



PATRISTIC
STUDIES

Gerald Bray
General Editor

Vol. 7

Jill Burnett Comings

ASPECTS OF THE LITURGICAL
YEAR IN CAPPADOCIA
(325–430)



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt am Main • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt am Main • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Chapter 3

The Nativity/Incarnation Cycle

The evidence from around the Mediterranean indicates that, generally speaking, by the middle of the fourth century, the churches of the East feasted Christ's birth and baptism on the same day, January 6,¹ while the churches of the West observed December 25 as their Nativity feast.² By the last quarter of the century, the calendars of most churches in both East and West included both feasts. Scholars have explained the adoption of Christmas in the East and Epiphany in the West by suggesting that during the latter half of the fourth century, after the Peace of Constantine had made the commerce of Christian ideas legal and, consequently, safer, the churches of the two halves of the Roman Empire exchanged nativity feasts. The Eastern churches divided their unitive feast celebrating the birth and baptism of Jesus and transferred the nativity commemoration to the feast on December 25. Epiphany then became the feast celebrating the baptism of Jesus, as it is today. The Western churches added January 6 as a second nativity observance, eventually distinguishing between the two feasts by celebrating the visit of the magi, which had once been part of a unitive feast celebrating all facets of the nativity story, on the feast of the Epiphany on January 6. As far as it goes, this is a useful and accurate summary, although it obscures somewhat the complexity of these developments. In this chapter we will examine the Cappadocian sources in order to ascertain as clearly as possible if and when this "feast exchange" took place there, under what circumstances and with what consequences for the fourth-century Cappadocian liturgical calendar.

Two Incarnation Feasts

The earliest evidence of a Christian feast observed on January 6 comes from Clement of Alexandria, who says that some Basilidians, an early second-century Gnostic Christian group in Alexandria, celebrated the baptism of Christ on January 6.³ There is no further mention of a feast on this day until the middle of the fourth century. Curiously, it comes from the West; Ammi-

anus Marcellinus reports that Emperor Julian attended church in Gaul on Epiphany, “in the month of January” of 361.⁴ Cappadocian sources are among the earliest fourth-century Eastern documents to contain evidence of the January 6 feast, and while scholars believe that Epiphany pre-dated Christmas in this region, the two feasts appear in these sources at roughly the same time.

John Chrysostom, preaching in Antioch on December 25, c. 386, gives us fairly precise information about the institution of the feast there—or at least about how long *he* had known about the feast. He says, “It is scarcely ten years, in fact, since this day has been made manifest and known to us. At present the feast is not everywhere kept, for I know that even now many are still discussing it among themselves.”⁵ Our Cappadocian and Pontic friends were not among those who were still debating the feast’s merits; it is clear that by the mid-380s, Constantinople, Nyssa and Amaseia celebrated both Christmas and Epiphany, although, unfortunately, they have not left us such precise information about when this happened. Citing Gregory of Nazianzus’ self-designation as the ἑξάρχος of the Theophany feast,⁶ many scholars credit him with instituting Christmas in Constantinople during his brief tenure as bishop there. Botte, for example, writes:

We possess two homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, one on Christmas, the other on Epiphany, preached at Constantinople. At the time of his short stay in this Church, therefore, he celebrated the two feasts there. But that of Christmas is of recent institution, and Gregory calls himself the ἑξάρχος of this feast. It is he who instituted it, and it is interesting to note that this innovation is not without relation to the anti-Arian reaction, just as at Alexandria it will coincide with the anti-Nestorian movement.⁷

We will return to the question of the relationship of the adoption of Christmas to the doctrinal controversies in which Cappadocian church leaders were involved. First, however, it is necessary to address the question of the precise meaning of ἑξάρχος for Gregory. The term has several meanings. Botte and the other scholars listed above interpret it as “founder.” However, as Susan Roll points out, other scholars, such as McArthur, Theodorou and Talley,⁸ maintain that it could also mean merely “leader” and that “Gregory was presiding at the liturgy of an already established feast.”⁹ Roll herself does not offer an opinion, but she does cite Talley’s convincing assessment of this matter. Talley writes:

What can be said with reasonable assurance is that it seems highly unlikely that the festival would have been adopted from Rome under an Arian emperor. Therefore, if not adopted since the death of Valens, it would have had to be a very early feature of the Byzantine liturgy, given the brevity of the episodes of orthodoxy in the imperial city between Constantine and Theodosius. If the institution of Christmas at Rome had as much to do with Constantine’s solar piety as has been urged by some, one would expect him to have pressed for the festival in his new capital, but of that we have no evidence whatsoever. If, on the contrary, we are to look for the introduction of the festival of December 25 after the fall of Valens, then the interpretation of *exarchos* becomes somewhat academic. If Gregory Nazianzen did not preside at the first celebration of Christmas in Constantinople in 380, that occasion was no more than the second such celebration of the feast.¹⁰

However, was Gregory of Nazianzus really the trendsetter in this instance? Talley implies that this was the case when he writes, “From the time of the restoration of orthodoxy with the accession of Theodosius, then, the observance of the nativity festival on December 25 extended smoothly and swiftly from Constantinople across Cappadocia to Antioch.”¹¹ Is it possible, however, that Basil had already introduced it at Caesarea and that, therefore, the extension of the December 25 feast was from *Cappadocia* northwest to Constantinople and southeast to Antioch? His homily *In sanctam Christi generationem*¹² had to have been preached at least one year earlier than Gregory’s sermon, since Basil died on January 1, 379. But was this sermon preached on December 25 or January 6? Fedwick dates it to January 6, sometime during Basil’s ordained ministry—between the years 363 and 378. The sermon itself does not say; Fedwick’s determination seems to be based only on what happened in “the East” generally, that is, events surrounding the incarnation that we now associate with *two* feasts were celebrated on the same day—January 6—until the end of the fourth century.¹³ Botte and Talley disagree, maintaining that this sermon was preached on December 25.¹⁴ Let us examine the text in search of clues.

Basil begins his remarks with an exhortation, “Let the birth of Christ, the fitting and first and peculiar [birth] of his deity, be honored in silence; rather let us also order our thoughts not to seek nor be curious about these things.”¹⁵ In this case, Basil is not out to spoil everyone’s fun; he is beginning this sermon with anti-Arian sentiment. Basil warns his congregation to avoid trying to understand the mystery of the incarnation in terms of human reason. He says:

But the Father existed, and the Son was begotten. Do not say “when?” but pass over the question; do not inquire “how?” for the answer is impossible. For the “when,” on the one hand, [is] temporal; the “how,” on the other hand, produces a snare with regard to the bodily means of the birth. I am able to say from the scripture “as a reflection from the glory and as an image from the prototype” (Heb. 1.3). Nevertheless, since such a word of answer does not stay the inquisitiveness of your reasonings, I appeal to the inexpressibility of the glory, and I confess that the manner of the divine birth is inconceivable by reasonings and unutterable in human words. Do not say “if he was begotten, he did not exist,” and do not maliciously grasp vulgar understandings of words, falsifying the truth from the examples here and defiling the theology. He was begotten, I have said, in order that I might proclaim his origin and source, not in order that I might later refute the Only-begotten.¹⁶

The silence Basil seeks is more an attitude of heart than adherence to a “gag order.” After a long meditation on the incomprehensibility of the incarnation, during which he cites Isaiah 7 and 9, Matthew 1.18–2.9 and portions of Luke 1 and 2 to muse on the virginity of Mary, Jesus’ various appellations, the Magi, the star, the shepherds and the angels, he encourages joyful, *unquestioning* noise:

Who is so sluggish in soul, who is so ungrateful, as not to rejoice and exult and brighten up at the present circumstances? A communal feast of all creation; it presents the supramundane things to the world; it sends the archangels to Zachariah and to Mary and establishes the choruses of angels who say: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among humans” (Lk. 2.14). Stars run about from heaven; Magi are moved from the Gentiles; earth receives in a cave; no one is uncontributing, no one is ungrateful. Let *us* also utter some sound of exultation; let us give a name to our feast, Theophany; let us feast the salvation of the world, the birthday (τὴν γενέθλιον ἡμέραν) of the humanity. Today the condemnation of Adam has been abolished.¹⁷

The phrase “let us appoint a name to our feast, Theophany; let us feast the salvation of the world, the birthday of the humanity” raises two questions pertinent to our discussion. First, to which feast does Theophany (Θεοφάνια) refer? Second, does “let us give a name to our feast” (ἄνομα θώμεθα τῆ ἑορτῆ ἡμῶν) indicate that this feast was an innovation in need of an appellation?

With regard to the question of festal names, Mossay points out that in the fourth-century Cappadocian sources there are four terms—ἡ Ἐπιφάνια, τὰ Φῶτα, τὰ Θεοφάνια, and τὰ Γενέθλια—used to refer to the two feasts of December 25 and January 6. He also suggests that there was an evolution of

terminology. He writes, “At a time when Christmas takes the names of Theophany or Nativity, that is to say around 380, the term Epiphany designating the feast of January 6 is supplanted by the expression feast of the Lights.”¹⁸ So if the December 25 feast did not take the name Theophany until around 380, Basil’s earlier use of the term must have referred to the January 6 feast. Talley does not read the data this way. As mentioned above, he believes Basil’s sermon was for the December 25 feast, and he writes:

In Cappadocia the situation is similar to that in Constantinople, the nativity festival on December 25 is called ‘Theophany’ (but sometimes *Genethlia*) and the festival of January 6 celebrates Christ’s baptism and is called ‘The Feast of Lights.’ This was the case with Gregory of Nyssa and Basil, as well as others in Cappadocia. Amphilochius of Iconium, in a Christmas sermon (PG 39.3644), uses only *ta genethlia* to designate the festival. The Byzantine tradition finally settled on that title for the December feast, using both *Theophania* and *ta phōta* of that in January in the typika of Hagia Sophia in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁹

So for Talley, the evolution of the term Theophany moves in the opposite direction than that suggested by Mossay. The second question raised above—that of Basil’s suggestion “let us give a name to our feast”—supports Talley’s reading. This phrase makes much more sense in reference to a new feast than to the renaming of an already-established festival. In addition, the sermon is entirely about events surrounding Christ’s birth; his baptism is not mentioned.

