

## The Paradoxes of the Incarnation

مَيْتٌ فَعَيْمَشَعْنَ بِيْ مَيْتٌ كَدْمَتْ  
مَيْتَعْنَ دَمَدْنَ ئَيْمَسْ دَمَتْ

*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!

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;

كَمَدْنَ بِيْ كَمَدْنَ  
كَمَدْنَ مَوْمَدْنَ بِيْ كَمَدْنَ  
كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ  
كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ  
كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ  
كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ كَمَدْنَ

**بِمَيْتَنَ:** تَدْبِي بِمَيْتَنَ

كَدْمَنَ فَعَيْمَشَنَ دَمَنَ جَلَّ  
فَعَيْمَشَنَ دَمَنَ دَمَنَ دَمَنَ  
بَلَدَ جَهَنَّمَ بَلَدَ بَلَدَ  
بَلَدَ تَمَوَّلَتَنَ لَمَدَنَ مَنَنَ  
تَدْبِي دَمَشَنَ

دَمَهَنَ كَلَنَ وَمَيْكَنَ بَنَنَ  
بَلَدَ سَرَمَدَنَ دَمَنَ دَمَنَ  
نَبَعَ مَيْكَنَ بَلَدَ بَلَدَ  
هَلَكَ نَبَعَ جَفَنَ وَكَسَنَ شَجَنَ  
تَدْبِي سَمَدَنَ

بَلَدَ كَلَنَ دَمَنَ كَمَدَنَ  
بَلَدَ كَلَنَ دَمَنَ دَمَنَ

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!

From on high did Power<sup>2</sup> descend to us, [Luke 1:35]  
 from within a womb did Hope shine out for us,  
 from the grave has salvation<sup>3</sup> appeared for us,  
 and on the right-hand the King for us is seated. [Ps 110:1]  
 Blessed is His glory!<sup>4</sup>

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!

The Word came forth from the Father's womb,<sup>5</sup> [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!<sup>6</sup> [John 1:14]

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.

لَهُنَّ بِهِ سَيِّدٌ وَّلِيْلُهُمْ بِهِ  
 حِلْمَقَنْ يَعْلَمُهُ جَلِيلُهُمْ  
 تَذَبَّرُ مُجَمِّدُهُ

بِهِ دُوْمَنْ سِكَنْ عِيْهِ كَلِيلٌ  
 بِهِ كَمْ حَذَّهُنْ تَحْذَّهُ مُكَلِّلٌ  
 بِهِ بَلَّهُنْ بَلَّتُهُ دَبِّلَهُ كَلِيلٌ  
 مَلِكُ بَصِّيَّنْ مَلَكُنْ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ  
 تَذَبَّرُ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ

بِهِ دُوْمَنْ دَبَّنْ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ  
 مِيْنَاتُ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ  
 بِهِ بَلَّهُنْ عِيْهِ بَلَّهُ فَرَّانٌ  
 هَلِيلُ كَلِيلَهُ بَلَّهُ دَعْيَانٌ  
 تَذَبَّرُ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ

مِيلِيلُ كَلِيلَهُ لَلَّانَ مِنْ دَعَوَانِ  
 هَلِيلُهُ فَلَّهُنْ تَحْمَلَنْ نَسَدَنِ  
 بِهِ دَعَوَنْ لَهُمَنْ يَعْلَمُهُ  
 وَمِلِيلُهُ مِيْنَاتُ دَعَوَنْ بَحْرَانِ  
 تَذَبَّرُ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ

بِهِ دُوْمَنْ عِيْهِ مَنِيْلُهُ مَنِيْلُهُ  
 بِهِ كَمْ حَذَّهُنْ تَفَكَّرُ بَلَّهُ كَلِيلٌ  
 وَمَلِكُ دَعَوَنْ تَبَدِّلَهُ كَلِيلٌ  
 وَتَذَبَّرُ شَعِيدَهُ بَلَّتُهُ هَلِيلُهُ كَلِيلٌ

Blessed is His victory!

تَذَبَّرْ يَسْتَدِيْرْ

Mary carried Him as a child,  
the priest [Simeon] carried Him as an offering,  
[Luke 2:28]  
the Cross carried Him as on slain,  
Heaven carried Him as God.

