Scholia on the Gospel of Matthew

Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 230–250)

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Matthew 1

Verse 18. “Now the birth of Jesus was like this.” Here the evangelist speaks of “birth” (gennēsis), but at the beginning of the Gospel he speaks of “genesis.” Here he says, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this,” and there, “The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ.” What, then, is the difference between birth and genesis? And how are both said of Christ? The spoken word is by its own nature intangible and invisible. But when it is written in a book and, as it were, embodied, then it is seen and touched. In the same way the Word of God, without flesh and without body, is neither seen nor written in respect of his deity. But since he became flesh, he is both seen and written. So, as one who became flesh, there is also a book of his genesis. But the question here is not why he said “book” and not “vision” or “word.” It is what birth is and what genesis is. They differ. Genesis is the first forming by God. Birth is the succession of one person from another, which comes from the sentence of death because of the transgression. Again, genesis has incorruption and sinlessness, while birth has susceptibility to suffering and sinfulness. So the Lord took sinlessness from genesis, by nature, but did not take on incorruption. And he took susceptibility to suffering from birth, but did not take on sinfulness. In this way he bore the first Adam undiminished in both respects. In Christ, then, genesis would not be a coming from non-being into being. It would be a journey from existing in the form of God to taking the form of a servant. His birth, however, was twofold: like us and beyond us. To be born of a woman is like us. To be born not of the will of flesh or of man, but of the Holy Spirit, is beyond us. This also announced in advance the birth to come, which he was going to give us from the Spirit.

Matthew 7

Verse 5. “Do not give what is holy to the dogs, and do not throw your pearls before the pigs...”

Verse 6. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” So that the disciples would not be ignorant of which of their hearers are dogs or pigs, he says: Seek earnestly from God, and everything will be revealed to you. The beginning of virtue is to know the good through prayer. Next is to know how one must walk the way of virtue. Third is to knock through works so that the door is opened to him. For knocking with the hands signifies this. The truth of the saving teachings is grasped in three ways. First, by careful prayer. Second, by a settled state of the ruling part of the soul in seeking divine things. Third, as regards finding, by [a perceptive] grasp of the depth and certainty of the hidden Scriptures, through exact inquiry. For he says that the Scriptures are opened in this way.

Verse 9. “Which of you is the man who, if his son asks him for bread, will hand him a stone?” Verse 10. “And if he asks for a fish, will he hand him a snake?” Consider whether knowledge is food, [without which] one cannot be saved. An example is the exact teaching about how one must eat. A fish is like a relish for the lover of learning: to know the structure of the world, the working of the elements, the beginning, the end and the middle, and whatever else wisdom goes on to say. God does not give a stone instead of bread, which the devil wanted Jesus to eat. Nor does he give a snake instead of a fish, which the Ethiopians eat, being unworthy to eat fish. But how could he call the disciples evil? Even if they followed by their own choice, they still had the changeableness of human nature. Only the Son of God was unchangeable, in both his deity and his humanity. He calls the spiritual gifts “good gifts.” Luke said “Holy Spirit” instead of “good things,” and there is no difference. For the Holy Spirit is himself the good light, and so he gives good things to those who share in him. For those who are exceedingly wicked, because they sin without letting up, wickedness becomes in some way their nature. Satan and the demons are like this. One may call them evil by nature, though they were not created evil by nature. They have hardened through wickedness of their own choosing.

Matthew 8

“Many will come from east and west, and will recline at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens.” If the way is narrow and hard, and few find it, by what way will the many enter? For of the broad and roomy way he says that many will enter through it. We answer that the Savior’s saying was spoken because few from Israel were being saved, since not many believed in him. That is why he also said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, because God has been pleased with you.” But “Many will come” was spoken prophetically, as about those from the nations who would believe in him. He says “many” in contrast to those who did not believe after his coming: those from the nations who will recline at table with Abraham and his descendants in the kingdom of the heavens. And in number these are many times more than those from Israel who confess Jesus Christ.

Matthew 11

“But the least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he.”

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is treated with violence, and violent men seize it.” We say that “least” is spoken about Christ himself [text uncertain]. He is “least” only in the opinion of those who hear. The words “in the kingdom of the heavens” show that in spiritual things, and in everything heavenly and divine, Christ is greater than John. So we will read it this way: “Least.” Then, pausing briefly, we add: “In the kingdom of the heavens he is greater than he.” The kingdom of the heavens is Christ himself, urging all to repentance and drawing them to himself by grace.

