



Joyful Songs of the
Glorious Nativity

The Wondrous Son of God!

By St. Jacob of Serugh



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Homilies on the Nativity 2

Joyful Songs of the Glorious Nativity II

The Wondrous Son of God!

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The Wondrous Son of God!

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men! (Luke 2: 14)

Amid the joyous celebrations of the blessed Nativity, St. Jacob of Serugh's heart leaps to the manger in Bethlehem where he sees, lying in the manger, the One whom all the heaven and earth cannot contain. The events of the Nativity pass before his eyes:

1. *He hears the angel's song and the praises joyously sung by a whole chorus of angels. To whom do they offer this heavenly welcome? Is it to the high heaven or to the earth and to people? He has given glory to the heavens, peace to the earth and goodwill (or hope) to humans. This jubilant praise declares the heavenly ones rejoicing with the earthly creation, and especially humankind.*
2. *He sees that the heavenly One has descended and become part of a human family, or rather the whole human family! And He opens the door of sonship and daughtership to God, by which we become members in the divine family!*
3. *His memory takes him to the first Adam who clothed himself in fig leaves. Today the second Adam is wrapped in swaddling cloth, so that we too may return and put on the righteousness of Christ!*
4. *With the fall, humans returned to dust and became food for the serpent (Genesis 3: 14), and now the Savior Judge has come to annul the sentence, tear up the bondage record, and open paradise.*
5. *St. Jacob realizes that the door of paradise is reopened for humans and sees the serpent standing silently, the serpent that had tricked Eve. He sees the guardian cherub of paradise throw down his spear which has now become useless, and sees Adam throwing off his fig leaves and putting on the divine vestments of light instead.*
6. *The scribes' plots and arguments against the child disturb St. Jacob, but that quickly fades as soon as he sees the prophet Isaiah singing to the virgin-born Child on his harp (Isaiah 7: 14).*
7. *He asks himself: am I in a cattle barn or in the heavenly Bridegroom's chambers as He comes to humanity as its Betrothed?!*
8. *Going back to the past, he sees Jacob the patriarch sleeping on the wayside in the desert without fearing its beasts, and a ladder reaching down from heaven upon which angels go up and down! And now he sees the Lord of the angels descending even to the manger, so that every believer can hasten towards the divine throne!*
9. *With all his heart he exclaims: today not only the heavenly ones who sing praises, for the earthly ones join them! And now the dwellers of both heaven and earth rejoice even more at the angels' praise!*

10. He calls upon virgins to rejoice with the Virgin Mary and calls upon mothers to be glad because St. Mary has become a mother!

That I may wonder at You and not debate Your birth!

It is in loving faith that the believer meets the child of the manger, feels His divine love, and experiences His salvation and intimacy. Faith does not ignore or destroy the role of reason, for we see St. Mary asking, “how can this be since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1: 34). The archangel explained the mystery of the incarnation and the role of the Holy Trinity to her, and she replied, “let it be unto me according to your word” (Luke 1: 38). But at the same time, faith does not go together with the kind of dry debate that tries to subordinate divine and heavenly matters to human reason, and where the human being stands proudly and ignores divine grace and God’s revelation in Scripture. On the contrary, faith sanctifies and uplifts reason and rejects dry intellectual arrogance.

In our own daily lives and temporal experiences, science remains unable to fully explain everything that impacts our bodies and thoughts and emotions. How so much more then should we submit to God’s revelation in humility and love, and so experience the loveliness of the divine mysteries?!

*My Lord, help me wonder at You and bow down before You,
But not debate or argue about Your birth.
I have grown weary in seeking You but did not find You in definitions
So I resorted to faith and there I found You.
I sought you amongst the learned and I stumbled,
Back among the simple ones I walked without stumbling.
I learned faith from fishermen,
Worldly wisdom is useless in matters of faith.
Many have fallen from such worldly wisdom,
And in their debates about the Son have fallen from His heights.
The Word is the Creator with His Father,
All creation overflows with Him, while He remains unlimited.
If He is God, how could a womb contain Him as a child,
How could He be held on a human lap and suck the milk?¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

