

The Discourse on the Holy Theophany.

1. Good, yea, very good, are all the works of our God and Saviour—all of them that eye seeth and mind perceiveth, all that reason interprets and hand handles, all that intellect comprehends and human nature understands. For what richer beauty can there be than that of the circle¹⁷⁸² of heaven? And what form of more blooming fairness than that of earth's surface? And what is there swifter in the course than the chariot of the sun? And what more graceful car than the lunar orb?¹⁷⁸³ And what work more wonderful than the compact mosaic of the stars?¹⁷⁸⁴ And what more productive of supplies than the seasonable winds? And what more spotless mirror than the light of day? And what creature more excellent than man? Very good, then, are all the works of our God and Saviour. And what more requisite gift, again, is there than the element¹⁷⁸⁵ of water? For with water all things are washed and nourished, and cleansed and bedewed. Water bears the earth, water produces the dew, water exhilarates the vine; water matures the corn in the ear, water ripens the grapecluster, water softens the olive, water sweetens the palm-date, water reddens the rose and decks the violet, water makes the lily bloom with its brilliant cups. And why should I speak at length? Without the element of water, none of the present order of things can subsist. So necessary is the element of water; for the other elements¹⁷⁸⁶ took their places beneath the highest vault of the heavens, but the nature of water obtained a seat also above the heavens. And to this the prophet himself is a witness, when he exclaims, "Praise the Lord, ye heavens of heavens, and the water that is above the heavens."¹⁷⁸⁷

2. Nor is this the only thing that proves the dignity¹⁷⁸⁸ of the water. But there is also that which is more honourable than all—the fact that Christ, the Maker of all, came down as the rain,¹⁷⁸⁹ and was known as a spring,¹⁷⁹⁰ and diffused Himself as a river,¹⁷⁹¹ and was baptized in the Jordan.¹⁷⁹² For you have just heard how Jesus came to John, and was baptized by him in the Jordan. Oh things strange beyond compare! How should the boundless

1782 δίσκου.

1783 σεληνιακοῦ στοιχείου.

1784 πολυπηγήτου τῶν ἄστρον μουσίου.

1785 φύσεως.

1786 στοιχεῖα.

1787 Ps. cxlviii. 4. [Pindar ("Ἀριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, *Olymp.*, i. 1), is expounded and then transcended.]

1788 ἀξιοπιστίαν.

1789 Hos. vi. 3.

1790 John iv. 14.

1791 John vii. 38.

1792 Matt. iii. 13.

River¹⁷⁹³ that makes glad the city of God have been dipped in a little water! The illimitable Spring that bears life to all men, and has no end, was covered by poor and temporary waters! He who is present everywhere, and absent nowhere—who is incomprehensible to angels and invisible to men—comes to the baptism according to His own good pleasure. When you hear these things, beloved, take them not as if spoken literally, but accept them as presented in a figure.¹⁷⁹⁴ Whence also the Lord was not unnoticed by the watery element in what He did in secret, in the kindness of His condescension to man. “For the waters saw Him, and were afraid.”¹⁷⁹⁵ They well-nigh broke from their place, and burst away from their boundary. Hence the prophet, having this in his view many generations ago, puts the question, “What aileth thee, O sea, that thou fleddest; and thou, Jordan, that thou wast driven back?”¹⁷⁹⁶ And they in reply said, We have seen the Creator of all things in the “form of a servant,”¹⁷⁹⁷ and being ignorant of the mystery of the economy, we were lashed with fear.

