



## HOMILY ON THE ANNUNCIATION\*

*by St. Nicholas (Cabasilas)*

1. If there is ever a time when a man should rejoice, exult, and cry out with gladness, when he should go off and search for what great and brilliant statements he might utter, when he should wish to be vouchsafed sublimity of ideas, beauty of diction, and powerful oratory, I see no other occasion than this day, on which an Angel came to earth from Heaven bearing every good tiding. Today Heaven is exalted; today the earth is resplendent; today all of creation rejoices, and He Who holds Heaven in His hands is not absent from the Feast, either. Rather, the present celebration is in very truth a festival: all things are gathered together in a single act of rejoicing—the Creator, all of His creatures, and the Mother of the Creator herself, who made Him a partaker of our nature and of our liturgical *synaxes* and feasts. For He, being our Benefactor from the beginning of creation, and making this His own proper activity (never being in need of anything from anyone), to bestow gifts and to do good, and knowing only such things as these, on this day both does those same things and assumes a secondary place and stands in solidarity with the recipients of His benefactions. Bestowing some things on

the creation from Himself, and receiving other things from it, He rejoices not so much in giving great gifts, since He is munificent, as in receiving small gifts from those to whom He has done good, since He loves mankind. He obtains honor not only from what He has laid down for His poor servants, but also from what He has received from us paupers.

For, although He chose to empty Himself<sup>1</sup> and took our poverty upon Himself, yet in accordance with His judgments, as recipient, He used the gift that He received from us for His own adornment and majesty.<sup>2</sup> What greater occasion for delight could there be for the creation—by which I mean both the visible creation and that which transcends our eyes—when it beholds its own Maker in its midst and the Master of all among the ranks of His servants, not divesting Himself of His Lordship, but assuming the form of a servant; not throwing away His wealth, but imparting it to the poor; and not falling away from the summit of His eminence, but elevating the lowly? She who is the cause of all these things for us all rejoices, on the one hand, at sharing, for her part, in the common goods, in that she belongs to the order of creation; and she rejoices, on the other hand, that she shares in these goods before all and most of all, and that through her all of these goods were bestowed on everyone; and fifthly, and most importantly of all, she rejoices because not only did God bring about resurrection for mankind through her, but she also brought it about herself, through the things that she knew and foreknew.

2. For the Virgin was not like the earth, which contributed to the creation of man but did not bring it about, but merely offered it-

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:7.

<sup>2</sup> Citing the following words from St. Nicholas' celebrated treatise, *The Life in Christ*, "Jesus, being of twofold nature, in accordance with His humanity which He shares with us honoured the Father and wove for Him that wondrous crown of glory from His Body and Blood" (Book IV, §5, trans. Carmino J. de-Catanaro [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974], p. 120), Nellas astutely remarks that if God had simply bestowed salvation on mankind, He would have shown Himself to be merely "munificent" (*φιλότιμος*). However, by virtue of His act of "self-emptying" (*κένωσις*) at the Incarnation, He demonstrated that He was "philanthropic," that is, "He Who loves mankind" (*φιλόανθρωπος*). In this way, He not only called man to cooperate in the work of salvation, but also manifested the greatness both of mankind and of His love for mankind, which is not simply pity or charity, but rather, friendship (*φιλία*) (*Η Θεομήτωρ*, p. 121). Cf. "Henceforth I call you not servants...but I have called you friends" (St. John 15:15).

self as matter to the Creator and was only acted upon and did not do anything. But those things which drew the Artificer Himself to earth and which moved His creative hand did she provide from within herself, being the author thereof. What were these things? A blameless life, an utterly pure way of life, the rejection of all evil, the practice of every virtue, a soul purer than light, a body that was entirely spiritual, brighter than the sun, purer than Heaven, and more sacred than the Cherubic thrones; a mind furnished with wings that was not daunted by any height; a longing for God, which had absorbed the entire appetitive faculty of the soul into itself; possession by God, a union with God inconceivable to any created intellect. Having trained both body and soul to receive such beauty, she turned the gaze of God towards herself, and by her own beauty rendered our common nature beautiful and won over the Impassible One; and He Who was despised by men on account of their sin became man because of the Virgin.

