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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Matthew Chapter 2: 3-15

Verse 3- *When king Herod heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Herod was troubled, because he feared that he would lose the kingdom of the Jews, now that Messiah, their true and legitimate Prince, was born. "What wonder," says S. Augustine, "that impiety should be troubled at the birth of piety?" (*Serm. 2 de Innocent.*) Jerusalem was troubled, as well because there were many in it who favoured Herod, as because the Scribes and chief Priests, having leisure only for their own advantage, and being thus in a state of spiritual slumber, had no thought about the coming of Messiah; that now the sceptre was departed from Judah, as Jacob had foretold, Messiah should be born. Wisely does S. Gregory say (*Hom. 10. in Evangel.*), "When the King of heaven was born, the earthly king was troubled because, indeed, terrestrial exaltation is confounded when celestial greatness is disclosed." "For," as S. Fulgentius says (*Serm. 1 de Epiph.*), "This King came, not to fight against and conquer

earthly kings, but, by dying, marvellously to subdue them. Not, therefore, was He born to be thy successor, O Herod; but that the world might faithfully believe in Him." "Christ seizes not thy royalty," says S. Leo, "nor would the Lord of the universe be contented with thy petty sceptre. He, whom thou wishest not to be king in Judæa, reigns everywhere, and thyself wouldst reign more prosperously if thou wouldst be subject to His sway."

And Herod, as we may see in Josephus, cut off all the members of the royal house of Judah, lest there should be any rival to his sovereignty.

Verse 4- *And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born.* He calls the learned doctors of the law, the Scribes, who occupied themselves in transcribing, reading, and expounding the sacred Scriptures. They are sometimes called lawyers; such a one was Ezra.

Verse 5-6- *But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judæa. For so it is written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel.*

1. I have explained this prophecy in my Commentary upon Micah v., so that I shall not here repeat it. Only let us observe three discrepancies between S. Matthew and Micah. The first is that S. Matthew, in speaking of Bethlehem, omits the name Ephratah. The explanation is that Bethlehem had two names. It was called by its founders Bethlehem and Ephratah, because Ephratah was the father of Bethlehem. (See 1 Chron. iv. 4); and *Ephratah* in Hebrew signifies *fruitful*, or *fruit-bearing*. Bethlehem has a similar meaning, being *house of bread*. The literal reason why Christ would be born at Bethlehem was that He might be accounted David's Son, who was promised to him, who was himself born in Bethlehem. The moral reason was to teach us humility, to be content with a lowly parentage, a lowly country, a humble cottage. Whence S. Leo (*Serm. I de Epiph.*) says— "He who took the form of a servant chose Bethlehem for His birthplace, that in that obscure place He might hide His glory, but Jerusalem for His passion, that He might the more make known abroad the shame of the Cross." He taught us, therefore, to cover our glory, to uncover our shame. He here taught us that heavenly glory, which is a paradox to the world, is, that "the way to glory is flight from glory." Christ, who is a star—*i.e.*, a light and guide to glory and blessedness—hid Himself, and His Godhead and His dignity of Messiah, by abiding in the manger of Bethlehem. And therefore God the Father displays Him to the whole world, and glorifies Him by means of a star shining out of heaven. If, therefore, thou seekest true glory, shun fame, court ignominy; for if thou desirest glory, thou shalt lose it; but if thou despisest it, then, even against thy will, thou shalt be had in honour. For this paradox is most true—"Glory follows him that shuns it, flees from him that pursues it, as a shadow the body." "Humility goeth before

glory.” (Prov. xv. 33.) God exalteth the lowly, and humbleth the proud. Whence “Christ emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross: for which cause God also hath exalted Him, and given Him a name, which is above all names.” (Phil. ii. 7.)

