

The Mystery of the Nativity according to *Liber de divinis officiis* by Rupert of Deutz OSB

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Abstract: The theological interpretation of liturgical texts and gestures presented by representatives of the German monastic school played an important role in the liturgy of the medieval era. Among its most important representatives was Rupert of Deutz OSB, who presented his views in *Liber de divinis officiis*. This article aims to show what the uniqueness of the Incarnation of the Son of God consists in according to Rupert of Deutz's views, based on the example of the celebration of the Nativity. Particularly significant is his interpretation of Old Testament texts and images, and his reference of the Incarnation to the first day of creation. He presented his views not only based on liturgical customs but also according to the principles of medieval computistics.

Keywords: medieval liturgy, Nativity, history of the liturgy, salvation, allegory, theological monastic school

At the heart of the celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation is the liturgical Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. It was first mentioned in the Chronograph of 354, which is the oldest and fundamental document on the celebration of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.¹ Although the commemoration of this event is based on the fact of Jesus' birth — a part of the world's history — according to the oldest liturgical references, it was not so much the moment of his earthly birth that was commemorated as the presence of the Lord and Saviour who became man to achieve salvation.²

Theological reflection, which has been present since the time of the Church Fathers, has a crucial place in learning the meaning of the Lord's Incarnation. It was particularly such authors as St. Zeno of Verona (d. 371), St. Ambrose (d. 397), St. Maximus of Turin (d. ca. 408–423), St. Jerome (d. 420), and St. Augustine (d. 430) that linked this event mainly with the prophet Malachi, who proclaimed that the sun of righteousness would rise for those who worshipped the name of the Lord (cf. Mal 3:20), and interpreted in a way that contradicted the pagan festival of the birth of the invincible sun (*Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*).³ Patristic reflection soon drew attention to the connection between the birth of Jesus and salvation. Although St. Augustine calls

¹ Cf. Righetti, *L'anno Liturgico*, 66.

² Cf. Berger, "Ostern und Weihnachten," 7–9.

³ Cf. Righetti, *L'anno Liturgico*, 67.

the celebration of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem a mere commemoration and contrasts it with the true mystery (*Sacramentum*) that is the celebration of Easter, Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461) refers to the Nativity as a *Sacramentum* that is in close union with the mystery of Easter.⁴

The Middle Ages saw a deeper reflection on the unity of the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, with a vital role played by Rupert of Deutz OSB (d. 1129/30). He is the main representative of the medieval monastic-theological school in Germany. His views were strongly influenced by the theological thought of the canon regular Gerhoh of Reichersberg (d. 1169) and Honorius of Autun (d. 1150).⁵ The former was particularly skilled in historical-philosophical criticism of source texts,⁶ whereas the latter co-developed the scholastic method.⁷ Drawing on the experience of other theologians, Rupert of Deutz left an enormous written legacy in the form of biblical commentaries and theological treatises and went down among his theological contemporaries as a biblical scholar who claimed that theological knowledge could consist solely in the correct reading of the Bible. Therefore, he read sacramental theology and Christology — especially the Incarnation and liturgy — according to this belief.⁸

This study aims to present how Rupert of Deutz showed the uniqueness of the mystery of the Incarnation, using the example of the liturgical texts on the feast of the Nativity and the symbolism that accompanies it. The starting point for a theological reflection on the celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation is the biblical and liturgical texts read on Christmas Eve, as well as on Nativity Day itself. Therefore, to show the particular uniqueness of Rupert of Deutz's interpretation of the Incarnation, it is necessary to analyze the sources, especially the biblical and liturgical texts found in the oldest liturgical books. Although his writings on the interpretation of Scripture, especially the Song of Songs,⁹ are well known, few authors have elaborated on his interpretation of the liturgy. One aspect of his liturgical interpretation concerning the mystery of the Incarnation will therefore be shown based on the source texts.

1. The Vigil on the Night of Jesus' Birth as Contemplation of Divinity

Liturgical texts chosen for a given liturgical day are meant to show this day's depth and theological meaning and are the foundation of theological reflection. The oldest liturgical texts for Nativity Day can be found in the Verona Sacramentary, which

⁴ Cf. Auf der Maur, *Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit*, 169.

⁵ Cf. Beinert, "Rupert von Deutz," 1107.

⁶ Cf. Tyrawa, "Gerhoh z Reicherbergu," 1000.

