

Friday of the Fourth Week of Advent

The Liturgical Year

Dom Prosper Gueranger

The Lord is now nigh; come, let us adore.

From the Prophet Isaiah - Chapter 66

Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at his word. Your brethren that hate you, and cast you out for my name's sake, have said: Let the Lord be glorified, and we shall see in your joy: but they shall be confounded. A voice of the people from the city, a voice from the temple, the voice of the Lord that renders recompense to his enemies. Before she was in labour, she brought forth; before her time came to be delivered, she brought forth a man-child. Who has ever heard such a thing? And who has seen the like of this? Shall the earth bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be brought forth at once, because Sion has been in labour, and has brought forth her children?

Shall not I that make others to bring forth children, myself bring forth, says the Lord? Shall I, that give generation to others, be barren, says the Lord thy God? Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you that mourn for her: that you may suck and be filled with the breasts of her consolations: that you may milk out and flow with delights, from the abundance of her glory. For thus says the Lord: Behold I will bring upon her as it were a river of peace, and as an overflowing torrent the glory of the Gentiles, which you shall suck: you shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they shall caress you. As one whom the mother caresses, so will I comfort you and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb, and the hand of the Lord shall be known to his servants, and he shall be angry with his enemies. For behold the Lord will come with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind: to render his wrath in indignation, and his rebuke with flames of fire: for the Lord shall judge by fire: and by his sword unto all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

Thy presence, Oh Jesus, will give fruitfulness to her that was barren, and the despised Sion shall suddenly bring forth a people which the world is too small to hold. But all the glory of this fruitfulness belongs to Thee, Oh divine Word! The psalmist had foretold it when, speaking to Jerusalem as to a queen, he said to her: 'Instead of thy fathers, sons are born to thee; thou shall make them princes over all the earth: they shall remember thy name throughout all generations; therefore shall people praise thee for ever and ever, yea for ever and ever.' But for this end it was necessary that God Himself should come down in person. He alone could make a Virgin-Mother; He alone could raise up children to Abraham out of the very stones. 'Yet one little while,' as He says by one of His prophets, 'and I will move heaven and earth, and I will move all nations.' And by another: 'From the rising of the sun even to the going down, My name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation.' There will soon be, then, but one sacrifice; for the Lamb, who is to be offered therein, will be born a few hours hence; and since sacrifice is the bond of union among men, when there shall be but one sacrifice there shall be but one people.

Come then quickly, Oh Church of God, that art to unite us all into one; come and be born into our world. And since for us thy children thou art already born, may the Lamb, thy Spouse, pour out upon thee the river of peace

announced by the prophet: may He open out upon thee *the glory of the Gentiles, as an overflowing torrent*; may the nations cluster round thee as their common mother, and be filled with *the abundance of thy glory, with the breasts of thy consolations*; and thou carry them on thy heart and caress them in thy tender love. Oh Jesus, it is Thou that has inspired our mother with this wonderful love; it is Thou that consoles us, and enlightens us, by her. Come to her and visit her; come, and, by the new birth Thou art about to take among us, renew her life within her. Give her, during this year also, firmness of faith, the grace of the Sacraments, the efficacy of prayer, the gift of miracles, the succession of her hierarchy, power of government, fortitude against the princes of the world, love of the cross, victory over Satan, and the crown of martyrdom.

During this new year make her, as ever, Thy beautiful bride; make her faithful to Thy love, and more than ever successful in the great work Thou hast entrusted to her; for each year brings us nearer to the day when Thou wilt come for the last time, not in the swathing bands of infancy, but on a cloud with great majesty, to render Thy rebuke with flames of fire, and destroy those that have despised or have not loved Thy Church, which Thou wilt then raise up and admit into Thy eternal kingdom.

Hymn of the Birth of Christ
(Taken from the poet Prudentius)

Come forth, sweet Babe! Child of chastity, Child of a Virgin Mother! Come, Oh thou, our Mediator, Man and God.

Though thou did come, in time, from the mouth of the most high Father, and became incarnate at the angel's word; yet had thou, Oh eternal Wisdom, dwelt for ever in the bosom of thy Father.

This eternal Wisdom manifested itself when it made heaven, light, and the other creatures; by the power of the Word were all these made, for the Word is God.

But having thus created the world, and fixed the laws of the universe, this creator and maker still left not his Father's bosom.

Until at length thousands of years rolled on, and then he deigned to visit the world grown old in sin.

For man, blinded with passion, paid adoration to empty vanities, and believed that brass, or stiff blocks of stone and wood were God.

Abandoned to idolatry, they became the slaves of the treacherous enemy, and plunged their enslaved souls into the dark abyss.

But the Son of God compassionated this destruction of his fallen creatures; for it was the ruin of his Father's image.

He took to himself a mortal body, that by the resurrection of that body he might break the chain of death, and raise up man to his Father.

Thou forebodes his sufferings, Oh noble Virgin, and yet to give birth to this thy Son is an honour which adds fresh lustre to thy spotless purity.

Oh that Virgin Mother, what joy for the world does she contain within her! A new age, a golden light, will come by her.

**Prayer from the Gallican Sacramentary
(In Adventu Domini, Contestatio)**

It is truly meet and just that we should here and in all places ever give thee thanks, Oh almighty God, through Christ our Lord, of whom John, the faithful friend, was the precursor in birth, the precursor in preaching in the wilderness, the precursor in baptism, preparing thus the way to the Judge and Redeemer. He called sinners to repentance; and purchasing a people for the Saviour, he baptised in the Jordan them that confessed their sins. He conferred not the full grace which regenerates man, but taught him to look for the coming of the most merciful Saviour. He remitted not the sins of them that came unto him, but he promised the future remission of sins to believers; that thus they who went down into the waters of penance, might hope for a merciful cure and forgiveness from him, who, they were told, was to come full of the gift of truth and grace, our Lord Jesus Christ.