However, it seems that the only thing we can say for sure from the text is that this sermon was for the day on which Basil’s community celebrated Christ’s birth. Are there other sources that might help answer the question of on which day that celebration was held? In late 375 or early 376, Basil wrote to his friend Amphilochius of Iconium to thank him for some gifts. He writes:

Every day that brings me a letter from you is a feast day, the very greatest of feast days. And when symbols of the feast are brought, what can I call it but a feast of feasts, as the old law used to speak of Sabbath of Sabbaths? I thank the Lord that you are quite well, and that you have celebrated the commemoration of the œconomy of salvation in a Church at peace.²⁰

What was this “commemoration of the œconomy of salvation” (τῆς σωτηρίου οἰκονομίας τὴν ἀνάμνησιν)? F. Loofs leans toward January 6, because he assumes that the December 25 feast had not yet been adopted in

“the East” at this point.²¹ At some point during his episcopate, Amphilochius preached a homily on the birthday feast (τὰ Γενέθλια) of Christ; the use of the term γενέθλια and the fact that the sermon is entirely about the events surrounding Christ’s birth and not at all about Christ’s baptism indicate that this sermon was intended for the December 25 feast. Would he have already known this feast in 375/376? Datema thinks not; he dates the homily to later in Amphilochius’s ministry because Amphilochius describes this feast as “all-venerable” and “all-praised,” a status that a feast would not enjoy until it had been around awhile. Citing the “fact” that “it is only toward the year 380 that the feast of Christmas is instituted in Cappadocia and in neighboring regions,”²² Datema concludes that this homily must be from the 380s or 390s. A bit further on in Basil’s letter to Amphilochius, he writes:

Do come to see me while I am yet upon this earth. Act in accordance with your own wishes and with my most earnest prayers. I may be allowed to be astonished at the meaning of your blessings, inasmuch as you have mysteriously wished me a vigorous old age. By your lamps you rouse me to nightly toil; and by your sweet meats you seem to pledge yourself securely that all my body is in good case. But there is no munching for me at my time of life, for my teeth have long ago been worn away by time and bad health.²³

Does the fact that Amphilochius sent Basil lamps (λαμπήναι)²⁴ and sweet meats (τραγημάτα) as “symbols of the feast” (σύμβολα ἑορτῆς) help us to identify the feast in question? Unfortunately, it does not, because gift-giving was also practiced at other festivals. For example, Gregory of Nyssa wrote a short meditation on the relationship between the seasons and two Christian feasts as an Easter gift to Eusebius, Bishop of Chalcis in Coele-Syria, writing, “Why, since it is the custom in these general holidays (ἐν ταῖς πανδημοῖς ταύταις ἱερομηνίαις) for us to take every way to show the affection harbored in our hearts, and we thought it only right not to leave you without the homage of our gifts, but to lay before your lofty and high-minded soul the scanty offerings of our poverty.”²⁵ Gregory also wrote *On the Making of Man*, intended as a supplement to Basil’s *Hexameron*, as an Easter gift to his brother Peter, since “the holy Eastertide demands the accustomed gift of love....”²⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus also participated in this custom of giving gifts at Easter. Two of his letters to Theodore of Tyana in Cappadocia Secunda, are thank-you notes for Theodore’s gifts.²⁷ Gregory reciprocated by sending his prayers and a copy of the *Philocalia of Origen*, which he and Basil had compiled together in 358–359.

Unfortunately, Basil’s *Exhortatoria ad sanctum baptismum*, which Bernardi dates to January 6, 371 and Fedwick assigns to January 5 or 6 sometime during the period of 363 to 378,²⁸ does not help to answer the question either. It gives much information about baptism but mentions neither a December 25 nor a January 6 feast. In fact, the only feast it *does* mention is the Pascha, as discussed in Chapter Two. In his eulogy on Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus mentions a confrontation between Basil and Valens when Valens attended church on the feast of the Epiphany in 372, but he does not give us any information about the celebration, other than that the church was very crowded and the psalmody was chanted very loudly.²⁹

It is not until the sermons of the two Gregorians that we find enough evidence to prove for sure that the churches in this area were now observing feasts on both December 25 and January 6. Both Gregorians distinguish between the two feasts. In his *Oration 38 On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ*, which Ruether dates to December 25, 379,³⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus says “Christ is Born, glorify ye Him”³¹ and after briefly mentioning Christ’s ascension and second coming, he calls himself back to the topic at hand:

Of these on a future occasion; for the present the Festival is the Theophany or Birthday, for it is called both, two titles being given to the one thing. For God was manifested to man by birth. On the one hand Being, and eternally Being, of the Eternal Being, above cause and word, for there was no word before The Word; and on the other hand for our sakes also Becoming, that He Who gives us our being might restore us by His Incarnation, when we had by wickedness fallen from wellbeing. The name Theophany is given to it in reference to the Manifestation, and that of Birthday in respect of His Birth. This is our present Festival; it is this which we are celebrating to-day, the Coming of God to Man....³²

The fact that Gregory refers to both the manifestation and the birthday might lead us to believe that the community at Constantinople still celebrated both the birth and the baptism on the same day; however, later in the sermon, Gregory indicates that this is not the case. He says:

A little later on you will see Jesus submitting to be purified in the River Jordan for my Purification, or rather, sanctifying the waters by His Purification (for indeed He had no need of purification Who taketh away the sin of the world) and the heavens cleft asunder, and witness borne to him by the Spirit That is of one nature with Him; you shall see Him tempted and conquering and served by Angels, and healing every sickness and every disease, and giving life to the dead (O that He would give life to you who are dead because of your heresy), and driving out demons, sometimes Himself, sometimes by his disciples; and feeding vast multitudes with a few loaves;

and walking dryshod upon the seas; and being betrayed and crucified, and crucifying with Himself my sin; offered as a Lamb, and offering as a Priest; as a Man buried in the grave, and as God rising again; and then ascending, and to come again in His own glory. Why what a multitude of high festivals there are in each of the mysteries of the Christ; all of which have one completion, namely, my perfection and return to the first condition of Adam.³³

This is not a catalogue of the “high festivals” observed in Constantinople; it seems to be a list—more or less chronological—of events from Matthew’s account of Christ’s life and ministry. However, the phrase “a little later on” does suggest that the first event listed—that of Jesus’ baptism by John—will be observed at a later date. Gregory’s next paragraph confirms this, because it tells us what the *present* festival is about:

Now then I pray you accept His Conception, and leap before Him; if not like John from the womb, yet like David, because of the resting of the Ark. Revere the enrollment on account of which thou wast written in heaven, and adore the Birth by which thou wast written in heaven, and adore the Birth by which thou wast loosed from the chains of thy birth, and honour little Bethlehem, which hath led thee back to Paradise; and worship the manger through which thou, being without sense, wast fed by the Word.³⁴

In addition, Gregory provides us with another sermon, which most scholars date to the following January 6,³⁵ that addresses Christ’s baptism specifically and differentiates that feast from the one celebrating Christ’s birth. In his *Oration 39 On the Holy Lights*, Gregory says:

At His birth we duly kept Festival, both I, the leader of the Feast, and you, and all that is in the world and above the world. With the Star we ran, and with the Magi we worshipped, and with the Shepherds we were illuminated, and with the Angels we glorified Him, and with Simeon we took Him up in our arms, and with Anna the aged and chaste we made our responsive confession. And thanks be to Him who came to His own in the guise of a stranger, because He glorified the stranger. Now, we come to another action of Christ, and another mystery. I cannot restrain my pleasure; I am rapt into God. Almost like John I proclaim good tidings; for though I be not a Forerunner, yet am I from the desert. Christ is illumined, let us shine forth with Him. Christ is baptized, let us descend with Him that we may also ascend with Him.³⁶

A couple of years later, Gregory of Nyssa, in his January 6, 383³⁷ homily *In diem luminum*, also distinguishes between the feasts and their themes. He says, “Christ, then, was born as it were a few days ago—He Whose generation was before all things, sensible and intellectual. To-day He is baptized by

John that He might cleanse him who was defiled, that He might bring the Spirit from above and exalt man to heaven, that he who had fallen might be raised up and he who had cast him down might be put to shame.”³⁸ On the feast of St. Stephen, in a homily that Daniélou dates to 386,³⁹ Gregory puts the Nativity celebration in relation to the day honoring the first martyr:

How lovely is the inspiration exhibited by those who are good, and how sweet is the joy which they disclose! See, we acquire a feast from a feast and grace from grace. Yesterday the Lord of the universe welcomed us whereas today it is the imitator of the Lord. How are they related to each other? One assumed human nature on our behalf while the other shed it for his Lord. One accepted the cave of this life for us, and the other left it for him. One was wrapped in swaddling clothes for us, and the other was stoned for him. One destroyed death, and the other scorned it.⁴⁰

In another sermon preached on the feast of St. Stephen in 386,⁴¹ Asterius of Amaseia also places the Nativity feast and the saint’s day in relation to one another:

How truly holy and good [is] the cycle of events that gladden us! For feast succeeds to feast, and festal gathering overtakes festal gathering; and we are called from prayer into prayer, and the honoring of the servant overtakes the Theophany of the Lord. But whether someone looks to the birth yesterday of the one who was brought into the world through flesh and is forever in accordance with divinity, or to the martyrdom of that one, which indeed the noble servant today has undertaken, he will find many and various events, but one goal, that *we* might be taught godliness. So then yesterday we learned through the cyclical [ἐγκυκλίου] and customary [συνήθους] feast that the Savior of the world was born, and the fleshless one clothed himself in flesh, and the bodiless one put on a body, then that he also accepted sufferings for our sake and was lifted up on the tree not for the sake of some other or for our provision. But today we see the noble combatant being stoned to death for his sake, in order that he might repay the grace with blood for the sake of blood.⁴²

So, by the mid-380s, the celebration of Christ’s birth was a separate feast, held on December 25, in Constantinople, Nyssa and Amaseia, as well as in Iconium by the 390s. Of Caesarea we cannot be as certain. If Basil’s letter to Amphilochius is referring to the December 25 feast and if Basil’s sermon on the birthday of Christ was for that feast, this would mean that *Basil*, not Gregory of Nazianzus, was the first to institute it in this region, even if, as seems likely, Gregory was the one who initially brought it to Constantinople.