3. But we, who know the economy, adore His mercy, because He hath come to save and not to judge the world. Wherefore John, the forerunner of the Lord, who before knew not this mystery, on learning that He is Lord in truth, cried out, and spake to those who came to be baptized of him, “O generation of vipers,”¹⁷⁹⁸ why look ye so earnestly at me? “I am not the Christ;”¹⁷⁹⁹ I am the servant, and not the lord; I am the subject, and not the king; I am the sheep, and not the shepherd; I am a man, and not God. By my birth I loosed the barrenness of my mother; I did not make virginity barren.¹⁸⁰⁰ I was brought up from beneath; I did not come down from above. I bound the tongue of my father;¹⁸⁰¹ I did not unfold divine grace. I was known by my mother, and I was not announced by a star.¹⁸⁰² I am worthless, and the least; but “after me there comes One who is before me”¹⁸⁰³—after me, indeed, in time, but before me by reason of the inaccessible and unutterable light of divinity. “There

1793 [Ps. xlv. 4.](#)

1794 Economically.

1795 [Ps. lxxvii. 16.](#)

1796 [Ps. cxiv. 5.](#)

1797 [Phil. ii. 7.](#)

1798 [Matt. iii. 7.](#)

1799 [John i. 20.](#)

1800 οὐ παρθενίαν ἐστείρωσα. So Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Sancta Theophania*, p. 106, edit. Vossii: “Thou, when born of the Virgin Mary, . . . didst not loose her virginity; but didst preserve it, and gifted her with the name of mother.”

1801 [Luke i. 20.](#)

1802 [Matt. ii. 9.](#)

1803 [John i. 27.](#)

comes One mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”¹⁸⁰⁴ I am subject to authority, but He has authority in Himself. I am bound by sins, but He is the Remover of sins. I apply¹⁸⁰⁵ the law, but He bringeth grace to light. I teach as a slave, but He judgeth as the Master. I have the earth as my couch, but He possesses heaven. I baptize with the baptism of repentance, but He confers the gift of adoption: “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” Why give ye attention to me? I am not the Christ.

4. As John says these things to the multitude, and as the people watch in eager expectation of seeing some strange spectacle with their bodily eyes, and the devil¹⁸⁰⁶ is struck with amazement at such a testimony from John, lo, the Lord appears, plain, solitary, uncovered,¹⁸⁰⁷ without escort,¹⁸⁰⁸ having on Him the body of man like a garment, and hiding the dignity of the Divinity, that He may elude the snares of the dragon. And not only did He approach John as Lord without royal retinue; but even like a mere man, and one involved in sin, He bent His head to be baptized by John. Wherefore John, on seeing so great a humbling of Himself, was struck with astonishment at the affair, and began to prevent Him, saying, as ye have just heard, “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?”¹⁸⁰⁹ What doest Thou, O Lord? Thou teachest things not according to rule.¹⁸¹⁰ I have preached one thing (regarding Thee), and Thou performest another; the devil has heard one thing, and perceives another. Baptize me with the fire of Divinity; why waitest Thou for water? Enlighten me with the Spirit; why dost Thou attend upon a creature? Baptize me, the Baptist, that Thy pre-eminence may be known. I, O Lord, baptize with the baptism of repentance, and I cannot baptize those who come to me unless they first confess fully their sins. Be it so then that I baptize Thee, what hast Thou to confess? Thou art the Remover of sins, and wilt Thou be baptized with the baptism of repentance? Though I should venture to baptize Thee, the Jordan dares not to come near Thee. “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?”

5. And what saith the Lord to him? “Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.”¹⁸¹¹ “Suffer it to be so now,” John; thou art not wiser than I. Thou

1804 [Matt. iii. 11.](#)

1805 *παράπτω.*

1806 It was a common opinion among the ancient theologians that the devil was ignorant of the mystery of the economy, founding on such passages as [Matt. iv. 3](#), [1 Cor. ii. 8](#). (Fabricius.) [See Ignatius, vol. i. p. 57, this series.]

1807 *γυμνός.*

1808 *ἀπροστάτευτος.*

1809 [Matt. iii. 14.](#)

