

PREPARING SERVANTS FOR
The Service Of The Kingdom

BOOK 2
ZOOM INTO THE HEAVENLY PLACES



PRESENTED AND COMPILED BY
VIOLA YASSA

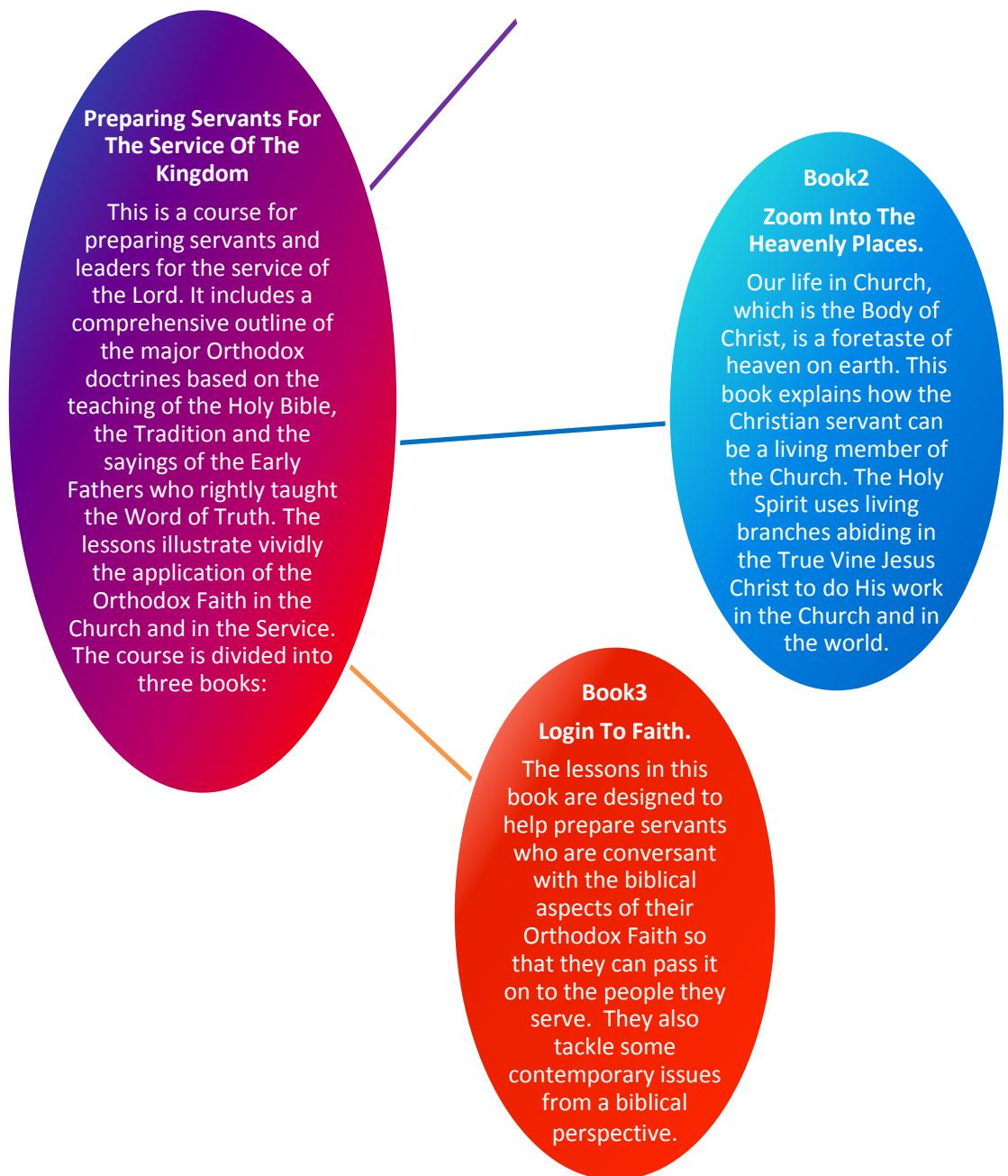
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Coptic Orthodox Church

Diocese of Sydney

Australia





Acknowledgement



"But the people who know their God will
be strong and do valiantly," Dan11:32.

We praise our Good Lord and thank Him for
His great help throughout this work. Special
thanks are given to the many God-loving
people who were moved by the Spirit of
the Lord to assist in the production
of this book.

May the Lord repay them
hundred-fold and bless them

Zoom Into The Heavenly Places



"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you," John14:26.



Book2: Zoom Into The Heavenly Places



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Preface

“The Lord has done great things with us; we are glad,” Psa126:3.

Zoom Into The Heavenly Places is the second book of the course for preparing servants. It provides a close-up view of heaven. It deals with the biblical aspects of the Church according to the Coptic Orthodox Church, and how the individual believer can enjoy them. Our life in Church is a foretaste of heaven on earth.

The lessons are designed to help edify the members of the Body of Christ, the Church. They were originally given in Sydney, Australia (1990-2010) to pre-servants classes in

- St Anthony and St Paul's Church, Guildford
- St Mary's Church, Sydenham
- The Holy Apostles and St Abanoub's Church, Blacktown
- Archangel Michael and St Pishoy's Church, Mount Druitt.

To serve the Kingdom of God servants need to be prepared. By making these lessons accessible we hope that many more people may benefit and increase their knowledge to be effective Christian Servants.

June 2013 AD

Feast of the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven



Contents



1. The Church Description
2. The Church, The House of God
3. Our Eschatological Church
4. Monasticism in the Coptic Orthodox Church
5. Ecumenical Councils



THE CHURCH DESCRIPTION

Big Idea: The nature and mission of the New Testament Church.

Bible Text: Eph5:22-32.

Bible Verse: 1Cor12:27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The nature of the Church (1Cor6:17-19)
- ✖ The different pictures of the Church in the New Testament:
 - a firm building (1Pet2:4,5 ; Eph2:20-22),
 - a virgin bride (Eph5:25-27; Rev21:2),
 - a functioning body (Eph 1:22, 23; Eph5:22-32),
 - a permanent city (Rev21:10-27),
 - a stable family (Eph2:19),
 - an active army (Eph6:12).
- ✖ The purpose of the Church (Eph3:21; Eph4:7-16).

Feel: The need to be equipped to perform the work of God.

Do:

- ✖ Ask the Lord to help them know the work He would like to do through them.
- ✖ Accomplish the work to the best of their ability.



THE CHURCH DESCRIPTION



God created Adam and gave him Paradise. There, Adam would detect God's presence and love around him and hear the sound of the Lord walking in the garden. He would be attracted to Him and meet with Him. In Paradise, Adam would offer love to his Creator directly and at any time. The spacious Garden of Eden was the Holy House of God.

Not before long, however, Adam was dismissed from Paradise. Sin fogged his eyes and he could no longer see God. He felt lonely and weak, unable to reattach himself with God. Yet, there was a great desire in his heart to reunite with God. Thus, there arose the great need for heavenly intervention to overcome the barrier of sin and comfort Adam. God, too, was keen to communicate with him.

The divine incarnation fulfilled the aim of God to be with His people. He established His unity with them for "the Word became man". The Church is the Body of Christ (1Cor12:27) and believers become "members of His Body" (Eph1:22, 23). They are the "Temple of God" (1Cor6:17-19).

Indeed, if the House of God is a place to be with God, then it is substantially an entry to the Sacrifice of the Cross. Through this sacrifice, we can be reconciled with God. We become qualified to enjoy the new life and to be transferred to heaven to participate in His Glories.

Through such a concept of faith, the "Church of the New Testament" held a distinctive sanctity in the believers' eyes. For this reason, on entering the Church, they kiss its steps, doors, icons etc, and kneel before the sanctuary as before God Himself.

Although meeting with God is achieved on a personal basis by our faith in the Saviour, it is bound to be in conjunction with other believers. In His Body and Blood, all abide in Him and unite with Him as branches in the one vine. Therefore, the Church building is correlated with the Holy Body of Christ as well as with the members of the congregation.

MAIN DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH

There are a number of different pictures of the Church in the New



Testament. Looked at together, these pictures give us a full idea of the nature and character of the Church and its mission.



A Firm Building

The New Testament letters take up Christ's theme of "building His Church". **"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it," Matt16:18.** The apostles Paul and Peter, in particular, saw the Church as a "spiritual building", composed of living stones, the Christians. This picture shows us how the Christians depend upon each other and upon Christ as the building's cornerstone (1Pet2:4, 5; Eph2:20-22).

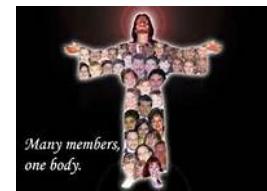
A Virgin Bride

A relationship of deep intimacy is suggested by the New Testament concept of the Church married to Christ. We are told that Christ loves the Church, and has made it pure and faultless by His death (Eph5:25-27). The Apostle John's vision of the new heaven and the new earth describes the Church as Christ's bride prepared and ready to meet her husband (Rev21:2).



A Functioning Body

The picture of the Church as a body, with Christ as its head is described in St Paul's letter to the Ephesians.



"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually," 1Cor12:27. "...and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church which is His body...," Eph1:22, 23.

As in the picture of the Church as a building, the dependence of the Church upon Christ is stressed, but we also learn the important truth that no member of the body is disposable or of overriding importance (1Cor12:12-31).



A Permanent City

The theme of the city of God is usually seen in the Bible as a future hope. God's people live as strangers in the world (Heb13:14), and are looking for the city which is to come (Rev21:10-27).

A Stable Family

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of Our Lord





Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," Eph2:14, 15. The terms 'family' 'or household' of God (Eph2:19) points again to the relationship that exists in the Church between the members and the head. And God's very fatherhood provides a pattern for family life now.

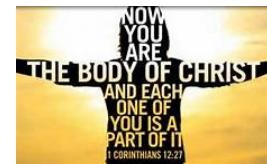


An Active Army

The references to the Church as an army are not heavily pronounced in scripture. However, the New Testament teaches that the Church is involved in a spiritual warfare. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places," Eph6:12. Intensity, activity and victory are the main ideas conveyed to us by this imagery, the weapons (Eph6:14-18) and the victory itself (Rev12:11) being God's.

THE CHURCH - THE BODY OF CHRIST

In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul describes the nature of the Church and its relationship to Jesus Christ. The Lord has not separated us from Him, we are His body, and He is our head. Christ is the head of the Church (Eph5:23; 1Cor11:13) and our bodies are the limbs of Christ (1Cor6:15). We are members of His Body (Eph5:30). This is indeed a profound mystery, a beautiful unity.



In Gal 2:20, St Paul says, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me". Just as Christ is in you, so too are the Father and the Holy Spirit. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temples and that God's Spirit lives in you?" 1Cor3:16 and "Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you? 1Cor6:19. Our Lord Jesus says, "If any one loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our Home with him," John14:23.

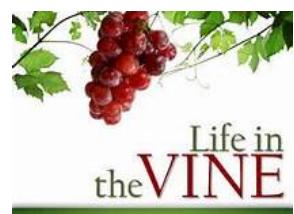
Jesus explained this wonderful unity in the example of the vine and the branches "Abide in Me and I will abide in you.... I am the vine; you are the branches," John15:4, 5. The vine and the branches are one entity, like the head and the body. We abide in God as the branch abides in the vine, with the sap of the vine flowing into it and





giving it life. If the sap of the vine does not flow into it, it dries up and dies.

