



# Our Mothers in Faith

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## Introduction

Throughout salvation history, women have played a crucial role. Woman, as well as man, was made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27) The book of Genesis presents woman as the pinnacle of creation because she was created last. (Genesis 2:21-23) God gives an equal blessing to Adam and Eve, and when they sin God gives them comparable curses. Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit mattered and Adam trusted her. (See Genesis 3)

God spoke with women, such as Rebekah (Genesis 25) to further salvation history. Women led God's people as judge (Deborah in Judges 4 & 5) or Queen Mother (Bathsheba 1 Kings 2 & Athaliah in 2 Kings 8). Judith and Jael are king slayers who save their people (Judith 13 & Judges 4:17-21). Ester masterfully saved her people despite suffering abuse and the perils of her position as a kidnapped slave-queen to an enemy king. The Old and

New Testaments depict women both as great saints and great sinners, and God's plan continued through both groups.

Physical strength commonly far less than that of men, the dangers of child birth, and biological motherhood seemed to limit the women of days past, but God shows His might through "lifting up the lowly." (See Luke 1:49,52) God shows His might by using the physically weak or the outnumbered to win battles, using not only women such as Jael and Judith, but also David (1 Samuel 17) and Gideon's small fighting force (Judges 6). God possesses all power. The Psalmist writes,

- <sup>16</sup> "A king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.  
<sup>17</sup> The war horse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.  
<sup>18</sup> Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
<sup>19</sup> to deliver their soul from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine." (Psalm 33:16-19)

Repeatedly, the women in the Bible demonstrate the power of God and their trust in His promises by obtaining victory against overwhelming odds.

At other times, scripture describes God as a mother to demonstrate His love, care, gentleness, strength, and life giving nature. Mothers nurture the children in their wombs and the infants in their lap, God nurtures us. Mothers labor and struggle for their children both before,

during and after her child's birth, God's love labors for us.

“For a long time I have held my peace,  
I have kept still and restrained myself;  
now I will cry out like a woman in labor,  
I will gasp and pant.” (Isaiah 42:14)

“Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.” (Isaiah 49:15)

“As a mother comforts her child,  
so I will comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:13)

“I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs,  
and will tear open the covering of their heart;” (Hosea  
13:8)

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and  
stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to  
gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood  
under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34)

Just as one looks to one's father to see an image and  
example of God, so one looks to one's mother to see who  
God is like.

Besides one's experience with one's own mother,  
one can encounter God through a relationship with the  
holy women of faith who came before us. Yet, as far as  
we know, no book of the Bible was written by a woman.  
Fewer women of ancient days were literate than men who  
as a class were themselves often illiterate. The precursors

to paper were expensive, the methods, rules, and characters of writing were unrefined and inefficient, and there was relatively little to read, and few people to whom to write. Some priests and religious leaders would read sacred texts, some kings or tribal leaders would employ a scribe trained since birth, and occasionally wealth would afford a child the leisure to become a scholar. Occasionally, merchants would learn to read and write from necessity. The priests, scholars, professional scribes and occasional messy novices (Galatians 6:11) would write, and when they had a text they would proclaim aloud it for their communities. We regularly read the testimonies of faithful men, but our relationship with God, whether we ourselves are men or women, need the examples and the testimony of faithful women.

As mentioned above, the scriptures contain and highlight the accounts of the virtues, faults, trials, trauma, and victories of women. Matthew's Gospel goes so far as to emphasize the role of five women above the role of most of the 42 men in Jesus' ancestry. (Matthew 1:1-17) These women were highlighted because each had found herself in the midst of scandal or slander. Yet, men's accounts of women's experiences and faith are men's accounts. Providentially, scripture understands our spiritual need occasionally presenting a woman and the world in her own words, most notably in the form of songs or prayers. These verses stand as a testament of the bold and vibrant faith of women throughout history. Their words, their relationship with God, and their own self knowledge riveted their communities and have

helped form the faith of generations of believers of both sexes

The following pages explore how woman reveals God, for she is created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:27) and how women have experienced God.

In Part 1, encounter the words of the biblical mothers and “championesses” of the faith whose words intertwined with the Holy Spirit’s inspiration to become Sacred Scripture. Through these women’s words, God Himself speaks.

In Part 2, read the earliest extant document written by a Christian woman, the prison diary of Perpetua—whose martyrdom has converted and encouraged many, and whose visions are early witnesses of prayer for the dead.

In Part 3, we join St. Ephrem in learning from the lullabies he imagines Mary sings to Jesus, and joining in the praises others sing to Mary who Ephrem presents as the preeminent theologian of the Church. While Ephrem is a man, we recognize in his quest, our own quest to learn to encounter God from holy women.

# **Part 1**

## **The Words of Biblical Women**

### Miriam

Miriam was a prophetess and the sister of Moses. She helped her mother save her infant brother during the time of persecution, and shrewdly negotiated with a daughter of Pharaoh who wanted to adopt the child for her mother to be paid to nurse her now protected younger brother. Miriam sometimes struggled with jealousy regarding God's special selection of Moses, but sought God both in praise and repentance. A short chant that she composed on God's victory at the Red Sea makes its way into scripture. Micah refers to her as a leader of the people. (See Micah 6:4), She appears in Exodus 2 (watching over her infant brother) & 15 (singing her hymn), Numbers 12 (jealous of Moses, temporarily receiving leprosy) & Numbers 20 (her death is recorded).



<sup>19</sup> When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

<sup>20</sup> Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

(Exodus 15:21)

## Deborah

Deborah was a prophetess and a judge- a loose leader of God's people following in the footsteps of Moses. The Bible's account of Deborah is the only account of a woman holding the divinely appointed position of judge. Deborah judges during a time of persecution under Canaanite rule. Deborah summoned Barak, a warrior chieftain of the tribe of Naphtali (one of the 12 tribes of Israel), to deliver a message from God commanding that he gather troops and fight, that God might secure victory. Her faithful leadership is recounted in Judges 4 & 5. Below find her poem praising God for victory.

Then Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying:

“When locks are long in Israel,  
when the people offer themselves willingly—  
bless the Lord!

“Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;  
to the Lord I will sing,  
I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.

“Lord, when you went out from Seir,  
when you marched from the region of Edom,  
the earth trembled,  
and the heavens poured,  
the clouds indeed poured water.

The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai,  
before the Lord, the God of Israel.

“In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,  
in the days of Jael, caravans ceased  
and travelers kept to the byways.

The peasantry prospered in Israel,  
they grew fat on plunder,  
because you arose, Deborah,  
arose as a mother in Israel.

When new gods were chosen,

then war was in the gates.  
Was shield or spear to be seen  
among forty thousand in Israel?

My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel  
who offered themselves willingly among the people.  
Bless the Lord.

“Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,  
you who sit on rich carpets  
and you who walk by the way.

To the sound of musicians at the watering places,  
there they repeat the triumphs of the Lord,  
the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel.  
“Then down to the gates marched the people of the  
Lord.

“Awake, awake, Deborah!  
Awake, awake, utter a song!  
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,  
O son of Abinoam.