1810 *ἀκανόνιστα δογματίζεις.*

1811 [Matt. iii. 15.](#)

seest as man; I foreknow as God. It becomes me to do this first, and thus to teach. I engage in nothing unbecoming, for I am invested with honour. Dost thou marvel, O John, that I am not come in my dignity? The purple robe of kings suits not one in private station, but military splendour suits a king: am I come to a prince, and not to a friend? “Suffer it to be so now for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness:” I am the Fulfiller of the law; I seek to leave nothing wanting to its whole fulfilment, that so after me Paul may exclaim, “Christ is the fulfilling of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”¹⁸¹² “Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” Baptize me, John, in order that no one may despise baptism. I am baptized by thee, the servant, that no one among kings or dignitaries may scorn to be baptized by the hand of a poor priest. Suffer me to go down into the Jordan, in order that they may hear my Father’s testimony, and recognise the power of the Son. “Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” Then at length John suffers Him. “And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and the heavens were opened unto Him; and, lo, the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and rested upon Him. And a voice (came) from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”¹⁸¹³

6. Do you see, beloved, how many and how great blessings we would have lost, if the Lord had yielded to the exhortation of John, and declined baptism? For the heavens were shut before this; the region above was inaccessible. We would in that case descend to the lower parts, but we would not ascend to the upper. But was it only that the Lord was baptized? He also renewed the old man, and committed to him again the sceptre of adoption. For straightway “the heavens were opened to Him.” A reconciliation took place of the visible with the invisible; the celestial orders were filled with joy; the diseases of earth were healed; secret things were made known; those at enmity were restored to amity. For you have heard the word of the evangelist, saying, “The heavens were opened to Him,” on account of three wonders. For when Christ the Bridegroom was baptized, it was meet that the bridal-chamber of heaven should open its brilliant gates. And in like manner also, when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and the Father’s voice spread everywhere, it was meet that “the gates of heaven should be lifted up.”¹⁸¹⁴ “And, lo, the heavens were opened to Him; and a voice was heard, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

7. The beloved generates love, and the light immaterial the light inaccessible.¹⁸¹⁵ “This is my beloved Son,” He who, being manifested on earth and yet unseparated from the

1812 Rom. x. 4.

1813 Matt. iii. 16, 17.

1814 Ps. xxiv. 7.

1815 φῶς ἄλλον γεννᾷ φῶς ἀπόσιτον. The Son is called “Light of Light” in the *Discourse against Noetus*, ch. x. [See p. 227 *supra*.] In φῶς ἀπόσιτον the reference is to 1 Tim. vi. 16.

Father's bosom, was manifested, and yet did not appear.¹⁸¹⁶ For the appearing is a different thing, since in appearance the baptizer here is superior to the baptized. For this reason did the Father send down the Holy Spirit from heaven upon Him who was baptized. For as in the ark of Noah the love of God toward man is signified by the dove, so also now the Spirit, descending in the form of a dove, bearing as it were the fruit of the olive, rested on Him to whom the witness was borne. For what reason? That the faithfulness of the Father's voice might be made known, and that the prophetic utterance of a long time past might be ratified. And what utterance is this? "The voice of the Lord (is) on the waters, the God of glory thundered; the Lord (is) upon many waters."¹⁸¹⁷ And what voice? "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is He who is named the son of Joseph, and (who is) according to the divine essence my Only-begotten. "This is my beloved Son"—He who is hungry, and yet maintains myriads; who is weary, and yet gives rest to the weary; who has not where to lay His head,¹⁸¹⁸ and yet bears up all things in His hand; who suffers, and yet heals sufferings; who is smitten,¹⁸¹⁹ and yet confers liberty on the world;¹⁸²⁰ who is pierced in the side,¹⁸²¹ and yet repairs the side of Adam.¹⁸²²

8. But give me now your best attention, I pray you, for I wish to go back to the fountain of life, and to view the fountain that gushes with healing. The Father of immortality sent the immortal Son and Word into the world, who came to man in order to wash him with water and the Spirit; and He, begetting us again to incorruption of soul and body, breathed into us the breath (spirit) of life, and endued us with an incorruptible panoply. If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be God.¹⁸²³ And if he is made God by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver¹⁸²⁴ he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ¹⁸²⁵ after the resurrection from the dead. Wherefore I preach to this effect: Come, all

1816 ἐπεφάνη οὐκ ἐφάνη. See Dorner's *Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, div. i. vol. ii. p. 97 (Clark).

1817 Ps. xxix. 3.

1818 Luke ix. 5. [Compare the *Paradoxes*, attributed to Bacon, in his *Works*, vol. xiv. p. 143; also the *Appendix*, pp. 139–142.]

