

Luke 1:26–38

From Catena Aurea:

26. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

27. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

BASIL. (in Esai. 6.) The heavenly spirits visit us, not as it seems fit to them, but as the occasion conduces to our advantage, for they are ever looking upon the glory and fulness of the Divine Wisdom; hence it follows, The angel Gabriel was sent.

GLOSS. (interlin.) But the place is also added whither he is sent, as it follows, To a city, Nazareth. For it was told that He would come a Nazarite, (i. e. the holy of the holy.)

AUGUSTINE. (de san. Virg. cap. vi.) To a virgin, for Christ could be born from virginity alone, seeing He could not have an equal in His birth. It was necessary for our Head by this mighty miracle to be born according to the flesh of a virgin, that He might signify that his members were to be born in the spirit of a virgin Church.

CHRYSOSTOM. (sup. Mat. Hom. 4.) The angel announces the birth to the virgin not after the conception, lest she should be thereby too much troubled, but before the conception he addresses her, not in a dream, but standing by her in visible shape. For as great indeed were the tidings she receives, she needed before the issue of the event an extraordinary visible manifestation.

AMBROSE. Scripture has rightly mentioned that she was espoused, as well as a virgin, a virgin, that she might appear free from all connexion with man; espoused, that she might not be branded with the disgrace of sullied virginity, whose swelling womb seemed to bear evident marks of her corruption. But the Lord had rather that men should cast a doubt upon His birth than upon His mother's purity. He knew how tender is a virgin's modesty, and how easily assailed the reputation of her chastity, nor did He think the credit of His birth was to be built up by His mother's wrongs. It follows therefore, that the holy Mary's virginity was of as untainted purity as it was also of unblemished reputation. Nor ought there, by an erroneous opinion, to be left the shadow of an excuse to living virgins, that the mother of our Lord even

seemed to be evil spoken of. But what could be imputed to the Jews, or to Herod, if they should seem to have persecuted an adulterous offspring? And how could He Himself say, I came not to abolish the law, but to fulfil it, (Matt. 5:18.) if He should seem to have had his beginning from a violation of the law, for the issue of an unmarried person is condemned by the law? (Deut. 23:17.) Not to add that also greater credit is given to the words of Mary, and the cause of falsehood removed? For it might seem that unmarried becoming pregnant, she had wished to shade her guilt by a lie; but an espoused person has no reason for lying, since to women child-birth is the reward of wedlock, the grace of the marriage bed. Again, the virginity of Mary was meant to baffle the prince of the world, who, when he perceived her espoused to a man, could cast no suspicion on her offspring.

ORIGEN. For if she had had no husband, soon would the thought have stolen into the Devil's mind, how she who had known no man could be pregnant. It was right that the conception should be Divine, something more exalted than human nature.

AMBROSE. But still more has it baffled the princes of the world, for the malice of devils soon detects even hidden things, while they who are occupied in worldly vanities, can not know the things of God. But moreover, a more powerful witness of her purity is adduced, her husband, who might both have been indignant at the injury, and revenged the dishonour, if he also had not acknowledged the mystery; of whom it is added, Whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

1:28–29

28. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

29. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

AMBROSE. Mark the virgin by her manner of life. Alone in an inner chamber, unseen by the eyes of men, discovered only by an angel; as it is said, And the angel came in unto her. That she might not be dishonoured by any ignoble address, she is saluted by an angel.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Diem Nat. Orat. in Christi.) Far different then to the news formerly addressed to the woman, is the announcement now made to the Virgin. In the former, the cause of sin was punished by the pains of childbirth; in the latter, through gladness, sorrow is driven away. Hence the angel not unaptly proclaims joy to the Virgin, saying, Hail.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer) But that she was judged worthy of the nuptials is attested by his saying, Full of grace. For it is signified as a kind of token or marriage gift of the bridegroom, that she was fruitful in graces. For of the things which he mentions, the one appertains to the bride, the other to the bridegroom.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer) But this is the sum of the whole message. The Word of God, as the Bridegroom, effecting an incomprehensible union, Himself, as it were, the same both planting, and being planted, hath moulded the whole nature of man into Himself. But comes last the most perfect and comprehensive salutation; Blessed art thou among women. i. e. Alone, far before all other women; that women also should be blessed in thee, as men are in thy Son; but rather both in both. For as by one man and one woman came at once both sin and sorrow, so now also by one woman and one man hath both blessing and joy been restored, and poured forth upon all.