Matthew 12

“But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.” The closer someone comes to Jesus, the less he takes such counsel. For the counsel of evil men does not come near to Jesus. But when someone goes outside of Jesus, he takes counsel to destroy the light, the good way, the life, the treasure, the one who bore witness to love and peace. Whoever destroys him is called a son of destruction.

“But Jesus, knowing it, withdrew.” For he ought not to stay with the sons of destruction. They lost [him]; we, who did not seek, found him. For he says, “I was found by those who were not seeking me; I became visible to those who were not asking for me.” For he himself came to the lost sheep, but they forgot their own shepherd. He withdraws, not out of fear of the plot, but to check the wickedness. And so that no one would think he left out of cowardice, he healed them all, showing his all-powerful strength. Yet he holds back from being made public, being gentle and free of vainglory.

Matthew 13

(6) "The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure," and so on. On another interpretation, the field is Scripture, planted with many sayings: those of the law, of the writings, and of history. The treasure is the varied meanings contained in them, both plain and hidden. And Christ is the precious treasure of Scripture. Or the field is Christ, in whom Paul says the hidden treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God are hidden. So the heavenly realities, and the kingdom of the heavens, are written as in an image in the Scriptures, which are the kingdom of the heavens. And the kingdom is Christ himself, whose knowledge is in us according to our ability. He is found through faith and bought through the virtues. So someone who finds this treasure in the Scriptures hides it, knowing it is not safe to share unspeakable things with just anyone. Having hidden it, he goes off to buy the field at whatever price he wishes. The Hebrews were entrusted with this field first. Whoever receives it from them (in another parable it is a vineyard) makes it his own possession, having sold all that he had. These possessions were evil, in that he no longer lives by them but has been put to death to the whole world and its desires. (7) As for those who have written about pearls, they say there are six kinds of them. The best are those found in shells in India, formed from heavenly dew.

The lesser pearls, then, are the inquiries into the law and the prophets and the rest of Scripture. The person who searches hard and sells off his merchandise is looking for Christ, the pearl better than all of these. He counts all these things, good as they are, as loss and as refuse compared with the knowledge of Christ. Again, the dragnet is the weaving together of the ancient words of Scripture, which seemed incomplete until Christ came and brought it to completion. This net is thrown into the sea of this present life. It gathers not different natures but free decisions of the will and choices. So what is gathered from every kind includes both the praiseworthy and the blameworthy, according to their leaning toward the forms of virtue or of vice. Besides this, what is gathered "from every kind" can also point to the calling that comes from every race. The angels will not drag the net to the shore, that is, to the things outside this life, unless it has been filled with the full number of the nations. When it is full they bring it up. Each of the good ones under the net is restored to its own rank, according to what are here called their "vessels." The rotten ones they throw outside. The "outside" is the furnace of fire, as the Savior says in what follows: the worthless fish are thrown outside, but the worthless among people go into the furnace of fire.

Verse 47. Again: "The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet thrown into the sea." The woven net that the mind can grasp is the Scripture, old and new, made up of many different thoughts. The sea is the tossing life of human beings. The whole varied range of human choices is the calling of every kind of nation. The workers with the net are the Lord and the angels who came to serve him. The vessels are the different dwelling places. The net is not drawn up until the full number of the nations has come in. Or take it this way: the net is the apostolic teaching, which catches without distinction Jews and Greeks, barbarians, Scythians, slaves, free people, wicked and good. The sea is human life. The shore is its end. At the close of the age, when the net is drawn up, the good are separated from the wicked, some to be honored and some to be punished. For not all believers have the same way of life. And so that no one would suppose that the unbelieving and wicked are only thrown outside, he made clear that they are sent on to unending punishment: "And they will throw them into the furnace of fire," and so on.

Matthew 18

Verse 5. “And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.” He urges the faithful to receive, in his name, one such child, or one of such people, the spiritual ones in whom Christ has taken form, according to the humbling of their own spirit. In Luke, the child the Savior pointed out is to be received in his name, so that in the child one receives Christ, who is also in the Spirit. Or “one such” is said because all the spiritual are one. The word also urges us to welcome, in the word of Christ, those who are simple and gentle in heart. He is checking the love of winning among the disciples. When teachers fight, divisions arise and many are caused to stumble, because those who are offended want to draw the hearers to their own side. So he warns beforehand of the punishment that awaits them. This was said as a command: even if you cause one insignificant believer to stumble, the punishment against you will be heavy. By the millstone and the drowning in the sea he points to the unbearable punishment that will come on those who treat such people with contempt. For here he calls insult a “stumbling block.” I say this because the little ones are easily made to stumble, so that we may not look down on them. The great and perfect person in virtue despises every stumbling block. By warning beforehand and lamenting over such people, he gives them time to repent. When he says “it is necessary,” he does not remove free choice. He shows his foreknowledge of what will certainly happen. That is why he adds “Woe to them,” as to people who stumble willingly. By “punishment” he means people who live in a shameful way.