The picture of the Church as a body, with Christ as its head, emphasizes that the Church is a living organism and not an organization. One of the characteristics of a living organism is reproduction or production of fruit. We cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit unless we abide in Christ. If we were to ask a branch on a grape vine, "How do you grow such luscious fruit?" the branch would probably reply "I don't know. I don't grow any of it, I just bear it. Cut me off from this vine and I will wither away and become useless". Without the vine the branch can do nothing. Jesus said, "**Apart from Me you can do nothing,**" **John15:5.** As long as I strain and work to produce the fruit of the spirit from within myself, I will end up fruitless, and frustrated. But as I abide in Christ through obedient living, the Holy Spirit works in me to produce the fruit of the Spirit.



Life in
the **VINE**

There are four means of abiding in Christ:

1. Faith, "**Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God,**" **1John4:15.**
2. Holy Communion, "**He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him,**" **John6:56.**
3. Love, "**No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us,**" **1John4:12.**
4. Keeping the commandments, "**Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him,**" **1John3:24.**



"**Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually,**" **1Cor12:27.** Clearly, we learn the important truth that no member of the body is disposable or of overriding importance (**1Cor12:12, 13**). Each individual is worth the Blood of Christ. If I were the only person living in this world Christ would have come and died for me. What can I give in return for this great Love? "**My son give Me your heart,**" **Pro23:26.** Love the Lord your God with all your heart.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH (Eph3:21)

The ultimate purpose of the Church is to bring honour and glory to its head, Jesus Christ. It does this as it fulfills its **two** purposes related to God's



program for the world.

The **first** purpose of the Church, as it relates to the world is **evangelism**. This program is spelled out in the Great Commission (Matt28:19, 20) which has never been rescinded. The program is to "make disciples of all nations". The way this is done is twofold: by "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit", and by "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you".



The **second** purpose of the Church as it relates to the world is **edification**.



spiritual maturity.

According to Eph4:12, the saints need to be edified (built-up) for two goals: "**for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry**". The believers who compose the Church's membership need to be built up so that they may realize all that God has provided for Christian living and that they come to

They also need to be equipped to perform that work in the body of Christ that God wants them to perform. In a real sense each member of the Church is to be a Christian worker so that the work that God wants to perform through the local Church can be accomplished (Matt16:18; Acts2:42-47).

Every member of Christ's body is important to the overall life and work of the Church.





The Church, The House Of God

Big Idea: The idea of the "House of God" building evolved throughout history.

Bible Text: Various.

Bible Verse: Matt21:13, "My house shall be called the house of prayer".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The need for the Altar.
- ✖ Bethel, the House of God.
- ✖ The Tabernacle.
- ✖ The Temple.
- ✖ The Church of the New Testament.
- ✖ The heavenly character of the Church Building.

Feel: That in the New Testament we enjoy the new life with Christ.

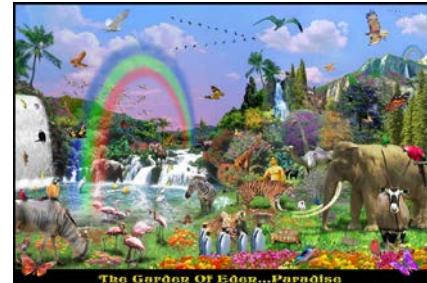
Do: Participate in these glories by doing the Sacraments.



The Church, the House Of God



In Paradise, Adam had a direct and intimate relationship with God. The spacious Paradise was the Holy "House of God". Not before long, however, Adam was dismissed from Paradise. God then, introduced the rite of the sacrifice and the altar, as a preliminary basis for the House of God where Adam would be able to communicate with his Creator.



THE NEED FOR THE ALTAR



The Altar of God was with all the men of God e.g. Noah and Abraham etc... The introduction of the altar reveals to us two basic facts.

The first fact deals with our relationship with God on a personal basis. The word 'altar' in Hebrew and in Arabic refers to the place at which sacrifices are slaughtered. This is clear in Genesis22:9 where Isaac was laid on the altar to be slain and burned. This means that meeting with God is made possible through a sacrifice of reconciliation.

The second fact deals with our relationship with God through the congregation of believers. This concept came to light at the time when Elijah the prophet built an altar of twelve stones (1Kin18:30), imitating the Sinai tradition (Exo24:4). Each stone represented a tribe, indicating that God's altar is built on the presence of all people.

These two facts paint for us the icon of our relationship with God. It includes two important and vital features, namely, God's wish to unite with each one of us personally and God's wish that we all unite in Him as one body.

BETHEL, THE HOUSE OF GOD

The Bible, in Genesis25:12-15, widened our knowledge of God's relationship with us. Jacob was chosen because he was the father of the whole Jewish nation; his twelve sons, later, became heads of the twelve tribes. This choice focused the light on the broader aspects of the House of God, compared with the previous form of the altar.



God wanted to illustrate two vital facts of faith regarding His relationship with people. The first fact was that God *was* with His people. While Jacob was running away aimlessly, with no place to rest, and nobody to protect him, God's voice assured him, "**I am with you,**" **Gen28:15**. Jacob found relief in Bethel, the House of God.

The second fact was that heaven was open to humans. Jacob saw the angels descending and ascending on the ladder at the top of which the Lord was standing. In the house of God, there was fulfilment of God's wish in linking the heavenly creation with the earthly one. The ladder was a symbol of the incarnation and crucifixion through which the link actually happened.

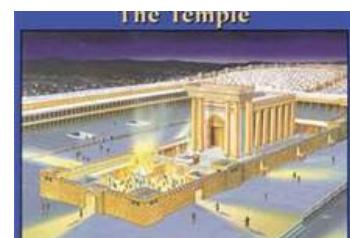
THE TABERNACLE

In **Exo25:9** and **Heb8:5**, we learn for the first time of an official divine commandment to the people regarding the setting up of the "House of God". Because the Israelites were on the run, it was in the form of a tent to be pitched wherever they camped. The design of that tent was directly dictated by God to Moses. Evidently, the Tabernacle fulfilled Jacob's dream in a more realistic and elaborate form.



THE TEMPLE

When the people had settled in Jerusalem the Temple was constructed in Jerusalem according to the pattern demonstrated to the prophet David by God. Once again the Temple's design was dictated from above. The House of God as a Temple designated that its occupant, God, was the King reigning upon the hearts of His people, their inner senses and external characteristics. Within it, prayers took place as a sign of God's possession of the hearts. Jesus had tremendous love for the Temple considering it the "**House of my own Father**" worthy of every honour.



THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

God's aim to be with His people was fulfilled through the divine incarnation, "**the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,**" **John1:14**. The Church is "**the Body of Christ**" and the believers become 'members of His Body,' **1Cor12:27**. They are "**the temple of God,**" **1Cor6:19**.

As such the Church of the New Testament was not founded on vision and symbols, but upon the divine act, the Incarnate Word. This is the new



church that within its building gathers the Holy Body of Christ; the Head together with the members. The Head, Christ, leads the various members through the Holy Spirit, and members attain their right to unite with each other through their belonging to the Body of Christ. In the Church of the New Testament, our relationship with God commenced a new phase in that we became qualified to enjoy the new life with Christ and to be transferred to heaven to participate in His glories.



THE HEAVENLY CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

The Church Building is associated with the community; it is bound to reveal its heavenly character and to help lead the human soul to the Divine throne. When Moses established the Tabernacle, he explained only the shadow of the eternal dwelling place. But we, in the Church, have entered the heavenly place itself (Heb9:23), and enjoyed the Temple that is not made with hands (Heb9:11).

THE ORIENTATION OF THE CHURCH

As our communication with God is distinguished by its intimate nature within the heart, it is not bound by time and place. However, there is the fact that our God likes discipline and hates disorder. This explains the reason for orienting the worship towards a certain direction. Before Christianity, prayers were offered towards the Temple of Jerusalem, and the Church of the New Testament oriented its liturgical, as well as its private devotions towards the east. **"Sing to God who rides upon the heaven of heavens towards the east," Psa68:34.**

According to the Apostolic Constitutions, "the Church must be oblong in form and pointing to the east." Such a tradition was mentioned in the writings of many early Fathers, as St Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Tertullian. Such a tradition was clear in the early Church; in the Liturgy of Baptism, the candidate after renouncing the devil, is asked to face the east to profess his belief in the Holy Trinity.

The Theology of Orientation

Christ is our East: Our Christ was called "the Sun of Righteousness," Mal 4:2. We ought to pray eastward in order to indicate that the soul is oriented toward the Sun of Salvation, Who shines upon the Church.



A Reminder of the Lost Paradise: When we pray towards the East, we seek the ancient homeland, Paradise, that God had planted for us in the East and we look forward to the eternal life in heaven.

Waiting for the "Parousia" (advent) of Christ at the end of the age: The Lord declared that His last advent looks like the lightening that appears from the east, and shines upon the west (Matt24:27). On the Lord's Ascension, the angel informed the disciples that the Son of Man will come again from the east (Acts1:11).



Looking at Jesus on the Cross: St Athanasius pointed out that when Christ was hanging on the Cross, He was facing westward; thus, when we pray looking towards the east, we face the Crucified Lord.

The Orientation of the Graves: In the old Christian graves, some observed that the majority of cemeteries were built in such a way, that the dead bodies were oriented to face the east, as they were waiting for the call of Resurrection, coming from the east (Zech14:4). In this respect it was also said that St Mary, before she passed away, turned to the east and prayed in a heavenly language, and then laid down still facing the east.

THE STYLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH BUILDINGS

In the Old Testament, the believers were in their spiritual childhood; God took upon Himself the responsibility of dictating all the relevant details of the "House of God." In the New Testament, God considered it is sufficient to grant us His Holy Spirit to guide us in all the aspects of our life.

There are some factors that affected the style of Church Buildings:

The Temple or Tabernacle: A quick glance at the Church and Tabernacle clarifies such a correspondence. The Church's Sanctuary is analogous to the Holy of Holies; the Nave to the Holy; the Narthex to the courtyard. The Laver is fully realized in the Baptistry site, and the Altar of burnt offerings is fulfilled by the Altar of the New Testament.



The Roman Court Law: It might have affected the architecture of the Churches, especially in Western Europe, where it followed the "Basilica" style, or the "Imperial" style, as the building was dedicated to the King of Kings.



The Pagan Temple: Many of these unused temples were transformed into Churches, because of the great number of pagans who converted to Christianity. Accordingly, whenever a temple was utilized as a Church, relevant changes were required.

Catacombs: This term is associated with subterranean early Christian burial places (*ravine* in Greek). These were used by Christians as places of worship especially during the times of persecution.

THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

The Church Building is confirmed according to specific well defined shapes, in three designs:

- The Cruciform
- The Circle
- The shape of a ship

These forms reveal a substantial aspect of the nature of the Church, her character, and her message.

The Cruciform Shape gives an idea of the mystical nature of the Church, as being the crucified Body of Christ. It was very common in the Byzantine style, but rarely used in the Coptic Churches.



The Circular Shape refers to the eternal nature of the Church as being an endless line. This type is very common in the Coptic architecture.



The Shape of a Ship: This is the most commonly used shape in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The shape of a ship held a special mystical significance, even before Christianity, in the Gentiles' ideology: various shapes of ships were found inscribed on Egyptian, Greek, and Roman tombs, rings and other jewellery. This explains their belief about immortality, regarding death as a journey to the other world. After Christianity, the symbol continued to express their new risen life in Christ.