مَذْبَرْ كَلِيْدَرْ نَبِيْرْ كَلِيْدَرْ  
ذَرْتَنْ كَلِيْدَرْ نَبِيْرْ مَذْتَرْتَنْ  
كَلِيْدَرْ كَلِيْدَرْ نَبِيْرْ كَلِيْدَرْ  
عَذَنْ كَلِيْدَرْ نَبِيْرْ لَذَنْكَنْ  
جَوْبَنْ كَلِيْدَرْ لَذَنْكَنْ

Praise to His Father!

بَرْ جَدْ كَبِيْرْ زَوْجَدْ مَنْزَابْ  
نَوْ سَةَلَتْنَ بَرْ مَقْلَعَتْ  
ذَلِكَهْ بَعْدَنْ كَبِيْرْ سَهْلَعَتْ  
ذَلِكَهْ فَقَوْعَنْ كَبِيْرْ مَهْلَعَتْ  
تَذَبَّرْ يَلْتَيْرْ

From every side He stretched out and gave  
healing and promises:  
children ran to His healings,  
the discerning ran to His promises.  
Blessed is His revelation!

بَرْ فَهَقْ بَعْنَ يَهْهَبْنَ بَرْتَابْ  
كَبِيْرْ بَعْدَنْ مَيْكَنْ بَلْبَنْ  
بَرْ فَهَمْيَنْ كَبِيْرْ بَلْبَنْ  
بَرْ بَلْبَنْ بَعْدَنْ بَرْتَابْ  
تَذَبَّرْ جَنْبَرْ

From the fish's mouth He gave a coin [Matt  
17:27]  
whose imprint was temporal, whose currency  
passing; [Matt 22:21]  
from His own mouth He gave a new imprint,  
giving us the New Covenant.  
Blessed is its Giver!

بَرْ بَلْكَنْ بَلْكَنْ  
وَبَرْ مَنْيَهْنْ نَوْ نَتْعَمْهَ  
بَرْ مِلْحَمَهْ نَوْ حَوْمَدَهْ  
وَبَرْ بَهْ بَهْ بَهْ نَوْ مَلْحَمَهْ  
تَذَبَّرْ سَهْلَكَيْرْ

From God is His divinity,  
from mortals His humanity  
from Melchizedek His priesthood [Heb 5:6]  
from David's line His reign [Matt 1:6, Luke  
1:32]  
Blessed is His combining them!

بَرْ وَمَيْتَنْ فَهْ بَلْمَهْ

He was one of the guests at the Wedding  
Feast, [John 2:1-11]

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!

مَنْ لَمْ يَتَقْبَلْ حِكْمَةَ يَسُوعَ  
مَنْ لَمْ يَتَرَكَّبْ 25َسَنْ تَبَلِّغَتْ  
وَمُلْقَتْ 25َسَنْ تَبَلِّغَتْ  
تَذَبَّحْ وَلَقِيَتْ

He did not shrink from the unclean,

He did no turn away from sinners;  
in the harmless He greatly delighted,  
for the simple He greatly longed.

Blessed is His teaching!

مَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَّكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
مَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَّكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
تَهْمِيقَتْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَلَعْبَكَيْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
تَذَبَّحْ بِلَقِيَتْ

He did not hold back His footsteps from the  
sick  
or His words form the simple;

He extended His descent to the lowly,  
and His ascension to the highest.

Blessed is His Sender!

مَنْ لَمْ يَدِيْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَكَيْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَكَيْ مَيْكَةَ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَكَيْ مَيْكَةَ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
تَذَبَّحْ تَلَمِيَتْ

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!

مَهْكِيْ لَكَيْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَكَيْ لَكَيْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَكَيْ مَيْكَهَ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
وَكَيْ هَوْكَيْ لَكَيْ 25َسَنْ  
حَمَدَ بَهْدَنْ دَيْ

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.

