Word of God and has been preferred to the heavenly and intelligible powers in this respect.[46]

Amphilochius eulogizes Mary to express the wonder of the birth of the Creator. The Word of God receives human nature from her, and human nature is therefore honored above the angelic powers. Amphilochius' words about Mary express the full Divinity and

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[43] Considered "weaker" and "incomplete" in Amphilochius' culture. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), s.v. "Women."
[44] AIO 1.105-109.
[45] AIO 1.109-110.
[46] AIO 1.113-119.

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humanity of the One born of her, and the raising of our nature above that of the angels. In Amphilochius' sermon, praising Mary is a way of expressing the Christological doctrine that Christ is both fully divine and fully human, and its consequences in the raising up of human nature.

Although Amphilochius' sermon shows no sign of being preached in the context of controversy as does Gregory of Nazianzus' sermon, it still contains the full Nicene teaching on the full Divinity of Christ. As we noted in the rhetorical analysis, Amphilochius' encomium uses many alpha-privatives to inspire awe. However his use of these words was not only for rhetorical effect, but also to express a certain theology. A stress on apophatic (sometimes called "negative") theology is a well-known aspect of Eastern Christianity, and was especially made famous by Pseudo-Dionysius. Apophatic theology was also the staple of the Cappadocians' defense against Eunomius' logic that attempted to define divinity by the one concept "Unbegotten."[47] According to the Cappadocians, any of our notions about God are imprecise and do not describe God so much as those things surrounding God. Amphilochius held together the paradox of the incarnation by contrasting the inexpressible nature of God with the incarnation: "The immortal God will have come to most earthly humans, and the Untouchable One to the touchable ones, the Unobservable to the visible ones."[48] Using speech-in-character, Amphilochius pretends to question Isaiah about his prophecy that the Lord will actually

[47] See the introductory chapter on St. Gregory of Nazianzus for more about the Cappadocians' defense against the Arians.
[48] AIO 1.40-42.

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come, again contrasting the circumscription of the incarnation with the uncircumscribability of God:

> How then does he (Isaiah) say, "The Lord Himself will have come and will save us?" Will you tell us, O blessed one, how the Formless One is formed, how the Immovable One changes places from the heavenly throne to earth?[49]

The alpha-privatives used by Amphilochius are not only poetic rhetorical devices which inspire awe at the occasion, but also an attempt to find words appropriate to God, that is, theology.

In addition, we find in Amphilochius' sermon the same necessary reasons for the incarnation of God the Word as stressed by other Nicenes, such as Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory of Nazianzus. St. Athanasius had said even before the heat of the Arian crisis that only the Word of God could restore humanity to the image from which it had fallen: "Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone . . . to bring again the corruptible to incorruption . . . For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world."[50] Amphilochius states in words very similar to those that had been used by Athanasius:

> For it is necessary that the wholly august Word of God condescend as far as flesh to us, in order that (the Word) might renew through the incarnation those who had been created by the Incorporeal Divinity, when they had been made old through sin, and might furnish them again incorruptible through the likeness to corruption.[51]

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[49] AIO 1.55-57

[50] De Incarnatione 7.4-8.1 found in *Athanase d' Alexandrie : Sur l'Incarnation du Verbe*, texte ... Charles Kannengiesser, SC 199 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1973). English translation from *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP), p.33.

[51] AIO 1.69-73.

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Athanasius had also expressed the necessity of the incarnation for humanity's deification in *On the Incarnation* when he said, "God became human, so that the human might become god."[52] Amphilochius expressed a similar idea when he said "The Master has been conformed to the servants, in order that the servants might become conformed again to God."[53] Gregory of Nazianzus would express the same necessity of the incarnation for humanity's healing later in his battle against Apollinarianism: "That which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."[54] Although Amphilochius' panegyric was probably not delivered in an atmosphere of polemic against the Arians or Apollinarians, we can find in it the same theological content that was so important in the Cappadocians' defense of the full Divinity and full humanity of Christ.

Liturgical content

The first sentence of Amphilochius' oration depicts the Church as a beautiful meadow in bloom, a type for Paradise: "This spiritual and brilliant meadow, embroidered by the beauty of heavenly blossoms and sweetly scented by the apostolic and undefiled fragrances . . . ."[55] Then Amphilochius goes on to say that just as Paradise is adorned by incorruptible fruits, so the Church is adorned with the mysteries, one of which is the Nativity:

> This most godlike company of the most holy Church is also made brilliant by intelligible and ineffable mysteries, of which the feast today . . . is the

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[52] SC 199:54.3.
[53] AIO 1.110-111.
[54] Ep. 101 from *Lettres théologique, Grégoire de Nazianze*, intro ... Paul Gallay, SC 208 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1974). English translation from *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen,* NPNF ser.2, v.7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996 reprint), p.440.
[55] AIO 1.1-2.

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> unbreakable groundwork and unshakeable foundation stone and saving source and all holy summit.[56]

This passage in Amphilochius' homily is significant in the study of the Church's use of the word "mystery" to describe the evolving Festal cycle. Here not only Pascha, but also the Feast of the Nativity is described as a "mystery" of the Church, and in fact, the foundational "mystery."

The word "mystery" was not foreign to the early Church. It occurs in Christ's explanation of the Sower parable[57] and in the Epistles of St. Paul,[58] where it is used to describe the full inclusion of the Gentiles in Christ, not fully known beforehand. By the time of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, we have the language of "mystery" being applied to the sacramental life of the Church: Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist. While the earliest Christians avoided association with the mystery cults, by the fourth century the Church had appropriated some of the mystagogical terminology to describe its sacramental life. Mystagogical language, however, had been washed of its pagan overtones and "Christianized." One was being initiated into Christ, and, unlike in Gnosticism, Christianity boasted of no secret privileged teaching received by only a few. By the time of the Cappadocian sermons in our study, the word "mystery" begins to be applied to the feasts of the Church calendar.

At first, the primary feast or "mystery" celebrated in the Church year was Pascha. In fact, Gregory of Nyssa had to defend the celebration of the Nativity, saying, "And let no one consider that such a thanksgiving is only appropriate to the mystery belonging to

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[56] AIO 1.9-13.
[57] Mk 4.11//.

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Pascha."[59] This passage is quite similar to what Amphilochius says. Amphilochius calls the feast of the Nativity "the unbreakable groundwork and unshakeable foundation stone and saving source and all-holy summit."[60] We can perhaps hear in Gregory of Nyssa's defense—and in Amphilochius' lack of defensiveness—a progression, which adds credence to Datema's conclusion that this homily must have been preached after the celebration of the Nativity had become well established in the area. More importantly, the Nativity has come to bear the name "mystery." For both Gregory of Nyssa and Amphilochius, the Nativity is the foundational mystery. This does not mean that Pascha ever lost its place of preeminence among the feasts of the Church, but that, as Gregory says, there could be no Pascha without the Nativity.[61]

It is impossible to know the lectionary for the newly emerging celebration of the feast of the Nativity in the East. There are, of course, standard passages that have been used before this time in Patristic literature to talk about the incarnation, among which is Isaiah 9.5: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." This passage occurs in Amphilochius' sermon[62] as well as in Gregory of Nazianzus' and Gregory of Nyssa's.[63] That this latter passage also occurs in the sermons of these three suggests that it may have played a part in the celebration of the feast in Cappadocia.

Amphilochius also uses several other Old Testament passages to refer to the Nativity, with a special reference to light: "O day . . . on which the star from Jacob has

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[58] Eph 3.9; Col 1.26-27.
[59] GNO X, 2:265.14-15.
[60] AIO 1.11-12.
[61] GNO X, 2:265.16-17.
[62] AIO 1.64-65.
[63] SC 358:38.106.13-15; GNO X, 2:246.7.

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risen for us;"[64] "the Sun of Righteousness has overshadowed us;"[65] and "the Dayspring from on high has dawned."[66] He concludes by calling Christ "the Light of the Nations."[67] The use of light imagery, however, does not necessarily prove that Amphilochius was consciously attempting to compete with a pagan sun cult. Rather, light occurs already in Biblical quotations and imagery about the Messiah. The use of light metaphors on December 25 would resonate also with the natural occurrence of the turn of the season in the lengthening of days beginning on the winter solstice. Since Amphilochius' panegyric is apparently devoid of polemical or apologetic purposes, it seems likely that Amphilochius used the Old Testament light imagery to adorn his oration and to make it appropriately reflect the natural occurrence of the lengthening of light.

Ethical content

Amphilochius' oration concludes with a section of exhortation, a traditional ending for an *encomium*. Panegyric of a person traditionally included an exhortation to live according to the virtues modeled by the person extolled. For example, Gregory of Nyssa in his panegyric of Gregory the Wonderworker said, "For it is clear that when his life of virtue, like a beacon fire, shines out to our souls through recollection, it becomes a path toward the good for the one who describes it and for his hearers."[68] Likewise *On the Nativity of Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ* concludes with an exhortation to a life of virtue.

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[64] AIO 1.88-89; Num 24.17.
[65] AIO 1.90-91; Mal 3.20.
[66] AIO 1.92-93; Zch 6.12.
[67] AIO 1.95; Is 42.6; Lk 2.32.

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Amphilochius stated that the purpose of the incarnation was the restoration of humanity to God: "The Master has been conformed to the servants, in order that the servants might become conformed again to God."[69] Furthermore he stated that as a result of the incarnation, evil has been destroyed at its root: "Where now is the hostile and audacious, the avenging and all-abominable serpent, who promised to raise his own throne up to the heights?"[70] As an outcome of the destruction of evil and restoration of humanity to God, Amphilochius challenges his audience to astonish the world with their virtue. He reminded the people that, as a result of the birth of Christ, they are called to be light to the nations.

Amphilochius exhorted his listeners to live in such a way that they would become worthy of the gifts of adoption and fellowship, which God had bestowed upon them by the incarnation. Amphilochius based how his audience should live on the ethic found in the Acts, Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament—what he calls "the lessons of the Holy Apostles:"[71]

> Let us serve (God) willingly out of love, being ready for the accomplishment of all righteousness, adorned with chastity, seeking after poverty, devoted to the words of God, dedicated to holy prayers and hymns of God, transforming ourselves from this age, forgetting earthly and mortal desires, conquering evil by good, not returning evil for evil, not thinking to ourselves that we live on the earth, but have citizenship in heaven, associate with the angels, and stand next to the throne of the heavenly kingdom.[72]

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[68] Translation by Michael Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works* (Washington, D.C.: CUAP, 1998), p.42; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, ed. Gunter Heil, GNO 10.1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p.4.
[69] AIO 1.110-111.
[70] AIO 1.125-128.
[71] AIO 1.144.
[72] AIO 1.135-144.

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Amphilochius alludes to various passages of the New Testament in this exhortation: Ac 1.14; Ro 12.21; Ro 12.17; Lk 22.29; and Php 3.20.

Having one's citizenship in heaven, and being here on earth as sojourners or exiles, is an approach to life that has its roots in the New Testament, but which also had grown in the era of the "Apostolic fathers." Christ was recorded in the Gospels as saying, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."[73] St. Paul had said, "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."[74] The Apostolic writings of the early Church stated that Christians living in the world were called to live in a permanent state of freedom from the normal structures of human life. For example, the author of the "Letter to Diognetus" described Christians as those who "dwell in their homelands, but as ones in exile in them."[75] The Greek word for one in exile is *paroikos*, a word that is the root for our modern word "parish." Amphilochius taught that the Christian's true homeland was not in the structures of this world, but also in the Kingdom of God. In his heavily embellished panegyrical sermon, Amphilochius exhorted his listeners to turn their attention to the inheritance they had received as a result of the incarnation, and to live in conformity with the commonwealth of heaven to which they now belonged.

Conclusions

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[73] Mt 8.20; Lk 9.58.
[74] Php 3.20.
[75] "Letter to Diognetus," *The Apostolic Fathers*, v.2, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), p.358.

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Amphilochius of Iconium's oration *On the Nativity of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ* is difficult to date. If one understands Amphilochius' characterization of the Nativity as "all-praised"[76] to mean that the celebration was already well established in the area, the date would fall sometime between the late 380's and 394. Further evidence of a relatively late date for this oration lies in the absence of any polemic concerning Arianism, and of any apology for the celebration of the Nativity on December 25. Amphilochius' oration is very ornate, and of the genre panegyrical sermon. With its use of unfamiliar and made-up words, and prevalence of ornamentation, it departs from a more restrained Attic style.

Amphilochius' use of the word "mystery' to describe the feast of the Nativity marks a progression in the application to the term. Without any defense, Amphilochius applies the term "mystery" not only to the sacraments, and not only to Pascha, but also to the feast days. Amphilochius, as well as Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, makes use of Isaiah 9.5, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," in his oration, indicating that this passage may have played a part in the celebration of the feast in Cappadocia. The use of Scriptural passages with light imagery in Amphilochius does not point to competition with sun worship, but rather functions to adorn the sermon, making the panegyric reflect the natural occurrence of the lengthening of light. Amphilochius' encomium focuses on inspiring proper awe in response to the incarnation. The result of the incarnation is that humanity may now be conformed again to the image of God, and

[76] AIO 1.82-86.

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Amphilochius calls for his listeners to respond to the gifts God has given them in their manner of life, to live as citizens of heaven.

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Gregory of Nazianzus'

For God's Appearing[1]

1. Christ is born; glorify (him).[2] Christ is from heaven;[3] receive (him). Christ is on earth be lifted up.[4] "Sing to the Lord, all the earth,"[5] and that I might say both concisely, "Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad,"[6] on account of the One who is of heaven and then of earth.[7] Christ (is) in the flesh;[8] rejoice exceedingly with trembling[9] and joy—with trembling on account of sin, with joy on account of hope. Christ is from a Virgin; women, live a virgin life that you might become mothers of Christ. Who does not worship the one "from the beginning?"[10] Who does not glorify the last?[11]

2. Again the darkness is dissolved; again the light takes shape; again Egypt is chastised by darkness;[12] again Israel is illumined by a pillar.[13] Let the people which is "sitting in darkness" of ignorance "see a great light" of knowledge.[14] "The old things have passed

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[1] Or "For Theophany." This homily, despite its title, was delivered on the feast of the Nativity. Gregory says in it that the festival is called both Nativity and Theophany. See paragraph 3 on the following page. Some manuscripts read "For the Nativity of the Savior" or "For the Nativity of Christ."

[2] In this opening section I have followed the translation commonly used in the hymnography of the Orthodox Church in America to accentuate the relationship between preaching and worship. St. Cosmos of Jerusalem used this opening part of Gregory's homily for the opening of his hymn on the Nativity (PG 98:459A), which is the basis of the Nativity canon sung in all Orthodox Churches to this day.

[3] Cf. Jn 6.38.

[4] Cf. Ath. *Ar.*1.41.

[5] Ps 95.1.

[6] Ps 95.11.

[7] Cf. 1 Cor 15.40, 47, 48f. Although we find the same words "τὸν ἐπουράνιον" and "ἐπίγειον" in 1 Cor, St. Paul uses them in the opposite order to describe Adam and then Christ. Here St. Gregory uses them to describe the Incarnation, the heavenly Word made earthly, that is, flesh.

[8] Cf. Jn 1.14.

[9] Cf. Ps 2.11.

[10] Cf. 1 Jn 1.1.

[11] Cf. Re 1.17, 2.8.

[12] Cf. Ex 10.21.

[13] Cf. Ex 13.21.

[14] Cf. Is 9.2.

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away; behold, all things have become new."[15] The letter withdraws,[16] the Spirit encroaches; the shadows flee away, the Truth enters afterwards. Melchizedek is summed up: the motherless one becomes fatherless; motherless formerly, fatherless for the second time.[17] Laws of nature are destroyed. The world above must be fulfilled.[18] Christ is urging; let us not resist. "All the nations, clap your hands,"[19] "for a child is born unto us, and a son is given to us, whose government (is) upon his shoulder,"[20]—for it[21] is lifted up with the cross—and his name is called "messenger of great counsel" of the Father. Let John cry,[22] "Prepare the way of the Lord."[23] I shall proclaim the power of the day. The one who has no flesh takes on flesh; the Word becomes material;[24] the invisible one is seen; the intangible one is touched; the timeless one makes a beginning; the Son of God become Son of man, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today, and unto the ages."[25] Let the Jews be scandalized,[26] let the Greeks mock, let the heretics blaspheme. Then they

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[15] Cf. 2 Cor 5.17.
[16] Cf. 2 Cor 3.6.
[17] Cf. He 7.3.
[18] I.e., with respect to a prophecy or type. Cf. Gn 14.18-20.
[19] Ps 46.1.
[20] Is 9.6.
[21] Gregory associates the phrase "his government is upon his shoulder" with the Cross, which was borne on Christ's shoulders, and by which Christ's Kingdom was established. This Isaiah passage is also an important feature of Amphilochius' homily. Perhaps it was part of the lectionary for the feast in the early celebration of the Nativity in the East. Today it is an important fixed part of Great Compline, which is served in Orthodox parishes on the Eve of the Nativity.
[22] Some manuscripts read the indicative present here, "John cries...."
[23] Cf. Mt 3.3, Is 40.3.
[24] The Greek word here παχύνεται literally means "to become thick, fat or swollen." The idea is that the Word, who is fine and intangible, becomes flesh, becoming tangible and thickening."
[25] He 13.8.
[26] Cf. 1 Cor 1.23.

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will believe, when they see (him) go up into heaven;[27] and if not then, yet when they see him coming from the heavens[28] and seated as judge.[29]

3. This (is) later; now the festival is Theophany, or the Nativity, for it is called both, the two names being appointed in connection with one matter. For God has appeared to men through birth: on the one hand, existing and being eternal, from the One who eternally is[30] above cause and reason;[31] on the other hand, on account of us born later, in order that the One who gave being might also offer as a free gift well-being; or rather, he brings us who have fallen from well-being by wickedness back up to himself again through becoming flesh. The name for the appearing is Theophany; the name for the birth is Nativity.