⁷ Cf. Zahajkiewicz, "Honoriusz z Autun," 1215.

⁸ Cf. d'Onofrio, *Historia teologii*, 237–238.

⁹ Cf. Beinert, "Rupert von Deutz," 1107.

also has several Mass formularies for this day included at its end.¹⁰ As early as the sixth century, the papal liturgy introduced a custom of celebrating three Masses on the feast day itself: at midnight, at dawn, and during the day; this custom was already mentioned in the Würzburg Lectionary and in the Gregorian Sacramentary of Hadrian.¹¹ Since the era of the Old Gelasian Sacramentary, the custom of celebrating three Masses, as present in the papal liturgy, has been transferred to the liturgy of presbyters.¹² Although tradition has it that the custom of celebrating two Masses on Christmas Day and one at night was introduced by Pope Telesphorus (125–136), there is no confirmation of this in historical sources.¹³

The first liturgical texts pertaining to the mystery of the Nativity are read on the Eve of the Nativity Day itself. According to Rupert, the promise of God's consolation is clearly announced on this day: "Today you will know that the Lord will come, and he will save us, and in the morning you will see his glory" (cf. Exod 16:6.7) and "[...] stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (cf. 2 Chr 20:17).¹⁴ The biblical context of this encouragement is crucial: during Jehoshaphat's reign, the Ammonites, Moabites, and inhabitants of Mt. Seir rose up against Judah. Then, when the people of Judah held a prayer, the spirit of the Lord rested on Jahaziel, who assured that God himself would fight against the rebels and he would prevail.¹⁵ As such, the words: "[...] stand firm [...] Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you." (2 Chr 20:17) are, in Rupert's eyes, an indication that the birth of the Son of God is salvation for mankind just like the deliverance in the time of Jehoshaphat.¹⁶ At the same time, the Ammonites, Moabites, and inhabitants of Mt. Seir appear in the Bible as synonymous with evil and sin (cf. Jer 48; Ezek 35).¹⁷ Thus, their image became an allegory of the sins and vices that contributed to the fall of man and thus to the beginning of the realization of salvation.

Watching for the coming of the Lord is the centerpiece of the Eve of the Nativity, and to demonstrate its significance, Rupert points to Old Testament events and links them with the Incarnation. He relates the *introit* of the Mass to Old Testament events: "Today you will know that the Lord will come, and he will save us, and in the morning you will see his glory" (cf. Exod 16:6–7). This passage is present even

¹⁰ Cf. *Sacramentarium Veronense*, 157–163.

¹¹ Cf. *Le Sacramentaire Grégorien*, 99–104.

¹² Cf. *Liber Sacramentorum*, 7–10.

¹³ Cf. *Księga Pontyfików* 1–96, 23*.

¹⁴ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 68).

¹⁵ Cf. Tronina, *Druga Księga Kronik*, 238–239.

¹⁶ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 68).

¹⁷ Cf. Ruiz, "Księga Ezechiela," 972.

in the oldest surviving Mass antiphonaries.¹⁸ Its origin dates back to the Israelites' wanderings through the desert when God promised to rain down manna — bread from heaven. In this way, Rupert showed the connection between this *introit* passage and the Eucharist: "bread from heaven" (cf. Ps 78[77]:24). He thus shows the reciprocal relationship between the manna and the Word of God who took flesh from the Virgin Mary. After the coming of Jesus, man eats his flesh, whereas before that, as Rupert notes, man was filled with vices like the pots of meat in the land of Egypt (cf. Exod 16:3) Rupert relates this image to the words of Jesus himself, who said: "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. (John 6:48–51).¹⁹ In this way, Jesus asserts that it is God and not Moses who gives bread to man. Its meaning, on the other hand, can only be known and accepted through faith, that is, by listening to God and learning his teaching.²⁰

The writings of Rupert of Deutz show that the manna is a harbinger of the Incarnate Word of God made flesh (cf. John 1:1.14). Jesus himself testified to this in the Gospel by saying: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51), yet Rupert notes that as early as the moment of raining down the manna God wanted to show that "[...] man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:3). Rupert claims that this purity of intention is in line with the teaching of God, who raises his son in the same way as a man (cf. Deut 8:5). In this way, God's eternal wisdom was made known to the world (cf. Eph 3:10). Man can access this manna through baptism.²¹ It allows him to eat the Flesh and Blood of Christ, a food that gives life to those who receive it.²²

The subject of contemplation and reflection on the eve of the Nativity of the Lord is not only the mere fact of his birth but also the search for answers to the question of why he was born and how great and powerful he is. Rupert contemplates this based on the following words: "Look how great, how glorious he is!" (cf. Heb 7:4).²³ This passage comes from an antiphon that was recited in the last days of Advent, as reflected by the oldest surviving antiphonaries of the medieval era.²⁴

¹⁸ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 12–13.