Then down marched the remnant of the noble;  
the people of the Lord marched down for him against  
the mighty.

From Ephraim they set out into the valley,  
following you, Benjamin, with your kin;  
from Machir marched down the commanders,

and from Zebulun those who bear the marshal's  
staff;

the chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah,  
and Issachar faithful to Barak;  
into the valley they rushed out at his heels.  
Among the clans of Reuben  
there were great searchings of heart.

Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,  
to hear the piping for the flocks?  
Among the clans of Reuben  
there were great searchings of heart.

Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;  
and Dan, why did he abide with the ships?  
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea,  
settling down by his landings.

Zebulun is a people that scorned death;  
Naphtali too, on the heights of the field.

“The kings came, they fought;  
then fought the kings of Canaan,  
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;  
they got no spoils of silver.

The stars fought from heaven,  
from their courses they fought against Sisera.

The torrent Kishon swept them away,

the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon.  
March on, my soul, with might!

“Then loud beat the horses’ hoofs  
with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.

“Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord,  
curse bitterly its inhabitants,  
because they did not come to the help of the Lord,  
to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

“Most blessed of women be Jael,  
the wife of Heber the Kenite,  
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.

He asked water and she gave him milk,  
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.

She put her hand to the tent peg  
and her right hand to the workmen’s mallet;  
she struck Sisera a blow,  
she crushed his head,  
she shattered and pierced his temple.

He sank, he fell,  
he lay still at her feet;  
at her feet he sank, he fell;  
where he sank, there he fell dead.

“Out of the window she peered,  
the mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice:

‘Why is his chariot so long in coming?  
Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?’

Her wisest ladies make answer,  
indeed, she answers the question herself:

‘Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?—  
A girl or two for every man;  
spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera,  
spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,  
two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as  
spoil?’

“So perish all your enemies, O Lord!  
But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its  
might.”

And the land had rest forty years. (Judges 5)

## Hannah

Hannah knew the sorrow of barrenness and longed for a child. In addition to the sorrow she faced because of her health problem, she also faced the judgments of her community, who considered barrenness a shame. Hannah perseveres in faith in her pain. She courageously stands up to the high priest Eli who mistakes her prayer for drunkenness. She hopes in God when encouraged by Eli. She offers her son Samuel as a Nazarite and a temple initiate, mirroring Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and foreshadowing the sacrifice of the God the Son on the Cross. Hannah is considered to be a prophetess. Her story is found in 1 Samuel:2-2:21. Below find her prayer in the midst of her pain.



Hannah prayed and said,

“My heart exults in the Lord;  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.

“There is no Holy One like the Lord,  
no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken,  
but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for  
bread,  
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.  
The barren has borne seven,  
but she who has many children is forlorn.

The Lord kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,  
and on them he has set the world.

“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,  
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;  
for not by might does one prevail.

The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered;  
the Most High will thunder in heaven.  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
he will give strength to his king,  
and exalt the power of his anointed.” (1 Samuel 2:1-  
10)

## Judith

Judith lost her husband in a tragic accident and was mourning for over three years when she heard her nation was under attack and her people were terrified and unwilling to trust in the Lord. Judith has great faith, yet also seems to carry the burden of loss and trauma. Judith exhorts the people, to trust in God, personally beheads Holofernes, and God delivers victory over the Assyrians through her. Judith's endurance in mourning demonstrates an impressive self-mastery and maturity beyond her years. Her words demonstrate her prophetic gifts. Her actions demonstrate her prudence, chastity, courage, and temperance. Her plan demonstrates both her trust in God and her willingness to self-sacrifice. She symbolically fulfills God's promise in Genesis 3:15 of Crushing the head of the Serpent. She foreshadows Jesus' triumph over death in Sheol when He whose heel is crushed by a nail crushes the head of Satan. Her story is found in Judith 8-16.

## Judith's Speech

When Judith heard the harsh words spoken by the people against the ruler, because they were faint for lack of water, and when she heard all that Uzziah said to them, and how he promised them under oath to surrender the town to the Assyrians after five days, she sent her maid, who was in charge of all she possessed, to summon Uzziah and Chabris and Charmis, the elders of her town. They came to her, and she said to them:

“Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia! What you have said to the people today is not right; you have even sworn and pronounced this oath between God and you, promising to surrender the town to our enemies unless the Lord turns and helps us within so many days. Who are you to put God to the test today, and to set yourselves up in the place of God in human affairs? You are putting the Lord Almighty to the test, but you will never learn anything! You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart or understand the workings of the human mind; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? No, my brothers, do not anger the Lord our God. For if he does not choose to help us within these five days, he has power to protect us within any time he pleases, or even to destroy us in the presence of our enemies. Do not try to bind the purposes of the Lord our God; for God is not like a human being, to be threatened, or like a mere mortal, to be won over by pleading. Therefore, while we wait for his deliverance, let us call

upon him to help us, and he will hear our voice, if it pleases him.

“For never in our generation, nor in these present days, has there been any tribe or family or people or town of ours that worships gods made with hands, as was done in days gone by. That was why our ancestors were handed over to the sword and to pillage, and so they suffered a great catastrophe before our enemies. But we know no other god but him, and so we hope that he will not disdain us or any of our nation. For if we are captured, all Judea will be captured and our sanctuary will be plundered; and he will make us pay for its desecration with our blood. The slaughter of our kindred and the captivity of the land and the desolation of our inheritance—all this he will bring on our heads among the Gentiles, wherever we serve as slaves; and we shall be an offense and a disgrace in the eyes of those who acquire us. For our slavery will not bring us into favor, but the Lord our God will turn it to dishonor.

“Therefore, my brothers, let us set an example for our kindred, for their lives depend upon us, and the sanctuary—both the temple and the altar—rests upon us. In spite of everything let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who is putting us to the test as he did our ancestors. Remember what he did with Abraham, and how he tested Isaac, and what happened to Jacob in Syrian Mesopotamia, while he was tending the sheep of Laban, his mother’s brother. For he has not tried us with fire, as he did them, to search their hearts, nor has he taken

vengeance on us; but the Lord scourges those who are close to him in order to admonish them.”

Then Uzziah said to her, “All that you have said was spoken out of a true heart, and there is no one who can deny your words. Today is not the first time your wisdom has been shown, but from the beginning of your life all the people have recognized your understanding, for your heart’s disposition is right. But the people were so thirsty that they compelled us to do for them what we have promised, and made us take an oath that we cannot break. Now since you are a God-fearing woman, pray for us, so that the Lord may send us rain to fill our cisterns. Then we will no longer feel faint from thirst.”

Then Judith said to them, “Listen to me. I am about to do something that will go down through all generations of our descendants. Stand at the town gate tonight so that I may go out with my maid; and within the days after which you have promised to surrender the town to our enemies, the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand. Only, do not try to find out what I am doing; for I will not tell you until I have finished what I am about to do.”

