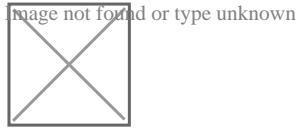


## **The Word became Flesh: the inexpressible mystery of salvation (Saint Symeon the New Theologian)**

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When God, the Son of God, entered the womb of All-Holy Virgin and took flesh from her, He was born a perfect person and perfect God, without confusion. When has anything more important ever happened for us? We all believe in this Son of God and Son of the ever-virgin Mother of God, Mary, which is why we confidently accept this information about Him and this event. If we confess Him and repent from the bottom of our heart then the word of devotion [to Him] is born within us like a seed, in exactly the same way as the Word of the Father entered the womb of the Virgin. Marvel at this great and astonishing miracle and accept it in all certainty and faith.



So we conceive this Word, not bodily, as the Virgin and Mother of God did, but

spiritually and in truth. And we have Him in our hearts Who is the same Christ born of the Pure Virgin, as Saint Paul says: 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (II Cor. 4, 6), as if saying: 'He's been wholly born within us'. This is clear from what he goes on to add: 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (II Cor. 4, 7), meaning, by 'treasure', the Holy Spirit.

Elsewhere he calls the Holy Spirit 'Lord', because, as he explains, the Holy Spirit is the Lord. So whenever you hear 'the Son of God', you should also understand 'the Spirit' and when you hear 'the Holy Spirit' you should also understand 'the Father', as Saint John says 'God is Spirit' (Jn, 4, 24), teaching that the Holy Trinity is undivided and of the same substance. In other words, where the Son is, there is the Father; where the Father is, there is the Spirit; and where the Holy Spirit is, there are the three Persons of the Godhead, one God and Father, together with His Son and the Spirit all sharing the same substance: 'Who is blessed forever. Amen'. (Rom. 1, 25).

So when we believe wholeheartedly, and repent fervently, we'll conceive the Word of God in our hearts, as has been said, as the Virgin conceived Him, offering Him our pure and virgin souls. And just as she wasn't consumed by the fire of the Godhead, because she was pure and all-spotless, neither are we when we offer Him our pure and cleansed hearts. Instead we feel a heavenly dew within us, a spring of water and a stream of immortal life. As to the fact that we also receive the full force of the fire of the Godhead, listen to the Lord when He says: 'I have come to set fire to the earth' (Luke, 12: 49). What else does He mean, if not the Spirit, Who is of the same substance as the Godhead, and Who comes to us and is known to us, together with the Son Himself and the Father?

Since the Word of God once became incarnate and was born to the Virgin, in the body, ineffably and beyond reason, and that it's not possible for each one of us to give birth to Him in the flesh, what has He arranged? For nourishment, He gives us that spotless Body which He took from the All-Pure Mother of God, at the time when He was born in the flesh. If we partake of it worthily, we have within us the whole of the incarnate God, Jesus Christ our Lord, this same Son of God and Son of the Virgin, Who sits at the right hand of God and Who says: 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them' (Jn. 6, 56). He doesn't come from us, nor is born in the body by us, though He's never parted from us. We don't feel Him as flesh, though He's within us, just like an infant, but rather He's bodiless within a body, ineffably intermingled with our nature and our essence, making us divine, because we've become completely at one with Him, that is, flesh of His

flesh and bone of His bone. This is the greatest and most dread mystery of His inexpressible providence and condescension, which I've been reluctant to write about because I tremble to attempt it.

But God always wants His love for us to be revealed and manifested, so that we, at some stage, will understand His great goodness and, feeling ashamed, will be more than ready to love Him in return. This is why I was moved by the Holy Spirit, Who illumines our hearts, to reveal to you these mysteries in writing, though not to show that we're the same as her who give birth to the Lord- God forbid!- that would be impossible. The incarnation and birth of the Divine Word by the Virgin is one thing, and what happens to us spiritually is another. By giving birth to the Son and Word of God she actuated, here on earth, the mystery of the re-creation of the human race and the salvation of the whole world, that is, Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, He Who united in Himself the things that were divided and washed away the sin of the world.