

The Marian Month Celebrating St. Mary

Α ΤΑΙ ΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ (A Tai Parthenos)

The Hymn of the 10 Strings 3rd & 4th String

Last week we reflected on the 1st & 2nd strings of the (A Tai Parthenos) Hymn. Today we will continue with both 3rd & 4th strings of this beautiful hymn.

The 3rd string says: “He struck the third string of his harp, crying out and saying, “All the glory is of the daughter of the King of Cheshbon; she is clothed in fringes of gold”, which is based on Psalm 45:13 “All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with gold.”

At first glance, reading this verse along with the hymn of the Ten Strings might seem to describe the physical beauty of St. Mary. Yet the beauty spoken of here is far deeper, it is the inner beauty of her soul. As St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches: “Her soul was adorned with the gold of divine virtues, and thus she was prepared as a dwelling for the King of Glory.”

The Virgin’s soul was clothed in fringes of gold which represent her many virtues like chastity, prudence, obedience, love, and patience. These virtues clothed her human nature, and these very virtues, that were given to her by God, made her truly radiant before Him and before the entire world for generations to come.

St. Mary was entirely covered and filled with divine grace, that is the Holy Spirit, Who perfected her and rendered her wholly beautiful before the Lord. This is why the Archangel Gabriel greeted her with the words, “Hail full of grace”(Luke 1:28), she was completely clothed in the grace of the Holy Spirit.

St. Gregory the Theologian expresses this mystery beautifully in his homily: “The visible beauty is not hidden, but that which is unseen [the soul] is visible to God. All the glory of the King’s daughter is within, clothed with golden fringes, embroidered whether by actions or by contemplation.”

The 4th string reads: “He struck the fourth string of his harp, crying out and saying, “They will bring in to the King virgins following her””, which derived from Psalm 45:14 “In many-colored robes she is led to the king, with her virgin companions following behind her”

Here we see the Psalmist paint a picture of a heavenly procession: the Queen, the Theotokos, is brought into the presence of the King, followed by virgins who walk in her footsteps. This imagery speaks about Mary’s example and her intercession on our behalf. The virgins following her are the souls prepared to meet the King, much like the five wise virgins who trimmed their lamps in anticipation for the Bridegroom.

St. Hilary of Poitiers explains: “The wise virgins are those who, embracing the time available to them, were prepared at the first onset of the coming of the Lord. But the foolish were those who were lax and unmindful.

They troubled themselves only over present matters and, forgetting what God said, did not direct their efforts toward hope for the resurrection.”

St. Mary becomes the model and leader of these virgins, the one whose life of purity, obedience, and preparedness they follow. Beyond being an example, she is also their intercessor before the King, pleading on their behalf. Through her intercession, the Lord grants help in times of temptation, comfort in despair, and hope during times of tribulation.

May our hearts and souls be transformed by the inner beauty of St. Mary, that we too may be clothed in the grace of the Holy Spirit, walking faithfully in her footsteps, and entering with her into the presence of the King.

Sources

- Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Psalms 1-50
- Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Matthew 14-28