AMBROSE. But mark the Virgin by her bashfulness, for she was afraid, as it follows; And when she heard, she was troubled, It is the habit of virgins to tremble, and to be ever afraid at the presence of man, and to be shy when he addresses her. Learn, O virgin, to avoid light talking. Mary feared even the salutation of an angel.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (sup.) But as she might be accustomed to these visions, the Evangelist ascribes her agitation not to the vision, but to the things told her, saying, she was troubled at his words. Now observe both the modesty and wisdom of the Virgin; the soul, and at the same time the voice. When she heard the joyful words, she pondered them in her mind, and neither openly resisted through unbelief, nor forthwith lightly complied; avoiding equally the inconstancy of Eve, and the insensibility of Zacharias. Hence it is said, And she cast in her mind what manner of salutation this was, it is not said conception, for as yet she knew not the vastness of the mystery. But the salutation, was there aught of passion in it as from a man to a virgin? or was it not of God, seeing that he makes mention of God, saying, The Lord is with thee.

AMBROSE. She wondered also at the new form of blessing, unheard of before, reserved for Mary alone.

ORIGEN. For if Mary had known that similar words had been addressed to others, such a salutation would never have appeared to her so strange and alarming.

1:30–33

30. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

When the angel saw that she was troubled at this unusual salutation, calling her by her name as if she was well known to him, he tells her she must not fear, as it follows; And the angel said, Fear not, Mary.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Photius.) As if he said, I came not to deceive you, nay rather to bring down deliverance from deception; I came not to rob you of your inviolable virginity, but to open a dwelling-place for the Author and Guardian of thy purity; I am not a servant of the Devil, but the ambassador of Him that destroyeth the Devil. I am come to form a marriage treaty, not to devise plots. So far then was he from allowing her to be harassed by distracting thoughts, lest he should be counted a servant unfaithful to his trust.

CHRYSOSTOM. But he who earns favour in the sight of God has nothing to fear. Hence it follows, For thou hast found favour before God. But how shall any one find it, except through the means of his humility. For God giveth grace to the humble. (James 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5.)

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (ubi sup.) For the Virgin found favour with God, in that decking her own soul in the bright robes of chastity, she prepared a dwelling-place pleasing to God. Not only did she retain her virginity inviolate, but her conscience also she kept from stain. As many had found favour before Mary, he goes on to state what was peculiar to her. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) By the word behold, he denotes rapidity and actual presence, implying that with the utterance of the word the conception is accomplished.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Sev. Antiochenus.) Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, that he might shew that our Lord from the very Virgin's womb, and of our substance, took our flesh upon Him. For the Divine Word came to purify man's nature and birth, and the first elements of our generation. And so without sin and human seed, passing through every stage as we do, He is conceived in the flesh, and carried in the womb for the space of nine months.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) But since it happens also that to the spiritual mind is given in an especial manner to conceive the Divine Spirit, and bring forth the Spirit of salvation, as says the Prophet; therefore he added, And thou shalt bring forth a Son. (Is. 26:18.)

AMBROSE. But all are not as Mary, that when they conceive the word of the Holy Spirit, they bring forth; for some put forth the word prematurely, others have Christ in the womb, but not yet formed.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Orat. in Diem Nat.) While the expectation of child-birth strikes a woman with terror, the sweet mention of her offspring calms her, as it is added, And thou shalt call his name Jesus. The coming of the Saviour is the banishing of all fear.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geom. sup.) And he says, Thou shalt call, not His father shall call, for He is without a father as regards His lower birth, as He is without a mother in respect of the higher.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. (de fide ad Theod.) But this name was given anew to the Word in adaptation to His nativity in the flesh; as that prophecy saith, Thou shalt be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord hath named. (Is. 62:2.)

