

WORDS AND WORSHIP

This month's words: "*We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, only-begotten, that is of the substance of the Father...who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate, was made man, was born perfectly of the holy virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit; by whom he took body, soul and mind and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance.*"

These words from the Nicene Creed describe the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, God the Son. They tell us several things which have been basic to Christian belief from the very start of the Church's history. First, Christ is God just as the Father is God. They are of the same substance. He is begotten of His Father, not made by His Father as we creatures are. Jesus Christ is not just like us; He is and has been and will be God forever and always, in the same way as God the Father is and has been and will be.

This second Person of the Trinity came down from heaven and was incarnate—that is, He took human flesh and became man. This happened by the Holy Spirit, and He was born of the Virgin Mary. The next part of the Creed establishes that this was a true incarnation—He took everything that is in man *truly* and not just *seemingly* or in semblance.

All of this relates to a question which is often asked in the Armenian Church and all Orthodox Churches. It has to do with the titles we give to the Virgin Mary when we call her *Asdvadzadzin* or Theotokos or God-Bearer or Mother of God. Some people are uncomfortable with those titles. They ask, aren't we in danger of giving too much honor to a human being, maybe even in equating her with God? Should Mary really be referred to as the Mother of God?

The words of the Creed which we have quoted can help us discover that it is very appropriate to give these titles to Mary. They do not in any way equate her with God. They only reflect what God Himself has chosen to do through her.

Who is this God that we worship? Is He a mere man? Of course, the answer is no. We worship Jesus Christ because, as the words of the Creed tell us, He is God at every moment that He is man with us on earth. So if there never is a moment when Jesus Christ is not God, then He was God at every moment when He was in Mary's womb. The Son she bore was God at every moment. So she is the Mother of God, the Bearer of God or *Asdvadzadzin*. She is all those things, for He was always God and He was also in her womb and born of her. If we hesitate to call Mary the Mother of God, then we are casting into doubt whether Jesus is God. We are denying the most basic pillar of Christian belief.

These words of the Creed which we have quoted, as

well as our title for Mary, are very sound Biblically. In Luke 1, when Gabriel comes to Mary to tell her she will bear the Son of God, this mighty angel of heaven tells her that she will "bear a son" and that this son "will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High." In other words, the message from this messenger of God is that Mary's son is also the Son of God. The one in her womb will be God.

Later in the same Luke I chapter, in verse 39 we read that Mary went to visit Elizabeth her cousin, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth is honored by the visit, for she says, "Why is this granted to me, that the *mother of my Lord* should have come to me?" She gives to Mary the same title that we have given this young woman over the centuries. And by doing so she expresses her faith that the baby in her cousin's womb is indeed the Lord, and that the fruit of Mary's womb is blessed.

There are those who feel that all of this merely reflects some religious thinking that took place centuries ago. What does it matter, some people ask, if we believe that Christ is the Son of God or that he is merely a great human teacher, or perhaps one among many prophets?

In fact, it matters more than anything else matters. On our belief about Jesus Christ hinges our whole salvation. For if we believe in a mere man, we have no savior. The promise of the Kingdom, the hope of eternal life with God and the saints, the certainty that human life has meaning, all will become nothing for us unless Christ is the true Divine Savior. As Armenian Church members, we are descended from people who gave their lives for that true belief. Perhaps during this season of Lent when the Church calls us to deepen our faith, it is time to pray and reflect on our own commitment to belief. How else can we ever be worthy heirs of the inheritance which is ours?

"Whoever is separated from the Church...is separated from the promises of the Church; nor will he that forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is an alien, a worldling, and an enemy. He cannot have God for his father who does not have the Church for his mother."

St. Cyprian of Carthage
c. 250 A.D.

-
- Without God, I can't;
Without me, God won't.

St. Augustine