¹⁹ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 69).

²⁰ Cf. Okure, "Ewangelia według św. Jana," 1332.

²¹ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 72–73).

²² Cf. Megger, "Eucharystia," 28.

²³ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 69).

²⁴ According to surviving sources, this antiphon was part of the Officium at various times during the last week of Advent. As an antiphon to the *Magnificat*, it was sung on Tuesday according to the antiphonary of Saint-Loup of Benevento, on Thursday according to the antiphonaries of Saint-Gall, Saint-Denis, Compiègne, Monza, and Verona, and on Friday as per the antiphonary of Ivree. According to the antiphonary of Saint-Maur-les-Fossés, it was also sung on Friday as the first antiphon during laudes, whereas according

Yet another symbol that shows the mystery of the Eve of the Nativity is the gate of heaven. The offertory of this Mass calls for the ancient doors to be lifted so that the King of glory and Lord almighty may come in (cf. Ps 24[23]:7.9.10). Moreover, Rupert relates another passage of this Psalm — “For he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters” (Ps 24[23]:2) — to the Christian people, who rank higher than the princes of the world.²⁵

The *introit* passage is also repeated during the gradual of this Mass but at that point is accompanied by another verse of the psalm: “Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.” (Ps 80[79]:2).²⁶ Rupert recognizes this psalm as a prayer for Jews and Gentiles, so that they may eventually be converted to the Lord. He points out that in this psalm, he relates Israel to Joseph, who was described as “a fruitful vine near a spring” (cf. Gen 49:22).²⁷ In translating this biblical passage, Rupert points to the explanation of Raban Maura (d. 856).²⁸

Rupert shows the interrelationship between the words of the *introit* and the Christmas Eve Mass readings. Thus, he answers the question of how and through which gate the Lord sent manna to mankind. The gate was the Virgin Mary, for it was through her, with the power of the Holy Spirit, that God sent His son (cf. Matt 1:18–21) who, according to the flesh, originated from the lineage of David (cf. Rom 1:1–6).²⁹ According to prophecy, this refers to the locked eastern gate of the Jerusalem temple through which the Lord himself, the God of Israel, has entered (cf. Ezek 44:2–3).³⁰ For it was the Lord himself who opened this gate, which Rupert calls the greatest of gates (Latin: *Maxima namque portarum coeli*), to rain down manna. Through this gate, the Incarnate Word of God descended like dew and manna from heaven (cf. Num 11:9). Rupert also interprets the words of the *introit* eschatically since the word “tomorrow” refers to the glory of the resurrection when people will not only see Jesus’ human nature but also experience his divinity, for the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see the salvation of God (cf. Isa 40:5, Luke 3:6).³¹ In this way, he shows the unity of the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption.

to the antiphony of Rheinau, it was sung on Saturday. In contrast, an 11th century French antiphony states that it was sung as the fourth one during the laudes; cf. Hesbert, *Corpus antiphonalium*, 291.

²⁵ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 69).

²⁶ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 12–13.

²⁷ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 70).

²⁸ Cf. Rabanus Maurus, *De universo libri viginti duo* (PL 111, 47B).

²⁹ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 70).

³⁰ Cf. Ruiz, “Księga Ezechiela,” 978.

³¹ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 70–71).