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (sup.) But as this name was common to Him with the successor of Moses, the angel therefore implying that He should not be after Joshua's likeness, adds, He shall be great. (Josh. 1.)

AMBROSE. It was said also of John, that he shall be great, but of him indeed as of a great man, of Christ, as of the great God. For abundantly is poured forth the power of God; widely the greatness of the heavenly substance extended, neither confined by place, nor grasped by thought; neither determined by calculation, nor altered by age.

ORIGEN. See then the greatness of the Saviour, how it is diffused over the whole world. Go up to heaven, see there how it has filled the heavenly places; carry thy thoughts down to the deep, behold, there too He has descended. If thou seest this, then, in like manner, beholdest thou fulfilled in very deed, He shall be great.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Photius.) The assumption of our flesh does not diminish ought from the loftiness of the Deity, but rather exalts the lowness of man's nature. Hence it follows, And he shall be called the Son of the Highest. Not, Thou shalt give Him the name, but He Himself shall be called. By whom, but His Father of like substance with Himself? For no one hath known the Son but the Father. (Matt. 11:27.) But He in Whom exists the infallible knowledge of His Son, is the true interpreter as to the name which should be

given Him, when He says, This is my beloved Son; (Matt. 17:5.) for such indeed from everlasting He is, though His name was not revealed till now; therefore he says, He shall be called, not shall be made or begotten. For before the worlds He was of like substance with the Father. Him therefore thou shalt conceive; His mother thou shalt become; Him shall thy virgin shrine enclose, Whom the heavens were not able to contain.

CHRYSOSTOM. (non occ.) But since it seems shocking or unworthy to some men that God should inhabit a body, is the Sun, I would ask, the heat whereof is felt by each body that receives its rays, at all sullied as to its natural purity? Much more then does the Sun of Righteousness, in taking upon Himself a most pure body from the Virgin's womb, escape not only defilement, but even shew forth His own mother in greater holiness.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Severus Antiochenus.) And to make the Virgin mindful of the prophets, he adds, And the Lord God shall give unto him the seat of David, that she might know clearly, that He Who is to be born of her is that very Christ, Whom the prophets promised should be born of the seed of David.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. (contra Julian lib. viii.) Not however from Joseph proceeded the most pure descent of Christ. For from one and the same line of connexion had sprung both Joseph and the Virgin, and from this the only-begotten had taken the form of man.

BASIL. (Epist. 236. ad Amphil.) Our Lord sat not on the earthly throne of David, the Jewish kingdom having been transferred to Herod. The seat of David is that on which our Lord reestablished His spiritual kingdom which should never be destroyed. Hence it follows, And he shall reign over the house of Jacob.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. vii. in Matt.) Now He assigns to the present house of Jacob all those who were of the number of the Jews that believed on Him. For as Paul says, They are not all Israel which are of Israel, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) But to reign for ever is of none save God alone; and hence though because of the incarnation Christ is said to receive the seat of David, yet as being Himself God He is acknowledged to be the eternal King. It follows, And, his kingdom shall have no end, not in that He is God, but in that He is man also. Now indeed He has the kingdom of many nations, but finally he shall reign over all, when all things shall be put under Him. (1 Cor. 15:25.)

34. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

35. And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

AMBROSE. It was Mary's part neither to refuse belief in the Angel, nor too hastily take unto herself the divine message. How subdued her answer is, compared with the words of the Priest. Then said Mary to the Angel, How shall this be? She says, How shall this be? He answers, Whereby shall I know this? He refuses to believe that which he says he does not know, and seeks as it were still further authority for belief. She avows herself willing to do that which she doubts not will be done, but how, she is anxious to know. Mary had read, Behold, she shall conceive and bear a son. (Is. 7:14.) She believed therefore that it should be, but how it was to take place she had never read, for even to so great a prophet this had not been revealed. So great a mystery was not to be divulged by the mouth of man, but of an Angel.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Orat. in Diem Nat. Christi.) Hear the chaste words of the Virgin. The Angel tells her she shall bear a son, but she rests upon her virginity, deeming her inviolability a more precious thing than the Angel's declaration. Hence she says, Seeing that I know not a man.