This is the Day that the Lord has Made

David the psalmist cried out and begged for divine mercy, which the whole world and

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003).

all nations need. On the **day of Christ's birth, St. Jacob of Serugh** beholds the nations that had long been enslaved to Satan, and now the time for their freedom has come. It has come because of the Almighty divine savior, the artistic creator who alone is able to restore the image of humanity, the architect who builds up the ruined house, the shepherd who restores the lost sheep, the physician of soul and body who bandages wounds, binds up the broken and strengthens the weak. Indeed, how wondrous are the love and mercies of God! This is the day of the nations that were sorrowful in this age, and now He has come to abolish their sorrow and bestow the joy of freedom upon them.

This is the day of every person. When one serves God, God works in his/her life as if there were no one else. God is the shepherd who pursues every lost sheep, who carries it on His shoulders and seeks all those who are in need of support and do not have it.

*Today the one who was persecuted for a long time has been released,
because the Mighty One stood up and broke the fetters of her imprisonment.
Today the maid-servant of the demons has obtained freedom,
because the great Lord has put them to flight and led out what belongs to Him.
Today the Painter restored the image of Adam: because it had worn out,
He mingled with it the pigment that it might not get corrupted.
Today the Master-builder has rebuilt the house that had fallen,
and so that it might not fall, the support of divinity entered in.
Today his Lord has reconciled Himself with Adam
because the Son who shone forth has set peace between the two sides.
Today the Shepherd has found the sheep that had gone astray;
and upon His shoulders He lifted up and carried it into Paradise.
Today the flock of the peoples has been made return,
because a hidden wolf had disturbed them from the Pastor of all.
Today the outsiders have entered and became inmates,
and behold, the household members have gone out and parted in anger from the King's palace.
Today God has descended and unmasked the idols,
and He has removed from them the name of gods and has despised them.
Today the Mighty One has stood up against the rebellious one,
and laid hold of and bound him and ravaged his habitation that had been flourishing.
Today the Warrior has come to the captives
and bound the captor with power and made to return His own.
Today the Physician has come to the wounded
bandaging, healing and giving reward to those who are healed.
Today the Doctor came to all who were fractured
supporting, binding, nourishing and restoring by His care.
Today the Strengthenener has come for all who are infirm:*

*He takes hold and straightens, strengthens and feeds by His diligence.*¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

How can the omnipresent God dwell in a small womb?!

Some are arrogant and dare to engage in dry debates rather than loving God and having faith in Him. In their debates they object, how can the omnipresent (unlimited) God enter the small womb of the virgin and be born into the world?! Our saint responds by saying:

1. *God is not limited by space, and so while heaven and earth cannot contain Him, at the same time a small space does not bother Him.*
2. *We accept that God came into the burning bush when He appeared to Moses (Exodus 3: 4). God did not belittle the weak bush. The expansive heavens do not limit Him, and at the same time the tiny bush does not bother Him.*
3. *How then would the Lord enter Abraham's tent, when He appeared to him accompanied by two angels (Genesis 18: 2)?*
4. *We believe that the Lord is present in the holy temple, why then would we not believe that He was also present in the virgin's womb?*

*The womb is small, and God is greater than all creatures,
Don't you know how easily He can come into such smallness?
Or maybe He was not present on the mount in Sinai,
Or did not enter Abraham's tent as it is written.
Maybe He did not dwell in the holy temple,
And never dwells in any cramped space.
In your arrogance search for a wide place and invite Him to enter,
As if He were a limited being.
The bush is small and minuscule, and the heavens are wide and expansive; Both are
equal in His eyes, and He dwells in both.*²

St. Jacob of Serugh

The Wonderful Son of God

Isaiah tells us a few names for the virgin's Son, and one of them is the name "wonderful." This is why:

¹ Jacob of Serugh. *Select Festal Homilies*, trans. Thomas Kollamparampil, CMI. Rome: (Centre for Indian and Interreligious Studies, and Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997), FH 1.

² Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

1. *This wonderful One submitted to His Father's great love for humanity and consented to be the virgin's Son.*
2. *Some people thought they could discover the truth about Him without needing God's grace.*
3. *Whoever wants to limit Him is in reality taking His name of "wonderful" away from Him.*
4. *The virgin's Son is indeed wonderful! He dwelled in her womb, her arms held him, her embrace enveloped Him, her bosom enfolded Him, her mouth gently hummed to Him, and her shoulders contained Him. She held Him as a child while He is the Lord of all. Surely, He is most wonderful!*

*The Son of God bowed Himself in His Father's love,
 And came to be the virgin's Son for a purpose.
 Mary gave birth to God in her virginity,
 And He is indeed wonderful! Who can doubt it?
 Christ is called 'wonderful' in the prophecy (Isaiah 9: 6),
 If one tries to limit Him, He would not be 'wonderful'!
 None can take His name away from Him, or change Him to be limited,
 Instead of 'wonderful' as Scripture says.
 O Son of God, You came from on high and You are wonderful,
 You dwelled in the virgin's womb, and wonderful is Your name.
 The womb bore You, the manger sufficed for You, the arms embraced you,
 The knees held You, the bosom enfolded You, the mouth hummed to You,
 The care engulfed You and you held the breast as a babe.
 And in everything that took place,
 You are indeed wonderful!¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

She bore Him and the door remained sealed

The virgin birth occurred because God is able to pass through solid substances without opening doors or windows. Solid substances cannot hinder God's movements. This we accept by faith, but who can explain it?!

No one before the Son of God has trod this path of divine incarnation, and neither will anyone after Him. This is why, when He became incarnate in the world, even the wise people were unable to examine or investigate Him. Anyone who focuses on debating and investigating Him finds it impossible to walk the path [of faith], and even the learned ones cannot pursue or investigate Him. When the virgin gave birth, they all gathered around her – the wise, the skeptics, the investigators and protesters – all brazenly wanting

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

to examine the matter! But such a matter can only be explained by faith, for no other explanation can suffice for it. Yet at the same time, no one can deny her virginity or that she gave birth to the incarnate Son, for she is rejoicing in this event which faith alone can illuminate.

*When He came to the world, He entered through an unopened door,
And so the learned do not know how to follow Him.
Being God, He did not open the door when He went through it
To be born in the world as a babe.
The virgin gave birth, and what can the learned one say
If requested to explain the inexplicable?
He confesses that she gave birth, but how?! He knows not.
And she remained a virgin when she birthed Him, for her Son is divine.
God passes through solid matter and when He does,
He neither opens nor closes the door.
Mary gave birth in her virginity, and the crowds
Of followers, investigators and skeptics emerged.
If Faith were to come in and give a speech,
Its words would be beautiful and wonderful, for it is indeed inscrutable.
When God makes something a reality,
Let the speaker remain silent and clothe himself in amazement!
The virgin stood amongst the crowds to show herself to the multitudes.
Her voice is commanding and rejoicing is in her face.
She ranks amongst the virgins without marriage,
And indisputably carried a Son like the mothers.
The milk is in her breasts and virginity in her organs;
Everything about her is beautiful and is described by faith alone.¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

Between the Virgin and Burning Bush

According to St. Jacob of Serugh, the reason we find it difficult to accept the incarnation of the divine Word from the virgin is because we do not realize how much God really values humanity, whom He created in His own image and likeness, and also because we belittle women very much.

The saint is amazed at God being present in the burning bush when He appeared to Moses; he appeared inside its thorny branches without disdain, and yet when He dwelt in the womb of the virgin, the daughter of David, their thoughts were disturbed. Which is more becoming, he asks, that God dwell among the thorns or in the virgin whom God

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

created in His own image and likeness?!

The saint moreover realizes that the divine incarnation was present in God's thought ever since He created humanity, which is why He created humanity in His image and likeness (Genesis 2: 26); man and woman He created them. He created Adam and give Him His image, and also created Eve in His image because in the fullness of time He will come and dwell in the most blessed and beautiful virgin's womb. He came to His own and dwelt in His own image: in the daughter of Adam who carries the image of God.

