



LIGHT & LIFE

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KNOWING JESUS THROUGH THE LUMINOUS MYSTERIES, PART ONE

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

For some of those who have prayed the Rosary throughout their lives, the acceptance of the Luminous Mysteries has been difficult. It seems unimaginable that anyone would dare add mysteries to the Rosary. But Pope St. John Paul II did just that with his Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, on October 16, 2002.

However, Pope John Paul was not just any pope; his motto, *Totus tuus*, expressed his relationship and deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his understanding of her unique role in salvation history. He says [with his emphasis], "Thanks to St. Louis de Montfort, I came to understand that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption." ¹ As a result, he believed that Marian devotion "not only addresses a need of the heart, a sentimental inclination, but it also corresponds to objective truth about the Mother of God." ²

Thus, for our Marian Pope, the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ emerges in a special way in the Luminous Mysteries, which capture the years of his public life and teachings, beginning with his baptism in the Jordan, and culminating with his institution of the Holy Eucharist on the eve of his passion, death and resurrection. St. John Paul says [with his emphasis], "Each of these mysteries is a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus." ³

Regarding Christ's Incarnation, St. Peter Chrysologus sees a clear three-fold Epiphany of his divinity. ⁴ God chose to manifest himself to man so that we could understand his true nature and what he set out to do through his Son

to redeem the world. This Epiphany is illuminated in three separate mysteries of the Rosary, the third Joyful Mystery, the Birth of Jesus, and the first two Luminous Mysteries, Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan and his Miracle at Cana. Thus, the first two Luminous Mysteries are necessary to complete the triptych.

So, what does all this have to do with the Blessed Virgin Mary? The answer is, Everything! God became perfectly human in all things—which means he took on our humanity as it was before the Fall. Naturally, this would mean he was born of a human mother. At his birth, Mary sees the manifestation of the eternal God in her son. Years later, she hears of the marvelous event of his baptism, how he is anointed by the Father while the Holy Spirit descends upon him, and then witnesses his first sign—through her own intercession—as he commences with his mission to redeem the world. Thus, by the working of this sign at Cana through the intercession of Mary, Jesus manifests himself as the messianic Savior, who is both Son of God and son of Mary. ⁵



OUR LADY OF LOURDES

As Mary has always been about "proclaiming the greatness of the Lord," (Luke 1:46) it is apropos that through her Rosary, we go deeper into the great mysteries of the life of the Son of God who

humbled himself by becoming one of us so as to bless us with eternal life and save us from an ignominious death.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11)

The baptism of Jesus—*unlike* our baptism, which is necessary for the forgiveness of original sin—signifies the

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

Mary in the Theology of the Fathers (Part 1)

By Fr. Ambrose Sigman, O.P.

[Fr. Ambrose Sigman, OP joined the Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus of the Dominican Order in 2006. He made his solemn profession in 2011 and was ordained a priest in 2013. He has served as parochial vicar at St. Raymond's Catholic Church in Menlo Park, California, a ministry of the Western Dominican Province. Currently, he is a student at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, earning his doctorate in Patrology. He resides in the Convent of Sts. Xystus and Clement, attached to the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome.]

The place of the Virgin Mary in the history of Christian thought is a long and complex one. Since the days of the inspired authors of the New Testament, there has been a great deal of reflection on what role Our Lady played in the providence of God and in the history of our salvation. This is especially true with the period between the 2nd and the 8th centuries, the period of the Fathers of the Church. It is important for us to understand the doctrine that the Fathers taught about the Virgin Mary. We can understand and examine the first steps taken by Christians as they labored to remain faithful to the understanding of the New Testament. During these early centuries, the Fathers rarely spoke about Mary outside of Christ. Allusions to the Virgin almost always arose out of a Christological or a biblical context. The discussion of the mystery of the Incarnate Word becomes clearer when Mary and her role are brought into it.

In the first centuries of the Church the amount of material written about Mary was quite small, especially when compared to later centuries. In the earliest centuries of the Church, references to Our Lady are scattered across a variety of genres and authors, but starting in the second half of the fourth century, Christian authors became more and more interested in Our Lady and her theological import. After the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon in the mid-fifth century, there occurs a sharp increase in the level of Marian doctrine and devotion, some of which we will see. Much of this theological and devotional interest is expressed in the form of surviving homilies from great spiritual and theological masters, who preached about Our Lady in the context of some liturgical celebration. By the end of this period, devotion to Mary had become quite widespread, with Our Lady held up as a model for the Christian life, an influence which became especially apparent in the practices of monastic life and consecrated virginity.

The end of this period saw an extraordinary flowering of works on the Virgin Mary, especially homilies. In these early homilies, panegyrics were offered directing the attention of Christians toward the Mother of God. She became not only an object of admiration and veneration, but also a model for imitation with regard to the practice of the Christian life and the living out of the virtues of the Gospel. This period also saw the development of Marian hymns. At their best, these hymns combined the beauty of their composition with the richness of their theological content. Worship and devotion came together in the

celebrations of the first Marian feast days. The faithful began to recognize more and more that Mary had an ongoing mission in the Church, among the faithful, a mission that did not end with her role in the Incarnation. The Fathers of the Church gave voice to this recognition, and in doing so, began to work out the Marian theological patrimony that became the basis of later traditions. In these works of the Fathers, we have the seeds of future development.