2. The second discrepancy is, that for, *thou art not the least*, as S. Matthew has it, Micah has, *thou art a little one* (*parvulus*, Vulg.)—*i.e.*, *art the least*, or *very little*. The explanation is that, in Micah, an adversative particle is implied from the context, as in Ps. cxviii. 141, 157, meaning “Very little art thou, O Bethlehem, if I look at thy walls, thy citizens, thy buildings, thy fame; but yet very far art thou from being little, if I consider the princes that have come from thee, and that have been and shall be born in thee. For in thee was born King David, and of thee shall be born Christ, David’s antitype.” Some read the words in Micah interrogatively—*Art thou very small?* That is, *Thou art by no means the least*, but, by reason of Christ, thou shalt become very great and famous.

3. Instead of *among the princes*, Micah has, *among the thousands*. The explanation is, that the Hebrew *aleph* denotes both *a thousand* and *a prince*. But either translation in this place comes to the same thing; for, *in the princes* means *among the princes*—*i.e.*, the cities, or even the inhabitants of Judah; this is, from the great number of princely men who have, or shall come forth from thee. *In the thousands*. This is the same as *among the cities*, which contain many thousands of people; and therefore they are princes, and have their own chiefs, or princes. For the people of Israel was divided by Moses into chiliads, or so many thousands of families, each of which had their own dukes and princes. (See Exod. xviii. 25, and Judges vi. 15.)

Verse 7- *Then Herod, privately calling the wise men inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.* This he did secretly, in order to avoid popular rumours, murmurs, and tumults. For the people were expecting their Messiah. It was also that he might more thoroughly and reliably find out all the particulars concerning the star. He learned from them when the star appeared, that thus he might know when Christ was born, and so, by killing all the infants who were born about that date, might slay Christ among them. For even already he had determined on the slaughter of the infants, in his own mind. Whence the Arabic version hath it, “He was informed by them concerning the time in which the star appeared to them.”

Verse 8- *And sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him.* This was the fox-like cunning of a fox. He would make the Magi obedient and faithful to himself, by pretending that he wished to worship Christ, when he was taking thought how to kill Him. So Caracalla, in order to reign alone, slew his brother Geta in his mother’s arms, because he was associated with him in the empire; and, to extenuate his crime by piety, he placed his brother among the gods, saying, “Let him be a god, so long as he is not alive.” In like manner, Herod saith to the Magi, that he would worship Christ as God, whilst he purposed in his mind to kill Him as a man and a king.

It cannot be doubtful that when the Egyptians saw the sanctity of the Blessed Virgin and Joseph, and had had frequent opportunities of converse and intercourse with them, they came to know, worship, and love the true God. The Roman Martyrology assigns the 7th of January to the return of Christ from Egypt. Some say that he was three years in Egypt, some seven, others eight. But nothing is certain.

when he persecuted the child Jesus, Jesus fleeing into Egypt should, as it were, draw the garden of balsam after Him. For Jesus is the true and pure balsam of the soul, according as it is said, “Thy name is oil poured forth.” (Cant. i. *Vulg.*) Adrichomius adds, this garden in Egypt is irrigated by a small fountain, which has, however, a very copious supply of water; and the tradition is, that in it the Child Jesus was often placed by the Blessed Virgin, and that the holy Joseph often drew water from it, for himself and his holy spouse, when they were in Egypt; and that it is therefore held in great veneration by the inhabitants of the country.

Anselm asserts that Christ, when in Egypt, dwelt in a city called Heliopolis, or the city of the sun. In short, this flight of Christ was a mark, not of fear, but of prudence and fortitude. Hear Chrysologus (*Serm.* 50): “So Christ was born that He might make man anew; and that He might recall the fugitives, He fled. And if He himself wandered, so that He might call back the sheep which was wandering upon the mountains, how shall He not flee to bring again His flying people?” And shortly afterwards, “The refuge of all things fled, the help of all things lies hid, the strength of all things fears, the defence of all things defends not himself.” And again—“When the valiant warrior flies in battle, it is of design, not fear. When God fled from man, it was a mystery, not from dread.”

