

CHAPTER ONE

*Concerning the Lord's baptism by John
in the Jordan. Concerning the calling
of Peter and Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee.
Concerning the man possessed of a demon.
Concerning Peter's mother-in-law.
Concerning those healed of various diseases.
Concerning the leper.*

1-3. The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: as it is written in the prophets, **Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.** The evangelist calls John, who was the last of the prophets, the beginning of the Gospel of the Son of God. For the end of the Old is the beginning of the New Testament. The testimony concerning the Forerunner is taken from two prophets: "Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee" is from Malachi.¹ "The voice of one crying in the wilderness..." is from Isaiah.² Here God the Father is speaking to God the Son, calling the Forerunner an "angel" [*angelos*] because of John's angelic and all but immaterial way of life, and also because he comes to announce [*angellein*] and to proclaim the coming of the Christ. John prepared the way of the Lord by preparing the souls of the Jews to accept Christ. He did this by baptizing, that is, immersing them in water. "Before Thy face" means "Thy messenger"³ will be close to Thee", showing the kinship of the Forerunner to Christ, just as those who go directly before a king in a procession are of the king's own household. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness" refers, perhaps, not only to the Jordan desert but also to the desolate synagogue of the Jews. "The way" is the New Testament; the "paths" are the Old Testament which was well trodden. The Jews needed to be prepared for the way, that is, for the New Testament, and they also

¹ Mal 3-1

² Is 40:3

³ The Greek word *angelos* means both "messenger" and "angel"

needed to make straight the Old Testament paths which they had once followed but from which they had turned and become wayward.

4-5. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins; and there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized by him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. The baptism of John did not bestow the forgiveness of sins but instead only led mankind to repentance. Why then does Mark say here "unto" the remission of sins? We answer that John preached the baptism of repentance. Where did this preaching lead? Unto the remission of sins, that is, to the baptism of Christ, which bestows the remission of sins.⁴ Likewise it might be said that a soldier arrives before the king to summon people to prepare the king's meal, assuring them that it will be for their own good to do so. But that does not mean that the soldier himself will be the benefactor of those who prepare the king's meal. Rather, that the soldier has only commanded the preparation of the meal, and it will be the king who will reward those who have prepared the meal and received him. In like manner, the Forerunner proclaimed the baptism of repentance so that those who repent and receive Christ would have the forgiveness of sins.

6. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and a leather belt about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey. We have spoken of these things in the *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew*,⁵ and we will now speak only of what we did not mention there. John's clothing was a symbol of mourning, for the prophet is showing that he who repents must mourn for his sins. The hair-shirt indicates mourning; the belt of dead animal flesh signifies the deadness of the fleshly Jews.⁶ The Lord Himself says that John's clothing

⁴ A scholion in the Greek text adds: "For before the Saviour, nowhere does it appear that remission of sins was given, but Christ was the first Who bestowed this gift through Himself and through His own baptism. Therefore it is clear that the baptism of John was a preparation for the remission of sins."

⁵ *The Explanation by Bl. Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, Missouri, 1992, p.33.

⁶ Elsewhere, Bl. Theophylact calls "fleshly" those Jews who understand the Mosaic law in a literal and superficial manner. See *The Explanation of St. Matthew*, *ibid.*, p. 125.