

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

AND THE EPIPHANY



EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY AND THE EPIPHANY

Translated from the Syriac by J. B. Morris and A. Edward Johnston, revised by John Gwynn From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 13, edited by Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D.

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duction. The footnote apparatus is retained where it serves the text; we have set aside those notes that pertain only to the nineteenth-century volume context, and any commentary at variance with the Orthodox confession of the Fathers themselves. We add a scripture index for the text in hand.

The texts are typeset in IM Fell English, a face cut by John Fell in seventeenth-century Oxford and freely available again through the work of Igino Marini. The Greek, where there is any, is set in Philokalia, designed for the Athonite tradition.

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HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY AND THE EPIPHANY

NINETEEN HYMNS
ON THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST
IN THE FLESH

(Translated, I.-XIII. by Rev. J. B. Morris, M.A., [Oxford *Library of the Fathers*]; XIV.-XIX. by Rev. A. Edward Johnston, B.D.).

Hymn I

This is the day that gladdened them, the Prophets, Kings, and Priests, for in it were their words fulfilled, and thus were the whole of them indeed performed! For the Virgin this day brought forth Immanuel in Bethlehem. The voice that of old Isaiah spake,[1] to-

[1] Is. x. 19.

day became reality. He was born there who in writing should tell the Gentiles' number! The Psalm that David once sang, by its fulfilment came to-day![2] The word that Micah once spake,[3] to-day was come indeed to pass! For there came from Ephrata a Shepherd, and His staff swayed over souls. Lo! from Jacob shone the Star,[4] and from Israel rose the Head.[5] The prophecy that Balaam spake had its interpreting to-day! Down also came the hidden Light, and from the Body rose His beauty! The light that spake in Zachary, to-day shined in Bethlehem!

Risen is the Light of the kingdom, in Ephrata the city of the King. The blessing wherewith Jacob blessed, to its fulfilment came to-day! That tree likewise, [the tree] of life, brings hope to mortal men! Solomon's hidden proverb[6] had to-day its explanation! To-day was born the Child, and His name was called Wonder![7] For a wonder it is that God as a Babe should show Himself. By the word Worm

[2] Ps. lxxxvii. 6.
[3] Mic. v. 2.
[4] Num. xxiv. 17.
[5] Hos. i. 11.
[6] Prov. iii. 18.
[7] Isa. ix. 6.

did the Spirit foreshow Him in parable,[8] because His generation was without marriage. The type that the Holy Ghost figured to-day its meaning was [explained.] He came up as a root before Him, as a root of parched ground.[9] Aught that covertly was said, openly to-day was done! The King that in Judah was hidden, Thamar stole Him from his thigh; to-day arose His conquering beauty, which in hidden estate she loved. Ruth at Boaz' side lay down, because the Medicine of Life hidden in him she perceived. To-day was fulfilled her vow, since from her seed arose the Quickener of all. Travail Adam on the woman brought, that from him had come forth. She to-day her travail ransomed, who to her a Saviour bare! To Eve our mother a man gave birth, who himself had had no birth. How much more should Eve's daughter be believed to have borne a Child without a man! The virgin earth, she bare that Adam that was head over the earth! The Virgin bare to-day the Adam that was Head over the Heavens. The staff of Aaron, it budded, and the dry wood yielded fruit! Its mys-

[8] Ps. xxii. 6.

[9] Is. liii. 2.

tery is cleared up to-day, for the virgin womb a Child hath borne![10]

Shamed is that people which holds the prophets as true; for unless our Saviour has come, their words have been falsified! Blessed be the True One Who came from the Father of the Truth and fulfilled the true seers' words, which were accomplished in their truth. From thy treasure-house put forth, Lord, from the coffers of Thy Scriptures, names of righteous men of old, who looked to see Thy coming! Seth who was in Abel's stead shadowed out the Son as slain, by Whose death was dulled the envy Cain had brought into the world! Noah saw the sons of God, saints that sudden waxed wanton, and the Holy Son he looked for, by whom lewd men were

[10] Notice here, how St. Ephraim (in common with others) speaks of the *celebration* of the day as if it was the day itself, partly in exhibiting his intense realization through faith of the mystery and the re-presentation of it, to use the word in its ancient sense; partly as evincing, perhaps, a belief in the unabidingness of our conceptions of time—a belief resulting, it may be, from the mystical union with God in Christ which the saints enjoy. For to God time is as nothing, and those who through grace are one with Him, begin to view things as He views them.