2. Man's Sin and the Incarnation of the Eternal Word – The Atonement Cover

The reflection on the necessity of the original parents committing original sin, its scourge, as well as God's plan of salvation, has accompanied Christianity since its early days. This question became particularly pertinent in the medieval era when sin was treated ritualistically, as an evil external act, due to the emergence of Penitentials.³² Therefore, from the biblical standpoint, Rupert takes up the question of why God allowed the fall of man and whether his Incarnation was necessary. The starting point for these reflections is not only the event connected with original sin in paradise but above all God's plan that the Israelites, who were suffering famine in Egypt, should be led out of slavery by Moses and Aaron, with this process to be accompanied by various signs and miracles (cf. Ps 105[104]:16.23). Thus, by allowing the reason for which the people of Israel went to Egypt and were later freed by Moses and Aaron, God also revealed his power among the Gentiles (cf. Ps 77[76]:15; Ps 96[95]:3) so that they would know that he alone is God (cf. Ps 105[104]:7). By pointing to this divine wisdom, Rupert emphasizes that these events are a reflection of the divine justice that made it possible to bring about great things despite Adam's sin and the famine of Jacob's time, based on the intention to do good things. This is also how earlier events became a picture (cf. 1 Cor 10:11) and a foreshadowing of the good things to come (cf. Col 2:17).³³ This particularly highlights the fact that these events reflect the ultimate, indestructible, eschatological reality that comes from Christ.³⁴

In his reflection on God's scourge and the fall of man, Rupert points out that one could also ask in this context why God gave man a commandment that he knew man would not be able to keep. In response, he points out that a commandment is the beginning of all teaching — especially of humility (cf. Rom 12:3). Nor is the purpose of reflecting on God's scourge and man's fall to be a scientific decision about the rightness of God's teaching, but rather thanksgiving that God, through the Incarnation of his Son, has shown his face to man (cf. Ps 80[79]:4) and thus brought about the conception of the "new man" (cf. Eph 2:15; 4:24).³⁵

Due to his Incarnation, Christ is compared to the atonement cover that was on the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Exod 25:10–22). In explaining this symbol, Rupert starts from the custom of two readings before the Gospel on this feast day — one from the Old and one from the New Testament. Though unknown in the Roman liturgy during Rupert's time, this custom existed in the Gallican tradition and some Eastern

³² Cf. Pryszmont, "Grzech," 271.

³³ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 71–72).

³⁴ Cf. Mora Paz, "List do Kolosan," 1545.

³⁵ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 73–74).

churches since the sixth century.³⁶ Rupert explains this custom by citing St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), who compared the two readings to the cherubs that were mounted on the atonement cover.³⁷ The cherubim were facing each other and had their wings spread upward, covering the atonement cover (cf. Exod 25:20). Rupert noted that since “cherub” means “fullness of knowledge,” they symbolize the Old and New Testaments. In contrast, the board of the atonement cover is a sign of the Incarnation of Christ, in accordance with the words of St. John that Jesus “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:2). At the same time, it is a foreshadowing of Christ’s sacrifice, which cannot be construed as his death alone — it also refers to the knowledge and will that he consciously offered himself as a sacrifice, thus fulfilling the will of the Father.³⁸

While looking at God Incarnate, the two cherubs do not stop looking at each other because together they reveal the mystery of his plan of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 4:1). Thus, Rupert indicates that the two cherubs — readings from the two Testaments — are looking at the atonement cover: The Gospel, i.e., the Word made flesh. Therefore, Rupert emphasizes the connection between the salvation awaited by Judah and Jerusalem and the fact that the station church in Rome on this day is the Basilica of Saint Mary Major (*Statio ad S. Mariam maiorem ad Praesepe*) since salvation came through the womb of the Virgin Mary as the gate of heaven.³⁹ This is due to the custom of celebrating this day’s liturgy at station churches, a custom that has evolved over the centuries.⁴⁰

3. The Nativity of the Lord — The New Creation of the Light of the World

Yet another symbol that shows the mystery of the Incarnation is light. Rupert’s starting point is not the celebration of *Solis Invicti*, but the creation of the world. According to medieval computistics, Jesus was supposed to be born on Sunday night.⁴¹

³⁶ Cf. Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, 505–509.

³⁷ Cf. Gregorius Magnus, *XL homiliarum in Evangelia libri duo* (PL 76, 1191).

³⁸ Cf. Migut, “Ofiara Chrystusa,” 235.

³⁹ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 74).

⁴⁰ The first Mass on Nativity Day was celebrated at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. Starting from the 4th century, the second mass was held at Rome’s Basilica of St. Anastasia of Sirmium. The third Mass of the day was originally celebrated at St. Peter’s Basilica, as witnessed by the oldest surviving Mass antiphonaries from the 8th to 10th centuries. From the twelfth century on, the *statio* of this Mass took place at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major; cf. Kirsz, *Die Stationskirchen*, 237–239; Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 14–15.