3. The “middle wall and barrier of enmity”<sup>3</sup> were of no account to her; indeed, everything that divided the human race from God was abolished as far as she was concerned. Even before the common reconciliation, she alone had made peace with God; or rather, she was never in any need of reconciliation, since from the very beginning she stood foremost in the choir of the friends of God. However, such a reconciliation was made for the rest of mankind. And she was, before the Comforter, “an advocate for us before God,”<sup>4</sup> as Paul puts it, not lifting up her hands to Him on behalf of mankind, but holding out her life as an olive branch. The virtue of a single soul was sufficient to put a stop to all of the evil committed by men from the beginning of time. And, just as the Ark, which saved man during the general shipwreck of the inhabited earth, was not itself subject to the calamities that befell the entire world, and just as it preserved for the human race the resources for its continuation, so also did it happen in the case of the Virgin. And, as if no man had dared to commit even one single sin, but all had abided by the Divine commandments and were still occupying their ancient habitation,<sup>5</sup> thus did she ever keep her mind inviolate; and she had no awareness of the wickedness that had, so to speak, been diffused in every direc-

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:14.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Romans 8:34.

<sup>5</sup> According to Nellas, in this context “the ancient habitation” (ἡ ἀρχαία ἐστία) refers to Paradise (*Ἡ Θεομήτωρ*, p. 127).

tion. The cataclysm of evil, which held all things in its grip, closed Heaven and opened up Hades, started a war between God and men, drove the Good One from the earth and introduced the Evil One in His stead, was yet completely powerless against the blessed Virgin; although evil had dominion over the entire inhabited earth and had everywhere wrought confusion, commotion, and havoc, it was defeated by a single thought and a single soul, and it yielded not only to her, but also, on account of her, to the entire human race.

This was the contribution that the Virgin made to the common salvation of mankind, even before that day arrived on which God was to bow the Heavens and descend.<sup>6</sup> As soon as she was born, she constructed a dwelling-place for Him Who is able to save and fashioned a beautiful house for God—and one that would be worthy of Him. The King could not find any fault with His palace; and indeed, not only did she provide a dwelling fit for His royal majesty, but she also prepared from herself His purple robe<sup>7</sup> and cincture, and the majesty, strength, and the Kingdom itself;<sup>8</sup> just as an illustrious city that surpasses all other cities in size, beauty, wisdom, population, wealth, and all its resources, is able not only to offer a welcome and hospitality to the King, but also to establish, adorn, strengthen, and arm his royal authority, and in this way to inflict inevitable woe upon his enemies, but to confer salvation and an abundance of all good things upon his friends.

4. Thus did the Virgin benefit the human race before the time came for our common salvation. But since that time had now come and the Angelic messenger was at hand, she believed, gave her consent, and undertook her ministry. These things were indispensable and in every way necessary for our salvation; without them, there would have been no hope for humanity. For, neither would it have been possible, had the Blessed Virgin not prepared herself, as I said, for God to look kindly on mankind and to desire to descend to earth, that is, had there not been someone to receive Him, someone capable of serving Him in the œconomy of salvation; nor would it have been possible, had she not believed and given her consent, for God's will for us to have been realized. This is evident from the fact that

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<sup>6</sup> I.e., in accordance with His præeternal counsel (Nellas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ*, p.129).

<sup>7</sup> This purple robe is understood by the Fathers to denote Christ's human flesh; see St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Bk III, ch. 5, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXIII, col. 484B.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Psalm 92:1, *Septuaginta*.

Gabriel, in addressing the Virgin and calling her “Full of Grace,” expressed everything pertaining to the mystery. God did not descend until the Virgin sought to learn the manner of her conceiving. But when He saw that she was persuaded and that she accepted the invitation, the deed was accomplished straightway; and God clothed Himself in humanity and the Virgin became the Mother of her Creator. In the case of Adam, God neither foretold nor persuaded him concerning the rib from which Eve was to be fashioned, but put him to sleep, and in this way deprived him of the member in question; in the case of the Virgin, however, He first instructed her and awaited her assurance before proceeding to the deed. Regarding the creation of Adam, He conversed with His Only-Begotten Son, saying: “Let Us make man.”<sup>9</sup> But when, as Paul says, He was going to bring this wonderful Counselor,<sup>10</sup> the First-Begotten, into the world,<sup>11</sup> and to form the second Adam, He made the Virgin a participant in his decision. And this great counsel, about which Isaiah speaks,<sup>12</sup> God proclaimed and the Virgin ratified. The Incarnation of the Word was the work not only of the Father, Whose good pleasure it was, and of His Power,<sup>13</sup> Who overshadowed, and of His Spirit, Who descended, but also of the will and faith of the Virgin. For, just as, without those Three, it would have been impossible for this decision<sup>14</sup> to be implemented, so also, if the All-Pure One had not offered her will and faith, this design could not possibly have been brought to fruition.

