

A Sermon of our Father among the Saints  
**Epiphanius, Archbishop of Cyprus,**

on the Burial of the divine Body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
on Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus,  
and on the Lord's Descent into Hell,  
which occurred in wondrous manner after his saving Passion.<sup>1</sup>



WHAT IS THIS? Today, great silence in the earth. What is this? Great silence and great stillness. Great silence, for the King sleeps. The earth feared and was still<sup>2</sup>, when God fell asleep in the flesh. God died in the flesh, and Hell trembled. God slumbered a short spell, and woke up out of Hell those of times past who were sleeping.

Where now are yesterday's commotions, the cries, the clamourings against Christ, O ye transgressors? Where are the mobs, the riots, the troops, the weapons and the spears? Where the kings, the priests, the judges worthy of judgment? Where the torches, the swords, the unruly shouts? Where the crowds, the jeers, the insolent guards?

Truly in verity and verily in truth, the peoples imagined vain and futile things.<sup>3</sup> They stumbled at the cornerstone Christ<sup>4</sup>, and were broken. They crashed themselves against the solid Rock, but their waves scattered into foam. They struck against the indestructible Anvil, but were themselves shattered. They lifted up the Rock upon the Tree, but it fell down and crushed them. They bound the great Samson, Sun, and God<sup>5</sup>, but he loosed the age-old bonds, and destroyed the Philistines and transgressors. The divine Sun set beneath the earth, and brought about deep darkness for the Jews.

Today is salvation for those on earth, and those of ages past beneath the earth. Today is salvation for the world, both seen and unseen. Twofold is the Master's coming today, twofold the dispensation, twofold the love of man, twofold the descent, and likewise the condescension, twofold the visitation unto men—from heaven to earth, and from earth to under the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the critical Greek text in André Vaillant, "L'homélie d'Epiphane sur l'ensevelissement du Christ," *Radovi Staroslavenskog Instituta*, 3 (1958).

<sup>2</sup> cf. Ps. 75:10. All Psalm references are according to the LXX numbering. Old Testament readings unique to the LXX are indicated as such.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Ps. 2:1 *Why have the heathen raged and the peoples imagined vain things?*

<sup>4</sup> cf. Rom. 9:32 ... *they stumbled at that stumbling-stone.*

<sup>5</sup> 'Samson' means 'Sun' in Hebrew; while Christ is himself the 'Sun of righteousness' (cf. Mal. 4:2).

God draws nigh, Hell's gates open wide. O ye of times past who are fallen asleep, rejoice! Ye that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, receive the great Light!<sup>6</sup> The Master is with his slaves, God with the dead, the Life with mortals, the Guiltless with the guilty, the unwaning Light with those in darkness, the Liberator with the captives, the One far above the heavens<sup>7</sup> with those in the lowest depths.

When Christ was on earth, we believed on him; now that Christ is among the dead, let us go down with him. Let us learn the mysteries there, let us come to know the wonders of the hidden God hid beneath the earth, let us learn how the preaching appeared even to those in Hades. What then? Did God save all without exception when he appeared in Hell? Not so, but there too, only those who believed.

Yesterday, he displayed the things of economy: today, those of sovereignty; yesterday, the things of infirmity: today, those of authority; yesterday, the things of humanity: today, those of divinity. Yesterday, he was slapped: today, he strikes Hell's household with the thunderbolt of his Godhead. Yesterday, he was bound: today, he binds fast the tyrant with unbreakable bonds. Yesterday, he was condemned: today, he grants freedom to the damned. Yesterday, Pilate's minions mocked him: today, Hell's porters shudder to see him.<sup>8</sup>

Come then, listen to the lofty tale of Christ's Passion, listen and praise him, listen and glorify him, listen and proclaim God's great wonders: how the Law retreats, how Grace flourishes; how the types<sup>9</sup> pass away, how the truth is preached; how the shadows<sup>10</sup> recede, how the Sun fills the world; how the Old Covenant expires, how the New Covenant is established; how old things are passed away<sup>11</sup>, how new things blossom forth.

Two peoples were present in Zion at the time of Christ's Passion, that of the Jews and that of the Gentiles; two kings, Pilate and Herod; two high priests, Annas and Caiaphas; that there might likewise be two Passovers—one that was ending, and Christ's, just beginning. Two sacrifices were accomplished that evening, since two salvations were at work—of the living, that is, and of the dead.

The Jew bound a lamb and slew it in sacrifice, while the Gentile sacrificed God in the flesh. The one looked to the shadow, while the other ran to the Sun and God. The

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<sup>6</sup> cf. Lk. 1:79 ... *to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*; Is. 9:2 *O people walking in darkness, behold a great light: ye that dwell in the region and shadow of death, a light shall shine upon you.*

<sup>7</sup> cf. Eph. 4:10 *He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.*

<sup>8</sup> cf. Job 38:17 (LXX) *And do the gates of death open to thee for fear; and did the porters of hell quake when they saw thee?*

<sup>9</sup> cf. Heb. 9:24 *For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures [αντιτυπα, antitypes] of the true.*

<sup>10</sup> cf. Heb. 10:1 *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things ...*

<sup>11</sup> cf. 2 Cor. 5:17 ... *old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.*

Jews bound Christ and sent him away, while the Gentiles eagerly took him in. The one brought in sacrifice an animal victim, while the other offered the body of God; the Jews made remembrance of their passing over from Egypt, while the Gentiles made proclamation of their deliverance from error.