⁴¹ According to medieval computistics, until the thirteenth century, the daily date was marked by *concurrentes* (*concurrentes septimanae, epactae solis, epactae maiores*), and the corresponding age by solar

Thus, the coming of the Son of God into the world took place on the same day on which God had once said “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen 1:3). These words also refer to the fact that “Even in darkness light dawns for the upright” (Ps 112[111]:4; Isa 58:10) and that the Lord will visit his own like “the rising sun [that] will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,” (Luke 1:78), so that the birth which took place at night (cf. Isa 60:3), at a time when the sun was rising, should be a sign that he will come to lighten the night (cf. Exod 14:20).⁴² The last passage refers to the pillar of cloud that stood between the Egyptian army and the Israelite army during the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. For the Egyptians, the cloud was darkness; for the Israelites, it illuminated the night and kept them safe.⁴³

The initial Nativity of Jesus is the recollection of the creation of the Eternal Word by the Father, that is, by means of the mystery of his being. Rupert reminds us that it took place before the “Morning Star” (Ps 110[109]:3), that is, before the creation of angels and other creatures (Prov 8:22), and as Jesus was born, he came into the Virgin’s womb as “blessed in the name of the Lord” (Ps 118[117]:26).⁴⁴

The “genealogy” (cf. Matt 1:1–17), which was read on Christmas Eve, corresponds with the image of the creation of new light. This is because the Gospel of Matthew was regarded as the book of the new beginning and new creation that Jesus Christ had accomplished.⁴⁵ Rupert compares the genealogy to a ladder from Jacob’s dream, on which he saw angels ascending and descending (cf. Gen 28:12–13). By type and antitype, this ladder foreshadowed the Incarnation (cf. 1 Cor 10:11). At the top step of the ladder was St. Joseph, to whom God entrusted the care of Jesus. Similar to Jacob, Jesus was also brought by his guardian to Egypt and brought back again after Herod’s death (cf. Matt 2:20). Thus, on this night of vigil, the Church repeats after the Bride from the Song of Songs: “I slept but my heart was awake” (Song 5:2).⁴⁶

The ladder of Jesus’ genealogy is based on the salvation of man, which was fulfilled in Christ and was meant to point to the universality of salvation, as expressed by the following blessing: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring” (Gen 28:14). The universality of salvation was emphasized by the inclusion of Rahab the Harlot and Ruth the Moabite in Jesus’ genealogy (cf. Matt 1:5).

and lunar regulars. St. Bede the Venerable (d. 735) claimed that the concurrentes were counted from 24 March. According to Rupert, the value of the concurrentes for the year of Jesus’ birth was 5, meaning that 24 March fell on a Thursday. When a fixed number for the given month is added to the concurrentes, which in the case of December is 7, it follows that 1 December also fell on a Thursday, and as such, 25 December fell on a Sunday; cf. Grotefend, *Zeitrechnung*, 27–28, 163–164; Wąsowicz, “Konkurrenty,” 648–649; Wąsowicz, “Regular,” 1325–1326.

⁴² Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 75).

⁴³ Cf. Craghan, “Księga Wyjścia,” 360.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 75).

⁴⁵ Cf. Paciorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, 81.

⁴⁶ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 75–76).

According to Jewish tradition, these women helped fulfill God's plans through Israel.⁴⁷ According to Rupert, this emphasized that according to the flesh Jesus was born not only of the Jewish people but also of the Gentiles. Thus, he compares these nations to two parts of a ladder that "support" Jesus as he ascends to the edge of heaven (cf. Ps 19[18]:7). Thus were fulfilled the words of Jesus who said: "Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51). The Incarnation and Redemption opened the gates of heaven to allow one to accompany the Lord in "descending" into his suffering and humiliation on the cross and "entering" into the mystery of his deity. In the next section, Rupert draws a parallel between the fact that Jacob, upon awakening, immediately "took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it" (cf. Gen 28:18). Rupert relates this image to Christ, who is the precious cornerstone (cf. 1 Pet 2:6) which, like a solid foundation (cf. Eph 2:20), was laid under the heart of man and anointed with the oil of thanksgiving.⁴⁸ Jesus thus became the cornerstone of the Church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.⁴⁹