Uzziah and the rulers said to her, “Go in peace, and may the Lord God go before you, to take vengeance on our enemies.” So they returned from the tent and went to their posts. (Judith 8:9-33)

## The Song of Judith

And Judith said,

Begin a song to my God with tambourines,  
sing to my Lord with cymbals.  
Raise to him a new psalm;  
exalt him, and call upon his name.

For the Lord is a God who crushes wars;  
he sets up his camp among his people;  
he delivered me from the hands of my pursuers.

The Assyrian came down from the mountains of the  
north;  
he came with myriads of his warriors;  
their numbers blocked up the wadis,  
and their cavalry covered the hills.

He boasted that he would burn up my territory,  
and kill my young men with the sword,  
and dash my infants to the ground,  
and seize my children as booty,  
and take my virgins as spoil.

But the Lord Almighty has foiled them  
by the hand of a woman.

For their mighty one did not fall by the hands of the  
young men,  
nor did the sons of the Titans strike him down,

nor did tall giants set upon him;  
but Judith daughter of Merari  
with the beauty of her countenance undid him.

For she put away her widow's clothing  
to exalt the oppressed in Israel.  
She anointed her face with perfume;

she fastened her hair with a tiara  
and put on a linen gown to beguile him.

Her sandal ravished his eyes,  
her beauty captivated his mind,  
and the sword severed his neck!

The Persians trembled at her boldness,  
the Medes were daunted at her daring.

Then my oppressed people shouted;  
my weak people cried out, and the enemy trembled;  
they lifted up their voices, and the enemy were  
turned back.

Sons of slave-girls pierced them through  
and wounded them like the children of fugitives;  
they perished before the army of my Lord.

I will sing to my God a new song:  
O Lord, you are great and glorious,  
wonderful in strength, invincible.



Let all your creatures serve you,  
for you spoke, and they were made.  
You sent forth your spirit, and it formed them;  
there is none that can resist your voice.

For the mountains shall be shaken to their foundations  
with the waters;  
before your glance the rocks shall melt like wax.  
But to those who fear you  
you show mercy.

For every sacrifice as a fragrant offering is a small  
thing,  
and the fat of all whole burnt offerings to you is a  
very little thing;  
but whoever fears the Lord is great forever.

Woe to the nations that rise up against my people!  
The Lord Almighty will take vengeance on them in  
the day of judgment;  
he will send fire and worms into their flesh;  
they shall weep in pain forever.

## The Mother of King Lemuel

Little is known of the Mother of King Lemuel. It is slightly possible that she is Bathsheba, and that Lemuel is a name for Solomon who wrote much of the Book of Proverbs.

The Oracle below features advice for a king as well as advice for women on how to be holy, presented as a description of the kind of woman a man should want to marry. While some of the advice seems specific to a time and culture long past, a deeper reading reveals that the same virtues make one holy in both private or public life. The presentation of the poem as the words of the King, taught by his mother, juxtapose the care of parents for their children with the care of a ruler with his or her people. A case can be made that the role of the family is more important.

This Oracle foreshadows the role of Queen Mother fulfilled by Mary, when she is crowned in Revelations

11:19-12:6. The Mother of King Lemuel is mentioned only in Proverbs 31.

The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him:

No, my son! No, son of my womb!  
No, son of my vows!

Do not give your strength to women,  
your ways to those who destroy kings.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,  
it is not for kings to drink wine,  
or for rulers to desire strong drink;

or else they will drink and forget what has been  
decreed,  
and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Give strong drink to one who is perishing,  
and wine to those in bitter distress;

let them drink and forget their poverty,  
and remember their misery no more.

Speak out for those who cannot speak,  
for the rights of all the destitute.

Speak out, judge righteously,  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

## Ode to a Capable Wife

A capable wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant,  
she brings her food from far away.

She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her servant-girls.

She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She girds herself with strength,  
and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff,

and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.

She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.

Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household,  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her happy;  
her husband too, and he praises her:

“Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.”

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the city gates.  
(Proverbs 31)

## Elizabeth

Elizabeth is the cousin of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the mother of John the Baptist. Elizabeth endured barrenness without losing her faith. When she becomes pregnant late in life she responds with great gratitude towards God. When Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, Elizabeth pins part of one of the world's most popular prayer. Elizabeth cares for her husband when he is mute, is so attuned to God that she recognizes God's grace in her son while he is in the womb, and rejoices in the promise of Mary's Son, our God and Messiah. Elizabeth bravely insisted that her son will be named John which means gift from God. Her story is found in Luke 1.

‘When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”’ (Luke 1:41-4)

## The Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary is far and away the second most important figure in history. It was through her yes that God chose to enter the world. Mary's encounter with the angel demonstrates a profound faith in God. Mary's eager service to Elizabeth demonstrates a burning charity and humility. At the birth of her Son, Mary displays peace and joy. When she finds young Jesus in the temple, Mary models temperance, prudence, and wisdom. At the wedding feast, Mary teaches us prayer with confidence. At the Cross, Mary shows courage, hope, and mercy. Mary exemplifies chastity. Gabriel announces to Mary that she will have one Son, by the Holy Spirit. On the Cross Jesus tells Mary that she will have many children, gives her one that day, several 3 days later, and 3000 conceived by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus calls his Mother, "Woman" and in and through her God reveals Himself in the flesh, and in her God reveals most perfectly in the image of God, God created her. Her story is found in Matthew 1, 2, & 12, Mark 3, 6, & 16, Luke 1, 2, 4, 8, & 11, , John 2, 6, & 19, Acts 1, Revelation 12.



And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

(Luke 1:45-50)

## Part 2

### St.Perpetua:

#### *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity 203 AD*

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*Vibia Perpetua, was executed in the arena in Carthage on 7 March 203. The account of her martyrdom - technically a Passion -is apparently historical and has special interest as much of it was written [section 3-10], in Latin by Perpetua herself before her death. This makes it one of the earliest pieces of writing by a Christian woman.*

## PROLOGUE

1. If ancient examples of faith kept, both testifying the grace of God and working the edification of man, have to this end been set in writing, that by their reading as though by the showing of the deeds again, God may be glorified and man strengthened; why should not new witnesses also be so set forth which likewise serve either end? Yea, for these things also shall at some time be ancient and necessary to our sons, though in their own present time (through some reverence of antiquity presumed) they are made of but slight account. But let those take heed who judge the one power of the Holy Spirit according to the succession of times; whereas those things which are later ought for their very lateness to be thought the more eminent, according to the abundance of grace appointed for the last periods of time. For *In the last days*, says the Lord, *I will pour my spirit upon all flesh, and their sons and daughters shall prophesy; and upon my servants and upon my handmaids I will pour forth of my spirit; and the young men shall see visions, and the old men shall dream dreams.* [Acts 2:17, cf. Joel 2:28]

We also therefore, by whom both the prophecies and the new visions promised are received and honored, and by whom those other wonders of the Holy Spirit are assigned unto the service of the Church, to which also was sent the same Spirit administering all gifts among all men, *according as the Lord hath distributed unto each* [I.Cor 7:17]- do of necessity both write them and by reading celebrate them to the glory of God; that no

weakness or failing of faith may presume that among those of old time only was the grace of divinity present, whether in martyrs or in revelations vouchsafed; since God ever works that which He has promised, for a witness to them that believe not and a benefit to them that believe. Wherefore we too, brethren and dear sons, *declare to you likewise that which we have heard and handled* [I Cor 15:1?]; that both you who were present may call to mind the glory of the Lord, and you who now know by hearing may have communion with those holy martyrs, and through them with the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen.

