

### The Lord Has Reigned and Is Clothed With Majesty

St. Gregory the Theologian, said in the Gregorian Divine Liturgy, "You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation" (St. Gregory Divine Liturgy). How wonderful is this love that has turned punishment into salvation and restoration. Stunned by the height, depth, length and width of this love, St. Gregory reiterated, "Ineffable is the power of Your wisdom, and no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love toward mankind" (St. Gregory Divine Liturgy). About this unlimited love, St. John says, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). When describing the time of our Lord's departure, St. John also addressed this love saying, "*Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end*" (John 13:1). Describing furthermore this love, 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*" (1 John 3:1).

After Adam and Eve had sinned, we inherited death. However, God, out of his unlimited love, had already prepared a salvation plan, the heavy cost of which, was paid by his death with us and for us for the sake of saving us from the tongs of eternal death granting us eternal life. St. Paul described this plan succinctly saying, "*who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Philippians 2:6-11).

To many people, death is a dark, despicable, frightening issue to be avoided if possible. However, through His incarnation, Jesus Christ has changed the concept of death completely. St. Paul says, "*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (Hebrews 2:14-15); "*but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2 Timothy 1:10). We also read in the Holy Gospel according to St. John, "*Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.'*" (John 11:25); "*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'*" (John 14:6).

God created Adam a living being, "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*" (Genesis 2:7).

Consequently, with Adam's disobedience, the spirit of God could no longer find rest in Adam and Eve. *"And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'" (Genesis 6:3).*

As a result, the Word of God condescended and chose to incarnate without losing His deity. Then, at the appointed time for Him to start His ministry, He got baptized in the Jordan River.

*"And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.'" (John 1:32-34).*

Since He is the One Who would eventually baptize with the Holy Spirit, it was necessary that He be baptized for our sake because He bore us within His flesh. As St. Paul has vividly described it, *"For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones"* (Ephesians 5:30).

St. Kyrillos the Great says, "Christ has not received the Holy Spirit for Himself; but for us who are in Him. For, all the good things flow in us through Him. For, as Adam through his succumbing to the deception and subsequent disobedience and sin, could not retain the grace of the Holy Spirits thus incurring the loss of God's good gift on the whole human race, it was necessary for the Logos, Who knows no change, to become man in order as a man to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and restore it forever in Him for our sake."

### **Pain and Death for Salvation and Resurrection**

St. Kyrillos continues to say, "For what purpose had the Logos, the only begotten Son, obtained for Himself a human body becoming man just like us in appearance? It was for the sake of ridding the human nature of sin by killing sin and subsiding the sting of the instincts that lead to abominable desires. However, He did not accomplish all of these goals for Himself (since He is without sin); but it was for the sake of reconstructing our nature once again and of making it in His likeness, sanctified, blameless without sin that He became man like us."

He preceded us in everything so that when we follow His steps, we obtain death, that is to say dwindling of the sinful desires within us. *"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:18).

St. Kyrillos explains that God, the incarnate, has gotten for Himself a mortal body like ours in order to experience our pain, and be tempted with the same temptations. This means that He does not get to know pain and temptation as God; but as man.

St. Paul refers to the sufferings that Jesus Christ had bore in His human nature, having overcome them and having granted us the power to overcome them as well.

*"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted"* (Hebrews 2:18).

*"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).*

*"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).*

*"who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:23-24).*

The Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the flesh, but was alive in the spirit. Therefore, He destroyed death with His death and revealed Resurrection through His resurrection, *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).*

### **Raised and Seated with Him in the Heavens**

St. Paul says, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:4-6).*

God was not just satisfied with emptying Himself becoming like a slave in the likeness of people; but in love for His handmade humanity, He willingly bore our pains and sufferings and obeyed to the extent of accepting death on the cross. He could have possibly destroyed that generation of sinners and created a new one as He had told Moses after the people had carved for a statue for worship. *"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.'" (Exodus 32:7-10).*

Therefore, not because of any deservedness on our side, we who are fallen in sin and dead in iniquities, but in His rich mercy and abundant love, God made us alive in Jesus Christ. By grace we are saved. *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6).*

St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote, "Since our nature needed total rescue from death, He stretched out His hand and stooped coming very close to that dead body as if to personally come in touch with death in order to allow His life to run through our dead nature and thus resurrect man completely.