The Ship's Symbolism: In the Old Testament, the ancient people of God regarded the ship as a symbol of salvation. No doubt, Noah's Ark represents, in many aspects, a substantial element as a shadow of the Church of the New Testament. The ship, as a symbol of the New

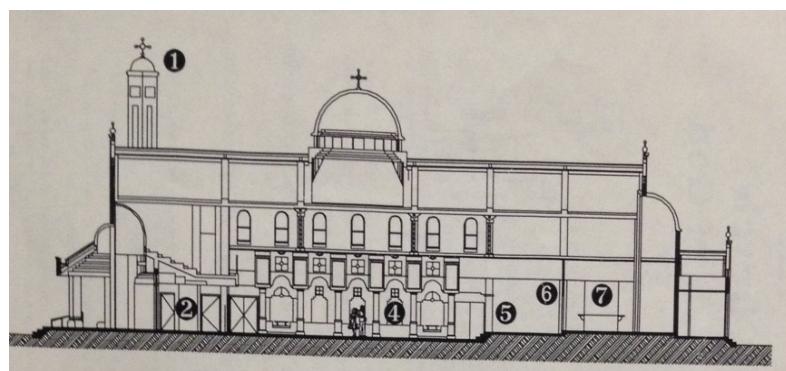


Testament Church, is a general tradition: as Christians are sailing amidst frightful dangers, but within the Lord's ship, "The Church," they were filled with the hope of reaching eternal rest.

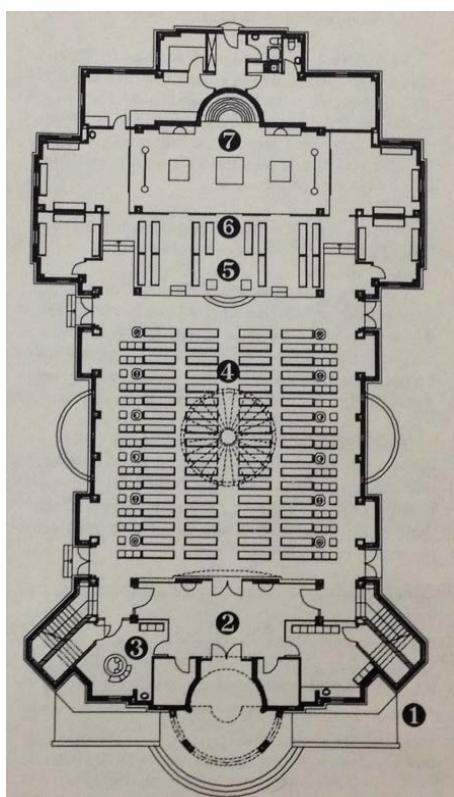
THE CHURCH BUILDING

The Church Building is divided into **three main divisions**:

1. The Sanctuary containing the Altar.
2. The Nave that is separated from the Sanctuary by the Iconostasis. It contains two divisions, namely, the Chancel for Deacons, and the main Nave for the Believers.
3. The Narthex for the catechumens and the Baptistry.



Section



Legend

1. The Church Tower
 - Bells
2. The Narthex (Porch at west end of Church)
 - Catechumens & Repentants
3. The Baptistry
 - Dome
 - Stairs
 - Icon
4. The Nave (The main body of the Church)
 - The Divisions of the Nave (North & South)
 - The Domes
 - The Pillars
 - The Ambo (Raised lectern)
 - The Mandatum Tank
5. The Chancel (Choir)
 - Two Lecterns
 - Two Candleabras
 - Seats for the Deacons
 - The Bishops Throne
6. Iconostasis
 - The Royal Doors
 - The Windows
 - The Positioning and Order of the Icons
 - The Candles
 - The Ostrich Egg
7. The Sanctuary & Altar
 - The Altar
 - The Canopy
 - The Apse (Niche)
 - The Tribune

Floor Plan



The Sanctuary

It is located in the very far east of the Church. It represents heaven itself, the place of God's residence. It is therefore called the "Holy of Holies," the "Great Dome," the "Temple of His Holiness," and the "Third Heaven." It contains the Altar. The Sanctuary is raised somewhat from the Nave. Inside the Sanctuary, and behind the Altar, lies the Tribune, also known as the "*Synthronos*", on which the Bishop's Throne is placed. Around the Tribune lies the Niche that represents God's Bosom.



We honour the Sanctuary because of its spiritual beauty. The Sanctuary is for clergymen only. We can only step into the Sanctuary bare-footed, according to the Divine commandment to Moses, "**Take your sandals off your feet, for the place whereupon you stand is holy ground,**" Exo3:5, and usually, we step in with the right foot first. No talking is allowed in the Sanctuary, except for necessity.

The Altar

The word "altar" is derived from the Latin word "ALTARE" which means "the place upon which sacrifices are slain (same in Greek). It is also known as "The Lord's Table" (1Cor10:21).



Do we still need the Altar although there is no animal sacrifice? Although there are no animal sacrifices, we still need the Altar for the unique Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, according to the following verses:

- **Malachai1:11**, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down, in everyplace, incense shall be offered of My name."
- **Isaiah9:19**, "In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt". This prophecy is specific for the Christian Altar in Egypt. It is not for the pagans, because it is an "Altar to the Lord."
- **Matthew5:23**, "...If you bring your gift to the altar..."
- **1Corinthians10:21**, "You cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of the devils".
- **Hebrews13:10**, "We have an altar from which those who serve the Tabernacle have no right to eat".
- **Hebrews10**. St Paul mentioned the sacrifices in the Old Testament being symbols fulfilled on Calvary or in the Eucharist.



- In the Didache (about 100 AD), it is written that the Eucharist is a pure sacrifice. The early Church applied the Greek terms "Thysia", or Sacrifice, and "Prophora", or Oblation, with the "Holy Eucharist."

The Tribune

Behind the Altar at the eastern wall of the Sanctuary, lies the Tribune. This is often made of marble or stone, and consists of seven semi-circular steps. The steps represent the ranks of Priesthood.

The Bishop's Throne at Present

Due to the expansion in the sizes of the Church Buildings, a Bishop's seat is added to the Chancel to enable the congregation to hear him with greater ease. Unfortunately, not a single "Synthronos" is now left in the Tribune of the Coptic Orthodox Churches.



The Iconostasis

The Iconostasis, or Icon Stand, represents one of the most important architectural features of the Orthodox Churches. It is a rigid screen of wood or marble, carrying the Icons of the Lord, His Angels and His Saints. The Church wished to confirm our relation with the Heavenly Creatures and the Saints in Jesus. According to Church doctrines, our early Fathers, who departed in the Lord, are never separated from the Church, and did not lose their love for the salvation of mankind. So we can consider the Iconostasis as a symbol for reserving the front part of the Nave for the victorious saints, who are in fact, one with their militant brothers.

The original forms of Iconostasis were created very early in the Christian Churches, and they were mentioned in the writings of the Early Church Fathers; however, the shape and height of these screens varied. It lies between the Sanctuary and the Nave.

A curtain is fitted over the door-like opening in the Iconostasis called the "Royal Door". The curtain is opened and closed during and after the services. This means that the Sanctuary is visible and inaccessible at the same time. It is wrongfully named sometimes as veil, for the Christian Church never accepts a veil, similar in





concept, to that of the Temple of Solomon; that has been torn down forever through the Cross.

The Position and Order of the Icons on the Iconostasis

When facing the Iconostasis, on the right side of the Royal Door, we see:

- The Icon of the our Lord Jesus Christ holding a page from the Gospel, on which is written, "I am the Good Shepherd" because He is the unique Gate leading to the Heavenly Kingdom, and the Good Shepherd Who opened the gates of Heaven.
- The Icon of the Forerunner, St John the Baptist baptizing Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Icon of the Patron Saint of the Church.
- Selected Icons of Saints and Martyrs.



On the left side of the Royal Door, we can see

- The Icon of the Holy Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, the Mother of God. She represents the whole Church, and the Queen who sits at the right hand side of the King, Jesus Christ.
- The Icon of the Annunciation.
- The Icon of Archangel Michael.
- The Icon of St Mark the Evangelist.
- The Icons of the St Peter and St Paul, and/or other saints and martyrs.



Directly above the Royal Door, the Icon of the Last Supper is mounted. This signifies the office of Christ as a Priest. On both sides of the Icon of the Last Supper, we usually find the Icons of the twelve Disciples. This indicates the apostolic feature of the Church.

On top of the Iconostasis, a Cross is mounted, as it was written, "Before whose eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified," Gal 3:1. Wherever possible, the Icon of the Virgin Mary stands on one side of the Cross and the Icon of St John the Beloved stands on the other side.



The Ostrich Eggs

The main feature that distinguishes ancient Coptic and Greek Churches is the Ostrich Eggs. They are suspended before the Iconostasis between the Icons. Eggs generally held a symbolic meaning in



the early Church, as the hope of resurrection, or the resurrected spiritual life in Christ. There is a traditional belief that the ostrich, after laying her eggs, must keep looking at them, in order to speed up their hatching. So, when we go to Church, we have to concentrate all our thought and attention to the Divine worship, leaving behind us all earthly worries.

THE NAVE

The Nave of the Church is normally divided into two parts.

The Chancel

It is situated on the east end of the Nave, separated from the Sanctuary by the Iconostasis. The Chancel is three steps higher than the Nave. It contains seats for the deacons, two candelabras, and two lecterns on which the lectionaries are placed.

The Main Nave

The term "Nave" is derived from the Latin word "navies" meaning a "ship". The Sanctuary represents God's presence, and the Nave declares the people's meeting with God.

The Domes

Some Coptic Churches have a dome called "Cupola" built on top of the nave. This refers to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, seated in the Heavens. For this reason, it is usually painted with Icons of the Lord, or in a bright blue colour, decorated with Angels and stars. Some Churches have three Cupolas that represent the Holy Trinity. Other Churches have five "Cupolas." The principle one, which is large in the centre represents the Lord; and the four small ones around it represent the four Evangelists.

THE NARTHEX

The Narthex is in the western area near the entrance of the Church, where the Catechumens and repentant attend a special part of the Liturgy called "The Liturgy of the Catechumens," or "The Liturgy of the Word." The Catechumens are those who are getting ready for baptism, and the repentant are Christians who have committed certain sins, and whose spiritual Fathers forbade them to receive Holy Communion for a period of time. This part is rarely seen in Church buildings nowadays.

THE BAPTISTERY

With great spiritual wisdom, the Didache identified the location where the Baptistry is to be built. It should be built in the north western side of the



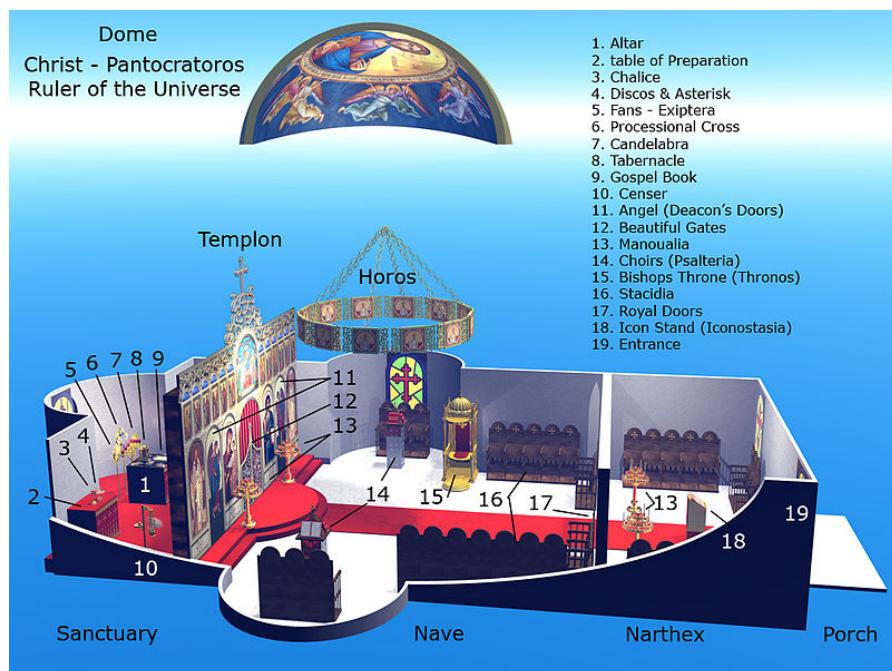
Church, i.e., at the left hand side of the main entrance. Because the Baptistry is considered the womb of the Church, through which we get born again, nobody can cross over to the chorus of the believers and receive the Sacraments at the Altar, without first entering the Baptistry to receive the New Birth. And also because our Lord commenced His public ministry by His Baptism, we consider that the first step to enter among the believers is through the Baptistry.

