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978-1-108-06111-7 - The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: Volume 2

Ælfric, Abbot of Eynsham Edited and Translated by Benjamin Thorpe

Excerpt

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INCIPIT PRÆFATIO HUIUS LIBRI.

IN NOMINE CHRISTI OMNIPOTENTIS.

ÆLFRICUS, humilis servulus Christi, honorabili et amando Archiepiscopo Sigerico perpetuam sospitatem optat in Domino. Fateor Almitati tuæ, Domne venerabilis, omnimodis me indignum, et quasi supersticiosum, quod presumpsi tibi alloqui divinis sermocinationibus, videlicet per codicellum quem nuper tuæ auctoritati direximus: sed quia nostrum studium nimium laudasti, gratanter illam interpretationem suscipiens, festinavimus hunc sequentem librum, sicuti Omnipotentis Dei gratia nobis dictavit, interpretare, non garrula verbositate, aut ignotis sermonibus, sed puris et apertis verbis linguæ hujus gentis, cupientes plus prodesse auditoribus simplici locutione quam laudari artificiosi sermonis compositione, quam nequaquam didicit nostra simplicitas; et licet multis injuriis infestum piratarum concutiebamur, postquam præfatum libellum tuæ Sanctitati transmisimus, tamen nolentes repperiri falsidici promissores, dolente animo hoc opus perfecimus. Igitur in anteriore opere ordinavimus xl. sermones, in isto vero non minor numerus sententiarum invenitur, quamvis aliquæ illarum brevitate angustentur. Hoc quoque opus commendamus tuæ auctoritati corrigendum, quemadmodum et precedens, precantes obnixè ne parcas obliterare, si aliquas malignæ hæresis maculas in eo repperies, quia malo apud Benignitatem tuam

HOM. VOL. II.

B

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reprehendi quam incauta seductione apud inscios laudari.
Perlegat queso Benignitas vestra hanc nostram interpreta-
tionem, quemadmodum et priorem, et dijudicet si fidelibus

PRÆFATIO.

IC ÆLFRIC munuc awende þas bōc of Ledenum bōcum to Engliscum gereorde, þam mannum to rædenne þe þæt Leden ne cunnon. Ic hi genām of halgum godspellum, and æfter geðungenra lāreowa trahtnungum hi asmeade, þæra lāreowa naman ic awrāt on ðære ærran hēc, on ðære Ledenan forespræce. Ic gesette on twām bōcum þa gerecednysse ðe ic awende, forðan ðe ic ðohte þæt hit wære læsse æðryt to gehyrenne, gif man ða āne bōc ræt on ānes geares ymbryne, and ða oðre on ðam æftran geare. On ægðer þæra bōca sind feowertig cwyda, buton ðære forespræce, ac hī ne sind na ealle of godspellum genumene, ac sind forwel fela of Godes halgena līfe oððe þrowunge gegaderode, þæra ānra þe Angelcynn mid freols-dagum wurðað. Ætforan ælcum cwyde we setton ða swutelunge on Leden, mæg swa-ðeah se ðe wile þa capitulas æfter ðære forespræce geendebyrdian. Nu bidde ic and halsige, on Godes naman, gif hwā ðas bōc awritan wylle, þæt hē hī geornlice gerihte be ðære bysne, þe-læs ðe we, þurh gymeleasum writerum, geleahtrode beon. Micel yfel deð se ðe leas writ, buton he hit gerihte, swilce hē gebringe ða soðan lāre to leasum gedwylde: forði sceal gehwā gerihlæcan þæt þæt hē ær to wōge gebigde, gif he on Godes dome unscyldig beon wile.

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catholicis habenda est, an abicienda. Nequaquam nos invidorum reprehensio movet, si hoc munus tuæ benigne auctoritati non displicuerit. Vale in Christo jugiter. Amen.

PREFACE.

I ÆLFRIC the monk have turned this book from Latin books into the English tongue, for those men to read who know not Latin. I have taken it from the holy gospels, and treated it after the expositions of highly venerable doctors, the names of which doctors I wrote down in the former book, in the Latin preface. I have set the matter which I have turned in two books, because I thought that it were less tedious to hear, if the one book were read in the course of one year, and the other in the year following. In each of these books there are forty discourses, without the preface, but they are not all taken from the gospels, but are very many of them gathered from the life or passion of God's saints, of those only whom the English nation honours with feast-days. Before each discourse we have set the argument in Latin, though every one who will, may order the chapters according to the preface. I now pray and implore, in the name of God, if any one will transcribe this book, that he carefully rectify it by the copy, lest, through negligent writers, we be blamed. He does great evil who writes false, unless he rectify it, as though he brought the true doctrine to false heresy; therefore should every one correct that which he had perverted to wrong, if he will be guiltless at God's doom.

