God Among Us: A Theological Analysis of Olivier Messiaen's *La Nativité*

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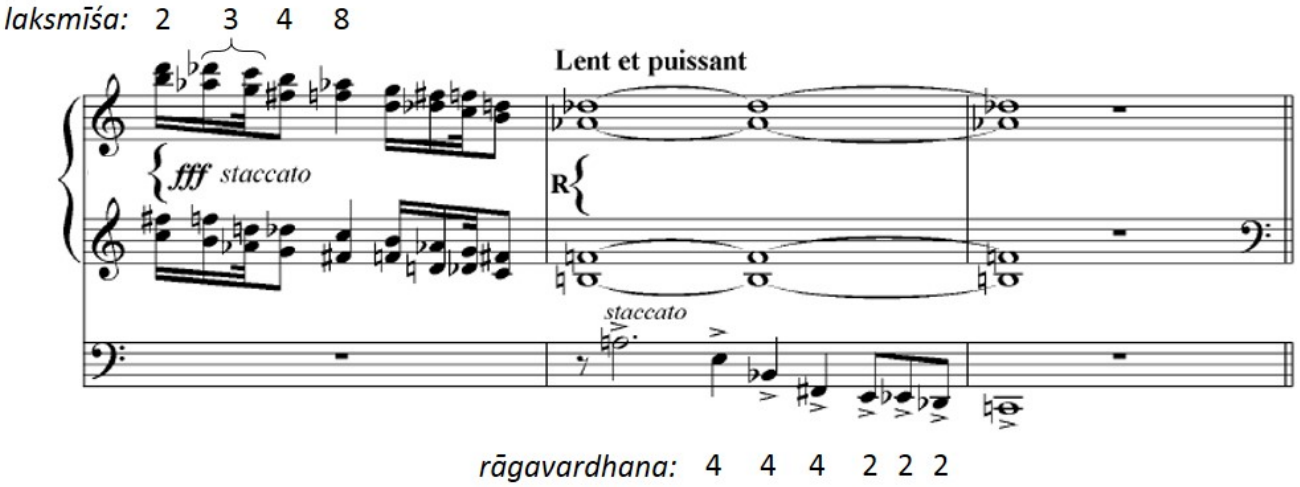
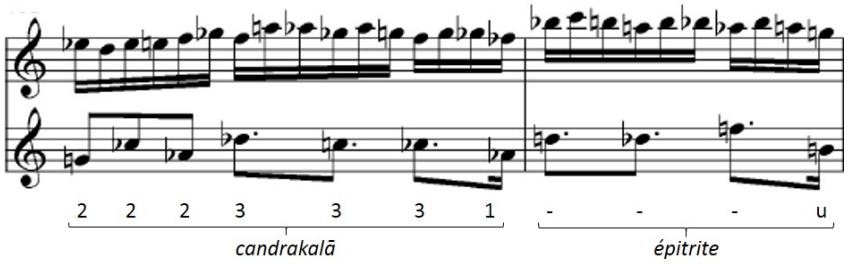
MUSICAL EXAMPLES

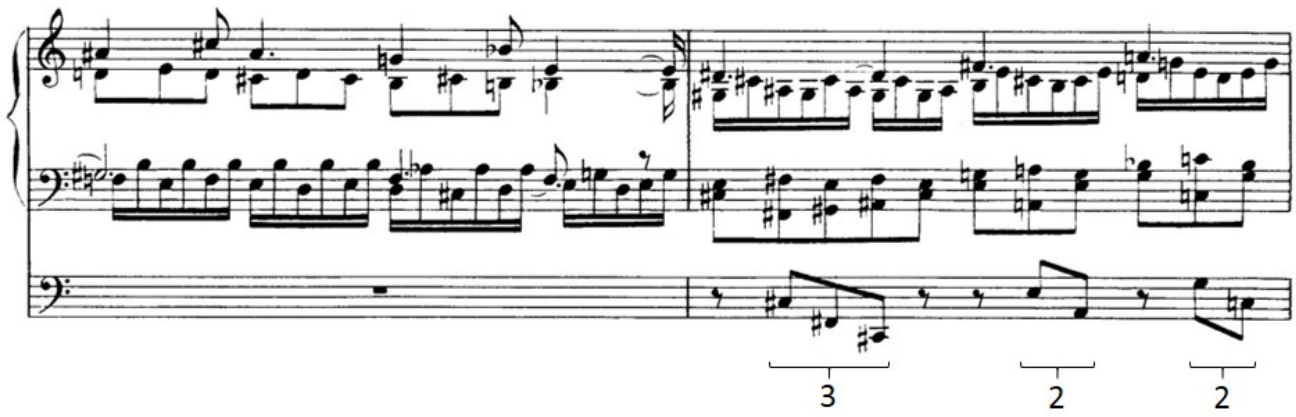
Example 1. "Dieu parmi nous," from Messiaen, *La Nativité*, mm. 1–3