Tropologically, Christ fled into Egypt that He might teach us to despise exile, and that we, as pilgrims and exiles on the earth, might pant after and strive for heaven as our true country. Whence Peter Chrysologus says (*Serm.* 115), “Christ fled that He might make it more tolerable for us, when we have to flee in persecution.” S. Gregory Nazian. (*Orat.* 28) says—“Every land, and no land is my country.” No land was Gregory’s country, because heaven was his country. Again, every land was his country, because he looked upon the whole world as his country. Thus Socrates, when he was asked what countryman he was, replied, “A citizen of the world.” S. Basil said the same, as Nazian. testifies (*Orat.* 20)—“In every land the brave man is as much at home as fishes in the sea.”

Verse 15- *And he was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt have I called my son.*

He cites Hos. xi. 2. See my comment on that prophet, where I have fully expounded the passage.

Tropologically, S. Chrysostom, *in loc.*, says, that God weaves, as it were, a fair and variegated crown out of the prosperous and adverse circumstances of the life of Christ and Christians. When Joseph saw his wife great with child, he was sorely troubled: but forthwith an angel came to him, and put an end to his suspicion, and drove away his fear. Then came the joyful adoration of the Magi, but this was followed by the persecution of Herod, and the flight into Egypt.

Verse 9- *Who having heard the king, went their way; and lo! the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was.* From hence it would appear that the star which shone in the east with great effulgence, afterwards, when it accompanied the Magi, appeared less brilliant, and, at Jerusalem, was hidden altogether, so as to force the Magi to inquire of the Scribes where Christ should be born, that, by this means, it might be made known even to them that He was born. For Herod and his minions were unworthy of beholding this celestial star; for if they had, they would have used their knowledge to seek out and destroy Christ. But when the Magi departed from Jerusalem, the star again appeared, and shone with its former lustre, to indicate Christ, who is the Light—yea, the Sun of this world—and by its radiance to point out the very spot—that is to say, the stable in which he abode after his birth—so that they might not have to wander in vain, searching for Him from house to house.

Verse 10- *And seeing the star—i.e., as brilliant as at first—they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. Exceeding great.* This is the force of the Hebrew *gedolah meod*. And they rejoiced so greatly because, by the star being thus lustrous, they knew that they were come nigh to Messiah, and were going to Him in a direct course.

Verse 11- *And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother.* From this passage some are of opinion that, after their enrolment, the wealthier people, who had come to Bethlehem for the purpose, were departed; so that there were now many houses in Bethlehem at liberty for the purpose of hospitality and that Christ had been removed from the stable in which He was born, to some worthier abode of one of the citizens, and was there worshipped by the Magi. For it is said, *they entered into the house*. So S. Epiphanius, *Hæres.* 51, Maldonatus, and others.

But the more common opinion is, that the stable in which Christ was born is called *the house*. For the Hebrews call any place in which people live, a house, as Ps. ciii. 17. *The house—i.e., the nest, of the coot (Ital.) is their leader*—namely, of birds and flying creatures. For since the census of the whole people proclaimed by Augustus was being taken during some weeks and months, and since during that period a succession of wealthy people kept arriving for enrolment, and afterwards departing, there was no room for Mary and Joseph, who were poor people, in the hostelry, until the thirteenth day after Christ’s birth. And God ordered this, both to try the constancy of the Magi, and to teach them and others that Christ’s kingdom consists in poverty, humility, and contempt of the world, not in earthly wealth, and pride, and pomps, and palaces. So S. Augustine (*Serm.* 1 & 2 *de Epiph.*), Justin, *c. Tryph.*, Chrysostom, &c., and Suarez, which latter adds—“It is plain that Christ, and the Blessed Virgin, as a woman who had lately given birth to a child, remained in the stable until her Purification.”