BASIL. (235. Ep. Amph.) Knowledge is spoken of in various ways. The wisdom of our Creator is called knowledge, and an acquaintance with His mighty works, the keeping also of His commandments, and the constant drawing near to Him; and besides these the marriage union is called knowledge, as it is here.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (sup.) These words of Mary are a token of what she was pondering in the secrets of her heart; for if for the sake of the marriage union she had wished to be espoused to Joseph, why was she seized with astonishment when the conception was made known unto her? seeing in truth she might herself be expecting at the time to become a mother according to the law of nature. But because it was meet that her body being presented to God as an holy offering-should be kept inviolate, therefore she says, Seeing that I know not a man. As if she said, Notwithstanding that thou who speakest art an Angel, yet that I should know a man is plainly an impossible thing. How then can I be a mother, having no husband? For Joseph I have acknowledged as my betrothed.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) But mark, how the Angel solves the Virgin's doubts, and shews to her the unstained marriage and the unspeakable birth. And the Angel answered, and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 49 in Gen.) As if he said, Look not for the order of nature in things which transcend and overpower nature. Dost thou say, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? Nay rather, shall it happen to thee for this very reason, that thou hast never known a husband. For if thou hadst, thou wouldest not have been thought worthy of the mystery, not that marriage is unholy, but virginity more excellent. It became the common Lord of all both to take part with us, and to differ with us in His nativity; for the being born from the womb, He shared in common with us, but in that He was born without cohabitation, He was exalted far above us.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Orat. in Diem Nat.) O blessed is that womb which because of the overflowing purity of the Virgin Mary has drawn to itself the gift of life! For in others scarcely indeed shall a pure soul obtain the presence of the Holy Spirit, but in her the flesh is made the receptacle of the Spirit.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Lib. de Vita Moysis.) For the tables of our nature which guilt had broken, the true Lawgiver has formed anew to Himself from our dust without cohabitation, creating a body capable of taking His divinity, which the finger of God hath carved, that is to say, the Spirit coming upon the Virgin.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (in Diem Natal.) Moreover, the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Christ is the power of the most high King, who by the coming of the Holy Spirit is formed in the Virgin.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Orat. in Diem Nat.) Or he says, overshadow thee, because as a shadow takes its shape from the character of those bodies which go before it, so the signs of the Son's Deity will appear from the power of the Father. (non occ. in Greg. Nyss.). For as in us a certain life-giving power is seen in the material substance, by which man is formed; so in the Virgin, has the power of the Highest in like manner, by the life-giving Spirit, taken from the Virgin's body a fleshly substance inherent in the body to form a new man. Hence it follows, Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee.

ATHANASIUS. (Ep. ad Epictetum.) For we confess that which then was taken up from Mary to be of the nature of man and a most real body, the very same also according to nature with our own body. For Mary is our sister, seeing we have all descended from Adam.

BASIL. (Lib. de Spirit. Sanct. c. v.) Hence also, St. Paul says, God sent forth his Son, born not (through a woman) but of a woman. For the words through a woman might convey only a notion of birth as a passing through, but when it is said, of a woman, (Gal. 4:4.) there is openly declared a communion of nature between the son and the parent.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Victor Presbyter.) But observe, how the Angel has declared the whole Trinity to the Virgin, making mention of the Holy Spirit, the Power, and the Most High, for the Trinity is indivisible.c

1:36–38

36. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37. For with God nothing shall be impossible.

38. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

CHRYSOSTOM. (49 in Gen.) Seeing that his previous words had overcome the mind of the virgin, the angel drops his discourse to a humbler subject, persuading her by reference to sensible things. Hence he says, And, behold, Elisabeth thy cousin, &c. Mark the discretion of Gabriel; he did not remind her of Sarah, or Rebecca, or Rachel, because they were examples of ancient times, but he brings forward a recent event, that he might the more forcibly strike her mind. For this reason also he noticed the age, saying, She also hath conceived a son in her old age; and the natural infirmity also. As it follows, And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For not immediately at the beginning of Elisabeth's conception did he make this announcement, but after the space of six months, that the swelling of her womb might confirm its truth.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN. (Carm. 18. de Geneal. Christi.) But some one will ask, How is Christ related to David, since Mary sprang from the blood of Aaron, the angel having declared Elisabeth to be her kinswoman? But this was brought about by the Divine counsel, to the end that the royal race might be united to the priestly stock; that Christ, Who is both King and Priest, might be descended from both according to the flesh. For it is written, that Aaron, the first High Priest according to the law, took from the tribe of Judah for his wife Elisabeth, the daughter of Aminadab. (Exod. 6:23.) And observe the most holy administration of the Spirit, in ordering that the wife of Zacharias should be called Elisabeth, so bringing us back to that Elisabeth whom Aaron married.

CHRYSOSTOM. For the Lord of nature can do all things as He will, Who executes and disposes all things, holding the reins of life and death.

AUGUSTINE. (contra Faust. l. xxvi. c. 5.) But whoever says, "If God is omnipotent, let Him cause those things which have been done to have not been done," does not perceive that he says, "Let Him cause those things which are true, in that very respect in which they are true to be false." For He may cause a thing not to be which was, as when He makes a man who began to be by birth, not to be by death. But who can say that He makes not to be that which no longer is in being? For whatever is past is no longer in being. But if aught can happen to a thing, that thing is still in being to which any thing happens, and if it is, how is it past? Therefore that is not in being which we have truly said has been, because the truth is, in our opinions, not in that thing which no longer is. But this opinion God can not make false; and we do not so call God omnipotent as supposing also that He could die. He plainly is alone truly called omnipotent, who truly is, and by whom alone that is, whatever in any wise exists, whether spirit or body.

AMBROSE. Behold now the humility, the devotion of the virgin. For it follows, But Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord. She calls herself His handmaid, who is chosen to be His mother, so far was she from being exalted by the sudden promise. At the same time also by calling herself handmaid, she claimed to herself in no other way the prerogative of such great grace than that she might do what was commanded her. For about to bring forth One meek and lowly, she was bound herself to shew forth lowliness. As it follows, Be it unto me according to thy word. You have her submission, you see her wish. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, signifies the readiness of duty. Be it unto me according to thy word, the conception of the wish.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) Some men will highly extol one thing, some another, in these words of the virgin. One man, for example, her constancy, another her willingness of obedience; one man her not being tempted by the great and glorious promises of the great archangel; another, her self-command in not giving an instant assent, equally avoiding both the heedlessness of Eve and the disobedience of Zacharias. But to me the depth of her humility is an object no less worthy of admiration

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

1:26–29 Gabriel Greet the Virgin Mary

The Perpetual Virginity of Mary.

Jerome: Holy Mary, blessed Mary, mother and virgin, virgin before giving birth, virgin after giving birth! I, for my part, marvel how a virgin is born of a virgin, and how, after the birth of a virgin, the mother is a virgin.

Would you like to know how he is born of a virgin and, after his nativity, the mother is still a virgin? “The doors were closed, and Jesus entered.” There is no question about that. He who entered through the closed doors was neither a ghost nor a spirit. He was a real man with a real body. Furthermore, what does he say? “Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” He had flesh and bones, and the doors were closed. How do flesh and bones enter through closed doors? The doors are closed, and he enters, whom we do not see entering. Whence has he entered? Everything is closed up. There is no place through which he may enter. Nevertheless he who has entered is within, and how he entered is not evident. You do not know how his entrance was accomplished, and you attribute it to the power of God. Attribute to the power of God, then, that he was born of a virgin and the virgin herself after bringing forth was a virgin still. Homily 87.

Mary Prefigures the Church.

