

THE WHOLE UNIVERSE cannot give us a right idea of the greatness of God.

St Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, VI:11 NPNF, Vol. VIII, p. 89

WHEN YE GLORIFY THE LORD, exalt Him as much as ye can; for even yet will He far exceed: and when ye exalt Him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough. Who hath seen Him, that he might tell us? and who can magnify Him as He is? There are yet hid greater things than these be, for we have seen but a few of His works.

Ecclesiasticus, 43:30–32

THE FEAST OF OUR LORD'S NATIVITY was originally kept in the East as a double feast conjointly with that of His Baptism in the Jordan on January 6. Known together as the *Theophany*, that is, the manifestation of God, it celebrated God become man – the Nativity; and man revealed as God – at the Jordan where the Father's voice called Him His Son. It was at Rome that these were first kept as two separate feasts, the Nativity being kept on December 25. In the year 386, some ten years after this custom had also been introduced in the East, Saint John Chrysostom gave a sermon in Antioch to answer those who objected to this as a novelty. He gives scriptural foundations for which we may be certain that December 25 is the date on which our Lord was born. Saint John begins with the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to Zacharias (Luke 1:5–20). Since it says that Zacharias was not at the altar of sacrifices, but the altar of incense, and that the people were waiting without, and that the Archangel appeared to Zacharias alone, Saint John concludes that this was the one time in the year when the priest entered alone into the Holy of Holies, the Feast of Tabernacles, on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 16:29–34). The "seventh month" is our September, in which month we celebrate the Feast of the conception of Saint John the Baptist on the 23rd. Saint Luke refers to the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to our Lady the Theotokos as occurring "in the sixth month" (Luke 1:26): he means the sixth month after Elizabeth conceived following the appearance of Gabriel to Zacharias. Thus our Lady's conception of our Lord (March 25) follows the conception of Saint John the Baptist (September 23) by six months, following the chronology given by Saint Luke. From March 25 it is exactly nine months to our Lord's birth on December 25. © H.T.M., Brookline, MA. All rights reserved.

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