Whence S. Jerome (*Epist. 17 ad Marcellam*) says, “Behold in this little hole of the earth, the Maker of the Heavens is born. Here He was wrapped in swathings, here adored by the Magi.” And Augustine (*Serm. de Epiph.*) says: “He was lying in a manger, yet He led the Magi from the East. He was hidden in a stable, and was acknowledged in Heaven; that being recognized in Heaven, He might be manifested in a stable.” You may reconcile these two opinions with each other, if you suppose that in Bethlehem, being a small city, there was only one public hospice for strangers, to which was attached a stable for their horses and other beasts of burden. And so it is said that the Magi entered into the house, or inn, because they went into the stable of the inn. S. Luke’s words are in favour of this, when he says:—“There was no room for them in the inn.” This means the common hospice of the place. And *they found the Babe lying in the manger*, plainly, the only manger belonging to the stable of this hospice.

No mention is made of Joseph upon this occasion, either because he had gone away into the city or the country, to procure food and other necessaries for the Blessed Virgin and Christ. And this was in accordance with the Divine purpose, that the Magi might not suppose him to be the father of Christ, and Christ to be born as other children are. Or if he were present, he was supposed, under the name of Mary’s husband, to be the guardian of Christ, and the keeper of the stable. And S. Matthew signifies by his narrative that the Blessed Virgin and Joseph so conducted themselves in the presence of the Magi, that they understood by God’s inspiration that Christ was born of the Virgin alone by the power of the Holy Ghost, and that Joseph only took care of them. Wherefore it is not doubtful that the Magi conversed with Mary either in Arabic, for she had the gift of tongues, or else in Hebrew, through an interpreter, and learnt from her the manner of the Conception and Birth of Christ. And therefore they adored Him as God and the Son of God, and offered unto Him their threefold gifts, but received from Him far greater spiritual gifts for their souls, even illumination, consolation, and heavenly warmth. In return for their gold, they received the increase of wisdom and burning love; instead of their frankincense, the gift of prayer and devotion; and in exchange for myrrh, zeal for a pure and uncorrupt life.

They fell down and worshipped him. The Arabic has—*they fell down in adoration of him.* Erasmus thinks that the Magi did not know Christ was God, and therefore did not worship Him with *latria*, but with civil respect, as the King of the Jews. But the fathers and interpreters teach the contrary—that the Magi, by Divine inspiration, were aware of Christ’s Divinity, and worshipped It with *latria*, and that for this reason, they offered Him frankincense, which is due to God alone. So S. Irenæus, lib. 3, c. 10; S. Leo, *Serm. de Epiph.*; and others *passim*. Whence S. Fulgentius says wisely in his sermon on the Epiphany, “Consider what they offered, and you will know what they believed.” Hence this day is called by the Greeks, Epiphany and Theophany—*i.e.*, the appearing of God—because on that day Christ was declared to the Magi to be God, and was worshipped by them as God.

And opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

3. Because Egypt was full of idols and superstitions. They worshipped dogs, crocodiles, cats, calves, rams, goats, and what not? Christ entered into Egypt that He might cleanse it from this filthiness, and consecrate it to the true God. Listen to S. Leo *Serm. 2 de Epiph.*: “Then also the Saviour was brought to Egypt, in order that a nation given up to ancient errors might now be signed for salvation nigh to come, for hidden grace, and that she which had not yet cast out superstition from her mind might receive truth as her guest.” Whence also Isaiah prophesies mystically of the same thing (xix. 1), saying: “Behold the Lord shall ascend upon a light cloud, and shall enter into Egypt, and all the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence.” And so S. Jerome and others relate that the idols of Egypt did, in truth, fall down when Christ came into it. (See my comment on this chapter of Isaiah.)

Sozomen (lib. 5, c. 20) relates that there was an ancient tradition that when Christ entered Hermopolis, a city of Egypt, a lofty tree bowed herself down, and worshipped Him as God. Many suchlike things are told, but because they are taken from an apocryphal book, called the “Infancy of the Saviour,” and from the Koran, it would seem that they ought to be rejected, as fabulous, or of doubtful credit.

For Herod will seek the child to destroy him. The angel knew this by the revelation of God. He would also conjecture the same thing from the disposition of Herod, and his ambition of reigning. Herod’s suspicious, cruel, savage disposition is thus described by Josephus (lib. 1, *de Bell. Jud.* c. 19): His fear made him timid, and incited him to every kind of suspicion. And from dread lest any who were obnoxious to him should escape him, he put to the torture many who were innocent.

