

## QUESTION 35

### Christ's Nativity

Now that we have discussed Christ's conception, we have to talk about His nativity: first, with respect to the nativity itself (question 36) and, second, with respect to the manifestation of the newborn Christ (question 37).

On the first topic there are eight questions: (1) Does the nativity belong to the [human] nature or to the person? (2) Should a second nativity, besides His eternal nativity, be attributed to Christ? (3) Is the Blessed Virgin the mother of Christ with respect to His temporal nativity? (4) Should she be called the Mother of God? (5) Should Christ, given His two filiations, be called the Son of God the Father and of His virgin mother? (6) What about the manner of the nativity? (7) What about the place of the nativity? (8) What about the time of the nativity?

#### Article 1

##### Does the nativity belong more to the [human] nature than to the person?

It seems that the nativity belongs more to the [human] nature than to the person (*nativitas naturae conveniat magis quam personae*):

**Objection 1:** In *De Fide ad Petrum* Augustine says, "The eternal and divine nature could not be conceived and born of human nature except in accord with the genuineness of the human nature (*nisi secundum veritatem humane naturae*)." Therefore, it was fitting for the divine nature to be conceived by reason of the human nature (*ratione humanae aeternae*). Therefore, [the nativity] belonged much more to the human nature.

**Objection 2:** According to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics 5*, "The name 'nature' (*natura*) is taken from 'being born' (*nascendo*)." But denominations are made according to an agreement of likeness. Therefore, it seems that the nativity belongs more to the nature than to the person.

**Objection 3:** What is born properly speaking is what begins to exist through the birth. But through Christ's nativity it was not the person of Christ that came to exist; instead it was His human nature. Therefore, it seems that the nativity belongs properly to the nature and not to the person.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Fide Orthodoxa 3* Damascene says, "The nativity belongs to the person and not to the nature."

**I respond:** There are two senses in which a nativity can be attributed to something: (a) in the sense of being attributed to it as the *subject*, and (b) in the sense of being attributed to it as the *terminus*.

(a) A nativity is attributed to *that which is born* as the *subject* of *being born*. For since *being born* is a certain sort of *being generated* and since something is generated in order that it might exist, so something is born in order that it might exist. But *esse* belongs properly to a subsistent entity, since a form that does not subsist is said to exist only because it is *that by which* something exists. Now a *person*, or *hypostasis*, is signified in the manner of a *thing that subsists*, whereas a *nature* is signified in the manner of a *form in which* something subsists. And so the nativity is attributed to the *person* or *hypostasis*—and not to the *nature*—as the *subject*, properly speaking, of *being born*.

(b) By contrast, a nativity is attributed to the *nature* as its *terminus*. For the terminus of a generation, or of any nativity, is a form. But it is the nature that is signified in the manner of a form. This is why, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Physics 2*, *being born* is called a *path to a nature* (*via in naturam*); for the tendency of nature [as a whole] (*intentio naturae*) is terminated in the form of the species, i.e., the nature of the species.

**Reply to objection 1:** Because of the identity that exists in divine matters between the nature and

the *hypostases*, the nature is sometimes posited for a person or *hypostasis*. And it is in this sense that Augustine claims that the divine nature is conceived and born, viz., since the person of the Son is conceived and born with respect to human nature.

**Reply to objection 2:** No movement or change is denominated from the subject that is moved; instead, it is denominated from the terminus of the movement, from which it takes its species. And it is for this reason that the nativity in question is not denominated from the person who is born, but from the nature in which the birth is terminated.

**Reply to objection 3:** Properly speaking, it is not the nature that begins to exist, but instead the person begins to exist in a certain nature. For, as has been explained, the nature is signified as *that by which* something exists, whereas the person is signified as *that which has subsistent esse*.

## Article 2

### Should any temporal nativity be attributed to Christ?

It seems that no temporal nativity should be attributed to Christ (*Christo non sit attribuenda aliqua nativitas temporalis*):

**Objection 1:** Being born is like a movement which (a) belongs to an entity that does not exist before it is born, and which (b) procures for this entity the benefit of a nativity in order that it might exist. But Christ existed from eternity. Therefore, it was not possible for Him to be born in time.