2. There were apprehended the young catechumens, Revocatus and Felicity his fellow servant, Saturninus and Secundulus. With them also was Vibia Perpetua, nobly born reared in a liberal manner, wedded honorably; having a father and mother and two brothers, one of them a catechumen likewise, and a son, a child at the breast; and she herself was about twenty-two years of age. What follows here shall she tell herself; the whole order of her martyrdom as she left it written with her own hand and in her own words.

## PERPETUA'S ACCOUNT

3. When, she said, we were still under legal surveillance and my father was liked to vex me with his words and continually strove to hurt my faith because of his love: Father, said I, Do you see (for examples) this vessel lying, a pitcher or whatsoever it may be? And he said, I see it. And I said to him, Can it be called by any other name than that which it is? And he answered, No. So can I call myself nought other than that which I am, a Christian.

Then my father angry with this word came upon me to tear out my eyes; but he only vexed me, and he departed vanquished, he and the arguments of the devil. Then because I was without my father for a few days I gave thanks unto the Lord; and I was comforted because of his absence. In this same space of a few days we were baptized, and the Spirit declared to me, I must pray for nothing else after that water save only endurance of the flesh. After a few days we were taken into prison, and I was much afraid because I had never known such darkness. O bitter day! There was a great heat because of the press, there was cruel handling of the soldiers. Lastly I was tormented there by care for the child.

Then Tertius and Pomponius, the blessed deacons who ministered to us, obtained with money that for a few hours we should be taken forth to a better part of the prison and be refreshed. Then all of them going out from the dungeon took their pleasure; I suckled my child that was now faint with hunger. And being careful for him, I spoke to my mother and strengthened my brother and

commended my son unto them. I pined because I saw they pined for my sake. Such cares I suffered for many days; and I obtained that the child should abide with me in prison; and straightway I became well and was lightened of my labor and care for the child; and suddenly the prison was made a palace for me, so that I would sooner be there than anywhere else.

4. Then said my brother to me: Lady my sister, you are now in high honor, even such that you might ask for a vision; and it should be shown you whether this be a passion or else a deliverance. And I, as knowing that I conversed with the Lord, for Whose sake I had suffered such things, did promise him nothing doubting; and I said: Tomorrow I will tell you. And I asked, and this was shown me.

I beheld a ladder of bronze, marvelously great, reaching up to heaven; and it was narrow, so that not more than one might go up at one time. And in the sides of the ladder were planted all manner of things of iron. There were swords there, spears, hooks, and knives; so that if any that went up took not good heed or looked not upward, he would be torn and his flesh cling to the iron. And there was right at the ladder's foot a serpent lying, marvelously great, which lay in wait for those that would go up, and frightened them that they might not go up. Now Saturus went up first (who afterwards had of his own free will given up himself for our -sakes, because it was he who had edified us; and when we were taken he had not been there). And he came to the ladder's head; and he turned and said: Perpetua, I await you; but see that

serpent bite you not. And I said: it shall not hurt me, in the name of Jesus Christ. And from beneath the ladder, as though it feared me, it softly put forth its head; and as though I trod on the first step I trod on its head. And I went up, and I saw a very great space of garden, and in the midst a man sitting, white-headed, in shepherd's clothing, tall milking his sheep; and standing around in white were many thousands. And he raised his head and beheld me and said to me: Welcome, child. And he cried to me, and from the curd he had from the milk he gave me as it were a morsel; and I took it with joined hands and ate it up; and all that stood around said, Amen. And at the sound of that word I awoke, yet eating I know not what of sweet.

And at once I told my brother, and we knew it should be a passion; and we began to have no hope any longer in this world.

5. A few days after, the report went abroad that we were to be tried. Also my father returned from the city spent with weariness; and he came up to me to cast down my faith saying: Have pity, daughter, on my grey hairs; have pity on your father, if I am worthy to be, called father by you; if with these hands I have brought you unto this flower of youth- and I-have preferred you before all your brothers; give me not over to the reproach of men. Look upon your brothers; look upon your mother and mother's sister; look upon your son, who will not endure to live after you. Give up your resolution; do not destroy us all together; for none of us will speak openly against men again if you suffer aught.

This he said fatherly in his love, kissing my hands and groveling at my feet; and with tears he named me, not daughter, but lady. And I was grieved for my father's case because he would not rejoice at my passion out of all my kin; and I comforted him, saying: That shall be done at this tribunal, whatsoever God shall please; for know that we are not established in our own power, but in God's. And he went from me very sorrowful.

6. Another day as we were at meal we were suddenly snatched away to be tried; and we came to the forum. Therewith a report spread abroad through the parts near to the forum, and a very great multitude gathered together. We went up to the tribunal. The others being asked, confessed. So they came to me. And my father appeared there also, with my son, and would draw me from the step, saying: Perform the Sacrifice; have mercy on the child. And Hilarian the procurator - he that after the death of Minucius Timinian the proconsul had received in his room the right and power of the sword - said: Spare your father's grey hairs; spare the infancy of the boy. Make sacrifice for the Emperors' prosperity. And I answered: I am a Christian. And when my father stood by me yet to cast down my faith, he was bidden by Hilarian to be cast down and was smitten with a rod. And I sorrowed for my father's harm as though I had been smitten myself; so sorrowed I for his unhappy old age. Then Hilarian passed sentence upon us all and condemned us to the beasts; and cheerfully we went down to the dungeon. Then because my child had been used to being breastfed and to staying with me in the prison, straightway I sent Pomponius the deacon to my



father, asking for the child. But my father would not give him. And as God willed, no longer did he need to be suckled, nor did I take fever; that I might not be tormented by care for the child and by the pain of my breasts.

7. A few days after, while we were all praying, suddenly in the midst of the prayer I uttered a word and named Dinocrates; and I was amazed because he had never come into my mind save then; and I sorrowed, remembering his fate. And straightway I knew that I was worthy, and that I ought to ask for him. And I began to pray for him long, and to groan unto the Lord. Immediately the same night, this was shown me.

I beheld Dinocrates coming forth from a dark place, where were many others also; being both hot and thirsty, his raiment foul, his color pale; and the wound on his face which he had when he died. This Dinocrates had been my brother in the flesh, seven years old, who being diseased with ulcers of the face had come to a horrible death, so that his death was abominated of all men. For him therefore I had made my prayer; and between him and me was a great gulf, so that either might not go to the other. There was moreover, in the same place where Dinocrates was, a font full of water, having its edge higher than was the boy's stature; and Dinocrates stretched up as though to drink. I was sorry that the font had water in it, and yet for the height of the edge he might not drink.