And where did these things take place? In Zion, the city of the great King<sup>12</sup>, where he wrought salvation in the midst of the earth<sup>13</sup>—Jesus, that is, the child of God, known in the midst of two living things<sup>14</sup>: acknowledged<sup>14</sup> to be the Life from Life engendering life in the midst of the Father and the Spirit, the two Living Beings; born in a manger in the midst of angels and men; set as a cornerstone in the midst of the Jews and the Gentiles; preached alike in the midst of the Law and the Prophets; seen on the mountaintop in the midst of Moses and Elias; acknowledged to be God by the wise thief in the midst of two thieves; sitting as eternal Judge in the midst of this life and the next; and working today a twofold life and salvation in the midst of the living and the dead. Twofold life, I repeat; twofold birth, which is to say, rebirth; listen, then, to the facts of the twofold birth, and applaud the wondrous works.

An angel announced the birth of Christ to Mary, Christ's mother, and an angel announced the rebirth of Christ from the tomb to Mary of Magdala. By night was Christ born in Bethlehem, and again by night was he reborn from the dead in Zion. In a cave of stone was Christ born, and in a cave of stone was Christ reborn. He received swaddling-bands when he was born, and he is wrapped in swaddling-bands here as well. He received myrrh at his birth, and he receives myrrh and aloes at his burial. There—Joseph, supposed spouse of Maria; here—Joseph of Arimathea. His birth was in Bethlehem, laid in a manger for his crib, while here, the place where he lay<sup>15</sup> as in a manger, was in a crypt. Shepherds first preached the glad tidings of Christ's birth, and the shepherds of all men, Christ's disciples, first preached the glad tidings of Christ's rebirth from the dead. There, the angel cried "Hail!" to the Virgin, and here, Christ the Angel of great counsel<sup>16</sup> cried out "All hail!" to the women.

Forty days after his first birth, Christ went up to the earthly Jerusalem, to the temple, and as firstborn, brought a pair of turtledoves to God; and forty days after his rebirth from the dead, Christ ascended to the Jerusalem which is above, whence he had never been parted, into the true Holy of holies, as the incorrupt firstborn from the dead<sup>17</sup>,

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<sup>12</sup> cf. Ps. 47:3 ... *Mount Zion, the slopes of the north, the city of the great King.*

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 73:12 *But God is our King before the ages: he hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth.*

<sup>14</sup> cf. Hab. 3:2 (LXX) *In the midst of two living beings, thou shalt be known; when the years draw nigh, thou shalt be acknowledged.*

<sup>15</sup> cf. Mt. 28:6 ... *come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

<sup>16</sup> cf. Is. 9:5 (LXX) ... *and his name shall be called Messenger [αγγελος, angel] of great counsel.*

<sup>17</sup> Col. 1:18.

and brought to God his Father, like two unblemished turtledoves, our soul and our body; and God, the Ancient of days<sup>18</sup>, took him up in his arms<sup>19</sup>, like another aged Simeon, into his uncircumscribed bosom. Now, if thou hearest these things as fables, and not with faith, the unbroken seals of the tomb of Christ's lordly rebirth are thine accusers. For just as Christ was born of a Virgin while keeping sealed the bolts that open the womb, Christ's rebirth took place without breaking open the seals of the tomb. Let us then listen to the sacred oracles concerning how Christ the Life was laid in a tomb, when and by whom.

*When the even was come*, it says, *there came a rich man, named Joseph;*<sup>20</sup> *the same went in boldly unto Pilate, and asked of him the body of Jesus.*<sup>21</sup> Mortal went in unto mortal and asked to receive the God of mortals. Clay asks clay to receive the Fashioner of all, straw from straw seeks to carry off the heavenly Fire, a tiny drop from a drop receives the whole Ocean. Who has ever seen or heard the like? Man grants man the Creator of men. A lawbreaker ventures to hand over the lawful Legislator of laws. An unjust judge sends to burial the Judge of judges as one judged.

*When the even was come there came a rich man, named Joseph.* Rich indeed, for he carried away the whole compound Person of the Lord. Truly rich, for he received the dual essence of Christ from Pilate. Yea verily rich, for he was vouchsafed to carry off the priceless Pearl. Rich indeed, for he bore off a sack full of the treasure of divinity. How could he not be rich, who acquired the Life and Salvation of the world? How could Joseph not be rich, who received as a gift the Nourisher and Master of all?

*When the even was come*, for the Sun of righteousness had now set in the grave; wherefore, *there came a rich man named Joseph, of Arimathea*<sup>22</sup>, *which was a disciple secretly for fear of the Jews*<sup>23</sup>; and there came also Nicodemus, who once *came to Jesus by night.*<sup>24</sup> O hidden mystery of mysteries! Two secret disciples come to hide away Jesus in a tomb, teaching by their hiding the hidden mystery of God hid bodily in the grave, each one outdoing the other in their zeal for God—Nicodemus, magnanimous in providing the myrrh and aloes, and Joseph, meritorious for his boldness and daring before Pilate.

You see, this latter, casting off all fear, *went in boldly unto Pilate, and asked the body of Jesus.*<sup>25</sup> Now when he went in, he dealt very shrewdly, so as to achieve his desired aim. Hence he used not pompous and high-sounding words with Pilate, lest he provoke him

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<sup>18</sup> cf. Dan. 7:9, 22.