Shifting Festal Themes

Because we do not know for sure for which feast Basil intended *In sanctam Christi generationem*, and we have little other information about the celebration of Epiphany in Cappadocia before Christmas arrived,⁴³ it is difficult to determine if and how the content of the January 6 feast shifted when the December 25 feast was adopted. As mentioned above, Basil's *Exhortatoria ad sanctum baptismum* does not situate itself on any particular feast. However, if Bernardi and Fedwick are correct in assigning it to Epiphany, and if Bernardi is correct in dating it to 371, we may be able to gather a few clues about what happened on January 6 in Caesarea in the years before the adoption of the December 25 feast.

First, it is essential to note that this sermon contains nothing at all about the birth of Christ. Neither is the baptism of Christ its theme. Basil does speak generally about the baptism administered by John, but only in order to contrast it with the baptism administered by the church. In so doing, he tells us what scripture readings were appointed for the day. He says:

John proclaimed a baptism of repentance, and all Judea went out to him; the Lord proclaims a baptism of adoption, and who of the ones who have hoped in him will not listen? That was the elementary baptism; this is perfective. That was a retreat of sin; this is appropriation by God. The proclamation of John was of one man, and he drew everyone to repentance; but do you, being taught through prophets—"Wash yourself, become clean" (Is. 1.16)—, being admonished through psalms—"Draw near to him and be enlightened" (Ps. 33.6)—, being evangelized through apostles—"Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, and you will gain the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2.38)—, being received by the Lord himself, who says: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11.28) (for all these things have come together today for the public reading)—do you hesitate and deliberate and continually delay?⁴⁴

The sermon is entirely about the dangers and folly of hesitating about, deliberating over and continually delaying baptism. In the passage quoted in Chapter 2,⁴⁵ Basil says that baptism may be received at any time, although the Pascha is the most suitable occasion. On the other hand, the sermon is full of warnings not to wait much beyond the next Easter. Basil asks:

A tempter through life, a spy until old age, when will you become a Christian? When will we point you out as ours? Last year you waited for the present time, now again you await the following [year]. Be on guard lest you be found making prom-

ises longer than [your] life. You do not know what the following [year] will bring forth; do not promise things [that are] not yours.⁴⁶

We also know that this sermon was preached on the day on which candidates for baptism were enrolled. Basil issues the following invitation:

Therefore, come now to me, transfer yourself wholly to the Lord; freely give your name; be registered with the Church. The soldier is reckoned by the registers; the athlete contends having registered himself; the citizen is reckoned having been enrolled as a citizen by fellow tribesmen. You are responsible to all these things, as a soldier of Christ, as an athlete of piety, as having citizenship in heaven. Be registered in this book, in order that you might be translated into the one above.⁴⁷

By the time both feasts were unquestionably included in the calendars in question, the Feast of Lights on January 6 focused on Christ's baptism. We have already noted the differentiation Gregory of Nazianzus made between the content of the two feasts. *Oration 39 On the Holy Lights* begins:

Again My Jesus, and again a mystery, not deceitful nor disorderly, nor belonging to Greek error or drunkenness (for so I call their solemnities, and so I think will every man of sound sense); but a mystery lofty and divine, and allied to the Glory above. For the Holy Day of the Lights, to which we have come, and which we are celebrating to-day, has for its origin the Baptism of my Christ, the True Light That lighteneth every man that cometh into the world, and effecteth my purification, and assists that light which we received from the beginning from Him from above, but which we darkened and confused by sin.⁴⁸

The rest of the sermon contrasts this feast with those of the Greeks, contrasts it with the Christian feast celebrating Christ's birth, discusses Christ's baptism, as well as the different prefigurations of baptism found in the Hebrew scriptures and the different kinds of New Testament and present-day baptisms known by Christians. Gregory concludes his remarks with a reiteration of the day's main theme:

But let us venerate to-day the Baptism of Christ; and let us keep the feast well, not in pampering the belly, but rejoicing the spirit. And how shall we luxuriate? "Wash you, make you clean." ... Anyhow be purified, and you shall be clean (for God rejoices in nothing so much as in the amendment and salvation of man, on whose behalf is every discourse and every Sacrament), that you may be like lights in the world, a quickening force to all other men; that you may stand as perfect lights beside That great Light, and may learn the mystery of the illumination of Heaven, enlightened by the Trinity more purely and clearly, of Which even now you are

receiving in a measure the One Ray from the One Godhead in Christ Jesus our Lord....⁴⁹

Gregory's *Oration 40 On Holy Baptism*, preached the following day, provides more glimpses into his interpretation of the feast of the Holy Lights but focuses more on the baptism of Christians than on that of Christ. He begins:

Yesterday we kept high Festival on the illustrious Day of the Holy Lights; for it was fitting that rejoicings should be kept for our Salvation, and that far more than for weddings and birthdays, and namedays, and house-warmings, and registrations of children, and anniversaries, and all the other festivities that men observe for their earthly friends. And now to-day let us discourse briefly concerning Baptism, and the benefits which accrue to us therefrom, even though our discourse yesterday spoke of it cursorily; partly because the time pressed us hard, and partly because the sermon had to avoid tediousness.⁵⁰

Gregory of Nyssa also differentiated between the content of the two feasts, as mentioned above. He says:

Therefore let us leave the other matters of the Scriptures for other occasions, and abide by the topic set before us, offering, as far as we may, the gifts that are proper and fitting for the feast: for each festival demands its own treatment. So we welcome a marriage with wedding songs; for mourning we bring the due offering with funeral strains; in times of business we speak seriously, at times of festivity we relax the concentration and strain of our minds; but each time we keep free from disturbance by things that are alien to its character.⁵¹

He concludes this sermon, "And now we have spoken sufficiently for the holy subject of the day, which the circling year brings to us at appointed periods." From the passage cited above, we know that Gregory held the baptism of Christ to be "holy subject" of this particular day, whereas Christ's birth was the suitable topic "a few days ago."⁵²

In addition to serving as a commemoration of Christ's baptism at the hands of John, the Feast of Lights was a major baptismal occasion for the Christians of this area. Although Basil claims that Pascha is the best time for baptism, the Feast of Lights is the occasion for which baptismal homilies survive from Basil and both Gregorians. Gregory of Nazianzus urges the unbaptized members of his congregation not to delay baptism. He says:

Let us then be baptized that we may win the victory.... Let us be baptized today, that we suffer not violence to-morrow; and let us not put off the blessing as if it

were an injury, nor wait till we get more wicked that more may be forgiven us; and let us not become sellers and traffickers of Christ, lest we become more heavily burdened than we are able to bear.... While thou art still master of thy thoughts run to the Gift.⁵³

Gregory of Nyssa's January 6 homily urges the *faithful* to bring the uninitiated to the font:

The time, then, has come, and bears in its course the remembrance of holy mysteries, purifying man, – mysteries which purge out from soul and body even that sin which is hard to cleanse away, and which bring us back to that fairness of our first estate which God, the best of artificers, impressed upon us. There it is that you, the initiated people, are gathered together; and you bring also that people who have not made trial of them, leading, like good father, by careful guidance, the uninitiated to the perfect reception of faith.⁵⁴

Gregory of Nyssa's homily also gives us some glimpses of baptismal meanings and practices, as well as some information of Gregory's sacramental theology in general. He explains:

Baptism, then, is a purification from sins, a remission of trespasses, a cause of renovation and regeneration. By regeneration, understand regeneration conceived in thought, not discerned by bodily sight.... And this gift it is not the water that bestows (for in that case it were a thing more exalted than all creation), but the command of God, and the visitation of the Spirit that comes sacramentally to set us free. But water serves to express the cleansing.... Despise not, therefore, the Divine laver, nor think lightly of it, as a common thing, on account of the use of water. For the power that operates is mighty, and wonderful are the things that are wrought thereby. For this holy altar, too, by which I stand, is stone, ordinary in its nature, nowise different from the other slabs of stone that build our houses and adorn our pavements; but seeing that it was consecrated to the service of God, and received the benediction, it is a holy table, an altar undefiled, no longer touched by the hands of all, but of the priests alone, and that with reverence. The bread again is at first common bread, but when the sacramental action consecrates it, it is called and becomes the Body of Christ. So with the sacramental oil; so with the wine: though before the benediction they are of little value, each of them, after the sanctification bestowed by the Spirit, has its several operations. The same power of the word, again, also makes the priest venerable and honourable, separated, by the new blessing bestowed upon him, from his community with the mass of men.⁵⁵

Gregory then responds to a question about the fact that in baptism one is immersed three times. His answer gives us a picture of how baptism was administered. He says:

We recognize four elements, of which the world is composed, which every one knows even if their names are not spoken; but if it is well, for the sake of the more simple, to tell you their names, they are fire and air, earth and water. Now our God and Saviour, in fulfilling the Dispensation for our sakes, went beneath the fourth of these, the earth, that He might raise up life from thence. And we in receiving Baptism, in imitation of our Lord and teacher and Guide, are not indeed buried in the earth (for this is the shelter of the body that is entirely dead, covering the infirmity and decay of our nature), but coming to the element akin to earth, to water, we conceal ourselves in that as the Saviour did in the earth: and by doing this thrice we represent for ourselves that grace of the Resurrection which was wrought in three days: and this we do, not receiving the sacrament in silence, but while there are spoken over us the Names of the Three Sacred Persons on Whom we believed, in Whom we also hope, from Whom comes to us both the fact of our present and the fact of our future existence.⁵⁶

