242 To Be Born, Born (*Nasci, Natus*)

Just as we read,[[1]](#endnote-1) there are three substances in Christ: divinity, flesh, and spirit, so then three nativities. In this it recalls the scripture: divine from the Father, carnal from the mother, and spiritual from the Spirit. From the Father is born God, from the mother is born man, from the Spirit is born the spirit. From the Father the way, from the mother the truth, and from the Spirit life. And from the Father is born for all time, from the woman once, from the Spirit he is born frequently.

Concerning the first, Psal. [109:3]: “Before the day star I begot you.”

Concerning the second, Isai. [7:14; 9:6]: “Behold a virgin shall conceive,” and it follows, “A child is born to us.”

Concerning the third, Mala. [4:2]: “Unto you that fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise.”

According to eternal generation he has a mother,[[2]](#endnote-2) according to that of Matt. [12:50]: “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father,” this one is a father to me, “he is my brother, and sister, and mother.” The Church represents these three nativities in those three masses which it celebrates on Christmas. For the eternal generation which is hidden is represented by the mass at night. Wherefore says Isai. [53:8]: “Who shall declare his generation?” The second nativity, the carnal, which is partly hidden in a way, but partly busy, partly open as far as the deed is represented by the second mass at dawn. The third nativity, the spiritual, which is open by the effect is represented by the third mass. On the day Christ certainly is born by affect and effect but is nourished through the stomach. And as Christ had a double nativity, one from the part of the Father, the other from the part of the mother, so also, we ought to be doubly born, namely, to the world and to God. About which John 3[:9]: “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

¶ Concerning these two nativities Augustine says in his little book *De catechizando rudibus*, c. 2,[[3]](#endnote-3) just as Jacob in his birth put out his hand first and then followed the head and the other members, so Christ having sent first the patriarchs and the prophets in a certain part, as if the hand of his body, he would be born pronouncing. And as if the five fingers the five books of the law because of holding the precedent that he would not supplant them. Therefore, concerning the nativity of Christ, it is to be known that Christ was born of a mother, just as a flower from a thorn, just as the creator from a creature, just as gold from the earth. First, he shows his purity. Second is his humanity. Third is his goodness or planning.

¶ Concerning the first, Matt. 2[:1]: “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod.” Wherefore as it is said the thorns suffocate the flower growing among them, as it is said in Luke 9[:7-9]. So, the Jews and Herod endeavored to extinguish the flowering Christ among them. Wherefore that fits as well, Job [14:1]: “Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries.”

Concerning the second, it is said in Psal. [86:5]: “That man is born in her, and the Highest himself hath founded her.” When a man dies among his enemies he lacks a house well founded, so Christ when he died among the perverse founded for himself the strongest house which no enemy could pierce nor penetrate. Wherefore also his mother supported the faith of the Church when the apostles tottered and fled. Wherefore Chrysostom, homily 9 *Super Mattheum*,[[4]](#endnote-4) man is born in the flesh, so that he may be subject to corruption, but Christ was born, that he may cure corruption. I have seen the admirable nativity of Christ through men who are sinners, through women who are prostitutes, adulterers, and gentiles. But such generation does not defile the dignity, but more commends his mercy, namely, he wished it through such ones. And it follows below, homily 15.[[5]](#endnote-5)

¶ Other sons receive generosity from their fathers, but from this son the fathers are generous.

Concerning the third, according to the naturalists,[[6]](#endnote-6) gold is produced, lies, and is born in the earth and requires a greater struggle than other metals. Therefore, by the north wind the heat is more compressed to the interior of the earth because of the surrounding cold. So, Christ was born in the deepest humility and draws to himself greater heat of charity and grace than any other. And as gold is the best metal, so Christ is the best creature. Wherefore also it is figured through “the gold of Hevilath which is very good,” Gen. 2[:11-12]. So therefore, the imitators of Christ ought to be born in purity and humility, in goodness for the dignities of the world, John 1[:12]: “He gave them power to be made the sons of God,” etc., who are not from blood as much as purity.

¶ For where several bloods are contrary to the generation of another, there is impurity “nor of the will of the flesh,” [John 1:13], as much as humility. “For the flesh lusts against the spirit,” [Gal. 5:17], to this which it is dominated, John 1[:13]: “nor of the will of man,” as much as to goodness, for just as what is from nature is better than what is from the will. So, what is from above is better than what is from nature, because it is better that which is from God than what is from man. And this what is understood. But they are born from God. Therefore, the nativity of such one is powerful according to that of [1] John 5[:4]: “For whatsoever is born of God, overcomes the world.” This is apparent in the sons of the Church, because some are born of blood and such ones are horrible in the Church. For while the mother is in blood she cannot conceive a blessed one. Some are from the will of the flesh, but fleshly parents do not generate well. But some are generated from the will of man and such a one is not good but generated violently.

¶ Note here that the Church celebrates three nativities,[[7]](#endnote-7) namely, of Christ, Mary, and John the Baptist. As a sign of the three spiritual nativities by which we are reborn to health, namely, with John in water, with Mary in penance, with Christ in glory.

¶ Concerning the first, John 1[:26]: “I baptize with water.” Concerning 1 John 2[:29]: “Everyone who does justice, is born of him.” Penance is an act of justice. Wherefore when a man is born in the world two evils come forth with him, namely, original sin and its propensity for kindling to sinning. The first of these is deleted through baptism, the second is mitigated through penance.

¶ Concerning the third, the Church recalls the death of the saints by their birth, because just as nativity in the world is their nativity in death, so their death is nativity to life, Eccle. 7[:2]: “The day of death is better than the day of one's birth.” Therefore Job 3[:3] said: “Let the day perish wherein I was born,” namely, mutability.

