

SERMON OF ST. LEO THE GREAT ON THE NATIVITY¹

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OUR SAVIOR, dearly beloved, is born today; let us rejoice, for it is not fitting to be sad on the birthday of Life. No one is shut out from a participation of this cheerfulness; all have a common cause for joy. Let the saint exult, for he draws near to the palm; let the sinner rejoice, for he is invited to forgiveness; let the Gentile take courage, for he is called unto life. For the Word of God, God the Son of God, in order to deliver man from eternal death, is made man. And in such a manner did He unite both natures, that the glorification did not consume the inferior, nor the assumption diminish the superior.

“Accordingly, while the distinctness of both substances is preserved and both meet in one Person, lowliness is assumed by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity; so that, as an appropriate remedy for our ills, one and the same Mediator of God and men might from the one nature die, and from the other rise again. For unless He were true God, He could not bring us healing; unless He were true man, He could not supply an example. ‘Glory to God in the highest,’ is sung by the exulting angels at Our Lord’s birth. How greatly ought the lowliness of men be gladdened by this ineffable work of love, when even the sublime angels rejoice so.

“Let us then, dearly beloved, render thanks to God the Father, through His Son, in the Holy Ghost. Let us put off the old man with his deeds, and having obtained a share in the birth of Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh. Acknowledge, O Christian, your own dignity, and having been made partaker of the divine nature, do not by degenerate conduct return to your wickedness of old. Be mindful of what Head and of what Body you are a member. Remember that you have been rescued from the powers of darkness and translated into the light and kingdom of God. Do not subject yourself again to the servitude of the devil, for your ransom is the blood of Christ. He will judge you in truth, Who redeemed you in mercy.’

¹ Second Lessons for the Feast of the Nativity.