Verse 14- *Who arose, and took the child and his mother by night, (mark his prompt obedience) and retired into Egypt*—that Christ might sanctify and bless it by His coming. Hence faith and sanctity so flourished in Egypt that it produced the Pauls, the Antonys, the Macarii, and those crowds of monks and anchorites who emulated the life of angels upon earth, as is seen in Eusebius, S. Jerome, Palladius, S. Athanasius, and the lives of the Fathers. Whence S. Chrysostom, *in loc.*, says, that Christ converted Egypt into a paradise. “Heaven does not shine so brightly with the various choirs of the stars as Egypt is illuminated by its innumerable habitations of monks and virgins.” And Trismegistus, quoted by S. Austin (lib. 8, *de Civ. Dei*, c. 14), says, “Egypt is an image of Heaven, and the temple of the whole world.” Adrichomius adds out of Brocardus and Saligniac, in his description of the Holy Land (page 47, n. 116), on the word Engaddi, that when Jesus fled out of Judæa into Egypt, He took balsam with Him. For Cleopatra, the friend of Antony, envying Herod the possession of such a treasure, obtained from Antony the privilege of transporting balsam-plants out of Judæa into Egypt. (See Josephus, lib. 5, *Bell. Jud.* c. 13.) This was a just judgment of an avenging God, that Herod before was the possessor of the balsam, but that

become a traitor to Christ." And S. Gregory saith (*Hom.* 10), "Our country is paradise. And when we have known Jesus, we are forbidden to return to it by the way which we came. For we departed from our country by pride, by disobedience, by following things that are seen, by tasting the forbidden fruit. But we must return to it by weeping, by obedience, by despising things that are seen, and by bridling the carnal appetite. We return to our country by another way; because we left the joys of paradise by the way of pleasures, we return to them by the way of sorrows.

Verse 13- *And when they were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him.*

Note that these things did not happen immediately after the adoration of the Magi. Something must be supplied here from S. Luke (ii. 22). That is to say, after their departure on the 6th of January, Christ was taken to Jerusalem, and presented in the Temple; this was on the 2nd of February. From thence He returned to His own country, Nazareth, and from thence He fled into Egypt. So Euthymius and Maldonatus, *in loc.*; also Ammon and Tatian, *in Harmon. Evangel.* Although S. Augustine, and Jansen after him, think that Christ went into Egypt from Judæa, and not from Galilee, because S. Matthew here says (ver. 22), that when Joseph was returning from Egypt, he was minded to go into Judæa. And so they say that he had fled into Egypt from Judæa, but S. Matthew does not say this expressly, but, "When he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judæa in the stead of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go thither." This, indeed, intimates that he was thinking of going into Judæa, probably to Jerusalem and the Temple, there to give God thanks for his safe return, as pious persons are wont to do.

The reason why Christ fled into Egypt, rather than into Assyria, or any other country is:—

1. Because it was near to Judæa, and on account of the streams of the Nile, by which it was surrounded, and the sea, by which it was washed, secure from the attacks of enemies. Hence, when the Jews fled from the Chaldæans and the Assyrians, they went into Egypt.

2. Because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the children of Israel, from whom Christ was sprung, dwelt in Egypt for two hundred years, and were called forth from thence by God, by the hand of Moses. And this was a type of the calling back of Christ out of Egypt, as S. Matthew adds, *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of The Lord by The prophet* (Hosea xi.), *saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.* Especially because the Hebrews were delivered out of Egypt by the blood of the Paschal Lamb, which was a type of Christ. "That not without that region the sacrament of the one only Victim might be prepared, in which first the safe-giving sign of the slaying of the Lamb, and the Passover of the Lord, had been prefigured," says S. Leo. (*Serm.* 3 *de Epiph.*)

In these things Arabia abounds. (See Ezek. xxvii. 22, and Pliny, lib. 12, c. 14.) It was the ancient custom of the Arabians and other Orientals, not to approach their kings and rulers except with a gift, as it were a tribute due to them. (See Gen. xliii. 11; I Sam. x. 27.) Whence Seneca says (*Epist.* 17), "No one may salute the monarchs of Parthia without a present." Moreover, it was God's law (Exod. xxiii.), "Thou shalt not appear empty before me." Lastly, the Queen of Sheba gave precious gifts to Solomon, and received greater from him. Thus it was with the Magi and Christ, who is the true Solomon.