5. Having in this way taught and persuaded her, God made her His Mother and borrowed flesh from her with her knowledge and consent, in order that, just as He was conceived voluntarily, it might equally come about for His Mother that she should conceive voluntarily and become His Mother willingly and by her own free decision; and so that, even more importantly, she might not simply contribute to the Economy of the Incarnation as one who had been conscripted like some puppet, but might herself offer her own self

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:26; cf. St. John Chrysostomos: “Who is this to Whom God says, ‘Let Us make man’? Who, other than the Angel of great counsel, the wonderful Counselor...the Only-Begotten Son of God...through Whom all things were brought into being” (“Homily VIII on Genesis,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LIII, col. 72).

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 9:6.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 1:6.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 9:6.

<sup>13</sup> I Corinthians 1:24.

<sup>14</sup> I.e., concerning the Incarnation of the Word.

and become a fellow-worker with God in His Providence for the human race and, thereby, be made a partaker and sharer with Him of the glory deriving therefrom; and so that, furthermore, just as the Savior Himself became man and the Son of man not only for the sake of the flesh, but also had a soul, a mind, and a will, and everything else that is human, He might in the same way obtain a perfect Mother who would minister to His Nativity not only through the nature of her body, but also through her mind, her will, and all that she possessed, and that the Virgin might thus be His Mother in both flesh and soul and might endow the ineffable birthgiving with human nature in its totality.<sup>15</sup>

For this reason, before placing herself at the service of the mystery, she learns about it, believes in it, consents to it, and prays for its fulfillment. Moreover, God wished to show the virtue of the Virgin, how great was her faith in Him, and what great courage of soul she had, and all her prudence and greatness of soul, in accepting and believing the most paradoxical words of the Angel, that God would truly come in person and provide for our salvation, and that she would cooperate with this work and prove capable of serving it. The latter is manifest proof that the Virgin was fully aware of that which is greatest of all, that than which no one could wish anything greater;<sup>16</sup> the former is sufficient evidence that she had clear knowledge of God's goodness and love for mankind, for which reason it seems to me that she was not initiated into this mystery directly by God—although this mode of learning would have befitted her more than any celestial spirit—, in order that the faith which she had concerning God might be clearly shown to be hers, lest the whole matter be imputed to the power of God that persuaded her. For, just as those of the faithful who have not seen are more blessed than those who have seen,<sup>17</sup> so also those who are persuaded by servants of the Master are more prudent than those whom God Himself has persuaded. But the fact that she was conscious that there was nothing in her soul that was inconsonant with the mystery, and that her character was in such harmony with it that no mention was made of any human weakness in her case; and also the fact that it was not because

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. St. Gregory the Theologian: "What is unassumed is unhealed" (Epistle 101, "To Cledonios," *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXVII, col. 181C).

<sup>16</sup> Cabasilas does not specify precisely what he means by "that which is greatest of all," but it seems likely that he is alluding, here, to the Incarnation of the Word.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. St. John 20:29.

she harbored any doubts that she inquired how this would come to pass, that she did not talk about what was conducive to her purification, and that she did not need anyone to explain the mystery to her—I do not know whether this is something appropriate to ascribe to a created nature.

For, even if she had been a Cherub or a Seraph, or some other creature much purer than these Angelic beings, how could she have endured these words? How could she have supposed that she would be able to fulfill these promises? How could she have furnished strength that would be commensurate with the magnitude of the work? John, “a greater” than whom, according to the judgment of the Savior Himself, “there hath not risen,”<sup>18</sup> did not consider himself worthy even to touch His shoes, and that, when the Lord was leading a life of poverty.<sup>19</sup> The All-Blameless Virgin was bold enough to carry in her womb the Word Himself, the very Hypostasis of God. “Who am I, and what is the house of my father?”<sup>20</sup> “Even in me, O Lord, shalt Thou save Israel?”<sup>21</sup> Such things are to be heard from righteous men who were called to perform deeds accomplished by many persons and at many times. But the Blessed Virgin was induced to undertake something unwonted and in no way congruent with human nature, something surpassing all rational understanding—for what else was she doing than elevating the earth to Heaven and through herself changing and transforming all things?—; and she was not shaken in her mind, nor did she perceive her soul to be inferior to this task. But, just as we are not at all bothered if someone tells us that light is going to strike our eyes, and it is not strange for someone to state that when the sun rises it brings day, so also the Virgin, on learning that she would be capable of conceiving and bearing God Himself, Who is not contained in any place, was not at all surprised.<sup>22</sup> And she did not leave the words addressed to her unexamined, nor did she experience any light-mindedness, nor was

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<sup>18</sup> St. Matthew 11:11.

