

## Saint\_Thomas\_explains\_the\_Gospel\_for\_the\_2<sup>nd</sup>\_Sunday\_of\_Advent

*Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples he said to him: Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another? And Jesus making answer said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me. And when they went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.*

GLOSS. The Evangelist had shown above how by Christ's miracles and teaching, both His disciples and the multitudes had been instructed; he now shows how this instruction had reached even to John's disciples, so that they seemed to have some jealousy towards Christ; John, when he had heard in prison the works of Christ, sent two of his disciples to say to him, Are you he that should come, or do we look for another?

GREG. We must inquire how John, who is a prophet and more than a prophet, who made known the Lord when He came to be baptized, saying, Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world! - why, when he was afterwards cast into prison, he should send his disciples to ask, Are you he that should come, or do we look for another? Did he not know Him whom he had pointed out to others; or was he uncertain whether this was He, whom by foretelling, by baptizing, and by making known, he had proclaimed to be He?

AMBROSE; Some understand it thus; That it was a great thing that John should be so far a prophet, as to acknowledge Christ, and to preach remission of sin; but that like a pious prophet, he could not think that He whom he had believed to be He that should come, was to suffer death; he doubted therefore though not in faith, yet in love. So Peter also doubted, saying, This be far from you, Lord; this shall not be to you.

CHRYS. But this seems hardly reasonable. For John was not in ignorance of His death, but was the first to preach it, saying, Behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world. For thus calling Him the Lamb, he plainly shows forth the Cross; and no otherwise than by the Cross did He take away the sins of the world. Also how is he a greater prophet than these, if he knew not those things which all the prophets knew; for Isaiah says, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.

GREG. But this question may be answered in a better way if we attend to the order of time. At the waters of Jordan he had affirmed that this was the Redeemer of the world: after he was thrown into prison, he inquires if this was He that should come - not that he doubted that this was the Redeemer of the world, but he asks that he may know whether He who in His own person had come into the world, would in His own person descend also to the world below.

JEROME; Hence he frames his question thus, Are you he that is to come? Not, Are you He that has come? And the sense is, Direct me, since I am about to go down into the lower parts of the earth, whether I shall announce You to the spirits beneath also; or whether You as the Son of God may not taste death, but will send another to this sacrament?

CHRYS. But is this a more reasonable explanation than the other? for why then did he not say, Are You He that is coming to the world beneath? and not simply, Are you he that is to come? And the reason of his seeking to know, namely, that he might preach Him there, is even ridiculous. For the present life is the time of grace, and after death the judgment and punishment; therefore there was no need of a forerunner thither. Again, if the unbelievers who should believe after death should be saved, then none would perish; all would then repent and worship; for every knee shall bow, both of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth.

GLOSS. But it ought to be observed, that Jerome and Gregory did not say that John was to proclaim Christ's coming to the world beneath, to the end that the unbelievers there might be converted to the faith, but that the righteous who abode in expectation of Christ, should be comforted by His near approach.

HILARY; It is indeed certain, that he who as forerunner proclaimed Christ's coming, as prophet knew Him when He stood before him, and worshipped Him as Confessor when He came to him, could not fall into error from such abundant knowledge. Nor can it be believed that the grace of the Holy Spirit failed him when thrown into prison, seeing He should hereafter minister the light of His power to the Apostles when they were in prison.

JEROME; Therefore he does not ask as being himself ignorant. But as the Savior asks where Lazarus is buried, in order that they who showed Him the sepulcher might be so far prepared for faith, and believe that the dead was verily raised again - so John, about to be put to death by Herod, sends his disciples to Christ, that by this opportunity of seeing His signs and wonders they might believe in Him, and so might learn through their master's inquiry. But John's disciples had somewhat of bitterness and jealousy towards the Lord, as their former inquiry showed, Why do you and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples fast not?