S. Bernard thinks that the Magi offered gold to the Blessed Virgin and Christ to succour their poverty, myrrh to strengthen Christ's infant limbs, frankincense to prevent the unpleasant odours of the stable. This is a very literal and undignified sense. For the fathers teach, *passim*, in a far higher way, that illuminated by the Holy Ghost they offered gold to Christ as the most wise King; for wisdom is compared to gold (Prov. viii. 19); frankincense as to God, and according to His humanity, as the High Priest and Pontiff; Myrrh to Christ as man, about to die and be buried for the redemption of the human race, and the third day to rise again to immortality and eternal glory. For the bodies of the dead are buried with myrrh, that they may remain incorrupt. Myrrh has the property of drying up moisture, and preventing the generation of worms. So S. Leo says, "Frankincense they offer to God, myrrh to man, gold to the king, wisely venerating the Divine and Human Nature joined in one. What they believe in their hearts they show forth by their gifts."

And S. Ambrose says—"Gold for a king, frankincense for God, myrrh for the dead." And S. Gregory (*Hom.* 10), "By gold they proclaim a king, by frankincense God, by myrrh a mortal man." "Very beautifully," says S. Jerome, "does the Presbyter Juvencus in one sentence comprehend the mysteries of the gifts, 'Gold, frankincense, myrrh, for a king, man, and God.'"

Grammarians derive *thus* (frankincense) from the Greek *θύω*, *I make an odour*, or better, from *θύω*, *I sacrifice*, because the first sacrifices of primitive men were fumigations of incense. Hence, "honours of frankincense" meant divine honours. Bede, whose words I have already quoted, asserts that the first of the Magi, whose name was Melchior, gave gold, Gaspar the second, frankincense, Balthasar the third, myrrh.

But others, with more probability, think that each of them offered all these their gifts to Christ, and that each, by these their gifts, attested their own faith in Christ as being a King and God, and about to suffer for man.

Hence the Gloss says: "All this was done by divine inspiration to signify the regal power in Christ by gold, the divine majesty by frankincense, and human mortality by myrrh."

Allegorically, these three gifts signify Christ, who offered Himself to God the Father upon the cross as it were gold, since out of golden love, even love to man, He immolated Himself; as the myrrh of the very bitter passion of His griefs and torments; and as the frankincense of the highest devotion, submission, veneration, and worship. Whence also on the same day of the week on which Christ offered Himself upon the cross the Magi offered their three gifts to Christ. For the tradition is that Christ was born on the Lord's Day. And if from thence you reckon thirteen days you will come to the Friday of the following week. For the Magi worshipped Him on the thirteenth day after His birth.

Again, Christ offered three gifts to the Holy Trinity, namely, His flesh, soul, and divinity, just as Christians offer to the same Triune God acts of faith, hope, and charity.

