

This hymn begins by accentuating the uniqueness of Mary's motherhood through the majesty of her Son. In the first strophe Ephrem stresses that Mary addresses her Son as both divine and human. Then he considers these two aspects in turn: as Son of the Creator, he creates his own body in the womb and descends from the presence of his Father (str. 2); in his human aspect he inherits the promises given to the Jewish people (str. 3). He is heir to the priesthood of Melchizedek, the kingship of David and the nation of Abraham. Ephrem's choice of Melchizedek rather than Aaron and Abraham rather than Moses is probably meant to stress the applicability of God's promises to the Gentiles.

Mary is the harbor into which the Old Testament types come to rest as ships. The promises given to David and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus born of Mary. In this context Ephrem refers to Psalm 110, a basis for both royal and priestly messianic claims traced through David and Melchizedek. Along with Psalms 24 and 68 this psalm provided the scriptural basis for the earliest Christian claims concerning the ascension of Christ.²⁶⁷ Less typically, Ephrem interprets a number of the psalms as a mystical indication of the divine and human natures of Christ.

But Ephrem's emphasis here is on the female mediators of the messianic promise as much as on the males. Returning to a theme he began in the previous hymn, the presentation of the women of the Old Testament as foils for Mary, Ephrem chooses three women from the Matthean genealogy of Jesus who maintained the continuity of the line from Abraham to David to Jesus through extramarital sexual relations: Tamar, Ruth and Rahab (str. 7 ff.). Stressing Tamar (str. 8-13) and Ruth (str. 12, 14-16), Ephrem construes their behavior as motivated by the anticipation and love of the Messiah, that is, Jesus.

267. J. Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1956), 303-18.

The same melody

- 1 Who will dare speak to her son
as in prayer, to the hope of his mother
as God, to her beloved [child] and her son
as man. In fear and love
it is right for Your mother to stand before You.

Refrain: Praise be to You on the day of Your manifestation²⁶⁸ for Your flock.

- 2 You are the Son of the Creator, Who resembles His Father.
As Maker, He made Himself in the womb;
He put on a pure body and emerged;
He made our weakness put on glory
by the mercy that He brought from His Father's presence.
- 3 From Melchizedek, the high priest,²⁶⁹
the hyssop came to You; a throne and a crown
from the House of David; a family and a people
from Abraham. Who will speak
so to her son as Your mother to You?
- 4 "I became a haven for Your sake,
great Sea. Behold, the psalms
of Your father David and also the words
of the prophets, like ships
discharged in me Your great wealth.
- 5 David, Your father, wove and brought for You
Psalm one hundred and ten,
two numbers, as a crown.
O Victorious One, with them You were crowned,
and You ascended and sat down upon the right hand.
- 6 The great crown is the number
that is woven with the hundred; with it Your divinity

268. Or "sunrise," or Epiphány, cf. Nat. 1.6.

269. Gen. 14.17-20; cf. Ps. 110.4 and Hb. 5.6. In each of these, as in Ephrem's hymn here, the word used is *kwmr'*, a more general designation for priest than *kbn'*, a specifically Aaronic or Levitical priest. In other works Ephrem specifies when the transmission of the Old Testament priesthood passed to Jesus: either when Jesus was presented to Simeon in the Temple (de Dom. nos. 50.6) or at the moment of his baptism by John (CH 22.18, and Comm. Diat. p.94f.); cf. Graffin, *Eucharistie*; Saber, *Typologie*, 84-86.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- is crowned. The small crown,
the number ten, crowns the head
of Your Humanity, O Glorious One.
- 7 Because of You,²⁷⁰ women pursued
men: Tamar²⁷¹ desired
a man who was widowed, and Ruth²⁷² loved
a man who was old. Even Rahab,²⁷³
who captivated men, by You was taken captive.
- 8 Tamar went out and in darkness
she stole the light, and by filth
she stole chastity, and by nakedness
she entered furtively to You, the Honorable One,
Who produces chaste [people] from the licentious.
- 9 Satan saw Him and was afraid and ran
as if to hinder [her]; He reminded [her] of judgment,
but she feared not, of stoning and the sword
but she was not afraid.²⁷⁴ The teacher of adultery
was hindering adultery to hinder You.
- 10 For the adultery of Tamar was chaste
because of You. For You she thirsted,
O Pure Fountain. Judah cheated her
of drinking You. A thirsty fount
stole Your drink from its source.
- 11 She was a widow for Your sake.
She desired You, pursued You, and even
became a harlot for Your sake.
For You she longed, You she kept [in memory], and she became
a chaste woman.²⁷⁵ She loved You.
- 12 May Ruth receive good tidings, for she sought Your wealth;
Moab entered into it. Let Tamar rejoice

270. Cf. Matt. 1.1-17 and Nat. 1.13 and note ad loc.

271. Gen. 38.6-30.

272. Ruth 3.10.

273. Jos. 2.1-22, 3.22-25.

274. Gen. 38.24; as Beck has noted, Judah speaks of burning Tamar, not of stoning or execution by the sword. Lev. 20.10 and Deut. 22.22 prescribe death as the penalty for adultery but do not specify the means.

275. I have not accepted Beck's suggestion that Ephrem has translated the Hebrew *qedēša* with *mqdšt'* meaning "sacred [prostitute]" since, as he notes, it does not appear in the Peshitta or in the dictionaries.

HYMN 9

- that her Lord has come, for her name announced
the son of her Lord, and her appellation
called You to come to her.²⁷⁶
- 13 By You honorable women made themselves contemptible,
[You] the One Who makes all chaste: She stole You
at the crossroads, [You] Who prepared the road
to the house of the kingdom. Since she stole life,
the sword was insufficient to kill her.
- 14 Ruth lay down with a man on the threshing floor
for Your sake. Her love was bold
for Your sake. She teaches boldness
to all penitents. Her ears held in contempt
all [other] voices for the sake of Your voice.
- 15 The fiery coal that crept into the bed of Boaz
went up and lay down. She saw the Chief Priest
hidden in his loins, the fire for his censer.
She ran and became the heifer of Boaz.
For You she brought forth the fatted ox.
- 16 She went gleaning for love of You;
she gathered straw. You repaid her quickly
the wage of her humiliation: instead of ears [of wheat],
the Root of kings, and instead of straw,
the Sheaf of Life that descends from her.

276. Ephrem plays on the similarity between the pronunciation of Tamar's name (*tmr*) and the phrase, "Come, my Lord!" (*t' mry*). For the use of similar phrases in the earliest liturgical contexts, cf. 1 Cor. 16.22, Rev. 22.20, and *Didache* 10.