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NATIVITAS DOMINI.

AMMONITIO.

Unum adhuc vellem preponere huic libello, non quasi pre-
fationem, sed quasi ammonitionem : scilicet, cavende ebrie-
tatis, sicut Dominus in Levitico ad Aaron his verbis locutus
est, “ Dixit Dominus ad Aaron, Vinum et omne quod inebri-
ari potest non bibes tu et filii tui, quando intratis taberna-
culum testimonii, ne moriamini, quia preceptum est sempi-
ternum in generationes vestras, et ut habeatis scientiam dis-
cernendi inter sanctum et prophanum, inter pollutum et
mundum.” In Novo Testamento quoque Dominus am-
monivit discipulos suos, his verbis, dicens, “ Adtendite autem

INCIPIIT LIBER SERMONUM CATHOLICORUM
ANGLICE, IN ANNO SECUNDO.

CATHOLICUS SERMO DE NATALE DOMINI, AD POPULUM
EXCERPTUS.

DE TESTIMONIIS PROPHE TARUM.

VIII. KĪ. JANUĀR.

NATIVITAS DOMINI.

MINE gebroðra ða leofostan, on þisum dæge we wurðiað
ures Hælendes acennednysse æfter þære menniscnysse. Hē
wæs to-dæg acenned of ðam halgan mædene Marīan mid
lichaman and mid sawle, seðe wæs æfre mid ðam Fæder
wunigende on þære Godcundnysse. He is tuwa acenned,
and ægðer acennednys is wundorlic and unasegendlic. Hē

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THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD.

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vobis, ne forte graventur corda vestra in crapula et ebrietate et curis hujus vitæ, et superveniat in vos repentina dies illa.” Tantum vitium est ebrietas, ut Paulus apostolus et doctor gentium adtestetur, “Ebriosos regnum Dei possidere non posse.” O quam beati sunt qui Deo vivunt, et non seculo, virtutibus, et non vitiis; et quamvis sanctorum patrum jejunia vel abstinentiam non valeamus imitari, nequaquam tamen debemus enerviter succumbere nefandis crapulis et æbrietatibus, Domini nostri et Dei terribilibus commoniti comminationibus. Sufficiunt hæc monita docibilibus, nam indocibilibus et duris corde nulla sufficiunt hortamenta. Iterum rogo et opto ut valeas, venerabilis Archiepiscopo Sigerice, jugiter in Christo. Amen.

HERE BEGINS THE BOOK OF CATHOLIC SERMONS IN ENGLISH, FOR THE SECOND YEAR.

A CATHOLIC SERMON ON THE LORD'S NATIVITY,
SELECTED FOR THE PEOPLE.

ON THE TESTIMONIES OF THE PROPHETS.

DECEMBER XXV.

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD.

MY dearest brethren, on this day we celebrate our Saviour's birth according to humanity. He was to-day born of the holy maiden Mary, with body and with soul, who was ever existing with the Father in the Godhead. He is twice born, and each birth is wonderful and unspeakable. He was ever

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wæs æfre of ðam Fæder acenned, forðan ðe hē is þæs Fæder Wisdom, þurh ðone hē geworhte and gesceop ealle gesceafta. Nu is ðeos acennednys buton anginne, forðan þe se Fæder wæs æfre God, and his Wisdom, þæt is, his Sunu, wæs afre of him acenned, buton ælcere meder.