<sup>19</sup> cf. Lk. 2:28 ... *then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God.*

<sup>20</sup> Mt. 27:57.

<sup>21</sup> Mk. 15:43.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Mt. 27:57.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Jn. 19:38.

<sup>24</sup> Jn. 3:2.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Mk. 15:43.

to anger and be denied his request; neither did he say, “Give me the body of Jesus, who just a short while ago darkened the sun, rent the rocks, made the earth to quake, opened the graves, and rent in twain the veil of the temple.”<sup>26</sup> Nothing of this sort said he to Pilate. What then? A small request:

“O judge, I am come to ask a small favour of thee: Give me to bury the dead body of the one condemned by thee, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the pauper, Jesus the wanderer, Jesus hanging naked, Jesus the commoner, son of a carpenter, Jesus the prisoner, Jesus bereft of shelter, the stranger, unknown among strangers, who lies hanging, scorned by all and hated. Give me this stranger: for what use to thee is the corpse of this stranger? Give me this stranger: for he is come here from a far country to save strangers.<sup>27</sup> Give me this stranger: for he is come down into darkness to draw up strangers. Give me this stranger: for he alone is truly a stranger. Give me this stranger, whose country is unknown to us strangers. Give me this stranger, whose father is unknown to us strangers. Give me this stranger, whose place and manners are unknown to us strangers. Give me this stranger, who lived a strange life amidst strangers. Give me this Nazarene stranger, whose birth is unknown to us strangers. Give me this voluntary stranger, *who hath not where to lay his head*.<sup>28</sup> Give me this stranger, who as a stranger in a strange land was born homeless in a manger. Give me this stranger, who from this same manger fled Herod as a stranger.

“Give me this stranger, who from infancy lived in Egypt a stranger, having neither city, nor village, nor house, nor lodging, nor kinsfolk, dwelling in foreign parts with his mother, while yet possessing all things.<sup>29</sup> Give me, O governor, this man crucified and naked, that I may cover him who covered my nature’s nakedness. Give me this man, at once dead and God, that I may cover him who covered my sins.<sup>30</sup> Give me to bury this dead man who buried my sin in Jordan. I beseech thee for a dead man, wronged by all, betrayed by a friend, sold by his disciple, persecuted by his brethren, buffeted by his own servants. I entreat thee for a dead man, condemned by those he freed from bondage, given vinegar to drink by those he nursed like babes, wounded by those he healed, abandoned by his disciples, deprived of his own mother. I implore thee, O Pilate, for a dead man hanging on a tree, seeing he has on earth no father at his side, neither any friend, nor disciple, nor kinsman, nor any to bury him, but is all alone in the world—the only-begotten of the only Father—himself God, and no other.”

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<sup>26</sup> cf. Mt. 27:53.

<sup>27</sup> i.e. the Gentiles; cf. Eph. 2:12 ... *at that time ye were without Christ ... {being} strangers from the covenants of promise*.

<sup>28</sup> Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58.

<sup>29</sup> cf. 2 Cor. 6:10 ... *as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Ps. 84:3 *Thou hast forgiven the iniquities of thy people, thou hast covered all their sins*.

When Joseph had spoken these things to Pilate, Pilate commanded to give him the all-holy body of Jesus.<sup>31</sup> Then he went to Golgotha and took down God incarnate from the Cross; and laid upon the earth God naked in the flesh, yet henceforth naked no more.<sup>32</sup> And so he who draws all men up above<sup>33</sup> is seen lying below; the Life and Breath of all is for a time bereft of breath; the Creator of the many-eyed angels is seen devoid of sight; the Resurrection of all men is laid down to rest; God who raises the dead is dead in the flesh; the thunder of God's Word is silent in the flesh; he who holds the earth in the hollow of his hand<sup>34</sup> is borne about by the hands of men.

Joseph, O Joseph, who didst ask and receive<sup>35</sup>: knowest thou well whom thou hast received? Well? when thou didst draw near the Cross and take down Jesus, didst thou know then whom thou barest? If indeed thou knowest whom thou hast held, now art thou rich. But how then dost thou also prepare for burial that divine and most-fearsome body of Jesus? Laudable is thy purpose, but even more so thy soul's boldness. What? dost thou not tremble to carry in thine arms him who causes the Cherubim to tremble? With what fear dost thou strip off the covering of that divine Flesh? Or with what reverence dost thou steady thy trembling gaze, to look upon and uncover the fleshly nature of the God above all nature? Pray tell me, O Joseph, dost thou bury toward the east as one dead, Jesus, the Sunrise of the east?<sup>36</sup> Or dost thou shut with thy fingers, after the custom of the dead, the eyes of Jesus, who with his immaculate finger opened the eyes of the blind? Dost thou then cover over the mouth of him who opened the mouth of the dumb? Dost thou wrap up the hands of him who stretched out the hands that were withered? Or dost thou bind up, after the custom of the dead, the feet of him who made lame feet to go? Dost thou take up in a bed him who commanded the paralytic, "Take up thy bed and walk?" Dost thou pour out myrrh upon the heavenly Myrrh who poured himself out and sanctified the world? Darest thou to wipe dry the divine and still-bleeding side of Jesus, who as God healed the woman with an issue of blood? Dost thou then wash with water the body of God, who washes all men and grants them cleansing? What lamps dost thou light for the true Light, *which lighteth every man*?<sup>37</sup> What funeral dirges dost thou sing for him who is ceaselessly praised by all the hosts of heaven? Dost thou indeed shed tears for him, as though dead, who wept and raised up dead Lazarus? Or makest thou lamentation for him who gives joy to all and put an end to Eve's sorrow?

