

*At the beginning of a new year which looks like being just as challenging as 2020, the message of Christmas assures us that our hope is not a fantasy. God has already taken all that is ours to himself and transformed it into something that transcends the very worst that can happen in this world. I hope these words from one of the letters of St Athanasius may encourage you during the dark days we are living through.*

“As the Apostle tells us, God’s Word took to himself the descendants of Abraham and so had to be like his brothers in all things, including having a body like ours. This is why Mary is central to the story, so that he might receive a body from her, a real body which he would offer for us. ... Gabriel spoke precisely and wisely to Mary when he announced his birth. He did not say simply “what will be born *in* you”, which might be misunderstood as implying that a body would be introduced into her womb from outside; he spoke of “what will be born *from* you,” so that we might know by faith that her child originated within her and from her.

This being so, because the Word assumed what was ours and offered it in sacrifice, he was to destroy it utterly and reclothe us in what was his, enabling the Apostle to say, “This corruptible body must put on incorruption; this mortal body must put on immortality.”

This was no fiction, as some reckon. Far from it! Our Saviour truly became man, and from this has followed the salvation of man as a whole. Our salvation is in no way make believe, nor does it apply only to the body. The salvation of the whole man, that is, of soul and body, has really been achieved in the Word himself.

What was born of Mary was therefore human by nature, in accordance with the inspired Scriptures, and the body of the Lord was a true body: It was a true body because it was the same as ours. Mary, you see, is our sister, for we are all born from Adam.

St John makes the same point when he says, “The Word was made flesh.”. Our human body has acquired something great through its communion and union with the Word. From being mortal it has been made immortal; though it was a animal body it has become a spiritual one; though it was made from the earth it has passed through the gates of heaven.

*From a letter from St Athanasius to Epictetus*