þeos acennednys, þe we nu to-dæg wurðiað, wæs of eorðlicere meder, buton ælcum eorðlicum fæder. Se Fæder ðurh hine gesceop ús, and eft, ðaða we forwyrhte wæron, þa asende hē þone ylcan Sunu to ðisum life to ure alysednysse; forðan þe Adam, se forma mann, agylte wið God, and his Scyppendes bebod tobræc, and deofles lāre gehyrsumode, and wearð deofle betæht, hē and eal mancynn into helle wīte. Þa æfre smeade God fram frymðe middaneardes, hū he mihte mancynnes gehelpan, and fram deofles anwealde ahreddan. Þa nolde hē asendan to ure alysednysse naðor ne engel, ne heah-engel, ne wītegan, ne apostolas; ac sende se Fæder his ācennedan Sunu to þrowunge and to cwale for mancynnes alysednysse. Ða geswutelode God hū miccle lufe he hæfde and hæfð to us, þaða he asende his āgen Bearn to slege for us. Hwā dorste þæs gewilnian þæt se Ælmihtiga Cyning sceolde besceofan to cwale his ācennedan Æðeling, and swa ahreddan þone ðeowan? Næs se Sunu na genyd þæt hē mann gewurde, and siððan for us ðrowian sceolde, ac hē wæs gehyrsum his Fæder æfre oð deað. He wæs ācenned mid his Fæder on heofonum; ða nolde he āna beon, ac wolde habban gebroðru, and com to ús, forði þæt he wolde us to his rice gebringan, þær we to gesceapene wæron. Þa gif hē come on ðære Godcundnysse buton menniscnysse, þonne ne mihte ure tyddernys aberan his mihte. Ne seo Godcundnys ne mihte nān ðing þrowian, forðan þe heo is unðrowigendlic. Þa genam se Ælmihtiga Godes Sunu ða menniscnysse of anum mædene, and wearð gesewenlic mann and þrowigendlic; and swiðe gedafenlic hit wæs, ðaða hē mann wolde beon, þæt hē ne geceas na him wif to meder, ac geceas clæne mæden; and

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born of the Father, for he is the Wisdom of the Father, through whom he wrought and created all creatures. Now this birth is without beginning, because the Father was ever God, and his Wisdom, that is, his Son, was ever born of him, without any mother.

This birth, that we now to-day celebrate, was of an earthly mother, without any earthly father. The Father created us through him, and afterwards, when we were fordone, he sent the same Son to this life for our redemption ; because that Adam, the first man, sinned against God, and brake his Creator's commandment, and obeyed the devil's teaching, and was delivered to the devil, he and all mankind, into hell-torment. Then God ever meditated from the beginning of the world, how he might help mankind, and rescue them from the power of the devil. Then he would not send to our redemption either angel, or archangel, or prophets, or apostles ; but the Father sent his only-begotten Son to suffering and to death for the redemption of mankind. Then God manifested how great love he had and hath for us, when he sent his own Child to be slain for us. Who durst desire that the Almighty King should urge to death his only-begotten Prince, and so save the servant ? The Son was not forced to become man, and afterwards to suffer for us, but he was ever obedient to his Father unto death. He was only-begotten with his Father in heaven ; then would he not be alone, but would have brothers, and came to us, because he would bring us to his kingdom, to which we had been created. But if he had come in the Godhead without humanity, then could our weakness not have endured his might. The Godhead could suffer nothing, because it is impassible. The Almighty Son of God assumed humanity of a maiden, and became a visible and passible man ; and very fitting it was, when he would become man, that he chose not a woman for his mother, but chose a pure maiden ; and also, when a maiden should bear,

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eac, ðaða mæden acennan sceolde, þæt heo acende God Ælmihtigne, seðe is ægðer ge God ge mann, ân Crist. He ongann beon þæt he næs, ac hē þurhwunode þæt he ier wæs. He ongann on ðære menniscnysse, seðe æfre wæs and æfre bið God. Nis na hwæðere gerunnen togædere seo Godcundnys and seo menniscnys, ac seo Godcundnys is ymbscryd mid þære menniscnysse, swa þæt ðær nys naðor gemencgednys ne todāl.

Marīan mægðhād wæs menigfealdlice getācnod on þære ealdan æ. God behead Moysen þam heretogan þæt hē ge-name twelf drige gyrda æt þam twelf mægðum Israhela ðeoda, and alede hī ætforan ðam halgan scrine, binnon ðam micclan getelde : and hē wolde ðurh ða gyrda geswutelian hwæne hē to biscope gecoren hæfde. Þa, on ðam oðrum dæge, wæs Aārones gyrd gemett growende mid bogum, and blowende, and berende hnyte. Witodlice seo drige gyrd, þe næs on eorðan aplantod, ne mid nānre rinde befangen, ne mid sæpe acucod, and swa-ðeah greow, and bleow, and bær hnyte, hæfde getācnunge þære eadigan Marīan, þe næfde weres gemānan, and swa-ðeah þone liflican wæstm abær, seðe is soð Biscop and ure sawla Alysand.