**Objection 2:** That which is perfect in itself does not need a nativity. But the person of the Son of God was perfect from eternity. And so it seems that He was not born in time (*non sit temporaliter natus*).

**Objection 3:** The nativity belongs to the person properly speaking. But in Christ there is just one person. Therefore, in the case of Christ there is just one nativity.

**Objection 4:** What is born by two nativities is born twice. But *Christ was born twice* seems to be false. For since the nativity by which He is born of the Father is eternal, it does not admit of any interruption. But this is what is required for the adverb *twice (bis)*; for instance, that individual is said to run twice who runs with an interruption. Therefore, it seems that one should not posit two nativities in the case of Christ.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “We confess two nativities for Christ, (a) one eternal nativity, which is from the Father, and (b) one which occurs in the last times for our sake.”

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), a nature is related to a nativity as the terminus of a movement or change. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Physics* 5, movements are diversified by the diversity of their termini. Now in the case of Christ there are two natures, one of which He received from eternity from the Father, and the other of which He received in time from His mother. And so one must attribute to Christ two nativities, one by which He is eternally born of the Father and the other by which He was born of His mother in time.

**Reply to objection 1:** This was the objection of a certain heretic, Felicianus, and in *Contra Felicianum* Augustine disposes of the objection as follows: “Let us suppose, as many maintain, that in the world there is a universal soul, which, by its ineffable movement, vivifies all seeds in such a way that it does not grow with the things that are begotten, but instead gives life to the very things that are going to be begotten. Without a doubt, when this soul reaches the womb and is about to form the passible matter to its own purposes, it unites itself to the person of the entity, though it is clear that it does not share the same substance, and with the soul acting and the matter receiving, there comes to be one man

from two substances. And so we say that the soul is born from the womb—but not because, as far as it itself is concerned, it had been nothing at all before it was born. So, then, in a much more sublime way, the Son of God was born as a man, just as it is taught that the mind is born together with the body—not because one substance is made up of the two of them, but because one person comes to be from the two of them. Yet we do not say that the Son of God began to exist because of this beginning, lest someone think that His divine nature is temporal. Nor do we believe that the flesh of the Son of God existed from eternity, lest we end up thinking that He took up [just] the appearance of a body and not a genuine human body.”

**Reply to objection 2:** This is Nestorius’s argument, which, in a certain letter, Cyril disposed of by saying: “We do not claim that the Son of God necessarily needed, for His own sake, a second nativity after the nativity which is from the Father. For it is foolish and ignorant to claim that He who existed before all ages and is coeternal with the Father needs to begin to exist a second time. But it is because, uniting human nature to His Person for us and for our salvation, He came forth from a woman, that He is said to be born carnally.”

**Reply to objection 3:** The nativity belongs to the person as its *subject*, but to the nature as its *terminus*. And it is possible for many changes to exist in a single subject, though these changes have to vary with respect to their termini. (We talk this way not to imply that the eternal nativity is a change or movement, but because it is signified in the manner of a change or movement.)

**Reply to objection 4:** Christ can be said to be born twice in accord with two nativities. For just as that individual is said to run twice who runs at two times, so that individual can be said to be born twice who is born once in eternity and once in time, since eternity and time are much more different from one another than two [distinct] times are, even though each designates a measure of duration.

### Article 3

#### Can the Blessed Virgin be called the mother of Christ with respect to His temporal nativity?

It seems that the Blessed Virgin cannot be called the mother of Christ with respect to His temporal nativity (*secundum temporalem nativitatem Christi beata virgo non possit dici mater eius*):

**Objection 1:** As was explained above (q. 32, a. 4), the Blessed Virgin Mary did nothing by an active power in the generation of Christ, but instead supplied the matter alone. But this does not seem sufficient for the notion of a mother; otherwise, wood would be called the mother of a bed or a bench. Therefore, it seems that the Blessed Virgin cannot be called the mother of Christ.

**Objection 2:** Christ was born miraculously of the Blessed Virgin. But a miraculous generation is not sufficient for either the notion of motherhood or the notion of filiation; for instance, we do not say that Eve was the daughter of Adam. Therefore, it seems that neither should Christ be called the son of the Blessed Virgin.