4. This is our festival; this, we celebrate today, the sojourning of God with humans, so that we might travel to God—or return, for to speak thus is more suitable—that "putting off the old man, we may put on the new,"[32] and just as we have died in Adam, so we might live in Christ,[33] being born, crucified,[34] buried[35] and raised up with Christ.[36] For it is necessary for me to undergo the noble reversal; and just as pains have come from more favorable things, so more favorable things must return from pains. "For when sin

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[27] Cf. Jn 6.62.
[28] Cf. 1 Th 4.16.
[29] Cf. Mt 25.31.
[30] Gregory is referring to the "I AM" of Ex 3.14. In the LXX, the tetragrammaton YHWH is rendered as a participle, ὁ ὤν, which literally means "the Being."
[31] Or, word.
[32] Cf. Eph 4.22-24.
[33] Cf. 1 Cor 15.22.
[34] Cf. Ga 2.19.
[35] Cf. Ro 6.4, Col 2.12.
[36] Cf. Origen, *Hom. in Jer.* 1.16.

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increased, grace abounded the more,"[37] and if the tasting condemned,[38] how much more has Christ suffering justified? Therefore indeed let us keep the festival, not pompously but divinely;[39] not in a worldly but in a heavenly manner; (celebrating) not our affairs, but rather those of one who is ours, or rather, the Master; not of weakness, but of healing, not of the molding but of the molding anew.[40]

5. And how will this be? Let us not wreath the front doors,[41] let us not put together choruses, nor adorn the streets, nor let us feast the eye, nor charm the ear with flute-playing, nor make effeminate the sense of smell, nor prostitute the sense of taste, nor gratify the sense of touch, with those ready roads and entrances of sin for evil; let us not be softened through raiment that is delicate and flowing and most beautiful in its uselessness, nor through the radiance of gems, nor with the glistening of gold, nor by the artifices of colors, falsifying the natural beauty and invented contrary to the image;[42] (let us not be softened) with "reveling and drunkenness" with which I know that "debauchery and licentiousness" are closely united,[43] since the lessons of evil teachers (are) evil, or rather the fields of bad seeds are bad. Let us not pile high couches for reclining at meals, as a habitation of dainties for the belly; let us not prize the bouquet of wines, the

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[37] Ro 5.20

[38] Cf. Gn.3.7.

[39] The adverb "θεικῶς" is used mostly in Patristic literature to describe the actions of God or Christ as fully Divine. Here it is used to establish the manner and character of a Christian festival. Christians are to distinguish themselves from the pagans in their manner of keeping festival, since the nativity is "of God."

[40] In the nativity, Christians celebrate not just the natural order, what was given at creation, but especially the gift of its restoration.

[41] These same pagan festivities are described more positively by Libanius' *Oratio* IX.6-14 from his *Opera*, ed. R. Foerster, I, 2, (Leipzig, 1903-1927), pp.394-397. These pagan practices ultimately entered the Christian festivities.

[42] That is, the image of God in which we are made. Cf. Gn 1.26-27.

[43] Cf. Ro 13.13. This verse inspired the conversion of Augustine. Cf. Augustine, *Confessions: Books 1—XII,* trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianoplis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993), p.146.

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trickery[44] of cooks, the expensiveness of perfumes;[45] let not the earth and sea bring to us as a gift the costly dung, for so I know how to esteem luxury.[46] Let us not be zealous to gain victory one over another in intemperance. For to me everything that is excessive and above need is intemperance, and especially when others hunger and are in need, who are of the same clay and mixture.[47]

6. But this, let us leave to the pagans, and to the pagan pomps and festivals—who actually call gods those who are delighted by the smell of sacrifices, and consequently worship the deity with their belly, being evil: makers, initiators and initiates of evil demons. We, however, for whom the object of worship is the Word, even if it might be necessary to indulge in some luxury, let us fare sumptuously on the Word: the divine law and the histories, especially those out of which (comes) the present feast, in order that the fare might be proper to and not far from the one who has called us together.

Or do you wish me (for today I am your host) to provide to you noble guests a discourse about this, abundantly and ambitiously as possible, in order that you might know how a foreigner is able to feed the local people; someone from the country, those from the city; one who does not live in luxury, those who live luxuriously; and how the common laborer and homeless (can feed) those illustrious in abundance.[48] I shall begin

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[44] Cf. Ath. 1.9c. Athenaeus Grammaticus (2nd-3rd c. A.D). Cf. Liddell & Scott, "μαγγανεία."
[45] Used at pagan festivals. Just. coh. Gr. 4.
[46] Cf. SC 358, p.112, n.2. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 36.
[47] Cf. Gn 2.7. Those who are poor are made from the same material and in the same manner as we.
[48] Although Gregory was from the country, he was certainly not from a family of common laborers. Educated in Athens, with a bishop as his father, we might say that he has carried this section a bit too far. If this homily was preached Christmas 380 as Moreschini reasonably proposes, (SC 358, p.147 n.2.) then Gregory, although not new to Constantinople, would have been preaching at Hagia Sophia for only one month, since it was November of 380 when the Emperor Theodosius had him officially enthroned there. Therefore here he is rhetorically introducing himself to a larger audience in a manner that would prepare them to listen.

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from this, namely: please purify your mind, hearing and understanding,[49] as many as luxuriate in such things, since the discourse is about God and the divine, that you might depart having delighted in things that can not be exhausted. And the same discourse will be at once very full and very concise, so as neither to grieve you by lack nor to be annoying through surfeit.

7. God was eternally and is and will be; or rather (God) exists eternally. For "was" and "will be" are sections of the flowing nature of time in our (dimension); and the One who eternally is[50] names himself[51] even this, when negotiating with Moses on the mountain. For He has gathered in himself all being, which neither began nor will end—as some sort of sea of being unlimited and undefined, transcending every conception both of time and of nature; He (can be) depicted sketchily by the mind only, and this exceedingly faintly and within due limits, not from the things proper to him, but from the things around him—one impression gathered from one thing, another from another, into some image of the truth, which flees before being laid hold of, and escapes before being apprehended, lighting up our reason[52] (and this, if we have been cleansed) as much as a flash of lightning illuminates even our sight, not staying its velocity. It seems to me (this is so) in

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[49] Gregory has already stressed the importance of purification for theology in his Theological Orations delivered in the house church of the Anastasia in Constantinople. "Not to every one, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about God.... Not to all men, because it is permitted only to those who have been examined.... Not to all men, because it is permitted only to those who have been previously purified in souls and body, or at least are being purified." *Or.* 27.3 from *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzen: Orations, Sermons, Letters*, NPNF, 2nd series, v. 7, p. 285.

[50] The "ὁ ὢν" is the Greek translation of the "I AM" of Ex 3.14.

[51] It is impossible to render the reflexive pronoun here in English without gender. It must be noted that before the Incarnation God has no gender. In languages other than English grammatical gender does not necessarily correspond to sexual gender. The Cappadocians would have asserted that outside the Incarnation, God is beyond gender. See Verna Harrison's article "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," *JTS* 41 (1990): pp.441-71.

[52] Greek: τὸ ἡγεμονικόν. This was the authoritative part of the soul (reason), especially in Stoic philosophy. Zeno Stoic 1.39. Cf. Liddel & Scott.

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order that the divine may draw to itself by means of (the part) to be apprehended (for that which is completely incomprehensible is hopeless and unattainable); and may be marveled at by (the part) which is not to be apprehended; and being marveled at may be more desired, and being desired may purify, and purifying may make (people) godlike, and may forthwith converse with ones who have become such as kin—the discourse risks some audacity—God being united to and known by gods,[53] and perhaps as much as He already knows those who are known.[54]

Accordingly the divine is infinite and hard to contemplate, and only this (attribute) of his is graspable in everyway, namely, the infinitude, even if one thinks that by being of a simple nature He is either entirely not able to be apprehended or completely apprehendable. Let us inquire, what is being of a simple nature? For this, namely simplicity, is certainly not his nature, since the nature of compound things is not only in being compound.

8. Now the infinite is contemplated in two ways, according to beginning and end, for the infinite is above these and not within them. When the mind looks at the depth on high, not having a place to stand and lean on the imaginations about God, it named the infinite contained there "beginningless;" but when (the mind looks at) what is below and in succession, it named (it) "immortal" and "indestructible;" furthermore when (the mind) grasps at once the whole, it named (it) "eternal."[55] For eternity[56] is neither time nor a part

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[53] Cf. Ps 81.1,6.
[54] Cf. 1 Cor 13.12.
[55] Greek: αἰώνιον, distinct from ἀΐδιος. While the latter means everlasting, the former implies timeless. Cf. Liddel & Scott, s.v. "ἀΐδιος."

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of time for it is not even measurable, but exactly what time is to us, measured by the motion of the sun, is eternity to the everlasting ones,[57] coextensive with their being, as a sort of temporal movement and interval.

Let this (suffice) for my philosophizing about God for now.[58] Nor is there even opportunity (to go) beyond this, because our subject is not theology, but economy.[59] But when I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit, since Divinity is neither spilled out beyond these, lest we introduce a mob of gods, nor limited within fewer than these, lest we be condemned for poverty of divinity, either by reason of the monarchy becoming Judaizers, or by reason of abundance pagans. For the evil in both is similar, even if it is found in opposite poles. Thus certainly (is) the Holy of Holies, which is both veiled completely by the Seraphim and glorified by the three acclamations of holiness,[60] which come together into one lordship and divinity. This also has been investigated philosophically by some other person before us most beautifully and most loftily.[61]

9. And since this was not enough for goodness, namely, to be moved only by contemplation of itself, but it was necessary that the Good be spread abroad and go forth, so that there are more beneficiaries—for this was of the highest goodness—first of all he

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[56] Greek: αἰών, while usually meaning "age," may also mean "eternity," as contrasted with χρόνος. (Plato *Timaeus* 37d; Metrodorus *Fr.* 37; Philo 1.496.619; Plotinus 3.7.5.) Cf. Liddel & Scott, s.v. "αἰών." Also cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p.327.

[57] Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the angelic realm.

[58] Gregory is drawing a close to his discussion of God's essence. On the term "philosophy" in the Cappadocians, see Pelikan, pp.179-182.

[59] Theology has a technical meaning here—the study of God according to God's own inner life (Unity and Trinity)—while economy deals with God's management of the world, and here particularly concerns the Incarnation. See G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964), pp.57-68.

[60] Cf. Is 6.2-3.

[61] Gregory is probably referring here to Basil the Great, who had presented this interpretation of Is 6.2 in his *Contre Eunome* 3.3 (SC 305, p.144 f.) as cited by Moreschini, p.121, n.1.

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conceived of the angelic and heavenly powers, and the conception was a work completed by the Word and perfected by the Spirit. And so the second splendors came into existence, servants of the first splendor; whether one must suppose these (to be) intelligent spirits, or as of immaterial and incorporeal fire, or some other nature very much like the aforesaid. I prefer to say that these are immovable towards the bad and have only the motion of good, inasmuch as they are about God and are illumined at first from God, for things here are of a second illumination; but one persuades me to accept and say that they are not immovable but difficult to move, who on account of splendor was called Lucifer and who became and is called darkness on account of pride, and the rebellious powers under his control, makers of evil by flight from good, and our patrons (in evil).

10. So then in this way, the intelligible world came into existence for him and because of this, as at least I philosophize about this matter, estimating great things with (my) small speech. But after that when the first (creation) was acceptable to him, He conceives a second world, material and visible, and this is the composition and compound of heaven, and earth, and the things in the middle—while laudable for being well-put together in each part, yet more worthy of praise for the harmony and concord of all, one part going well with another and all going well with all—into a completion of the one world; in order that He might show that He is able to conceive a nature not only akin to himself, but also altogether foreign. For the spiritual natures, which are grasped by only the mind are akin to divinity; whereas all natures that are subject to sense perception are

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entirely foreign, and still further than these are all that are completely lifeless and motionless.

"But what part of this speech is for us?" perhaps someone very fond of feasts and rather passionate might say. "Spur your horse around the post. Explain to us the meaning of the feast, over which we preside today." I shall do just this even if I have begun from a little farther back, because desire and discourse forced me.

11. Therefore, mind and sense perception, thus distinguished from one another, were remaining within their own limits, and carrying in themselves the majesty of the Creator-Word, silent praisers[62] and piercing heralds of the mighty work. Not yet was there a mixture out of both, nor any mingling of opposites—a sign of wisdom greater even than the prodigality in regard to the natures—nor yet was the whole wealth of goodness well-known. The Artificer-Word wishing to display this, namely, one living being from both, I mean from the invisible and visible natures, also creates man.[63] And taking the body from matter, which already existed before, but inspiring breath in it from himself (which reason recognizes as an intelligent soul and image of God)[64] he places him upon the earth like a second world,[65] great in littleness, (to be) another angel, a blended worshipper; eyewitness of the visible creation,[66] initiate of the spiritual (creation); king of earthly affairs, ruled by a heavenly king; earthly and heavenly; transitory and immortal; visible

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[62] Cf. Ps 18.4-5.

[63] Greek: τὸν ἄνθρωπον, i.e. a person of either sex, or humanity in general.

[64] Cf. Gn 1.26, 27; 2.7.

[65] Originally a classical concept used variously by the Cappadocians, cf. Pelikan, p. 280. Also cf. Philo, *De post. Cain.* 16.58; *Quis rer. div. heres* 31.155; *De Abr.* 15.71 and Greg. Naz., *Discours* 28.22 as cited by Moreschini p.125, n.3. Gregory of Nyssa, however, does not receive the idea of man as a microcosm favorably. Cf. Greg. Nyssa, *De hom. Opif.* 16 (PG 44:180A).

[66] Cf. 2 Pe 1.16

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and intelligible; between greatness and lowliness, the same spirit and flesh: spirit because of grace, flesh because of pride; the one that he might remain and glorify the benefactor, the other that he may suffer and suffering, may be reminded and trained to aspire to greatness; a living being sustained here and moved elsewhere, and as the completion of the mystery, deified by inclination[67] towards God. The light of truth in measure here for me leads to this, namely, both to see and experience the splendor of God, which is worthy of the One who bound together,[68] and will loose us, and will bind us together anew in a loftier manner.[69]

12. This being, He placed in paradise,[70] whatever this paradise was, having honored him with free will,[71] that the good may belong to the one who chose it, no less than to the one who furnished the seeds, a gardener of immortal plants,[72] perhaps of divine conceptions, the simpler and the more complete, naked in the sense of a simple and unsophisticated life, and entirely without covering and defense. For it was fitting that the being be such from the beginning. And He gave a law, material for free will. And the law was a command which fruit trees he should partake of, and which he must not touch.[73] The latter was the tree of knowledge, which neither was ill planted from the beginning, nor forbidden from envy—let the fighters against God not shout these nor imitate the serpent[74]—but good when partaken of seasonably. For the tree was contemplation, as my

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[67] Note the terminology of mysticism. Pelikan, p.298.
[68] Soul and body. Or. *Princ.* 1.8.1.
[69] I.e., in death and resurrection.
[70] Cf. Gn 2.8, 15.
[71] Free will is part of the divine image according to Gregory of Nyssa. Pelikan, p.160.
[72] Cf. Gn 2.15.
[73] Cf. Gn 2.16-17.
[74] Cf. Gn 3.1-3.

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contemplation, which only the more perfect in habit may safely enter upon. But it was not good for those who are still rather simple and greedy in appetite, just as adult food is not beneficial to those still tender and needing milk.[75] But when the devil's envy (led to) assault on the woman, which she experienced as more tender,[76] and which she offered as more persuasive—alas for my weakness, for the weakness of my forefather is mine—he (Adam) forgot the commandment which had been given and was defeated by the bitter taste, and simultaneously is banished through (his) wickedness from the tree of life,[77] the garden,[78] and God, and he puts on garments of skins,[79] perhaps the courser flesh both mortal and obstructive. And the first thing he gains knowledge of is his own shame, and he hides himself from God.[80] In fact, he gains something also here: death and the interruption of sin in order that evil might not be immortal, and the punishment becomes an act of love for humankind. For I am persuaded it is in this way that God chastises.

13. Then, disciplined at first in many ways for the many sins which the root of evil sprouted for different causes and at different times: by word; by law; by prophets; by kindnesses; by threats; by blows; by waters; by conflagrations; by wars; by victories; by defeats; by signs from heaven; by signs from the air, from earth, from sea; by unexpected changes of men, cities, nations—the goal of which was for evil to be eradicated. At last he needs a stronger medicine for the more terrible sicknesses: slaughterings of one another; adulteries; perjuries; unnatural lusts; the last and first of all evils, idolatry and

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[75] Cf. 1 Cor 3.2, I Pe 2.2.
[76] I.e., morally weaker.
[77] Cf. Gn 2.9; 3.24.
[78] Cf. Gn 3.23.
[79] Cf. Gn 3.21.
[80] Cf. Gn 3.8-9.

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the transfer of worship from the Creator to creatures.[81] Since these (sicknesses) had need of a greater remedy, they even obtained it. And this was the Word of God himself, the one before the ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the incorporeal, the beginning from the beginning,[82] the light from light,[83] the spring of life[84] and immortality, the imprint of the archetype (of beauty)[85] the seal not moved,[86] the exact image,[87] the definition and Word of the Father. He goes in quest of his own image,[88] bears flesh for the sake of flesh, and mingles with an intellectual soul[89] for the sake of my soul, cleansing the likeness by the likeness. And He becomes entirely human, except for sin.[90] (The Word) was conceived by the Virgin, who had been purified before by the Spirit[91] in both soul and body. For birth had to be honored and virginity had to be preferred. Then, he came forth as God with that which was assumed,[92] one from two opposites, flesh and Spirit, the one deifying, the other being deified. Oh, the new mingling! Oh the marvelous blending![93] The "I AM" comes to be; the Uncreated is created; and the Uncontainable is contained, by the intermediary of the intelligent soul which mediates between divinity

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[81] Cf. Ro 1.25.
[82] Cf. Jn 1.1; 1 Jn 1.1.
[83] Cf. Jn 8.12.
[84] Cf. Re 21.6.
[85] Cf. He 1.3. After archetype, some manuscripts add "of beauty."
[86] Cf. Jn 6.27.
[87] Cf. Col 1.15, 2 Cor 4.4.
[88] Cf. Gn 1.26, 27; 2.7; 9.6. Also cf. Origen's *Hom. in Gen.* 1.13, for whom only Christ could properly be called the image of God and humanity was made according to "the image of the image."
[89] Against Apollinarius, who maintained that the Logos replaced the human mind in Christ, Gregory of Nazianzus in his famous dictum, "What He has not assumed He has not healed," (SC 208:1.32) maintains that the Word assumed a fully human reason-endowed soul.
[90] Cf. He 4.15.
[91] Cf. Lk 1.35.
[92] That is, human nature assumed by Christ in the Incarnation.
[93] It would be anachronistic to judge Gregory by the language of Chalcedon here concerning the union of the two natures of Christ.