<sup>19</sup> According to Nellas, this refers to the poverty of the human nature which the Word assumed at the Incarnation (*Ἡ Θεομήτωρ*, p. 139).

<sup>20</sup> II Kings 7:18.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Judges 6:36.

<sup>22</sup> “The Virgin is not surprised, because, as the enlightened human being that she is, she knows that man’s purpose is to be united with God. How, then, would she be surprised when she sees the fulfillment of something that constitutes the purpose of her existence?” (Nellas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ*, pp. 140-141).

she carried away by the great loftiness of the Angelic laudation, but she restrained herself and focussed her attention on the salutation; she inquired into the manner of her conceiving and sought to learn about other matters related to this. She did not go on to ask whether she was adequate and suited to the great magnitude of this ministry, or whether she had properly purified her body and her soul; rather, concerning what pertained to nature, she was puzzled, whereas she passed over what pertained to the readiness of her soul. She requested an explanation of the former from Gabriel, but the latter she knew from herself. She had confidence and boldness before God from within, as John says, since her heart was an advocate for her.<sup>23</sup>

6. “How shall this be?”<sup>24</sup> she asks. “Not because I still need further purification or greater virtue, but because it is a law of nature that those who have vowed, as I have, to live in virginity should not be able to conceive.” “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”<sup>25</sup> “I am ready to receive God and am sufficiently prepared; but pray teach me whether nature will comply.” And indeed, after Gabriel had proclaimed the manner of this strange pregnancy—“The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee”<sup>26</sup>—and had recounted other such things, the Virgin was no longer in any doubt about the glad tidings; for she was blessed, on the one hand, on account of the very sublime mysteries of which she was a minister, and, on the other hand, on account of her belief that she was capable of undertaking this ministry.

That this reaction was not the result of light-mindedness on her part, but an indication, rather, of the wondrous and ineffable treasury of the most perfect wisdom, faith, and purity that existed within her, was revealed by the Holy Spirit when He called her blessed, since she had accepted the message of the Angel and had easily been persuaded by the good news. For the mother of John, filled with the Holy Spirit, called her blessed: “Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.”<sup>27</sup> “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,”<sup>28</sup> replied the Virgin.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. I St. John 3:21.

<sup>24</sup> St. Luke 1:34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> St. Luke 1:35.

<sup>27</sup> St. Luke 1:45.

<sup>28</sup> St. Luke 1:38.

Deservedly was she called the handmaid of the Lord, for she recognized the homecoming of the Lord, and, as Scripture says, immediately opened her house to “Him Who came and knocked”<sup>29</sup> and truly provided a dwelling for Him Who had thitherto been homeless.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, for Adam alone, for whose sake the visible universe had been fashioned, no help mate was found before Eve,<sup>31</sup> whereas all other creatures had what they needed; but for the Word, Who had brought all things into being and had allotted suitable locations for each creature, there was no house or place before the Virgin. However, she “gave no sleep to her eyes, nor slumber to her eyelids”<sup>32</sup> until she found a tabernacle and a place for Him. We must consider these words, uttered by the tongue of David, as belonging to the All-Pure One, since he was the father of her line, just as Levi, when he “was yet in the loins of his father...paid tithes”<sup>33</sup> to Melchisedek in the person of Abraham.” But the greatest and most sublime thing of all is that, while she had not previously been told anything about this mystery and had no prior knowledge of it, she was so ready and suitable for it, and that when God suddenly arrived, she received Him with proper steadfastness, preparation, and vigilance of soul.

7. And she responded with these words, which were fitting and appropriate for her, so that all men might know what prudence there was in the Blessed Virgin, how she was a new creation and superior to human nature, transcending the comprehension of every mind; for she kindled such wondrous love for God in her soul, not because the things that were going to happen to her, of which she alone was to partake, had previously been announced to her, but because of those common gifts, which either had been or would be Divinely bestowed on mankind. For Job is admired, not so much because he patiently endured after being smitten by plagues as because he endured these calamities, not knowing what recompense he would receive for his struggles; in just the same way, the Virgin showed herself worthy of the Grace that surpasses human reason, of which she

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Revelation 3:20.