THE CHURCH DOORS

There are three doors to the Church as mentioned in the Didache. "The Church must have three doors according to the Holy Trinity." Nobody can join the Church unless they are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The western door is the main door, through which we enter, in the direction of the east, to the Sanctuary.

The Church doors refer to the doors of the Heavenly Kingdom, which are: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. God loved these doors, "**The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all of the dwellings of Jacob,**" Psa87:2. In the early days, they used to draw twelve angels and write the name of the twelve tribes on the Church doors, as mentioned in Revelation 21:12.

The Church Building can be valued as an architectural design reflecting certain religious values. It is, also, an open Bible written in a visible and tangible language that is attractive to a simple child and a wise theologian.





OUR ESCHATOLOGICAL CHURCH

Big Idea: All the righteous Christians will be transformed into Christ's image and full eschatological life beyond the reach of death.

Bible Verse: "Come, you beloved of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matt25:34.

Bible Text: Acts 15: 5-32; 1 Peter 4:7-11.

Students will

Know:

- ✗ The Christian Church is eschatological.
- ✗ The hope of Christians is focused on the permanent value of God's coming kingdom.
- ✗ Eschatology in the Old Testament.
- ✗ Judas and Silas could visualise the glory and the joy of Christ's coming.
- ✗ The martyrs rejoiced in death as a speedy means to be with Christ.
- ✗ The joy of the servants is renewed day after day and week after week. It is the power that energises them to teach and strengthen (Acts15:32).

Feel: The need to be vigilant and look forward to the spreading of the Kingdom.

Do: Be transformed into Christ's image and help others be transformed.



OUR ESCHATOLOGICAL CHURCH



Read the Bible text, Acts15:5-32.

Judas and Silas were prophets. This means that they could visualise the glory and joy of Christ's Second Coming. They could see what it would be like to live eternally with Christ.

That was their aim and hope. The apostles preached an Eschatological Church.

Eschatology is a word from the Greek work "*eschatos*" meaning "last". Eschatology then is the 'doctrine of last things'. In the New Testament perspective, the 'last things' began with the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian lives between the resurrection of Christ and the future general resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ.

The hope of Christians is focused on the permanent values of God's coming kingdom. Jesus has prepared an eternal home for each believer. He promised, "**In My Father's house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also,**" John14:2, 3.

No one knows the exact day or hour of His coming. "**It is not for you to know the time or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority,**" Acts1:7. We should worry less about when our Saviour will return and concern ourselves with what He has called us to do now.

The events following His return will not happen over a long period of time, but all of a sudden. Any day we could meet the Lord, either because He has returned, or because we have passed away. None of us should take life for granted. Jesus said, "**I am coming and My reward is with Me, to render every man according to what he has done,**" Rev22:12. Christians then live vigilantly like servants who daily expect the return of their master (Luke12:35-38).

Jesus said we are to be on the alert, for we do not know the day or the hour (Matt25:13). Although Christ said that only the Father knows the exact moment of the Second Coming (Matt24:36), we should live as if it were today. An eager anticipation of the Lord's return keeps us living



productively. Setting our mind on Him motivates us to walk in holiness. In his first letter, St John says, "When He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure," 1 John 3:2, 3.

Jesus reminded the disciples of their spiritual assignment. Every time, his followers asked about the Second Coming, our Lord refocused their attention on what he had already told them: how they should live until His return. For instance, they asked when Israel would be made a sovereign state again. Instead of answering their question, Jesus told them it wasn't their place to know (Acts 1:6). Then he reminded them of their calling to share the gospel: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth," Acts 1:8.

The Church looks forward to the coming of Christ on the Last Day Of Judgement to hear the blessed words of the King, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matt 25:34. As Christians, we don't have to be anxious about bad news. No matter what happens on earth, we can take comfort in knowing that we have eternal life. The Holy Spirit will empower us to do whatever the Father asks of us. And Scripture promises peace if we will give our worries to God and trust in Him.

The martyrs could visualise the kingdom and they witnessed to the after-life with Christ, to Christ's coming to judge the living and the dead, to the salvation of Christ and to the spreading of the kingdom. The hope of being with Jesus forever makes us very happy. "Always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you," 1 Pet 3:15. Even when people mock our belief in the second coming, we can have confidence that God is working all things according to His perfect plan (2 Pet 3:1-9).

In the Old Testament, the high priest would go in the Holy of Holies once a year. This is the happiest occasion for him as he is going to be in the presence of God. He puts on a robe that bears twelve precious stones that represent the twelve tribes of Israel. There are bells at the hem of the robe that jingle as he walks. On hearing the jingling bells the people become very happy as they feel they will be represented in the presence of God.



At present, at the end of reciting the Creed, we sing "we wait for the resurrection of the dead and the life to come". We happily look forward to the next life, when all righteous Christians will be transformed into Christ's image and attain full eschatological life beyond the reach of death. Then our salvation will be complete (Rom8:25, 2Cor3:18).

Like Judas and Silas, every servant in Sunday School is a prophet in that they teach and visualise the Kingdom of God coming into their hearts and the hearts of the children they serve. This is a great source of joy that is renewed day after day and week after week.

Judas and Silas taught and strengthened the people (Acts15:32). Each week, we should gather in church to encourage, and pray for, each other, and to exalt the Lord together. An attitude of worship should characterise our lives the rest of the week too.

As we anticipate our Lord's return, we will pay attention to our lifestyles. The choices we make should be testimonies to those who don't believe. Thus, St Paul writes, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and Godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works," Titus2:12-14.

God's timing is not ours. Regardless of when Christ's return is, we should seek to follow His will for our lives. Everyone should actively serve the Lord somehow. We never retire from working for God. Maybe you can't sing in the choir or teach a class, but you can make coffee or set up chairs.

Do you actively invest your life in seeking and obeying the will of God? I pray that you will evaluate your thoughts, activities and priorities in light of Christ's return. Jesus could appear at any moment. Will you be ready?

"Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus," Rev22:20.

"Maranatha, the Lord is near," 1Cor16:22.



MONASTICISM IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

Big Idea: Origin of the monastic movement and key characters that contributed to its establishment.

Bible Text: 1 John 2:15-17

Bible Verses: ✕ Matt 19:21, "If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me."
✕ 1 Thess 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

Students will

Know: ✕ That Monasticism is biblical.
✕ That the principles of Coptic Monasticism are derived from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.
✕ The history of Monasticism in Egypt.
✕ The different types of monastic orders.
✕ The spreading of Monasticism throughout the whole world.
✕ The role of Monasticism in civilization.

Feel: ✕ The richness of our monks in the desert.
✕ Blessed and honoured that our Coptic Church introduce this way of life to the whole world.

Do: ✕ Practice one of the virtues of Monasticism
✕ Read the life of the desert Fathers
✕ Visit the Monastery with an illuminated spirit.



MONASTICISM IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

MONASTICISM IS BIBLICAL



The early Christians were affected by the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, by His seclusion and meditation in the wilderness and on the mountain. The life of St John the Baptist was also one of celibacy and asceticism until the day he started his ministry, as was the case with the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

The early Christians, especially the Egyptians, from the day St Mark the Evangelist preached to them the Good tidings in the middle of the first century, were greatly affected by the Bible. The life of our Lord and His announcements about the ascetic way of life, celibacy, seclusion and obedience, stirred spiritual enthusiasm in the pious believers to imitate Him. St Peter the Apostle said, ".... leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps," 1Pet2:21.

THE FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MONASTICISM

These are celibacy, obedience, meditation in seclusion, hand work, and voluntary poverty (asceticism). These five principles were derived from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible:

- Our Lord lived a life of **celibacy** and spoke about "....those who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God...", Matt19:11. St Paul the Apostle also spoke about celibacy in Chapter 7 of his first Epistle to the Corinthians.
- Jesus spoke about **voluntary poverty**, **asceticism** and **hermetic life** when He said, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have, and you shall have treasure in heaven...." Matt19:21, and "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also..." Luke12:33-34.
- Regarding **meditation in the wilderness** and living as strangers, our Lord said about Himself, "... the son of Man has nowhere to lay His head..." Luke21:37. The prophets Elijah and Elisha, and St John the Baptist lived in a similar way.
- Jesus lived a life of **obedience** to God's Word and His ministers as it is written, " Though He were a Son, yet He learned obedience through the things He suffered..." Heb5:8.
- God called His prophets and disciples while performing their work. Our Lord said about Himself, "... the Son of Man came not to be served,





but to serve...," Matt20:28.

Therefore, the principles of the Coptic Monastic life are a practical echo of the life and words of our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples as written in the Bible.

THE HISTORY OF MONASTICISM IN EGYPT

The Monastic Movement was born and forged in the deserts of Egypt. During the periods of persecution, individual Christians had sought refuge and answered the contemplative and ascetic call of Christianity by living a life of poverty, solitude and prayer in the heart of the desert.

It is mentioned that **Frantonious**, a wealthy man of Alexandria, left for the nearby desert in about 150 AD with 70 others. In 190 AD, **St Paul of Thebes** left for the Eastern desert; he was followed by **St Anthony the Great** in 270 AD, who established the **Hermetic system** of monasticism and became the **Father of all Monks** all over the world. St Anthony had left for the desert after hearing the Gospel in Church which was, "**If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have...**," Matt19:21.



As the persecution ceased and peace and security came to the Church, no longer did Christians face battles against pagan rulers or contend with the threat of martyrdom for their faith. However, a new form of voluntary 'martyrdom' arose within the Church. That was the deliberate denial of self and the forsaking of the world in order to fight the battle against Satan, sin and self, in the very heart of the desert, which since Ancient Egyptian times, was recognized to be the domain of evil and the haunt of the demons. Those who entered into this life-long battle in the deserts, as hermits or monks, were known as 'God's Warriors' or 'God's Athletes'. In the heart of the desert, they waged the spiritual war against the powers of evil, striving ceaselessly in intercession and prayer for the Church and the world. Such was the power of the desert Monasticism of Egypt, which produced many spiritual giants in the annals of the history of the Coptic Church.

In 320 AD, **St Pachomius** established the **Order of Cenobitic Monasticism** in Upper Egypt. Many orders of Monasticism still follow it including the Benedictine monks, whose motto is *ora et labora*, which is 'prayers and labour together'.





In 330 AD, **St Macarius the Great** set down the Monastic Order called **Laura**, which was a combination of the two previous Orders. Monasticism, in all its forms, was also adopted by **women, who became hermits, semi-hermits and nuns**, living in convents established for women and following the same order of life as for men.



The Monastic Movement spread throughout Egypt with great fervor, and by 394 AD, travelers reported that the population of the deserts equaled that of the towns. *"I also saw another vast company of monks of all ages living in the desert and in the countryside. Their number is past counting. There are so many of them that an earthly Emperor could not assemble so large an army; for there is no town or village in Egypt and the Thebaid which is not surrounded by hermitages, as if by walls. And the people depend on the prayers of these monks as if on God Himself. Some of them live in desert caves, others in more remote places..."* (Prologue 10: The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum, AD 394 tr. Norman Russell).