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and the thickness of the flesh; and the one who bestows riches becomes poor, [94] for He is poor in my flesh that I might be rich in his divinity. And the full[95] one is emptied;[96] indeed, He is emptied of his own glory for a little, that I might partake of his fullness. Of what sort is the wealth of goodness? What is this mystery about me? I partook of the image[97] and did not guard it; He partakes of my flesh that He might both save the image and give immortality to the flesh. He partakes in a second communion, much more marvelous than the first, inasmuch as then He gave a share of the better, now He partakes of the worse. This is more godlike than the first; this is loftier to those having understanding.

14. In answer to this, what say the slanderers to us, the bitter cipherers of divinity,[98] the accusers of what is praised, who are in the dark concerning the light, who are uneducated concerning the wisdom, for whom "Christ died in vain,"[99] the unthankful creatures, moldings of the evil one? Do you reproach God for this,[100] his kindness? Is He small for the reason that He is humbled for your sake? That he came to the lost (sheep)[101] as the good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep;[102] to the mountains and the hills, upon which you were sacrificing,[103] and found the one that was straying; and having

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[94] Cf. 2 Cor 8.9.
[95] Cf. Col 2.9.
[96] Cf. Php 2.7.
[97] Refers to the image of God in man. Cf. Gn 1.26-27; 9.6.
[98] A direct assault on the Eunomians, who constructed a logical argument to defend their position on the Trinity.
[99] Cf. Ga 2.21.
[100] Note Gregory's change in pronoun from 3rd person plural to 2nd person singular here, which is a direct challenge to Arians in his audience.
[101] Cf. Mt 18.12; Lk 15.4.
[102] Cf. Jn 10.11.
[103] Cf. Ho 4.13 LXX.

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found it He took it up on his shoulders,[104] upon which also He took up the cross; and He took and restored it to the life on high; and having brought it back, He numbered it among the remaining (sheep)? (Do you reproach God) because He lighted a lamp, His own flesh, and swept the house, cleansing the world from sin; and sought the coin,[105] the royal image covered up by the passions; and summons (the) powers friendly to himself, upon the finding of the coin, and makes them sharers of His joy, whom He had made initiates even of the economy? (Do you reproach God) because the exceedingly bright light follows the preceding lamp;[106] and the Word follows the voice;[107] and the bridegroom[108] follows the friend,[109] as he prepares for the Lord a chosen people[110] and purifies (them) in advance by water[111] for the Spirit? Do you reproach God for this? And do you conceive (him) to be worse for this (reason), because He girds himself with a towel and washes the feet of the disciples,[112] and shows that humility is the best road to being exalted?[113] Because He humbles himself for the sake of the soul which is bowed down to the ground,[114] in order that He might exalt (that) which inclines downwards through sin? And surely you criticize the fact that He eats with tax collectors and at their houses,[115] and instructs tax collectors as disciples,[116] in order that He also might gain

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[104] Cf. Lk 15.5.
[105] Cf. Lk 15.8. The coin referred to here is a drachma, worth about a day's wage.
[106] Cf. Jn 5.35. The following passage is about the forerunner, John the Baptist.
[107] Cf. Jn 1.23.
[108] Cf. Mt 9.5; Lk 5.34-35.
[109] The bridegroom's friend leads the bride to the bridegroom's house.
[110] Cf. Lk 1.17; Tit 2.14.
[111] Cf. Jn 1.26; Mt 3.11; Lk 3.16.
[112] Cf. Jn 13.4.
[113] Cf. Lk 14.11; 18.14.
[114] Cf. Lk 13.11.
[115] Cf. Mt 9.11; Mk 2.15; Lk 5.30.
[116] Cf. Mt 9.9; Mk 2.14; Lk 5.27.

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something. Of what sort? The salvation of sinners. (You cannot blame him) unless one also accuses the physician because he stoops to the diseases and endures foul smell, that he might give health to the sick; and the one leaning down into a pit on account of philanthropy[117] that he may rescue the animal that had fallen in, according to the Law.[118]

15. He was sent,[119] but as man, for He was twofold: He was weary,[120] hungry,[121] thirsty,[122] anxious,[123] and wept,[124] by reason of the law of the body. But if He was also sent as God, what is this? Consider the good pleasure of the Father[125] to be a mission, to whom He offers himself, both to honor the timeless First Cause,[126] and not seem to be another rival god. (He was twofold), since indeed He is said to have been delivered,[127] but also it stands written that He gave himself up;[128] and He is said to have been raised up by the Father,[129]and taken up,[130] but it also stand written that He raised himself and ascended back;[131] the former (actions) belong to the good pleasure, the latter ones belong to the authority. You state the things which lessen (him),[132] but overlook the things which

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[117] The word "φιλανθρωπία" is not only a human concern for others, but also characterizes God's love for humans. Cf. Clem. *prot.* 10; Ath. *inc.* 4.2; Or. *Cels.* 4.15, among other examples cited by Lampe, s.v. "φιλανθρωπία."
[118] Cf. Deut 22.4; Mt 12.11.
[119] I.e., sending the Son is not incompatable with unity of Godhead. Cf. Cyr. *Jo.* 1.2.
[120] Cf. Jn 4.6.
[121] Cf. Mt 4.2; 21.18.
[122] Cf. Jn 4.7; 19.28.
[123] Cf. Lk 22.44.
[124] Cf. Jn 11.35.
[125] Cf. Mt 3.17, 17.5, 2 Pet 1.17. Refers to Incarnation as in Irenaeus *haer.* 1.9.3: μονογενὴς υἱὸς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς εὐδοκίαν σαρκωθεὶς ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπον. *Symbolum Antiochenum* 1.
[126] I.e., the Father.
[127] Cf. 1 Cor 11.23.
[128] Cf. Ga 2.20; Eph 5.2, 25.
[129] Cf. Ro 4.24.
[130] Cf. Mk 16.19.
[131] Cf. Jn 20.17. Ignatius of Antioch says of Jesus, "ἀνέστησεν ἑαυτόν. *Sm.*2.
[132] Cf. He 2.7-9.

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exalt (him),[133] and you hold that He suffered, but do not add that it was voluntary. The Word even now suffers such! By some (the Word) is honored and confused as God;[134] by others (the Word) is dishonored and separated[135] as flesh. At whom will God be more angered? Or rather whom will He pardon the more? Those who contract, or those who sever—badly? And in fact the former ought to have distinguished (them) and the latter united (them); the one by number, the other by divinity. Do you take offence at the flesh? The Jews also (did) this. Or do you also call (him) a Samaritan, and the next which I shall pass over in silence.[136] Do you disbelieve in (his) divinity? Not even the demons (do) this.[137] Oh, you who are both more unbelieving than the demons and more ungrateful than the Jews! The latter considered the title "Son" as a declaration of equality of honor;[138] the former knew that God was expelling them.[139] For they were persuaded by what they suffered. But you—you neither accept the equality nor confess the divinity. It would have been better for you to be circumcised and possessed by a demon[140] (to say something quite ridiculous!), than to be evilly and atheistically disposed in uncircumcision and health.

16. A little later, then, you will see: Jesus being purified in the Jordan for my purification,[141] or rather cleansing the waters by (his) purification—for surely He himself

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[133] Cf. Ac 2.33; 5.31.
[134] Confused with the Father, I.e. Sabellianism.
[135] Separated from the Father, i.e. Arianism.
[136] I.e., the accusation of Jesus being possessed by a demon in Jn 8.48. Cf. McGuckin, p.186, n.72.
[137] Cf. Jas 2.19.
[138] Cf. Jn 5.18.
[139] Cf. Mk 1.34 and Lk 4.41.
[140] Cf. Jn 8.48.
[141] This is rather convincing evidence that this homily was not preached on Jan.6, but rather on Dec.25. However, it could refer to the narration of events of Jesus' life, connected by polysyndeton in the Greek.

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had no need of purification, "He who takes away the sin of the world."[142] (You will see) the heavens parted,[143] (Jesus) having witness borne to him by the Spirit akin to him,[144] being tempted and having victory over the tempter and being served by angels[145] "healing every sickness and every infirmity,"[146] and giving life to the dead.[147] Would that I might give life to you too who have become dead through false belief! (You will see Jesus) driving away demons, some by himself,[148] others through the disciples;[149] feeding with a few loaves multitudes;[150] going by foot on the sea;[151] being betrayed,[152] crucified,[153] and crucifying my sin therewith.[154] (You will see Jesus) offered as lamb,[155] as Priest offering, as human buried,[156] and as God arising.[157] Then (you will see him) as ascending,[158] so coming back in his own glory.[159] How many feasts are there for me (to celebrate) concerning each of the mysteries of Christ.[160] My perfection, remaking, and return to the first Adam, are the one main point of all of these.

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[142] Cf. Jn 1.29.
[143] Cf. Mk 1.10.
[144] Cf. Mt 3.16; Mk 1.10; Lk 3.22; Jn 1.32.
[145] Cf. Mt 4.1-11; Mk 1.12-13; Lk 4.1-13.
[146] Cf. Mt 4.23.
[147] Cf. Mt 9.25 and parallels; Jn 11.43-44.
[148] Cf. Mt 8.16.
[149] Cf. Mt 10.8 and parallels.
[150] Cf. Mt 14.17,19.
[151] Mt 14.25 and parallels.
[152] Cf. Mt 26.47-49 and parallels.
[153] Cf. Mt 27.35 and parallels.
[154] Cf. Ro 6.6; Ga 2.9.
[155] Cf. Is 53.7.
[156] Cf. Mt 27.60 and parallels.
[157] Cf. Mt 28.6 and parallels.
[158] Cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 31.7, 42.4.
[159] Cf. Ac 1.11.
[160] We can see here the development of the festal calendar. The many events in Christ's life are now seen as mysteries, which can be entered into by liturgical celebration of various feasts.

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17. And even now, please, accept the conception and leap before him, though surely not as John from the womb,[161] then as David upon the resting of the Ark.[162] Revere the census through which you have been registered in heaven. Reverence the birth, through which you have been freed from the bonds of birth.[163] Honor the little Bethlehem, which has returned you to Paradise; and prostrate yourself before the manger, through which you, being irrational, have been fed by the Word![164] Know, as the ox does, (its) owner—Isaiah exhorts you—and as the ass does, the manger of his master,[165] whether (you are) one of the clean (animals), under the Law, chewing the cud of the Word, and fit for sacrifice; or of the hitherto unclean, uneatable, not fit to be offered,[166] and belonging to the Gentile party. Run with the star,[167] and with the Magi bear gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh,[168] as for a king, as for God and as for one dead for your sake! With the shepherds give glory; with the angels sing;[169] with the archangels form a chorus. Let the feast be shared in by the heavenly and earthly powers! For I am persuaded that those also rejoice together and keep festival with us today, since they are lovers of humankind and

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[161] Cf. Lk 1.41.
[162] Cf. 2 Sm 6.16.
[163] The Eastern Church Fathers' teaching on "original sin" varies from that of Augustine, in that the East never taught that the guilt of Adam was inherited, but rather that the consequences of sin, such as death, sickness and suffering, were inherited. These consequences of Adam's sin of course make it more difficult for us to exercise our free will in a positive way towards God, but never completely take away free will. Cf. John Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. George S. Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publications, 2002).
[164] There is a play of words in the Greek, which is untranslatable, between Word: "Λόγος," and irrational: "ἀλόγος."
[165] Cf. Is 1.3.
[166] Cf. Lv 19.7.
[167] Cf. Mt 2.9.
[168] Cf. Mt 2.11. The idea of myrrh symbolizing death is previously found also in Irénée, *Contre les hérésies* III.9.2 (SC 211, p.107); Grégoire de Nysse, *Cant. Hom.* (GNO VI:189.2; IX:290.11). Cf. SC 358, p.145 n.2.
[169] Cf. Lk 2.13-14, 20.

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lovers of God, just as those whom David represents going up with Christ after the Passion, both going to meet him and exhorting one another to lift up the gates.[170]

18. You should hate one of the things surrounding the birth of Christ: Herod's slaughter of the children;[171] or rather revere also this, the sacrifice contemporaneous with Christ, slaughtered before the new victim. If He flees into Egypt[172] eagerly be banished at the same time. It is good to flee along with Christ as He is persecuted. If He delays in Egypt, call him out of Egypt,[173] though He is worshipped well there.[174] Journey blamelessly through all the ages and abilities of Christ, as a disciple of Christ. Be purified; be circumcised; [175] strip off the veil which covers from birth.[176] After this teach in the Temple,[177] and drive away those trading in divine things.[178] Received stoning, if it is necessary to suffer this. You will escape those throwing stones, well I know; you will also flee through the midst of them, as God.[179] For the Word is not stoned. If you are led before Herod, do not answer for the most part.[180] He will also respect your silence more than the long discourses of others. If you are scourged,[181] also seek the (sufferings) which remain: taste gall[182] on account of the tasting;[183] be given vinegar to drink;[184] seek

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[170] Cf. Ps 23.7, 9 LXX.
[171] Cf. Mt 2.16.
[172] Cf. Mt 2.13.
[173] Cf. Mt 2.15.
[174] This phrase may allude to the Nicene faith of the Patriarch Peter, successor of Athanasius. Moreschini recommends placing Discourse 38 after Discourse 34, which seals the reconciliation between Gregory and Peter, therefore dating this homily, Dec 25, 380. Cf. SC 358, p.147 n.2.
[175] Cf. Lk 2.21-23. The reference is not a command to be literally circumcised but as Deut 10.16 commands, "circumcise the hardness of your heart."
[176] Cf. 2 Cor 3.16.
[177] Cf. Lk 2.46-47.
[178] Cf. Mt 21.12 and parallels.
[179] Cf. Jn 8.59; Lk 4.30.
[180] Cf. Lk 23.9.
[181] Cf. Mt 27.26 and parallels.
[182] Cf. Mt 27.34.

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spittings;[185] receive slaps,[186] buffetings.[187] Be crowned with thorns,[188] by the harshness of the life according to God; put on the scarlet robe; receive a reed; [189] be worshipped[190] by those jesting at the truth. At last, be crucified with (Christ);[191] be put to death with him;[192] be buried with him[193] eagerly, in order that you might also rise with him,[194] be glorified with him,[195] and reign with him,[196] beholding God and being beheld as much as it is possible, who in Trinity is worshipped and glorified, Whom we pray is made clear to us even now, as much as is possible to captives of the flesh, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is the glory and the might, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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[183] From the forbidden tree. Cf. Gn 3.6.
[184] Cf. Mt 27.48.
[185] Cf. Mt 26.67 and parallels.
[186] Cf. Jn 18.22.
[187] Cf. Mt 26.67.
[188] Cf. Mt 27.29.
[189] Cf. Mt 27.28-29.
[190] Cf. Mk 15.19.
[191] Cf. Ga 2.19.
[192] Cf. 2 Tm 2.11.
[193] Cf. Ro 6.4; Col 2.12.
[194] Cf. Col 3.1; Eph 2.6.
[195] Cf. Ro 8.17.
[196] Cf. 2 Tm 2.12.

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Gregory of Nyssa's

On the Nativity of the Savior

Sound the trumpet at the new moon, says David,[154] on the famous day of our feast. And the orders of the divinely inspired teaching are entirely law for those who hear. Therefore since the famous day of our feast is here, let us also fulfill the law and become trumpeters[155] of the sacred month. And the trumpet of the Law, as the apostle bids (us) to think,[156] is language.[157] For he says that the sound of the trumpet ought not to be unclear, but distinguished by articulate sounds for the clearness of the things spoken. Well then let us also, brethren, make a clear and audible sound and no less honorable than one from a trumpet made of horn.

And in fact the Law, which depicts the truth in advance by the foreshadowing of Tabernacles, ordained the sound of trumpets.[158] And the basis of the present feast is the mystery of the authentic feast of Tabernacles. For in this (feast) the human tabernacle[159] is pitched for the one who put on humanity for us.[160] In this (feast), our tabernacles, which had collapsed under death, are reconstructed by the one who built our dwelling from the

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[154] Ps 80.4; Cf. St. Athanasius' *Festal Letters*, Letter 1, 1-4, NPNF series 2, v. 4, pp.506-508.

[155] The trumpet in antiquity was not primarily a musical instrument, but a means of amplifying the voice. See Folker Siegert, "Homily and Panegyrical Sermon," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C. – 400 A.D.*, ed. Stanley Porter (Prometheus Books, 2001), pp.421-443

[156] 1 Cor 14.7-8.

[157] Greek: ὁ λογος, could also mean "the Word," although context here dictates otherwise. See, however, p.237, ln.10, which speaks of the real Unicorn, the incarnate Word.

[158] Ps 80.4.

[159] Or, habitation.

[160] Cf. Jn 1.14. As most students of New Testament Greek learn upon reading the Prologue of John in Greek, the Word became flesh and "pitched tent" among us. This is the source of St. Gregory's language here about dwelling and tabernacles.

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beginning.[161] Let us too, singing in the same chorus of psalmody with the grandiloquent David, say: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."[162] How (is he said to be) "coming"? Not as it were by some ship or carriage, but having crossed over to human life through virginal incorruption. Thus our God, thus the Lord, has given light to us to celebrate this feast with thick branches even to the horns of the altar.[163]

But we are in no way ignorant, brethren, of the mystery in the things said—that all of creation is pretty much one temple[164] of the Master of creation. But since, with the entrance of sin, the mouths of those who were conquered by evil were shut,[165] and "a voice of exultation"[166] was silenced, and the harmony of those keeping festival was broken up, when the human creature was not concelebrating with the celestial nature. On account of this came the trumpets of the prophets and the apostles—which the Law says are made of horn because their construction is out of the true Unicorn. These (trumpets) proclaimed the Word of truth intently according to the power of the Spirit,[167] in order that, when the faculty of hearing, which had been stopped up by sin, has been opened, there might be one harmonious feast during the thick covering of the feast of Tabernacles, as the creation here below joins in chorus with the powers shining forth and standing in front around the altar above. For the powers of the spiritual[168] nature that stand and appear

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[161] Cf. 2 Cor 5.2.
[162] Ps 117.26.
[163] Cf. Ps 117.27.
[164] Or, royal dwelling place.
[165] Ro 3.19.
[166] Cf. Ps 117.24.
[167] Or, "the breath." Here the breath moving through the horns is a metaphor, typical of the second Sophistic, for the Holy Spirit.
[168] Greek: νοερᾶς.