But this was not the *only* suitable day for baptism. In trying to persuade the uninitiated among his listeners to take the plunge, Gregory of Nazianzus writes: “Every time is suitable for your ablution, since any time may be your death. With Paul I shout to you with that loud voice, ‘Behold now is the accepted time; behold Now is the day of salvation;’ and that Now does not point to any one time, but is every present moment.”⁵⁷ Later in this homily Gregory continues to encourage immediate response to the call to baptism, but in exposing the folly of excuses given, he also informs us that Easter and Pentecost were other baptismal occasions. He says:

Therefore since you have heard these words, come forward to it, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed through missing the Grace. Receive then the Enlightenment in due season, that darkness pursue you not, and catch you, and sever you from the Illumining.... And consider how Solomon reproves you who are too idle or lethargic, saying, How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard, and when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? You rely upon this or that, and ‘pretend pretences in sins;’ I am waiting for Epiphany; I prefer Easter; I will wait for Pentecost. It is better to be baptized with Christ, to rise with Christ on the Day of His Resurrection, to honour the Manifestation of the Spirit. And what then? The end will come suddenly in a day for which thou lookest not, and in an hour that thou art not aware of; and then you will have for a companion lack of grace.... Therefore do not delay in coming to grace, but hasten, lest the robber outstrip you, lest the adulterer pass you by, lest the insatiate be satisfied before you, lest the murderer seize the blessing first, or the publican or the fornicator, or any of these violent ones who take the Kingdom of heaven by force.⁵⁸

Gregory tenaciously cajoles his listeners and gives *us* additional glimpses of the baptismal customs with which his community was familiar and to which they had become perhaps too attached.

Let us be like Peter and John, and let us hasten; as they did to the Sepulchre and the Resurrection, so we to the Font; running together, racing against each other, striving to be first to obtain this Blessing. And say not, ‘Go away, and come again, and tomorrow I will be baptized,’ when you may have the blessing today. ‘I will have with me father, mother, brothers, wife, children, friends, and all whom I value, and then I will be saved; but it is not yet the fitting time for me to be made bright;’ for if you say so, there is reason to fear lest you should have as sharers of your sorrow those whom you hoped to have as sharers of your joy. If they will be with you, well; — but do not wait for them. For it is base to say, ‘But where is my offering for my baptism, and where is my baptismal robe, in which I shall be made bright, and where is what is wanted for the entertainment of my baptizers, that in these too I may become worthy of notice? For, as you see, all these things are necessary, and on account of this the Grace will be lessened.’ Do not trifle with great things, or allow yourself to think so basely. The Sacrament is greater than the visible environment. Offer *yourself*; clothe yourself with Christ, feast me with your conduct; I rejoice to be thus affectionately treated, and God Who gives these great gifts rejoices thus. Nothing is great in the sight of God, but what the poor may give, so that the poor may not here also be outrun, for they cannot contend with the rich. In other matters there is a distinction between poor and rich, but here the more willing is the richer.⁵⁹

Apparently, some were even measuring baptismal grace bestowed in terms of the bestower’s position in church hierarchy or holiness of life, because Gregory continues:

Do not say, “A Bishop shall baptize me, and he a Metropolitan, and he of Jerusalem (for the Grace does not come of a place, but of the Spirit), and he of noble birth, for it would be a sad thing for my nobility to be insulted by being baptized by a man of no family.” Do not say, “I do not mind a mere Priest, if he is a celibate, and a religious, and of angelic life; for it would be a sad thing for me to be defiled even in the moment of my cleansing.” Do not ask for credentials of the preacher or the baptizer. For another is his judge, and the examiner of what thou canst not see. For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. But to thee let every one be trustworthy for purification, so only he is one of those who have been approved, not of those who are openly condemned, and not a stranger to the Church.... And so anyone can be your baptizer; for though one may excel another in his life, yet the grace of baptism is the same, and anyone may be your consecrator who is formed in the same faith.⁶⁰

Gregory’s homily on baptism is a treasure trove of information about the baptismal practices and interpretations with which he was familiar. For example, catechumens were not safe from the wiles of the devil. Gregory warns:

Take not thine enemy to be thy counsellor; despise not to be and to be called Faithful. As long as you are a Catechumen you are but in the porch of Religion; you must come inside, and cross the court, and observe the Holy Things, and look into the Holy of Holies, and be in company with the Trinity. Great are the interests for which you are fighting, great too the stability which you need. Protect yourself with the shield of faith. He fears you, if you fight armed with this weapon, and therefore he would strip you the Gift, that he may the more easily overcome you unarmed and defenceless. He assails every age, and every form of life; he must be repelled by all.⁶¹

Infants were baptized. Gregory says:

Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Fearest thou the Seal on account of the weakness of nature? O what a small-souled mother, and of how little faith! Why, Anna even before Samuel was born promised him to God, and after his birth consecrated him at once, and brought him up in the priestly habit, not fearing anything in human nature, but trusting in God. You have no need of amulets or incantations, with which the Devil also comes in, stealing worship from God for himself in the minds of vainer men. Give your child the Trinity, that great and noble Guard.⁶²

Infant baptism was perfectly acceptable in emergencies, but otherwise Gregory believes it is probably better to wait until children can speak for themselves. He says:

Be it so, some will say, in the case of those who ask for Baptism; what have you to say about those who are still children, and conscious neither of the loss nor of the grace? Are we to baptize them too? Certainly, if any danger presses. For it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than that they should depart unsealed and uninitiated. A proof of this is found in the Circumcision on the eighth day, which was a sort of typical seal, and was conferred on children before they had the use of reason. And so is the anointing of the doorposts.... But in respect of others, I give my advice to wait till the end of the third year, or a little more or less, when they may be able to listen and to answer something about the Sacrament; that, even though they do not perfectly understand it, yet at any rate they may know the outlines; and then to sanctify them in soul and body with the great sacrament of our consecration.⁶³

Exorcism was a part of the baptismal ritual, to which there was apparently some resistance:

From the day of your new birth all the old marks were effaced, and Christ was put upon all in one form. Do not disdain to confess your sins, knowing how John baptized, that by present shame you may escape from future shame.... Do not reject the

medicine of exorcism, nor refuse it because of its length. This too is a touchstone of your right disposition for grace.⁶⁴

Confession of faith in the Trinity was also a part of the rite, as Gregory says:

Besides all this and before all, keep I pray you the good deposit, by which I live and work, and which I desire to have as the companion of my departure; with which I endure all that is so distressful, and despise all delights; the confession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. This I commit unto you to-day; with this I will baptize you and make you grow. This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because Consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia.⁶⁵

Psalmody and the lighting of lamps also accompanied the rite:

But one thing more I preach unto you. The Station in which you shall presently stand after your Baptism before the Great Sanctuary is a foretype of the future glory. The Psalmody with which you will be received is a prelude to the Psalmody of Heaven; the lamps which you will kindle are a Sacrament of the illumination there with which we shall meet the Bridegroom, shining and virgin souls, with the lamps of our faith shining....⁶⁶

The Feast of Lights homilies give us more information about Cappadocian baptismal practices than did their paschal and Lenten counterparts, but they do not provide any glimpses of baptismal preparation, other than Basil's discussion of Epiphany enrollment. The preachers seem much more concerned to get people into the font lest they die unbaptized than they be properly prepared for baptism.

As for Christmas, our homilies celebrate most if not all of the elements of the birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke. As he did with his Easter sermon, Amphilochius provides us with a beautiful hymn-like homily for the December 25 feast. His *Oration 1 In Natalitia Domini*⁶⁷ begins with a poetic praise of the day and of the salvific consequences of the event that it celebrates:

This spiritual and radiant meadow, which has been embroidered with the beauty of the heavenly flowers and which smells sweet with the apostolic and undefiled

scents, appears to me to be an image of the divine paradise. For just as that scent and pure place is brightened with imperishable trees and immortal fruits and countless other exceedingly bright beauties, indeed so also this most godlike banquet of the most sacred church is made splendid by mental and inexpressible mysteries, of which our unbroken foundation and unshaken foundation stone and saving corner and all-venerable crown is the feast today of the holy birthday of Christ our true God; on account of which both the old things are prophesied typologically and the new things are proclaimed explicitly to the whole inhabited earth, on account of which heaven is opened and earth <is> raised up to divine height, on account of which paradise is given back to humans and the power of death is abolished, on account of which the power of corruption is trampled and deadly worship of the devil is at an end, on account of which human suffering is put to death, the life of absolute angelic rule is renewed, on account of which deceit of demons is driven away, wisdom and all-hallowed coming of God is revealed.⁶⁸

Amphilochius continues, listing some of the elements that comprise the feast's content:

“For the Lord himself,” it says, “will come and save us” (Is. 63.9). In what manner do you proclaim that the Lord comes to us, O divine prophet? For I will speak openly to you in this matter, having taken upon myself the face of the old men, who have not celebrated these things in the all-praised festal assembly, nor made proof of the new and all-hallowed birth from the undefiled virgin, nor looked upon the heavenly herald, indeed I mean the most godlike star, nor seen the leaps of the holy angels, nor heard the divine voices which, having rejoiced, they reported to the priestly shepherds, proclaiming the begotten savior, nor understood the gifts of the magi and the divine adoration; having taken up the face of those, I may ask you about the manner of the coming.⁶⁹

He weaves together scriptures from both testaments to illustrate how the birth of Christ fulfilled prophecy and in what a paradoxical manner this occurred.