St Shenoute (333-451 AD), the great Coptic reformer, was another important Monastic founder in Upper Egypt. He worked for eighty years in the great White and Red Monasteries, located near the modern-day Sohag. These were originally started by his uncle St Pijol; he had some 2200 Monks and 1800 Nuns under his command. He was also a prolific writer in the Sahidic dialect of the Coptic language and greatly influenced the Coptic community of Egypt. Although he had little or no contact with the Greek-speaking clergy and the people of Alexandria, he was part of the Egyptian delegation to the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. His biography was written by his disciple and successor, St Besa.



An important result of the Monastic Movement was the spread of Christianity to the remote parts of Egypt that had not been reached. From the mid 4th Century onwards, the deserts were thronged with monks and monasteries, which had a great influence upon the native population of the Egyptian countryside. By the 5th Century, the whole of Egypt had become Christians, except for a few centres of Egyptian and Greek paganism, mostly found in Alexandria and the towns. These pockets of paganism were uprooted in the 6th Century, when Justinian in 529 AD ordered to close the temple of Philae and purge the land of all remaining traces of the ancient religion.



In the following centuries, the ceaseless cycle of prayer and worship echoed continuously from the desert monasteries, during periods of persecution and peace as well as during political unrest and stability. They also offered spiritual strength and succor to the Christians fighting the battle in the world and provided the Church with her leaders, in unbroken succession. Although, at times, marauding Bedouins and tyrannical leaders plundered and destroyed the Monasteries, often massacring the monks, the Monasteries were always rebuilt and repopulated, at the earliest possible opportunity, so that their light and witness would not cease. The Monasteries of the Natroun Valley suffered at least three such devastations, in 407-408 AD, 434 AD and 577 AD.

THE DIFFERENT MONASTIC ORDERS

The Hermetic Order was founded by St Anthony near the Red Sea in 270 AD. The members lead a **life of solitude which is completely eremitic**. Although St Anthony laid down **no written rules**, he gave his disciples **two principles** which had been revealed to him by the vision of an angel; those of **alternating Prayer and Handwork**. He also introduced a monastic garb to his monks, consisting of a short calf-length tunic of white flax, fastened by a wide leather belt, and an outer sheep-skin for journeys. **His disciples would come together for spiritual benefit on Saturdays and Sundays; they live alone in their respective mountain caves for the rest of the week.** These principles formed the basis of what became known as the **Anthonian Monasticism**.

The Cenobitic Order was founded by St Pachomius in Upper Egypt. St Pachomius (290-347 AD) was born of pagan parents and converted to Christianity by the example of the kindness of Christians he observed while he was a conscript at Esnah. In 323 AD, he founded **cenobitism**, or '**communal life**' (from the Greek: 'Koinos Bios' i.e. community life), at Tabennisi, in the Thebaid, for those who wanted to live the **monastic life, but in fellowship with others**. He established a Community and a common rule of life, comprising of **fixed rules and regulations governing work and the life they shared together**. With his organization of twelve Koinonia Communities (meaning 'fellowship') for men, and three such communities for women, totaling thousands of Monks and Nuns, **Monasticism became institutionalized**. St Pachomius bears the title of 'Father of Cenobites'.

Laura was founded by St Macarius in Wadi Al Natroon. This **Semi Eremitic Order** is characterized by a combined life of solitude during the



week and communal life on Sunday. Monks lived individually but near one another and assembled together every Saturday evening, until Sunday, for spiritual talks; they also celebrated the liturgy, which was followed by an *agape* meal which they shared before returning to their cells. St Macarius visited St Anthony at least twice.

The Anchoretic Order was founded by St Shenouda in Upper Egypt.
The Archimandrite monks start as cenobitic and then become eremitic.

SPREADING OF MONASTICISM THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD

Monasticism spread throughout the Eastern and Western deserts of Egypt; from the Northern coast to Nubia. Before the Arab conquest of Egypt (641 AD), there were around five thousand monasteries and convents. Monasticism spread from Egypt to Ethiopia in the fourth century; it also spread to Palestine and Syria by St Hilary of Gaza.

Monasticism spread to the West through the Coptic monks who were preaching in Ireland; and from there to Scotland and the rest of Europe. It also spread through the Western travelers who visited Egypt and lived in its monasteries among the monks, from whom they adopted the spirit of Coptic Monasticism. They transferred it to the West, through their books or by the example of their lives.

Examples of such people include: John Cassian (360-435 AD), who wrote the 'Institutes' and the 'Conferences'; Palladius (363-431 AD), who wrote the 'Historia Lausica'; Rufinus, who wrote 'Historia Monachorum'; Jerome (342-420 AD); Evagrius; Melanius, a man of Spanish origin who travelled from Rome to Egypt with Rufinus in 373 AD; and Paul, a Roman who visited Egypt with Jerome in 385 AD.

THE ROLE OF MONASTICISM IN CIVILIZATION

Coptic Monasticism and its monasteries formed a centre of spiritual illumination, civilization, and culture in Egypt throughout the ages, especially in the Middle Ages, when they were almost turned into small universities. In the West, the role of Monasteries and Monasticism in preserving knowledge, science, culture, civilization, and education was instrumental.

Adapted from "Coptic Orthodox Church as an Ascetic Church" by Fr Tadros Y. Malaty, 1996.



ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Big Idea: Learn about the first four Ecumenical Councils.

Bible Text: Acts15

Bible Verse: Acts15:6, "Now the apostles and the elders came together to consider this matter".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ What is a Council?
- ✖ The Council of Jerusalem.
- ✖ The spirit of the Church Council.
- ✖ The three Great Councils.
- ✖ The danger of Arianism.
- ✖ The Council of Chalcedon.
- ✖ The role played by the Coptic Fathers in the Ecumenical Councils.

Feel: Proud of their Orthodox faith.

Do: Preserve the Orthodox faith and teach it to others.



ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

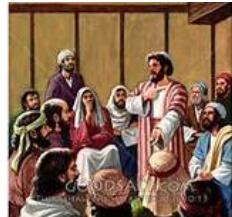


The Early Church, in the first centuries, spread all over the world. The Holy Spirit led the Apostles, the Disciples and the Bishops of the Church in understanding and interpreting the Christian faith. They always prayed for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided their thinking and preserved their unity. From time to time some persons, who depended on their own minds and knowledge, started teaching in a different way than what the Church has received in the Scripture and from our Lord Himself.

But the Church was always careful to preserve the spirit of unity among the Christians all over the world and protect the Christian faith from any misunderstanding or wrong interpretation. When any controversy was raised, the leaders of the Church assembled together to examine the different views and declare the Orthodox faith of the Church. The bishops of the Church came from different parts of the world and met together in the form of an ecumenical council.

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

The first Council in the life of the Christian Church was assembled in Jerusalem at the time of the Apostles of our Lord. We can read about the Council in the Book of Acts Chapter 15.



After the ascension of our Lord to heaven, His Disciples and Apostles received the Holy Spirit, and started preaching and teaching the salvation of Christ to the world. Paul and Barnabas two of the Apostles preached among the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people, in different parts of the world. When they finished their mission, they travelled by boat to Antioch and met with the Disciples and the Church there. They told them about all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.



The Controversy

While they were in Antioch, some of the Jews who became Christians insisted that the Gentiles could not be saved unless they first followed the Law of Moses before becoming Christians. Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them. They had long arguments and debates together.

The Church of Antioch appointed the Apostles Paul and Barnabas and some other members of the Church of Antioch to go to Jerusalem. When they reached there, they told the Disciples of the dispute that happened in Antioch and asked their guidance. The Apostles, the Disciples and the bishops of the Church assembled together in Jerusalem to consider the matter. Paul and Barnabas told them how the Christian Jews of Judea insisted that the Gentiles must first follow Jewish traditions before becoming Christians. The members of the Council prayed asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They knew that they cannot decide on matters of faith by their own individual minds, but only through the action of the Holy Spirit in them as they come together with the spirit of Unity and love in the Council.

The members of the Council had long discussions about the matter. Then St Peter rose and said that God gave the Holy Spirit to all those who believed in Him in the whole world and purified their hearts by faith. He said, "We believe that all men, Gentiles and Jews, shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now therefore why do you test God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"

St James one of the twelve Disciples told them that what they heard from Peter, Paul and Barnabas agreed with the words of the Prophets of the Old Testament. Then he offered the following proposal: "We should not trouble those of the Gentiles who are turning to God, but should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood," Acts 15:19, 20. All the members of the Council agreed on the proposal of St James and wrote a message to the Churches informing them of the Council's decision.



THE SPIRIT OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL

The Council of Jerusalem was a model for the life of the Church through the centuries. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, continued to build up clear understanding on Christian Faith. Individual and heretic interpretations were examined and refuted by Ecumenical Councils. The Councils offer testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In the Ecumenical Councils, bishops from all over the world expressed the true unity and love of the whole Church. Many ideas were expressed in seeking the truth but they denied individual views and accepted the Orthodox understanding of the Christian Faith.

In the first three centuries, Christians were persecuted and hundreds of thousands were martyred for their faith. During the time of persecution, the Christians defended their faith and died for it. Christian believers were simple pure and strong. In the year 313 AD, Constantine, the Roman Emperor accepted Christianity and forbade all persecution of Christians.

In a few years, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire; statesmen and officials were Christians. The Christian Church faced an important task in the following two centuries, namely, to explain the Christian faith and to answer the challenges of pagan schools and heretic philosophies which continued to influence the minds of many people.

THE THREE GREAT COUNCILS

At the beginning of the fourth century a priest in the city of Alexandria called Arius started a strange teaching. He taught that Jesus Christ was not God in the same sense as God the Father, not of the same essence and not eternal. Arius was a cunning scholar. He was able to popularise his ideas among simple minded people as well as among some highly educated people who were still attached to pagan thinking. He was a good propagandist cultivating his popularity by visits, speeches, sending letters and by writing popular songs in which he formulated his theological arguments.

THE DANGER OF ARYANISM

The teaching of Arius was more dangerous for Christianity than the worst



persecution. If Christ was not God, who had become man, who had suffered and died for men, and by His death had conquered death, then Christianity would have become some moral ideas, like what pagan philosophies offered. Arius taught that God was a supreme divine being completely separated from mankind. Christianity professed faith in God Who so loved man that He Himself became Man and suffered and died to redeem the sins of man. **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us all," John 1:1-14.**

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

The Church of Alexandria felt the danger of the Arian heresy. Pope Alexandrus of the Coptic Church condemned the teaching of Arius and tried to guide him to the Orthodox Christian faith. Arius would not be convinced and complained to Emperor Constantine asking for an Ecumenical Council.



The Emperor finally accepted to call a General Ecumenical Council to settle the dispute. Three hundred and eighteen bishops and priests from the Churches all over the world were assembled in Nicaea in Asia Minor, in the spring of 325AD. Among them was Bishop Paul from Syria, with his burned hands carrying the signs of the persecution he had suffered, together with St Paphnotius and St Potamon, both blinded in one eye and lamed from the tortures inflicted on them, and Pope Alexandrus and his deacon St Athanasius the Great from Egypt.

The Council studied the teaching of Arius and examined them carefully. Long and heated arguments took place. In a lengthy dialogue between the young deacon Athanasius and Arius, Athanasius explained the Orthodox faith showing how **the Son is of One Essence of the Father**. The Fathers of the Council, led by Athanasius, proclaimed the Orthodox faith of the Church in clear terms:

We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, things visible and invisible. And in One Lord, Jesus Christ, the



only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father, before all ages; Light out of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten not made; of One Essence of the Father.

The Council of Nicaea was one of the greatest events in the history of Christianity. It brought together for the first time the largest number of bishops who formulated the Creed of the Church and saved it from the Arian heresy.



THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The Christian faith was again threatened by a new heresy. Mecedonius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, taught that the Holy Spirit was created and denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. A second Ecumenical Council was held in May 381 AD at Constantinople, at the invitation of Emperor Theodosius the Great.