And I awoke, and I knew that my brother was in travail. Yet I was confident I should ease his travail; and

I prayed for him every day till we passed over into the camp prison. (For it was in the camp games that we were to fight; and the time was the feast of the Emperor Geta's birthday.) And I prayed for him day and night with groans and tears, that he might be given me.

8. On the day when we abode in the stocks, this was shown me.

I saw that place which I had before seen, and Dinocrates clean of body, finely clothed, in comfort; and the font I had seen before, the edge of it being drawn to the boy's navel; and he drew water thence which flowed without ceasing. And on the edge was a golden cup full of water; and Dinocrates came up and began to drink therefrom; which cup failed not. And being satisfied he departed away from the water and began to play as children will, joyfully.

And I awoke. Then I understood that he was translated from his pains.

9. Then a few days after, Pudens the adjutant, in whose charge the prison was, who also began to magnify us because he understood that there was much grace in us, let in many to us that both we and they in turn might be comforted. Now when the day of the games drew near, there came in my father to me, spent with weariness, and began to pluck out his beard and throw it on the ground and to fall on his face cursing his years and saying such words as might move all creation. I was grieved for his unhappy old age.

10. The day before we fought, I saw in a vision that Pomponius the deacon had come hither to the door of the prison, and knocked hard upon it. And I went out to him and opened to him; he was clothed in a white robe ungirdled, having shoes curiously wrought. And he said to me: Perpetua, we await you; come. And he took my hand, and we began to go through rugged and winding places. At last with much breathing hard we came to the amphitheatre, and he led me into the midst of the arena. And he said to me: Be not afraid; I am here with you and labor together with you. And he went away. And I saw much people watching closely. And because I knew that I was condemned to the beasts I marveled that beasts were not sent out against me. And there came out against me a certain ill-favored Egyptian with his helpers, to fight with me. Also there came to me comely young men, my helpers and aiders. And I was stripped naked, and I became a man. And my helpers began to rub me with oil as their custom is for a contest; and over against me saw that Egyptian wallowing in the dust. And there came forth a man of very great stature, so that he overpassed the very top of the amphitheater, wearing a robe ungirdled, and beneath it between the two stripes over the breast a robe of purple; having also shoes curiously wrought in gold and silver; bearing a rod like a master of gladiators, and a green branch whereon were golden apples. And he besought silence and said: The Egyptian, if shall conquer this woman, shall slay her with the sword; and if she shall conquer him, she shall receive this branch. And he went away. And we came nigh to each other, and began to buffet one another. He tried to trip up

my feet, but I with my heels smote upon his face. And I rose up into the air and began so to smite him as though I trod not the earth. But when I saw that there was yet delay, I joined my hands, setting finger against finger of them. And I caught his head, and he fell upon his face; and I trod upon his head. And the people began to shout, and my helpers began to sing. And I went up to the master of gladiators and received the branch. And he kissed me and said to me: Daughter, peace be with you. And I began to go with glory to the gate called the Gate of Life.

And I awoke; and I understood that I should fight, not with beasts but against the devil; but I knew that mine was the victory.

Thus far I have written this, till the day before the games; but the deed of the games themselves let him write who will.

## SATURUS' ACCOUNT

11. And blessed Saturus too delivered this vision which he himself wrote down.

We had suffered, he said, and we passed out of the flesh, and we began to be carried towards the east by four angels whose hand touched us not. And we went not as though turned upwards upon our backs, but as though we went up an easy hill. And passing over the world's edge we saw a very great light; and I said to Perpetua (for she was at my side): This which the Lord promised us; we have received His promise. And while we were being carried by these same four angels, a great space opened before us, as it had been a having rose-trees and all kinds of flowers. The height of the trees was after the manner of the cypress, and their leaves sang without ceasing. And there in the garden were four other angels, more glorious than the rest; who when they saw us gave us honor and said to the other angels: Lo, here are they, here are they: and marveled. And the four angels who bore us set us down trembling; and we passed on foot by a broad way over a plain. There we found Jocundus and Saturninus and Artaxius who in the same persecution had been burned alive; and Quintus, a martyr also, who in prison had departed this life; and we asked of them where were the rest. The other angels said to us: Come first, go in, and salute the Lord.

12. And we came near to a place, of which place the walls were such, they seemed built of light; and before the door of that place stood four angels who clothed us when we went in with white raiment. And we went in,

and we heard as it were one voice crying *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, without any end. And we saw sitting in that same place as it were a man, white-headed, having hair like snow; youthful of countenance; whose feet we saw not. And on his right hand and on his left, four elders; and behind them stood many other elders. And we went in with wonder and stood before the throne; and the four angels raised us up and we kissed him, and with his hand he passed over our faces. And the other elders said to us: Stand you. And we stood, and gave the kiss of peace. And the elders said to us: Go you and play. And I said to Perpetua: You have that which you desire. And she said to me: Yes, God be thanked; so that I that was glad in the flesh am now more glad.

13. And we went out, and we saw before the doors, on the right Optatus the bishop, and on the left Aspasius the priest and teacher, being apart and sorrowful. And they cast themselves at our feet and said: Make peace between us, because you went forth and left us thus. And we said to them: Are not you our Father, and you our priest, that you should throw yourselves at our feet? And we were moved, and embraced them. And Perpetua began to talk with them in Greek; and we set them apart in the pleasure garden beneath a rose tree. And while we yet spoke with them, the angels said to them: Let these go and be refreshed; and whatsoever dissensions you have between you, Put them away from you each for each. And they made them to be confounded. And they said to Optatus: Correct your people; for they come to you as those that return from the games and wrangle concerning the parties there. And it seemed to us as though they would shut the

gates. And we began to know many brothers there, martyrs also. And we were all sustained there with a savor inexpressible which satisfied us. Then in joy I awoke.

## NARRATIVE OF MARTYRDOM

14. These were the glorious visions of those martyrs themselves, the most blessed Saturus and Perpetua, which they themselves wrote down. But Secundulus by an earlier end God called from this world while he was yet in prison; not without grace, that he should escape the beasts. Yet if not his soul, his flesh at least knew the sword.

15. As for Felicity, she too received this grace of the Lord. For because she was now gone eight months (being indeed with child when she was taken) she was very sorrowful as the day of the games drew near, fearing lest for this cause she should be kept back (for it is not lawful for women that are with child to be brought forth for torment) and lest she should shed her holy and innocent blood after the rest, among strangers and malefactors. Also her fellow martyrs were much afflicted lest they should leave behind them so good a friend and as it were their fellow-traveler on the road of the same hope. Wherefore with joint and united groaning they poured out their prayer to the Lord, three days before the games. Incontinently after their prayer her pains came upon her. And when by reason of the natural difficulty of the eighth month she was oppressed with her travail and made complaint, there said to her one of the servants of the keepers of the door: You that thus make complaint now, what wilt you do when you are thrown to the beasts, which you didst contemn when you would not sacrifice? And she answered, I myself now suffer that which I suffer, but there another shall be in me who shall suffer



for me, because I am to suffer for him. So she was delivered of a daughter, whom a sister reared up to be her own daughter.