*Compare now the virgin to the bush, if you can!
Witness: which is more beautiful for Him to dwell in?
The daughter of David and Abraham, the rib of Adam,
The virgin who is daughter of the famous heroes.
The pure nature was found worthy to become the image of God,
And the Son of God descended and dwelled in her.
He dwelled among the thorns and was not rebuked,
But when the virgin bore Him they cried: He is not a God!
Who is beautiful: the thorny bush or the daughter of David?!
Which dwelling is more suitable for God to dwell in?!
It is not difficult for one who listens intently:
Mary the virgin is pleasing, pure and full of beauty.
He who dwelled in her and made her His mother did not hesitate
For the human image is not foreign to God.
The Word, who is the Only-Begotten,
Dwelled in the blessed virgin and was not ashamed.¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

Mary: the sealed message full of mysteries!

The saint compares between the first and second Eve. The first one unquestioningly accepted the serpent's trickery and subsequently fell into bondage. For this reason, the Son of the King descended and dwelled in the second Eve's womb in order to restore the enslaved one to freedom.

*Come now and see the path by which the Son of God
Descended to humanity. Come, reflect on its beauty!
The killer of men had captured them from paradise,
And the King's Son descended to restore them from their captivity.
He came after the thief with all His might,*

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

*And the path led him to Eve the virgin.
Being the Word, the door of the ear received Him,
And He was borne [by Mary] until his physical birth.
Mary became as a message replete with mysteries,
Sealed with the sanctity of virginity.
From her blessed womb He took the image of a servant.
He visited and freed the slaves while in their image.
He dwelled in a daughter of the people: becoming the Son of Man
Without losing His divinity with His Father.
Because He came by way of [a physical] birth, the arrogant ones
Were deluded and stole from Him the name of God, which is His rightful name.¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

Two Births of the Son and Two Births for us

The One who is eternally begotten of the Father accepted to be born inside time according to the flesh (in the incarnation) so that we too can have two births: one earthly and one spiritual. **St. Augustine** writes: [The heavenly Lord became of the earth in order to make the earthly into heavenly ones. The immortal became mortal when He took the image of the servant upon Himself, and not by any change in the Lord's own nature. He made the mortals immortal through the Lord's grace and not by defending the servants' sin.]² He also writes: [we have two births: one earthly and another heavenly. The first is of the flesh and the second of the spirit. The first springs from a mortal principle and the second from an eternal principle. The first is of a man and a woman, and the second is of God and the church. The first makes us children of the flesh and the second children of the spirit. The first makes us children of death and the second children of the resurrection. The first makes us children of this age and the second children of God. The first makes us the children of curse and wrath, and the second children of love and blessedness. The first binds us in the chains of original sin and the second frees from all the fetters of sin.]³

*He became from a woman so we may become of the Holy Spirit,
The Son has two births, as do we [have two births] as well.
He is born of the Father in an unfathomable manner,
And from Mary too: a new and wondrous birth.
Though He is divine, she bore Him physically in a human body,
That He may become a human without change.
He issued forth from the womb in a pure body, a rational soul*

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

² Augustine, Letter to Consentius, 205.

³ In Joan. Homily 19.

*And a perfect intellect, to renew all with His birth.
 He put on organs and become [one of] us,
 To clothe us with might and spirit so we become of Him.
 With His second birth He showed us what we must do:
 We require a second birth to renew us.
 Baptism has become a second womb to birth us ...
 The elderly one enters into the water's embrace
 And emerges a newborn babe from its womb.
 Human birth from Adam was real,
 And now we become children of God through water and spirit.
 Since our Lord [‘s testament], Eve is no longer our mother,
 For the Spirit bore and birthed us to become His children.
 Eve's womb birthed flesh through marriage,
 And baptism gives birth to life and spirit without change.
 God Himself showed us this as He came to the birth,
 While He is eternally begotten ...
 The Ancient of Days became a babe through His new birth
 That the elder may learn the way and come to their birth.
 How can an old man enter his mother's womb
 And be born again after the time is past?
 Our Lord explained to the one who asked Him,
 So he may know it is accomplished through water and spirit (John 3: 5) ...
 Baptism is for us the second Mary,
 And is our mother in the true and perfect birth ...
 To us and to our Lord there are two new births:
 From Mary for our Lord and from baptism for us.
 The spiritual One made the fleshly one His mother,
 And to us, the fleshly ones, He gave a spiritual mother.
 He took the flesh and we took the spirit.¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

Unlike humans, space does not limit the Son (the Word)

As we know, the heaven and earth in their entirety do not contain God, and at the same time God is present in all places, no matter how small or cramped. It is the human being who seems to be a speck or even nothing at all compared to the vastness of the heavens and earth, and who cannot fit into a space that is smaller than his/her body even for a few seconds.

