

indicates mourning, when He says, "We have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented,"<sup>7</sup> where "mourning" refers to the Forerunner's way of life. For He says, "John came neither eating nor drinking, and you say, he hath a demon." The food that John ate certainly showed his self-control, but it may also be seen as a symbol of the spiritual fare of the people at that time. For they did not eat any of the birds of the heavens, which they were allowed to eat, nor did they apprehend the lofty, but instead fed on that which seemed to leap heavenward, but which always fell back to earth again. Such is the nature of the locust, which leaps upwards as if to the heights only to fall back down again. And John's fare of wild honey may also show that the people were eating honey produced by bees, that is, by the prophets, but the honey was not being cultivated and domesticated, meaning, that the words of the prophets were not being well understood, and searched, and comprehended. For the Hebrews had the Scriptures which were sweet as honey,<sup>8</sup> but they were neither tending nor searching them.

**7-8. And preached, saying, There cometh One mightier than I after me, the thong of Whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you in water, but He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit.** John is saying, "I, the least of His servants, am not worthy to unloose the tied thong of His sandal." It may also be understood as follows. All those who came and were baptized by John, by their repentance were loosed from the bond of their sins when they later believed in Christ. Of all these John loosed the thongs and the bonds of their sins. But he was not able to loose the thong of Jesus, because he found no thong, that is, no sin in Him.

**9-11. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.** Jesus does not come to baptism to be forgiven of sins, for

<sup>7</sup> Mt. 11:17

<sup>8</sup> "How sweet to my palate are Thy sayings, more sweet than honey to my mouth." Ps. 118:103.

He committed no sin. Nor does He come to receive a share of the Holy Spirit. For if the baptism of John does not take away sin, as I have already said, how could it bestow the Spirit? But neither does Jesus come to John to be baptized in order to repent; for He was greater by far than the Baptist. Why then does He come? For no other reason than for John to reveal Him to the people. Since a large crowd had gathered, Jesus chooses to come so that all might witness Who He is. At the same time, He comes to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness, that is, all the commandments of the law. Since it was considered a commandment to obey a prophet as one sent by God, Jesus fulfilled the commandment by heeding this prophet who was calling all to baptism. The Spirit did not come down because Christ was in need of the Spirit. How could that be, when the Spirit and He are one in essence? Rather the Spirit came down so that you, O reader, might learn that when you are baptized the Holy Spirit comes upon you as well. The descent of the Spirit also accomplished another purpose: when the Father had spoken from above, "This is My Son," the Spirit descended upon Jesus, showing that those words were spoken concerning Christ. Thus the people who heard the voice would not think that it referred to John. The heavens were opened that we might learn that when we are baptized, the heavens are also opened for us.<sup>9</sup>

### **12-13. And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness.**

<sup>9</sup> A scholion in the Greek text adds: The Holy Spirit is likened to a dove on account of the tender love which He has for us: when God has been rejected by men, He nonetheless again draws near to men with no less tenderness than before, out of His own goodness. Likewise the dove does not leave off its usual habits, even when men abuse it by snatching away its young. Or, the Holy Spirit is likened to a dove to show that the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament is one and the same, and to recall to mind the flood in the time of Noah. Then a dove announced the deliverance from the flood by carrying in its beak a twig of olive. And here again the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove to declare the deliverance from sins. Or, the Holy Spirit is likened to a dove on account of the guilelessness and meekness of the dove, and its utmost cleanliness; for it will not stay where there is any stench. The evangelist says "the Spirit", but this is not one of the ministering spirits, but He Who is one in essence with God. Through the witness of the Father and the descent of the Dove, the three Hypostases of the Holy Trinity are revealed. For the Father bore witness from above that while he who baptized was holy, He Who was baptized was God, lest anyone imagine that John was greater than Christ because he baptized Him. For the Jews held John in high regard, but did not consider Jesus so highly. So then, the One Who bore witness was the Father; the One of Whom testimony was given was the Son; and the Holy Spirit showed to Whom the testimony was given. "In Whom I am well pleased" means "in Whom I take My rest" and "He is pleasing to Me."

**And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto Him.**

The Lord went up onto the mountain to be tempted, teaching us not to become despondent if we are assailed by temptations after our baptism. In fact, He did not go up, but was led up by the Holy Spirit to show that likewise we should not rush into temptations, but should patiently endure them when they come at us. Jesus ascends the mountain so that the devil might be emboldened by the desolation of the place to approach Him. For it is his custom to set upon us when he sees that we are alone. The place was so inaccessible that it was full of wild beasts.<sup>10</sup> The angels ministered unto Him after He had vanquished the tempter; these things are treated at greater length in *The Explanation* of St. Matthew.<sup>11</sup>

**14-15. Now after John was handed over, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the Gospel.** When He heard that John had been put into prison, Jesus departed into Galilee, to show that we too should not run to meet temptations but should flee them. But when we fall into temptations, we should endure them. It may appear that the Lord is preaching the same things as John, "Repent" and "The kingdom of God is at hand." But it is not so. For John said, "Repent," meaning "Turn away from sins." But Christ says, "Repent," meaning "flee from the letter of the law." This is why He also added the words, "Believe in the Gospel, the Good Tidings."<sup>12</sup> For he who is about to believe through the Gospel, has in fact finished the law. The Lord says that the very time of the law has been fulfilled. Up until now, He says, the law governed, but from now on there is the kingdom and rule of God, that is, a life governed by the Gospel, and such a life is rightly compared to the kingdom of heaven. For when you see one living a life governed by the Gospel, and fasting as if he were

<sup>10</sup> A scholion in the Greek text adds: "Christ was with the wild beasts so that you might learn that he who guards the high station of his soul is fearsome to the wild beasts. For man, before he disobeyed, had been commanded to rule over all things."

<sup>11</sup> op. cit., p.40.

<sup>12</sup> The English word "Gospel" is a contraction of two Old English words, "good" and "spell", together meaning, "Good Tidings", as do also the two Greek words *ev* and *angelion* which form the word *evangelion*.