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

St. Ignatius of Antioch is one of earliest post-Biblical Christian authors. His letters to the various churches he encountered on the way to his martyrdom in Rome offer a wealth of information about the early Church. As was typical at this time, he does not say much about Our Lady, but what he does say is quite revealing. Ignatius' importance in this regard is his witness to some of the earliest liturgical traditions in the Church. In his letters, he offers various professions of faith, undoubtedly used in many liturgical celebrations. All of these creeds mention Mary and present her as the mother of Christ according to his human nature, as God the Father is his father according to His divine nature. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, he writes, "There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit, both made and not made, God existing in flesh, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord." (Ephesians 7.2). The motherhood of Mary becomes a part of God's plan of salvation, and Mary has the honor of being the one who inserts Christ into the line of David's descendants, thus allowing him to fulfill the messianic prophecies. He affirms this in his letter to the church in Tralles, "Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and ate and drank. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and truly died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead . . ." (Trallians, 9.1).

In his time, Ignatius was struggling against the heresy of Docetism, a heresy which denied the reality of the Incarnation. According to this heresy, Jesus was not truly a man, but was rather a kind of spiritual phantasm. They considered it undignified for God to have a human body. Because of his contesting of this heresy, Ignatius emphasizes strongly the fact that Christ was truly born from the Virgin Mary, thus testifying to the Church's belief in the Incarnation, and the value of Christ's redemptive action. Mary truly engendered the flesh of Christ, she truly carried him about in her virginal womb, and she truly gave birth to Him. This was all a part of God's saving plan.

Born in Nablus, in Palestine in the year 100, St. Justin Martyr was a philosopher who converted to Christianity. Only a few of his writings survive, including the Dialogue

with Trypho. In this dialogue with a Jewish opponent of Christianity, Justin mounts a strong defense of the virgin birth against Jewish accusations to the contrary, using especially Isaiah 7:14.

Justin also moves in some new theological directions by identifying Mary's response at the Annunciation as an essential moment in the history of salvation. Mary's willing participation enables the destruction of sin and death brought about through Eve's disobedience. He writes, "For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God . . . And by her has He been born and by whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him; but works deliverance from death to those who repent of their wickedness." (*Dialogue with Trypho* 100).

SAINT IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who was martyred around the year 202, was one of the earliest dogmatic theologians in the Church. With his works, we have some of the earliest attempts at a more systematic presentation and explanation of the Christian faith. He strongly emphasized the idea of the recapitulation of all things in Christ, a doctrine derived from the writings of Saint Paul. In the letter to the Romans 5:12-21, Paul sets up a contrast between Adam and Christ. Through Adam, sin and death enter the world, but through Christ comes life and grace. The failures of Adam are made up for by the new Adam, Jesus Christ, who restores us to our original purpose and remedies the sin of Adam. Paul's extended reflection on Adam and Christ become a springboard for much of the theology of St. Irenaeus.

Because of this focus, Irenaeus emphasizes Mary's role as the new Eve. He writes, "Even though Eve had Adam for a husband, she was still a virgin. . . . By disobeying, she became the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race. In the same way, Mary, though she also had a husband, was still a virgin, and by obeying, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. . . . The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. What Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith" (*Adv. Her.* 3, 22). Irenaeus presses the logic of this theme even further than does Justin. He identifies Mary as "the cause of salvation" who rescues the human race from its slavery to death, whose obedience makes possible the salvation of all of God's creation.

The writings of Irenaeus also contain one of the earliest possible references to Mary's role as an intercessor in *Adversus Haereses* 5.19.1. He writes, "For just as the former was led astray by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed His word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should carry God, being obedient to His Word. And if the former did disobey God, yet the

latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness (*advocata*) of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience." St. Irenaeus holds out the possibility that Mary took on the role of an intercessor, at least on behalf of Eve. Mary not only makes good on the failures of Eve, she also seeks God's mercy for her as well.

According to St. Irenaeus, just as Adam was recapitulated in Christ, so Eve was recapitulated in Mary. So, we can begin to see how theological discussions about the nature of Christ and our salvation, what we call Christology and soteriology, included discussion of Our Blessed Mother, and we can see how integral she was to these discussions in the earliest Christian authors. This trend becomes clearer as the centuries progress. Theologically speaking, Mary comes to serve as a guarantor of the Church's teachings about Christ. ■

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Knowing Jesus... Continued from page 1

beginning of his public ministry. This is a momentous event in salvation history for Our Lord, marked by the presence of both the Father and the Holy Spirit. In this sacred event, Jesus receives his Father's blessing as he embarks upon the work of proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God (in his Person) and it culminates in his ascent to the cross at Calvary and his resurrection from the dead.