Tropologically, in the first place, gold is charity, or love, and wisdom; frankincense is prayer and devotion; myrrh is mortification. Whence S. Gregory says (*Hom.* 10), "we offer gold, if we shine by the light of wisdom; frankincense, if we are redolent with fervent prayer; myrrh, if we mortify the vices of the flesh." Hence in Cant. v. 14, the bride says of Christ, the bridegroom: "His hands are turned and as of gold, full of hyacinths." (Vulg.) "His hands," that is, the works of Christ, and therefore perfect. They are as rings, they may be turned and adapted to every thing good. They are golden, because adorned with charity; full of hyacinths, because they breathe the love of heavenly things. Thus the golden works of charity make golden hands. As many works of charity as thou doest, so many golden rings dost thou put upon thy fingers, yea, verily, upon the fingers of Christ. "Good works," says S. Bernard (*de Convers. ad Cleric.*, c. 15), "are the seed of eternity and of eternal glory." The very celebrated painter, Zeuxis, used to paint very slowly. Being asked the reason, he replied—"I paint for eternity." Thus also do thou, O believer, work, live, paint, for eternity, that thy works may, through all eternity, shine in heaven before God, the angels, and the blessed. That frankincense denotes prayer, and myrrh mortification, is plain from Cant. iv. 6, "I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense." And i. 12, "A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me." And iv. 14, "The smell of thy garments, as the smell of frankincense," *i.e.*, lifting up prayers and sighs to God. "For," says S. Gregory, "in all his works he prays, whilst he performs all such good works as he is able to do, with the intention of arriving at heavenly things." The same says on Cant. chap. iii., "The holy soul makes its heart, as it were, a thurible to its God." Mark the saying of S. Gregory Nyssen., "The cause of sin is not to implore the help of God by prayer."

Again, gold is voluntary poverty. For this poverty is most rich, and far more pleasing to God than all the gold in the world. Whence the apostle, "As having nothing and possessing all things." (2 Cor. vi. 10.)

Frankincense is obedience, whereby a man offers his own will and intellect, yea, his entire self, to God, as a holocaust of frankincense.

Myrrh is fasting, mortification of the flesh; and what springs from mortification,

chastity. Wherefore many think that the three vows of religion are here mystically signified: namely by frankincense, the vow of obedience; by myrrh, the vow of chastity; by gold, the vow of poverty.

Moreover, by these three gifts three kinds of good works are denoted: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, to which all species of virtues may be referred. For almsgiving helps our neighbour; prayer worships and calls upon God; fasting steadies a man within himself. So then, by means of these three, we offer to God whatever good things we have—namely, by almsgiving, our works; by prayer, our souls; by fasting, our bodies.

Anagogically, S. Maximus thinks that by gold is signified man's redemption, by frankincense the Christian religion, by myrrh the resurrection.

Verse 12- *And having received an answer from God* (Vulg.: the Greek, *χρήσομαι*, signifies *oracles*; and the word *answer* implies, that the Magi in a doubtful matter, in the first place asked light of God, and received an answer from Him), *in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country.* Cyril, the monk, in his life of the Abbot S. Theodosius, relates that the Magi, when they fled from Herod, avoided high roads and public hospices, and rested in mountains and caves. "Because," he adds, "they had determined not to enter Jerusalem, it was difficult for them to return home any other way, just as we see now is the case, those who come from Bethlehem pass through Jerusalem."

The author of the *Imperfect Commentary* cries out in admiration of the faith and constancy of the Magi: "O faith! which contradicted not the admonition of the angel, nor said, 'We have come so great a journey; as we came we feared not the crowds of so many cities; we were not terrified at the face of that dreadful king, but we stood before him and confidently proclaimed that King who had been born, and we offered unto Him, as God, worthy gifts; and now you bid us conceal ourselves like slaves and take to flight, as having come one way and departing another way.' But they continued faithful. And as before they were not afraid to be known, so now they blushed not to depart in secret."

Tropologically, Herod is the devil, the world, and the flesh, and the way to him is pleasure and greed. They, therefore, who pass from him to Christ, walk by the other way of the cross and mortification; and thus it behooves them to return to their own country—that is, the heavenly paradise.

Hear the author of the *Imp. Com.* (*Hom.* 2): "He who comes from the devil to God must never walk by the way by which he went to the devil. Thou wentest by the way of fornication; for the future, walk by the way of chastity. Thou wentest by the way of avarice; walk for the rest of thy life in the way of almsgiving. For if thou goest back by the way by which thou camest, thou shalt come again under the dominion of Herod, and shalt