**Objection 3:** The separation of the semen seems to involve the mother. But as Damascene points out in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, Christ’s body “was formed not by the operation of semen, but creatively (*conditive*) by the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, it seems that the Blessed Virgin should not be called the mother of Christ.

**But contrary to this:** Matthew 1:18 says, “The generation of the Christ took place in this way. When the mother of Jesus had been betrothed to Joseph ...”

**I respond:** The Blessed Virgin Mary is the true and natural mother of Christ. For as was explained

above (q. 5, a. 1 and q. 31, a. 5), the body of Christ was not, as the heretic Valentinus claimed, brought down from heaven, but was instead taken from His virgin mother and formed from her purest bloods. And as is clear from what was said above (q. 31, a. 5 and q. 32, a. 4), it is this alone that is required for the notion of a mother. Hence, the Blessed Virgin is truly the mother of God.

**Reply to objection 1:** As was explained above (q. 32, a. 3), paternity, or maternity, and filiation are fitting not in just any sort of generation, but only in the generation of living things. And so if something inanimate comes to be from some matter, the relation of maternity and filiation does not thereby result in it; this occurs only in the generation of living things and is properly called a nativity.

**Reply to objection 2:** As Damascene explains in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, the temporal nativity by which Christ is born for the sake of our salvation is (a) “in one sense *in accord with us (secundum nos)*, since He was a man born of a woman and at a time that was appropriate given His conception (*et tempore conceptionis debito*), but (b) in another sense *beyond us (super nos)*, since it was not from semen but from the Holy Spirit and the holy Virgin, beyond the law governing conception.” So, then, on the part of the mother the nativity in question was *natural*, whereas on the part of the operation of the Holy Spirit it was *miraculous*. Hence, the Blessed Virgin is the true and natural mother of Christ.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (q. 31, a. 5, ad 3 and q. 32, a. 4), the release of the female seed is not necessary for conception. And so the release of this seed is not required for being a mother.

#### Article 4

##### Should the Blessed Virgin be called the Mother of God?

It seems that the Blessed Virgin should not be called the Mother of God (*beata virgo non debeat dici mater Dei*):

**Objection 1:** One should not make any claim about the divine mysteries that is not taken from Sacred Scripture. But we never read in Sacred Scripture that [the Blessed Virgin] is the Mother of God or that she gives birth to God (*sed numquam in sacra Scriptura legitur quod sit mater aut genetrix Dei*). Instead, we read that she is “the mother of Christ” or “the mother of the child,” as is clear from Matthew 1:18. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin should not be called the Mother of God.

**Objection 2:** Christ is called God because of His divine nature. But His divine nature did not receive a beginning of its existence from the Virgin. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin should not be called the Mother of God.

**Objection 3:** The name ‘God’ is predicated in common (*communiter*) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, it seems to follow that the Blessed Virgin is the mother of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—which is absurd. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin should not be called the Mother of God.

**But contrary to this:** In the chapters of Cyril, approved by the synod of Ephesus, we read: “If anyone does not profess that (a) Emmanuel is God in truth and that (b) for this reason the holy Virgin is the Mother of God, since she gave birth carnally to the Word of God made flesh, let him be anathema.”

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 16, a. 1), every name that signifies a nature in the concrete can supposit for any *hypostasis* of that nature. Now since, as was explained above (q. 2, a. 3), the union of the Incarnation is effected in a *hypostasis*, it is clear that the name ‘God’ can supposit for a *hypostasis* that has a human nature and a divine nature. And so whatever belongs to the human nature or to the divine nature can be attributed to that person, either insofar as a name signifying the divine nature

supposits for it or insofar as a name signifying the human nature supposits for it.

Now *being conceived* and *being born* are attributed to a *hypostasis* with respect to that nature in which it is conceived and born. Therefore, since, as was explained above (q. 33, a. 3), the human nature was assumed by the divine person at the very beginning of the conception, it follows that what was conceived and born of the Virgin could truly be called God. But a given woman is called the mother of a given individual by the fact that she conceived and bore him. Hence, it follows that the Blessed Virgin is truly called the Mother of God.