So how should we glorify the feast today? How should we bless the most mysterious festal gathering for the present? For what will trace out the immortal wealth of this day? With what kind of sublime-sounding and loftiest words should we proclaim this all-praised and mystery of incorruptibility to which trophies are dedicated? O worthy day of countless hymns, in which the star rose out of Jacob (Num. 24.17), and the heavenly human, who appeared out of Israel, and the “mighty God” visited us, and the “sun of righteousness” overshadowed (Mal. 3.20) and the treasury of the divine virtues is opened, and the plant of eternal life sprouted to humans (Zech 6.12), and the dawn from heaven shone forth, and the Master of the heavenly things and earthly things has come out of a maiden’s womb into a perishable world for the redemption of the world. “For a savior was born to us today, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2.11), who is a “light of the Gentiles” and “salvation of the house

of Israel” (Luke 2.32, Is. 42.6). O wonder! The one who is not circumscribed by the heavens encamped in a manger as a young child, and the one who established all things with a little word was comforted by feminine arms, and the one who had freely given being to all the supramundane powers was suckled by the undefiled breasts of the holy virgin.⁷⁰

Amphilochius continues to rhapsodize:

O Bethlehem, consecrated city that is also joined in lot with humans! O manger, o manger partaking with the cherubim and equally honored with the seraphim. For the one who is divinely borne eternally by those thrones, now in turn corporeally finds lodging in you. O Mary, o Mary, she who possesses as firstborn the creator of all things! O humanity, who has corporeally invested with being the eternal word of God and who has been honored above the heavenly and intellectual powers in this matter!⁷¹

Gregory of Nazianzus contrasts the Christian feast with pagan solstice celebrations and customs. He exhorts, “Let us not adorn our porches, nor arrange dances, nor decorate streets; let us not feast the eye, nor enchant the ear with music, nor enervate the nostrils with perfume, nor prostitute the taste, nor indulge the touch, those roads that are so prone to evil and entrances for sin....”⁷² He continues:

Let us leave all these to the Greeks and to the pomps and festivals of the Greeks, who call by the name of gods beings who rejoice in the reek of sacrifices, and who consistently worship with their belly; evil inventors and worshippers of evil demons. But we, the Object of whose adoration is the Word, if we must in some way have luxury, let us seek it in word, and in the Divine Law, and in histories; especially such as are the origin of this Feast; that our luxury may be akin to and not far removed from Him Who hath called us together.⁷³

Gregory then discourses on the incomprehensibility of the divine nature but calls himself back to the subject at hand, saying, “This, however, is all I must now say about God; for the present is not a suitable time, as my present subject is not the doctrine of God but that of the Incarnation. But when I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”⁷⁴ However, first he briefly discusses what he feels are errors in heretical and Jewish theology, as well as the genesis of heavenly and angelic powers. Then in words very similar to some used in his Easter sermon of 383, he says:

But perhaps some one of those who are too festive and impetuous may say, What has all this to do with us? Spur your horse to the goal. Talk to us about the Festival, and the reasons for our being here to-day. Yes, this is what I am about to do, al-

though I have begun at a somewhat previous point, being compelled to do so by love, and by the needs of my argument.⁷⁵

Finally, Gregory gets to what, for him, is the essence of this feast. He preaches on the creation of the invisible (angelic) and visible worlds, the creation of humans as the mingling of these two worlds, the Fall of Adam and Eve, their banishment from Eden and punishment, and the many chastisements used by God in an attempt to reconcile lost humanity.⁷⁶ Then, the Word takes flesh, an event that Gregory praises:

O new commingling; O strange conjunction; the Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreate is created, That which cannot be contained is contained, by the intervention of an intellectual soul, mediating between the Deity and the corporeity of the flesh. And He Who gives riches becomes poor, for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead.⁷⁷

Gregory of Nyssa also focuses on the mystery of the incarnation and the elements surrounding Christ's birth, as they are described by Matthew and Luke. He states the reason for the feast:

And the present occasion of the feast is the mystery of the true tabernacle. For in this the human tent is pitched by the one who clothed himself in humanity for our sake... Joining in the chorus, let us also say that of the psalmody by the lofty David, that "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 117.26). How does he come? Not, as it were, by means of some ship or chariot, but having passed through to the human life through the incorruption of a maiden.⁷⁸

As he would do in his Ascension and Pentecost sermons of 388, Gregory uses the psalmody to set the joyful tone of the feast. He also makes use of the feast's coincidence with the winter solstice. He says:

Come indeed, having stirred up our souls to the spiritual dance, let us choose David as leader and guide and chief of our chorus and let us say with him that sweet sound, which, having anticipated, we sang. And let us take it up again, that "This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 117.24) in which the darkness begins to decrease and the duration of the night is forcibly compressed to eclipse by the one who exceeds the sunbeam. Brothers, through accident, some such non-accidental plan with respect to the feast has now become the manifestation of the divine life to human life. But the creation fully describes some mystery to the clearer-sighted ones through the things that are visible, all but sending forth sound and teaching the one who is able to hear, what the day being increased and the night being shortened means in the coming of the master. For I am determined to hear the creation as it expounds any such things, because when you see these things, O hu-

man, observe the secret being made manifest to you through the things that are visible. Do you see the night having advanced to the greatest length and halting at the high point of movement and returning in the opposite way? Observe that the evil night of sin was also as long, and having increased through every thought of evils and having arrived first at the highest magnitude of wickedness, today has been driven back further than the law, and the things from this are being brought to cessation and also destruction. Do you see the more lasting beam of light and the higher sun of fellowship? Perceive the coming of the true light that illuminates the whole inhabited world with the beams of the gospel.⁷⁹

Like Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa goes off on tangents, and his calling himself back to the point gives us information about what he thinks the essence of the feast is. After enumerating events from the Hebrew scriptures in which God did not self-manifest in human form and discoursing on the evils of humans and Satan, Gregory says:

But let us return to the present joy which the angels proclaim to the shepherds, which the heavens tell to the magi, which the spirit of prophecy publishes abroad through many and different ones, as also the magi become heralds of the grace.... Do you hear Isaiah crying out, "A child has been born to us, and a son has been given to us" (Is. 9.6)? Learn from the prophet himself how the child was born, how a son was given. According to the law of nature? No, says the prophet, the master of nature is not a slave to the laws of nature. But say how the child has been born. "Look," he says, "the virgin will conceive and will bear a son and will call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us" (Is. 7.14).⁸⁰

After another excursus—this one on the perpetual virginity of Mary—Gregory once again calls himself back to the topics of the day:

But we have wandered far from the things set before [us]; it is necessary to return to the word about Bethlehem in the gospel. For if we really are shepherds and keep a watchful eye on our own flocks, the voice of the angels that is proclaiming this great joy is certainly for us. Accordingly, let us look up into the heavenly army, let us see the chorus of angels, let us hear their divine hymning. What is the sound of those who are keeping festival? They cry aloud "Glory to God in the highest" (Lk. 2.14). For what reason does the voice of the angels glorify the deity who is being beheld in the highest? Because, it says, "And peace on earth." The angels have become very glad because of the one who appears; peace on earth.... Having heard these things let us go into Bethlehem, let us see the new wonder, how the virgin glories in child-birth, how the unwedded one nurses the infant. But first, let us hear who and from where she is from those who record things about her.⁸¹

Gregory then gives some of Mary's history, which he has learned from "some hidden account" (*ἀποκρύφου τινὸς ἱστορίας*); he talks about her birth,

childhood and youth,⁸² and her *initiation* by Gabriel. He says, “Then the virgin is initiated (μυσταγωγείται) by Gabriel. And the words of the initiation were a blessing. ‘Hail, highly favored one,’ he says, ‘the Lord is with you’” (Lk. 1.28),⁸³ and then goes on to discuss the Annunciation.

Then Gregory finally gets to Bethlehem. He discusses the manger, the swaddling clothes, the animals, the Magi and the Holy Innocents.⁸⁴ The Magi account gives Gregory the opportunity to criticize Israel. He says:

But let us look up to the heavenly wonders. For see, not only prophets and angels announce this joy to us, but the heavens also proclaim the glory of the good news through suitable wonders. Christ springs up to us from Judah, just as the apostle says, but the Jew is not illuminated by the one who has sprung up. The Magi [were] strangers to the covenants of the promise and aliens of the blessing of the fathers, but they outrun the Israelite people to the knowledge, both having discovered the heavenly star and not being ignorant of the king in the cave. Those bring presents, these plot. Those worship, these persecute. Those rejoice when they have found the one being sought, these are troubled at the birth of the one that was revealed.⁸⁵

Gregory concludes this sermon with a section linking the Nativity feast to the Pascha, saying in effect, as did John Chrysostom,⁸⁶ that there would be no Easter without Christmas. He exhorts:

And let no one suspect that such a thanksgiving [εὐχαριστίαν] only suits the mystery in relation to the Pascha. For let him consider that the Pascha is the end of the plan. But how would the end have come if the beginning had not led the way? Which is more primal than which? Quite clearly the birth of the plan in relation to the suffering. So also the beautiful things of the Pascha are part of the honors around the birth, and if someone lays down the good deeds of those recorded in the gospels, and if he goes through the wonders during the healings, the nourishment in the midst of difficulties, the return of those who had died from their graves, the improvised tillage of the wine, the flight of the demons, the changing of manifold sufferings into health, the leaps of the lame, the eyes from clay, the divine teachings, the law-givings, the instruction of the parables on higher things, all these things are a grace of the present day. For this [day] was the first of a series of good things. Accordingly, “Let us exult and rejoice in it” (Ps. 117.24), not fearing the reproach of humans and, as the prophet commands, not being defeated by their contempt, who scoff at the word of the plan as not being suited to assume the nature of a body and through birth to combine the Lord himself with human life.⁸⁷

Honoring the Holy Innocents

In the earliest extant sermon for the December 25 Nativity feast, given by Optatus of Milevis in Numidia, North Africa around 360 and entitled “On the Birthday of the Infants,” the preacher says:

This is the way of the heavens, the truth of the Gospels, the perpetual way of the saints. *I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except by me* (Jn. 14:6). If, then, Christ is the heavenly way which He has paved to be endured by the brothers who would follow him, if, revealing a hidden truth, He gave life to those believing in Him, let us who are sealed in the militia of the faithful follow bravely in the footsteps of Christ. If the world hates us, if the secular power persecutes us, already it hated the Lord Himself and by subtle inquiries sought to kill Him. And when he killed the infants in place of Christ he made a crowd of martyrs, but he did not find Christ whom he had badly looked for.⁸⁸

It is interesting to note that, more than two decades later, both Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa also mention Herod’s slaughter of the Innocents in their Nativity feast homilies. Gregory of Nazianzus says:

One thing connected with the Birth of Christ I would have you hate...the murder of the infants by Herod. Or rather you must venerate this too, the Sacrifice of the same as Christ, slain before the Offering of the New Victim. If He flees into Egypt, joyfully become a companion of His exile. It is a grand thing to share the exile of the persecuted Christ. If He tarry long in Egypt, call Him out of Egypt by a reverent worship of Him there. Travel without fault through every stage and faculty of the Life of Christ. Be purified, be circumcised; strip off the veil which has covered thee from thy birth. After this teach in the Temple, and drive out the sacrilegious traders. Submit to be stoned if need be, for well I wot thou shalt be hidden from those who cast the stones; thou shalt escape even through the midst of them, like God. If thou be brought before Herod, answer not for the most part. He will respect thy silence more than most people’s long speeches. If thou be scourged, ask for what they leave out. Taste gall for the taste’s sake; drink vinegar; seek for spittings; accept blows, be crowned with thorns, that is, with the hardness of the godly life; put on the purple robe, take the reed in hand, and receive mock worship from those who mock at the truth; lastly, be crucified with Him, and share His Death and Burial gladly, that thou mayest rise with Him, and be glorified with Him and reign with Him.⁸⁹

Gregory of Nyssa devotes much more time to the Holy Innocents. With a long series of questions, he illustrates the diabolical injustice of Herod’s decree that all Bethlehemite male children under the age of two be executed (Matt. 2.16). For example, Gregory asks:

For what reason is that awful injunction dispatched, the evil pebble [of condemnation] against the infants, to snatch the wretched babies, when they have injured what? Having supplied against themselves what reason for death and punishment, having only one charge—the act of having been begotten and having come into light?⁹⁰

Is it possible that in Cappadocia in the 380s there was no separate feast honoring the Holy Innocents? Current scholarly opinion holds that Christians in Jerusalem observed the Feast of the Holy Innocents on May 18 during this period.⁹¹ There is no evidence of such a spring observance in Cappadocia, but we cannot say that this is because the Innocents were consciously honored on or near December 25. In fact, after his lengthy and sometimes graphic treatment (and embellishment) of the story from Matthew, Gregory returns to the real point of the day:

But let us lead the preaching away from the dirges for the children and let us turn the mind to more cheerful things and better suiting to the feast, even if, outcroaring according to the prophecy, Rachel loudly bewails the slaughter of the children (cf. Jer. 38.15; Matt. 2.17). For in a day of feast, just as the wise Solomon says, forgetfulness of evils is fitting (cf. Ecclus. 11.25). But what should be clearer to us than this feast, in which, having dispersed the evil moonless night of the devil, the sun of righteousness (cf. Mal. 3.20) shines forth to nature through our nature itself, in which what had fallen down is woken up, what had been made hostile is led into reconciliation (cf. Ro. 5.10), what had been sold into slavery is brought back, what had fallen from life returns to life, what had been enslaved in captivity is taken up again into the worth of the kingdom, what had been bound with the bonds of death returns unbound to the place of the living? Now in accordance with the prophecy the bronze gates of death are smashed, the iron bars are shattered (cf. Ps. 106.16; Isa. 45.2), by which the human race was formerly confined in the prison of death. Now the gate of righteousness is opened, just as David says (cf. Ps. 117.19). Now the unison sound of those who are celebrating the festival is heard throughout the whole inhabited world.⁹²

Interestingly, Basil discusses Matthew's account of the Magi and Herod but stops short of mentioning the murder of the children. Lacking definitive information, all that can be said is that sometimes this part of Matthew's birth narrative was included in Cappadocian Nativity feast preaching along with many other elements of the Matthean and Lucan accounts, although Gregory of Nyssa clearly considered the happier elements to be more suitable to the feast.

The Kalends of January

In a letter to Libanius, who had been one of Basil's teachers in Athens, Gregory of Nyssa disparages the Roman celebration of the new year, saying:

It was a custom with the Romans to celebrate a feast in winter-time, after the custom of their fathers, when the length of days begins to draw out, as the sun climbs to the upper regions of the sky. Now the beginning of the month is esteemed holy, and by this day auguring the character of the whole year, they devote themselves to forecasting lucky accidents, gladness and wealth. What is my object in beginning my letter in this way? Why, I do so because I too kept this feast, having got my present of gold as well as any of them; for then there came into my hands as well as theirs gold, not like that vulgar gold, which potentates treasure and which those that have it give,—that heavy, vile, and soulless possession, but that which is loftier than all wealth, as Pindar says (Pindar, *Ol.* i.1: ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς, αἰθόμενον πῦρ ἅτε διαπρέπει νυκτός, μεγάλανόρος ἔξοχα πλούτου.), in the eyes of those that have sense, being the fairest presentation, I mean your letter, and the vast wealth which it contained. For thus it happened; that on that day, as I was going to the metropolis of the Cappadocians, I met an acquaintance, who handed me this present, your letter, as a new year's gift.⁹³

On January 1, 400, Asterius also criticized this holiday that had, apparently, lured some members of his congregation away from church. He says:

Yesterday and to-day two feasts, not only unrelated and discordant, but wholly adverse and hostile to each other have been celebrated. One is of the rabble without, gathering, in large sums, the money of mammon, and bringing in its train bargaining, vulgar and mean. The other is of holy and true religion, inculcating acquaintance with God, and the virtue of the purified life. And since many, preferring the luxury and absorption which arise from vanity, have left off going to church, come, let us with a discourse dispel from your souls this foolish and harmful delight, which as a sort of inflammation of the brain, with laughter and jesting, induces death.⁹⁴

Asterius continues to expose the evils of the festival, contrasting it with the major *Christian* feasts with which he was familiar, celebrated “in orderly succession” with the rest of the feasts. He says:

What then are we to call the festival, or the money spent in it? I cannot make out. But tell me, you who have been wearing yourselves out in preparing for it. Give an account of it, as we do of the festivals which are genuine and according to the will of God. We celebrate the birth of Christ, since at this time God manifested himself in the flesh. We celebrate the Feast of Lights (Epiphany), since by the forgiveness of our sins we are led forth from the dark prison of our former life into a life of light and uprightness. Again, on the day of the resurrection we adorn ourselves and march through the streets with joy, because that day reveals to us immortality and the

transformation into a higher existence. Thus we keep these feasts and the rest of them in orderly succession. For every human event there is a reason, but that which lacks reasonable explanation and purpose is stuff and nonsense.⁹⁵

It is obvious from these passages from Gregory and Asterius that “good Christians” did not participate in the revels of the new year celebration, and that the only legitimate holidays were those for which a “reasonable explanation” could be given. The first passage quoted from Asterius’s sermon also raises an interesting question. He contrasts the pagan feast, which lasted for several days,⁹⁶ with a feast of the “holy and true religion, inculcating acquaintance with God, and the virtue of the purified life.” What was this feast? According to Datema, it was Epiphany. He maintains that the pagan feast was celebrated over a period of five days, beginning on December 31 and ending on January 4, and that Asterius is contrasting the Christian feast celebrated “today” (that is, January 5) with the final day of the pagan feast, celebrated “yesterday.”⁹⁷ Asterius is, therefore, preaching at an Epiphany vigil. This is certainly possible, but it is difficult to say for sure, because Asterius devotes the entire sermon to criticizing the pagan feast and does not mention the Christian feast again, nor does he specify to which day of the pagan feast he is referring. He bemoans the amount of money and energy spent on the feast, as well as the exchange of gifts of money, which Datema says happened on the second day of the festival of the Kalends (that is, January 1), but this may be a general criticism of the entire feast. In addition, although Asterius makes several scriptural references, he is not preaching on a particular text, which might have given us a clue. Asterius’s contemporary Augustine of Hippo referred to a Christian feast on January 1; his sermon is similarly devoted to enumerating the evils of the pagan celebration. He also does not say what the Christians are feasting, but he does mention that they had just chanted Psalm 106.47—“Save us, O Lord our God: gather us from among the nations: that we may give thanks to Thy holy name.”⁹⁸ According to John Gunstone, some early sacramentaries, which he does not identify, prescribe fasts, litanies and processions to counteract the pagan reveling. He also notes that some seventh and eighth-century Roman sources, including the Gelasian Sacramentary, list January 1 as the commemoration of the birth of Mary; as the Octave of Christmas, the day later became the Feast of the Circumcision.⁹⁹ In fact, Caesarius of Arles (470–543) informs us that, in his community at least, the day already commemorated that event by the early sixth century.¹⁰⁰ It is also possible that Amaseia was commemorating a mar-

tyr, or perhaps Basil of Caesarea, on that day, but that is speculation. Without further information, we cannot identify the feast for sure.