Among the significant issues surrounding the genealogy of Jesus, there is also the question posed by Rupert himself: Why does the genealogy of Jesus lead to Joseph and not to the Virgin Mary? In answering it, Rupert explains that it is not so much a matter of showing biological relatedness as of pointing to those in the generation of Abraham and David to whom God addressed the word that later became flesh (cf. John 1:14). Rupert states that there is no doubt here that God's words: "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife [...]" (Matt 1:20) were addressed to Abraham first and to St. Joseph last. These three people in Jesus' lineage, Abraham, David, and Joseph, were mentioned as the greatest to whom the promise was made. Abraham heard the following promise: "[...] through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen 22:18); David heard what follows: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne" (Ps 132[131]:11), whereas Joseph heard about the birth of Jesus, who would save the people from their sins (cf. Matt 1:21). Rupert links these three promises with the three gifts given by the Three Wise Men, as they pertained to a mortal man, a king, and God.⁵⁰

In another section, Rupert vividly depicts Jesus' genealogy by comparing it to an angler catching fish. Jesus' generations are a rope that has been cast into the waters of this world. At its end was a fishing hook, i.e., Jesus, the true God and true man, who would capture Leviathan, the great serpent of evil that devours the souls of men (cf. Isa 27:1; cf. Job 40:25). This is because Leviathan was deemed the personification

⁴⁷ Cf. Leske, "Ewangelia według św. Mateusza," 1146.

⁴⁸ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 76–77).

⁴⁹ Cf. MacDonald, "List do Efezjan," 1524.

⁵⁰ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 77–78).

of all evil, which will be destroyed once and for all in the end times.⁵¹ On further reflection, Rupert points out that a fisherman's rope is not directly connected to the body, but to a special iron handle, and so the genealogy leads not to Mary but rather to Joseph.⁵² This thought is Rupert's original remark on this issue and is not found in the writings of the theologians he cites.

4. The Eternal Nativity of Jesus the Son of God — the First Mass

The following passage of the *introit* of Nativity Day's first Mass is fundamental to the consideration of the mystery of the Nativity: "[The Lord] said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your father'" (Ps 2:7). This antiphon is also one of the oldest liturgical texts.⁵³ Rupert refers here to the words of St. Augustine, who points out that in eternity, the word "today" does not mean something past or future, but the present, since that which is eternal always exists.⁵⁴ These words are repeated in the *graduale*, in the *Alleluia* verse, and in the antiphon for Holy Communion, and express the joy emphasized by the antiphon for the offering: "Let the heavens rejoice" (Ps 96[95]:11).⁵⁵ Rupert takes a holistic look at this event of eternal Nativity and relates it to the earthly birth, which is highlighted by a pericope taken from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:1–14).⁵⁶ This event reveals the truth that according to God's plan, the Savior of the world was born like a poor shepherd, and hence the truly poor will experience the blessings of the Hope of Israel.⁵⁷

Jesus as the firstborn was yet another topic of Rupert's reflections. He begins by citing the heresy of Helvidius (4th/5th century), a disciple of the Arian Bishop Auxentius of Milan (d. 373), who questioned Mary's virginity by claiming that she also had other offspring with Joseph — brothers of the Lord (cf. Matt 13:55–56).⁵⁸ In an apologetic work against Helvidius that showed the perpetual virginity of the blessed Mary, St. Jerome explained that while every only-begotten son is also a firstborn, not every firstborn is an only-born. Namely, both a child after whom other children are born and that after whom no other children are born are firstborns.⁵⁹ By using this

⁵¹ Cf. Rubinkiewicz, "Lewiatan," 893.

⁵² Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 79).

⁵³ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 12–13.

⁵⁴ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 79).

⁵⁵ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 12–13.

⁵⁶ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 79).

⁵⁷ Cf. Abogunrin, "Ewangelia według św. Łukasza," 1245.

⁵⁸ Cf. Kowalski, "Helwidiusz," 670.

⁵⁹ "Omnis unigenitus est primogenitus: non omnis primogenitus est unigenitus. Primogenitus est, non tantum post quem et alii: sed ante quem nullus" (Hieronymus, *De perpetua virginitate B. Mariae. Adversus Helvidium. Liber unus* 10 [PL 23, 192]).

phrase, the evangelist emphasized that the Virgin Mary became a mother. St. Bede the Venerable explained the issue in a similar way.⁶⁰ Based on these testimonies, Rupert explains that Jesus is “the firstborn over all creation” (Col 1:15) and “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). He is “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29), or the Wisdom that came out of the mouth of the Most High before all creation (cf. Sir 24:1–3), as emphasized by the chants and readings during this Holy Mass.⁶¹

