

MEDITATIONS ON THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST II
THE EVER-VIRGIN, MARY, IS THE 'MOTHER OF GOD'

One of the most deeply contested areas of conflict between the heretic Patriarch, Nestorius, and Cyril, the Orthodox Pope of Alexandria, during the great fifth controversy over the true identity of Christ was the term "Theotokos", or Bearer-of-God. It was used to describe Mary as the mother of God.

Nestorius wished to divide Christ into a human subject (personal identity) and a divine subject; the 'human subject' was the one that got hungry, wept for his dead friend, Lazarus, feared death, and so on, while the divine walked on water, raised Lazarus, and referred to himself in divine terms. Cyril, as we have seen, rejected such a division by teaching that the one who wept, got hungry and agonized in the garden of Gethsemane was the very same one who raised Lazarus, walked on water, and raised himself from the dead after his crucifixion. Both the divine and human natures were united in one and the same person--God the Eternal Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

Nestorius, since he denied that the flesh of Jesus was God (since it was created), also took offense at the idea that Jesus' mother could be called the "mother" of God. The virgin, Mary, might be called the "mother of a man" or "the mother of Christ", but never the "mother of God". Nestorius basically wanted to protect the uncreated God from being contaminated by creaturely human flesh. It is something of a paradox that virtually every heresy has had this same objective! How could the uncreated truly and personally be inseparably united with our created nature? It is logically impossible, philosophically ridiculous, theologically outrageous.

Cyril, on the other hand, confessed that salvation is possible ONLY if God had united himself fully, completely and personally to our creaturely nature. Any other understanding would render the

whole event a farce, a joke in bad taste! It was precisely because Jesus is truly Emmanuel (God-with-us) in the most intimate way possible--as one of us--that what we are can be redeemed and healed. He followed the teaching of the Scriptures themselves from the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament witness of the gospels--especially St. John's--and the writings of St. Paul. Only if God became a man could the human race be returned to its original vocation of union with God.

This leads us to the proper place of Mary, the ever-virgin Mother of God.

She was one of us, born under the power of original sin--meaning suffering the effects of the cosmic disaster that befell the human race in the Fall. And yet, filled with the grace of God, she freely chose to become the birth-giver of the Savior, Emmanuel, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. She became the mother in the flesh of the Eternal Word, the only Begotten Son of the Father. Since his human body, his human mind, will, emotions--were all taken from her, and since he is God, then she can be none other than 'Mother of God'! She did not give birth to his eternal nature, but she most certainly gave birth to all that is human in him. And from the moment of his conception there could no longer be any separation or division of what was human from what was divine in him. God the Eternal Word has become eternally united to our humanity. Without ceasing to be what he was (uncreated, uncircumscribed, eternal, divine, only-begotten Son) he became what he was not (created, en-fleshed, circumscribed in his humanity, son of man). The paradox of paradoxes has been revealed, the infinite joined to what is finite, the Almighty to the weakness and powerlessness of the creature.

It is terrible philosophy, outrageous theology! But it is the truth and grace and love of God. The Messiah is both divine and human united in the one, divine, person of the Word of God. There is no other subject in him. The same "I" that thirsted is the "I" who says that "I and the Father are one". The same "I" who weeps for Lazarus is the "I" who proclaims, "Before Abraham was I AM". And Mary is his mother. The voice that uttered from the mouth of Jesus is the voice of God and the

tongue that spoke them was given form in the womb of Mary and called her, "Mother". If he did, then so must we. One cannot be fully Christian and fail to confess her as Mother of God. It is as simple as that.