مَنْ لَهْوَكَيْ سَبَتْ 25َسَنْ  
مَنْ تَهْوَيْ دَيْ جَلْ  
مَنْ تَهْوَيْ سَبَتْ 25َسَنْ  
مَنْ قَهْوَيْ مَكَيْ جَلْ

Blessed is His foresight!

تَذَبَّرْ كِوْفَتْنِيَتْ

To Caiaphas His conception was a scandal,  
[Matt 26:63-65]

لِعْنَتْ كِيمِنْ هَوْنْ بَلْكِيَّتْ

but to Gabriel His birth was glorious; [Luke  
1:31-35]

وَلِكِتْبَدْ بَدْ عَبَسْ مَهْكِيَّتْ

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]

وَلِكَلْمِيَّتْ مَهْبَتْ بَهْكِيَّتْ

Blessed is His discernment!

تَذَبَّرْ كِوْفَتْنِيَتْ

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!

يَوْمَ تَلْمِيَّتْ تَذَبَّرْ بَلْكِيَّتْ  
وَلِكِتْبَدْ بَدْ مَهْكِيَّتْ  
لِيَكْتَتْ مَهْبَتْ هَوْنْ بَلْقَنْ  
وَلِكَلْمِيَّتْ بَهْكِيَّتْ هَوْنْ  
سَبَقْ بَهْكِيَّتْ

By the Evil One He was tempted, [Matt 4:1-  
11]  
by the [Jewish] people Hw 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!

بَهْ تَبْعَنْ يَلْبَهْ بَهْ  
بَهْ هَوْنْ بَلْقَنْ يَعْبَدْ بَهْ  
بَهْ كَلْمِيَّتْ كَلْمِيَّتْ بَهْ  
بَهْ كَلْمِيَّتْ بَهْ كَلْمِيَّتْ بَهْ  
تَذَبَّرْ تَلْمِيَّتْ

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!

بَهْ كَلْمِيَّتْ تَذَبَّرْ بَهْ  
وَكَهْ بَهْ كَلْمِيَّتْ تَبْعَنْ مَهْكِيَّتْ  
بَهْ كِلْمِيَّتْ تَبْعَنْ كِلْمِيَّتْ  
بَهْ كِلْمِيَّتْ تَبْعَنْ كِلْمِيَّتْ  
تَذَبَّرْ مَهْكِيَّتْ

Whom have we, Lord, Like You -

مَهْ كَهْ مَهْ كَهْ بَهْ

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!

دَنْتَنْ دَوْبَدَنْ دَبَدَنْ دَبَدَنْ  
دَهَنْ دَهَنْ دَهَنْ دَهَنْ دَهَنْ  
مَلَكَنْ دَيَّنْ دَيَّنْ دَيَّنْ دَيَّنْ  
دَبَدَنْ دَبَدَنْ دَبَدَنْ دَبَدَنْ

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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 ( شَرْطَنْ ) 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: ( مَسْتَقْلَةَنْ ) in early Syriac texts means “salvation” as well as “life”; thus the Greek Soteria is always rendered by مَسْتَقْلَةَنْ in the Old Syriac Gospels.*
4. *His glory ( شَرْفَنْ ) 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 شَرْفَنْ has the sense of “honor” rather than “glory”.*
5. *The Word... the father’s womb ( شَرْأَنْ ): 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 ( مَلَكَنْ ) is treated grammatically as feminine, as sometimes elsewhere in early Syriac texts; normally, however, the masculine is preferred.*
6. *resided in us ( دَرَسَنْ ): It is very likely that Ephrem has in mind John 1:14, even though all the known Syriac versions (Syriac Diatessaron, Peshitta, Harklean) have a different verb ( دَرَسَ ) here. References to (as opposed to citations of) both Luke 1:35 and John 1:14 in early Syriac writers regularly employ the verb ( دَرَسَ ); possibly this usage may go back to the first oral kerygma in Syriac*
7. *discernment ( سَيْفَنْ ): The word could also be translated “separation,” thus alluding to Luke 24:51, “he was separated ( سَيْفَنْ ) from them” (his disciples); if this is correct, then Ephrem will already have known the Peshitta reading there (the one surviving Old Syriac manuscript, the Sinaiticus, has “was raised”).*