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Author: Michael Psellos

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Translator: Andrew Louth

This translation has been checked against the critical text of *Oratio in Salutationem Deiparae* prepared by Elizabeth Fisher in Michael Psellus, *Orationes Hagiographicae*, Stuttgart & Leipzig: Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, 1994, 96–113.

Michael Psellos (1017/18-78) was an imperial courtier, philosopher, and man of letters, and an overview of his life and work can be found in Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

God is the beginning of all that is,
not as ranked among them or numbered with them, but raised above them and
transcendent. The annunciation of the good tidings to the Virgin and Mother of the Word by
the voice of

the angel

is the beginning of the divine feasts and celebrations:

a beginning, not as more incomplete than the other mysteries and manifestations
—far from that—but as more perfect than any other anniversary
and transcendent, not only over the wonders that took place in them,
but over any word or nature or conception.

For that the Word who was conceived in her womb was born,
and that the one thus born is made manifest through wonders –
even if these things are beyond any understanding –
is also beyond any perfection of the mind.

Nonetheless nature knows what follows from it,
and what is new fits with what took place of old.

For the creator of heaven and the fashioner of everything visible and invisible,
the One whom nothing created can contain,
who by an immeasurable magnitude transcends any being, whether intelligible or fashioned
from things perceived by the senses,

the One compared with whom the magnitudes of supernatural bodies, if it can be put
thus,

are, as it were, insubstantial, and reckoned as nothing:

how could this One be contained in the virgin's womb,
neither losing its boundlessness, nor being measured by the parts of our body?

In what way was the boundless limited?

How could angelic or archangelic nature contain it?

Or, if some higher rank than these be constituted, closer to the first light,
and from Him first receive illumination,

how could even they be raised up to the comprehension of such sublime
visions?

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For perhaps God's becoming human is as much ours, as it is theirs who are close to the transcendent light.

For if the wonder is incomprehensible and inconceivable to them, how could we grasp what it means?

If the human is to be deified—an act certainly beyond nature—it is necessary that this should have a fitting prelude.

Therefore Christ became human, that the human might, by means of a new mixture with him, be deified.

If the second is amazing, how much more is the first not even more amazing?

If the ascent is beyond all reason, how should not the descent be beyond any conception?

For here the mortal is raised up to the heavens, while there God comes down from heaven.

The uncontainable is also contained, while the fashioner of nature is united to an ensouled nature, and the one who is untouchable and immaterial is born of a virgin.

One who is properly not even called bodiless is addressed as a body – one who is not even called light or life, except figuratively and by analogy.

What reason would suffice for us to behold such a wonder?

What spiritual choir could be constituted, what songs could we sing, or with what spiritual and rational cymbals could we make a paean suitable to God, and how could we manifest the experience of the joy of these annunciations?

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O new event! O multitude of graces and infinity of wonders!

For everything fits together:

the voice of the archangel, the Incarnation of the Lord,

the deification of the body he has taken to himself,

the union of things that were set apart from one another,

the freedom of the oppressed, the inclusion of those rejected,

the reconciliation of those at war.

One word, and that a brief one, announcing 'Hail' to the divine Mother,
and thence there come about things beyond number or conception.

And the chief point:

God becomes a human and a human becomes God,
and the hidden mystery is made manifest at the end of the ages;
prophecy comes to an end, and the awaited redemption arrives.
Earth is mingled with heaven, and things sensible united to things intelligible,
and things that were set apart from one another are united in a manner that amazes.
The Lord who was conceived becomes the mediator of both,
mixing the whole of humanity with divinity.
Gabriel becomes the herald of good tidings;
to him alone is entrusted the mystery
and only here below does the subordinate order remain uninitiated into the wonder.
For it was necessary that the renewal of nature should be announced even to the divine
beings.

And God came down from heaven to earth,
not proclaiming his descent, nor making more splendid his procession,
but like the morning dew, or rather like rain upon the fleece,
so that the ancient wonder might discover its purpose, and the symbols confirm the
mystery. And the minister of the wonder is the initiator of the fact.

The One who is virgin finds room in the virgin,
the One who transcends being takes body and mind from a virgin connatural with us,
and therefore becomes more honourable than the messenger.

To him integrity and incorruptibility of thought belong by reason of nature,
to her belongs virginity of the soul, transcending nature.

For I do not speak of that other virginity that all revere and place above all other
virtues

(for incorruptibility of the body is truly the leader of the other virtues),
but on account of this, virginity of the soul, I reverence the mother of the Lord.