5. The Earthly Birth of Jesus – The Second Mass

Rupert portrays the officium of the second Mass as closely linked with the term “Shepherd.” In particular, the Gospel first mentions the shepherds who said: “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about” (Luke 2:15). He refers these words to the shepherds of souls who, likewise, in the “night” or in this life, “watch over” and “guard” the flock of the Lord (cf. Luke 2:8). In accordance with the words “for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.” (Ps 95:7). This is why it is, according to Rupert, a cause for joy sung in the introit: “A light will shine upon us today” (cf. Isa 9:1), for “The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength” (Ps 93:1).⁶² Through the Incarnation, the Lord became King, and His adornment, as Rupert points out, is His mercy, glory, grace and love. Thus, the goodness and love of the Savior (cf. Titus 3:4–7), on whom the Spirit of God rested (cf. Isa 61:1–3; 62:11–12), was made manifest. He is praised in the gradual as “blessed” (cf. Ps 118:26) who has been “robed with majesty” (Ps 93:1), as mentioned in the Alleluia verse. The *offertory* praises Him for having established the world (cf. Ps 93:1), and His throne is unshaken forever (cf. Ps 93:2). It is the source of joy for the Daughter of Zion (cf. Zech 9:9), the Church.⁶³ These liturgical texts were also known in the oldest antiphonaries.⁶⁴

It should be noted that the second Mass was to be celebrated at St. Anastasia Station Church. This was to be a reminder that under Diocletian it was on this day that she suffered the martyr’s death when she was burned at the stake. She was venerated

⁶⁰ “Quia et testimonium legis, et aperta ratio declarat omnes unigenitos etiam primogenitos, non autem omnes primogenitos etiam unigenitos posse vocari” (Beda Venerabilis, *In Lucae Evangelium expositio* [PL 92, 331]).

⁶¹ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 80).

⁶² Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 14–15.

⁶³ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 80–81).

⁶⁴ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 14–15.

in Constantinople on December 25, and this church was designated at the foot of the Palatine because of the Byzantine imperial administration living on the Palatine.⁶⁵

6. The Experience of God's Salvation in Christ – Third Mass

The powerful joy of the mystery of the Nativity resounds during the main Mass. According to the gradual, all nations have seen the salvation of God (cf. Ps 98:3).⁶⁶ Rupert emphasizes that on this day the mighty voice of the trumpet is sounded heralding the coming of the Lord, which is particularly resounding in the Gospel in the prologue of St. John (cf. John 1:1–14). It is, he writes, the loud “sound” of the heavens that praises the glory of God and spreads throughout the earth (Ps 19:5). This voice, as Rupert notes, proclaims the works of His hands (cf. Ps 19:2), brings good news, proclaims peace to all the pagans, and heralds salvation (cf. Isa 52:7).⁶⁷ This fulfills the promise of Isaiah's prophecy about God returning to Zion to occupy His throne.⁶⁸

The theme of joy resounding on the day of Jesus' birth is the words of the *introit* of the third Mass: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Isa 9:5), so the verse encourages the faithful to sing a new song to the Lord (cf. Ps 98:1).⁶⁹ Thus, as Rupert notes, “The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (Isa 52:10), which is proclaimed in the first reading. This Child is the Word through Whom God spoke in the last days (cf. Heb 1:1–12). Therefore, Rupert emphasizes that in this way all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God (cf. Ps 98:3), as indicated in the gradual, and the theme of the vision is the great light that has come down to earth and the true light that enlightens every person (cf. John 1:1.9).⁷⁰ The Word, then, is life, and in man it becomes the “light” of life, the illumination of his conscience so that he can discern between good and evil. For light is the principle of life.⁷¹

Rupert's interpretation of the liturgical texts or of the celebrations and customs at the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord made it clear that this mystery cannot be reduced to the sobbing of a baby in a manger, but to the powerful “voice” of the apostles that spreads throughout the earth (cf. Ps 19:5). This voice, in the words of St. Paul, declares that this is the great mystery of godliness, because: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among

⁶⁵ Cf. Mieczkowski, *Jednoczący charakter*, 197; Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 81).

⁶⁶ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 14–15.

⁶⁷ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 81).

⁶⁸ Cf. Pelletier, “Księga Izajasza,” 1146; Brzegowy, *Księga Izajasza*, 493.

⁶⁹ Cf. Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum*, 14–15.

⁷⁰ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 82).

