

The Paradoxes of the Incarnation

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This poem was extracted from Sebastian P. Brock & George A. Kiraz book of Select Poems of Ephrem the Syrian. The original text was scripted in Syriac with English translation; this version is in Aramaic with slight modification to the interpretation of English translation

The Lamb has come for us from the House of
David, [Matt 1:1]
the Priest and Pontiff from Abraham: [Heb
9:11]
He became for us both Lamb and Pontiff,
giving His body for sacrifice, His blood for
sprinkling. [Exod 12:6]
Blessed is His perfecting!

Refrain: Bless is Your rising up!

The Shepherd of all flew down
in search of Adam, the sheep that had strayed;
[Luke 15:4-5]
on His shoulders He carried him, taking him
up:
he was an offering for the Lord of the flock.

Blessed is His descent!¹

he sprinkled dew and life-giving rain
on Mary, the thirsty earth. [Isa 53:2]
Like a seed of wheat He fell again to Sheol
[John 12:24]
to spring up as a sheaf, as the new Bread. [Lev
23:11, John 6:36]
Blessed is His offering!

Knowledge of Him chased error away
from humanity that had become lost;

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the Evil-One was lead astray by Him and was
 confounded.
 [knowledge of Him] poured out all kinds of
 wisdom upon the peoples.
 Blessed is His fountain!

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 From on high did Power² descend to us, [Luke
 1:35]
 from within a womb did Hope shine out for
 us,
 from the grave has salvation³ appeared for us,
 and on the right-hand the King for us is
 seated. [Ps 110:1]
 Blessed is His glory!⁴

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 From on high He flowed like a river,
 from Mary he [stemmed] as from a root, [Isa
 11:1; Luke 3:32; Rom 15:12]
 From the Cross He descended as fruit,
 as the first-fruit He ascended to heaven. [Col
 1:18]
 Blessed is His will!

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 The Word came forth from the Father's
 womb,⁵ [John 1:18]
 He put on the body in another womb;
 from one womb to another did He proceed,
 and chaste wombs are filled with Him.
 Blessed is He who has resided in us!⁶ [John
 1:14]

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 From on high He came down as Lord,
 from within the womb He came forth as a
 servant;
 Death knelt before Him in Sheol,
 and Life worshipped Him at His resurrection.

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تذریعہ پیش کردہ

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 حَسَنٌ بِخَيْبِ بْنِ مَذَنَنْ
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He was one of the fasters in the Temptation,
[Matt 4:1-11]

He was one of the watchful in the Agony,
[Matt 26:26-36]

He was a teacher in the Temple [Matt 12:35]

Blessed is His doctrine!

He did not shrink from the unclean,

He did not turn away from sinners;

in the harmless He greatly delighted,

for the simple He greatly longed.

Blessed is His teaching!

He did not hold back His footsteps from the
sick

or His words from the simple;

He extended His descent to the lowly,

and His ascension to the highest.

Blessed is His Sender!

His birth gives us purification,

His baptism gives us forgiveness

His death is life to us,

His ascension is our exaltation.

How we should thank Him!

By the greedy He was considered a glutton,
[Matt 11:19]

but by those who know, the Provider of all;

by drunkards He was considered a drinker,
[Matt 11:19]

but by the discerning, the One who gives
everyone to drink.

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Blessed is His foresight!

To Caiaphas His conception was a scandal,
[Matt 26:63-65]
but to Gabriel His birth was glorious; [Luke
1:31-35]
to the unthankful His ascension is a source of
difficulty,
but to His disciples His exaltation is a source
of wonder [Acts 1:9-10]
Blessed is His discernment!

With His Begetter His birth is certain,
but to the investigator it is fraught with
difficulty;
to supernal begins its truth is crystal clear,
but to those below, a subject of enquiry and
hesitation
- yet one which cannot be investigated!

By the Evil One He was tempted, [Matt 4:1-
11]
by the [Jewish] people He was questioned,
[Matt 26:57ff]
by Herod He was interrogated:
he spurned him with silence when he wished
to probe Him. [Luke 23:9]
Blessed is His begetter!

They thought He was one of those baptized in
the river [Jordan],
they accounted Him amongst those that sleep
while at sea, [Matt 8:24]
they hung Him like a stain man on the Cross,
they laid Him like a corpse in the grave.
Blessed is His humiliation!

Whom have we, Lord, Like You -

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The Great One who became small, the
 Wakeful who slept,
 the Pure One who was baptized, the Living
 One who departed,
 the King who bore disgrace to ensure honor
 for all!
 Blessed is Your honor!

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1. *His descent. “hovering”* The term derived from Gen 1:2, for which is normally used in connection with Holy Spirit.
2. *Power (ܡܠܟܐ)* The “Power of the Most High” in Luke 1:35 was usually interpreted by Syriac writers as referring to the divine Word rather than to the Holy Spirit.
3. *Salvation: (ܡܠܟܐ)* in early Syriac texts means “salvation” as well as “life”; thus the Greek Soteria is always rendered by ܡܠܟܐ in the Old Syriac Gospels.
4. *His glory (ܡܠܟܐ)* Based on Ezek 3:12; the phrase is occasionally found in later literature, e.g. the Syriac translation of the Life of Antony. In normal Syriac usage ܡܠܟܐ has the sense of “honor” rather than “glory”.
5. *The Word... the father’s womb (ܡܠܟܐ):* The word used in John 1:18 can mean both “bosom” (so the Greek) and “womb,” and it is in the latter sense that Ephrem takes it, providing a parallel with the womb of Mary. In this line the word (ܡܠܟܐ) is treated grammatically as feminine, as sometimes elsewhere in early Syriac texts; normally, however, the masculine is preferred.
6. *resided in us (ܡܠܟܐ):* It is very likely that Ephrem has in mind John 1:14, even though all the known Syriac versions (Syriac Diatessaron, Pershitta, Harklean) have a different verb (ܡܠܟܐ) here. References to (as opposed to citations of) both Luke 1:35 and John 1:14 in early Syriac writers regularly employ the verb (ܡܠܟܐ); possibly this usage may go back to the first oral kerygma in Syriac
7. *discernment (ܡܠܟܐ):* The word could also be translated “separation,” thus alluding to Luke 24:51, “he was separated (ܡܠܟܐ) from them” (his disciples); if this is correct, then Ephrem will already have know the Peshitta reading there (the one surviving Old Syriac manuscript, the Sinaiticus, has “was raised”).