Verse 20. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”

Verse 21. Then Peter came to him and said, “Lord, how many times will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Two joined together in the name of Christ: body and spirit, not fighting against each other. The body is subjected, and the spirit gives it a share in divine life. And three: [the whole person, spirit, soul and body, he keeps for the coming of Christ]. Or the two may be the two Testaments, when the one who gathers them, the Holy Spirit, is in them. The three would then be law, prophets and Gospel. Or the three may be anger, desire and reasoning. Or they may be calling and election, and the kind of people appointed to first honor along with us. Notice that he did not say “I will be,” but “I am.” For as God, who is everywhere, he is in the midst of those who are

joined together through godliness. The power of God, which oversees all things and cannot be divided, becomes divisible for those who are worthy of it. We have authority to forgive offenses committed against us. We do not have it over offenses that reach God, only God himself does. That is why Peter said "against me." In asking how far one must go in not holding a grudge, he added "seven times" as if it were a great amount. The Lord, pointing to the limitlessness of patient endurance of wrong, said "seventy times seven." That is: as often as he sins against you, if he repents, forgive him. Christ had set a limit for those who are to be separated from the community, but not for those who repent. So Peter reasonably asks how far one must keep receiving the repentant. [See whether it is possible.] The number six is the number of work and of the making of the world, and seven is the number of rest. The person who loves the things of the world and of matter, and keeps sinning, has the seventh as his limit. Peter understood this, and so he wanted to forgive up to seven. The Lord extends it in the same manner, in proportion, from the unit to tens and hundreds. So the one who has gone beyond worldly things no longer has forgiveness of sins, for forgiveness belongs to things here, whether it comes slowly or quickly.

Matthew 21

Verse 33. “There was a man, a householder, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower, leased it to farmers, and went away,” and so on. The parable calls God the Father the householder, who showed great care for the Jews from the beginning. The vineyard, in the simple sense, is the first people, that is, Israel, planted by God in the land of promise. The fence is the law, which did not allow them to mix with the nations. The winepress is the altar, or the place of the drink offerings. The tower is Zion, or heaven. The farmers are the elders of the people, the wise men, and the teachers of each age. The householder went away when he no longer appeared to them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire. Or it means the patience of God, who did not immediately demand from the Jews the punishment for their offenses. The demand for fruit is the life lived according to the law. Their season is the demand made by the prophets. The first and second servants who suffered ill treatment are the prophets sent at different times. Of these, they beat one, like Micaiah, when Zedekiah struck him on the cheek. Another they killed, like Zechariah, between the temple and the altar.

Another they stoned, like Zariou, the son of Jodae the priest. Perhaps the vineyard is the kingdom of God, and its mysteries in the law and the prophets and the rest of the study of nature. The fruits are the virtuous life in character. The fence is the rational place, and the letter, so that outsiders cannot look in on the hidden mysteries. The winepress is the depth that receives the fruits of the soul, [and which sets everything toward battle; the text is unclear]. The tower is also the carefully distinguished discourse about God. [The temple is that of the divine temple within it; the text is unclear.] The farmers are those first entrusted with the oracles of God. [He goes away from them to occupy them with his own affairs,] giving them the opportunity, from what he himself planted, fenced, dug and built, to bear fruit. The season of fruits, which the householder knows, perhaps does not mean putting out leaves, or blossoming, or forming sour grapes, or being harvested. [Such are those of infancy, or of the completion of the word, or of progress in virtue, or of the beginning.] But the fruits are those of love, joy, peace, and the rest. The servants are the prophets, who demand that the spiritual offerings be brought to God as by priests.

Matthew 24

Verse 45. “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has put in charge of his household service?” Perhaps he says this to stir people to look for some one rare person. By the doubt in the word “then” he showed how rare such a steward is. And I think he knew no other faithful and wise steward than himself, one who is weighed against the works of the Father, I mean in the matter of humanity. He speaks as if about someone else, veiling it with the excess of his wisdom. He called himself a servant because he took the form of a servant. Consider also whether the word does not press on bishops and teachers who have been entrusted with such things, to deal wisely with each person according to what he deserves. They are to distribute spiritual food with knowledge, at the right time, in the right quantity and of the right quality. He said “Who then?” not because he did not know, but so that people would not pry. The saying also fits anyone who has been trusted with something by God, whether money, or office, or some other power. Second, the steward is required to have faithfulness and wisdom, so that he neither steals what belongs to the master nor fails to manage it properly. Or the servant is the one who has a good conscience toward God and does not fall away from any of his duties. He calls the one who teaches rightly “faithful.” He calls “wise” the one who is not carried along by the foolish talk of the heretics but discerns the precise sense of the word. Or the wise one is the one who is not tempted into sins, because of the variety and changeableness of people. He is the one who knows when to refute, or rebuke, or encourage, or teach; and whom he must give milk to, and whom he must share solid food with.