⁷¹ Cf. Okure, “Ewangelia według św. Jana,” 1320.

the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. (1 Tim 3:16).⁷² This early Christian hymn thus emphasizes that through the epiphany of God in Jesus Christ, the ecclesial community has become the place of His presence.⁷³

The universality of the salvation experience is indicated not only by the liturgical texts, which were interpreted allegorically, but also by the manner of celebration itself. Rupert pointed out the old custom of the deacon going in procession with the Gospel Book from the south to the north to proclaim the Gospel. The words of the prophet Ezekiel were invoked for clarification: "Son of man, set your face against Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuary." (Ezek 21:2) and the prophet Habakkuk that the Lord would come from the south (cf. Hab 3:3).⁷⁴ In this way, both the celebrations, texts and liturgical customs associated with the Nativity reveal the essence and significance of this mystery in the history of humanity and the world.

Conclusions

In the history and theology of the liturgy, the views of Rupert of Deutz OSB, a representative of the medieval monastic school of theology, hold a special place in the interpretation of the Incarnation. He bases his views in *Liber de divinis officiis* on the Mass forms of both the Vigil Mass and the three Masses celebrated on the very day of the solemnity of the Nativity of Jesus: at midnight, at dawn, and during the day. Rupert shows the uniqueness of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word by presenting the symbolism of this day in his own way.

As a starting point, we should note, following Rupert, the interpretation of the Old Testament texts proclaimed on Nativity Day beginning with the Vigil Mass. A paraphrase of the Old Testament text: "Today you will know that the Lord is coming to save us, and in the morning you will see His glory" known from the Israelites' exodus through the desert allowed to describe the event of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus with events related to sending manna to the world. The comparison reveals that Christ is the very manna – the bread from heaven that came down from heaven. He unambiguously relates this issue to the Eucharist, explaining that the Lord himself will give the true food to his people, not Moses. Also worthy of note is his emphasis on the unity of the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, while indicating that the word "tomorrow" – morning refers to the revelation of the full glory of Jesus born experienced in his resurrection. Christ, the true manna, came into the world through the gate through which the eternal King of Glory and Lord of Hosts entered.

⁷² Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 82–83).

⁷³ Cf. Schroeder, "Pierwszy List do Tymoteusza," 1576; Hareźga, *Pierwszy i Drugi list do Tymoteusza*, 246.

⁷⁴ Cf. Rupertus, *Liber de divinis officiis* (PL 170, 83).

The reference of this symbol to the closed eastern gate of the Jerusalem temple, through which the Lord himself entered, points to the Virgin Mary. The closing of this gate signifies the eternal Virginity of Mary.

In interpreting the mystery of the Nativity, Rupert points to the interrelationship between salvation and sin. He does not begin this interpretation with the sin of our first parents in paradise, but with the dispensation of providence when the Israelites experienced famine in Egypt. The Dispensation of Providence concerned bringing the Israelites into Egypt in Jacob's day so that God would accomplish great things during the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. The day of Nativity is thus a new day of the creation of light. The originality of thought, then, includes showing the interrelationship between the Nativity of Jesus and the creation of new light. It should be noted that Rupert does not compare this celebration to the pagan festival of the invincible sun (*sol invicti*) but that, according to medieval computation, Jesus was to be born on Sunday, the first day of creation. Thus Christ as the Light of the world became the propitiation from the Ark of the Covenant – that is, the atoning sacrifice for sins.

The genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew's Gospel was also read in the key of new creation and new beginning. On the one hand, Rupert compares it to the ladder that Jacob dreamed, on which the Savior came. The inclusion of two women, Rahab and Ruth, in the genealogy indicates, according to Rupert, the universality of salvation. On the other hand, an original thought is the comparison of genealogy to a fisherman casting a fishing rod into the depths of the sea, where the bait on this rod is Jesus, true God and true man, who was to catch Leviathan – the eternal enemy of mankind. These contents thus make it possible to show both the significance of the eternal Son of God and his earthly birth for the purpose of experiencing the mystery of God's salvation in Christ.

The Nativity of Jesus Christ represents a special moment in the history of human and world salvation. Over the centuries this event has been interpreted in different ways, seeking the deepest understanding and insight into this mystery, which is constantly being unveiled in the liturgy. The role of medieval theology, especially the monastic theological school represented by Rupert of Deutz, should not be forgotten in this quest. For the knowledge of the views of the past makes it possible to see in a full light the splendor of the mystery of the Incarnation down through the centuries.

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