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before the horns of the intellectual altar,[169] are principalities, authorities, thrones and dominions. To these is united human nature in the fellowship of the feast, through the tabernacle built on the basis of the Resurrection, thickly covered[170] by the renewal of bodies. For to be thickly covered is like being dressed or clothed, as those who know this interpret.

Come therefore, having lifted up our souls to the spiritual chorus, let us appoint David as president,[171] leader and choir director of our chorus, and say with him that sweet verse, which we sang beforehand. And again let us resume it: "This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,"[172] – (the day) on which the darkness begins to decrease, and the lengths of night are diminished by the increase of the sun's rays.[173] Brethren, such an economy[174] with regard to the feast is not some kind of accident occurring spontaneously—that the divine life was manifested to human life now. Rather the creation describes a sort of mystery through things visible to the more discerning, all but letting loose a voice and teaching the one able to hear,[175] the significance of the day being lengthened and the night shortened at the Coming of the Master. For I seem to hear the creation expounding something like the following: "Seeing

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[169] Greek: νοητοῦ.
[170] Therefore fulfilling the covering during the Feast of Tabernacles.
[171] The word here used is ἔξαρχον, which can mean either "originator" or "leader." In Gregory of Nazianzus' *Or.* 39.14, it plays an important role in the question of the origin of the first celebration of the Nativity in Constantinople. In that homily Gregory of Nazianzus refers to himself as the "ἔξαρχος" of the feast. By it, he may mean that he introduced the feast there, or may simply mean that he is the presider at the feast. For further discussion, see Thomas Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986), pp. 137-138.
[172] Ps 117.24.
[173] Literally, "to an eclipse" (if darkness can be said to eclipse). This is a reference to the Winter Solstice.
[174] See G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964), pp.57-68.

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this, O man, understand the hidden (reality) made manifest to you through the visible things."[176] Do you see that the night has advanced to (its) greatest length and is stopping from its forward motion, and returning the opposite way? Know that the evil night of sin, having increased as much as was possible, and having arrived beforehand through every evil device, at the greatest extent of wickedness, today has been restrained from spreading further, and now on wickedness is reduced to an eclipse and a disappearance. Do you see the ray of light lasting longer and the sun higher than usual? Apprehend the appearance of the true Light illumining the whole inhabited world with rays of good news.

Perhaps one might even reasonably surmise there is a cause why the Lord did not show himself in the beginning but graciously gave the manifestation of his Divinity to human life at the end of time.[177] It is that the one intending to mingle with human life for the destruction of evil of necessity waited for all the evil planted by the enemy to have shot up. Then, thus, just as the gospel says, he brought the ax to the root.[178] And in fact, those who pay heed to the art of the physicians, while the fever still smolders within the body and little by little is kindled by the causes making the sickness, give in to the illness, until the disease advances to its crisis, not providing the aid of food to the sick one. Whenever the evil becomes stable, then they apply the art (of medicine), when the entire disease has shown itself. In this manner also the one who heals those sick of soul, waited

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[175] Cf. He 11.3.
[176] This sentence may serve as a good definition of what Gregory means by the term "mystery" used earlier in this text (p.236, ln.7; p.237, ln.1-2; p.238, ln.19-20). It is "the hidden (reality) made manifest to you through the visible things." Notice the dynamism, in that a mystery is not only that which is hidden, but also that which is now made clear, visible and manifest to those listening to Gregory.
[177] Cf. 1 Pe 1.20; Jd 18.

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for the disease of wickedness, by which human nature was overcome, to be disclosed entirely, so that nothing of what was hidden might remain unhealed, if the physician heals only what was apparent. On account of this, neither in the times of Noah when all flesh had been corrupted by unrighteousness, did he apply the cure through his own manifestation, because the bud of the evil of Sodom had not yet sprouted; nor yet in the time of the destruction of Sodom does the Lord appear, for many festering evils were still hidden in human nature. For where was the fighter against God, Pharaoh? Where was the unbridled evil of the Egyptians? Assuredly not even then, I mean in the course of the Egyptian evils, was it seasonable for the one who sets aright everything to have been mingled with life.[179]

But it was necessary that the lawlessness of the Israelites also appear; it was necessary that the rule of the Assyrians and the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar, still smoldering, become manifest in life. It was necessary that the blood-guiltiness against the pious shoot up like a kind of wicked and thorny branch from the evil root of the devil. It was necessary that the rage of the Jews against the holy ones of God be revealed,[180] they who killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent,[181] and finally the crime which

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[178] Mt 3.10.

[179] Cf. Gr. Nyss. *Or. Cat.* 14: θεὸς . . . τῷ λύθρῳ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως καταμίγνυται. See Lampe, s.v. "καταμίγνυμι."

[180] Cf. Gr. Nyss., *Or. Cat.* 29. We must take care here not to use St. Gregory of Nyssa as an excuse for the inexcusable sin of anti-Semitism. It is true that his words here are rather harsh, yet they are not only directed against the Jews, but also against the nations which surrounded the Hebrew people in Old Testament times. His main point is one about the increase of evil in humanity in general. God waited until evil had increased to its farthest extent—to the utter depravity of murdering the righteous and destroying any hope for reconciliation—before the incarnation.

[181] Mt 23.35-37.

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they committed in the case of Zachariah, "between the sanctuary and the altar."[182] Add to the list of wicked offspring also Herod's murder of children.

When all the power of evil from the evil root had been disclosed and increased, in many forms, growing rank in the choices of action of those acquainted with evil in each generation, then just as St. Paul says to the Athenians, God arrives "in these last days," "overlooking the times of ignorance,"[183] when there was no one understanding and seeking for God, "when all strayed (and) together have been corrupted," [184] when "all things were consigned to sin,"[185] when lawlessness became more than enough, when the darkness of evil grew to (its) most extreme measure—then Grace showed itself,[186] then the Ray[187] of the true Light rose, then "the Sun of righteousness" gave light "to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death."[188] Then he crushed the many heads of the dragon, treading them underfoot by means of the human flesh, crushing them against the earth and trampling them underfoot.[189]

And let no one, looking at the evil in life now, believe to be false the account according to which we have said that the Lord shone upon life in the last times. For the opponent will perhaps say that the one who awaited the times with a view to the manifestation of evil, so as to remove it when grown from its foundations, would

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[182] Mt 25.35.
[183] Ac 17.30.
[184] Ps 13.2-3; Ro 3.11-12.
[185] Ga 3.22.
[186] Tt 2.11.
[187] Ray refers metaphorically to the Son of God. Cf. Lampe, s.v. "ἀκτίς" for this use: Eusebius, *De ecclesiastica theologia* 1.8; *De laudibus Constantini,* 6; Pseudo-Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Epistula ad Philgrium;* Clement, *Excerpta Theodoti* 61; and Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 8.13.
[188] Mal 3.20 ; Is 9.1 ; Ps 106.10 ; Lk 1.79.

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probably have done away with all of it, so that no trace of it would be left with life. But at this very moment murders, thefts, adulteries and all the most vicious acts are boldly undertaken.[190] But let the one who looks at this solve the ambiguity about this with an example from familiar occurrences. For just as in the slaying of reptiles, it is possible to see the coils in the rear not being killed immediately with the head,[191] but while the head is dead, the tail is still animated by its own soul[192] and is not deprived of vital movement; so also, when the beast increased in size very much with each particular generation of humanity, the slayer of the dragon, destroyed the head (that is, the scheming power of evil that has in itself many heads) and has deemed of no account the coils in back, since he left the motion in the dead beast as an occasion for training to successive generations.

Then what is the head that has been crushed?[193] It is the one who brought in death by evil counsel, the one who injected into humanity the death-bearing poison through its bite. Accordingly he, who abolished the power of death, crushed together the power in the head of the serpent, as the prophet says.[194] And the remaining coil of the beast, twisted together with human life, as long as humanity is under the control of evil impulses, ever makes life rough by the reptilian scale of sin. Indeed the (coil) is already dead in potentiality, the head having been disabled; but, when time passes away and the things in motion stand still according to the expected completion of this life, then the tail and the

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[189] Re 12.3f; Ps 73.13.
[190] Cf. Mk 7.21-23.
[191] Gr. Nyss., *Or. Cat.* 30.
[192] The word here is θυμὸς, breath, life in Homer.
[193] Cf. Gn 1.15 M.
[194] Ps 73.14, He 2.14.

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behind of the enemy is rendered impotent—and this is death.[195] And thus the complete destruction of evil will come about, when all have been recalled to life through the resurrection,[196] after the just are immediately transported to the appointed place on high, those loaded down with sins to be purified by the fire of Gehenna.[197]

But let us return[198] to the present joy, which the angels proclaim as good news to the shepherds, which "the heavens declare"[199] to the magi, which the Spirit of prophecy publishes through many and diverse people,[200] so that the magi also become heralds of grace. For the one, who causes the sun to rise on the just and the unjust and who causes it to rain on the wicked and the good,[201] brought the ray of knowledge and the dew of the Spirit also into alien mouths, so that by the witness from the opponents the truth is established more among us. Do you hear Balaam the diviner prophesying by greater inspiration to the gentiles that: "A star will rise out of Jacob?"[202] Do you catch sight of the magi, who derive their caste from him[203] watching for the rising of the new star according to the prediction of their forefather? (The star) which, contrary to the nature of the other stars, alone partook of both motion and stability, receiving each of these in succession

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[195] Cf. 1 Cor 15.26.

[196] To what extent St. Gregory of Nyssa held to the hope of ἀποκατάστασις τῶν πάντων, that is, that all would ultimately be restored to "the resurrection of life," (cf. Jn 5.29) is debated. See SC 453, p.264, n.1; W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: 1961), p.89; J. Daniélou, "L'apocatastase chez Grégoire de Nysse," *RSR* 30 (1940) pp.328-347.

[197] The image of Gehenna comes from the valley of Hinnom where the corpses of the worst malefactors were burned. Gregory uses this as an image of purging or cleansing rather than retribution.

[198] Greek: ἐπανέλθωμεν means, in writing or speaking, to end a digression.

[199] Ps 18.2.

[200] Or "things." Cf. He 1.1.

[201] Mt 5.45; He 1.1, 7-9.

[202] Nu 24.17; cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.58.

[203] Balaam was Mesopotamian and an astrologer.

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according to need?[204] For while some of the remaining stars stand fast once and for all in the fixed sphere and have been assigned to motionlessness stability, and others never cease from motion, this one both moves, going before the magi, and stands still, making known the place.

Do you hear Isaiah proclaiming that: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given?"[205] Learn from the prophet himself, how the child is born, how a son is given. According to the law of nature, then? No, says the prophet. The Master of nature is not a slave to the laws of nature.[206] But how the child is born, pray tell. "Behold," he says, "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel (which means, God with us)."[207] Oh the wonder! The Virgin becomes a mother and remains a virgin. Do you see the making anew of nature? In the case of other women, so long as she is a virgin, she is not a mother. But whenever she becomes a mother, she does not possess virginity. But here the two names coincided at the same time. For the same woman is both mother and virgin. For neither did the virginity prevent the birth, nor did the birth cause loss of the virginity. For it was fitting that the one who came into human life for the incorruptibility of the universe make a beginning of incorruptibility from the one

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[204] Mt 2.9.
[205] Is 9.5.
[206] The fact that the Master of nature is not a slave of nature is demonstrated by the unique nature of the star that heralded his birth. Instead of the stars being deterministic in Christ's life as was popularly held by the astrology of the time, Christ determines the special motion of the star. Cf. Gr. Nyss. *Ep.* 4.
[207] Cf. Mt. 1.23; Is 7.14. This variant reading is found in one fourth to one half the codices of Is 7.14.

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ministering to his birth. For common parlance knows how to call the unwedded[208] woman "incorruptible."[209]

That great Moses seems to me to have observed this beforehand in the Theophany that happened to him by means of the light, when the fire was attached to the bush, and the bush was not withered. For he says, "I shall pass over[210] and see this great sight,"[211] not, I think, meaning spatial motion by "passing over," but the fleeting passing over of time. For that which was then prefigured by the flame and by the bush, when the intervening time had passed, was clearly unveiled in the mystery belonging to the Virgin.[212] For as there the bush both kindles the fire and is not burned, so also here the Virgin both gives birth to the Light and is not corrupted. But if a bush prefigures the God-bearing body of the Virgin, do not be ashamed of the sign. For all flesh, because of the reception of sin, in this very respect, only that it is flesh, is sin.[213] And sin is denoted in Scripture by the name "thorn."

If it does not carry us too far from the subject, perhaps it is not untimely to produce Zachariah,[214] who was murdered between the sanctuary and the altar for a testimony of the incorruptible mother. This Zachariah was a priest, and not only a priest,

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[208] The Greek word here, ἀπειρόγαμον, means literally without sexual experience. St. John Chrysostom contrasts this term with dedicated virginity.
[209] Gregory seems to teach the perpetual virginity of Mary. Cf. *V. Mos.* p.59 and *De. Virg.* 19.
[210] Septuagint: "παρελθὼν," not "διαβὰς," which occurs here. Gregory's choice word here, "διαβὰς," is significant in that it was frequently associated among the Early Church Fathers with the derivation of the word "Passover." Cf. Lampe, s.v. "διαβὰσις."
[211] Cf. Ex 3.3.
[212] St. Ignatius in his *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1 says, "And hidden from the ruler of this age were the virginity of Mary, and her giving birth, as was also the death of the Lord. Three mysteries of a cry, which were wrought in the stillness of God." See also n.22 on the meaning of "mystery."
[213] Cf. Ro 7.18-23; Ro 8.3.

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but also (one) with the gift of prophecy. And the power of his prophesying is proclaimed faultless in the book of the gospel.[215] When the divine grace, preparing the way for humanity not to find incredible the childbearing from a virgin, trains in advance the assent of unbelievers by smaller miracles, a child is born to a barren woman advanced in age. This comes to pass as a prelude to the miracle of the virginity. For as Elizabeth becomes a mother not by the power of nature, since she grew old in life without issue, but the birth of the child is ascribed to the divine will, so also the doubt in virginal birth pangs feels confidence by the reference to the divine. Accordingly, since the one issuing from virginity was anticipated by the one from the barren woman—he who leaped in his mother's womb at the voice of the one pregnant with the Lord before preceding him into the light—as soon as the forerunner of the Word entered into birth, then Zachariah's silence is loosed through prophetic inspiration. And as much as Zachariah relates was a prophecy of the future. He, therefore led by the prophetic Spirit to the knowledge of hidden things, after he observed the mystery of virginity[216] in the incorruptible birth, did not segregate, within the temple, the unwedded mother from the place allotted for the virgins according to the custom. Thus he teaches the Jews that the maker of existing things and king of all of creation subjects human nature, along with everything else, to himself, leading it to the discretion of his will, since he himself is not dominated by it, so that it is in his power to fashion a new birth, which will not deprive one who has become

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[214] Mt 23.35.
[215] Cf. Lk 1.67.
[216] Cf. Ign. Ant. *Eph.* 19.1.

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a mother from being a virgin. Because of this, he[217] did not separate her from the chorus of virgins in the Temple. This place was the space between the sanctuary and the altar. So after they were apprized that the king of creation had arrived by economy[218] at human birth, because of fear of becoming subject to the king,[219] they kill the one who gives this witness concerning the birth, sacrificing the priest at the altar itself.[220]

But we have wandered far from the topic, while the discourse must return to Bethlehem in the Gospel. For if we are really shepherds and keep a watchful eye over our own flock, the voice of the angels, which brings the good news of this great joy, is certainly for us.[221] So let us look up to the heavenly host; let us behold the choir of angels; let us listen to their divine singing of praise. What is the sound of those keeping festival? "Glory to God in the highest,"[222] they cry aloud. Why does the voice of the angels glorify the Divinity, which is beheld in the highest heaven?[223] Because it says, "...and Peace upon earth."[224] The angels have become exceedingly glad at him who appears: Peace-upon-earth.[225] The (earth), which was formerly cursed,[226] bearing thorns and thistles, the

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[217] I.e., Zechariah.

[218] Greek: οἰκονομικῶς. See Lampe, s.v. "οἰκονομικῶς;" G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964) pp.57-68.

[219] Recall the words, "We have no king but Caesar." Mt 23.25.

[220] Cf. Origen, *In Matt.*, GCS 38.43, ln.5ff.

[221] At this point one cannot resist wondering if Gregory is addressing other "shepherds," or Bishops and Presbyters, perhaps at a local Synod. The answer to this question would have implications for the setting and/or dating of this homily. Cf. Eph 4.11; Jr 3.15; Ac 20.28; 1 Pt 5.2-3.

[222] Lk 2.14.

[223] Or contemplated. The word Θεωρέω is a technical word used by the Fathers for the activity of contemplating God, either through creation or more directly.

[224] Lk 2.14.

[225] Gregory is interpreting "peace on earth" here to refer to the person of Christ. Cf. Jn 14.27; Jn 20.19-21; Eph 2.14.

[226] Cf. Gn 3.18f; Gn 8.21; Mt 25.46.

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place of war, the banishment of the condemned,[227] is the very spot to have received Peace. Oh, the wonder! Truth has arisen from the earth and righteousness has looked down from the sky.[228] The earth of humanity has yielded such fruit of itself and these things come to pass for good will among humanity.[229] God mixes with human nature,[230] in order that the humanity may be elevated to the sublimity of God.

Having heard this, let us go to Bethlehem, let us see the new sight, how the Virgin exults in the birth, how the unwedded one suckles the infant. But first let us hear from those who record her history who she is and whence she came. Thus, I heard an apocryphal account,[231] adducing the narrative concerning her as follows: The father of the virgin was prominent by his strict way of life according to the law, and well known for great nobility, but he grew old in life childless, because his wife was not able to bear children. Now there was a certain honor (bestowed) upon mothers by the law, of which barren women did not partake. Accordingly she on her own imitates the narrative concerning the mother of Samuel.[232] And while in the temple (the sanctuary), she becomes a suppliant of God (and begs) not to fall outside the laws' blessing—since she did not sin at all concerning the law—but to become a mother and to consecrate the child to God. Then strengthened by divine approval for the favor that she sought, when the child had been born, called her Mary, in order that also through the name the God-given

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[227] Cf. Gn 3.24f.
[228] Ps 84.12.
[229] Cf. Lk 2.14; Php 2.13.
[230] Cf. Gr. Nyss., *Or. Cat.* 11: κατακιρνᾶται θεότης πρὸς τὸ ἄνθρώπινον. SC 453, p.59f.
[231] Such as the *Protevangelium Jacobi.*
[232] Cf. 1 Kg 1.12f.