16. Since therefore the Holy Spirit has suffered, and suffering has willed, that the order of the games also should be written; though we are unworthy to finish the recounting of so great glory, yet we accomplish the will of the most holy Perpetua, nay rather her sacred trust, adding one testimony more of her own steadfastness and height of spirit. When they were being more cruelly handled by the tribune. because through advice of certain most despicable men he feared lest by magic charms they might be withdrawn secretly from the prison house, Perpetua answered him to his face: Why do you not allow us to take some comfort, seeing we are victims most noble, namely Caesar's, and on his feast day we are to fight? Or is it not your glory that we should be taken out thither fatter of flesh? The tribune trembled and blushed, and gave order that they should be more gently handled, granting that her brothers and the rest should come in and rest with them. Also the adjutant of the prison now believed.

17. Likewise on the day before the games, when at the last feast which they call Free they made (as far as they might) not a Free Feast but a Love Feast\*, with like hardihood they cast these words at the people; threatening the judgment of the Lord, witnessing to the felicity of their passion, setting as nothing the curiosity of those that ran together. And Saturus said: Is not tomorrow sufficient for you? Why do you favorably

behold that which you hate? You are friends today, foes tomorrow. Yet mark our faces diligently, that you may know us again on that day. So they began all to go away thence astonished; of whom many believed.

*[note: Apparently Roman, as with modern, custom the condemned were allowed a choice of food. The martyrs used the opportunity to celebrate an Agape, or Christian Love-Feast.]*

18. Now dawned the day of their victory, and they went forth from the prison into the amphitheater as it were into heaven, cheerful and bright of countenance; if they trembled at all, it was for joy, not for fear. Perpetua followed behind, glorious of presence, as a true spouse of Christ and darling of God; at whose piercing look all cast down their eyes. Felicity likewise, rejoicing that she had borne a child in safety, that she might fight with the beasts, came now from blood to blood, from the midwife to the gladiator, to wash after her travail in a second baptism. And when they had been brought to the gate and were being compelled to put on, the men the dress of the priests of Saturn, the women the dress of the priestesses of Ceres, the noble Perpetua remained of like firmness to the end, and would not. For she said: For this cause came we willingly unto this, that our liberty might not be obscured. For this cause have we devoted our lives, that we might do no such thing as this; this we agreed with you. Injustice acknowledged justice; the tribune suffered that they should be brought forth as they were, without more ado. Perpetua began to sing, as already treading on the Egyptian's head. Revocatus and Saturninus and

Saturus threatened the people as they gazed. Then when they came into Hilarian's sight, they began to say to Hilarian, stretching forth their hands and nodding their heads: You judge us, they said, and God you. At this the people being enraged besought that they should be vexed with scourges before the line of gladiators (those namely who fought with beasts). Then truly they gave thanks because they had received somewhat of the sufferings of the Lord.

19. But He who had said *Ask and you shall receive* [John 16:24] gave to them asking that end which each had desired. For whenever they spoke together of their desire in their martyrdom, Saturninus for his part would declare that he wished to be thrown to every kind of beast, that so indeed he might wear the more glorious crown. At the beginning of the spectacle therefore himself with Revocatus first had ado with a leopard and was afterwards torn by a bear on a raised bridge. Now Saturus detested nothing more than a bear, but was confident already he should die by one bite of a leopard. Therefore when he was being given to a boar, the gladiator instead who had bound him to the boar was torn asunder by the same beast and died after the days of the games; nor was Saturus more than dragged. Moreover when he had been tied on the bridge to be assaulted by a bear, the bear would not come forth from his den. So Saturus was called back unharmed a second time.

20. But for the women the devil had made ready a most savage cow, prepared for this purpose against all custom; for even in this beast he would mock their sex.

They were stripped therefore and made to put on nets; and so they were brought forth. The people shuddered, seeing one a tender girl, the other her breasts yet dropping from her late childbearing. So they were called back and clothed in loose robes. Perpetua was first thrown, and fell upon her loins. And when she had sat upright, her robe being rent at the side, she drew it over to cover her thigh, mindful rather of modesty than of pain. Next, looking for a pin, she likewise pinned up her disheveled hair; for it was not meet that a martyr should suffer with hair disheveled, lest she should seem to grieve in her glory. So she stood up; and when she saw Felicity smitten down, she went up and gave her hand and raised her up.. And both of them stood up together and the (hardness of the people being now subdued) were called back to the Gate of Life. There Perpetua being received by one named Rusticus, then a catechumen, who stood close at her side, and as now awakening from sleep (so much was she in the Spirit and in ecstasy) began first to look about her; and then (which amazed all there), When, forsooth, she asked, are we to be thrown to the cow? And when she heard that this had been done already, she would not believe till she perceived some marks of mauling on her body and on her dress. Thereupon she called her brother to her, and that catechumen, and spoke to them, saying: Stand fast in the faith, and love you all one another; and be not offended because of our passion.

21. Saturus also at another gate exhorted Pudens the soldier, saying: So then indeed, as I trusted and foretold, I have felt no assault of beasts until now. And now believe

with all your heart. Behold, I go out thither and shall perish by one bite of the leopard. And immediately at the end of the spectacle, the leopard being released, with one bite of his he was covered with so much blood that the people (in witness to his second baptism) cried out to him returning: Well washed, well washed. Truly it was well with him who had washed in this wise. Then said he to Pudens the soldier: Farewell; remember the faith and me; and let not these things trouble you, but strengthen you. And therewith he took from Pudens' finger a little ring, and dipping it in his wound gave it back again for an heirloom, leaving him a pledge and memorial of his blood. Then as the breath left him he was cast down with the rest in the accustomed place for his throat to be cut. And when the people besought that they should be brought forward, that when the sword pierced through their bodies their eyes might be joined thereto as witnesses to the slaughter, they rose of themselves and moved, whither the people willed them, first kissing one another, that they might accomplish their martyrdom with the rites of peace. The rest not moving and in silence received the sword; Saturus much earlier gave up the ghost; for he had gone up earlier also, and now he waited for Perpetua likewise. But Perpetua, that she might have some taste of pain, was pierced between the bones and shrieked out; and when the swordsman's hand wandered still (for he was a novice), herself set it upon her own neck. Perchance so great a woman could not else have been slain (being feared of the unclean spirit) had she not herself so willed it.

O most valiant and blessed martyrs! O truly called and elected unto the glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ! Which glory he that magnifies, honors and adores, ought to read these witnesses likewise, as being no less than the old, unto the Church's edification; that these new wonders also may testify that one and the same Holy Spirit works ever until now, and with Him God the Father Almighty, and His Son Jesus Christ Our Lord, to Whom is glory and power unending for ever and ever. Amen.