1. Cf. Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg, *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* 4.11 (8:156a): Nativitas Christi triplex est, scilicet divina, humana, gratuita: prima est ex Patre; secunda, ex matre; tertia fit in mente. De Patre nascitur aeternaliter; de matre, temporaliter; in mente, spiritualiter. Et istæ tres nativitates sumuntur secundum tres substantias, quæ sunt in Christo, scilicet deitas, caro, et spiritus. Nam ex Patre nascitur Deus; ex matre, caro; in mente nascitur spiritus, scilicet per gratiam. Ex Patre nascitur semper; ex matre nascitur semel; in mente nascitur sæpe. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg, *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* 4.11 (8:156a): Secundum nativitatem divinam habet patrem sine matre; secundum habet matrem sine patre; secundum gratuitam habet patrem et matrem, secundum illud: *Qui fecerit voluntatem Patris,* etc. Has tres Christi nativitates repræsentat Ecclesia in die nativitatis ejus. Primam, scilicet divinam, in Missa quæ cantatur in nocte; est enim nativitas nobis occulta: *Generationem ejus quis enarrabit?* Secundam, in Missa quæ cantatur in aurora; quia nativitas humana partim fuit occulta, partim manifesta: occulta quidem quantum ad modum, quia natus est de virgine; sed manifesta quantum ad factum. Tertiam, scilicet gratuitam, in Missa quæ cantatur in die; quia nativitas gratuita est manifesta, in qua Christus per effectum concipitur, per affectum nascitur, et per amorem perfectum nutritur. .... [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 3.6 (PL 40:313-314): Sicut enim Jacob manum prius, dum nasceretur, emisit ex utero, qua etiam pedem praenascentis fratris tenebat, deinde utique secutum est caput, tum demum necessario membra caetera (Gen. XXV, 25); sed tamen caput non tantum ea membra quae secuta sunt, sed etiam ipsam manum quae in nascendo praecessit, dignitate ac potestate praecedit; et quamvis non tempore apparendi, tamen naturae ordine prius est: ita et Dominus Jesus Christus etsi antequam appareret in carne, et quodam modo ex utero secreti sui ad hominum oculos Mediator Dei et hominum homo procederet, qui est super omnes Deus benedictus in saecula (Rom. IX, 5), praemisit in sanctis Patriarchis et Prophetis quamdam partem corporis sui, qua velut [Col.0314] manu se nasciturum esse praenuntians, etiam populum praecedentem superbe, vinculis Legis tanquam digitis quinque supplantavit [1 1Kb] (quia et per quinque temporum articulos praenuntiari venturus prophetarique non destitit; et huic rei consonans per quem Lex data est, quinque libros conscripsit: et superbi carnaliter sentientes, et suam justitiam volentes constituere [Rom. X, 3], non aperta manu Christi repleti sunt benedictione, sed constricta atque conclusa retenti sunt: [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* Homilia 1 cap. 1, (PG 56:630-631): Homo enim in carne nascitur, ut corruptioni subjaceat: Christus autem natus est, ut sanet corruptionem. ...

   Vidi autem novam et admirandam Christi nativitatem, id est, per homines peccatores, per mulieres meretrices, et adulteras, et gentiles. Sed talis generatio non sordidat dignitatem Christi, sed commendat misericordiam ipsius. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* Homilia 1 cap. 1 (PG 56:630): Illic filii a patribus suscipiunt generositatis dignitatem, hic autem patres a filio susceperunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Naturalists, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Iob*, cap. 37: Contingit autem quandoque quod in aliquo loco tenebroso aliquid fulgidum invenitur, sicut pars Septentrionalis tenebrosa dicitur propter elongationem eius a sole et tamen in Septentrionalibus regionibus multum auri invenitur quod est inter cetera metalla fulgidius, et hoc ideo quia calore propter circumstans aeris frigus recurrente ad interiora viscera terrae efficacius ibi operatur ad auri generationem, et hoc est quod subdit ab Aquilone aurum veniet, quasi dicat: in regione aquilonari aurum magis abundat. Et sicut in tenebris Septentrionis invenitur fulgor auri, ita etiam inter tenebras ignorantiae huius vitae invenitur aliqua licet obscura refulgentia divinae cognitionis, unde subdit et a Deo formidolosa laudatio: si enim nihil divinae lucis in nobis fulgeret, nullatenus eum laudare possemus; rursus si fulgeret nobis divina veritas manifeste sicut in meridie, eum secure laudaremus, sed quia in nostra cum quadam obscuritate nobis aliquid de divina luce fulget, cum formidine ipsum laudamus, sicut cum formidine homo facit illud quod scit se perfecte facere non posse, unde subdit digne eum invenire non possumus, ut scilicet per nostram inventionem perveniamus ad eum cognoscendum sicuti est; quod quidem ex eius excellentia contingit, unde subdit magnus fortitudine, quia scilicet eius virtus in infinitum excedit omnes suos effectus, unde ex eis inveniri digne non potest. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg, *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* 4.11 (8:156b): Nativitas Christi fuit utilis, honesta, et jucunda. Quid autem utilius salute hominis? ... Quid honestius partu Virginis, ubi Virgo est quæ generat, Deus est qui generatur, Spiritus sanctus qui operatur in generatione? Quid jucundius nativitate Dei et hominis? ... Item, qui sequuntur: *Gaudete in,* etc. Item, qui præsentes erant, ut angeli decantantes, et pastores videntes, et Joannes eum in utero sentiens, et Simeon amplexans, sed maxime Virgo ipsum generans.... [↑](#endnote-ref-7)