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(nature) of the favor might be indicated. And when the girl was grown, so she no longer needed to nurse, (Anna) gave (her) back to God and fulfilled her promise and brought (her) to the Temple.[233]

And the priests for a time brought up the girl in the same way as Samuel in the holy precincts, and when she had grown they held council as to what they should do with that holy body so that they might not sin against God.[234] For it seemed most out of place to yoke her to the law of nature and to enslave her by marriage to a husband. For it was deemed an outright sacrilege for a human being to become the master of the sacred offering,[235] since the husband was appointed by the law to be master of her with whom he cohabitates. And for a woman to live among the priests in the Temple precincts and to be seen in the sanctuary was not lawful and lacked propriety. And to them deliberating about this comes a plan from God to give her to a husband betrothed in name, and such a kind as to suitably keep watch over her virginity. So then Joseph was found, such as the (divine) word demanded,[236] from the same tribe and lineage as the virgin. And he betroths to himself the child according to the plan of the priests; however, the union was as far as the betrothal.[237]

Then the virgin is led into the sacred mysteries[238] by Gabriel. And the words of the initiation were a blessing: "Rejoice," he says, "Full of grace, the Lord is with you."[239] The

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[233] Cf. *Prot. Jacobi* 7.1; 1 Sam 1.22.
[234] Cf. *Prot. Jacobi* 8.2.
[235] I.e., the Theotokos.
[236] Of Scripture. Cf. Lk 1.27; 2.4. Messiah must be of Davidic descent.
[237] I.e., it was not consummated in sexual union. Cf. Mt 1.18ff; Lk 1.27.
[238] Greek: μυσταγωγέω.

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Word now comes to the virgin opposite to the first declaration to the woman. The former (Eve) was condemned because of sin to pain in the labors of childbirth, in (Mary's) case pain is banished through joy.[240] In the case of the former (Eve), pain was leader of the travail, but here joy serves as midwife to the labor. "Fear not," he says.[241] Since the expectation of labor causes fear to every woman, the promise of the sweet labor banishes fear. "You will conceive," he says, "and bear a son and call his name Jesus."[242] Then what (does) Mary (say)? Listen to the pure virgin's voice. The angel proclaims the glad tidings of the birth, and she (Mary) clings to virginity, judging sexual integrity to be more highly honored than the angelic manifestation, and neither is she able to be unbelieving to the angel nor does she depart from her decisions. "Sexual intercourse with a husband has been forbidden to me,"[243] she says. "How can this happen to me, since I do not know man?"[244] This utterance of Mary is a demonstration of the things narrated obscurely.[245] For if she had been taken by Joseph into his house for marriage,[246] how would she have been astonished by the one foretelling to her the birth, as she too in every way and completely, expected to become a mother according to the law of nature? And since it was necessary that the flesh consecrated to God, like a holy offering, be guarded untouched, because of this, she says: "Even if you are an angel, even if you come from

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[239] Lk 1.28.
[240] Jn 16.21.
[241] Lk 1.30.
[242] Lk 1.31.
[243] Or, "I have renounced sexual intercourse with a husband."
[244] Lk 1.34. Gregory adds μοι after ἔσται.
[245] I.e., in the apocryphal account, *Prot. Jacobi.*
[246] Cf. Mt 1.20, 24.

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heaven, even if what appears is more than human, still it is impossible for me to know a man. How shall I be a mother without a husband? For although I know Joseph as a suitor, but not as a husband. What then? Is the bridal attendant Gabriel? What sort of bridal chamber does he furnish for the pure and undefiled marriage? He says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."[247] Oh, the blessedness of that flesh, which has won for itself the good things of the soul through (its) exceeding purity! For in the case of all others, scarcely would a pure soul receive the presence of the Holy Spirit, but here the flesh becomes a receptacle of the Spirit. But (he says), "And the power of the Most High will overshadow you." What does the Word mean by this mystery? "Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God," says the Apostle.[248] Thus the Power of the Most High God, who is the Christ, by the "coming upon" of the Holy Spirit, is fashioned in virginity. For just as the shadow of bodies is conformed to the outline of what goes before, so the stamp and the characteristics of the Divinity of the Son will plainly be shown, by the power of the one born, to be icon, seal, shadow and reflection[249] of the prototype through the actions of working of miracles.

But the angelic proclamation of good news urges us to run back to Bethlehem in the discourse and to perceive the mysteries in the cave.[250] What is this? A child is covered in swaddling clothes and resting on a manger and the virgin after the birth, the incorrupt

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[247] Lk 1.35.
[248] 1 Cor 1.24.
[249] Cf. He 1.3.
[250] Gregory returns from digressions beginning at p. 250, ln.14 and p. 245, ln.3.

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mother, shows homage to her offspring. Let us the shepherds[251] speak the utterance of the prophet, "Just as we have heard, so also we have seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, the city of our God."[252] Have these events happened and been recorded in regard to the Christ, and there is no reason to the history?[253] What is the meaning of the Master's lodging in the cave? His being made to lie down in the manger? The mingling with life in the time of the census[254] of tribute? Or is it clear, that just as he rescues us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us,[255] and he transfers our bruises to himself, that by his bruise we might be healed, so also he is born in (time) of tribute, so that he might free us from the evil tributes, to which humanity was liable, being subjected to tribute by death.

Beholding the cave, in which the Master is born,[256] apprehend the gloomy and subterranean life of humanity, into which is born the one who shines upon those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.[257] And bound tightly by swaddling clothes is the one who puts on the cords of our sins.[258] And the manger is the dwelling-place of the irrational animals, into which comes the Word, in order that "the ox may know its owner and the ass might know his lord's crib."[259] The one who is yoked under the Law (is) the ox, and the animal bearing burdens is the ass, heavy laden with the sin of idolatry. But the

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[251] Cf. above, p.250, ln.15f.
[252] Ps 47.9.
[253] Here Gregory begins an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptural narrative.
[254] Cf. Lk 2.2.
[255] Cf. Ga 3.13
[256] For discussion of this tradition, see *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge University Press, 1980) p.47.
[257] Cf. Lk 1.79.
[258] Cf. Pr 5.22.

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appropriate nourishment of irrational animals is grass. For the prophet says, "...causing grass to grow for the cattle."[260] But the rational animal is nourished by bread. Therefore the Bread which came down from heaven[261] is set forth in the manger, which is the altar of the irrational animals, in order that irrational beings also, having partaken of rational food, may be under the influence of the Logos.[262] Accordingly, upon the manger the Lord of both mediates for the ox and ass, in order that "having destroyed the wall of partition he might make the two in himself into one new humanity,"[263] as he removed from the one the heavy yoke of the law, and unloaded the burden of idolatry from the other.

But let us look up at the heavenly wonders. For behold, not only do prophets and angels proclaim the good news of this joy to us,[264] but also the heavens proclaim the glory of the good news through their own marvels.[265] The Christ rises for us from the tribe of Judah, just as the apostle says,[266] but the Jew is not illumined by the one who has dawned.[267] The magi (are) "strangers from the covenants of promise"[268] and foreigners to the blessing of the fathers,[269] but they anticipate the people of Israel in knowledge,

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[259] Is 1.3.
[260] Ps 103.14.
[261] Jn 6.50f.
[262] This whole section depends on a play on words in the Greek language in which rational and irrational share the same root with Logos.
[263] Eph 2.14.
[264] Cf. Lk 2.10.
[265] I.e., the star (of the magi). Cf. Mt 2.2.
[266] Cf. He 7.14.
[267] Gregory here is using the Jewish people rhetorically as an opportunity to stress the paradox of the coming of Christ. Christ is from the tribe of Judah, but it is another foreign people who recognize him. The contrasts in the paradox are too tempting to pass over. While foreigners bring gifts, the local governor of Christ's own people plot to have him killed, etc. See the introductory chapter to this oration for a look at the issue of anti-Semitism in this passage.
[268] Eph 2.12.
[269] Cf. Ga 3.14.

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because they made known the heavenly luminary and did not ignore the king in the cave. The latter bear presents; the former plot against (him). The latter worship, while the others persecute. The (magi) rejoice when they found the one sought after, but the former are disturbed at the birth of the one who is revealed. For it says, "The magi, when they beheld the star near the place, where the child was, rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."[270] But Herod, after he heard the report, was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.[271] The former present frankincense as to God and honor the royal office with gold, at the same time as they indicated the economy[272] of the passion with a kind of prophetic grace by the myrrh. The others pass a sentence of utter destruction upon all the youth of a populous, (an action) which seems to me to possess evidence of not only their harshness but also extreme folly.

To what purpose for them is the massacre of innocents, and to what end has such an abomination been dared by the bloodthirsty? Since a new sign of heavenly marvels, he says,[273] revealed to the magi the appointment of the king. What then? Do you believe the sign which informed (to be) true, or do you suppose the common talk (is) idle? For if he is such, as to arrange the heavens for himself, he is completely beyond your power. If, however, his life and death are in your power, in vain have you feared such a one. Why is

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[270] Cf. Mt 2.9-11.
[271] Mt 2.3.
[272] Cf. above, n.20.
[273] Gregory has turned rhetorically to Herod, and is challenging him on the illogical nature of his action.

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the one who acts thus, so as to be subject to your authority, plotted against?[274] For what reason is that terrible command sent down, the evil decree against the infants, that the pitiful newborn babies be destroyed. What wrong have they done? What ground did they furnish for (a sentence of) death and punishment, their only crime being that they were born and came into the light? And on this account, was it necessary to have filled the city full of executioners, and for a drove of mothers to have been gathered together with a crowd of infants whom they bore together with them, and probably all who share in (that) generation, were crowded together for the calamity?

Who could describe the calamities in speech? Who could bring before (one's) sight the sufferings through the narrative, that commingled lamentation, the mournful concord of children, mothers, fathers and kinsfolk crying out pitiably at the threatening of the executioners? How could one paint the executioner standing by the infant with naked sword, looking fiercely and murderously and uttering more such, and drawing the newborn babe to himself with one hand, and with the other stretching forth the sword? The mother on the other side pulling contrariwise the child to herself and interposing her own throat as a defense against the edge of the sword, so that she might not see the wretched child killed at the hands of the executioner? How might one tell in detail the condition of the fathers, their calls for retreat, their lamentations, the last embraces of the children, while many such events happen at the same time together? Who might portray as in a tragedy the diverse variety of the calamity, the twofold birth pains of those having

[274] If Herod believes that the rumors are true, then the power and authority of such a person is so great that the murder of the children will achieve nothing. If Herod does not believe that the rumors are true, then his

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just given birth, the sharp cauterizations of nature; how the wretched newborn babe as soon as it clung to the breast received the mortal blow through its inward parts; how the miserable mother was both offering the nipple to the infant's mouth and receiving the blood of the child into her bosom? And many times, I suppose, the executioner by a swing of the hand, with one assault of the sword thrust through the child with the mother, and there was one stream of blood mingled from the blow to the mother and from the mortal wound of the child. And since this belongs to the defiled decree of Herod that not only is the death dealing vote cast against the newborn, but everyone advanced in age to the second year is to be carried away (for it is written, "from two years and under"[275]), the account sees in these events in all likelihood another suffering, that often the time intervening caused the same woman (to be) the mother of two children. The spectacle again of such cases was in fact of this sort: two executioners busily engaged one mother, the first drawing the toddler to himself, the second pulling the suckling infant from the breasts. What (was) it likely for the mother to suffer from this, as her nature is torn to her two children, each equally inflaming the fire in her maternal affections.[276] She does not know which of the evil executioners to follow, while one on this side, the other from the other side, drag the infants towards the slaughter. Should she run up to the newborn, who sends forth his lamentation that is still inarticulate and confused? But she hearkens to the other (child), who already speaks and with stammering voice is calling his mother again and again in tears. How is she to suffer? Which (child) is to live? Whose voice should she

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rule is not threatened anyway.

[275] Mt 2.16.

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respond to? Whose crying should she lament in return? Which death will she bewail, since she is scourged by the pangs of nature equally for each?

But let us taper off hearing about the lamentations on the children and direct the mind to what is more cheerful and more appropriate to the feast, even if Rachel, roaring out according to the prophet, loudly bewails the slaughter of her children.[277] For on the day of a feast, as the Wisdom of Solomon says, the forgetfulness of evil things is appropriate.[278] And what could be more auspicious than this feast of ours: in which the Sun of righteousness,[279] dispersing the evil moonless night of the devil, through our very nature shines upon nature; in which that which is fallen is raised; that which is at war is led to reconciliation;[280] that which has been banished is restored; that which is fallen away from life returns to life;[281] that which has been enslaved to captivity is received back into the dignity of the kingdom; that which has been fettered by the bonds of death returns relaxed to the land of the living? Now, according to the prophecy, the bronze gates of death are shattered, the iron bars are broken in two, by which formerly the human race had been confined in the prison of death.[282] Now is opened, as David says, the gate of righteousness.[283] Now in unison throughout the whole world the sound of those keeping the feast is heard. Through a human being (came) death; through a human being (came)

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[276] Greek: σπλάγχνοις.
[277] Mt 2.17f; Jr 38.15 (LXX). At this point Gregory ends a digression on the massacre of innocents from p.260, ln.4.
[278] Cf. Sir 11.25.
[279] Mal 3.20.
[280] Cf. Ro 5.10.
[281] Cf. Gn 3.24f.
[282] Cf. Ps 106.16; Is 45.2.
[283] Cf. Ps 117.19.

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the savior. The first human being fell into sin; the second set aright the fallen.[284] The woman has made a defense in behalf of the woman. The earlier gave the entrance for sin, but the latter ministered to the entrance of righteousness. The former obtained the counsel of the serpent; the latter presented the slayer of the serpent. The former introduced sin through the tree;[285] the latter brings in instead good through the tree.[286] For the cross was wood. And the fruit of this tree becomes evergreen and unfading life for those who taste it.

And let no one suppose that such a thanksgiving befits only the mystery[287] of Pascha.[288] For let them take into account that Pascha is the end[289] of the economy. And how could the end have happened, if the beginning had not led the way? Which is more primary than the other? Clearly the nativity is more primary than the economy of the passion. Therefore even the excellences of Pascha are a part of the acclamations about the birth. Even if one recites the benefits of the actions narrated by the Gospels; even if one recounts the miracles of the healings, food from the trackless places,[290] the return of the dead from the tombs,[291] the improvised cultivation of wine,[292] the flight of the demons,[293]

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[284] The idea expressed here is that of "recapitulation." The second Adam recapitulates in himself that which the first Adam was called to be and failed. Common in the early Church writings, this idea has its roots in the New Testament (Cf. Ro 5.12-17; 1 Cor 15.21f). The idea is also extended in early Church writers, such as in St. Irenaeus to Eve and Mary.
[285] Cf. Gn 2.16-17; Gn 3.2-4, 7, 9, 12-13.
[286] Cf. Ac 5.30; 10.39; Ga 3.13; 1 Pe 2.24.
[287] Mystery here is used in the sense of liturgical participation in an event of Christ's life. It is not meant as something esoteric, but rather a historical event which may be entered into through the on-going life of the Church.
[288] Or, the Easter festival.
[289] "End" in the sense of "issue" or "accomplishment."
[290] Cf. Mt 15.33; Lk 9.12.
[291] Cf. Mt 27.52-53.
[292] Cf. Jn 2.8.

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the exchange of various symptoms for health,[294] the leaps of the lame,[295] the eyes from clay,[296] the Divine teachings, the acts of law-giving,[297] the initiation into more lofty matters through the parables—all these are the grace[298] of the present day. For this day was the beginning of the good things that follow.

Therefore "let us rejoice and be glad in it,"[299] not fearing the reproach of human beings and not being defeated by their contempt, as the prophet recommends.[300] (These are ones) who scoff at the doctrine of the economy, as if it were not appropriate for the Lord to have put on bodily nature and through birth to have mingled himself with human life. For you are not altogether ignorant of the mystery concerning this, how the Wisdom of God economized[301] our salvation. We were voluntarily sold to sins;[302] in the manner of chattel, we were enslaved to the enemy of our life. What action on the part of the master would have been pleasing to you? Is it not to be removed from the misfortune? Why do you investigate the manner? Why do you legislate the form of the good deed to (your) benefactor, just as if someone would blame the physician for his beneficence, because he effected the healing not in this way but otherwise? But if from a meddling disposition, you seek the rationale of the economy, it is enough for you to learn this much, that divinity does not possess only some one of the goodnesses, but all whatsoever is good by

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[293] Cf., e.g., Mk 5.2-16.
[294] Cf. Mt 11.5; Lk 7.22.
[295] Cf. Mt 11.5; 15.30; Jn 5.5-9.
[296] Cf. Jn 9.6f.
[297] Cf. Mt 5-7.
[298] "Grace" in the sense of pure gift. All these are gifts issuing from the nativity of Christ.
[299] Ps 117.24; cf. above p.238, ln.15.
[300] Cf. Is 51.7.
[301] I.e., effect or contrive by accommodation. See Lampe, "οἰκονομέω," med.

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reflection is that one: mighty, righteous, good, wise, as many names and concepts[303] as are all significations appropriate to God. Therefore consider, if you please, whether or not everything we have mentioned coincided in reference to that event: goodness, wisdom, righteousness, might. As good, he loved the rebel. As wise, he contrived the design of the restoration of those who had been enslaved. As just, he does not do violence to the one who enslaved, who justly acquired (us) for a price, but he gives himself as an exchange for those held captive, in order that even as a guarantor transferred the debt to himself, he might free the captive from those in power. As mighty, he was not mastered by Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.[304] For neither was it possible for the author of life[305] to be held by corruption.

But is it shameful to come into human birth and to undertake the experience of fleshly sufferings? Do you say that it is the excess of kindness? For since it was not possible for humanity to be rescued from evil another way, the king of all impassibility endured to exchange his own glory for our life. And purity is found in our filth, but filth does not lay hold of purity, as the Gospel says, "The Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not overcome it."[306] For the gloom vanishes in the presence of the ray; the sun is not eclipsed[307] by the nether gloom. The mortal is swallowed up by life, just as the

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[302] Cf. Ro 7.14.

[303] On the concept of ἐπινοία, see NPNF 2, 5, p.249 and Paulos Gregorios, *Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence* (New Delhi: Sophia Publications) pp.41-46.

[304] Cf. Ps 15.10.

[305] Cf. Ac 3.15.