Matthew 25

Verse 1. “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.” They say the ten virgins are the senses in each soul, of the inner and the outer person. They have withdrawn from idolatry and worldly desires by receiving the pure word of God, whether in pretense or in truth, and have been made virgins. They are the senses commonly understood, and also those set out in Proverbs, which follow along, as the virtues of the substance of Christ. For this reason, in the [local passage] it is not that some are foolish and others wise. Rather there is one, and all of them went out to meet him, those who had received the mystery concerning Christ. For they go out from the error of the world, hurrying toward the one who is eagerly hastening toward them. Another comment, from Origen. Virginity is one thing and almsgiving another, and the mind is one thing and the body another; take this into account for the ten virgins. The wise ones, then, are the senses of a person who lives according to reason; the foolish ones are those of a person who lives the opposite way, contrary to right reason. The lamps are the action that is full of every virtue. The oil is the word poured in from the soul, from the one who produces good action. Those who sleep are those who have given up their vital strength. So the wise do not lose their lamps, nor are they careless about keeping the oil. The angels cry out to the sleeping senses and rouse them; that is, the ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are going to inherit salvation. The adornment of the lamps is the gospel use of the senses: of the eyes, in marveling at the one who made them, and in closing so as not to see injustice; of the hearing, [in refusing to accept what is vain], neither a judgment of blood, but the equal word.

Taste perceives Christ the Lord. Smell enjoys the fragrance of Christ and of the ointment that was poured out. Touch lays hold of the Word, as John says: “Our hands handled the Word of life.” The cry comes at midnight. That was the hour when the sons of Israel went out of Egypt, and the hour when Christ rose from the dead. The cry is the trumpet that raises the dead and brings them out of the tombs. The words “Go out” also have a hidden meaning, for unless we go out, we cannot meet the bridegroom. The lamp of virginity is the light of knowledge. The oil for the lamps is zeal in the knowledge of God and the doing of the commandments. This is what keeps the light within us safe, by keeping the eye single, so that our whole body is filled with light, according to the Lord’s word. So the virgins who took up careful zeal for doing the commandments are wise. The careless are foolish, because

they spent the time they were given on zeal for empty things. The words "they slept" mean the sleep of death. Midnight shows what is sudden and unexpected, and at the same time frightening. For those who have risen, the fruit of their labors is at hand. But for those who bring nothing with them, because of their indifference toward godliness, the soul begins to grow gloomy, as if it were being put out, and to slide into folly, so that they imagined they would be saved by the virtue of others. This is why they are rejected, when the others say, "Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you." Those who sell the oil are the teachers, who sell it for the reward of devoted attendance, attention, love of learning and love of hard work. Or the sellers are the prophets, apostles and evangelists, by whom a person is taught and then works virtue.

Matthew 27

Verse 11. “And the governor questioned him, saying, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’” Pilate asks him as one condemned on a public charge: “Are you the king of the Jews?” He asks either mockingly or in real doubt. Jesus answers quietly, hinting at a “yes,” since he is king of all people, with the words “You say so.” The high priest had questioned him as a judge, saying, “Tell us whether you are the king,” but Pilate asked in a way that declared a verdict. Consider whether “You have said so,” spoken to the high priest, exposes his doubt, which he had not noticed, while “You say so,” spoken to Pilate, confirms Pilate’s own declaration. For he was king of Israel. Jesus did not say a plain “yes,” so as not to give Pilate a reasonable ground to condemn him. Because the accusers were so unchangeable, he does not answer them either. And he rightly did not answer Pilate, because Pilate was in doubt whether he should defend himself against unjust accusations, and was of two minds about them. For it was clear that if Jesus had defended himself and shown himself guilty of no charge, the judge would have released him, having found a way to give a favorable verdict. So the governor marveled at him, that though he could have made many defenses, he kept silent. Therefore, as one wanting to release him, Pilate urged him toward this. For Pilate also knew that he had been handed over out of envy. Pilate did not simply marvel, but marveled greatly. Perhaps it was because of Jesus’ steadiness and calm in the face of death, and the serenity of his face even in these things. Or he marveled at his more than human patience. It is likely that, since the Jews had just entered into a treaty with the Romans, they thought the favor of a release would be granted to them at the feast. Saul also shows that this kind of thing had happened before, when he granted Jonathan to the people. Pilate said this thinking they would ask for either the innocent man or one guilty of countless charges, as though they were righteous people.