CHRYS. Yet whilst John was with them he held them rightly convinced concerning Christ. But when he was going to die, he was more concerned on their behalf. For he feared that he might leave his disciples a prey to some pernicious doctrine, and that they should remain separate from Christ, to whom it had been his care to bring all his followers from the beginning. Had he said to them, Depart from me, for He is better than me, he would not have prevailed with them, as they would have supposed that he spoke this in humility, which opinion would have drawn them more closely to him. What then does he? He waits to hear through them that Christ works miracles. Nor did he send all, but two only, (whom perhaps he chose as more ready to believe than the rest,) that the reason of his inquiry might be unsuspected, and that from the things themselves which they should see they might understand the difference between him and Jesus.

HILARY; John then is providing not for his own, but his disciples' ignorance; that they might know that it was no other whom he had proclaimed, he sent them to see His works,

that the works might establish what John had spoken; and that they should not look for any other Christ, than Him to whom His works had borne testimony.

CHRYS. So also Christ as knowing the mind of John, said not, I am He; for thus He would have put an obstacle in the way of those that heard Him, who would have at least thought within themselves, if they did not say, what the Jews did say to Christ, You bear witness of yourself. Therefore He would have them learn from His miracles, and so presented His doctrine to them more clear, and without suspicion. For the testimony of deeds is stronger than the testimony of words. Therefore He straightway healed a number of blind, and lame, and many other, for the sake not of John who had knowledge, but of others who doubted; as it follows, And Jesus answered and said to them, Go and tell John what you have heard and seen; The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel preached to them.

JEROME; This last is no less than the first. And understand it as if it had been said, Even the poor; that so between noble and mean, rich and poor, there may be no difference in preaching. This approves the strictness of the master, this the truth of the teacher, that in His sight every one who can be saved is equal.

CHRYS. And blessed is he who shall not be offended in me, is directed against the messengers; they were offended in Him. But He not publishing their doubts, and leaving it to their conscience alone, thus privately introduced a refutation of them.

HILARY; This saying, that they were blessed from whom there should be no offense in Him, showed them what it was that John had provided against in sending them. For John, through fear of this very thing, had sent his disciples that they might hear Christ.

GREG. Otherwise; The mind of unbelievers was greatly offended concerning Christ, because after many miracles done, they saw Him at length put to death; whence Paul speaks, We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block. What then does that mean, Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me, but a direct allusion to the humiliation of His death; as much as to say, I do indeed wonderful works, but do not disdain to suffer humble things. Because then I follow you in death, men must be careful not to despise in Me My death, while they reverence My wonderful works.

HILARY; In these things which were done concerning John, there is a deep store of mystic meaning. The very condition and circumstances of a prophet are themselves a prophecy. John signifies the Law; for the Law proclaimed Christ, preaching remission of sins, and giving promise of the kingdom of heaven. Also when the Law was on the point of expiring, (having been, through the sins of the people, which hindered them from understanding what it spoke of Christ, as it were shut up in bonds and in prison,) it sends men to the contemplation of the Gospel, that unbelief might see the truth of its words established by deeds.

AMBROSE; And perhaps the two disciples sent are the two people; those of the Jews, and those of the Gentiles who believed.

CHRYS. Sufficient had been now done for John's disciples; they returned certified concerning Christ by the wonderful works which they had seen. But it was necessary that the multitude also should be corrected, which had conceived many things amiss from the

question of John's disciples, not knowing the purpose of John in sending them. They might say, He who bare such witness to Christ, is now of another mind, and doubts whether this be He. Does he this because he has jealousy against Jesus? Has the prison taken away his courage? Or spoke he before but empty and untrue words?

HILARY; Therefore that this might not lead them to think of John as though he were offended concerning Christ, it continues, When they had gone away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes concerning John.

CHRYS; As they departed, that He should not seem to speak flattery of the man; and in correcting the error of the multitude, He does not openly expose their secret suspicions, but by framing his words against what was in their hearts, He shows that He knows hidden things. But He said not as to the Jews, Why think you evil in your hearts? though indeed it was evil that they had thought; yet it proceeded not from wickedness, but from ignorance; therefore He spoke not to them harshly, but answered for John, showing that he had not fallen from his former opinion. This He teaches them, not by His word only, but by their own witness, the witness of their own actions, as well as their own words. What went you out into the wilderness to see? As much as to say, Why did you leave the towns and go out into the wilderness? So great multitudes would not have gone with such haste into the desert, if they had not thought that they should see one great, and wonderful, one more stable than the rock.

PSEUDO-CHRYS; They had not gone out at this time into the desert to see John, for he was not now in the desert, but in prison; but He speaks of the past time while John was yet in the desert, and the people flocked to him.

CHRYS; And note that making no mention of any other fault, He clears John of fickleness, which the multitude had suspected him of, saying, A reed shaken by the wind?

GREG; This He proposes, not to assert, but to deny. For if but a breath of air touch a reed, it bends it one way or other; a type of the carnal mind, which leans to either side, according as the breath of praise or detraction reaches it. A reed shaken by the wind John was not, for no variety of circumstance bent him from his uprightness.

JEROME; Was it for this you went out into the desert to see a man like to a reed, and carried about by every wind, so that in lightness of mind he doubts concerning Him whom once he preached? Or it may be he is roused against Me by the sting of envy, and he seeks empty honor by his preaching, that he may thereof make gain. Why should he covet wealth? that he may have dainty fare? But his food is locusts and wild honey. That he may wear soft raiment? But his clothing is camel's hair. This is that He adds, But what went you out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?

CHRYS. Otherwise; That John is not as a waving reed, yourselves have shown by going out to the desert to him. Nor can any say that John was once firm, but has since become willful and wavering; for as some are prone to anger by natural disposition, others become so by long weakness and indulgence, so in inconstancy, some are by nature inconstant, some become so by yielding to their own humor and self-indulgence. But John was neither inconstant by natural disposition; this he means by saying, What went you out for to see, a reed shaken by the wind? Neither had he corrupted an excellent nature by self-indulgence,

for that he had not served the flesh is shown by his raiment, his abode in the desert, his prison. Had he sought soft raiment, he would not have dwelt in the desert but in kings' houses; Lo they that are clothed in soft raiment, are in kings' houses.

JEROME; This teaches that an austere life and strict preaching ought to shun kings' courts and the palaces of the rich and luxurious.

GREG; Let one suppose that there is nothing sinful in luxury and rich dress; if pursuit of such things had been blameless, the Lord would not have thus commended John for the coarseness of his raiment, nor would Peter have checked the desire of fine clothes in women as he does, Not in costly raiment.

AUG. In all such things we blame not the use of the things, but the lust of those that use them. For whoever uses the good things in his reach more sparingly than are the habits of those with whom he lives, is either temperate or superstitious. Whoever again uses them in a measure exceeding the practice of the good among whom he lives, either has some meaning therein, or else is dissolute.

CHRYS. Having described his habits of life from his dwelling-place, his dress, and the concourse of men to hear him, He now brings in that he is also a prophet, But what went you out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

GREG; The office of a prophet is to foretell things to come, not to show them present. John therefore is more than a prophet, because Him whom he had foretold by going before Him, the same he showed as present by pointing Him out.

JEROME; In this he is also greater than the other prophets, that to his prophetic privilege is added the reward of the Baptist that he should baptize his Lord.

CHRYS; Then he shows in what respect He is greater, saying, This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face.

JEROME; To add to this great worthiness of John, He brings a passage from Malachias, in which he is spoken of as an Angel. We must suppose that John is here called an Angel, not as partaking the Angelic nature, but from the dignity of his office as a forerunner of the Lord.

GREG; For the Greek word Angel, is in Latin Nuntius, 'a messenger.' He therefore who came to bear a heavenly message is rightly called an Angel, that he may preserve in his title the dignity which he performs in his office.

CHRYS; He shows where it is that John is greater than the Prophets, namely, in that he is nigh to Christ, as he says, I send before your face, that is, near you, as those that walk next to the king's chariot are more illustrious than others, so likewise is John because of his nearness to Christ.

PSEUDO-CHRYS; Also the other Prophets were sent to announce Christ's coming, but John to prepare His way, as it follows, who shall make ready your way before you;

GLOSS: That is, shall open the hearts of your hearers by preaching repentance and baptizing.