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<sup>31</sup> cf. Mt. 27:58.

<sup>32</sup> i.e. since Joseph covers his nakedness with the winding-sheet.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Jn. 12:32 *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

<sup>34</sup> cf. Is. 40:12 (LXX) *Who hath measured ... all the earth in a handful?*

<sup>35</sup> cf. Mt. 7:8 *For every one that asketh receiveth*; Jn. 16:24 ... *ask, and ye shall receive.*

<sup>36</sup> cf. Zach. 6:12 (LXX) *Behold the man whose name is The Branch* [Ανατολή, i.e. Orient, East].

<sup>37</sup> cf. Jn. 1:9 *That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

Howbeit, I bless thy hands, O Joseph, which have tended and handled Jesus' divine and still-bleeding hands and feet. I bless thy hands which drew near the gash in God's side even before Thomas, the faithless believer and commendable inquisitor. I bless thy mouth, insatiably sated by and joined to the mouth of Jesus, whence it was filled with the Holy Spirit. I bless thine eyes, which were pressed to the eyes of Jesus, whence they received the true Light. I bless thy face which touched the face of God. I bless thy shoulders, which bore the Bearer of all things.<sup>38</sup> I bless thy head, which came so close to Jesus, the Head of all.<sup>39</sup>

I bless both Joseph and Nicodemus, for they are become Cherubim before the Cherubim, bearing aloft God in their midst; they are become divine ministers before the six-winged Seraphim, covering and reverencing God not with wings, but with a winding-sheet. Joseph and Nicodemus bear upon their shoulders him before whom the Cherubim tremble, just as all the bodiless ranks together bear him; for where Joseph and Nicodemus are, is not the whole divine assembly of angels gathered together as well? The Cherubim go before, and the Seraphim run alongside, the Thrones together bear him, the six-winged cover him, the many-eyed are affrighted to see Jesus sightless in the flesh, the Powers likewise enshroud him, while the Principalities sing hymns. Indeed, all the ranks of angels tremble, astonished and astounded, and they inquire among themselves, saying:

“What is this dreadful matter, fearful and frightful in manner? What is this grand and exceptional spectacle? The invisible God who is above us, the bodiless, is seen below as a man among men, naked and lifeless. Joseph and Nicodemus fearlessly give burial to him upon whom the Cherubim attend with reverent fear. When did he descend, who never left the heights? How did he go out, who is ever within? How did he come to earth, who fills all things? How did he depart unnoticed by all, who as God is ever with the Father on high? He who has never appeared to us at any time, has appeared to men as both man and man's friend. How is the Invisible seen? How is the Immaterial incarnate? How did the Passionless suffer the Passion? How was the Judge brought to judgment? How did the Life taste death?<sup>40</sup> How is the Uncontainable contained in a tomb? How does he dwell in a grave, who never left the Father's throne? How does he enter the door of the cave, who opened not the gates of heaven,<sup>41</sup> yet opened the gates of Paradise; who broke not the doors of the Virgin's womb, yet shattered the gates of Hell<sup>42</sup>; who opened not the doors before Thomas, yet opened the gates of the Kingdom to men; who kept unopened the doors and seals of the tomb? How is he numbered among the dead, who is

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<sup>38</sup> cf. Heb. 1:3 ... *upholding all things by the word of his power.*

<sup>39</sup> 1 Cor. 11:3 ... *the head of every man is Christ.*

<sup>40</sup> cf. Heb. 2:9 ... *that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*

<sup>41</sup> i.e. since they are ever open to him.

<sup>42</sup> cf. Ps. 106:16 *For he shattered the gates of bronze.*

free among the dead?<sup>43</sup> How does the unwaning Light appear in darkness and the shadow of death?<sup>44</sup> Whither does he go, whither does he descend, he who cannot be held by death? What is the reason, what the manner, what the purpose for his descent into Hell? Perhaps he goes down to bring up Adam, our condemned fellow-servant. Yes, surely he goes to seek the first-formed man like a lost sheep. Doubtless he wishes to visit even those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.<sup>45</sup> Doubtless he goes to loose from their bonds captive Adam and his fellow-prisoner Eve, he who is at once their son and God. So let us descend with him, let us assemble with him, let us hasten, let us skip, let us escort him, let us raise a shout, let us hurry, that we may see God's reconciliation with men, and the gracious Master's release of the condemned."