For one could deny that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God only if either (a) the human nature was subjected to the conception and the nativity before the man in question was the Son of God, as Photinus claimed, or (b) the human nature was never assumed (*non fuisset assumpta*) into a unity with the person or *hypostasis* of the Son of God, as Nestorius claimed. But both of these claims are erroneous. Hence, it is heretical to deny that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God.

**Reply to objection 1:** This was an objection made by Nestorius. The objection is resolved by the fact that even though one does not find it explicitly stated in Scripture that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, what *is* found explicitly stated in Scripture is that (a) “Jesus Christ is true God,” as is clear from 1 John 5:20, and that (b) the Blessed Virgin is “the mother of Jesus Christ,” as is clear from Matthew 1:18. Thus it follows with necessity from these words of Scripture that she is the Mother of God.

Again, Romans 9:5 says, “Christ, who is from the Jews according to the flesh, is over all things, God blessed forever.” But He is from the Jews only by the mediation of the Blessed Virgin. Hence, “He who is above all things, God blessed forever,” was truly born of the Blessed Virgin as of His mother.

**Reply to objection 2:** This objection comes from Nestorius. But in a certain letter written against Nestorius, Cyril disposes of it by saying, “It is just like when a man’s soul is born with its own body, and the soul and body are thought of as one being. And if anyone wants to claim that the mother of the flesh is not likewise the mother of the soul, he is going way too far (*nimis superflue loquitur*). We see a similar movement in the case of the generation of Christ. For the Word of God was born of the substance of God the Father, but because He took on flesh, it is necessary to profess that He was born of a woman with respect to His flesh.” Therefore, one should claim that the Blessed Virgin is called the Mother of God not because she is the mother of the divine nature, but because she is the mother, with respect to the human nature, of a person who has a divine nature and a human nature.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was established above (q. 16, a. 1 and *ST* 1, q. 39, a. 4), even though the name ‘God’ is common to the three persons, nonetheless, it sometimes supposits just for the person of the Father, sometimes just for the person of the Son or the Holy Spirit. And so when it is claimed that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, the name ‘God’ is suppositing just for the incarnate person of the Son.

## Article 5

### Are there two [relations of] filiation in Christ?

It seems that in Christ there are two [relations of] filiation (*in Christo sint duae filiationis*):

**Objection 1:** A nativity is a cause of a filiation. But in the case of Christ there are two nativities. Therefore, in the case of Christ there are likewise two filiations.

**Objection 2:** Filiation, by which an individual is called the child of some mother or father, depends in some sense on the individual himself, since the *esse* of a relation consists in one thing’s being related in some way to another. Hence, if one of the related individuals is taken away, the other is taken

away. But the eternal [relation of] filiation by which Christ is the Son of God the Father does not depend on His mother, since nothing eternal depends on anything temporal. Therefore, Christ is not the son of His mother by an eternal [relation of] filiation. Therefore, either (a) He is her son in no way at all, which is contrary to what was said above (aa. 3-4), or (b) He has to be her son by a different and temporal [relation of] filiation. Therefore, there are two filiations in Christ.

**Objection 3:** One of two related things is placed in the definition of the other, and from this it is clear that one of the related things is given its species by the other. But one and the same thing cannot exist in diverse species. Therefore, it seems to be impossible for one and the same relation to be terminated in altogether diverse termini. But Christ is called the son of an eternal Father and of a temporal mother, which are altogether diverse termini. Therefore, it seems that it is not possible for Christ to be called the son of His father and His mother by the same relation. Therefore, there are two filiations in Christ.

**But contrary to this:** As Damascene explains in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, the things that belong to a *nature* are multiplied in the case of Christ, but not the things that belong to the *person*. But as is clear from what was said in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 32, a. 3 and q. 40, a. 2), filiation pertains specifically to the *person*, since it is a personal property. Therefore, in the case of Christ there is just one [relation of] filiation.