## Part 3

### **Hymns on the Nativity- Mary's Lullabies Written by St. Ephrem the Syrian**

St. Ephrem

St. Ephrem the Syrian, who died in 373 was known as the Harp of the Holy Spirit, because he was a prolific writer of hymns. His hymns were theologically profound and artistically beautiful. Ephrem wrote over 300 call and response hymns and sung metrical homilies. For much of his life, Ephrem was a choir director and was well known for training women's choirs. During times of poverty and war he was well known for providing food for the poor. In recognition of his great musical work, religious teachings, and his charity he was ordained a deacon late in life. In 1920, St. Ephrem was declared to be one of the now 36 Doctors of the Church, and is one of the 17 most important theologians held by both the Orthodox and Catholic Church.

St. Ephrem likely wrote the Hymns on the Nativity one per year, to be chanted by two choirs during the night

before Christmas. Many of the hymns are written from the perspective of the Blessed Virgin Mary singing lullabies to her new born child in deep adoration of the wonder and mystery of God become so small. In the song “Mary Did You Know?”, Mary is imagined as an unaware mere instrument in God’s plan. Ephrem presents Mary as the preeminent theologian due to a special grace of the Holy Spirit, personal intelligence, and deep reflection. Mary understands more than anyone else who Jesus is and what God is doing. Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets were partners with God and God chose to make Mary His preeminent partner. Eve and Adam were cooperators in the downfall of man, so it was fitting that the New Adam, Jesus, chose Mary to be a New Eve in His plan of redemption.

The 4 Hymns that follow are selected as most clearly demonstrating the pattern of lullaby. Pay attention to the rich theology and imagery from the Old and New Testaments and Scripture. However, all of the poetry, rhythm, and meter which so marked St. Ephrem’s brilliance and his renown as a teacher of both the literate and illiterate people of his day is lacking. The beauty of Syriac poetry, inaccessible to almost everyone alive today is still found in our Maronite hymns, many of which he wrote, and our prayers, many of which draw inspiration from our teacher Ephrem, who counted Mary as his teacher, who he knew through the New Testament and accessible as a mother to us all, as his teacher.



## Hymn 9

Come rest, and be still in the bosom of Your Mother, Son of the Glorious. Forwardness fits not the sons of kings. O Son of David, You are glorious, and [yet] the Son of Mary, who hides Your beauty in the inner chamber.

To whom are You like, glad Babe, fair little One, Whose Mother is a Virgin, Whose Father is hidden, Whom even the Seraphim are not able to look upon? Tell us whom You are like, O Son of the Gracious!

When the wrathful came to see You, You made them gladsome: they exchanged smiles one with another: the angry were made gentle in You, O sweet One. Blessed are You, little One, for that in You even the bitter are made sweet.

Who ever saw a Babe that was gladsome when in arms to those that came near him, lo! reached Himself unto them that were far off? Fair sight [to see] a Child, that takes thought for every man that they may see him!

He that has care came and saw You, and his care fled away. He that had anxiety; at You forgot his anxiety; the hungry by You forgot his victuals; and he that had an errand, by You was errant and forgot his journey!

O still Yourself, and let men go to their works! You are a son of the poor, learn from Yourself that all the poor had

to leave their work to come. You who loves men, hast bound men together by Your gladness.

David, that stately king, took branches, and in the feast among the children as he danced, he gave praise. Is it not the love of David Your father that is warm in You?

That daughter of Saul! Her father's devil spoke in her: she called the stately [king] a vile fellow, because he gave an ensample to the elders of her people of taking up branches with the children in the day of praise to You.

Who would not fear to lay it to You that You are forward? For lo, the daughter of Saul who mocked the child, cut off her womb from childbearing; because her mouth derided, the reward of its mouth was barrenness. (2 Samuel 6:23)

Let mouths tremble at blasphemy, lest they be shut up! Refrain, O daughter of Sion, your mouth from Him, for He is the Son of David, Who is gladsome before you. Be not unto Him as the daughter of Saul, whose race is extinct.

Because Elijah restrained the desire of the body, he withheld rain from the adulterous; because he kept under his body, he withheld dew from the whoremongers, who let their fountains be loosely poured out.

Because the hidden fire of the lust of the body ruled not in him, to him the fire from on high was obedient. And since he subdued on the earth the lust of the flesh, he went up there where holiness dwells and is at peace.

Elisha also who deadened his own body, quickened the dead. The resurrection of the dead was in the usual course by a sanctification not in the usual course; He raised the child, because he purified his soul like a weaned child.

Moses, who divided and separated himself from his wife, divided the sea before the harlot. Zipporah though daughter of a heathen priest kept sanctity: with a calf the daughter of Abraham went a whoring.

## Hymn 10

In You will I begin to speak, You Head that began all created things. (Revelation 3:14) I, even I will open my mouth, but it is You that fills my mouth. I am the earth to You, and You are the husbandman. Sow Your voice in me, (Hebrews 6:7) You that sowed Yourself in the womb of your Mother.

All the chaste daughters of the Hebrews, and the virgins' daughters of the chief men, are astonished at me! For You does the daughter of the poor meet with envy, for You, the daughter of the weak with jealousy. Who has given You to me?

O Son of the Rich One, Who abhorred the bosom of the rich women, who led You to the poor? For Joseph was needy and I also in want, yet Your merchants have come, and brought gold, to the house of the poor.

She saw the Magi: her songs increased at their offerings; Lo! Your worshippers have surrounded me, yea your offerings have encircled me. Blessed be the Babe who made His Mother a harp for His words:

And as the harp waits for its master, my mouth waits for You. May the tongue of Your Mother bring what pleases You; and since I have learned a new Conception by You, let my mouth learn in You, O new born Son, a new song of praise.

And if hindrances are no hindrances to You, since difficulties are easy to You, as a womb without marriage conceived You, and a belly without seed brought You forth, it is easy for a little mouth to multiply Your great glory.

Lo! I am oppressed and despised, and yet cheerful: mine ears are filled with reproof and scorn; and it is a small thing to me to bear, for ten thousand troubles can a single comfort of Yours chase away.

And since I am not despised by You, O Son, my countenance is bright; and I am slandered for having conceived, and yet have brought forth the Truth who justifies me. For if Tamar was justified by Judah, how much more shall I be justified by You!

David Your father sung in a psalm of You before You had come, that to You should be given the gold of Sheba. This psalm that he sung of You, lo! It, while You are yet a child, in reality heaps before you myrrh and gold.

And the hundred and fifty Psalms that he wrote, in You were seasoned, because all the sayings of prophecy stood in need of Your sweetness, for without Your salt all manner of wisdom were tasteless. (Job 6:6)

## Hymn 11

(The Virgin Mother to Her Child.)

I shall not be jealous, my Son, that You are with me, and also with all men. Be God to him that confesses You, and be Lord to him that serves You, and be Brother to him that loves You, that You may gain all!

When You dwelled in me, You also dwelled out of me, and when I brought You forth openly, Your hidden might was not removed from me. You are within me, and You are without me, O You that makes Your Mother amazed.

For [when] I see that outward form of Yours before my eyes, the hidden Form is shadowed forth in my mind, O holy One. In Your visible form I see Adam, and in Your hidden form I see Your Father, who is joined with You.