Indeed, the natural friend of man goes to bring out with his great might and authority the prisoners from ages past who dwell in the tombs,<sup>46</sup> whom the harsh and indomitable tyrant tyrannizes, having spitefully seized and stolen them from God, and filled his infernal lair with those who once dwelt above. There is Adam the prisoner, the first-enchained and first-sentenced to death, lower down than all the rest. There is Abel, the first-slain and first-righteous shepherd, prototype of the unjust slaughter of Christ the Shepherd. There is Noah, the type of Christ, Builder of the great Ark of the Church, who saved all the beastly nations from the flood of ungodliness by the Dove of the Holy Spirit, and expelled from her the dark diabolic Raven. There is Abraham, Christ's forefather, the sacrificer, who with unslain victim and unstained knife offered God propitious sacrifice.<sup>47</sup> There is Isaac in bonds, who was bound of old by Abraham, as a type of Christ. There is Jacob, grieving in Hades below, who once grieved over Joseph above. There is Joseph the prisoner, who was cast into prison in Egypt, as a type of Christ, the imprisoned Potentate. There is Moses, in darkness below, as once in a basket he was in darkness above.<sup>48</sup> There is Daniel in the den of Hell below, who was once in a den of lions above.<sup>49</sup> There is Jeremiah, as in a pit of mire<sup>50</sup>, in the pit of Hell and the decay of death. There in the all-devouring belly of Hell lies Jonah, the type of Christ, the eternal and pre-eternal

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<sup>43</sup> cf. Ps. 87:5-6 *I am become as a man without help, free among the dead.*

<sup>44</sup> cf. Ps. 87:7 *They have laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places and in the shadow of death.*

<sup>45</sup> cf. Ps. 106:10 *Such as sit in darkness and the shadow of death.*

<sup>46</sup> cf. Ps. 67:7 *God setteth the solitary in a house, he bringeth out the prisoners with manly might, even the rebellious, the dwellers in tombs.*

<sup>47</sup> *Lit.* the sacrificer, who offered God the propitious knife-knifeless and death-deathless sacrifice.

<sup>48</sup> cf. Ex. 2:4-7 *... and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child.* The basket was enclosed, and so Moses was in darkness floating down the river.

<sup>49</sup> cf. Dan. 6:16-23.

<sup>50</sup> cf. Jer. 45:6 (LXX); 38:6 (MT) *And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sank in the mire.*



Jonah, who lives for ever, yea, for ever and evermore.<sup>51</sup> There is David, God's forefather, of whom Christ was descended according to the flesh. But why speak I of David, Jonah, and Solomon? There is the illustrious John himself, greater than all the prophets, who heralds Christ's coming to all those in Hades, as he did even in the darkness of his mother's womb; the twofold forerunner, the preacher to the living and the dead, who was sent from Herod's prison to Hades, the common prison of those fallen asleep since the world began, righteous and unrighteous alike.

From thence, all the prophets and the righteous secretly sent up ceaseless supplications to God, asking for deliverance from that most dismal place, from the dark and dreary domination of the enemy, and the endless, impenetrable black of night. So one said to God, *From the belly of hell cometh my cry: hear thou my voice*<sup>52</sup>; while another said, *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice*.<sup>53</sup> Yet another, *Shine thy face that we may be saved*.<sup>54</sup> And another, *Thou that sittest upon the Cherubim, shine forth*.<sup>55</sup> Another, *Stir up thy might and come to save us*.<sup>56</sup> And another, *Let thy tender mercies quickly overtake us, for we are brought very low*.<sup>57</sup> Another, *Deliver my soul from the nethermost hell*.<sup>58</sup> Yet another, *Lord, bring my soul out of hell*.<sup>59</sup> And another, *Abandon not my soul to hades*.<sup>60</sup> And another, *Raise up my life from corruption, O Lord my God*.<sup>61</sup>

Having heard all these pleas, the all-compassionate God determined to extend his love for mankind not only to those living in his day and afterwards, but also to those before his coming held in Hades, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.<sup>62</sup> Wherefore, just as God the Word visited men in the flesh by means of soul-bearing flesh, so also did he appear to the bodiless souls in Hell by means of his immaculate and God-bearing soul—bereft of his body, but not his divinity.

Let us then make haste and journey in mind to Hades, that we may see how there at last, he masters with masterly might the most mighty master and tyrant, and with his

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<sup>51</sup> cf. Ex. 15:18 (LXX) *The Lord shall reign for ever, yea, for ever and evermore*. There is a play on words in the Greek, between *Ἰωνά* (Jonah) and *αἰών* (age, eternity).

<sup>52</sup> cf. Jon. 2:3 (LXX) *I called in my trouble to the Lord my God, and he hearkened unto me; from the belly of hell came my cry: thou heardest my voice*.

<sup>53</sup> Ps. 129:1.

<sup>54</sup> Ps. 79:4.

<sup>55</sup> Ps. 79:2.

<sup>56</sup> Ps. 79:3.

<sup>57</sup> Ps. 78:8.

<sup>58</sup> cf. Ps. 85:13 *For thy mercy is great upon me, and thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell*.

<sup>59</sup> cf. Ps. 29:4 *O Lord, thou hast brought my soul out of hell, thou hast saved me from those going down to the pit*.

<sup>60</sup> cf. Ps. 15:10 *Thou wilt not abandon my soul to hades, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption*.

<sup>61</sup> cf. Jon. 2:7 *and thou didst raise up my life from corruption, O Lord my God*.