**I respond:** On this question there are diverse opinions. Some writers, focusing on the *cause* of a [relation of] filiation, which is a nativity, posit two filiations in Christ, just as there are likewise two nativities. By contrast, others, focusing on the *subject* of a filiation, viz., the person or *hypostasis*, posit just a single filiation in Christ, just as there is likewise just a single *hypostasis* or person.

For whether there is one relation or more than one relation has to do not with the *termini*, but with the *cause* or the *subject*. For if it had to do with the *termini*, then each human being would have within himself two filiations, one by which he is related to his father and another by which he is related to his mother. But to one who considers the matter correctly, it is clear that, because of the oneness of the *cause*, each individual is related by the same relation [of filiation] to his father and his mother. For an individual is born by the same nativity to his father and his mother, and so he is related by the same relation [of filiation] to both of them. And the same line of reasoning holds for the case of a professor who teaches the same material to many students, and for the case of a lord who governs different subjects by the same power. On the other hand, if there are diverse causes differing in species, the result seems to be that the relations differ in species. Hence, there is nothing to prevent more than one such relation from existing in the same individual. For instance, if someone is a teacher of grammar to some students and a teacher of logic to other students, then the character of *teacher* is different in the two cases, and so one and the same man can, by different relations, be the teacher either of different students or of the same students with respect to different subject matters. But it can sometimes happen that (a) an individual has a relation to more than one individual because of diverse causes, and yet that (b) the relation is of the same species, as when an individual is the father of different children because of different acts of generating. Hence, [the relation of] fatherhood does not differ in species, since the acts of generation are the same in species. And since it is impossible for more than one form of the same species to exist simultaneously in the same subject, it is impossible for there to be more than one [relation of] fatherhood in an individual who is the father of more than one child by natural generation. It would be different, however, if he were the father of one of them by natural generation and of another of them by adoption.

Now it is clear that it is not by one and the same nativity that Christ is born of the Father from eternity and by His mother in time, and neither is there one species of nativity (*nec nativitas est unius speciei*). Hence, on this score one has to say that in Christ there are diverse relations of filiation (*esse diversas filiationes*), one temporal and the other eternal. However, since the subject of a relation of filiation is not a nature or a part of a nature but is instead a person or *hypostasis* alone, whereas in Christ

the only person or *hypostasis* is eternal, there cannot exist in Christ any relation of filiation which does not exist in an eternal *hypostasis*. But as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 13, a. 7), any relation that is predicated of God temporally (*ex tempore*) does not posit within God Himself any *real entity* (*non aliquid secundum rem*), but instead only posits something *according to reason* (*aliquid secundum rationem tantum*). And so the filiation by which Christ is related to His mother cannot be a *real* relation, but can only be a relation *of reason* (*filiatio qua Christus refertur ad matrem non potest esse realis relatio sed solum secundum rationem*).

And so on this score both opinions are true. For if one focuses on the *complete notions of filiation*, then he must claim that there are two filiations, corresponding to the two nativities. On the other hand, if we focus on the *subject* of [the relation of] filiation, which can only be an eternal suppositum, then in Christ it is only the eternal filiation that exists as a reality (*non potest in Christo esse realiter nisi filiatio aeterna*). Still, Christ is relationally called ‘son’ with respect to His mother by a relation which is understood concomitantly with her [real] relation of motherhood to Him—just as God is called ‘Lord’ by a relation which is understood concomitantly with the real relation by which a creature is subjected to God. And even though the relation *Lord* is not a real entity in God, He is nonetheless really the Lord, because of the creature’s real [relation of] subjection to Him. Similarly, Christ is really the son of His Virgin Mother because of Her real relation of motherhood to Christ.

**Reply to objection 1:** The temporal nativity would cause a temporal [relation of] filiation in Christ if there existed in Christ a subject fit for this sort of [relation of] filiation. But this cannot be the case, since, as has been explained, an eternal suppositum cannot receive a temporal relation. Nor, again, can Christ be said to receive a temporal [relation of] filiation by reason of His human nature in the way that He *can receive* a temporal nativity. For His human nature would have to be in some sense subject to [the relation of] filiation in the way that it is in some sense subject to a [temporal] nativity; for when an Ethiopian is said to be white by reason of his teeth, it is necessary for the Ethiopian’s teeth to be the subject of whiteness. But the human nature cannot *in any way* be the subject of [a relation of] filiation, since this relation has to do *directly* with the person.

**Reply to objection 2:** The eternal filiation does not depend on a temporal mother; however, a temporal relation, which is dependent on Christ’s mother and in accord with which Christ is called the son of His mother, is understood concomitantly with this eternal filiation.

**Reply to objection 3:** As *Metaphysics* 4 says, “*One and being* imply each other (*unum et ens se consequuntur*).” And so just as it is possible for a relation to be a [real] entity in one terminus but only a relation of reason (*ratio tantum*) and not a [real] entity and in the other terminus—as the Philosopher explains for the case of *knowledge* and *knowable thing* in *Metaphysics* 5—so, too, it is possible for there to be a single relation on the part of one terminus and many relations on the part of the other terminus. For instance, in the case of human beings, there are two relations on the part of the parents, one a [relation of] fatherhood and the other a [relation of] motherhood, and these relations differ in species because the father is a principle of generation in one way and the mother in another way. (If many individuals were the principle of a single action in the same way—as, for instance, when many individuals are dragging the same boat—then there would be one and the same relation in all of them.) By contrast, on the part of the child there is just one real relation of filiation (*una sola filiatio secundum rem*), but two relations of reason (*sed duplex secundum rationem*) which (a) correspond to each of the [real] relations belonging to the parents and which (b) are viewed from two intellectual perspectives (*secundum duos respectus intellectus*). And in this same way, as regards what exists in Christ (*quantum ad aliquid in Christo*), there is just one real [relation of] filiation, which points toward [Christ’s] eternal Father, but there is another temporal relation [of reason], which points toward [Christ’s] temporal mother.

## Article 6

### Was Christ born without pain on the part of His mother?

It seems that Christ was not born without pain on the part of His mother (*Christus non fuerit natus sine dolore matris*):

**Objection 1:** Just as the death of men follows from the sin of the first parents—this according to Genesis 2:17 (“On whatever day you eat, you shall die”)—so, too, does the pain of childbirth—this according to Genesis 3:16 (“In pain shall you give birth to children”). But Christ willed to be subject to death. Therefore, it seems that, by parity reasoning, His birth should have been accompanied by pain.

**Objection 2:** The end is proportioned to the beginning. But the end of Christ’s life was accompanied by pain—this according to Isaiah 53:4 (“Truly, he bore our sorrows”). Therefore, it seems that there was likewise the pain of childbirth in His nativity.

**Objection 3:** The book *De Ortu Salvatoris* tells us that present at Christ’s nativity were midwives, who seem necessary for the one giving birth because of the pain. Therefore, it seems that the Blessed Virgin gave birth in pain.

**But contrary to this:** In a sermon on the nativity Augustine, addressing the virgin mother, says, “You did not conceive without purity, you did not give birth with pain.”

**I respond:** The pain of childbirth is caused by the opening of a passage through which the child comes out. But it was explained above (q. 28, a. 2) that Christ came out of the closed womb of His mother, and so there was no opening of a passage there. And for this reason there was no pain in that birth, just as there was no corruption; instead, there was the greatest joy because the God-man was born into the world—this according to Isaiah 35:1-2 (“[The wilderness] shall bud forth and blossom like a lily, and shall rejoice with joy and praise”).

**Reply to objection 1:** The pain of childbirth in a woman follows upon intercourse with a man (*consequitur in muliere commixtionem virilem*). Hence, Genesis 3:16, after it says, “You shall give birth in pain,” adds, “and you shall be under the power of the man.” But as Augustine explains in the sermon *De Assumptione Beatae Virginis*, the Virgin Mother of God is excepted from this penalty: “Since it was without the dregs of sin and without the damage wrought by sexual mingling that she received Christ, she gave birth without pain; and without the violation of her integrity, she remained whole in the purity of her virginity.” On the other hand, in order to make satisfaction for us Christ accepted death by His own will and not, as it were, by the necessity inflicted by the penalty in question. For He Himself was not under the obligation to die.