The Council was attended by one hundred and fifty bishops. Pope Timothy of Alexandria played a vital role in the Council, and according to Sozomen, he chaired the Council. After lengthy discussions, the Council refuted the heresy of Mecedonius and completed the Creed of the Church:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Life-giving Lord, Who proceeds from the Father, we worship and glorify Him, Who spoke in the Prophets; and in the One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.



THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

After fifty years, Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, preached that God was not born of the Virgin Mary but she had given birth to a human being and God dwelt in him later on. He divided Christ into two separate persons: the Son of God and the son of man. He forced his teaching on the Church. The Pope of Alexandria, St Cyril the Great, wrote to Nestorius advising him to abandon his wrong teaching. He also wrote to many bishops around the world, warning them of the danger of the new heresy.

Finally, on the 22nd of June 431 AD, a third Ecumenical Council was held in



Ephesus, at the order of the Emperor Theodosius the Lesser. It was attended by two hundred bishops, and St Cyril the Great, Pope of Alexandria, chaired the Council.

St Cyril stressed on the unity of the Godhead and humanity without mixing or confusion. He also stressed on the title "Theotokos" i.e. "The Mother of God" for St Mary, in order to clarify that He who was born from her is truly God, the Incarnate Word and not an ordinary man on whom the Godhead descended subsequently. The Council refuted the teaching of Nestorius and declared the introduction of the Creed:

We magnify you, O Mother of the True Light; and we praise you O Holy Virgin Mother of God for you gave birth to our Saviour. He came and redeemed our souls.

Glory to You, our Master and King Jesus Christ: pride of the Apostles, Crown of Martyrs, Joy of the righteous, Confirmation of the Churches and the Remission of sins.

We preach the Holy Trinity, one God-head. We worship Him and glorify Him.

Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord bless us. Amen.

The Council declared the text of the Creed to be finally completed and forbade any change to it in the future.



THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON

Council of Chalcedon, fourth ecumenical council, convened in 451 to discuss Eutychianism. Based upon the formulation given by Pope Leo I in his famous *Tome* to Flavian, it declared that the second Person of the Trinity has two distinct natures—one divine and one human. The Council is not accepted by several of the ancient Eastern Churches, including the Oriental Orthodox of Egypt, Syria and Armenia, and the Assyrian Church of the East. The Oriental Orthodox Churches teach 'one nature' in Christ, composed of both Godhead and manhood. Misrepresented as a denial of his true humanity, this used to be denigrated as the heresy of Monophysitism, though now the neutral terms Miaphysite and Miaphysitism or non-Chalcedonian are widely preferred.

THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Students, studying the first three Ecumenical Councils, got to know the Alexandrian theologians as leaders of the Christian faith and concepts on



an ecumenical level. Their prominence was not based on any political power, even though Alexandria was under the Roman Empire, and consequently was ruled by the Byzantines, until the Arab conquest of Egypt. Their strength was based on their deep spiritual and theological concepts and biblical studies.

The Alexandrian Fathers were not looking for leadership, or personal prestige, but it was the openness of their hearts to divine love and their extensive studies that attracted many people to the School of Alexandria and to the Egyptian desert. There they learned the Alexandrine theology and were introduced to the ascetic life of the Egyptian monks.

The Copts, by their adherence to the Orthodox (true) faith since early Christianity, played a positive role in solving many theological problems in both the East and West. They did not interfere in other Churches' problems, but because of their spirit of love and unity they were called upon and consulted by other Churches.

When the Emperors accepted the Christian faith and the waves of persecution calmed down, the heretics found a great opportunity to spread their adverse teachings, especially Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Apollinarius etc. It became imperative for the Alexandrian Fathers to play their positive role in trying to win back these heretics to the true Christian Faith.

William Worrell, when writing about the ecumenical movement, said '*The Holy See of Alexandria was the most important in the Church, as the city was the most important in the East. To the prestige of ancient Egypt and Hellenistic Alexandria, the reputation for Christian learning and the power of leadership were added.*'

John Henry Newman wrote of Athanasius as '*that extraordinary man... a principal instrument after the Apostles by which the sacred truths of Christianity have been conveyed and he believed in the Word*'.

St Gregory of Nazianzen said, 'When I praise Athanasius, virtue itself is my theme; for I name every virtue as often as I mention him who possessed all virtues. He was the true pillar of the Church. His life and conduct were an example for bishops, and his doctrine was the Orthodox Belief'.

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THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Big Idea: The Sacraments are the dynamic symbols of the gospel and they are the ordinances of the Church.

Bible Text: Various.

Bible Verse: Pro 9:1, "Wisdom (our Lord Jesus Christ) has built her house (the Church); she has hewn out her seven pillars (the seven sacraments)".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ What is a Sacrament?
- ✖ Salvation in the Sacraments.

Feel: Grateful that the Divine life of our Lord is communicated to us through the Sacraments.

Do: Have a deeper awareness of Christ's death and living presence as we do the Sacraments.



THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH



The word "Sacrament" is the combination of the Latin word "Sacer" which means "holy" and the Greek word "Mysterion" which means secret rite. "Sacrament", thus, means "mystery", and our Lord Jesus Christ has been called by St Paul "A Great Mystery," **1Tim 3:16**. In Him, there is combined divinity and humanity, eternality and temporality, the invisible and visible.

The Human Nature of our Blessed Lord had no power to sanctify by itself, that is to say, apart from its union with the Divine Nature. But because of this union, the Humanity of the Lord became the efficient cause of our justification and sanctification and will be until the end of the world. Herein, is hidden a hint of the Sacraments. The Humanity of the Lord was the bearer of Divine life and the means of making men holy. The Sacraments were also to become the effective means of the sanctification purchased by His death. As our Blessed Lord was the tangible sign of God (**He is truly God**), the Sacraments were to become the tangible signs of the Grace (**they are truly Grace**), which our Lord had won for us.

If men were angels of pure spirits, there would have been no need for our Lord Jesus Christ to take a human nature of material things for the communication of the divine. Since man is composed of matter and spirit, body and soul, man functions best when he uses the material that hides the spiritual. From the very beginning of man's life, his mother's fondling is not merely to leave an impression upon the infant's body, but rather to communicate the sublime, beautiful and invisible love of the mother. It is not the material thing that man values, but rather what is signified by it. Hence, a Sacrament, in a very broad sense of the term, is a combination of two elements: one "**visible**" and the other "**invisible**"; one can be seen, tasted, touched, or heard while the other remains unseen to the eyes or hidden to the flesh.

The Sacraments are dynamic symbols of the gospel. The water of Baptism signifies cleansing and entry into God's Church. The holy oil of confirmation



helps us stand firm in the faith. Repentance and Confession grant forgiveness through the Blood of Christ i.e. it makes the redemption of the cross a continuous act. The bread and wine of the Holy Communion signify the receiving of Christ's Body and Blood, given for us in death. The oil for anointing the sick signifies the healing and comforting Christ present among His people. The rings in matrimony signify the continuous bond between the couple as both become one flesh. Priesthood represents Christ, our High Priest.

As every Sacrament has an outward or visible sign, the Sacrament also has a form or format, words of spiritual significance given to the matter when it is conferred. Three things, then, are absolutely required for a Sacrament: that it has been instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ; it must have an outward sign; and it must be conferred by the power of the grace purchased for us by the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord.

The Seven Holy Sacraments are:

1. The Sacrament of Baptism; it is

- admission to Church membership (Acts2: 41),
- power and joy (Acts8:38,39),
- death to the old life (Rom6:3,4),
- rising to the new life (Col 2:12) and
- identifying with Christ (Gal 3:27).



2. The Sacrament of Confirmation; it is

- rivers of living water (John7:37-39),
- promise of the Father (Acts1:4,5),
- light to the mind (1John2:20-27),
- determination in worship (2Cor1:21) and
- seal of the Spirit (2Cor1:22).



3. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist; in it

- we commemorate (Luke22:19-20),
- we communicate (John 6:56),
- we appropriate (Mark14:22),
- we participate (1Cor10:16-17) and





- we anticipate (1Cor11:26).

4. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession; it is

- a change of heart (Rev2:5, Luke15:1),
- acknowledgement of sin (Psa32:5,1John1:8,9),
- forgiveness of sins (Isa55:7, Luke18:14),
- salvation and justification (2Cor7:10, Luke8:14, Luke13:3) and
- peace with God (Rom 5:1).



5. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick; it is

- healing of physical illness (Mark6:13) and
- healing of spiritual illness (James5:14).



6. The Sacrament of Matrimony; it is

- a great mystery (Eph5:32),
- unbreakable(Matt19:6);1Cor7:10,11;Mal2:14,16),
- protection against temptation (1Cor7:1, 2, 9),
- honourable (Heb13:4) and
- blessed by God (Gen1:27, 28).



7. The Sacrament of Holy Orders (Priesthood); it is

- founded by Christ (Luke6:13),
- a calling (Acts13:2,3; Heb5:4),
- an apostolic succession (Acts14:23, Tit1:5),
- a teaching commitment (2Tim2:2) and
- the ministry of sacraments (John20:21-23).



SALVATION IN THE SACRAMENTS

One often sees a sign painted on roadways, "Jesus saves". Now this indeed is true, but the important question is how does He save? What relation do we have in the twenty-first century to our Lord Jesus Christ in the first place? Do we establish contact with Him only by reading about Him? If that were all, our relationship is not much closer than that which we can have with Plato. If the Lord Jesus Christ is only a memory of someone who lived centuries ago, then it is rather difficult to see that His influence will be any different than



that of Socrates or Buddha. The answer to the question of how our Lord Jesus Christ saves is to be found in the Sacraments.



The Divine life of the Lord is communicated through His Church or His mystical body in exactly the same way that His divine life was communicated when He walked on earth. As He then used His human nature as the instrument of divinity and used material things as means to confer His grace, for example, clay and water in the case of the born blind (John 9:11), He now uses other human beings (priests) and material things (water, bread and wine, oil) as instruments for the communication of the same divine life (grace).

Calvary is like a reservoir of divine life or grace. From it, there flows out seven different kinds of sanctification for man in different stages in his spiritual existence. Each of these seven channels is a Sacrament by which the power of the Risen Christ is bestowed on souls by a spiritual and effective contact. This divine grace is poured into the soul when we receive the Sacraments, unless we put an obstacle in the way; just as water will not flow out of a faucet if we put our hand in front of the faucet. But the faucet in a house has no power to quench thirst unless there is a reservoir and a pipeline. So the Sacraments do not confer grace as magical signs. They communicate it only because they are in contact with the Risen Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit about Whom the Lord said, "**H**e will take of what is Mine and declare it to you", John17:14.

The Sacraments are thus given a sacred mysterious significance that indicates a spiritual potency. The power is transmitted through material instruments and vehicles viewed as channels of divine grace and as benefits in ritual observance instituted by Christ. St Augustine defines the Sacraments as '*the visible form of an invisible grace*' (Encyclopedia Britannica; Volume 26, page 834). "**A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery (sacrament) but I speak concerning Christ and the Church**", Eph5:31-32. It is important not to under-emphasize the value of these ordinances given by Jesus Christ. Through them we come to deeper awareness of Christ's death and living presence.



THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Big Idea: The Sacrament of Baptism is a requisite for salvation and has primacy over the other six sacraments.

Bible Text: Matt28:18-19 and Rom6:3-9.

Bible Verse: Mark16:16, "He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not will be condemned".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ Institution of the Sacrament.
- ✖ How does baptism save us?
- ✖ Symbols of Baptism in the Old Testament.
- ✖ The Baptism of St John the Baptist.
- ✖ The Effectiveness of Baptismal Water.
- ✖ Immersion Vs Sprinkling.
- ✖ Why do we baptise infants?
- ✖ When do we baptise male and female infants?
- ✖ The fate of infants who die without Baptism.
- ✖ One Baptism.