Nor do I bear witness only to her, and thus call her virgin,
for if this is an example to other virgins,
what is achieved by others is not adequate to her praise.

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For the Virgin is truly a virgin, because she preserved undamaged the thoughts of her soul, even as the sun communicated intelligible graces to the body, so that body became radiant and shining, and was not besmirched by matter – something that not even the nature of angels could preserve, if it drew near to matter.

Let us pursue this, as a kind of hypothesis.

For only her most God-formed soul, like a kind of heavenly ray, made that undefiled body radiant; and was not contained by it, but rather contained it, and ruled it and transformed it into the utmost splendour.

For her mind belonged to God, not occupying any middle position, and as the body belongs to the intellect, so she wholly dwelt with God, and God shared a name with the body.

And he dwelt on earth and set his mark firmly below, without, if one dare say this, deserting unapproachable Trinity, beyond the Seraphim, but already, before she conceived, she saw God and ineffably conceived through contemplations, and bore in her womb and gave birth, just as later these things would happen to her in reality.

If therefore the great and lofty heaven has been given bodily form, as most think, from the flower of the first elements, and is therefore unshakable and inviolable, all the more is her body compacted from the best essence of the elements and fashioned as a sacred shrine for her soul.

But what can I say to indicate her purity?

Beauties that are seen would not suffice for me, nor even those intelligible.

I am ashamed to compare her to the sun;

I blush to rank her with the heaven.

If I attained the angelic essence, I would indeed rejoice because the conclusion of the comparison is beyond nature, but even so I would miss the measure.

For those angels can scarcely embrace a pure conception of God,
even though they are measured against the illumination from above;
she, however, contained God wholly in a small part of her body,
even though he did not depart from the Father's bosom,
but came to be wholly in the Mother and Virgin.
And this is the most wonderful opposition to reason:
I grasp what is lower than her, and cannot find what is greater,
for she was constituted lower only than the Son and Creator.
And she is greater in no respect, because she is also incomparable.
For what transcends her in magnitude according to any being and nature
is incalculable and incomparable;
she became a mother and is a virgin.
For this reason the Word enters her and emerges from her,
and does not damage her maidenhead, but the seal remains inviolate.
She is the garden enclosed and the sealed fountain;
she is the ark of sanctification of the Lord,
and the rod that put forth the blossom of Christ,
and the sacred shrine closely wrapped in the veil of her virginity.
She is the curdled mountain, the holy mountain, the mountain cloaked in cloud.
She is truly heaven, or rather she is and is called more than heaven,
containing the uncontainable, and encompassing the unlimited.
She is the foundation of the prophets,
and at once the beginning and the end of all foretelling.
Because of her God has descended to us, and we have ascended to Him.
O Ladder, touching the height of heaven and transcending nature!
O One of our race, but unapproachable even to angels,
so that we might share something of her joy in the transcendent Being.

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Just as the Virgin earlier suspected the sudden greeting and was troubled,
so now, the angel accurately explains everything, and reminds her of the prophecies,
intimates the descent of the Word, proclaims the ineffable conception,

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and assures her of her preparation and sanctification through the Father and the Son.
At once she feels the divine grace in the words,
and receiving calmly the good tidings, as a worshipper before the accomplishment of the
mystery,
she bows before her Master and is made ready for her service;
would that her foremother Eve had shown such carefulness at the promise of the serpent!
For if anyone had asked Adam about the kind of things the serpent had uttered to her,
or how an irrational animal should utter a human voice,
or whence the knowledge of deification came to him,
and how, knowing this, he was mistaken about the first voice:
if the foremother had diligently enquired of all this at the first speech of the serpent,
the serpent would have departed ashamed,
or rather, the one who had through the serpent spat forth the poison of death against the
foremother.

Because of this, the new was substituted for the old, the angel for the serpent,
virginity, even after birth, for travail in sorrow,
Christ for Adam,
and all things became new: conception, pregnancy, giving birth;
and the addition of sin overflowed into the grace of God;
and death became the friend and provider of immortality.

And you, receive for my sake the gift of the moment,
and at once wonder at and cooperate with the conception;
and conceiving the Word, you bear Him without travail.
But investigate carefully the conception, and receive with a philosophical mind the
promises. And if they are true, accept them;
if they are lies, flee from them,
and exercise the senses of the soul to the discernment of good and evil.
For in this way you will conceive God in purity, and suffer travail in the mind,
and give birth at the right time, and not be deceived concerning the good tidings,
but with the judgment of word be pregnant with the Word,

in the Word himself, Christ our Lord,
to whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen.