

The Mystery of Christ and the Mystery of the *Theotokos*

“The Son of God Is Perpetually Beholden to His Mother”

*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Light-Wrought Children of the Church:*

Let us cry out today with a loud voice, together with St. Paul, the inspired Apostle and Father of our Church, who traversed the Heavens:

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”!¹

Our Christ and God was yesterday, is today, and will be eternally the same and unchangeable. One and the same eternal God preëxisted as the incorporeal Son and *Logos* of the Father, became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and is now, as God-Man, seated at the right hand of God, “**on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the Heavens.**”²



The hypostatic union and mutual interpermeation of the Divine and human natures in the Person of the *Logos*, which we celebrate and worship today, was, is, and will be indivisible and inseparable.

On account of this inexpressible and indissoluble **union**, human nature was divinized, or deified; God anointed and deified—humanity, indeed, having been anointed and deified from the very beginning of His Conception.

O, this all-wondrous and magnificent divinization and deification! Our created nature has become a partaker of the beneficence and majesty of God; as the Holy Fathers say, our nature has become “**like unto God**” (ὁμόθεος)!³

This Mystery of the union of the Uncreated God and created man was the **Mystery** hidden from eternity. When it was revealed, it nonetheless remained a **Mystery**, and will remain a **Mystery** forevermore,

“**believed, but not known,**” according to St. Gregory Palamas, “**venerated, but not greatly to be pried into.**”⁴

Everything that appertains to the Divine, great, ineffable, and incomprehensible Mystery, the “**Mystery of Christ,**”⁵ is believed and worshipped “**through the Spirit alone,**”⁶ and only through the Grace of the Holy Spirit and only by those who render their souls, through good **intention**, receptive and susceptible to Divine illumination, to the Uncreated Energies of God—a fact which constitutes yet another wondrous mystery.

Indeed, is not the union of **faith** and **heart** a great mystery and miracle of Grace? From whence is the heart of man assured that God became man and that His Mother was, and remained, a Virgin? And from whence does the heart give unhesitating credence and assent to these truths?



My Christ-loving Brothers and Sisters:

The preternatural “Mystery of Christ”⁷ affords us the opportunity to delve into this mystery of the union of **faith** and **heart**.

As the God-Bearing Preceptors of our Church teach us, we must labor persistently in cultivating the practical virtues and in carrying out the Divine commandments, so that we might manifest our good intention to our Savior, Who loves mankind.

Our sincere persistence in **practice** (πρᾶξις) has such a purifying and healing effect on our **mind** and **heart** that it opens up the path to **Divine vision** (θεωρία) and an experiential apprehension of the ineffable Mysteries of God.

“**Let us be diligent, as far as we are able, to cultivate the practical virtues,**” Abba Philemon exhorts us, “**for in this way we are led up to devoutness, that purity of the intellect, the fruit of which is natural and theological intuition (θεωρία).** For through practice we ascend to vision.”⁸

The effort that we put forth in the **practice** of Christianity steadily opens up the path towards the sacred core of our existence, to our innermost being, where our mystical union with our God and Savior is Divinely effected

“through the return of the mind to the heart, and through the constant and unceasing repetition in the heart of the Divine and inward prayer, which is: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’”⁹

When we find in ourselves an inability to unite faith with the heart, when we are unable to feel assured about the Mysteries of our Church, this means that we are not opening ourselves up in good faith, through practice, to Divine vision.

“Hence, unless we first deliberately strive to open the noetic mouth of our intellect, the Grace of the Holy Spirit is not given to us.”¹⁰

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My Brothers and Sisters Who Bear the Name of Christ:

Let us not allow ourselves to be overcome by discouragement! We must all traverse the way that leads to experiential apprehension of the “Mystery of Christ,”¹¹ through strenuous practice and with the consolation of Divine vision.

We are not alone on this journey toward deification. The Immaculate *Theotokos*, who “lent flesh”¹² to the Son and *Logos* of God, the Creator of all things, is our all-powerful Mediatrix, Guide, and Protectress.

This “provision” of the *Theotokos* to our Lord already helps us to approach in some manner the other great Mystery, that of the *Theotokos*; for Christ borrowed from His All-Holy Mother

“an internal provision from her very nature, that is, from the very natural and all-pure blood of the *Theotokos*; hence, as a natural provision, it is also perpetual, and so, for this reason, the Son of God is perpetually indebted to His Mother.”¹³

The mind reels before this Mystery! Through His Incarnation, the Uncreated God becomes a “debtor” to a created human being, to His Mother!

It therefore behooved the Son, as a “debtor,” to glorify her—as indeed He did—

“with all of the God-befitting honors and glories with which He has glorified no other creature.”¹⁴

Furthermore, Christ

“is beholden, as a debtor, to hearken to the supplications and entreaties that His Mother offers to Him.”¹⁵

Do you see, my blessed Brothers and Sisters, do you see the greatness of the Virgin? Are you aware, I wonder, of what an all-powerful Mediatrix we have?

Let us have recourse, therefore, with piety and faith to her Grace! Let us constantly remind her that, through her “**provision**,” she “**put the Son of God in debt to herself**.”¹⁶ And let us ask her to support us, as a fervent protectress and helper, in our arduous journey towards purification, illumination, and deification, through **practice** and **Divine vision**.

May the precious and God-evoking prayers of our much-revered Elder and Father, Metropolitan Cyprian, accompany and strengthen us, so that we might undertake this contest, through the **Mystery of the Theotokos**, that leads us to the knowledge of the **Mystery of Christ**, unto the glory of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May the Grace of the Mother of God be always with you.

The Holy Nativity of our Savior Jesus Christ, 2007

Your humble intercessor before our Incarnate Lord,
✠ Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi,
Acting President
of the Holy Synod in Resistance

Notes

1. Hebrews 13:8.

2. Hebrews 8:1.

3. **St. John of Damascus**, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book III, ch. 17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1069A.

4. **St. Gregory Palamas**, “Homily XIV, ‘On the Annunciation of our Most Pure Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary,’” §1, in *Ἔργα [Works]*, “Ἕλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας” (Thessalonica: Paterikai Ekdoseis “Gregorios ho Palamas,” 1985), Vol. IX, p. 376.

5. Cf. Ephesians 3:4.

6. See note 4.

7. See note 5.

8. *A Very Beneficial Discourse Concerning Abba Philemon*, in *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν* (Athens: Ekdotikos Oikos “Aster,” 1975), Vol. II, p. 250.

9. **St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite**, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον* [Commentary on the Great Feasts] (Venice: 1836), p. 254.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
11. See note 5.
12. **St. Nikodemos**, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 548.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*

Note: The Reverend Parish Priests are asked to read the present Encyclical immediately after the Holy Gospel for the Divine Liturgy of Christmas.