Doctrinal Debates and the Institution of Christmas

Bernard Botte, in his study of the origins of Christmas and Epiphany, was one of the first to observe that both feasts developed in the context of doctrinal controversy in both East and West and that they were used by many pro-Nicene preachers and writers to promote Nicene theology and christology. He writes:

The two feasts of which we are speaking were developed during the centuries that saw the great theological and christological controversies unfold. They were not created with the intention of controversy, but it is undeniable that they served to instill the orthodox faith, the belief in the dogma of Nicea, Ephesus and Chalcedon.¹⁰¹

Other scholars have built on and nuanced Botte’s idea; Susan Roll provides a thorough and useful summary and critique of these works.¹⁰² She begins by noting:

A number of liturgical historians remark in their treatment of the early history of the Christmas feast that it cannot be coincidental that Christmas emerged from the post-Nicaea atmosphere of bitter rivalry between the Nicene and the Arian parties, including the struggles of the mainline church with several such doctrinal and organizational sub-groups. Also relevant were the fact that Christmas spread so quickly when the church was highly localized in nature, and that it was almost forcibly instituted in the East when a very similar Epiphany feast had already been celebrated for some time. Very few secondary sources on the liturgical year however go on to cite comprehensive primary evidence that Christmas was indeed deliberately promoted, not to say instituted, in response to these groups as a perceived threat to unity and consistency in the Christian church.¹⁰³

Roll then discusses this primary evidence, including that provided by our Cappadocian leaders, but does not quote the texts themselves. Such quotation is useful, because these texts show clearly that our preachers did, in fact, seize the opportunity provided by these occasions to draw the battle lines. Basil, for example, laments:

Oh this improper and evil arrogance! Magi worship, and Christians debate, how God [is] in flesh and in what sort of flesh; and if the human that has been appropriated is perfect or imperfect. May the unnecessary things be silenced in the Church of God; may the true things be glorified; may the things that are silenced not be inves-

tigated. Join yourself to those who welcome the Lord from the heavens with joy. Consider shepherds being instructed, priests interpreting, women making merry, when Mary was taught to rejoice by Gabriel, when Elizabeth had John leaping in the womb over them. Anna proclaimed good news, Simeon took [him] in his arms, worshipping the great God in a small infant; not despising the one who appears, but doxologizing the greatness of his divinity. For the divine power shone through the human body just as light through glass plates, shining through to those who have eyes of the heart that have been made clean, with which we should also be found reflecting the glory of the Lord with a veiled face, in order that we ourselves might be changed from glory into glory, by grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom [be] glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁰⁴

Gregory of Nazianzus provides many examples of this strategy. In his Theophany sermon, he asks, “To this what have those cavillers to say, those bitter reasoners about the Godhead, those detractors of all that is praiseworthy, those darkeners of light, uncultured in respect of wisdom, for whom Christ died in vain, those unthankful creatures, the work of the Evil One?”¹⁰⁵ He goes on to explain:

He was sent, but as man, for He was of a twofold Nature; for He was wearied, and hungered, and was thirsty, and was in an agony, and shed tears, according to the nature of a corporeal being. And if the expression be also used of Him as God, the meaning is that the Father’s good pleasure is to be considered a Mission, for to this He refers all that concerns Himself; both that He may honour the Eternal Principle, and because He will not be taken to be an antagonistic God. And whereas it is written both that He was betrayed, and also that He gave Himself up and that He was raised up by the Father, and taken up into heaven; and on the other hand, that He raised Himself and *went* up; the former statement of each pair refers to the good pleasure of the Father, the latter to His own Power. Are you then to be allowed to dwell upon all that humiliates Him, while passing over all that exalts Him, and to count on your side the fact that He suffered, but to leave out of the account the fact that it was of His own will? See what even now the Word has to suffer. By one set He is honoured as God, but is confused with the Father, by another He is dishonoured as mere flesh and severed from the Godhead.¹⁰⁶

In his homily for the Feast of Lights, Gregory admits to using the tactic of repetition:

Let none be astonished if what I have to say contains some things that I have said before; for not only will I utter the same words, but I shall speak of the same subjects, trembling both in tongue and mind and thought when I speak of God for you too, that you may share this laudable and blessed feeling. And when I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three. Three in Individualities or Hypostases, if any prefer so to call them, or persons, for we will not quarrel about names so long as the syllables amount to the same meaning; but One in

respect of the Substance – that is, the Godhead. For they are divided without division, if I may so say; and they are united in division. For the Godhead is one in three, and the three are one, in whom the Godhead is, or to speak more accurately, Who are the Godhead. Excesses and defects we will omit, neither making the Unity a confusion, nor the division a separation. We would keep equally far from the confusion of Sabellius and from the division of Arius, which are evils diametrically opposed, yet equal in their wickedness. For what need is there heretically to fuse God together, or to cut Him up into inequality?¹⁰⁷

Then, in his homily on baptism the following day, he says:

But if you still halt and will not receive the perfectness of the Godhead, go and look for someone else to baptize – or rather to drown you: I have not time to cut the Godhead, and to make you dead in the moment of your regeneration, that you should have neither the Gift nor the Hope of Grace, but should in so short a time make shipwreck of your salvation. For whatever you may subtract from the Deity of the Three, you will have overthrown the whole, and destroyed your own being made perfect.¹⁰⁸

Gregory of Nyssa, in his Feast of Lights homily, extends the criticism to those who deny the divinity of the Holy Spirit:

It may be thou art offended, thou who contendest boldly against the glory of the Spirit, and that thou grudgest to the Spirit that veneration wherewith He is revered by the godly. Leave off contending with me: resist, if thou canst, those words of the Lord which gave to men the rule of the Baptismal invocation. What says the Lord’s command? ‘Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.’ How in the Name of the Father? Because He is the primal cause of all things. How in the Name of the Son? Because He is the Maker of the Creation. How in the Name of the Holy Ghost? Because He is the power perfecting all.” “Why then dost thou divide the Three Persons into fragments of different natures, and make Three Gods, unlike one to another, whilst from all thou does receive one and the same grace?”¹⁰⁹

Clearly, the Cappadocians did use the feasts celebrating Christ’s incarnation to promote their own doctrines and to refute those of their opponents. However, as Roll points out, this does not necessarily mean that the December 25 feast was deliberately adopted for this purpose. She writes:

In Gregory’s Christmas Sermon 38 the total economy of salvation, centered on the Paschal mystery but here approached from the idea of incarnation, provides a setting to score direct hits on certain controverted points of Arian doctrine, though this fact alone need not be taken as *prima facie* proof that Christmas was consciously introduced or promoted with an eye to using it as a rhetorical vehicle.¹¹⁰

It should also be noted that the incarnation feasts were not the only occasions that they used for this purpose. We have already seen that Pentecost homilies were used to similar ends; in Chapter Four we will see that the celebrations of saints' days provided additional polemical opportunities.

Notes

1. There are some exceptions, of course. For example, in Egypt the feast of the Epiphany was not originally a nativity feast at all; only in the late fourth century did Egyptian Christians begin to celebrate Christ's birth on January 6.
2. A discussion of the two leading hypotheses for the origin of Christmas is beyond the scope of this paper, as we are not interested in its origins but in its adoption in Cappadocia. For a more information on the "History of Religions" and "Calculation" or "Computational" hypotheses, see Talley, *Origins*, 87–99; Roll, 87–105; 127–163; J. Neil Alexander, *Waiting For the Coming: The Liturgical Meaning of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press), 44–57.
3. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.21.146. See Talley, *Origins*, 118–121; Roland H. Bainton, "The Origins of Epiphany," in *Early and Medieval Christianity: The Collected Papers in Church History*, Series One (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 22–38.
4. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum* XXI.2.5, cited in Botte, 46: *Et ut haec die quam celebrantes mense Januario Christiani Epiphania dictitant, progressus in eorum ecclesiam, solemniter numine adorato discessit.*
5. John Chrysostom, *On the Birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ* 1, Carroll and Halton, 162.
6. In *Oration 39 On the Holy Lights*, Gregory says, "At His birth we duly kept Festival, both I, the leader (ἔξαρχος) of the Feast, and you, and all that is in the world and above the world" (*Or.* 39.14, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 357). There is some debate about the date of this sermon and its companions (*Orations* 38 and 40). Claudio Morchini and Paul Gallay (*Grégoire de Nazianze Discours 38–40*, Sources chrétiennes 358 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf], 153–159) and Ruether (179) date them to December 25, 379, January 6 and 7, 380. Bernardi (204) and Talley (*Origins*, 137) date them to December 25, 380, January 6 and 7, 381. Justin Mossay (212) does not make a choice ("La Noël et l'Épiphanie en Cappadoce au IV^e Siècle," in *Noël-Épiphanie Retour du Christ*, Lex Orandi 40 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967], 212); subsequent references to this work will be cited as "La Noël et l'Épiphanie." Gregory was Bishop of Constantinople for several months in 381, but at the request of the Nicene community there, including the new emperor, Theodosius, he had been in the imperial city and preaching since 379 (Ruether, 42–48).
7. Botte, *Origines*, 27–28: *Nous possédons de S. Grégoire de Nazianze deux homélies, l'une sure de Noël, l'autre sur l'Épiphanie, prêchées à Constantinople. Lors de son court passage dans cette Église, il y célébra donc les deux fêtes. Mais celle de Noël est d'institution récente et Grégoire se nomme lui-même l' ἔξαρχος de cette fête* (PG 36, 340, dans le sermon sur la fête des Lumières). *C'est lui qui l'a instituée et il est intéressant de remarquer que cette innovation n'est pas sans relation avec la*

