

- 1] In our creation God made us for Himself without our help. But after our fall from grace, when it comes to our salvation, he does not work alone; He calls us to synergy, to cooperation with the divine will.
- 2] We are not redeemed, we are not transfigured, we are not sanctified as if by magic; by instant divine fiat. We are not changed into the New Adam, like the proverbial fairy tale frog, transformed merely by the kiss of the princess.
- 3] The Word of God becomes flesh, becoming one of us, in order to work in us. It is through scriptures, written by human hands, that we are admonished, taught, guided and immersed in the story of our salvation. It was through the Law of Moses that He taught His old people to walk in the ways of God. It was through prophets that He gave voice to what he expected of the people and taught them to look for His coming among us. Why, even pagan astrologers are taught by the conjunction of heavenly bodies, oblivious in their orbits, to search for the One who can call all the stars by their names!
- 4] And what greater synergy, what more profound openness and collaboration with God do we know than Christ's incarnation, that came about through the consent of the Theotokos?
- 5] Let us cast our minds back nine months to the feast of the Annunciation. A hymn sung at Compline on the feast runs: 'The manner of His emptying is unknown, the fashion of His conceiving is ineffable. An angel ministers at the wonder; a virgin womb receives the Son. The Holy Spirit is sent down; the Father on high gives His consent; and so the covenant is brought to pass by common counsel.'
- 6] Not only do the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity share in a common purpose, as we would expect, but there is common counsel, a common mind and common action shared with angels and mankind.

7] Even the pagan emperor, Augustus, is unwittingly engaged to work the mind of God when he appointed Quirinius as hegemon, or procurator, over Syria. He was not the governor of Judea, but was put in charge of a local census to replace the incompetent Saturninus. So it was that the righteous Joseph, guardian of the Christ and His Holy Mother, found himself in Bethlehem for this nativity.

8] God does not need us in order to save us, but that is how He works. There are those who say we have only to believe, for the work is all God's; His alone. Are they fearful that we are taking from God's glory if there is something that we must do in order to inherit eternal life? That is not our experience of God, for He is content to engage us in our own salvation; how else could we be saved, if we are not interested, or indifferent or passive? For our repentance, our ascetic struggle, our charity for all: these are the ways that He has set down for us to walk in, with Him going on before.

9] The truth is, we were created to share the glory of God. None of this is strange to the Orthodox, for our bishops, like the fathers, work in council together; the doctrine of the Faith is received in common, as acknowledged by the people; union in the mind of Christ is the inner life of the Orthodox Church. We need not be surprised that the story of our salvation is found through the lives of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, ascetics, saints and angels, and all the people of God.

10] The Whole of our Theology is concerned with this: that we come to Theosis, to know God in us, by participation in the divine energies. We are saved not just by God's gracious action or by our intellect recognising Truth, but by becoming divine through our communion and sharing in the holy things. It was, of course, God's initiative, for yes, Christ-God first became man, as indeed the fathers taught, but in order that we might become God, working out our salvation in fear and trembling.

11] The body and blood of Christ-God that we receive into ourselves today in the Holy Gifts, is the same glorified flesh that He took from the Virgin. In her conception she became the New Eve, and as with

Adam, so with Christ: the Theotokos is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. And in a mystery we who partake become one and the same flesh with Him: our body becomes Bethlehem and our heart the manger where He is laid. So that we are to become a Theophany, where God is revealed in us to the world.

Christ is born, glorify Him!