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as Christ “by dying destroyed our death” (cf. 2 Timothy 1:10), so by His suffering He freed us from suffering, and this is why He willed to die in pain. But since Christ came to make satisfaction for *our sins*, the pain of His mother’s childbearing was not relevant to [the mission of] Christ. And so it was not necessary for His mother to give birth in pain.

**Reply to objection 3:** Luke 2:7 says the Blessed Virgin herself “wrapped in swaddling clothes” the child whom she had brought forth “and laid Him in a manger.” This shows that the story told by the apocryphal book cited in the objection is false. Hence, in *Contra Helvidium* Jerome says, “There was no midwife present; no zealous care by little women interfered. She was both mother and midwife. ‘She wrapped the infant in swaddling clothes,’ it says, ‘and laid him in a manger.’ This sentence proves the absurdity of the apocryphal writings.”



## Article 7

### Was it fitting for Christ to be born in Bethlehem?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ to be born in Bethlehem (*Christus non debuit in Bethlehem nasci*):

**Objection 1:** Isaiah 2:3 says, “The Law will go out from Sion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” But Christ is truly the Word of God. Therefore, He should have proceeded into the world from Jerusalem.

**Objection 2:** Matthew 2:23 says that it had been written of the Christ that he would be called a Nazarene. This was taken from Isaiah 11:1, “A flower shall rise up from his root.” For ‘Nazareth’ means ‘flower’. But an individual is named especially after the place of his birth. Therefore, it seems that He should have been born in Nazareth, where He was also conceived and brought up.

**Objection 3:** Our Lord was born into the world in order to proclaim the true Faith—this according to John 18:37 (“For this was I born and for this I came into the world, to give testimony to the truth”). But He would have been able to do this more easily if He had been born in Rome, which at that time ruled the world; hence, Paul, writing to the Romans, says in Romans 1:8, “Your faith is spoken of in the whole world.” Therefore, it seems that it was not fitting for Him to be born in Bethlehem.

**But contrary to this:** Micah 5:2 says, “And you, Bethlehem, of the land of Judah ... out of you shall come forth unto me he who is to rule over Israel.”

**I respond:** There were two reasons why Christ wanted to be born in Bethlehem:

First of all, because “He was made from the seed of David according to the flesh,” as Romans 1:3 puts it, and it was David to whom a specific promise had been made about the Christ—this according to 2 Kings 23:1 (“[David], the man to whom it was appointed, spoke concerning the Christ of the God of Jacob ...”). And so He wanted to be born in Bethlehem, where David had been born, in order to show by the place of His nativity that the promise made to David had been fulfilled. And the evangelist notes this by saying, “... because he was of the house and of the family of David” (Luke 2:4).

Second, because, as Gregory explains in a homily, “‘Bethlehem’ means ‘house of bread’. It is Christ Himself who says, ‘I am the living bread that has come down from heaven’.”

**Reply to objection 1:** Just as David was born in Bethlehem, so he also chose Jerusalem to establish the seat of his kingdom there and to build the temple there. And so Jerusalem is at one and the same time a kingly city and a priestly city. Now Christ’s priesthood and His kingly reign were principally consummated in His passion. And so it was fitting for Him to choose Bethlehem for His nativity but Jerusalem for His passion.

At the same time, He thereby also confuted the glory of men, who take pride in the fact that they derive their origin from the great cities in which they mainly want to be honored. Christ, by contrast, chose to be born in a humble city and to suffer dishonor in the great city.

**Reply to objection 2:** Christ wanted to ‘flower’ in virtuous living within His community and not in His carnal origin. And so He chose to be educated and brought up in the city of Nazareth. On the other hand, He wanted to be born away from home, as it were, because, as Gregory explains, “through the human nature that He had assumed He was born, as it were, in an alien place—alien not to His power, but to His [divine] nature.” And, as Bede likewise says, “By being destitute in a place of lodging, He was preparing many mansions for us in the house of His Father.”

