SAINT HILARY OF POITIERS

Hymns

Liber hymnorum

SABBATISMUS

Saint Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310–367)
Liber hymnorum · Hymns

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What remains of Saint Hilary's Book of Hymns

Happy the prophet David, who first, with the instrument, / proclaimed Christ in the flesh to the world in hymns.

I. On Christ, who is God

O you who remain before the ages, / and ever born, as ever he is Father! — / for without you, how / can it be said, unless he is Father, that he is Father? —

O God twice begotten for us, / O Christ! when you are born from the unborn God / or when, bodily and God, / the Virgin mother begot you for the world:

The believing people asks of you / that, in your gentleness, you hear the hymns' resounding / voices, which are sung to you together / by every age, O holy one, of your flock.

While, faithful, it asks you that to it / you remain merciful, the people of your name / in you worships the innascible God, / because the one remains in the other.

Beyond what can be grasped / by the human mind, the Son remains in the Father; / and again, that the Father should be with him / he is worthy, who as Son was begotten into God.

Happy he who by faith was able, / believing, to attain things so great to their depths: / that from the incorporeal God / the Begotten of God was perfect.

We speak of great things, and of God / true: that the Begetter, whatever is in him, / the splen-

dour of eternal glory, / has brought forth whole into the only-begotten God,

hence he who alone is rightly good / willed that his very self, what God is, beyond any envy of himself, / should be begotten into another, / transforming himself, as he is, into a living image.

In these lies open God's true / power: though he has given all things, yet / he does not lack the very things he has given, / having all that is his, though he has given it.

Beloved offspring of God, / with whom all the Father's splendour is born! / Nothing needed to be given to the one born, / but whatever was God's was born at the same time.

Light shone from light, / and true God subsisted from God / true; sprung forth, the Only-begotten has / nothing other than the innascible Father has.

This is a wondrous work of God: / that the eternal, incorruptible God, / who lacks a beginning, because / everlasting power is what God is,

with goods not born, in which he is, / should, serene, beget from himself into God; / and thus in the only-begotten God / that very thing which was begotten lacks a beginning.

O happy unity of the two! / And since the one is mingled in the other, / thus the two make one, / since in the two is what is in the one.

But the Begotten obeys the Father / and remains intent upon his every nod; / and it is not hard to know / what he wills him to follow, him with ⟨whom⟩ the Father is.

For what great goods he was begotten! / For he, appointed for the outset of all things, / and first founding the ages, / brought forth the times into an eternal motion.

God, prior to all things / — for through him all things were made —, / when there was as yet mere nothing, / founded the world in a bodily state.

But the letter does not allow us, / by which together we sing you begotten God, / to tell the events that are yours / and you born flesh, who were already God.

You, Lord in every way, / King of the heavens and of heavenly glory, / that all things founded through you / …

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II. On the resurrection of Christ

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The Word made flesh deceived you, savage one, / and you rush, wholly, upon the body of the living God.

You rejoice when you see him hanging on the wood of the cross, / and claim as your own the limbs fixed with nails.

This pageant you take up before so great a battle: / spittle, scourges, blows, the hollow reed.

He went in triumph, your death consumed, O Death, / God, who did not know how to be conquered by the realm of hell.

The glowing pool of the pale Styx grows cold, / and Phlegethon, grown stiff, does not know that it boils.

Light, dawning, shines on the vast night of the underworld; / and the savage keeper of deep Tartarus trembles.

Death, you feel yourself slain, together with your law, / when you see that God has made you subject to yourself.

This body that you hold is not perishable, / and corruption has no right over it.

The weakness of all our flesh conquers you; / the nature of flesh has been born together with God.

Through it I shall climb, joyful, into the high / heavens, rising again with my glorious body.

With what great hopes, faithful, I believed in Christ, / who, born, takes me up into himself through the flesh!

I have been reborn — O outset of a joyful life! — / and I live, a Christian, by new laws.

The everlasting gift of God grants the saints this: / that hereafter they live in a body conformed to him.

At last let the terror of your death, O Death, withdraw; / the patriarch receives me, joyful, into his bosom.

I shall live, set hereafter in the heavenly places, / certain that the flesh sits at the right hand of God.

Christ, returned as victor to your heavens, / remember the flesh in which you were born, my own.

Everlasting hymns with the choirs of angels / I shall sing, rising again, joyful, in this body.

Satan once envied me in death: / let him see me reigning with you through all the ages.

III. On the temptations of Christ

The glorious battles of Adam's flesh and perishable body, / in the heavenly Adam once again, let us sing together, / by which Satan was first conquered, in the new Adam.

The deceitful enemy of the ages, the artificer of dread death, / having now sown his viperous counsels through the whole world, / thinks that nothing remains of human hope for salvation.

He rejoices in altars, rejoices in temples, rejoices in the victim's gore; / rejoices in falsehoods, rejoices in debaucheries, rejoices in the blood of war; / rejoices that the Maker of heaven is unknown to the nations.