<sup>62</sup> cf. Ps. 106:10; Lk. 1:79.

brilliant lightning, as with a whole army, effortlessly subdues the ranks of that immortal infantry; Christ the Door<sup>63</sup> having first burst open the exitless doors in the midst, and shattered the woodless gates of bronze by the wood of the Cross<sup>64</sup>, by the nails having broken and sundered the age-old iron bars<sup>64</sup>, by the bonds of his hands having dissolved the indissoluble bonds like wax, and by the spear in his divine side having pierced through the fleshless heart of the tyrant. *There did he break the strength of the bow*<sup>65</sup>, when on the bow of the Cross, he stretched out the sinews of his divine arms like bowstrings. Therefore if thou followest Christ in silence, thou wilt presently see where he bound the tyrant, where he hung his head aloft, how he razed his dungeon and led out the prisoners, how he trampled the serpent, and where he displayed his head, how he freed Adam and raised up Eve, how he broke down the middle wall<sup>66</sup>, where he condemned the cruel dragon, how he set up invincible trophies, where he put Death to death, how he spoiled corruption, and restored man to his primal dignity.

Accordingly, he who yesterday refused the aid of legions of angels in his economy, telling Peter, “I could even now set before me more than twelve legions of angels,”<sup>67</sup> today with God-befitting majesty, as both Warrior and Master, goes down by means of death to the depths of death and Hell to oppose the tyrant of death, having with him immortal legions of bodiless soldiers and invisible orders; and not twelve only, but thousands of thousands and ten thousands of ten thousands<sup>68</sup>—Angels, Archangels, Powers, Thrones, six-winged Seraphim, many-eyed Cherubim, and all the host of heaven—escorting, attending, and hymning Christ as their own Master and King; not indeed as fellow-warriors (perish the thought! for what reinforcements could Christ almighty need?), but out of both their duty and longing to stand constantly by God their Master. Among them are loyal spearmen, keen footmen, and swift sceptre-bearers of the Master’s divine orders, who at a mere gesture, outrun one another with divine alacrity and zeal, at once putting deed into action at his command, and arraying themselves in triumph against the ranks of the enemy tyrants. Wherefore they then descended, hasting and hurtling to follow after their God and Master, towards the infernal subterranean habitations of those sleeping from past ages hidden deep beneath the earth, to bring out the prisoners and those who had fallen asleep since the world began.

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<sup>63</sup> cf. Jn. 10:9 *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.*

<sup>64</sup> cf. Ps. 106:16 *For he shattered the gates of bronze, and the bars of iron he brake.*

<sup>65</sup> Ps. 75:4.

<sup>66</sup> cf. Eph. 2:14 *For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.*

<sup>67</sup> cf. Mt. 26:53 *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?*

<sup>68</sup> cf. Dan. 7:10 *A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.*

Now when the luminous presence of the Master's divine retinue had arrived at the walled-off, sunless, pitch black habitations of Hades, with its dens and dungeons, caves and caverns, Gabriel the chief-commander went before all—it being his custom to bring glad tidings of joy unto men—and as befits an archangel and general, issued to the hostile powers a mighty, resounding, and lion-like command, saying: *Lift up your gates, O ye princes!*<sup>69</sup> After him cried Michael, *And be ye lift up, ye everlasting gates!*<sup>69</sup> Thereafter the Virtues said, “Stand back, ye lawless porters!” Then the Powers said with power, “Be broken, ye unbreakable bonds!” And another, “Be abashed, ye inimical foes!” Yet another, “Be affrighted, ye lawless tyrants!” And just as before the battle array of some terrible and invulnerable, all-powerful, royal, trophy-bearing army, a certain terror and trembling, panic and painful fear seize the enemies of an unconquerable king, just so did it befall those in Hades at Christ's unexpected coming to the netherworld, which occurred like a sudden lightning-flash from above, blinding the eyes of the hostile powers of Hell, as they heard certain thunderous voices bellowing, and angelic hosts commanding, and saying:

“*Lift up your gates, O ye princes! Lift up your gates! Do not simply open them, but lift them up from the foundations, root them out and remove them, that they may never more be shut. Lift up your gates, O ye princes! Not as though the Master here present is unable, even with the doors shut, to enter in at his own bidding, but because as fugitive slaves, he relegates to you the task of raising, removing, and shattering the everlasting gates; on which account he commands not the common lot among you, but those reckoned by you to be princes, saying, Lift up your gates, O ye princes! ‘Princes,’ and not any other sort among you; for if indeed until now ye have wickedly exercised princedom over those sleeping from the ages, yet henceforth ye shall be their princes no longer, neither of any others, but of yourselves only—yet not even of yourselves. Lift up your gates! for Christ the heavenly Door is at hand. Make way for him that rideth into the dusky regions of Hell—Lord is his name<sup>70</sup>; and to the Lord belong the ways out from the gates of death.<sup>71</sup> Ye indeed made the entryways of death, but he is come to make the ways leading out therefrom; wherefore: Lift up your gates, O ye princes! Lift them up, and do not delay! Lift them up, and make haste! Lift them up, and do not wait! For if ye think to tarry, we shall command the same gates to be lifted up without hands of themselves, saying, Be ye lift up, ye everlasting gates!”*

No sooner had the hosts of heaven cried out, than at once the gates were lifted up, at once the chains and bars were broken, at once the bolts fell away, at once the

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<sup>69</sup> Ps. 23:7, 9.

