

5.37

## **Gospel Miracles in a Fourth-Century Song: Hymn 9 by Prudentius**

Prudentius (348–ca. 405) was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day.

His best-known work may be the *Cathemerinon*, a collection of twelve lyric poems for use at different hours of the day and on Christian festivals. Of these, the most famous would be Hymn 9, which summarizes the story of Jesus in the Gospels, with emphasis on his incarnation, miracles, and passion-resurrection.

The midsection of the lengthy poem mentions several miracles of Jesus reported in the four New Testament Gospels. In lines 28–30, Prudentius describes Jesus’s turning water into wine (John 2:1–11):

In the urns the clear, cold water turns to juice of noblest vine,  
And the servant, drawing from them, starts to see the generous  
wine,  
While the host, its savour tasting, wonders at the draught divine.<sup>1</sup>

In lines 31–66, the hymn continues, recounting Jesus cleansing a leper (Matt. 8:2–4; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 5:12–13); healing the blind (Mark 8:22–26); calming the storm at sea (Matt. 8:23–27; Mark 4:37–

41; Luke 8:22–25); healing a woman who touches his garment (Matt. 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48); raising a widow’s son from the dead (Luke 7:11–15); raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44); walking on water (Matt. 14:25; Mark 6:48–51; John 6:19); healing the insane by exorcizing demons (Matt. 8:28–43; Mark 5:1–15; Luke 8:27–35); feeding a multitude, literally and figuratively (Matt. 14:15–21; Mark 6:35–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–13); healing the deaf and the mute (Mark 7:31–37); and healing sickness and infirmity (Matt. 14:35–36; Mark 1:34).

1. Aurelius Prudentius, *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co. Aldine House, 1905).