While he exults amid so many deaths of our ruin, / he hears glory proclaimed to God in the highest / and on earth the peace of men of the best will.

The company of angels, joyful, proclaiming this, terrifies him; / it terrifies him, announcing to the shepherds Christ born for the earth, / and that great joy would come from this to despairing peoples.

He wanders to this side and that, anxious at things so great; / he asks, bold, whether this is anyone worthy of such tidings, / seeing nothing beyond what is common sprung up on the earth.

Yet he sees that John is preaching in the desert places, / plunging them in the waters of the Jordan, repentance to all, / which the remission of sins confessed is to follow.

Among the crowds that were being plunged in throngs, he hears / a voice from heaven proclaiming: This is my Son; / hear him! This is the beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

He sees a man, he sees a body, which he had lured in Adam; / the voice of honour brought nothing more from above; / he knows that an earthly origin lies subject to the law of death.

To tempt him he sets in motion many arts of his ancient fraud; / he seeks, bold, a time that might be … / …

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A doubtful hymn. Hymn on Christ

Let the throng of brothers say a hymn, let song sound out a hymn; / singing together to Christ the King, let us give the praise that is due.

You are the Word from the heart of God, you the way, you the truth, / you are called the rod of Jesse, we read that you are the lion.

Right hand of the Father, mountain and Lamb, you the corner-stone, / you the same are bridegroom or dove, flame, shepherd, door.

In the prophets you are found, born in our age; / before the ages you were the maker of the first age.

Maker of heaven, maker of earth, you the gatherer of the sea, / and you the creator of all things which the Father bids be born.

Received within the Virgin's limbs at Gabriel's message, / the womb grows with the holy child; we are bidden to believe

a thing new and never seen before, a virgin mother. / Then the Magi, following the star, are the first to adore the little one,

offering incense and gold, gifts worthy of a king. / Soon word was brought to Herod; jealous of that power,

he then orders the little ones killed; he made a throng of martyrs. / The infant is carried off to be hidden where the river Nile flows.

After Herod he is brought back, to be reared at Nazareth. / Many signs as a child, many as a grown man, he worked from heaven,

some that lie hidden and some that are read, before many witnesses; / preaching the heavenly kingdom, he proves his sayings by deeds.

He makes the weak grow strong, he fills the blind with light, / by words he cleanses the disease of leprosy, he raises the dead.

[Into the wine that the jars lacked he bids the water be changed, / for a wedding kept short of wine, with a cup to be passed round].

With five loaves and two fishes he feeds five thousand / and gathers the fragments of the meal in three times four baskets;

from all the reclining throng he won unceasing praise. / He approved twelve men, through whom life is learned.

Of them one is found, Judas, the betrayer of Christ; / those sent by Annas are instructed by the traitor's kiss.

The innocent one is seized and held, and is led away without resisting; / he is made to stand, assailed by false witnesses, to be brought before Pontius.

The governor examines the charges, finds no crime. / But when the crowds of the Jews, for Caesar's safety,

said that Christ must be put to death, the holy one is handed over to the crowds; / he is weighed

down with impious words, he endures spittle, scourges.

The innocent one is ordered to mount the cross for the guilty; / by the death of the flesh he bore, he conquers the death of all.

Then, hanging, he calls with a great cry upon God the Father; / death, following, loosens the tight bonds of Christ's limbs.

The veils of the temple, torn, lie open; night darkens the world; / bodies long shut away are roused from the tombs.

Blessed Joseph was at hand; the body, anointed with myrrh, / bound in rough linen, he laid in the tomb in grief.

Annas, the chief, orders soldiers to guard the body, / to see whether Christ would prove what he had promised.

While they tremble at the angel of God, clothed in a white garment, / by whose whiteness of glory the silken fleece was surpassed,

he moves the stone from the tomb; Christ rises whole; / lying Judaea sees this, denies this, though it has seen it.

The women are the first to be told that the Saviour lives; / he himself greets them in their grief and fills the sorrowful with joy.

And that, raised from the dead by the Father's right hand, / he has returned on the third day, he announces to the apostles.

Soon he is seen by the blessed brothers whom he approved; / while they doubt that he has returned, he enters with the doors shut.

Teaching, he gives the precepts of the law, he gives the divine Spirit, / the perfect Spirit of God, the bond of the Trinity.

He commands that believers be baptised throughout the world, / calling upon the name of the Father, confessing the Son.

By a mystic faith he reveals those dipped in the Holy Spirit, / dipped in the font, made new, made sons of God.

Before the light, throng of brothers, let us sing glory together, / by which we are taught that we shall be, in the everlasting age.

[The cock's crowing, the cock's wing-beat senses the day is near; / we, singing and praying, believe the things to come.

And let us sing together unceasingly the boundless majesty, / before the light let us proclaim Christ the King to the world,

before the light singing out to Christ, the King and Lord, / and, those who rightly believe in him, who are to reign with him.

Glory to the unbegotten Father, glory to the Only-begotten, / together with the Holy Spirit, for everlasting ages].