<sup>70</sup> cf. Ps. 67:5 *Make way for him that rideth upon the dusk—Lord is his name—and rejoice before him.*

<sup>71</sup> cf. Ps. 67:21 *Our God is the God of salvation, and to the Lord's Lord belong the ways out from death.*

foundations of the prison were shaken, at once the hostile forces took flight—one running into another, another tripping over the other, one shouting at the other to flee. They were terrified, shaken, astonished, dismayed, bewildered, stunned and stupefied, confused and quivering. One stood with mouth agape, another hid his head between his knees, another was sprawled out face to the ground, another stood stiff as a corpse, another was seized with terror, another lay petrified and pale-faced, while another fled further inside. There did Christ cleave with frenzy the heads of the mighty, there were they shaken by him, there did they gape open their mouths<sup>72</sup>, and say:

“*Who is this King of glory?*”<sup>73</sup> Who is this Great One, who with such great numbers, performs here such great wonders? Who is this King of glory, who works now in Hell things never before done in Hell? Who is this that brings out hence the prisoners of all the ages?<sup>74</sup> Who is this that undoes our imperishable power and pride?”

Then the Master’s forces shouted to them in reply, saying:

“Would ye learn who is this King of glory? *The Lord strong and mighty*, the Lord mighty, and powerful, and invincible in battle.<sup>75</sup> This is he who thrust you out and banished you from the vaults of heaven, O ye miserable, criminal tyrants! This is he who brake the heads of your dragons in the waters of Jordan.<sup>76</sup> This is he who by the Cross openly put you to scorn, triumphed over you, and mortally wounded you.<sup>77</sup> This is he who bound you in chains, and cast you into the dark abyss.<sup>78</sup> This is he who shall expel and destroy you in the eternal fire of Gehenna. So do not dally, do not tarry, but hurry, and send forth those whom until now you have cruelly swallowed up; for your dominion is now abolished, your tyranny is now ceased, your insolence is miserably quashed, your arrogance is brought to an end, your strength is trampled on and destroyed.”

When the Master’s forces had said these things to the hostile forces, they pressed onwards. Some of them dug up the foundations of the prison, others pursued the hostile powers that fled from the outer chambers further in. Others went about and searched through the crevices, cells, and caverns, while still others carried prisoners to the Master from various places. Some shackled the tyrant, while others unshackled the prisoners of the ages. Some gave orders, while others swiftly carried them out. Some ran before the

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<sup>72</sup> cf. Hab. 3:14 (LXX) *Thou didst cleave with frenzy the heads of the mighty, they shall be shaken by it: thou shalt gape open their mouths, like a beggar eating in secret.*

<sup>73</sup> Ps. 23:8, 10.

<sup>74</sup> cf. Ps. 67:7 *...he bringeth out the prisoners with manly might.*

<sup>75</sup> cf. Ps. 23:8 *The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.*

<sup>76</sup> cf. Ps. 73:13 *Thou didst tame the sea by thy strength, thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.*

<sup>77</sup> cf. Col. 2:15 *... and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

<sup>78</sup> cf. Jude 6 *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day.*

Master as he went further in, while others stood beside him as their God and victorious King.

While these things, and even more besides, were taking place in Hades and being noised abroad, and as everything was in an uproar and great commotion, since the Master's presence was about to reach the very nethermost of the nether regions; then Adam, the first-created and first-imprisoned of all men, held fast in chains with great security deeper down than all the rest, heard the Master's footsteps coming toward the prisoners, and recognized their sound as he walked about the prison<sup>79</sup>, and turned to all the prisoners with him from former ages, and said:

"I hear the sound of someone's footsteps coming toward us; and if he has truly deigned to come unto this place, we are free of our chains: if we should truly see him here with us, we are delivered from Hell."

As Adam spoke these things and others like them to all his fellow-condemned, the Master entered in unto them, wielding the victorious weapon of the Cross. Upon seeing him, Adam the first-formed beat his breast in shock, and cried out to all those sleeping from times past, "My Lord be with you all!" And Christ answering said to Adam, "And with thy spirit." Then he took him by the hand and stood him up, saying:

*"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."*<sup>80</sup> I am thy God, who for thy sake became thy son—for thy sake and thy posterity—who now speak and with authority command the prisoners, 'Go forth,' and them that are in darkness, 'Show yourselves,'<sup>81</sup> and them that sleep, 'Arise.' Again I bid thee, *Awake thou that sleepest*: for I did not make thee, that thou shouldst be held captive in Hell. *Arise from the dead*: for I am the Life of mortals.<sup>82</sup> Arise, my creation; arise, my form, made in mine own image.<sup>83</sup>

*"Arise, let us go hence"*<sup>84</sup>; for we are one single, inseparable person—thou in me, and I in thee.<sup>85</sup> For thy sake, I thy God became thy son; for thy sake, I the Master took upon me thy servile form<sup>86</sup>; for thy sake, I that am far above the heavens came upon earth, and

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<sup>79</sup> cf. Gen. 3:9 *And they heard the voice {sound} of the Lord God walking in the garden in the afternoon; and both Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden.*

<sup>80</sup> Eph. 5:14.

<sup>81</sup> cf. Is. 49:9, *That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves.*

<sup>82</sup> cf. Jn. 11:25 *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life.*

<sup>83</sup> cf. Phil. 2:7 ... *but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant*; Gen. 1:26 *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*

<sup>84</sup> Jn. 14:31.