For Pilate knew that they had no clear proof against him. In some very old copies I found that Barabbas himself was also called Jesus. In those copies Pilate’s question read like this: “Which of the two do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For it seems that “Barabbas” was the robber’s family name, which is translated “son of a teacher.” Taken together, then, the name Barabbas means “son of our teacher.” And whose son are we to suppose this notorious robber was, if not the son of the man of blood, the murderer from the beginning? Even to this day those who have learned from him how to murder choose him over the one who gives life to people, our Lord Jesus Christ.

While Jesus was being judged by Pilate, he sent a message to Pilate's wife. By his silence he would astonish Pilate with his courage, and by the message Pilate would know that he was judging not a man but God. [The text is corrupt here.] Pilate himself did not see the dream, either so that he would not keep silent about the dream, or because he would not have been believed, or because he was unworthy, or so that he might hear what the woman had suffered and sympathize. For she not only saw the dream but suffered many things, and in the night, which made it more fearful. Besides, the dream was a work of Providence. It did not say what the matter was, but it showed that it was given not to keep Jesus from suffering but to save the woman. Blessed is the woman who has such suffering in dreams, so that she may not suffer beyond measure. [The text is unclear here.] But if this woman is a symbol of the Church that was once ruled by Pilate and is no longer under his hand because of faith in Christ, then — for the woman was a foreigner. [The text breaks off here.]

Verse 45. "From the sixth hour darkness came over all the land until the ninth hour." The prophet Zechariah also spoke about this darkening. He says: "On that day there will be no light. There will be cold and frost for one day. And that day is known to the Lord. It will be neither day nor night, and toward evening there will be light." He speaks of the darkness as the darkening of those who lay hands on the light. For just as there was darkness for the Egyptians and light for the sons of Israel, so now there is light for the Church, but for the Jews a darkness of three days: the darkness of the Father's light, of the radiance of Christ, of the shining of the Holy Spirit. And since man was made on the sixth day, it is likely that he also fell in the sixth hour. Perhaps for this reason the one who suffers for the salvation of men was hung up at the sixth hour. This is the sign that he had promised earlier to give to those who asked for it, when he said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign," and what follows; and, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he." For it is far more wonderful that these things happened while he was nailed to the cross than while he walked on the earth. The strangeness was not only in this. What they were seeking came from heaven, and it came over the whole inhabited world. That had never happened before, except in Egypt alone, when the Passover was also being kept.

For those things were a type of these. So that they could not say that what happened was an eclipse, it happened at a time when an eclipse could not occur. [The text is corrupt here.] It came in the middle of the day, so that all who live on the earth would learn that it was daytime everywhere in the world. A philosopher among the Greeks named Phlegon also mentions this darkness, as something that happened marvelously on the fourteenth day of the moon. At that time an eclipse cannot naturally occur, since the sun is far away, as far apart as from the beginning of the sky to its end. For eclipses happen when these two lights come close to each other. An eclipse of the sun happens when the moon, at the time of conjunction, passes under it, not at full moon, when the moon is at the opposite side. This happened as though creation were mourning at what had been done, and so showing that, since this drunken outrage was committed by the Jews, their mind was darkened and the sun of the mind withdrew from them. For if they thought he had done this, they ought to have believed and feared. If they thought it was not he but the Father, they ought even then

to have been pierced to the heart. For that darkness was the work of one who is angry, and a sign of what was going to seize those who fight against God and shed innocent blood. This is why it happened after the whole outrage, when they were sated with their mockery and had said everything they wished.

Matthew 28

Verse 18. “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” Understand the words “All authority has been given to me” and what follows as referring to the incarnation. But if you also consider it in relation to the divinity, then you will take “authority has been given to me” to mean “room has been made for it.” “Given” means “brought to me”; I have been entrusted with authority over free will. Life first had room among the things above, and now also among the things below. So baptize them with confidence into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. There is one who saves, and one salvation. There is one who lives: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is one, not by a blending together of the three, but in one being; yet there are three persons, each complete in every respect, and fitting together. The Father begot by nature, and so the one begotten was of the same being as himself. God is not a body. Therefore God, who is without a body, did not beget by [σταρε σιν: the word is uncertain, perhaps “emission” or “flowing”] or by movement, or by any such thing as is seen in bodies. The begetting is real and personal: the Son was brought forth from the being of the Father.

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