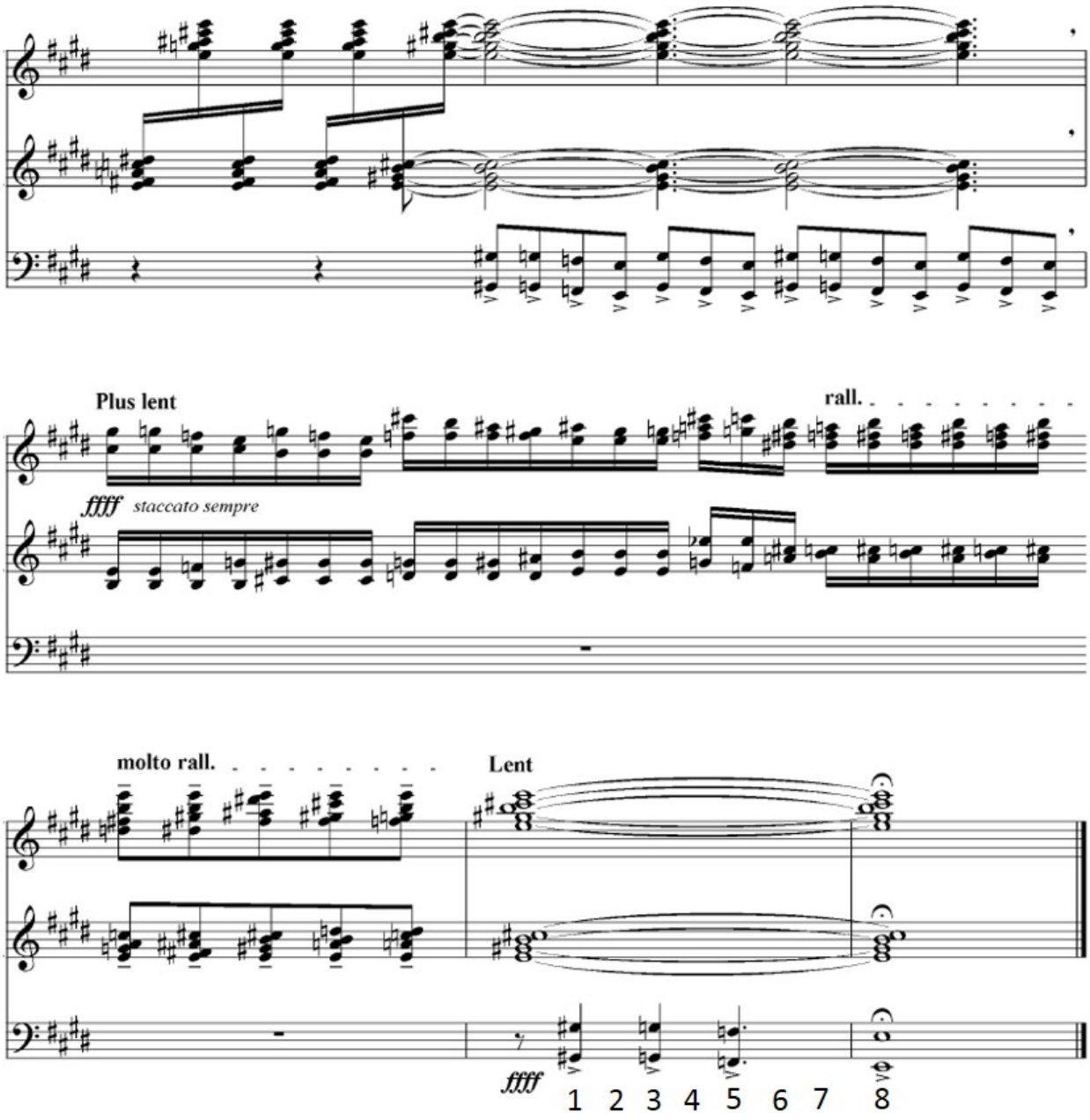
Example 2. "Dieu parmi nous," mm. 23–24



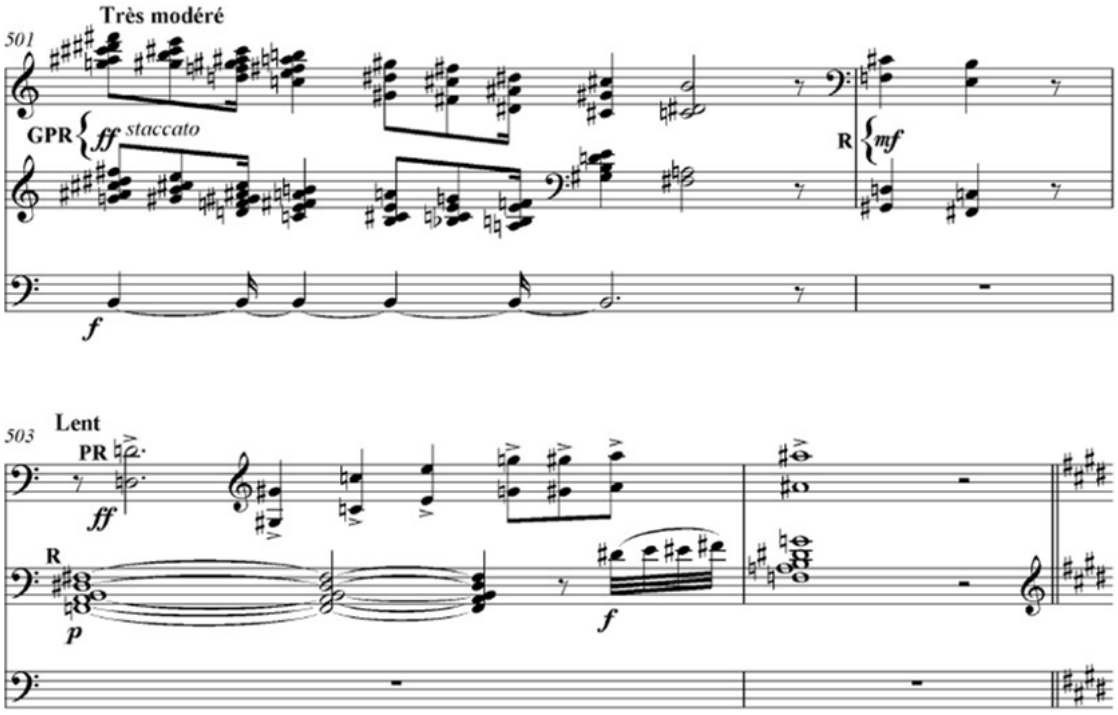
Example 3. "Dieu parmi nous," mm. 35–36



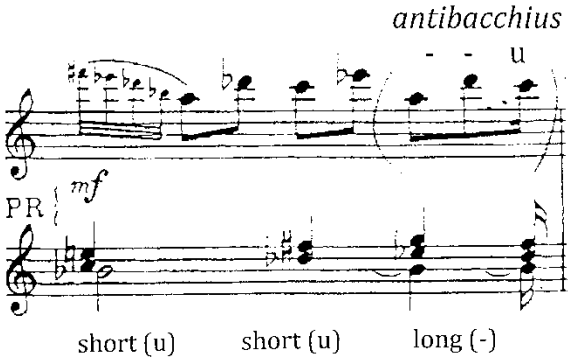
Example 4. “Dieu parmi nous,” mm. 100–104