Mennisc gesceapennys is on feower wison. Se frumsceapena mann Adām næs gestryned ne acenned, ac God hine gesceop. Seo oðer gesceapennys wæs swa þæt God gesceop Euan of hire weres sidan. Ne sind þas twa gesceapennyssa nanum oðrum gelīce. Seo ðridde gesceapennys is, þæt men beoð gestrynede ðurh wer and þurh wif, swa swa we dæghwomlice geseoð, and þeos ân gesceapennys is gewunelic. Seo feorðe gesceapennys wæs swa þæt Crist wearð acenned of mædene buton were. Nis ðeos gesceapennys nanum oðrum gelīc. Þa twā forman gesceapennyssa feollon on hryre, and seo ðridde wæs on hryre acenned ; ac seo feorðe alyside ða ðreo. Se ylca Godes Sunu, seðe ealle ðing gesceop, hē eac gesceop his āgene moder, and on hire innoð sylf becom, and ðærōn geworhte his āgenne lichaman, and wearð of hire ge-

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that she bare God Almighty, who is both God and man, one Christ. He began being what he was not, but he continued what he before had been. He began in humanity, who ever was and ever will be God. Yet are the Godhead and the humanity not mingled together, but the Godhead is invested with the humanity, so that there is neither admixture nor separation.

The maidenhood of Mary was manifoldly betokened in the old law. God bade Moses, the leader, take twelve dry rods from the twelve tribes of the people of Israel, and lay them before the holy ark within the great tabernacle: and he would by those rods declare whom he had chosen for bishop. Then, on the second day, Aaron's rod was found growing with boughs, and blowing, and bearing nuts. Verily the dry rod, which was not planted in the earth, nor clothed with any rind, nor with sap quickened, and yet grew, and blew, and bare nuts, betokened the blessed Mary, who had no society of man, and yet bare the Living Fruit, who is the true Bishop and the Redeemer of our souls.

Human creation is in four ways. The first-created man, Adam, was not begotten nor born, but God created him. The second creation was so that God created Eve from her husband's side. These two creations are like to none other. The third creation is, that men are begotten by man and by woman, as we see daily, and this creation is alone common. The fourth creation was so that Christ was born of a maiden without man. This creation is like to none other. The first two creations fell into perdition, and the third was in perdition born; but the fourth redeemed the three. The same Son of God, who created all things, created also his own mother, and came himself into her womb, and therein wrought his own body, and of her was born, a true man in soul and

boren, soð man on sawle and on lichaman ; and seo modor næs na gewemmed þurh þæt cild, ac wæs gehalgod. Mæden heo wæs beforan ðære cenninge, and mæden on ðære cenninge, and mæden æfter ðære cenninge. Ne bið nān mægðhād forloren on cenninge, ac bið forloren on hāmede. Þonne hwilc mæden mid luste weres bricð, þonne bið hire mægðhād æfre siððan adylegod, hæbbe heo cild næbbe heo. Ac þæt clæne mæden Maria hæfde behāten hire mægðhād Gode, and wæs mid þam Halgum Gaste afylled, and gescyld wið ælcere costnunge. Ne unlust on hire mōd ne becom, ne heo weres ne breac ; þa wæs heo forði mæden, þeah ðe heo Cild hæfde. Nis nān wifhādes mann hire gelīca, forði naðer ne ær ne siððan næs nān mæden þæt bearn gebære, and syððan mæden þurhwunode, buton hire ānre. Sindon þeah-hwæðere sume gesceafta þe tymað buton hāmede, and bið ægðer ge seo moder mæden ge seo dohtor ; þæt sind beon : hī tymað heora team mid clænnysse, of ðam hunige hī bredað heora brod, and beoð acennede þa geongan mid mægðhāde, and ða ylðran wuniað on mægðhāde. Eac seo halige Godes gelaðung, þæt is, eal cristen folc, is genemmed to ānum mædene, swa swa se apostol Paulus cwæð to ðam folce þe hē to Gode gebigde, “ Ic beweddode eow ānum were, þæt ge sceoldon gearcian clæne mæden Criste.” Eac Iohannes se Fulluhtere þus cwæð be Criste, “ Se ðe bryde hæfð, he is brydguma.” And se sealm-wyrhta Daudid sāng be Criste, þus cweðende, “ Swa swa brydguma hē gæð forð of his bryd-bedde.”

Ealle cyrcan on middanearde sind getealde to ānre cyrcan, and seo is gehāten Godes gelaðung, forðan ðe we sind ealle gelaðode to Godes rice. Nu is ðeos gelaðung Cristes bryd, and þurhwunað mæden, swa swa seo halige Maria. Seo gelaðung is ealra cristenra manna moder on gastlicere acennednysse, swa swa Crist sylf cwæð on his godspelle, “ Buton gehwā beo tuwa acenned, ne mæg hē na faran into heofonan rice.” Hū bið se mann tuwa acenned ? Ælc man bið acenned lichamlice of fæder and of meder, ac he ne bið Godes