Have You then shown me alone Your Beauty in two Forms? Let Bread shadow forth You, and also the mind; dwell also in Bread and in the eaters thereof. In secret, and openly too, may Your Church see You, as well as Your Mother.

He that hates Your Bread is like him that hates Your Body. He that is far off that desires Your Bread, and he that is near that loves Your Image, are alike. In the Bread and in the Body, the first and also the last have seen You.

Yet Your visible Bread is far more precious than Your Body; for Your Body even unbelievers have seen, but they have not seen Your living Bread. They that were far off rejoiced! Their portion utterly scorns that of those that are near.

Lo! Your Image is shadowed forth in the blood of the grapes on the Bread; and it is shadowed forth on the heart with the finger of love, with the colors of faith. Blessed be He that by the Image of His Truth caused the graven images to pass away.

You are not [so] the Son of Man that I should sing unto You a common lullaby; for Your Conception is new, and Your Birth marvellous. Without the Spirit who shall sing to You? A new muttering of prophecy is hot within me.

How shall I call You a stranger to us, Who is from us? Should I call You Son? Should I call You Brother? Matthew 12:50 Husband should I call You? Lord should I call You, O Child that gave Your Mother a second birth from the waters?

For I am Your sister, of the house of David the father of us Both. Again, I am Your Mother because of Your Conception, and Your Bride am I because of Your sanctification, Your handmaid and Your daughter, from the Blood and Water wherewith You have purchased me and

The Son of the Most High came and dwelt in me, and I became His Mother; and as by a second birth I brought Him forth so did He bring me forth by the second birth, because He put His Mother's garments on, she clothed her body with His glory.

Tamar, who was of the house of David, Amnon put to shame; and virginity fell and perished from them both. My pearl is not lost: in Your treasury it is stored, because You have put it on.

The scent of her brother-in-law slunk from Tamar, whose perfume she had stolen. As for Joseph's Bride, not even his breath exhaled from her garments, since she conceived Cinnamon. (Song of Songs 4:14) A wall of fire was Your Conception unto me, O holy Son.

The little flower was faint, because the smell of the Lily (Song of Songs 2:1) of Glory was great. The Treasure-house of spices stood in no need of flower or its smells! Flesh stood aloof because it perceived in the womb a Conception from the Spirit.

The woman ministers before the man, because he is her head. Joseph rose to minister before his Lord, Who was in Mary. The priest ministered before Your ark by reason of Your holiness.



Moses carried the tables of stone which the Lord wrote, and Joseph bare about the pure Tablet in whom the Son of the Creator was dwelling. The tables had ceased, because the world was filled with Your doctrine.

## Hymn 12

The Babe that I carry carries me, says Mary, and He has lowered His wings, and taken and placed me between His pinions, and mounted into the air; and a promise has been given me that height and depth shall be my Son's.

I have seen Gabriel that called him Lord, and the high priest the aged servant, that carried Him and bare Him. I have seen the Magi when they bowed down, and Herod when he was troubled because the King had come.

Satan also who strangled the little ones that Moses might perish, (Exodus 1:16) murdered the little ones that the Living One might die. To Egypt He fled, Who came to Judea that He might labour and wander there: he sought to catch the man that would catch himself.

In her virginity Eve put on the leaves of shame: Your Mother put on in her Virginity the garment of Glory that suffices for all. She gave the little vest of the Body to Him that covers all.

Blessed is she in whose heart and mind You were! A King's palace she was by You, O Son of the King, and a Holy of Holies by You, O High Priest! She had not the trouble nor vexation of a family, or a husband!

Eve, again, was a nest and a den for the accursed serpent, that entered in and dwelt in her. His evil counsel became

bread to her that she might become dust. You are our Bread, and You are also [of] our race and our garment of glory.

He that has sanctity, if he be in danger, lo! Here is his Guardian! He that has iniquity, lo! Here is his Pardoner! He that has a devil, here is the Pursuer thereof! They that have pains, lo! Here is the Binder up of their breaches.

He that has a child, let him come and become a brother to my Well-beloved! (Matthew 12:15) He that has a daughter or a young woman of his race, let her come and become the bride of my Glorious One! He that has a servant, let him set him free, that he may come and serve his Lord.

The son of free men that bears Your yoke, my Son, shall have one reward; and the slave that bears the burden of the yoke of two masters, of Him above and of Him below, there are two blessings for him, and two rewards of the two burdens.

The free woman, my Son, is Your handmaid: also if she who is in bondage serve You, in You she is free: in You she shall be comforted, because she is freed; hidden apples in her bosom are stored up, (Song of Songs 2:3) if she love You!

O chaste woman, long for my Well-beloved, that He may dwell in you; and you also that are impure that He may sanctify you! You Churches also, that the Son of the Creator Who came to renew all creatures, may adorn you!

He received the foolish who worshipped and served all the stars; He renewed the earth which was worn out through Adam, who sinned and waxed old. The new formation was the creature of its Renewer, and the all-sufficient One repaired the bodies along with their wills.

Come you blind, and without money receive lights!  
Come you lame, and receive your feet! You deaf and dumb, receive your voice! Come you also whose hand is cut off; the maimed also shall receive his hands.

It is the Son of the Creator Whose treasure-houses are filled with all manner of helps. Let him that is without eyeballs come to Him that makes clay and changes it, that makes flesh, that enlightens eyes.

By the small portion of clay He shows that it was with His hand that Adam was formed: the soul of the dead also bears Him witness, that by Him it was that the breath of man was breathed in; by the last witnesses He was accredited to be the Son of Him Who is the First.

Gather together and come, O you lepers, and receive purification without labour. For He will not wash you as Elisha, who baptized seven times in the river: neither will He trouble you as the priests did with their sprinklings. Foreigners and also strangers have betaken themselves to the Great Physician.

The rank of strangers has no place with the King's Son; the Lord makes not Himself strange to His servants, [or conceal] that He is Lord of all. For if the Just makes the body leprous, and You purify it; then, the Former of the body hates the body; but You love it.

And if it be not Your forming, being Just, You would not have healed it; (Deuteronomy 32:39) and if it were not Your creature, when in health, You would not have afflicted it. The punishments that You have cast upon it, and the pains which You have healed, proclaim that You are the Creator's Son.

## Sources

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From W.H. Shewring, trans. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, (London: 1931).

The translation has been modernized [not re-translated] for this etext version in the following ways:

- Archaic tenses and forms have been altered.
- Paragraphs have been introduced within sections to clarify meaning.
- Some phrasing has been altered

Much of this was done with reference to Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2-4

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Dedicated to the women of St.  
Ignatius of Antioch Maronite  
Catholic Church and all of the holy  
women who have shaped my faith.

As far as we know, no book of the Bible was written by a woman. We regularly read the testimonies of faithful men, but our relationship with God, whether we ourselves are men or women, need the examples and the testimony of faithful women., the scriptures contain and highlight the accounts of the virtues, faults, trials, trauma, and victories of women. Since Old Testament times the sayings of holy women, their relationship with God, and their own self-knowledge helped form the faith of generations of believers of both sexes.. Woman is created in the image of God. (see Genesis 1:27)

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