Because His human body that carries His deity and which through resurrection is raised with His deity, is from the same texture of our human body, therefore, His resurrection has been transferred to us all by virtue of the connection and unity between all. An analogous situation is the spread to all the body the sensational effect caused by one of the senses."

Thus when Jesus Christ rose from the dead He raised us with Him. That is why St. Paul said, "*The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'*" (Psalm 110:1).

He said it again "*and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:6). To the Ephesians He says, "*even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*" (Ephesians 2:5).

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will"* (Ephesians 1:3-5). "*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God*" (Colossians 3:1).

In His concluding prayer, the Lord asked of the Father for our sake, "*Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*" (John 17:24).

Thus the Lord has reigned and is clothed with majesty, "*It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High*" (Psalm 92:1).

Therefore, since we are "*members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones*", our place is with Him because He is in us and we are in Him. Through His resurrection, He has brought to life the hope in an imperishable inheritance in heaven described by St. Peter as, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you*" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

## **Articles on the Christian History The Fifth Century**

### **Pope Athanasius II - the Twenty-Eighth Pope (489-496 AD)**

Pope Peter III departed at a time during which the church was relatively in peace, because Emperor Zeno who had issued the Henotikon had established agreement between the Eastern churches (non-Chalcedonian) and the Western churches. So, the election of the new pope,

Athanasius II (or small) took place calmly unlike the time of Pope Peter and Pope Athanasius the Apostolic.

### **A New Beginning towards Unity of Dogma**

Like all the previous popes, Pope Athanasius II started his service with a friendly, brotherly papal message to all the patriarchs of the apostolic sees, especially those who accepted the Henotikon. However, Emperor Anastasius I, successor to Zeno, though lover of peace yet he was not of a strong personality. Two delegates from Rome, came to convince him to accept the Chalcedonian teachings, cross out the name of Pope Dioscorus from the list of popes and indorse the bishop appointed by Rome for the Egyptian churches. The Emperor called some of the Coptic monks living in Constantinople to conduct discussions with the two delegates. However, the Emperor was too weak in handling the discussions. Thus, all the efforts to bring unity between the Eastern and Western churches were lost. The papacy of Pope Athanasius lasted seven peaceful years and he reposed on the 20th day of Thout in 496 AD.

### **Pope John I - the Twenty-Ninth Pope (496-505 AD)**

After the departure of Pope Athanasius II, the people elected the pious monk from St. Macarius monastery to be ordained on the See of St. Mark. The monk asked to be given sometime to pray and ask God's will. Finally, he accepted and the ordination took place on the 29th of September 496 AD. Pope John remained in papacy for eight peaceful years guarding the true Orthodox faith. Also the Emperor Anastasius II did not adopt the Chalcedonian teachings and supported the Egyptian churches. Thus, the twenty peaceful years of the papacy of Pope Athanasius II and Pope John I were the time the School of Alexandria flourished and prepared non-Egyptian graduates who disseminated the true teachings in many regions in Europe. In addition, the Egyptian monasticism became well known throughout the known world at that time and the monasteries were sought by monks and hermits from outside Egypt seeking knowledge and piety.

Unfortunately, the only evil that disturbed those peaceful years was the plague that hit Egypt taking away the lives of so many people. However, Pope John reached out the afflicted becoming father to the orphans and supporter of the widows. Pope John reposed on the twenty-ninth of April 505 AD after having spent eight years as pope during the reign of Emperor Anastasius.