Feel: Enlightened about the Sacrament of Baptism as we do it in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Do:

- ✖ Encourage the baptism of the children of family and friends on time.
- ✖ Not to delay the baptism of children for any reason at all.



THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM



Baptism is the Holy Sacrament through which we are born again by being immersed in water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Baptism has the primacy among the Seven Holy Sacraments for it is the door through which the individual enters the Church as a member in the Body of Christ and is given the right to partake of the rest of the Sacraments.

INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this Sacrament **after** His blessed resurrection, having completed our redemption and having made salvation available. He said to His disciples, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**" Matt28:18-19, and "**He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned,**" Mark16:16. Thus baptism is necessary for salvation as the Lord indicated, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God,**" John3:5.

HOW DOES BAPTISM SAVE US?

Salvation simply means remission of sins and it is written, "**Without shedding of blood (death) there is no remission,**" Heb9:22. Salvation is made available through the redemptive death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. In order to have a share in this salvation, we must share in the death and resurrection of the Lord. Therefore, St Paul said, "**That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering being conformed to His death,**" Phil 3:10. Unless a person undergoes such death, he/she will not be saved!

Now how can we undergo such death? How can we share in the death of the Lord? The answer is "Through Baptism". St Paul said, "**Or do you not know that as many of you were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death,**" Rom6:3-4. It is our death and burial with the Lord through baptism that saves us and makes us share in the glories of His Resurrection. St Paul affirms, "**For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death (baptism), certainly we shall be in the**



likeness of His resurrection... now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him," **Rom6:5-8.**

The salvation that began with our death and burial with our Lord Jesus through Baptism continues to be effective in us as long as we remain dead to worldly lusts. For as long as the body is dead to sin, salvation lives in it. When carnal lusts rise, we become liable to lose our salvation.

Hence St Paul exhorts us saying,

- "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lusts," **Rom6:11-12.**
- "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live," **Rom8:13.**
- "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh and its passions and desires," **Gal 5:24.**
- "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," **Gal 2:20.**
- "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God," **Col 3:3.**
- "Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," **2Cor4:10.**
- "Therefore put to death your members which are on earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry," **Col 3:5.**
- "He who has died has been freed from sin," **Rom6:7.**

The salvation that we obtained through Baptism continues with us through death to sin. Thus we pray in the prayer of the ninth hour, in the Coptic Book of Hours, the Agpeya, saying, "O, who tasted death in the flesh in the ninth hour for our sake, we sinners, **put to death our carnal lusts** O Christ, our God, and deliver us".

SYMBOLS OF BAPTISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- It is written in **Gen1:2**, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters". This is both a symbol and a prophecy about the work of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal water to give it, its saving efficacy.
- St Peter interpreted the story of Noah's ark and the flood (**Gen7**) as a symbol of Baptism. He said, "The divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an



antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," 1Pet 3:20-21. Note the link between baptism and salvation through the resurrection of the Lord.

- St Paul interprets the commandment of circumcision (Gen17) as a symbol of baptism. He said, "You were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead," Col 2:11-12. Note the link between baptism and salvation through the resurrection of the Lord. In the Old Testament, the child who is not circumcised would be "cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant," says the Lord, Gen17:14. Likewise, a child who is not baptized cannot enter the Kingdom of God (John3:5).
- The relation between the ark, the circumcision, the saving resurrection of the Lord, and baptism goes even further. St Peter emphasizes that only **eight** souls were saved from the evil world through the water of the flood. Also notice that God ordered that children must be circumcised on the **eighth** day. Now the Lord's resurrection took place on the first day of the week (John20:1) that is the **eighth** day from the previous week. The number eight represents the new life and eternity. In fact, number **eight** is the only number (from 1-10) that does not have a beginning and end (**8**), which is basically the definition of eternity.
- St Paul interpreted the story of crossing the sea (Exo14) as a symbol of Baptism. He said, "All our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," 1Cor10:1-2. The sea was a symbol of the baptismal water that draws its saving efficacy from the precious blood of our Lord, the cloud was a symbol of the Holy Spirit who works through the baptismal water, and Pharaoh was a symbol of the devil, that is destroyed by the cross of Lord Jesus through the water of Baptism.
- The Priesthood was not given to Aaron and his sons except after being washed with water (Exo29:4), also the laver of bronze and its water, set between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar (Exo30:18) was a symbol of the spiritual cleansing effect of baptismal water.
- The sacrifice of Elijah the Prophet was accepted after pouring water on it three times (1Kin18:34). Moreover, Elijah himself was not taken up to heaven until he crossed the waters of the Jordan River (2Kin2:8). The same happened with the Israelites who went into the Promised Land



after going through the waters of the Jordan (Jos3). In the Holy Book of Revelation we read about "a sea of glass" (Rev4:6) before the throne of God. The point is that we must go through the waters of Baptism to reach the heavenly Promised Land and enjoy the company of God.

THE BAPTISM OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

No pre-Pentecost baptism can be equated with Christian baptism. This includes St John the Baptist's and the disciples' baptisms during the life of the Lord on earth (John4:2). These baptisms were preparatory ones, just for repentance, as St John said, "**I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,**" Matt3:11. The redemption had not yet been accomplished; the specific relationship of baptism with the cross and the blood of the Lord had not yet been established. Moreover, the gift of the Holy Spirit was not yet available (John7:37-39). On the day of Pentecost, no exceptions were allowed for those who may have received St John's baptism. St Peter said, "**Let every one of you be baptized,**" Acts2:38.

The Holy Book of Acts tells us of a specific incident where some believers at Ephesus were only baptized with St John's baptism. St Paul asked, "**Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?**" They replied, "**We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.**" He wondered, "**Into what then were you baptized?**" So they said, "**Into John's baptism**" Then St Paul explained, "**John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.**" So when they heard this, **they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,** Acts19:1-5.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BAPTISMAL WATER

It may be objected, "What does mere water do when a person is immersed in it?" One might just as well ask, what does water do when poured into the boiler? The water in the boiler can do nothing of and by itself, nor can the water in the baptistery; but when the water in the boiler is united with the mind of an engineer, it can drive an engine across a continent or a ship across the sea. So too, when water is united with the power of the Holy Spirit, it can give regeneration and spiritual cleansing.

Those who think that the effectiveness of baptism depends on the water



alone bring to mind the story of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, who was a leper. This man came to Elisha the Prophet to be healed from leprosy. Elisha told him, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean", **2Kin5:10**. Naaman was insulted and became furious; he said angrily, "Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" **2Kin5:12**. His servants, however, said to him, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean'?" **2Kin5:13**. So Naaman went down and dipped in the Jordan and he was healed! Likewise, if the blind man from birth had questioned the words of Lord Jesus about washing in the pool of Siloam (**John9:11**), he would have remained blind. Our Lord emphasized the relation between the water and the Spirit (**John3:5-6**).

Thus the baptismal water is not to be considered mere water for "**There are three that bear witness on earth: The Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one**", **1John5:7**.

IMMERSION VS SPRINKLING

To baptize (Gr. *Baptizo*) literally means to immerse or to put into. Therefore, the Orthodox Church baptizes by triple immersion, "**in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,**"



Matt28:19. Baptism by immersion is supported also by the following biblical examples:

- "Both Philip and the eunuch **went down into the water**, and he baptized him. Now when they **came out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away," **Acts8:38-39**. If baptism were by sprinkling, St Philip could have just brought some water to the chariot and sprinkled it on the eunuch.
- St Paul said, "We were **buried** with Him through baptism," **Rom6:4, Col 2:12**. The only way a person is buried in baptism is through complete immersion.
- St Paul said, "According to His mercy He saved us, through the **washing** of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit," **Tit3:5**. St Ananias said to St Paul (Saul), "Be baptized, and **wash** away your sins," **Acts22:16**. Baptism is also called "washing" in **1Pet3:18-21** and **Eph5:26**. To wash a piece of cloth you need to completely immerse it in water.



Because baptism is a very important condition for salvation (Mark16:16; John3:5) the Church allows baptism by sprinkling only in the case where immersion is prevented by a medical condition and there is a risk that the person would die without being baptized. For example, a newborn with a fatal health condition that is kept in an incubator cannot be immersed three times in water; the Church allows sprinkling in this instance. Moreover, if there was no priest available, any Orthodox Christian (male or female) can perform the Baptism by anointing the baby with water three times saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit". If the baby lives, Baptism is not repeated and the child just needs to be anointed with the Holy oil of Confirmation (Meyroon oil).

WHY DO WE BAPTIZE INFANTS?

- Baptism is essential for salvation and without it a person cannot enter the Kingdom of God, "**Most assuredly I say to you, unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God,**" John3:5. Infants are no exception since they are born with the corrupt nature due to the original sin. Therefore, infants are baptized to insure their salvation.
- Circumcision was a symbol of baptism (Col 2:11-13). Now if God commanded that infants enter in the Old Covenant with Him, should we prevent them from entering in the New Covenant?
- Crossing the Red Sea was also a symbol of baptism (1Cor10:1-2). Undoubtedly, infants crossed the sea with their parents. Why should we prevent infants today from being baptized?
- St Peter said to the people on Pentecost, "**Be baptized... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For, the promise is to you and to your children**", Acts2:38-39. This is a clear indication that children are accepted in baptism.
- The Holy Scripture records several occasions where families and entire households were baptized together (Acts16:14-15, 33; 1Cor1:16). These indicated that children were baptized.
- There is not a single biblical verse that supports the prevention of infants' baptism. On the contrary, our Lord said, "**Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven**", Matt19:14, and "**Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven,**" Matt18:10.



Origen (185 - 254 AD) said, 'The Church received from the Apostles the tradition of giving Baptism even to infants. For the Apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of divine mysteries, knew that there is in everyone the innate stains of sins, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit.' (Origen, Commentary on Rom5:9).

WHEN DO WE BAPTISE INFANTS?

According to Leviticus12, the set days for the purification of the mother are forty days in the case of a male child and eighty days in the case of a female. Forty days is considered an enough period for the postpartum haemorrhage to stop. The doubling of the periods when a female is born is intended to remind us of the fact that the woman was the first to fall into temptation and to introduce sin to the world (1Tim2:13-15; 1Pet3:7).

Man's life had been spoiled by sin. Therefore, his birth like his death is connected with uncleanness. Calling a woman unclean after childbirth is meant for her well being, so that she refrains from all chores in order that she may look after herself (Lev15:19-20).



Because the set days for the purification of the mother are not sufficient for her to be considered pure, she is bound to present sacrifices, thus emphasising the need for the sacrifice of the Messiah. In the New Testament, the priest prays the 'absolution for the mother'.

The Church can baptize any newborn child boy or girl on any day without waiting forty or eighty days. The forty or eighty-day-waiting period is the required time before the mother, who is the God mother, is allowed to participate in her child's baptism.



WHAT IS THE FATE OF INFANTS WHO DIE WITHOUT BEING BAPTIZED?

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God", John3:3, and "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God", John3:5. These infants inherited the



corrupt nature due to the original sin, for "we were by nature children of wrath", Eph2:3. St Paul affirms that corruption does not inherit incorruption (1Cor15:50). Therefore, these infants cannot enter nor see the Kingdom of God. One may object, "They didn't do anything wrong!" Well, they didn't do anything right either. The early Church Fathers agree that these infants will not enter the Kingdom of God (based on the words of the Lord) but concerning suffering and punishment the most probable and most acceptable opinion is that they will not suffer since they did not commit any personal sin (St Gregory the Theologian).