[306] Cf. Jn 1.5.

[307] Greek: ἐναμαυροῦται—hapax legomenon (not in the lexicons).

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apostle says;[308] life is not extinguished by death. That which has been corrupted is saved with the help of the incorruptible one, but corruption does not touch incorruptiblity. On account of this, there is shared concord of all creation, as in unison all send up the doxology to the master of creation, every tongue in heaven and on the earth and under the earth proclaiming, "That Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen."[309]

[308] Cf. 2 Cor 5.4.
[309] Cf. Ro 1.25; 9.5; Php 2.11.

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John Chrysostom's

On the Day of the Birth of Our Savior Jesus Christ[1]

1. That which, long ago, the Patriarchs travailed with, the prophets foretold, and the righteous desired to see,[2] has come to pass, and received its completion today: God both was seen upon the earth through flesh and associated with humans.[3] Therefore let us rejoice and be glad, beloved. For if John, being in (his) mother's womb, leapt when Mary visited Elizabeth—much more we, having beheld not Mary, but our very Savior brought forth this day, ought to leap and exult and wonder and be astounded at the magnitude of the economy[4] exceeding all thought. For consider how great it would be to see the sun, descended from the heavens, running its course upon earth and thence sending forth its rays upon all. And if this happening in the case of the perceptible sun would have astounded all who beheld it—behold consider with me now—how great it is to see the Sun of righteousness sending forth rays from our flesh and illumining our souls. For a long time I was desiring to see this day, and not simply to see it, but with so great a crowd—and I was praying continually for our theatre[5] so to be filled, just as now it is possible to see it filled. Accordingly this has come to pass and reached its goal. Although

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[1] The heading from PG adds, "Which was then still uncertain, but a few years ago made known and proclaimed on the part of ones who came from the West."
[2] Cf. Mt 13.17.
[3] Cf. Bar 3.38.
[4] Greek: οἰκονομίας. I have used "economy" to render this term, because the translation "dispensation" today tends to conjure up images of a legalistic nature. It is sometimes translated "incarnation," which solves the former problem, but does not solve the fact that God's economy is not limited to the incarnation, but began at creation, and continues through today. Οἰκονομία literally means "management of a household." It is used by the Church fathers to describe a variety of actions from creation to redemption to the particular way God saves each person through the disciplines of the Church. For more, see G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964) pp.57-68.
[5] Chrysostom is applying the image of a theatre to the Church.

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it is not yet the tenth year, from when this day has become clear and well known to us, but nevertheless it has flourished through your zeal, as if delivered to us from the beginning and many years ago. Whence one would not be in error to call the day both new and old: new because it was recently made known to us; at the same time, old and time-honored because it quickly became of like stature as the older days, and reached the same measure in stature with them. For just as with hardy and good trees (for the latter, as soon as they are put down into the earth, immediately shoot up to a great height and are heavy with fruit), so too this day being well known among those dwelling in the West from the beginning, and now having been brought us, and not many years ago, thus shot up at once and bore so much fruit, as is possible to see now—our sacred court filled, and the whole Church crowded by the multitude of those gathering together. By all means expect the worthy return for such great eagerness from Christ, who was brought forth according to the flesh today. That One will repay you completely for this zeal, for the affection and zeal with regard to this day is the greatest sign of love for the One born. But if it is necessary that some things be introduced by us fellow-servants, we also shall contribute things to the best of (our) ability, or rather, whatever the grace of God gives to be said for your advantage. Then what do you desire to hear today? What else, but concerning this day? For I know well that many still even now argue with one another—some accusing, others defending—and much discussion takes place about this day everywhere: some charging that it is sort of new and recent, and has been introduced now; others defending that it is old and well established, since the prophets already foretold concerning his birth, and from the beginning it became very manifest and famous

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with those living from Thrace to Gades. Come then, let us set in motion the discourse concerning these things. For as the subject of dispute enjoys so much good will from us, if it should become more well-known, it is very clear that it will enjoy greater zeal by far, when exposition concerning the teaching produces in you a greater disposition about.

Well then, I am able to state three proofs, through which we shall certainly know that this is the time,[6] at which our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Word, was born. And of these three, one proof is the fact that the festival was announced by messengers sent everywhere so quickly, and advanced to so great a height and blossomed; and the very thing which Gamaliel said about the preaching that if it is from humankind, it will be destroyed, but if it is from God, you will not be able[7] to destroy it lest you be found also fighting against God.[8] This I would also say concerning this day, confident that since God the Word is from God, not only was (the day) not destroyed, but also each year it increases and becomes more brilliant, since also the preaching in a few years laid hold of the whole inhabited world, although those who conveyed it everywhere were tent-makers, fishermen, unlettered and commoners, but the paltriness of those serving did not weaken it at all, since the might of the One preached determines all beforehand, both taking away impediments and showing forth His own strength.

2. And if someone fond of dispute would not bear with what has been said, it is possible also to state a second proof. Of exactly what nature is this proof? The one from

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[6] The Greek here is "καιρός," which means "the right season, the right time for action, the critical moment." (Cf. Liddell and Scott, s. v. "καιρός") Scholars of liturgical theology contrast this word to "χρόνος"—chronological time in arranged in intervals by which we order normal daily life.
[7] Two manuscripts read, "we will not be able....lest we be found also fighting against God."
[8] Cf. Ac 5.38-39.

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the census,[9] which is found in the Gospels. For it came to pass, says the Evangelist, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the inhabited world should be enrolled. This was the first census, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up to Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to bring forth. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them at the inn. "[10] It is clear from this that He was born during the first census.[11] And it is possible for the one who desires to know exactly to read the original codices publicly stored at Rome and learn the time of the census. So what, someone says, is this to us—who are neither there nor present? But listen, and do not be unbelieving, because we have received the day from those who know these things accurately and who dwell in that city. For the ones living there, having observed it from the beginning and from ancient tradition, now have themselves transmitted the knowledge of it to us. Nor in fact did the Evangelist indicate this time randomly, but both to make the day clear and known to us, and to show the economy[12] of God. For neither spontaneously, nor from himself did Augustus send out this edict at that time, but (he did it) because God who his soul in order that even inadvertently he might

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[9] ἀπογραφή from Lk 2.2. Two manuscripts read, "Scripture," instead of "census."
[10] Lk 2.1-7. I have used the RSV translation for Scripture quotations, making changes only it clarified the Greek text or when there was a variance with Chrysostom's text as may happen in the case of Old Testament passages because of the Septuagint.
[11] There was more than one census by Quirinius.
[12] In this case, economy means God's arrangement of things so that prophecy might be fulfilled.

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serve the coming of the Only-Begotten. "And what does this contribute to this economy?" one says. Not a little, nor a chance result, beloved, but both exceedingly great and one necessary and earnestly pursued.[13] Then what manner of thing is this? Galilee is a certain region in Palestine, and Nazareth is a city of Galilee. Again Judea is a region thus called by the inhabitants, and Bethlehem is a city of Judea. And all the prophets foretold that the Christ would come not from Nazareth, but from Bethlehem, and would be born there. For thus it has been written, "And you, O Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler, who will govern my people Israel."[14] And the Jews being asked at that time by Herod, where the Christ is born, spoke this testimony to him.[15] On account of this also Nathaniel said to Phillip, "'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'" since (Phillip) said, "'We have found Jesus of Nazareth.'"[16] Christ says concerning him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"[17] And on account of what, one says, did he commend him? Because he was not misled by the statement of Phillip, but knew clearly and accurately, that neither in Nazareth, nor in Galilee, was the Christ to be born, but in Judah and in Bethlehem, even the very thing which in fact came to pass. Accordingly since Phillip was ignorant of this, Nathaniel, inasmuch as he was learned in the laws, responded with the words of the above prophecy, knowing that the Christ will not come from Nazareth. And on account of this Christ says, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."[18]

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[13] Two manuscripts read "necessary and earnestly pursued and spiritual."
[14] Mt 2.6; Mic 5.2.
[15] Cf. Mt 2.4-6.
[16] Jn 1.45-46.
[17] Jn 1.47.
[18] Jn 1.47.

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On account of this also some of the Jews were saying to Nicodemus, "Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee."[19] And again elsewhere: does not the Christ come "from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"[20] And it was the common vote of all that of course he must come from there, not from Galilee. (354)

Therefore since Joseph and Mary, though citizens of Bethlehem, departed from that place and established their life in Nazareth and lived there (of course things such as this probably happen to many people, who have to leave their cities of origin, and reside in others, where they did not grow up from the beginning), and since it was necessary that the Christ be born in Bethlehem, the decree went out, forcing them even against their will into that city, because God arranged it in this way. For the law, which commanded each to register in his own native city, forced them to set out from that place, I mean from Nazareth, and to come to Bethlehem, so as to register. Certainly the Evangelist also hinted at this, when he said: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to bring forth. And she gave birth to her first-born son."[21]

3. Did you notice, beloved, the economy of God, the way He manages his (purposes) through unbelievers as well as believers, that strangers to piety might learn his might and power. And so while the star led the Magi from the East, the decree was

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[19] Jn 7.52.
[20] Jn 7.42.
[21] Lk 2.4-7.

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drawing Mary to the native-land spoken by the prophets. Thence it is clear to us that the Virgin is also of Davidic descent, for since she was from Bethlehem, it is abundantly manifest that she was "from the house and family of David."[22] The Evangelist made this clear even earlier by what he said, "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, with Mary, because he was of the house and family of David."[23] For since Joseph had his descent traced, but no one provided us with an account of her ancestors as they did his, receive instruction in order that you might not be in doubt and say, "So how is it clear that she too is of David?" "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David."[24] One must understand the phrase, "of the house of David," to have been said about the Virgin, which fact has been clarified here. Consequently the order and this law also became current, leading them up to Bethlehem, for as soon same time as they set foot in the city, Jesus immediately was born. Wherefore also was he laid down in a manger? —Because many people from all places had then come together, occupied the places beforehand, and created a great scarcity of room. On this account the Magi bowed down in worship before Him there. But in order that I might furnish a more clear and more remarkable demonstration for you, I entreat you please to rouse yourselves, for I wish to set in motion a long history and to read aloud the laws of old, so that the argument[25] might become clearer from every side to you.

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[22] Cf. Lk 2.4.
[23] Lk 2.4.
[24] Cf. Lk 1.26-27. Chrysostom says Gabriel was sent "by God," rather than "from God," a reading also found in manuscripts A, C, D and θ. Cf. Nestle-Aland, Lk 1.26.
[25] Greek: τὸν λόγον.

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The Jews had an ancient law—or rather let us begin the argument at an earlier point. When God freed the Hebrew people from the Egyptian tumults and the barbarous tyrant—seeing that they still had remnants of impiety and were desirous of material things, and marveled at the greatness and beauty of the temples,[26] God (355) commanded them that a Temple be built to surpass all the temples on earth—not by the expense of material alone, nor by the technical skill—but also in the plan of the building.[27] And just as an affectionate father,[28] receiving his own son who has lived for a long time together with polluted people, seducers and profligates, and enjoyed much luxury, and with assurance and dignity, sets him over more, so that when in distress he does not recall the former things nor come to desire them—thus also God seeing that the Jews were distracted with material things, also makes an abundance of perfection in this realm too so that they would never come to the desire of the Egyptians or things of Egypt. And so God has the Temple made according to the image of the entire universe, sensible and intelligible. For just as earth exists and heaven and this firmament as a partition is the middle, so (God) commanded that (temple) to be also. And having cut through this Temple in two, and stretched a curtain in the middle, he ordained the part outside of the curtain accessible to all, but the part within to be untrodden and not seen by all, except the high priest alone. And in support of the fact that these things are not our conjecture, but the Temple has been arranged as a representation of the whole universe,[29] listen to

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[26] "Temples" here refers to the Egyptian monumental architecture.

[27] Chrysostom refers here primarily to the Temple in Jerusalem, but perhaps he is also hinting at the Temple of Christ's body, which he talks about later, which truly can be said to "surpass all the temples on earth."

[28] Chrysostom uses the story of the Prodigal Son here as exemplifying God's economy. Lk 15.11-32.

[29] Greek: ἀλλ᾽ ἐν τύπῳ τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς ὁ ναὸς κατεσκεύαστο.

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what Paul says, who speaks about the Christ when he ascended into heaven—"For Christ has entered not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one ..."[30]—showing that the sanctuary here was a copy of the true one. And in support of the fact that the curtain also separated the Holy of Holies from the outer sanctuary, just as this heaven walls off the things above it from all that concern us—listen to how also he hinted at this, when he called the heaven a curtain.[31] For speaking about hope, that we have it as a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul," he added: "a hope that enters what is inside the curtain, where Jesus entered as a forerunner on our behalf,"[32] beyond the heaven above. Do you see how he calls the heaven a curtain? Accordingly, outside the curtain were the lamp-stand, the table and the bronze altar,[33] which received the sacrifices and whole-burnt offerings; but inside the curtain was the ark, covered completely on all sides with gold, containing the tables of the covenant, the golden jar, and the rod of Aaron that blossomed,[34] and the golden altar—not of sacrifices, nor of whole-burnt offerings—but of incense alone.[35] And so while it was permitted for all to tread on the area outside, it was permitted only for the high priest to walk within. And I shall also offer a proof text

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[30] He 9.24. Chrysostom here attributes the Epistle to the Hebrews to Paul.
[31] Calling the heavens a curtain also occurs in Is 40.22 and Ps 104.2, although the homily remains with the example from St. Paul.
[32] He 6.19, 20.
[33] There is confusion by Chrysostom of the two curtains: The bronze altar was not in the Holy Place (see the following chapters: 2 Chron 4; Ex 27; Ex 30); and the golden altar upon which incense daily was burned was not in the Holy of Holies, but rather before it (Ex 30.6, Ex 40.5-6) acting as a sort of borderline between the priest and the divine presence. For more details: Kjeld Nielsen, "Incense," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, v. III (NY: Doubleday, 1992) pp.406-407. 1 Kg 6.22, however, may have led to this confusion as it says, "... Also the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold."
[34] Chrysostom is following the account in He 9.4. According to 2 Chron 5.10 there was nothing in the Ark of the Covenant except the tablets of the Law delivered to Moses at Horeb.
[35] Ex 30.7-8 prescribes that Aaron burn incense every morning and afternoon. This incense was burned on the golden altar (Ex 30.1-8), which was before the Holy of Holies.

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of just this, when St. Paul says, "Now even the first tent[36] had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary ..."[37] (He calls the outer tent the earthly sanctuary, since it was customary for all the world to enter.) "... in which were the lamp-stand, as well as the table and the bread of the Presence.... Behind the second curtain (stood) a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold in which was a golden urn holding manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat.... These furnishings having thus been set, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing the rites; but into the second only the high priest goes, once a year, not without blood, which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people."[38] Do you see that the high priest enters alone, and but once the entire year?

4. What then is the relevance of this to the above-mentioned day? Wait a little, and do not become confused. For we are digging up the spring from farther back, and hasten to come to its source, so that all becomes clear to you with ease. Or rather, in order that the discourse might not remain in obscurity much longer, nor since it is rather unclear, cause you to grow weary because of the length of what is said, I shall now give you the reason why I have set all this in motion. What then is the cause? When Elizabeth was pregnant with John for six months, Mary herself conceived.[39] If therefore we learn what that sixth month was, we also shall know when Mary became pregnant. Then

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[36] He 9.1 reads δικαιώματα, "covenant," where Chrysostom says σκηνή, "tent."
[37] He 9.1.
[38] He 9.2-7.
[39] Cf. Lk 1.24, 26, 31, 36.

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having learned when she herself conceived, we also shall know when she bore, having calculated nine months from the conception.

How then shall we know what was the sixth month of the pregnancy[40] of Elizabeth? If we learn which was the month during which she herself conceived. How shall we know which was the month during which she conceived? If we learn at which time Zachariah her husband received the good tidings. But whence will this fact be known to us? From the Divine Scriptures—just as the Holy Gospel says that the angel announced the glad tidings to Zachariah who was inside the Holy of Holies,[41] and spoke to him concerning the birth of John. If therefore it is demonstrated clearly from the Scriptures that the high priest used to enter the Holy of Holies once as well as alone, and if (it is ascertained) when, and in which month of the year he entered this once, the time will be quite clear during which he received the glad tidings. And if this has become clear, the time of the conception will also be known to all. Paul made clear that he certainly in fact used to enter once a year. And Moses also makes this point clear, thus saying, " And the Lord spoke to Moses (saying) ... 'Speak to Aaron your brother, and let him not come at all times into the Holy place within the veil, before the mercy-seat which is upon the ark of the witness, and he will not die.'"[42] And again, "And no man shall be in the tent of witness, when he enters to make atonement in the Holy place until he comes

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[40] Lit. "conception."
[41] This is questionable, since incense was burned twice a day outside the Holy of Holies, according to the prescription of Ex 30.7-8. Most modern commentators state that Zechariah's visitation by Gabriel occurred during this daily burning of incense. See for example: R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Interpreter's Bible v.9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) pp.45-46. Chrysostom is basing his argument on the traditional reading of Hebrews, that Zechariah was High Priest. Cf. *Protevangelium Jacobi* 10.2; 23.1, 3; 24.1, 2-4.
[42] Lv 16.1.

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out. And he shall make atonement for himself, his house, and all the assembly of the sons of Israel. And he shall make atonement for the altar which is before the Lord...."[43] So it is clear from this that he was not constantly going into the Holy of Holies, nor was it permitted for any to touch him when he was within, but it was permitted to stand outside beside the curtain. But you clearly understand this accurately. It remains to show, what was the time at which he entered into the Holy of Holies, and that once a year he alone did this. Whence therefore is this clear? From this book itself. For as it says something like this: "...In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and shall do no work, neither the native nor the stranger who sojourns among you; for on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you for all your sins; you shall be cleansed before the Lord. Sabbath of Sabbaths will be this your rest and you shall afflict your souls. It will be statute forever. And the priest whom they anoint and whose hands they consecrate to serve as priest after his father shall make atonement; and he shall put on his holy robe, and he shall make atonement for the most holy place, and the tent of witness; and he shall make atonement for the altar; and he shall make atonement for sins of the priests; and he shall make atonement for all the people of the assembly. And this shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the sons of Israel from their sins. It shall be done once a year, just as the Lord commanded Moses."[44] He is

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[43] Lv 16.17-18a. Chrysostom's reading varies from the Septuagint for Lv 16.18. Chrysostom: καὶ ἐξιλάσεται ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ ἔναντι Κυρίου. LXX: καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ ὂν ἀπέναντι κυρίου καὶ ἐξιλάσεται ἐπ' αὐτοῦ.

