



# Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-century Homilies on the Mother of God

*Mary B. Cunningham*

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Mary, the virgin of Nazareth, was chosen by God to conceive and give birth to his only Son, Jesus Christ, at the time and place that prophets had foretold throughout the Old Testament. As Orthodox bishops eventually decided at the Third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus, ad 431, the Virgin Mary contained God himself in her womb. She should therefore be called Theotokos ( God-bearer or Birth-giver of God ) and be praised for her essential role in the mystery of the Incarnation. At the Church s recognition of her place in christological doctrine, popular veneration of the Virgin began from the middle of the fifth century and grew especially in the course of the sixth. The twelve sermons translated in this volume were all produced in the eighth century, not only in Constantinople, but also in Jerusalem, Crete, and possibly another outlying province in mainland Greece or Syria. They are the work of five preachers, John of Damascus, Germanos of Constantinople, Andrew of Crete, John of Euboia, and Kosmas Vestitor, four of whom were churchmen whereas the last was one of a small number of lay Byzantine preachers whose texts survive in liturgical manuscripts.

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