Ambrose: And, therefore, he who had undertaken to prove the incorrupt mystery of the incarnation thought it fruitless to pursue evidence of Mary’s virginity, lest he be seen as a defender of the Virgin rather than an advocate of the mystery. Surely, when he taught that Joseph was righteous, he adequately declared that he could not violate the temple of the Holy Spirit, the mother of the Lord, the womb of the mystery. We have learned the lineage of the Truth. We have learned its counsel. Let us learn its mystery. Fittingly is she espoused, but virgin, because she prefigures the church which is undefiled yet wed. A virgin conceived us of the Spirit, a Virgin brings us forth without travail. And thus perhaps Mary, wed to one, was filled by Another, because also the separate churches are indeed filled by the Spirit and by grace and yet are joined to the appearance of a temporal Priest. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2.6–7.

The Angel's Greeting to Mary Unique.

Origen: The angel greeted Mary with a new address, which I could not find anywhere else in Scripture. I ought to explain this expression briefly. The angel says, "Hail, full of grace." ... I do not remember having read this word elsewhere in Scripture. An expression of this kind, "Hail, full of grace," is not addressed to a male. This greeting was reserved for Mary alone. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 6.7.

The Lord's Presence Mysterious and Troubling.

Peter Chrysologus: "The Lord is with you." Why is the Lord with you? Because he is coming to you not merely to pay a visit, but he is coming down into you in a new mystery, that of being born. Fittingly did the angel add, "You are blessed among women." Through the curse she incurred, Eve brought pains upon the wombs of women in childbirth. Now, in this very matter of motherhood, Mary, through the blessing she received, rejoices, is honored, is exalted. Now too womankind has become truly the mother of those who live through grace, just as previously by nature are subject to death....

She soon realized that she was receiving within herself the heavenly judge, there in that same place where with lingering gaze she had just seen the harbinger from heaven. It was by a soothing motion and holy affection that God transformed the virgin into a mother for himself and made his handmaid into a parent. Nevertheless her bosom was disturbed, her mind recoiled, and her whole state became one of trembling when God, whom the whole of creation does not contain, placed his whole Self inside her bosom and made himself a man. Sermon 140.

The Modesty of the Virgin.

Ambrose: Learn of character from the Virgin. Learn of modesty from the Virgin. Learn of prophecy from the Virgin. Learn in the mystery. It is the nature of virgins to tremble at every entrance of a man and to be afraid at every address by a man. Let women learn to imitate the purpose of modesty. She was alone in the inner room which none among men may see. Only the angel found her. Alone without a companion, alone without a witness, lest she be corrupted by ignoble speech, she is greeted by the angel. Learn, virgin, to shun lewdness of words. Moreover, Mary was afraid at the angel's greeting. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2.8.

1:30–33 Gabriel Announces Jesus' Conception and His Designations

Mother Yet Virgin.

Prudentius:

A heavenly fire engenders him, not flesh

Nor blood of father, nor impure desire.

By power of God a spotless maid conceives,

As in her virgin womb the Spirit breathes.

The mystery of this birth confirms our faith

That Christ is God: a maiden by the Spirit

Is wed, unstained by love; her purity

Remains intact; with child within, untouched

Without, bright in her chaste fertility,

Mother yet virgin, mother that knew not man.

Why, doubter, do you shake your silly head?

An angel makes this known with holy lips.

Will you not hearken to angelic words?

The Virgin blest, the shining messenger

Believed, and by her faith she Christ conceived.

Christ comes to men of faith and spurns the heart

Irresolute in trust and reverence.

The Virgin's instant faith attracted

Christ into her womb and hid him there till birth.

The Divinity of Christ 566–84.

Jesus Will Save His People from Sin.

Ephrem the Syrian: The words "in the sixth month" are reckoned in relation to Elizabeth's pregnancy. "The angel was sent to a virgin," and he said to her, "Behold, in your virginity you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." He was speaking about him who was to appear in the body. He did not say to her, "that name which is called Jesus," but "you shall call his name." This shows that this name is of the economy which is through the body, since Jesus in Hebrew means "Savior." For the angel said, "You shall call his name Jesus," that is, Savior, "for he shall save his people from sins." This name therefore refers not to his nature but to his deeds. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 25.