<sup>30</sup> “After the Fall and before the Virgin came into existence, God was ‘homeless’ [ἄοικος] (which means ‘without a hearth,’ one who has no family or fatherland) and that it was precisely the Virgin who prepares a place and a dwelling for Him, that is, introduces Him into the human family” (Nellas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ*, p. 128).

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 2:20.

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 131:4, *Septuaginta*.

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 7:9-10.

had no knowledge. She was a bridal chamber with no expectation of a bridegroom, and she was a heaven, although she did not know that the Sun would dawn from her.

What could there be to match this prudence? And what would she have been, if she had known everything clearly beforehand and had had the wings that derive from hope? Why, then, was she not informed of this previously? It is clear that there was no point to which she had to progress, since she did not lack any sublimity of holiness; neither was there anything that she had to add to what she already possessed, nor was it possible for her to become greater in virtue, since she had attained to the very pinnacle of sanctity. For, if this were possible, and there were some height of virtue beyond what she had already attained, she would not have been ignorant of it, since it was for this very reason that she came into existence, and God would have taught her to make up for what was lacking and to prepare herself better to serve the mystery. For, neither is it possible to say that the Virgin would not have had a greater aptitude for virtue on the basis of these hopes, if it had, in fact, been at all possible that she might have become better than she actually was, she who, even without any incentives to virtue, trained her soul so well that she was preferred by God the Judge to all of humanity; nor was it fitting for God not to adorn His own Mother with all good things or form her in the best, most beautiful, and perfect way possible.

**8.** But since God remained silent and did not foretell to her anything that was going to happen, He clearly showed that He did not know anything more beautiful or greater than that which He perceived in the Virgin; from this fact it is evident that He did not choose for His Mother the best of all those in existence, but her who was absolutely the best; nor did He choose her who was more suitable for Him than anyone else in the human race, but her who so totally suited Him, that it was fitting that she become His Mother. Indeed, it was absolutely necessary for human nature at some time to make itself fit for the task for which it was created at the beginning, that is, to bring forth someone capable of worthily serving the purpose of the Creator. For God did not create humanity with one purpose in mind, only to decide later on to use it for a different purpose, in the way that we take tools designed for one pursuit and misuse them for another, so that there is no need for them always to be congruent with their original function. Rather, He created mankind with this end in view, that, when He needed to be born, He might take from it a Mother. Having first established this need as a kind

of standard, He then fashioned man in accordance with it. For, neither should we posit any other end for the creation of man than that which is the most excellent of all and which brings the greatest honor and glory to the Artificer, nor is it conceivable that God should in any way fail in creating the things that He creates. After all, builders of houses and manufacturers of clothing and footwear are able to ensure that their product is always in conformity with its end, although they do not have complete control over their materials and the latter do not always cooperate with them but, on the contrary, sometimes put up opposition to them; even so, by virtue of their skill, these craftsmen succeed in drawing the materials towards their purpose. But God has sovereignty over matter, and in the beginning He created it according to His pleasure, knowing how He would use it.

What, therefore, was there to prevent human nature from being in conformity, and in every way in agreement and harmony, with the purpose for which it was created? For it is God Who governs His Œconomy, and this Œconomy is the greatest work of God and *par excellence* the work of His hands; and He did not entrust the matter to the ministry of any human being or Angel, but reserved it for Himself. Therefore, whom, if not God, does it behoove, when producing anything whatsoever, to observe the requisite standards? And in the case of what else than the most beautiful of His works? On what else, of all things, if not on Himself, would God confer what is appropriate? After all, Paul required that a Bishop “rule well himself and his own house”<sup>34</sup> before caring for the common good.

9. So be it. When, therefore, all of these factors came together at the same juncture—the most just Ruler of the world, the most suitable minister of His Œconomy, and the most beautiful of all of the works of the Creator from all eternity—, how could everything appropriate not have been present in that place? Complete harmony and agreement had to be preserved, and nothing could happen that would be discordant with this great and wondrous undertaking. Therefore, since it behooves God, Who weighs all things with a balance,<sup>35</sup> to be just and to create all things in a fitting manner, in response to this, the Virgin, who was in every way suited to the task, bore Him and became the Mother of Him Whose Mother it was fit-

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. I St. Timothy 3:4. The point of this allusion is that the Bishop is an Icon of God. Hence, if a Bishop must be able to manage his own affairs, the same principle must, *a fortiori*, apply to God (Nellas, *Ἡ Θεομῆτωρ*, p. 155).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ecclesiasticus 28:25.