1819 ῥαπιζόμενος, referring to the slap in the process of manumitting slaves.

1820 Heb. i. 3.

1821 Matt. xxvi. 67. [From which proceeds His Church.]

1822 That is, the sin introduced by Eve, who was formed by God out of Adam's side. (Fabricius.)

1823 ἔσται καὶ Θεός, referring probably to 2 Pet. i. 4, ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως, "that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." [See vol. iii. p. 317, note 11. Tertullian anticipates the language of the "Athanasian Confession,"—"taking the manhood into God;" applicable, through Christ, to our redeemed humanity. Eph. ii. 6; Rev. iii. 21.]

1824 κολυμβήθρας.

1825 Rom. viii. 17.

ye kindreds of the nations, to the immortality of the baptism. I bring good tidings of life to you who tarry in the darkness of ignorance. Come into liberty from slavery, into a kingdom from tyranny, into incorruption from corruption. And how, saith one, shall we come? How? By water and the Holy Ghost. This is the water in conjunction with the Spirit, by which paradise is watered, by which the earth is enriched, by which plants grow, by which animals multiply, and (to sum up the whole in a single word) by which man is begotten again and endued with life, in which also Christ was baptized, and in which the Spirit descended in the form of a dove.

9. This is the Spirit that at the beginning “moved upon the face of the waters;”¹⁸²⁶ by whom the world moves; by whom creation consists, and all things have life; who also wrought mightily in the prophets,¹⁸²⁷ and descended in flight upon Christ.¹⁸²⁸ This is the Spirit that was given to the apostles in the form of fiery tongues.¹⁸²⁹ This is the Spirit that David sought when he said, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”¹⁸³⁰ Of this Spirit Gabriel also spoke to the Virgin, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.”¹⁸³¹ By this Spirit Peter spake that blessed word, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁸³² By this Spirit the rock of the Church was stablished.¹⁸³³ This is the Spirit, the Comforter, that is sent because of thee,¹⁸³⁴ that He may show thee to be the Son¹⁸³⁵ of God.

10. Come then, be begotten again, O man, into the adoption of God. And how? says one. If thou practisest adultery no more, and committest not murder, and servest not idols; if thou art not overmastered by pleasure; if thou dost not suffer the feeling of pride to rule thee; if thou cleanest off the filthiness of impurity, and puttest off the burden of sin; if thou castest off the armour of the devil, and puttest on the breastplate of faith, even as Isaiah saith, “Wash you, and seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow. And come and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, I shall make them white as snow; and though they be like crimson, I shall make them white as wool. And if ye be willing, and hear my voice, ye shall eat the good of the

1826 [Gen. i. 2.](#)

1827 [Acts xxviii. 25.](#)

1828 [Matt. iii. 16.](#)

1829 [Acts ii. 3.](#)

1830 [Ps. li. 10.](#)

1831 [Luke i. 35.](#)

1832 [Matt. xvi. 16.](#)

1833 [Matt. xvi. 18.](#)

1834 [John xvi. 26.](#)

1835 [τέκνον.](#)

land.”¹⁸³⁶ Do you see, beloved, how the prophet spake beforetime of the purifying power of baptism? For he who comes down in faith to the laver of regeneration, and renounces the devil, and joins himself to Christ; who denies the enemy, and makes the confession that Christ is God; who puts off the bondage, and puts on the adoption,—he comes up from the baptism brilliant as the sun,¹⁸³⁷ flashing forth the beams of righteousness, and, which is indeed the chief thing, he returns a son of God and joint-heir with Christ. To Him be the glory and the power, together with His most holy, and good, and quickening Spirit, now and ever, and to all the ages of the ages. Amen.

1836 [Isa. i. 16–19.](#)

1837 This seems to refer to what the poets sing as to the sun rising out of the waves of ocean. (Fabricius.) [Note, this is not said of such as Simon Magus, but of one who *puts off the bondage*, i.e., of corruption. Our author’s *perorations* are habitually sublime.]