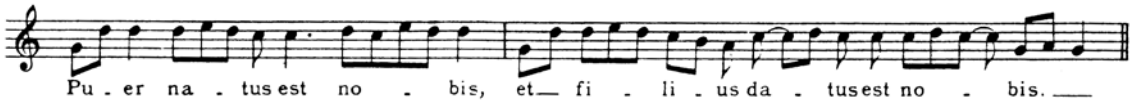
Example 5. “Dieu parmi nous,” mm. 55–58



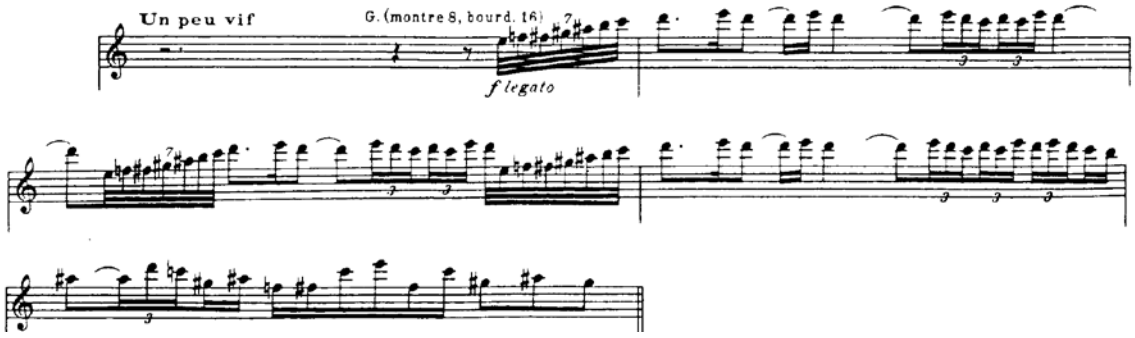
Example 6. “La Vierge et l’Enfant,” from Messiaen, *La Nativité*, m. 1



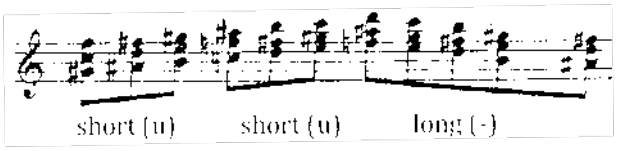
Example 7. “Puer natus est nobis” plainchant, from Messiaen, *Technique*, p. 37



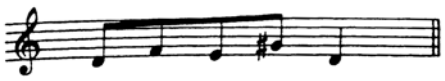
Example 8. “La Vierge et l’Enfant,” mm. 16-20, upper staff



Example 9. “La Vierge et l’Enfant,” m. 16, lower staff



Example 10. From Messiaen, *Technique*, p. 37



SIGNIFICANT SYMBOLIC NUMBERS UTILIZED IN *LA NATIVITÉ*

one. A number favored for its indivisibility, one often suggests the indivisible God. Additionally, Messiaen often uses one to add value to another unit of measurement.

two. This number represents earthly, terrestrial things, as it is the first even number. Though technically a prime number, it is essentially divisible into smaller units (1 + 1), unlike odd numbers which represent indivisible divinity. For Messiaen, two is the "purest" or smallest even number and is therefore the simplest representation of humanity.

three. A favored prime number, three suggests the Holy Trinity. Three cannot be divided, and it therefore suggests the indivisible God comprising three discrete beings. Messiaen considers three to be the first odd number, and he consistently remarks that it is the perfect symbol for divinity.

five. The number five is highly symbolic in Messiaen's music, as it is the sum of the first even number (2) and the first odd number (3). It often represents Christ, who is at once human and divine. Five is also associated with Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction; Messiaen notes that Shiva is associated with destruction, restorative dance, and ultimately rebirth or resurrection. In Indian culture, five represents the union of female (2) and male (3) and is therefore all-encompassing.

seven. Another prime number, seven holds great symbolism in many religions and cultures. God created the universe in six days, resting on the seventh; seven therefore symbolizes rest and Sabbath. There are numerous biblical references to the number seven, leading Messiaen to revere this number as representing all things sacred.

eight. The number eight symbolizes eternity for Messiaen, as the rest represented by seven is extended into the ultimate rest of eternity.

nine. Yet another odd number, nine is a perfect square as the product of 3 x 3. It often represents divinity or maternity, symbolizing the nine months of pregnancy.

ten. Ten is the number of commandments that God ceremoniously gave the Israelites; it may therefore be suggestive of Old Testament law in certain contexts within Messiaen's music.

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