ting that she be. Hence, if nothing else were to be gained from God becoming the Son of man, we are entitled to say that the Incarnation of the Word had nonetheless to come about, since it was entirely fitting that the Virgin become the Mother of God, and that the fact that God was bound to render unto every creature that which was proper to it, that is, to act in accordance with justice, was a sufficient reason for the renewal of natures.<sup>36</sup>

For, if the All-Blameless Virgin upheld all of her obligations to God, and proved to be so prudent that she did not neglect even one of the virtues that she was obligated to possess, how would it have been possible for God not to comport Himself with equal justice? And if nothing conducive to her becoming the Mother of God eluded the Virgin, and she had such an intense yearning for God, it would scarcely have behooved God not to accord her the commensurate recompense of becoming her Son. And if God gives rulers to the wicked according to their hearts' desire, how could He not have taken for His Mother her who proved to be truly in accord in every respect with His own heart? So entirely proper and appropriate to the Blessed Virgin was this gift. Therefore, when Gabriel clearly said that she would bear God Himself, and that "He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end,"<sup>37</sup> she joyfully received the news as if she had learned something unexceptional and not at all at odds or discrepant with the normal course of events. And so it was that with a blessed tongue, an unperturbed soul, and thoughts full of tranquillity she said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."<sup>38</sup>

**10.** These were the words that she said, and they were fulfilled at once: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us";<sup>39</sup> and, after giving her reply to God, she received the Spirit that created from her that flesh which was one with God. Her voice was a "mighty voice," as David puts it,<sup>40</sup> and the Word of the Father is formed by the word of a mother, and the Creator is created by the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. the *Heirmos* of the Ninth Ode of the Great Canon: "Conception without seed; Nativity past understanding, from a Mother who never knew a man; child-bearing undefiled; for the birth of God reneweth natures; wherefore, all generations magnify thee in Orthodox manner as Mother and Bride of God."

<sup>37</sup> St. Luke 1:33.

<sup>38</sup> St. Luke 1:38.

<sup>39</sup> St. John 1:14.

<sup>40</sup> Psalm 67:34, *Septuaginta*.

voice of a creature. And just as when God said, “Let there be light,” “at once there was light,”<sup>41</sup> so, as soon as the Virgin spoke, the true Light dawned; and He Who “lighteth every man that cometh into the world”<sup>42</sup> was joined to the flesh and carried in the womb. O sacred voice! O words of great power! O blessed tongue, which restored the entire inhabited earth in one fell swoop! O treasury of a heart which, by a few words, poured out upon us an abundance of good things! These words made the earth Heaven, emptied Hades of its prisoners, caused Heaven to be inhabited by men, joined Angels with men, and formed the Heavenly and earthly races into a single chorus around Him who is both, being God but becoming man.

What gratitude could we express to you for these words? What should we call you, of whom nothing human is worthy? Our words derive from existing things, whereas you surpass the whole world beyond every sublimity. If words are to be offered to you, this, I ween, is a task for Angels, for a Cherubic mind, for a fiery tongue. Hence, having mentioned, as far as we are able, those things which redound to your praise, and having chanted hymns to you, our salvation, to the best of our ability, we ask next for an Angelic voice. We will conclude with the salutation of Gabriel, adorning the sum of our oration with this additament: “Rejoice, thou who art full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.”<sup>43</sup> May you prepare us to make a habitation for Him within ourselves, for this is conducive to His glory and to the laudation of you who gave birth to Him, when we not only talk about it, but also put it into practice, for unto Him belongs glory unto the ages. *Amen.* □

\* Translated from the Greek text in “Homéliez Mariales Byzantines (II),” ed. M. Jugie, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, Vol. XIX, ed. R. Graffin and F. Nau (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1920), pp. 484-495. This is a fresh and precise translation of a Byzantine theological text that is, as the late Professor Panagiotes Nellas, one of the foremost interpreters in recent times of the theology of St. Nicholas Cabasilas, notes, “especially beautiful, but also exceptionally difficult” (*Ἡ Θεομήτωρ [The Mother of God]*, ed. and trans. [into modern Greek] by Panagiotes Nellas, in *Ἐπι τὰς Πέγας [Athens: Apostolike Diakonia, 1974]*, 2nd ed., Vol. II, p. 38).

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<sup>41</sup> Genesis 1:3.

<sup>42</sup> St. John 1:9.

<sup>43</sup> St. Luke 1:28.