- réaction anti-arienne, de même qu'à Alexandrie elle coïncidera avec le mouvement anti-nestorien.* See also Cullmann, 30; Mossay, "La Noël et l'Épiphanie," 212. Roll (192) also identifies as part of this group Usener, 261–262, 269; Hans Lietzmann, *Geschichte der alten Kirche* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1938), 322–323; Pietro Borella, "Appunti sul Natale e l'Epifania a Milano al tempo di S. Ambrogio," in *Mélanges offerts à Dom Bernard Botte* (Louvain: Mont César/Keizersberg Abbey, 1972), 54–55.
8. McArthur, 47; Evangelos Theodorou, "Saint Jean Chrysostome et la fête de Noël," in Botte, *et al.*, eds., *Noël-Épiphanie*, 206; Talley, *Origins*, 137–138.
 9. Roll, 192.
 10. Talley, *Origins*, 138. In his essay "Constantine and Christmas," published in 2000, Talley more clearly accepts the majority opinion that ἔξαρχος means "founder" (Talley, "Constantine and Christmas," in *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000], 271). Valens died at Adrianople August 9, 378.
 11. Talley, *Origins*, 138.
 12. Earlier scholars doubted that Basil wrote this sermon; Usener (249–250) summarizes the reasons and dismisses the conclusion.
 13. Fedwick, 9, n. 34.
 14. Botte, *Origines*, 29; Talley, *Origins*, 138. Roll (190, n. 71) notes the difference of opinion but does not offer an opinion of her own. Bernardi does not discuss this sermon at all, apparently accepting the arguments against its authenticity.
 15. Basil, *In sanctam Christi generationem* 1.
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. *Ibid.* 6.
 18. Mossay, "La Noël et l'Épiphanie," 214–215: *Au moment où la Noël prend les noms de Théophanie ou de Nativité, c'est-à-dire vers 380, le terme Épiphanie désignant la fête du 6 janvier, est supplanté par l'expression fête des Lumières* (B. Botte, *Les origines...*, pp. 78–80; Christine Mohrmann, «Épiphanie...», p. 655; E. Pax, art. «Épiphanie»..., col. 875.).
 19. Talley, *Origins*, 138.
 20. Basil of Caesarea, Letter CCXXXII, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 8, 272.
 21. F. Loofs, *Eustathius von Sebaste und die Chronologie der Basilien-Briefe: Eine patristische Studie* (Halle, Germany: Niemeyer, 1898), 8 n. 3.
 22. Datema, *Amphilochius*, xii.
 23. Basil of Caesarea, Letter CCXXXII, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 8, 273.
 24. The editors of the *NPNF* volume note that this word (λαμπήνη) actually means "covered carriage," but the context dictates that Basil really meant "lamps" (*NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 8, 273, n. 1).
 25. Gregory of Nyssa, Letter I, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 5., 527. (Letter IV, *GNO*, vol. 8, part 2, 27–30.)
 26. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 5, 387.
 27. Letters 115 and 121.
 28. Bernardi, 68; Fedwick, 9, n. 33.
 29. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 43.52.
 30. Ruether, 179.

31. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38 On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ 1*, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 345.
32. Ibid. 3–4, *NPNF*, 345.
33. Ibid. 16, *NPNF*, 350.
34. Ibid. 17, *NPNF*, 350–351.
35. Ruether (179) dates this sermon to 380.
36. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 39 On the Holy Lights 14*, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 357.
37. Daniélou, “Chronologie,” 372.
38. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ: A Sermon for the Day of Lights 3*, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 5, 518 (paragraph numbers supplied).
39. Daniélou, “Chronologie,” 372.
40. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Saint Stephen 1*, *GNO* 10.1.2, 75.4–12, trans. Richard (Casimir) McCambly, available from *The Gregory of Nyssa Homepage* at <http://www.bhsu.edu/artssciences/asfaculty/dsalomon/nyssa/home.html>; subsequent McCambly translations will be cited by homily and paragraph number as *GNH*.
41. Daniélou, “Chronologie,” 372.
42. Asterius of Amaseia, *Laudatio S. protomartyris Stephani* 1.1–2.
43. A homily for Epiphany formerly attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus has been proven inauthentic (Botte, *Origines*, 26).
44. Basil of Caesarea, *Exhortatoria ad sanctum baptisma 1*.
45. See p. 32.
46. Basil of Caesarea, *Exhortatoria ad sanctum baptisma 1*.
47. Ibid. 7.
48. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 39.1, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 352.
49. Ibid. 20, *NPNF*, 359.
50. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 40.1, *NPNF*, 360.
51. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ 2*, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 5, 518.
52. Ibid. 3, *NPNF*, 518. See passage cited above, p. 68.
53. Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 40.11, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 363.
54. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ 2*, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 5, 518.
55. Ibid. 3, *NPNF*, 519.
56. Ibid. 4, *NPNF*, 520.
57. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 40.13, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 364.
58. Ibid. 24, *NPNF*, 368.
59. Ibid. 25, *NPNF*, 368–369.
60. Ibid. 26, *NPNF*, 369.
61. Ibid. 16, *NPNF*, 365.
62. Ibid. 17, *NPNF*, 365.
63. Ibid. 28, *NPNF*, 370.
64. Ibid. 27, *NPNF*, 369.
65. Ibid. 41, *NPNF*, 375.
66. Ibid. 46, *NPNF*, 377.
67. The Greek title, translated “On the Birthday Feast of Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” uses the term τὰ γενέθλια for this feast.
68. Amphilochius of Iconium, *In Natalitia 1*.

69. Ibid.
70. Ibid. 3.
71. Ibid. 4.
72. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 38.5, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 346.
73. Ibid. 6, *NPNF*, 346.
74. Ibid. 8, *NPNF*, 347.
75. Ibid. 10, *NPNF*, 348.
76. Ibid. 11–13.
77. Ibid. 13, *NPNF*, 349.
78. Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem natalem salvatoris 2*. Daniélou dates this sermon to December 25, 386 (Daniélou, “Chronologie,” 372).
79. Ibid. 4.
80. Ibid. 7.
81. Ibid. 10.
82. Ibid. 11.
83. Ibid. 12.
84. Ibid. 13–15.
85. Ibid. 14.
86. John Chrysostom makes a similar statement in his homily on the anniversary of Philogonius of Antioch, five days before Christmas (PG 48.703).
87. Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem natalem salvatoris 17*.
88. Optatus of Milevis, *On the Birthday of the Infants 3*; Carroll and Halton, 150.
89. Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 38.18, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 351.
90. Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem natalem salvatoris 14*.
91. John F. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, ed. Robert F. Taft, no. 228 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 87–90; J. Neil Alexander, “Principal Aspects of Sacred Time in Byzantine Jerusalem,” (Th.D. diss., The General Theological Seminary, 1993), 87–90.
92. Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem natalem salvatoris 16*.
93. Gregory of Nyssa, Letter XI, *NPNF* Series 2, vol. 5, 533–534. (Letter XIV, *GNO*, vol. 8, part 2, 46–48.)
94. Asterius of Amaseia, *On the Festival of the Calends 1*, *Ancient Sermons for Modern Times by Asterius, Bishop of Amasia*, trans. Galusha Anderson and Edgar Johnson Goodspeed (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1904), 113–114. Paragraph numbers are supplied to correspond to Datema text. Subsequent references to this volume of translations will be cited as *Ancient Sermons*.
95. Ibid. 3, 115–117.
96. Mossay notes that the January revels were very popular feasts in the fourth century, particularly in the eastern half of the empire. He also says that, according to Libanius, the activities for January 1 through 3 included taking of vows of loyalty to the state and the emperor, as well as exchanging gifts, banqueting and dancing (“La Noël et l’Épiphanie,” 228–229).
97. Datema, *Asterius*, 228–229.
98. Augustine, Sermon 198 *On 1 January, Against the Pagans 1*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 3, *Sermons*, part 6, On the Liturgi-

- cal Seasons, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 73.
99. John Gunstone, *Christmas and Epiphany* (London: The Faith Press, 1967), 74–75.
100. Carroll and Halton, 191.
101. Botte, *Origines*, 86: *Les deux fêtes dont nous parlons se sont développées au cours des siècles qui ont vu se dérouler les grandes controverses théologiques et christologiques. Elles n'ont pas été créées dans un but de controverse; mais il est indéniable qu'elles ont servi à faire pénétrer la foi orthodoxe, la croyance au dogme de Nicée, d'Éphèse et de Chalcédoine.*
102. Roll, 183–189.
103. *Ibid.* 165.
104. Basil, In *sanctam Christi generationem* 6.
105. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 38.14, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 7, 349.
106. *Ibid.* 15, *NPNF*, 350.
107. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 39.11, *NPNF*, 355–356.
108. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 40.44, *NPNF*, 376.
109. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ* 4, *NPNF*, Series 2, vol. 5, 520.
110. Roll, 191.

Chapter 4

The Sanctoral Cycle

By the time Asterius was Bishop of Amaseia in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the celebration of saints' feast days was a deeply entrenched and beloved practice. In his *Encomium on the Holy Martyrs*, he writes:

For if the devil had not persecuted Christians and stirred up the battle against the church, we would not have martyrs; but when martyrs did not exist, our life was gloomy and festival-less. For what is worth as much as these festal gatherings? And what is so venerable and all-good as seeing the whole city constantly going out of town with the whole population, and attaining the holy place of truest godliness to accomplish the pure mysteries? But true godliness is to worship God and also to honor those who have staunchly borne sufferings for his sake and have stood ready to the last danger of death, of whom the leaders and chiefs who lead the people meet us here today; men who are immortal on account of a good death, who live always because of the scorning of life, who have taken the kingdom in exchange for the blood and have shown forth the treacherous flesh as benefactor of the soul.¹

Gregory of Nyssa attributes the establishment—or at least a great deal of enrichment—of the cycle of such festal gatherings to another of Pontus's bishops, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Bishop of Neocaesarea in the middle of the third century, including the period of the Decian persecution (250–251). Describing his activities when the persecution came to an end, Gregory of Nyssa writes:

When that tyranny had been broken by God's help and peace again made room for the human life in which it was easy for all to devote themselves to the divine in freedom, and when he had descended again to the city and visited the whole countryside round about, he gave [953B H53] to peoples everywhere an increase of devotion toward the divine by decreeing festivals in honor of those who had borne up bravely for the faith. Taking up the bodies of the martyrs here and there, gathering together on the anniversary by the yearly cycle, they rejoiced as they kept festival in honor of the martyrs.²

As was the case with the paschal and incarnation constellations of that yearly cycle, it is impossible to say exactly what the Cappadocian sanctoral constellation looked like. However, much information on this topic does sur-