[44] Lv 16.29-34. A close look will reveal a few differences with most English translations of Leviticus here. These arise because of Chrysostom's use of the Septuagint for the Old Testament. Especially note the variation in Lv 16.34.

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talking here about the Feast of Tabernacles, for then once a year the high priest entered;[45] in fact, the (Lord) himself made this clear saying, "This shall be done once a year."[46]

5. If therefore at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles the high priest alone enters into the Holy of Holies, come let us finally demonstrate that when he was in the Holy of Holies the angel was seen by Zechariah. For (the angel) was seen by him alone, as he was burning incense, and the high priest never enters—except only when alone. But there is nothing which hinders (us) from hearing the very words: "In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,[47] and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth."[48] "Now while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to burn incense, when he entered the temple of the Lord."[49]—Recall if you will, beloved, that text (of Scripture) which says, "And no man shall be in the tent of witness, when he enters to make atonement in the Holy place until he comes out."—[50]"And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense."[51] It did not say, "of the altar of sacrifices," but "of the altar of incense." For the altar outside was of sacrifices and whole-burnt offerings, but the one inside was of incense.[52] For this reason, and because (the angel) was seen by him alone, and because it is said that the people were

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[45]Actually, Atonement is made on Yom Kippur, 10 Tishri (September—October), which falls five days before Sukkot, or Tabernacles, which begins on 15 Tishri. The practice of building outdoor booths on the Feast of Tabernacles makes it well-known for those living in urban areas today as well as during Chrysostom's time in Antioch.

[46] Cf. Lv 16.34, LXX.

[47] Chrysostom does not include the words "ἐξ ἐφημερίας Ἀβιά" found in most manuscripts.

[48] Chrysostom skips from Lk 1.5 to Lk 1.8 here.

[49] Lk 1.8-9.

[50] Lv 16.17.

[51] Lk 1.11.

[52] See footnote 32.

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outside waiting for him, it is evident that he entered into the Holy of Holies. "And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell on him. And the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John'"[53] "And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay."[54] And when he came out, he was gesturing to them and could not speak.[55] Do you see that he was within the curtain? Therefore at that time he received the good tidings. And the time of the annunciation (to Zechariah) was that of Tabernacles and the fast, for this is the (text): "Afflict your souls."[56] And the same feast is kept by the Jews about the end of the month of Gorpiaios[57] just as you also witness; for we spend that time on the many long discourses to the Jews, arguing against the unseasonableness of their fast.[58] Therefore Elizabeth, the wife of Zachariah, then also conceived, "and she hid herself for five months, saying, 'Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.'"[59] Finally it is time to explain that when the former was into the sixth month of pregnancy, Mary receives the good tidings of the conception. The events

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[53] Lk 1.12-13.
[54] Lk 1.21.
[55] Cf. Lk 1.22.
[56] Cf. Lv 16.29,31.
[57] I.e. September.
[58] Chrysostom's reference here to "discourses to the Jews" (πρὸς Ἰουδαίους ... λόγους) very likely refers to what has come down to us under the name Λόγοι κατὰ Ἰουδαιῶν, translated into English in *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul Harkins (Washington, D.C.: CUAP, 1979). See Harkins, p.xxxi, n.47, for a defense of the title *Against Judaizing Christians* and Robert L.Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983) for a more thorough look at the purpose of these discourses. That Chrysostom says that he had preached many long discourses at the end of Gorpiaios (September) that year against the Jewish feast of Tabernacles is important for dating this homily. See this work's introductory chapter.
[59] Lk 1.24b-25.

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are that Gabriel came to her and said, "'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.'"[60] And as she was troubled, and sought to learn the manner, the angel answering said to her, "'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the one born of you will be called holy, the Son of God.' And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.'"[61] If therefore Elizabeth started to conceive after the month of Gorpiaios, as it has been shown, we must count from that month six months afterwards. So then these are the months: Hyperberetaios, Dios, Apellaios, Audonaios, Peritios and Dustros.[62]

After this sixth month, accordingly, Mary first conceived, whence also counting nine months, we shall arrive at this present month. Therefore the first month from the conception of the Lord is April, which is Xanthikos, after which is Artemisios, Desios, Panemos, Lōios, Gorpiaios, Hyperberetaios, Dios, Apellaios[63]—and this present month, during which we celebrate the day. But in order that what is said might become even clearer to you again taking up the same things again in brief, I shall speak to your charity: Once a year the high priest alone entered into the Holy of Holies. And when did this happen? In the month of Gorpiaios.[64] Then, in fact, Zechariah entered into the Holy of Holies; then also he received the glad tidings concerning John. Accordingly he withdrew

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[60] Lk 1.30b-31.
[61] Lk 1.35-37.
[62] Corresponding to our October, November, December, January, February, and March. See Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), p.68, Table 24.
[63] Corresponding to our May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December.
[64] September.

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from there, and his wife began to conceive. And after Gorpiaios, when Elizabeth was in the sixth month, which is Dustros,[65] Mary began finally to conceive. So counting nine months from Xanthikos,[66] we will come the present month, during which our Lord Jesus Christ was born.

6. Well, we have made everything clear to you about the day, but one thing remains to say and I shall close the sermon, making way for the common teacher of greater things.[67] For since many of the pagans hearing that God was born in the flesh, laugh scornfully, disparaging (this), and trouble and disturb many of the more simple folk, it is necessary to speak both to the pagans and to the ones disturbed, so that they neither be troubled anymore, misled by mindless men, nor disturbed by the laughter of the faithless. For small children also laugh often, when we are speaking seriously and occupied with pressing needs. Yet the laughter is a proof not of the baseness of the matters laughed about, but the folly of those laughing. Really one can say this very thing in the case of the pagans: also that being disposed almost more foolishly than children, they disparage things worthy of religious awe and full of much wonder, but they honor and protect things which are truly ridiculous. But nevertheless as our (tenets), which are laughed at by them, remain in their innate dignity, not at all damaged in their own glory by their laughter; so their (tenets), which are protected on all sides, display their innate deformity. For how is it not utter madness for them to believe that they neither do nor say anything shameful, when they introduce their own gods, since they are slippery, into

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[65] March.
[66] April.
[67] Flavian, Bishop of Antioch (381-404).

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stones, wood and cheap statues, and shut (them) up as if in a prison; while they accuse us, when we state that God having prepared a living Temple[68] for Himself by the Holy Spirit aided the inhabited world through it. And what kind of accusation is this? For if it is shameful for God to dwell in a human body, much more so in stone and wood, to the extent that stone and wood are less esteemed than humanity, unless of course our race seems to them to be cheaper than these materials lacking senses. For they dare to bring in the essence[69] of God into cats and dogs, and many of the heretics into even more dishonorable things than these.[70] But we do not say any of this, and would refuse ever to listen to it; but we do say this: that the Christ assumed from (the) virgin womb a flesh, which had become pure, holy, blameless and inaccessible to all sin, and He set aright His own creature.[71] And while those and the Manicheans who are impious in the same way as they, introducing the essence[72] of God into dogs, apes and beasts of all sorts (for they say that the soul of all these is from that essence),[73] do not shudder, nor hide themselves—but they say that we say things unworthy of God, because we refuse to pay attention to any of this. Really we say what was appropriate and fitting to God, that having come, He set aright His own work by the manner of this birth. What do you say? Tell me, my good fellow. You, who say that the soul of murderers and of sorcerers are of the essence of

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[68] The use of "Temple" to describe Christ's humanity is standard Antiochene language.

[69] Greek: οὐσία. Chrysostom does not hesitate here to use what was originally a philosophical word.

[70] Chrysostom is attacking pagan idolatry and pantheism. An enlightening distinction is made by Bishop Kallistos Ware between pantheism and panentheism: the first, which Christians cannot hold, is the belief that everything is god; the second, a Christian tenet, is the belief that God permeates everything.

[71] Greek: πλάσμα, which means, "*Anything molded or modeled* in clay or wax."See Liddell & Scott, abridged. It may also be translated "image," but I have not done so because it is not εἰκών which is used in Genesis for "image." Here it refers to the flesh molded by the Creator. See Lampe.

[72] Greek: οὐσία.

[73] The Manicheans, dualistic syncretists, taught the fragments of the divine are entrapped in the universe. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (University of California Press, 1967), pp.47-56.

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God, dare to accuse us, because we refuse all of this, and do not endure to listen to what is said, but even judge those speaking as partakers of impiety! We do say the following: that God, having prepared a holy Temple for Himself, through it introduced the citizenship of heaven into our life. And how are you not worthy of ten thousand deaths, both because of the charges you bring against us, and the impieties that you do not cease to utter. For if, as you say, it is unsuitable for God to dwell in a pure and blameless body, much more is it unsuitable (for God) to dwell in that of a sorcerer, a grave-robber, a pirate, an ape, a dog—not the very holy, blameless (body) seated now at the right of the Father. For what sort of harm would come to God from this economy, or what sort of defilement? Do you not see this sun, whose body is sensible, corruptible and perishable? —even if the pagans and Manicheans hearing these things choke ten thousand times?[74] And not it only, but also earth, sea, and, in short, all of the visible creation, has been subjected to futility. And listen to Paul who makes this clear, when he says, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope."[75] Then making clear what "to be subjected to futility" means, he added: "because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."[76] Therefore now it is perishable and corruptible, for being "in bondage to decay" is nothing else than being corruptible. Further, if the sun, being a corruptible body, sends forth its rays everywhere, and

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[74] The polemic turns from a criticism of pagan idolatry in general to a criticism of sun worship. The argument which follows can be summarized: If the rays of the physical sun are not defiled by enlightening the world, then Christ, the incorruptible "Sun of righteousness," is able even more to enlighten the world without being corrupted by sin. Chrysostom also criticizes the Manicheans who taught that fragments of the divine were entrapped throughout the universe.

[75] Ro 8.20.

[76] Ro 8.21.

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approaching the mires, defilements and much other such matter, receives no injury to its purity from the converse with bodies,[77] but even withdraws its rays pure again, giving a share of its own virtue to many of the bodies which have welcomed it,[78] and not receiving additionally the least bit of the filth and defilement, (if that is so) much more, the Sun of righteousness,[79] the Master of the bodiless powers, having come to pure flesh, not only has not become defiled, but also has made this itself more pure and more holy. Therefore considering all this and remembering the voice which says, "I will dwell among you, and walk among you,"[80] and again, "You are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you,"[81] – not only let us speak to them but also block the impudent mouths of the impious; and let us rejoice at our goods and glorify the God made flesh because of such great considerateness,[82] and according to our ability give back to Him what is worthy: honor and recompense. However, there can be no recompense to God from us, except only the salvation of us and our souls, and care with regard to virtue.[83]

7. Therefore let us not be ungrateful with regard to the Benefactor, but let us all contribute everything in our power: faith, hope, love, self-control, almsgiving, hospitality. And I shall not cease from the appeal, now and always, which I made earlier. And what is this? Being about to draw near to this fearful and Divine Table and holy participation in

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[77] Some manuscripts read, "...from the pollution of bodily uncleanness."
[78] The science of Chrysostom's time drew from Plato's theory that vision is a result of visual fire emanating from the eye, joining with light and coming into contact with emanations from the objects seen.
[79] Cf. Mal 4.2.
[80] Lv 26.12; 2 Cor 6.16.
[81] 1 Cor 3.16.
[82] Greek: συγκαταβάσεως. This word, which has often been translated "condescension," is rendered here "considerateness" out of respect for Robert C. Hill, who in his excellent translations and introductions on Chrysostom's scriptural commentaries has argued favorably for the use of a less patronizing and more broad term.
[83] Greek: ἀρετή, meaning of "goodness" or "excellence" of any kind. Other meanings include "valor, prowess, dignity, skill" (cf. Liddell & Scott).

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the Mysteries, do this with fear and trembling, with a pure conscience, with fasting and prayer, not making a commotion, nor kicking, nor shoving those nearby. For this is utter madness, and uncommon contempt. Therefore it brings even great punishment and retribution to those who do this.[84] Perceive, O human:[85] what sacrifice you are about to touch; what Table you are about to approach. Also reflect that being dirt and ashes, you receive the Blood and Body of Christ. And since the Emperor[86] is calling you to the feast, recline with fear, and receive the food set before you with respect and quietness; and since God is calling you to His own table, and setting forth His own Son, while the angelic powers stand near with fear and trembling, even the Cherubim covering their faces, the Seraphim crying out with trembling, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,"—do you cry out, tell me, and are you in disorder at this spiritual feast? Do you not know that it is necessary for the soul to be full of calmness at that time? There is need of much peace and quietness, not of commotion and irascibility and disorder, for these make the soul that approaches unclean. Now what forgiveness could there be for us, if after such sins, we do not purify the time of approach from those irrational passions? And what is actually more necessary than that which is set before us? Or what troubles us, that we make haste,[87] having left this behind, to run there. No, I ask and I entreat you, let us not move the wrath of God against us. That which is set forth us is salvific medicine for our

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[84] Cf. 1 Cor 11.27, 30.

[85] Greek: ἄνθρωπος means "human being" or "humanity." Greek has another word, ἀνήρ, for "man (a male of the human species)."

[86] Chrysostom applies the metaphor of the Roman Emperor inviting one to feast to the Eucharistic table.

[87] Some manuscripts read, "... haste, and having left spiritual things behind, hasten to fleshly things."

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wounds; it is unfailing wealth; an ambassador[88] of the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore let us shudder as we approach; let us give thanks; let us fall down, confessing our faults; let us weep, lamenting our own evils; let us give back to God fervent prayers; and so having thoroughly cleansed ourselves, thus let us come forward, calmly and with the good order befitting approaching the King of the heavens; and having received the blameless and holy sacrifice, let us kiss, let us enfold with the eyes, let us warm our understanding—that we do not assemble unto judgment nor unto condemnation,[89] but for sobriety of soul, for love, for virtue, and reconciliation with God, for sure peace, and a basis of innumerable goods, that we might both consecrate ourselves and edify those nearby. These things I say continually and shall not cease saying. For what does it profit, to run here simply and heedlessly, if you learn nothing of use? And what advantage is there, always to speak to gain favor? Short is the present (festal) season, beloved: Let us live soberly; let us be watchful;[90] let us train ourselves; let us display sincere commitment in all relationships; let us become devout in all things—whether it is necessary to listen to the Divine utterances, or pray, or come to communion, or do anything else, let it be with fear and trembling,[91] that we might not bring a curse upon ourselves through carelessness, for "cursed," it says, "is everyone who does the work of the Lord with slackness."[92] The clamor and irascibility is hubris towards the sacrifice which is set forth. It is extreme presumption to offer oneself defiled to God. Listen to what the Apostle says about such

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[88] Greek: πρόξενος. For a more precise understanding, see *The Oxford Classical Dictionary,* ed. M. Cary, A.D. Nock, J.D. Denniston, et al., (London, Oxford University Press, 1949), s. v. "Proxenos."
[89] Cf. 1 Cor 11.29, 34.
[90] Cf. 1 Pe 5.8.
[91] Other manuscripts say, "With fear and judgment."
[92] Jr 48.10a.

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things: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."[93] Therefore let us not provoke God, instead of reconciling, but let us, showing all diligence, all decorum and calm of soul, draw near[94] with prayer and a "broken heart,"[95] that even by this very thing, we having appeased our Master Jesus Christ, might be able to obtain the good things promised to us, by the grace and love for humankind[96] of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, with whom be to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, glory, might, honor, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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[93] 1 Cor 3.17.
[94] I.e., come to communion.
[95] Cf. Ps 50.19.
[96] Greek: φιλανθρωπίᾳ.

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Amphilochius Bishop of Iconium

On the Nativity of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ

1. This spiritual and brilliant meadow,[1] embroidered by the beauty of heavenly blossoms and sweetly smelling of the Apostolic and undefiled fragrances, seems to me to be an image of the Divine Paradise. For just as that perceptible and pure land is brightened up by incorruptible trees and undying fruits and countless other super brilliant beautiful things, exactly so this most godlike company of the most holy Church is also made brilliant by intelligible[2] and ineffable mysteries, of which the feast today of the Holy Nativity of Christ our true God is the unbreakable groundwork and unshakeable foundation stone and saving source and all holy summit.[3] This is the feast through which both the old things have been prophesied in types and the new things have been proclaimed distinctly throughout all the inhabited world, through which heaven has been opened and earth has been lifted up to Divine height, through which Paradise has been given back to humans[4] and the might of death has been abolished, through which the power of corruption has been trampled down, and the destructive worship of the devil has ceased, through which human passions have been put to death, a life of angelic mastery renewed, through which the error of demons has been chased away, the Wisdom and all

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[1] Amphilochius here is referring to the assembled Church.

[2] I.e., spiritual. The word which we have translated "intelligible" here is νοητοῖς, sometimes translated "noetic." "Intelligible" does not correspond to modern ideas of intellect, but rather means that which can be apprehended by the νοῦς, that is, the center of our being where humans choose right from wrong and can come to know God.

[3] Just as St. Gregory of Nyssa expresses that the Nativity is that upon which all the other feasts depend, Amphilochius also expresses that all the other mysteries of the Church depend upon the foundation of the Birth of Christ, the Incarnation.

[4] For the use of "human" as a noun, see *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Merriam-Webster, Inc.: Springfield, MA, 1993).

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pure coming[5] of God has been announced. "For not an angel," he says, "nor an elder, but the Lord Himself will have come and will save them."[6] O, inexpressible wealth of the Divine Gospels! O, indescribable knowledge of the all-wise mysteries! O, indelible treasure of Divine and unutterable gifts! O, measureless grace of provident love for humanity![7] For he says, "The Lord Himself will have come and will save us."

In what way, do you proclaim, will the Lord come to us, O Divine prophet? For I shall speak freely in this part to you,[8] taking up the role of the men of old—who celebrated these things (the all-famous[9] high festival) though they did not experience the new and all pure birth-giving of the undefiled Virgin, nor surely gazed at the heavenly herald, I mean, of course, at the most godlike star; though they neither saw the exultation of the holy angels, nor listened to their divine voices, with which crying out with joy to the shepherds[10] they announced rejoicing the Savior's birth, and surely did not see the gifts of the magi and the worship fit for God—having taken up the role of those (ancient

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[5] παρουσία.