Mary's Genealogy: House of David and Levi.

Ephrem the Syrian: From what the angel said to Mary, namely, "Elizabeth, your kinswoman," it could be supposed that Mary was from the house of Levi. Nevertheless up to this, the prophecy was established within the framework of the husbands. The family of David continued as far as Joseph, who had espoused her, and the birth of her child was reckoned through the framework of the men, for the sake of the family of David. It is in Christ that the seed and family of David are brought to completion. Scripture is silent about Mary's genealogy since it is the generations of men that it numbers and reckons. If Scripture had been accustomed to indicate the family line through the mothers, it would be in order for one to seek the family of Mary. But, lest the words "Elizabeth, your kinswoman" were to show that Mary was also from the house of Levi, take note that the Evangelist has said elsewhere, concerning Joseph and Mary, that "they were both of the house of David." The angel did not say to Mary that Elizabeth was her sister but "Elizabeth, your kinswoman." Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 1.25.

1:34–35 The Conception of Jesus and More Designations of the Messiah

Mary's Vow of Virginity.

Augustine: Indeed, her virginity was itself more beautiful and more pleasing, because Christ, in his conception, did not himself take away that which he was preserving from violation by humanity; but, before he was conceived he chose one already consecrated to God of whom he would be born. Holy Virginity 4.

The Virgin Birth a Divine Mystery.

Ambrose: Here Mary seems to have disbelieved, unless you pay close attention, for it is not right that she who was chosen to bear the only-begotten Son of God should seem to have been without faith. And how could this be? Although the prerogative of the Mother, on whom a greater prerogative is straightway to be conferred, is intact, how could it be that Zechariah who had not believed was condemned to silence, but Mary, if she had not believed, would be exalted by the infusion of the Holy Spirit? But with a greater prerogative, also a greater faith must be reserved for her. But Mary must both believe, and not so heedlessly usurp. She must believe the angel and not usurp divine things. Nor is it easy to know “the mystery which has been hidden from eternity in God,” which the higher powers could not know either. Nevertheless she did not deny the faith, she did not refuse the duty, but she conformed her will, she promised obedience. For truly when she said, “How shall this be?” she did not doubt concerning the outcome but sought the nature of this same outcome. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2.14.

Gabriel Should Fear Mary, Not Mary Gabriel.

Theophanes:

Theotokos: Make plain to me, how I, a virgin, shall bear him?

The angel: You seek to know from me the manner of your conceiving, Virgin, but this is beyond all interpretation! The Holy Spirit will overshadow you in his creative power and shall make this come to pass!

Theotokos: When she accepted the suggestion of the serpent, my mother Eve was banished from divine delight. Therefore I fear your strange greeting, for I take care that I not slip.

The angel: I am sent as God's messenger to disclose the divine will to you. Why are you afraid of me, undefiled one? I rather am afraid of you! Why do you stand in awe of me, O lady, who stand in reverent awe of you? Canon of Annunciation.

The Impregnating Spirit.

Prudentius:

He had to be redeemed: my Spirit came down

And impregnated flesh made from the dust

With the divine nature; God has assumed

Humanity, joining it with divinity,

And kindled in men's hearts new love of me.

Against Symmachus 2.265–69.

Jesus' Birth Prefigures Our Birth to New Life.

Peter Chrysologus: "Who was born from the Holy Spirit." Precisely thus is Christ born for you, in such a way that he may change your own manner of birth.... Formerly, death awaited you as the setting sun of your life; he wants you to have a new birth of life.

"Who was born from the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary." Where the Spirit is begetting, and a virgin giving birth, everything carried on is divine; nothing of it is merely human. Sermon 57.

Freedom Through the Virgin Birth.