<sup>85</sup> cf. Jn. 17:21 ... *that they may all be one: as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.*

<sup>86</sup> cf. Phil. 2:7 (see note 83).

went under the earth<sup>87</sup>; for thy sake, who art a man, I became as a man without help, free among the dead<sup>88</sup>; for thy sake, who wast exiled from a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden<sup>89</sup>, and in a garden was crucified.<sup>90</sup>

“Behold my face which received spittings, that I might restore to thee thy primal in-breathing.<sup>91</sup> Behold my cheeks which received blows, that I might set right thy marred form according the original image. Behold my back which received scourging, that I might loose the burden of thy sins laid upon thy back.<sup>92</sup> Behold my hands which were nailed to the Tree for good, on behalf of thee who didst stretch forth thy hand to the Tree for evil. Behold my feet which were pierced<sup>93</sup> and nailed to the Tree, on behalf of thee who didst wickedly run to the Tree.

“On the sixth day, thine expulsion took place; so on the sixth day, I worked thy restoration and the opening of Paradise.<sup>94</sup> I tasted gall for thee, that I might heal thee from the bitter pleasure of that sweet fruit. I tasted vinegar, that I might neutralise the acrid and unnatural cup of death. I accepted the sponge, that I might blot out the handwriting of thy sins.<sup>95</sup> I accepted the reed<sup>96</sup>, that I might sign the release of the human race. I slept on the Cross and was pierced in the side by a spear, on behalf of thee who didst sleep in Paradise and bring forth Eve from thy side. My side healed the pain of thy side, my sleep shall draw thee out of sleep in the grave, my spear has stopped the sword which turned every way against thee.<sup>97</sup>

“Arise then, let us go hence. I drove thee from the land of Paradise, yet I shall return thee no more to Paradise, but to a celestial throne. I barred thee from the archetypal Tree of Life, but lo, I myself, the Life, am now wholly united to thee. I placed Cherubim to keep thee out of Eden as a slave<sup>98</sup>, but now I make Cherubim to bow down

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<sup>87</sup> cf. Eph. 4:10 *He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.*

<sup>88</sup> Ps. 87:5-6.

<sup>89</sup> cf. Jn. 18:1 *{Jesus} went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden.*

<sup>90</sup> cf. Jn. 19:41 *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden.*

<sup>91</sup> cf. Gen. 2:7 *And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

<sup>92</sup> The first three sufferings here listed recall, in reverse order, those prophesied in Is. 50:6 (LXX): *I gave my back to scourges, and my cheeks to blows; and I turned not away my face from the shame of spitting.*

<sup>93</sup> cf. Ps. 21:7 (LXX): *they pierced my hands and my feet.*

<sup>94</sup> Vaillant notes that the placing of Adam’s sin and expulsion from Paradise on a Friday is a commonplace in apocryphal literature, especially in the apocryphal *Legend of the Twelve Fridays*.

<sup>95</sup> cf. Col. 2:14, ... *blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us.*

<sup>96</sup> cf. Mk. 16:36, *And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*

<sup>97</sup> cf. Gen. 3:24, *he placed ... a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

<sup>98</sup> cf. Gen. 3:24, *he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims ... to keep the way of the tree of life.*

before thee as a god.<sup>99</sup> Thou didst hide from God as one naked, but lo, now thou hast hidden within thyself the denuded God. Thou wast clothed in a shameful coat of skins<sup>100</sup>, but I, being God, am clothed in the sanguine coat of thy flesh.

“Wherefore arise, all of you, let us go hence, from decay to incorruption, from death unto life. Arise, let us go hence, from darkness to everlasting light. Arise, let us go hence, from grief to joy. Arise, let us go hence, from bondage to liberty, from prison to the Jerusalem above<sup>101</sup>, from bonds to God, from straitness to the bliss of Paradise, from earth to heaven. For to this end, I both died and rose again, that I might be Lord both of the dead and the living.<sup>102</sup>

“Wherefore arise, let us go hence; for my heavenly Father awaits the lost sheep; the ninety and nine sheep<sup>103</sup>, the angels, are waiting for the time when Adam their fellow-servant should arise, when he should ascend and return to God. A cherubic throne is set, and those who bear it aloft are ready and waiting, the bridechamber is furnished, the choice foods are made, the everlasting tabernacles and mansions are built, the treasures of blessings are open, the kingdom of heaven has been prepared before the ages.<sup>104</sup> The good things *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man*<sup>105</sup>, are laid up in store for mankind.”

When the Master had finished these sayings and others like them, Adam, who was united to him, arose with him; and Eve also arose together with them; and many bodies of the saints which slept from ages past arose<sup>106</sup>, and preached the Master’s Resurrection on the third day; the which, let us who believe cheerfully greet, behold, and embrace; dancing with the angels, celebrating with the archangels, and glorifying Christ who raised us up from corruption: to whom be glory and dominion, together with his beginningless Father, and the all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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<sup>99</sup> cf. Ps. 81:6, *I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the most High.*

<sup>100</sup> cf. Gen. 3:21, *Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

<sup>101</sup> cf. Gal. 4:26, *But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

<sup>102</sup> cf. Rom. 14:9 *For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.*

<sup>103</sup> cf. Mt. 18:12, Lk. 15:4.

<sup>104</sup> cf. Mt. 25:34, *Come ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

<sup>105</sup> 1 Cor. 2:9.

<sup>106</sup> cf. Mt. 27:52.