[6] Is 63.9. Amphilochius differs from the LXX in his use of the future tense, making this a prophecy.

[7] Amphilochius' encomium uses many "α-privatives" to inspire awe. In Greek the letter "α" can negate what it stands before. Amphilochius uses several "α-privatives" in a row here, ἀμύθητος, ἀνεκδιήγητος, ἀφράστων, ἀνεξάλειπτος, ἀναρίθμητος. His use of these words is not only for rhetorical effect, but also reflects a certain theology. A stress on apophatic (sometimes called "negative") theology is well known in Eastern Christianity, especially made famous by Pseudo-Dionysius, but also the staple of the Cappadocians' defense against Eunomius. Here particularly we can see that Amphilochius holds the apophatic nature of God together with the cataphatic or positive theology of the Incarnation, - "The Lord Himself will have come and will save us." (Is. 63.9)

[8] I.e., Isaiah. "You" is singular here, so Amphilochius is still addressing Isaiah.

[9] Datema, p.xii, finds evidence in the words πανύμνητος (ln. 30 and 86) and πανσεβάσμιος (ln.69), used in this homily to describe the Feast of the Nativity, that this homily must have been preached after the celebration of the Nativity had been established in the region of Cappadocia and therefore later in Amphilochius' episcopacy. Given the exalted nature of the language used in this encomium, however, it is possible that this homily was preached only a short time (as little as a year or two) after this feast had been established in the region.

[10] There is a problem with the text here. Perhaps Amphilochius says "priest-shepherds."

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men), I would ask you[11] the manner of coming. For the prophecy probably astounded them exceedingly and almost caused them to be out of their mind with a great amount of fear. For they could not know that the immortal God will have come to most earthly humans, and the Untouchable One to the touchable ones,[12] the Unobservable to the visible ones. For how have they thought that God would come, and how (God)[13] be seen? To some it seemed at first that God was seen by Abraham through angels, or again as God was seen by Moses through the fire in the bush, or in the manner in which God was seen by Isaiah through the Seraphim, or by Ezekiel through the Cherubim. For so all have testified that they have seen God in various ways. So then which of these ways in worthy for the contemplation of God? Clearly not one!

2. But whence are we most strongly convinced of this? From another statement of the prophet saying, "After these things he was seen on earth and lived among humans."[14] For those (former occurrences) were sure signs of a vision and not co-dwelling, these are announcements of co-dwelling and not a vision. How then does he say, "The Lord Himself will have come and will save us?"[15] Will you tell us, O blessed one, how the Formless One is formed, how the Immovable One exchanges places from the heavenly throne to earth? And this divine man meeting them will say: You have heard the manner

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[11] I.e., Isaiah.
[12] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp*, 3.2.
[13] There are places in Greek where the subject is understood or where a masculine pronoun will be used to express God (θεὸς in Greek in grammatically masculine, but gender in grammar is not limited by sexual gender, as anyone who has studied a number of languages will realize.) I have tried to be as sensitive whenever possible to the insights of gender inclusive language, supplying in these places in parentheses (God). Of course, there is no gender in the Trinity before the Incarnation.
[14] Bar 3.38.
[15] Is 63.9.

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of coming through other prophecies; why do you busy yourselves exceedingly about the prophecy here? Or did what was said escape your notice that "A virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is interpreted *God with us*."[16] Or have you not heard what is written that "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, whose government is upon his shoulder, and his name will be called messenger of great counsel, wonderful counselor, mighty God, ruler, prince of peace, father of the age to come?"[17] From these words you have discovered the manner of coming. For the incorruptible Virgin will bear bodily the incorruptible Light, for it is necessary that the wholly august Word of God condescend as far as flesh to us, in order that (the Word) might renew through the incarnation those who had been created by the Incorporeal Divinity,[18] when they had been made old through sin, and might furnish them again incorruptible through the likeness to corruption.

3. We also shall tell these things, from the prophet who spoke them. O child more ancient than the heavens! O thrice blessed son, who has come bearing his own government upon his shoulder and not seeking to recover it from another! For it is natural for the Word to rule all things as Son; and it is not foreign (for the Word) as it is for a creature. "For the government," (Isaiah) says, "(is) upon his shoulders."[19] O child given a

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[16] Is 7.14; Mt 1.23.
[17] Is 9.5. Amphilochius' reading is in accordance with manuscripts Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus (Suppletor), Lucian, *Catena in XVI prophetas*, and marked in Origen as a reading in accordance with the Hebrew.
[18] St. Athanasius says that only the Word of God could restore humanity to the image from which we had fallen. "Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone ... to bring again the corruptible to incorruption.... For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world." St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press), p.33.
[19] Is 9.5.

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great name! For he says, "He is named messenger of great counsel and mighty God." O almighty authority! For he is "wonderful counselor and prince of peace." So then how are we to glorify the feast today? How are we to bless the present most high festival? For who will search out the immortal wealth of this day? With what sort of high sounding and most lofty words are we to proclaim this mystery of incorruptibility, praised by all and adorned by trophies? O day, worthy of innumerable hymns, - on which the Star from Jacob has risen for us, and the Heavenly man who has appeared from Israel, and the Mighty God[20] has sojourned among us, and the Sun of righteousness[21] has overshadowed us, and the treasury of divine virtues has been opened, and the plant of eternal life has budded forth for humans, and the Dayspring from on high has dawned[22] and the Master of heavenly and earthly things has come from virginal womb into a corruptible world for redemption of the universe. For today has been born to us a Savior,[23] who is Christ the Lord, who is the Light of the nations and the salvation of the house of Israel. O marvel! The One who is not circumscribed by the heavens was lying out at night in a manger as a babe, and the One who constituted all things by a little word was warmed by the bent arms of a woman, and the One who freely gave being to all the transcendent powers suckled milk from the pure breasts of the Holy Virgin. "For it came to pass," it says, as the Gospel witnesses, "while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she

[20] Is 9.5.
[21] Mal 3.20.
[22] Zch 6.12.
[23] Is 42.6; Lk 2.43.

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gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."[24]

4. What is this new and strange mystical teaching?[25] What good will of Divine providence, almighty and rendering corruptible?[26] What mighty and all-wise strategem against the devil? The universe has been freed by a Virgin, which had fallen under sin through one before. Through virginal childbearing, so many and so great bands of invisible demons have been cast into Tartarus. The Master has become conformed to the servants, in order that the servants might become conformed again to God.[27] O Bethlehem, city hallowed and made an inheritor with humanity! O cave, cave, sharing with the Cherubim and equally honored with the Seraphim! For the one who, as God, is eternally carried by those thrones, now lies in you in bodily form. O Mary, Mary, having gotten the maker of all things as a first-born! O human nature, which gave bodily substance to the everlasting Word of God and has been preferred to the heavenly and intelligible powers in this respect. For Christ did not deign to be formed in the shapes of the archangels, nor yet in the immutable images of the principalities, powers and authorities,[28] but he deigned to be formed like you (human nature) which had sunk to mutability and become like the irrational animals. For those who are well have no need of

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[24] Lk 2.6-7.
[25] Or "mystagogy," which means initiation into the mysteries. In the early Church mystagogy took the form of instruction about and initiation into Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist. See *St. Cyril of Jerusalem Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, trans. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1986). Here in Amphilochius' homily it refers to the teaching about the mystery of the Nativity.
[26] I.e. The Word of God is united to corruptible flesh.
[27] Ro 8.29.
[28] This may be an allusion to Ephesians 6.12. Traditionally these were interpreted to be angelic ranks. See "The Celestial Hierarchy," *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid & Paul Rorem The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp.166-169.

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a physician,[29] but (the nature) which has been possessed by much sickness has met with a great physician, of such a kind that it is more blessed in regards to health than (simply) the disease having fled. But where now is the hostile and audacious, the avenging and all-abominable serpent, who promised to raise his own throne up to the heights?

5. Therefore, brethren, sharing in a "blessed heavenly call,"[30] we who have been called to adoption by God and to filial relationship, ought to give thanks to the One who has called us, and to present ourselves worthy of the One who grants filial relationship to us, and to be worthy as sons[31] of the One who bestows on us the sonship and has received us to adoption. Accordingly, let us serve Him willingly out of love, being ready for the accomplishment of all righteousness, adorned with chastity, seeking after poverty,[32] devoted[33] to the words of God, dedicated to holy prayers and hymns of God, transforming ourselves from this age, forgetting earthly and mortal desires, conquering evil by good,[34] not returning evil for evil,[35] not thinking to ourselves that we live on the earth, but have citizenship in heaven,[36] associate with the angels, and stand next to the throne of the heavenly kingdom.[37] These are the lessons of the Holy Apostles, - in them Christ has arranged for us the blessed and eternal covenant. Let the world be astonished at your virtue; let the Jews be ashamed beholding the new and chosen people with what spiritual

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[29] Lk 5.31.
[30] He 3.1.
[31] We, whether male or female, are granted by adoption that relationship which the Son has naturally with the Father.
[32] Or more literally, "not having any possessions."
[33] See Ac 1.14.
[34] Ro 12.21.
[35] Ro 12.17.
[36] Php 3.20. This idea of having one's citizenship in heaven, and being here on earth as sojourners or exiles is thoroughly developed in the writings of the Apostolic fathers.
[37] See Lk 22.29.

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beauty she has been adorned, with what brilliancy she illumines the universe. For on account of this, (God) allowed us to be mingled with the nations in order that we might shine forth as "lights in the world,"[38] in order that we might be a seed of salvation, beheld for the conversion by all with whom we are close and encounter. See that no one of the nations blasphemes God on account of you, but let the One who called, sanctified and saved be praised because of us. Let the violent and presumptuous wonder at our mildness and moderation; let the reviler who is praised in return be made ashamed. Let the one who is contentious about property and wishes to go to court find us untroubled about money, not considering that we have earthly possessions, but holding fast to the heavenly. Let the one who allows us to approach worldly pleasures through friendly entreaty find us solemn, immovable, yearning after self-control,[39] not being enticed by pleasure, in order that they may know how greatly the indwelling of the Holy Spirit prevails, mortifying the natural order of the flesh.[40] Let one inclined to perjury find us refusing even to swear, but afraid to offer the name of God in reference to matters low and earthly. For thus we all will be teachers of those who meet with us in any affair whatsoever. And living thus we will become truly a holy leaven, and through us the universe will be leavened unto salvation, and much fruit will be found from us, stored up for the Lord, and God will be glorified by us according to the Lord who says, "In this the Father has been glorified, that you may bear much fruit and become my disciples." (Jn

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[38] Php 2.15.

[39] Σωφροσύνη can also be translated sobriety, chastity or temperance.

[40] We can see from the rest of this homily that Amphilochius does not have a negative view of flesh *per se*. In context, the phrase "φύσιν σαρκὸς ἐκνεκρώσαντος" means putting to death every tendency of the flesh to act independently from God.

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15.8) And glorified by us, the Lord will glorify us with eternal glory, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom is the glory unto the ages of ages.

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Conclusions

The Nativity homilies of this study were all delivered within the first ten to fifteen years from the introduction of December 25 as a separate Nativity celebration. Gregory of Nazianzus' *For God's Appearing*, preached on December 25, 380, most likely marked the first or second celebration of the Nativity in Constantinople. Gregory of Nyssa's oration was probably preached in 386, and John Chrysostom's in 387. Probably the last of these four to be delivered was Amphilochius of Iconium's, which dates to when the feast was more established, from the late 380's to possibly as late as 394.

These orations illustrate that the Church fathers of the fourth century were willing to use the rhetoric they had studied outside the Church to serve the Church. The orations of the two Gregory's and of Amphilochius all belong to the genre panegyrical sermon, or encomium. Amphilochius' is the most ornate and exhibits an Asiatic style in its embellishment. Gregory of Nyssa's panegyric is complex in that it contains many subsections which exhibit various approaches to delve into the meaning of the feast: typology, allegory, apocryphal narration, and *ekphrasis*. Gregory of Nazianzus' oration is a panegyric, but challenges the anomoian and semi-Arian heretics in a lengthy section that borders on diatribe. Chrysostom's oration is the only in the collection that is not a panegyrical sermon, but an apology for the celebration of the Nativity on December 25.

Varied as to their rhetorical approaches, so also these orations vary in their theological themes. Gregory of Nazianzus' oration was delivered in an atmosphere of battle with the remaining Arianizing Christians in Constantinople, and so he focuses especially on theological themes also present in his *Theological Orations*—the necessity

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of a life of purification for theology and the full divinity of the Word and Spirit. While Gregory of Nyssa does engage in some polemics against those who denied the full divinity of the Word, his oration focuses on the more mystical and cosmic aspects of the incarnation. He recounts history from the perspective of the increase of darkness (evil) up until the time of the incarnation, and likens the present situation after the incarnation to that in which a snake's head has been destroyed, killing the snake, but in which there may be some remaining movement in the coils, the present persisting evils. Gregory's oration presents Tabernacles as a type for the resurrection, echoing themes found in Gregory's dialogue with Macrina, describing a cosmic worship of the Creator that is restored by the incarnation. In addition, Gregory of Nyssa concludes his oration with a strong connection between the incarnation and Pascha. Although Amphilochius of Iconium's oration is the most embellished and perhaps the least theologically substantial of all, it nevertheless asserts that the result of the incarnation is that humanity may now be conformed again to the image of God, and exhorts the audience to respond to the gifts God has given them in their manner of life, to live as citizens of heaven. John Chrysostom's apologetic homily demonstrates an Antiochene approach to theology in his concern for showing the historical accuracy of the day. He also engages in a polemic against Manicheans and pagans who disparage the doctrine of the incarnation, defending against those who criticize the teaching on the grounds that it is shameful for God to dwell in a body. Chrysostom's response is couched in a classic Antiochene Christological formulation: God prepares a temple for himself, pure and holy.

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A closer look at these homilies together has yielded a few liturgical insights. It is quite remarkable that none except Chrysostom's are interested in defending or investigating the origin of the celebration newly introduced to the region. Even Gregory of Nazianzus' oration, which may mark the first celebration of the Nativity on December 25 in Constantinople, did not focus on the novelty. His explanation of the names for the feast, Nativity and Theophany, are not necessarily an introduction to the feast, but more general instruction of the type that may be found in orations on feasts long established. Gregory of Nyssa, while using the Winter Solstice as a providential occurrence to show that darkness is now on the decrease, and that God as a physician awaited the full manifestation of evil before treating it, does not try to justify the feast's celebration on December 25 either. Chrysostom's homily was delivered less than ten years after the first celebration of the feast in Antioch; and given the close connection between Antioch and Constantinople, there may be an indication that Antioch had received the celebration from Constantinople. This oration is unique in this study in that it engages in a defense of the date, and Chrysostom does so on historical grounds, basing his argument on the feast's rapid spread, archives that Chrysostom says were still kept in Rome of the census described in Luke, and on calculations based on the time of Elizabeth's conception, established from Scripture.

These orations utilize many references from Scripture referring to Christ as light, such as "the Sun of righteousness,"[1] "the Dayspring from on high,"[2] and "the light of the

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[1] Cf. Mal 3.20, LXX.
[2] Cf. Zch 6.12, LXX.

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nations."[3] The use of light imagery, however, does not indicate that these fathers were competing with pagan worship of the sun, but that they were using the image of light that occurs already in the Scriptures about the Messiah. The use of light imagery in these orations also resonates with the natural lengthening of daylight that begins on December 25. While Chrysostom's oration does touch upon criticism of sun worship, his censure is rather low key, found together with polemic against other forms of paganism and against the Manicheans, and is not a major component of his oration.

A remarkable similarity in these sermons is that three of them, the ones by Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Amphilochius—the Cappadocians—all use Isaiah 9.5: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." The presence of this passage in the orations by these three may indicate that it was part of the Nativity celebration in Cappadocia.

Furthermore we witness the emerging festal cycle of the Church in these orations, and the use of the term "mystery" to describe the feasts themselves. The word "mystery," which initially had been associated primarily to Christ's life, first began to be applied it to the sacramental life of the Church. In these homilies we can see a further progression from applying the term to the sacraments of the Church, to the festal cycle itself. Gregory of Nazianzus still primarily connects the term with events in Christ's life, only secondarily associating these mysteries with the feast. Gregory of Nyssa and Amphilochius of Iconium, however, call the feast day of the Nativity a mystery. Gregory of Nyssa argues that the Nativity is a mystery just as worthy to be celebrated as the

[3] Cf. Is 42.6.

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mystery of Pascha. Amphilochius calls the Nativity one of the "mysteries" of the Church, and in fact the foundation of the mysteries of the Church.

These orations connect the liturgical celebration of the Nativity, and the theological content of the incarnation, with their ethical implications. Gregory of Nazianzus teaches that the proper manner of celebrating the Nativity is not in excess of food, drink or luxury, but rather in celebrating what God has done for humanity. He says that living in excess takes the necessities away from other persons, who are creatures of God just as we are. Gregory of Nyssa presents the ethical dimension of worship, saying that all of creation is a sort of Temple to God, and that with the entrance of sin, the harmonious concelebration of all creatures was interrupted. In his cosmic view of things, the incarnation makes possible the restoration of humanity to the shared concord of all creation as it praises the Master. Chrysostom's homily shows the connection between liturgical worship and ethics even more clearly, exhorting the people to approach the reception of the Eucharist properly, not in an aggressive competitive manner. Chrysostom expected that the reconciliation with God and one another that is integral to receiving Communion should be manifested in the lives of the faithful. Amphilochius of Iconium exhorts the people to live in a way worthy of the gifts of adoption and fellowship, which god had bestowed upon them by the incarnation. In an exhortation to live "in the world," but not "of the world," he says, "Let us . . . not (think) to ourselves that we live on the earth, but have citizenship in heaven."[4]

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[4] AIO 1.141-142.

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It has been proposed that one of the main reasons for Eastern Christendom's reception of a separate Nativity celebration in the fourth century was that such a feast served a rhetorical function in the battle against Arianism. The polemics in Gregory of Nazianzus' and Gregory of Nyssa's orations serve to support this idea. The absence of such polemics in Chrysostom's and Amphilochius' orations may be attributed to the fact that they were preached somewhat later, when the battle against various Arianizing groups had been won. These orations, whether preached in an atmosphere of polemics or not, do stress the necessity of a correct doctrine of the incarnation for humanity's restoration to God and divinization. As Gregory of Nazianzus says, "(The "I AM") is poor in my flesh that I might be rich in his divinity."[5]

[5] SC 358:38.13.31-32.

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