Augustine: The first sinner, the first transgressor, begot sinners liable to death. To heal them, the Savior came from the Virgin; because he didn't come to you the way you came, seeing that he did not originate from the sexual appetite of male and female, not from that chain of lust. The Holy Spirit, it says, will come upon you. That was said to the Virgin glowing with faith, not seething with carnal lust. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Being overshadowed like that, how

could she be seething with the heat of sexual desire? So, because he didn't come to you the way you came, he sets you free. Sermon 153.14.

Fruitful by the Holy Spirit.

Prudentius:

When God's coming draws near, the angel Gabriel advances

From the Father's high throne and enters the house of the Virgin.

"Mary," he says, "the Holy Spirit will render you fruitful,

And you shall give birth to the Christ, O glorious Virgin."

Scenes from Sacred History 25.

Hovering Spirit Sanctifies Fallen Creation.

Ephrem the Syrian: It was fitting that the Architect of the works of creation should come and raise up the house that had fallen and that the hovering Spirit should sanctify the buildings that were unclean. Thus, if the Progenitor entrusted the judgment that is to come to his Son, it is clear that he accomplished the creation of humanity and its restoration through him as well. He was the live coal, which had come to kindle the briars and thorns. He dwelt in the womb and cleansed it and sanctified the place of the birth pangs and the curses. The flame, which Moses saw, was moistening the bush and distilling the fat lest it be inflamed. The likeness of refined gold could be seen in the bush, entering into the fire but without being consumed. This happened so that it might make known that living fire which was to come at the end, watering and moistening the womb of the Virgin and clothing it like the fire that enveloped the bush. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 1.25.

Mary Now Represents Temple, Tabernacle and Ark.

Theophanes: The angel: Rejoice, lady; rejoice, most pure virgin! Rejoice, God-containing vessel! Rejoice, candlestick of the light, the restoration of Adam and the deliverance of Eve! Rejoice, holy mountain, shining sanctuary! Rejoice, bridal chamber of immortality!

Theotokos: The descent of the Holy Spirit has purified my soul; it has sanctified my body; it has made me a temple containing God, a divinely adorned tabernacle, a living sanctuary and the pure mother of life.

The angel: I see you as a lamp with many lights; a bridal chamber made by God! Spotless maiden, as an ark of gold, receive now the giver of the law, who through you has been pleased to deliver humankind's corrupted nature! Canon of Annunciation.

The Holy Spirit Brings a New Creation.

John of Damascus: And through the invocation the overshadowing power of the Holy Ghost becomes a rainfall for this new cultivation. For just as all things whatsoever God made he made by the operation of the Holy Ghost, so also it is by the operation of the Spirit that these things are done which surpass nature and cannot be discerned except by faith alone. "How shall this be done to me," asked the blessed Virgin, "because I know not a man?" The archangel Gabriel answered, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you." And now you ask how the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine and water the blood of Christ. And I tell you that the Holy Ghost comes down and works these things which are beyond description and understanding. Orthodox Faith 4.13.

1:36–38 The Sign to Mary and Her Response of Faith

Mary's Obedience Reverses Eve's Disobedience.

Irenaeus: So the Lord now manifestly came to his own. Born by his own created order that he himself bears, he by his obedience on the tree renewed and reversed what was done by disobedience in connection with a tree. The power of that seduction by which the virgin Eve, already betrothed to a man, had been wickedly seduced was broken when the angel in truth brought good tidings to the Virgin Mary, who already by her betrothal belonged to a man. For as Eve was seduced by the word of an angel to flee from God, having rebelled against his Word, so Mary by the word of an angel received the glad tidings that she would bear God by obeying his Word. The former was seduced to disobey God and so fell, but the latter was persuaded to obey God, so that the Virgin Mary might become the advocate of Eve. As the human race was subjected to death through the act of a virgin, so was it saved by a virgin was precisely balanced by the obedience of another. Then indeed the sin of the first formed man was amended by the chastisement of the First Begotten, the wisdom of the serpent was conquered by the simplicity of the dove, and the chains were broken by which we were in bondage to death. Against Heresies 5.19–20.