JEROME; Mystically; The desert is that which is deserted of the Holy Spirit, where there is no habitation of God; in the reed is signified a man who in outward show lives a pious life, but lacks all real fruit within himself, fair outside, within hollow, moved unclean with

every breath of wind, that is, with every impulse of unclean spirits, having no firmness to remain still, devoid of the marrow of the soul; by the garment wherewith his body is clothed is his mind strewn, that it is lost in luxury and self-indulgence. The kings are the fallen angels; they are they who are powerful in this life, and the lords of this world. Thus, They that are clothed in soft raiment are in kings' houses; that is, those whose bodies are enervated and destroyed by luxury, it is clear are possessed by demons.

GREG; Also John was not clothed in soft raiment that is, he did not encourage sinners in their sinful life by speaking smooth things, but rebuked them with sharpness and rigor, saying, Generation of vipers, &c.

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## Saint\_Thomas\_explains\_the\_Gospel\_for\_the\_Immaculate\_Conception

*And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*

THEOPHYL; Because either the Incarnation of Christ was to be in the sixth age of the world, or because it was to serve to the fulfilling of the law, rightly in the sixth month of John's conception was an angel sent to Mary, to tell her that a Savior should be born. Hence it is said, And in the sixth month, &c. We must understand the sixth month to be March, on the twenty-fifth day of which our Lord is reported to have been conceived, and to have suffered, as also to have been born on the twenty-fifth day of December. But if either the one day we believe to be the vernal equinox, or the other the winter solstice, it happens that with the increase of light He was conceived or born Who lightens every man that comes into the world. But if any one shall prove, that before the time of our Lord's nativity or conception, light began either to increase, or supersede the darkness, we then say, that it was because John, before the appearance of His coming, began to preach the kingdom of heaven.

BASIL. 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 fullness of the Divine Wisdom; hence it follows, The angel Gabriel was sent.

GREG. To the virgin Mary was sent, not any one of the angels, but the archangel Gabriel; for upon this service it was meet that the highest angel should come, as being the bearer of the highest of all tidings. He is therefore marked by a particular name, to signify what was his effectual part in the work. For Gabriel is interpreted, "the strength of God." By the strength of God then was He to be announced Who was coming as the God of strength, and mighty in battle, to put down the powers of the air.

GLOSS. 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.)

THEOPHYL; It was as a fit beginning for man's restoration, that an angel should be sent down from God to consecrate a virgin by a divine birth, for the first cause of man's perdition was the Devil sending a serpent to deceive a woman by the spirit of pride.

AUG. 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.

JEROME; And rightly an angel is sent to the virgin, because the virgin state is ever akin to that of angels. Surely in the flesh to live beyond the flesh is not a life on earth but in heaven.

CHRYS. 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 connection 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 fulfill it, 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? 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 dishonor, if he also had not acknowledged the mystery; of whom it is added, Whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

THEOPHYL; Which last applies not only to Joseph, but also to Mary, for the Law commanded that every one should take a wife out of his own tribe or family. It follows, And the virgin's name was Mary.

ID. Maria, in Hebrew, is the star of the sea; but in Syriac it is interpreted Mistress, and well, because Mary was thought worthy to be the mother of the Lord of the whole world, and the light of endless ages.

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 to her. That she might not be dishonored by any ignoble address, she is saluted by an angel.

GREG. NYSS. 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 EX. 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.

JEROME; And it is well said, Full of grace, for to others, grace comes in part; into Mary at once the fullness of grace wholly infused itself. She truly is full of grace through whom has been poured forth upon every creature the abundant rain of the Holy Spirit. But already He was with the Virgin Who sent the angel to the Virgin. The Lord preceded His messenger, for He could not be confined by place Who dwells in all places. Whence it follows, The Lord is with you.

AUG. More I than with me, for He Himself is in your heart, He is (made) in you womb, He fills your soul, He fills your womb.

GREEK EX. 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, has molded the whole nature of man into Himself. But comes last the most perfect and comprehensive salutation; Blessed are you among women. i.e. Alone, far before all other women; that women also should be blessed in you, as men are in your 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 has 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 EX. 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 you.

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.

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