

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

What we observe today begins the second greatest mystery of the Christian faith: God comes to earth and dwells with man.

Religions around the world are filled with what are called theophanies—the appearing or manifestation of their god or gods on earth to man. These gods appeared to someone to instruct them, to give them some bit of their holy writings, or to interact with them in some other way. In Greek mythology, these theophanies often resulted in the birth of demigods—half divine, half human creatures, and these were not always human in appearance. Perhaps the most notable among these demigods is Hercules—son of the lord of Olympus, Zeus, and his human consort, Alcmena.

When YHWH appears to man, when He comes and dwells with man, His is no theophany like those of ancient, false lore. Some may wish to draw connections between the myth of Hercules and what we heard in tonight's text, as if somehow part of what was read tonight was borrowed from that myth. But it is not so; the Son born to Mary is no demigod hero, but He is the very Son of God and YHWH Himself, the Creator and Savior of the world. He is Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us, the second person of the Holy Trinity enfleshed and dwelling with man—He **is** YHWH's theophany!

The angel Gabriel visited a lowly Maiden from Nazareth, and announced to her the theophany of the only true God:

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

This is the second greatest mystery of the Christian faith, second only to that greatest of mysteries, the Holy Trinity—that in Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (cf. Colossians 2:9) Jesus is no demigod, but is fully God and fully man, just as incomprehensible as the Athanasian Creed has you confess of the Trinity.

Mary replied, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word," and with those words she started down the road that would take her from ordinary maiden betrothed to a Nazarene carpenter to being the Mother of God. This title says more about her Son than it does about her. What grows in her womb is her Savior, the Son of God, Himself. She is no Alcmena, simply a false god's consort, but *Theotokos*, the bearer of God Himself! In her womb, He takes on human flesh and blood, becomes one with man, yet loses nothing of His divinity. He would need to be fully both to accomplish to task for which He was sent. What level of understanding Mary may have had regarding this visit we cannot say; but we know this for sure: she knew that in her womb was growing her Savior. "The Holy spirit will come upon you...that the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God," and she will give him the name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. (cf. Matthew 1:21)

Growing in Mary's womb is God in the flesh. He is God, do not doubt it, nor be deceived to think or believe otherwise. Veiled in flesh, He is the Godhead yet unseen. Though you could have seen the result of the incarnation—you would have seen a pregnant Mary—the mystery of the incarnation is that God is veiled in flesh, then that flesh of God is veiled in flesh. God hides the person of His Son in flesh, and hides His Son's flesh, these first nine months, in the flesh of His mother. Still, when Jesus is born, the Godhead is still veiled in flesh—unseen by human eyes, as it were.

This was all part of the plan and purpose of God, in order to procure your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

- Jesus was fully man in order, as a man, to be placed under the law: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5) Now, also being fully divine and under the law, Jesus was perfectly able to keep it. Also, having perfectly kept the law, being fully human, He was able to die and shed His blood as a propitiation for sin—to make recompense for sin.
- Jesus was fully divine in order that His fulfilling of the law might be perfect. If He were just another man, like you, then He would not have been able to keep the law perfectly; but as God, He did. Furthermore, His divine nature made it so that His life and death would be a sufficient ransom for all people, and so that by it He could overcome death and the devil by way of rising again from the dead.

What’s more, being fully man and fully God, Jesus is able to give of Himself to you and for you. And so, you come here and hear Him proclaimed to you—Jesus Christ crucified—and you receive Him through your ears. You hear the words of Holy Absolution and for Jesus’ sake, they give you exactly what they proclaim, the forgiveness of your sins. This confirms and reiterates what was received by you as Jesus was applied to you in the waters of Holy Baptism, and you were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. And most mysteriously, the Word of God is said over a piece of bread and some wine and they are for you the very body and blood of this God-man, Jesus Christ.

Were Jesus only partly human and partly divine or only human or only divine, He would not have been able to accomplish any of this for you. Now, we must tread carefully here, because with God all things are possible. (cf. Matthew 19:26) However, bear in mind that God set in motion the way He operates when He gave the law and made it possible to achieve remission only by the shedding of blood. (cf. Hebrews 9:22) Jesus had to be fully human and fully God for salvation by His blood for you to work.

With fallen man, all of this is impossible. Go ahead, dear hearers, try to keep the law; see how long you last. You won’t get very far; you won’t last very long. In no time, your Old Man will rear his ugly head, and you will sin—you will transgress the law of God. So, unlike this Jesus, you are not able to keep the law perfectly—on the contrary, you are perfectly incapable. I suppose you could shed your blood and give your life for your sins, but that would leave you dead and hopeless and in hell receiving the just punishment for your sins—the full wrath of God that you deserve. And your death and punishment would be only for you, not for the whole world.

With you, salvation is impossible. You have no power to save yourself. You have no power to overthrow the devil and all the powers of hell. Therefore, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem you, because only He has the power to conquer the devil and hell and to save you. God was conceived and born of a lowly maiden from Nazareth. He assumed flesh and blood like yours, yet was fully divine. He lived a life, as you would have lived, except that He was perfect and sinless. He was born and lived as you were supposed to be, as your father Adam was supposed to be—the New Adam. For you, Jesus fulfilled the law. For you, Jesus shed His holy, precious blood. For you, Jesus died innocently, but having taken all of your sin into His perfect flesh. He shed His blood as the propitiation for the world, and not for the world only, but for you. (cf. 1 John 2:2)

Crucified and buried, Jesus rose again on the third day. In His flesh, He burst forth from the grave, sanctifying the graves of His people, and giving to them a resurrection like His, so that, on the Last Day, when Jesus returns in His flesh, the dead will rise, and those who have received Him as you have, dear Baptized, will rise to life eternal with Him.

This mystery and all that was accomplished by the God-man Jesus Christ is what prompted St.

John Chrysostom to write, "Let us learn to know which nature it is to which the Father said, 'Share My seat.' It is that nature to which it has been said, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'" God cursed humanity shortly after the beginning, but in Christ, our nature is exalted. (cf. Philippians 2:5-11) Dear Baptized, God became man and the result is that your flesh will be exalted when Jesus returns to claim His Bride the Church to Himself. As St. John wrote,

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:1-3, emphasis mine)

Though God says to you, "Dust you are, and to dust you shall return," (Genesis 3:19b) now that you are in Jesus Christ, when He returns, He will say to you, "Share My seat."

So, like Chrysostom, gaze with amazement at the mystery that is the enfleshed God. Jesus is no mere man; He is fully man. Jesus is no demigod; He is fully god. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to redeem God's people, even as His name declares: Jesus, YHWH saves. Rejoice that God had chosen Mary to be *Theotokos*—the Bearer of God—because in her womb is conceived of the Holy Ghost the Savior of the world—your Savior! He is come and shed His holy blood, and you are covered in His precious blood, forgiving you for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.