**Reply to objection 3:** As a certain sermon of the Council of Ephesus says, “If He had chosen the great city of Rome, the change in the world would have been attributed to the power of her citizens. If He had been the son of the emperor, they would have attributed His service to the emperor’s power. But in order for it to be known that it was God who was transforming the world, He chose an impoverished

mother and an even more impoverished birthplace.”

As 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, “God chose the weak things of the world in order to confound the strong.” And so, in order to show His power to a greater extent, in Rome itself, which was the capital of the world, He established the head of His Church in a sign of complete victory, in order that the Faith might spread from there to the whole world—this according to Isaiah 24:5-6 (“The high city He shall lay low ... The feet of the poor”—i.e. of Christ—“shall trample it down, the steps of the needy”—i.e., of the apostles Peter and Paul.)

## Article 8

### Was Christ born at a fitting time?

It seems that Christ was not born at a fitting time (*Christus non fuerit congruo tempore natus*):

**Objection 1:** Christ had come into the world to call us back to freedom. But He was born in an age of servitude—more specifically, as Luke 2 reports, an age in which the whole world was being enrolled by the command of Augustus and made, as it were, subject to paying him tribute. Therefore, it seems that Christ was not born at a fitting time.

**Objection 2:** The promises about the Christ who was to be born were not made to the gentiles—this according to Romans 9:4 (“[The Israelites] ... to whom belong the promises”). But, as is clear from Matthew 2:1 (“When Jesus was born in the days of King Herod ...”), Christ was born at a time when a foreign-born king ruled. Therefore, it seems that He was not born at a fitting time.

**Objection 3:** The time of Christ’s presence in the world is compared to the daytime, because He is “the light of the world.” Hence, in John 9:4 He Himself says, “I must do the works of Him who sent me, while it is still day.” But the days are longer in the summer than in the winter. Therefore, since He was born in the dead of winter, eight days before the first day of January, it seems that He was not born at a fitting time.

**But contrary to this:** Galatians 4:4 says, “When the fullness of time arrived, God sent His Son, made from a woman, made under the Law.”

**I respond:** The difference between Christ and other men is that other men are born subject to the necessity of time, whereas Christ, as Lord and Creator of all times, chose for Himself the time at which He would be born, in the same way that He chose His mother and chose the place. And since the things done by God are ordered and disposed in a fitting way, it follows that Christ was born at the most fitting time of all.

**Reply to objection 1:** Christ came to *lead us back* to the state of freedom from the state of slavery. And so, just as he took on our mortality in order to lead us back to life, so, as Bede says, “He deigned to take flesh at a time when, shortly after His birth, He would be enrolled in Caesar’s census and thus submit Himself to servitude for the sake of our liberation.”

Also, at that time, when the whole world was living under one ruler, peace existed in abundance in the world. And so it was fitting for Christ, “who is our peace, making both one,” as Ephesians 2:14 says, to be born at that time. Hence, in *Super Isaiam* Jerome says, “Let us go through the old histories and we will find that in the whole world there was discord until the twenty-eighth year of Caesar Augustus. But when our Lord was born, all wars ceased”—this according to Isaiah 2:4 (“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation”).

Again, it was fitting for Christ to be born at a time in which one ruler dominated, since He had come, as John 10:16 says, “to gather His own into one, so that there might be one fold and one shepherd.”

**Reply to objection 2:** Christ wanted to be born in the time of a foreign-born king in order that the prophecy of Jacob might be fulfilled (Genesis 49:10): “The scepter shall not be taken away from Judah, nor the ruler from his thigh, until He who is to be sent comes.” For as Chrysostom says in *Super Matthaenum* says, “As long as Judah’s tribe was under Judean kings—however sinful those kings may have been—the prophets were sent for its healing. Now, however, when God’s Law itself was under the power of a wicked king, Christ was born, because a great and hopeless disease demanded a more skillful physician.”

**Reply to objection 3:** As it says in *De Quaestionibus Novi et Veteris Testamenti*, “Christ wanted to be born when the light of the day begins to take on an increase,” this in order to show that He had come so that men might grow toward the divine light—in accord with Luke 1:79 (“... to illuminate those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death”).

Again, He chose the harshness of the winter for His birth, in order to suffer, for our sake, the affliction of the flesh from that time on.