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 6 on The Star seen by the Magi and the Slaughter of the Innocents in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

*[They say that] Mary's womb did not contain Him; it is too small!
 O wretched ones! It is not too small for Him, for He is God!
 A cramped place upsets you, because you need one suitable to your body.
 A place smaller than your size cannot contain you,
 Nor can you limit a vast space.
 God's place cannot be known by measurements; He does not
 Seek an adequate space to dwell in.
 If He wishes to dwell in heaven or in the virgin,
 Then they are equal to Him because He is God.
 If He desires them not, all the heavens cannot contain Him,
 And if He desires the virgin, then she will spaciouly contain Him.
 So sublime is He that no space can limit Him,
 Yet He willingly chose to limit Himself in the poor one's embrace.
 He is not affronted or reproached or blamed or shamed,
 For He took [this] upon Himself for [our] salvation.¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

Three Dwelling² Places of the Son: Mary, Baptism and Sheol

He walked in our world: with us, like us, for us, and dwelled in three dwellings: in the virgin's womb, in a river and in the city of death, for He was going to penetrate that third dwelling where Adam was imprisoned.

Adam's beautiful image has been corrupted in Sheol (Hades). No one who has not died could enter that place and dying is hardly feasible for one who does not have human flesh. So, He dwelled first in the virgin and took flesh from her, so that in wisdom He would die, the life of His nature would be preserved, and it would be known and clear to all. Even when He was dead, He was alive ... Without dying He would not have entered the place of the dead, and without being alive He would not have set Adam free from his bondage."³

*He came to the world in the same way all humans do,
 And wished to dwell in all its dwellings.
 He dwelled in the **womb**, the first dwelling, and in the flesh
 Issued forth through childbirth to abide in the world.
 Along the way He met **baptism**, by which He was baptized
 And which He sanctified when He indwelt it.
 The end of the path was the **place of the dead**,*

1 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, Tarjama.

2 St. Jacob of Serugh uses 'dwelling' here as a place where the Son descended

3 Jacob of Serugh, Letter 36.

*Where Adam was bound and where He freed him.
The Mighty One divinely entered the place of death;
For He gained entrance as a human.
He came in the flesh and the grave accepted Him,
And uprooted Sheol where He descended as God.
Baptism, Mary and Sheol became His dwellings along the way,
And He desired to abide in each one.
The Word dwelled in Mary, because He desired to become flesh,
And He took flesh from the blessed one.
He came to baptism, descended and placed in baptism
The gown of glory Adam had lost, that it may be his [glory].
He came to Sheol to free the ones bound in it,
And thus He completed His path in all three dwellings.
He dwelled in the virgin and came to childbirth and He was God.
Baptism accepted Him and He was God.
He descended to Sheol and the world knew He was God,
For it did not recognize Him until He was at Sheol's very gates.
In childbirth He was wrapped in swaddling cloths as a babe,
And came to baptism, to John, as a man.
And when He entered into Sheol the world trembled,
The dead arose and the worlds knew that He is God!¹*

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 94 on Faith in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama*.

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He walked in our world: with us, like us, for us, and
dwelled in three dwellings:

In the virgin's womb, in a river and in the city of death ..

He dwelled in the **womb**, the first dwelling .. Along the
way He met **baptism** ..

The end of the path was the **place of the dead**,
Where Adam was bound and where He freed him.
In childbirth He was wrapped in swaddling cloths as a
babe, and came to baptism, to John, as a man.
And when He entered into Sheol the world trembled, the
dead arose and the worlds knew that He is God!

St. Jacob of Serugh

