THE THEOTOKION 'Ο ΤΗΝ ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΕΝΗΝ; ITS BACKGROUND IN PATRISTIC EXEGESIS OF LUKE 15.8-10, AND WESTERN PARALLELS.¹

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'Ο τήν εὐλογημένην
καλέσας σου Μητέρα,
γιάθες επί τὸ πάθος ἐκουσίᾳ βουλή,
λάμψας εἰς τῷ Σταυρῷ,
5 ἀναζητήσας θέλων τὸν 'Αδάμ,
λέγων τοῖς 'Αγγέλοις
Συγχάρητέ μοι,
ὅτι εὑρέθη ἡ ἀπολυμένη δραχμή.
'Ο πάντα σοφῶς οἰκονομήσαις
10 Θεός, δόξα σοι.

O you who called your Mother the Blessed One,
you came to the Passion by your willing design,
you shone on the Cross,
wishing to seek out Adam,
saying to the Angels:
"Rejoice with me,
for the Lost Drachma is found!"
O you who have disposed all things with wisdom,
O God, glory to you!

This is the theotokion associated with the apolytikion anastasimon (dismissal troparion of Saturday Vespers, also employed at Orthros and the Divine Liturgy on the following Sunday) of the second plagal (sixth) tone 'Αγγελικαὶ Διωμάτεις ("The Angelic Powers etc").² It is somewhat unusual among the dominical and ferial dismissal theotokia in that it is not addressed to the Theotokos. The other theotokia in this category not directly addressed to the Theotokos fall into two types: I) compressed third-person narratives of easily identified events in the life of the Theotokos:
The theotokion "Ο τήν εὐλογημένην stands out even among these unusual theotokia because of the obscure, almost riddling quality of its text. This theotokion is, thus, an interesting composition in itself, and it has the added interest of being an outstanding example of the transmission in a highly compressed, regularly repeated liturgico-poetic form of the patristic exegesis of a relatively little commented upon text, Luke 15.8-10, the Parable of the Lost Drachma. The purpose of this study is to explicate the theotokion "Ο τήν εὐλογημένην both in terms of the gradual elaboration of meaning in its internal development and in terms of the fuller meaning attaching to it from its background in the patristic exegesis of Luke 15.8-10. Parallel developments in the Latin West, both in exegesis and liturgy, will be described, and the conclusion will discuss briefly their relationship to the Eastern phenomena discussed earlier.

The Theotokion "Ο τήν εὐλογημένην

If we examine the text of the theotokion, we observe within the narrow compass of a mono-stanzaic poem the posing of a metaphorical riddle and its gradual resolution through its being situated in a specific text of Scripture, and within a specific line of that text’s exegetical tradition.

The opening address to Christ places Him in association with the Theotokos through allusion to Luke 1.42, Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary, or, more probably, to Luke 1.28, where a widespread variant places the title εὐλογημένη in the greeting of Gabriel to Mary.¹ Christ’s Passion is at once introduced as being part of His εξουσία βουλή, a concept which the remainder of the poem elaborates. The riddling part of the poem begins with λάμψας ἐν τῷ Σταυρῷ, as we try to imagine in what direction the choice of the verb λάμψας may be taking us. The following line, ἀναζητήσαι θέλων τὸν Ἀδὰμ points to a purpose, but again we wonder why the redemptive work should be described in terms of a quest. λέγων τοῖς Ἀγγέλοις prepares for what follows, the words Ἐν γυναικί μοι which