However, an essential element in Jesus' baptism is that the Father acknowledges him as his own beloved Son. The title, "Son of God" signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus to his Father.⁶ Hence, Jesus' baptism is a manifestation or "Epiphany" of Jesus as Messiah of Israel and Son of God.⁷

After his baptism, Jesus reveals that he came into this world not to do his own will but the will of his Father who sent him. (Cf. John 5) Moreover, he was sent here to do the works that his Father gave him to accomplish. (John 5:36) Likewise, upon his resurrection, Jesus returns to send his disciples forth to preach the Gospel, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21) Therefore, our own baptism, noted for its forgiveness of original sin (and actual sins if we were baptized as an adult), is also a sending forth by Christ to preach the Gospel.

In fact, the Great Commission that Jesus gave to his disciples, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20), correlates to his own baptism. Pope Benedict XVI states that there is an arc joining Jesus' baptism with his Great Commission linking them to the Holy Trinity. The mystery of the Trinitarian God begins to emerge

at Jesus' baptism and then is revealed fully only when Jesus completes the mission that was given him by his Father.⁸

As a result, in order to be Christian, one must believe in the Holy Trinity and that Jesus is the Son of God.⁹ Thus, it is no coincidence that Jesus' public ministry begins and ends with a direct reference to the Blessed Trinity and Jesus' divine Sonship.

THE WEDDING AT CANA

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there ... When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water ..." When the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." (Cf. John 2:1-10)

The miracle at Cana seems to pale in comparison to the other signs and miracles of Jesus and perhaps could cause one to dismiss this event; however, there are details here that foreshadow greater things to come. It all begins when his mother approaches him to ask for help when the wine runs out at a wedding. It seems like an inconspicuous way to begin the work of redeeming the world! Yet, it is the first sign that reveals that the son of Mary and Joseph is more than he appears to be, that there is something deeper at work within him.

The fact that it happens on the "third day" harkens back to the Great Theophany of the Old Testament when the heavens roar in the peals of thunder and lightning as Moses meets God on the mountaintop on the third day while God descends upon the mountaintop in fire (Exodus 19:16-18).¹⁰ At the same time, it is a prefiguring of history's final and decisive Theophany, the Resurrection of Jesus on the third day. On that day, it is the earth that roars as it is torn open and issues forth the Son of God, who once and for all reunites man with his Creator.¹¹

At Cana, Jesus tells his mother that his hour has not yet come. This too is a prefiguring of his final hour when he will be lifted up on the cross and take the sins of the world upon his shoulders. The wedding at Cana in Galilee marks the hour for the first manifestation of Jesus' messianic power.¹² It is a particularly important hour, as St. John the Evangelist tells us that this is the very first sign where the miracle is presented as the beginning of his signs where Jesus reveals his glory and his disciples believe in him (cf. John 2:11). However, on the horizon appears the hour of Jesus' passion and glorification. It is then that he will proclaim, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you . . ." (John 17:1) as he accomplishes his work of human Redemption.¹³

One other important aspect at Cana is the fact that Jesus produces a huge surplus of wine—180 gallons—for a private

party! We could dismiss this as insignificant or as a sign that something deeper is going on here.¹⁴ Pope Benedict believes that another sign at Cana is God's overflowing generosity. We see it in the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and here at Cana with the making of water into six stone jars of wine. Pope Benedict says, "God lavishly spends himself for the lowly creature, man. This abundant giving is his 'glory.'" The superabundance in the wedding at Cana is therefore a sign that God's marriage feast with humanity, his self-giving for men, has begun in the coming of Jesus.¹⁵ When Jesus goes to meet the wedding couple, it is really he himself who is beginning his work as the Bridegroom, inaugurating the wedding feast which is an image of God's kingdom (cf. Mt 22:2).¹⁶

In summary, as we are enlightened by these two Luminous Mysteries, we see how Mary has a special place in the "bookends" of the three-fold Epiphany by being present at Jesus' Birth, but also at his first sign at Cana—and through God's design—she is given a key role by which God manifests himself in his Son in the plan of our salvation.

As the life and purpose of the Blessed Virgin Mary has always been to bring Jesus Christ to us, even now she continues in that role given her by God. When we pray the Luminous Mysteries, Mary joins us and intercedes for us as we ponder the teachings of Our Lord and the events that occurred in his years of public ministry. Like the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries, the Luminous Mysteries contribute to our understanding of the Incarnation and Redemption in the life and death of her Son. It seems then that it is time to acknowledge these Mysteries of Light as having a rightful place in Mary's Rosary. (*In the next Newsletter, our exploration of the Luminous Mysteries continues ...*)

1. Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1994, pg. 213.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, #21.
4. St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 160: PL 52, 620-622
5. Pope John Paul II, General Audience, December 17, 1997
6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #454
7. *Ibid.*, #535
8. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part One*, Doubleday: New York, pg. 23.
9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #454
10. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part One*, Doubleday: New York, pg. 250.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Pope John Paul II, General Audience, December 17, 1997
13. *Ibid.*
14. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part One*, Doubleday: New York, pg. 252.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Pope John Paul II, General Audience, December 17, 1997

Note from the Director

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Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.