God said, "The uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin on the eighth day, that soul shall be cut off from his people; for he has broken My covenant", Gen17:14. Someone may ask, "What about God's mercy?" God's mercy is full of justice and His justice is full of mercy. So trust in the merciful justice of our God and don't worry about this subject.

ONE BAPTISM

The Sacrament of Baptism is performed once and is not repeated as we say in the creed, "we confess **one** baptism for the remission of sins". Since baptism is a spiritual birth so a person is born (baptized) once and since baptism is death with the Lord and the Lord died once so a person dies (baptized) once with the Lord. Thus St Paul said, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism", Eph4:5.

IF BAPTISM IS ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION, WHY WERE THE PEOPLE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT NOT BAPTIZED?

Baptism was not a condition for salvation in the Old Testament, but it was only instituted as a condition in the New Testament, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved", Mark 16:16. The reason is that the saving efficacy of baptism is linked to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Lord had not yet died in the Old Testament. Had baptism existed in the Old Testament, people would have had to be baptized in order to be saved. Nevertheless, the people of the Old Testament practiced the symbol of baptism available to them at such time, namely circumcision (Col 2:11-13). They also kept the Passover, which was a symbol of our Lord (1Cor5:7).

(Adapted from "The Church Sacraments" by Archdeacon Habeeb Guirguis)



THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Big Idea: Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, we can grow and bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Bible Text: Acts 8:14-17, 19:5-6, 1 John 2:20, 27.

Bible Verse: Psa51:11, "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ Institution of the Sacrament (John7:37-39).
- ✖ History of the Holy Chrism (Meyroon) (Exo30).
- ✖ Administration of the sacrament (Act2:38).
 - By the laying of Hands by the Apostles (Acts19:5-6).
 - By Confirmation (1John2:20, 27).
 - Children are no exception.
 - How it is practiced.
- ✖ Fruit of Confirmation
 - It enlightens our mind to receive the truth (1John2:20).
 - It establishes us in our spiritual growth (Gal 5:22-23).
 - It recruits us in God's army (Eph6:12).
 - It seals us by the Holy Spirit (2Cor1:2, 22).
 - It gives us the gifts of the Spirit (1Cor12:4-11, Rom12:68).
- ✖ Serving Hands

Feel: The importance and need of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Do: Teach others about the Sacrament of Confirmation.



THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION



After we are reborn in Baptism, we must grow in the spiritual life and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). We also need to acquire the spiritual power that will enable us to overcome Satan and his army "for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places," Eph6:12. Confirmation is the Sacrament through which we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Our body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor6:19) who helps us grow in our spiritual life. We receive this Sacrament directly after Baptism.

INSTITUTION

- Like all the other sacraments, the Sacrament of Confirmation was instituted by our Lord Jesus. "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified," John7:37-38.
- "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you," John14:26.
- Furthermore, Old Testament prophets spoke of this same promise of the Spirit, like Joel (Joel 2:28), as Saint Peter quoted, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh," Acts2:17.
- The book of Acts tells us, "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, 'which', He said, 'You heard from Me, for John baptized you with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now,'" Acts1:4-5.
- On the day of Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit as is narrated in the book of Acts.



The sacrament of Confirmation is independent of the sacrament of Baptism. We read in Acts, "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit," Acts8:14-17.



Another verse which clarifies this independence is, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them," Acts19:5-6.

The independence of these two Sacraments is also explicit in Hebrews 6:2, where the apostle distinguishes "the doctrine of baptisms" from the doctrine "of laying on of hands." 'Whoever is baptized should be anointed by Myroon, to become the anointed for God, and so is granted the grace of the Holy Spirit' (St Cyprianus). 'In the Sacrament of Baptism the body is cleansed, so that the soul may be purified, and in the Sacrament of Anointment the body is anointed so that the soul may be sanctified' (St Tertullian).

HISTORY OF THE HOLY MEYROON OIL



- Our Fathers the Apostles administered this sacrament by the laying on of hands directly after Baptism, as mentioned in the Holy Book of Acts. Phillip, the deacon, preached to the people of Samaria but did not grant them the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles came and later confirmed these new believers with the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (Acts8). Eventually, as the number of believers across several countries and cities increased, it became impossible for the Apostles to lay hands on all the baptized.
- Anointing (in Greek, *chrismatis* = anointing) was established as an alternative for the laying on of hands for the Holy Spirit's indwelling according to the following verses:

"You have an anointing from the Holy One," 1John2:20.

"The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you...the same anointing teaches you concerning all things," 1John2:27.

"He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God



who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as guarantee," 2Cor1:21-22.

The Apostles established anointing by oil as the alternative for the laying on of hands. They were the first to make the Meyroon oil. Certain fragrant oils which were used to anoint the body of the Lord Jesus during His burial were mixed with the spices which were brought by the women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus (but discovered that Christ had risen). The Apostles melted these spices into pure olive oil, prayed on this mixture in the Upper Room in Zion, and used it as a holy oil (called the Meyroon oil) for consecration.

When Saint Mark came to Alexandria, he brought with him some of this holy Meyroon oil. In the beginning of the 4th century, Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, the 20th Pope of Alexandria, decided to renew it, adding more oil, as well as spices and perfumes (that God had ordered Moses to use in making the holy ointment in Exodus 30) to the original mixture. It now consists of 30 types of ointments and fragrances. Saint Athanasius sent some of this Meyroon oil to the Bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Constantinople.

Meyroon oil is also used in the sanctification of baptismal water and in the consecration of churches, church altars, utensils, and icons. Bishops, the successors of the Apostles, lead by the Patriarch, renew the Meyroon oil periodically so that it does not run out. In making this Holy Chrism, the new mixture is cooked four times during Holy Week, and then remains in the sanctuary until Thomas Sunday, when the Pope adds the old mixture to the new. The Meyroon oil has been made 29 times in the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church, several times by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

The Orthodox Church administers the Sacrament of Confirmation immediately following Baptism, in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Bible and Apostolic tradition.

'After going out of the Baptismal water, we are anointed by Holy Oil according to old tradition. The anointment is accomplished externally on our bodies so that we may bear spiritual fruits' (St Tertullian).

This Sacrament is a Redemptive Sacrament, necessary for salvation. I



imparts an imperishable feature and indelible sign, and hence is performed once in a lifetime.

- The Bishop or Priest administering the Sacrament of Confirmation anoints the newly baptized individual with thirty six signs of the cross using the Meyroon oil, to sanctify all the parts/joints/senses of the body. The first eight anointments are on the senses: forehead, nostrils, mouth, right ear, right eye, left eye then left ear. The next anointments are the heart, the navel, the back, and then the lower back. Next are the six joints of the arm (shoulder, underarm, elbow, inner elbow, wrist, and back of wrist), right arm then left arm. Next are the six joints of the leg, right leg before left (hip, inside hip, knee, inner knee, ankle, then above the ankle). The right side is anointed before the left. Each anointing with the sign of the cross is accompanied by a specific prayer entreating the Lord to confirm the baptized person with the Holy Spirit

The head is anointed for the sanctification of the mind and thoughts. The nostrils are anointed for the sanctification of the sense of smell. The mouth is anointed for the sanctification of speech. The ears are anointed for the sanctification of hearing. The eyes are anointed for the sanctification of sight. The heart is anointed because in the figurative sense, our hearts must be preserved and guarded diligently, and must be kept holy and pure, and always with God. In the physical sense, the heart is a central organ which pumps blood to the entire body. The navel is the center of nourishment for a fetus, and is anointed for spiritual nourishment with the Holy Spirit. The back and lower back support the body and are protected by the Meyroon oil. The hands are anointed because they are an instrument of Godly work, and should be protected and kept pure. The inner hips contain the reproductive organs, anointed so that the confirmed may live in purity. The feet are anointed to keep the confirmed walking in the way of righteousness.

- The Bishop or Priest anoints the baptized in order of age, and also males before females.
- After the anointing, the confirmed is dressed in new white garments that are anointed three times by the Bishop or Priest. Then, he ties a red ribbon (girdle) around the waist of the baptized. Just as a soldier ties a girdle about his waist before going into battle, tying this ribbon on the baptized/confirmed signifies that he/she has now become a soldier



of Christ. The girdle is red, symbolizing the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon which all Sacraments were founded.

- A commandment is read to the parents/godparents of the baptized and confirmed person, instructing them to strive in bringing up the child as a Christian, teaching him/her prayer and the Holy Bible, commitment to Church and Apostolic teachings and traditions, fear of God, and virtuous living. The parents/godparents must bring the confirmed to Church regularly and teach him/her to respect God's house, and the Holy Sacraments.
- The Church is now accustomed to giving the baptized and confirmed person Holy Communion at the end of the Divine Liturgy, followed by a procession. After the procession, the red ribbon is untied by the Bishop or Priest as he prays the prayers of "Untying the Girdle". In the original rite, the untying of the girdle took place on the eighth day after Baptism and Confirmation.

FRUIT OF CONFIRMATION

In the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation, which directly follows baptism, we are sealed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We become temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must strive with all diligence to live godly and pure lives. The Holy Spirit aids us in our spiritual growth, enlightening us, providing us with the ability to receive spiritual knowledge, teaching us all things, reminding us of all things. He grants us grace and determination in our spiritual struggles, providing us with His spiritual fruits. He gives us spiritual talents and gifts with which we glorify and serve God, and grants us to abide in our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.



SERVING HANDS

The Church is called the Body of Christ because it is the body through which Christ works in the world today. By baptism we become members of the Church i.e. the Body of Christ. This means that after baptism, our hands are Christ's hands. When you were confirmed, the sign of the cross was made on your hands and the other members of your body with holy Meyroon oil of Confirmation. By this act your hands were dedicated to the service of Christ. They are the hands by which Christ must work in the world today. **"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" 1Cor12:27.** We should be reaching a *helping hand*.



At the end of the last war a platoon of American soldiers came to a bombed-out church. They found a statue of Christ that was smashed. They collected most of the pieces and cemented them together, all but the hands. These could not be found anywhere. Finally one soldier wrote a sign and left it by the partially restored statue of Christ. The sign read, "*He has no hands but yours*".

But the saddest thing about the hands of many Christians today is that they are *withered* by inactivity and unconcern. They need to be brought to Christ to heal them. Some people can go through life with gloves on never really touching anything (no fingerprints as in the perfect crime.). Others, thank God, leave the mark of a great love on the people and the enterprises they touch. There are also *washed* hands like Pilate's - constantly washing themselves of any responsibilities. Even today Pilate's washbowl is being passed around.

There are *empty* hands. After a great earthquake in Tokyo, no one was admitted into the city unless he came bearing rice and a candle. Once a little boy had five small loaves and two fish, he could have eaten his lunch and been entirely forgotten. But what little he had, he willingly gave to the Lord. The Lord took it and multiplied it a thousand fold, creating enough food to feed five thousand people. What do you have in your hand? It may not be so much but the secret is to turn it over to the Lord, to let Him use it to bring blessing to many.

The hands of a Christian are *praying* Hands. It is through prayer that they develop muscle-tone and power for the tasks of the day. We recall the famous prayer of Moses when he prayed for Israel until his up-raised hands became weary and had to be supported by Hur and Aaron.

Christian hands do not stop with prayers. They go on from prayer to work. They try to become part of the answer to prayer. Being Christ's hands, they continue in the World today the work of *caring, healing and loving*.

God is looking for hands to use. Even today He carries the cross - the cross of love, of concern for those who live in the darkness, for the sinner, for the poor, the afflicted, the maligned, the deprived and the downtrodden. He looks to us, to our hands, to help Him lift that cross.

"Take my hands and let them move, at the impulse of your Love."
(Adapted from "Youth and the Sacraments" by His Grace Bishop Moussa).



THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

Big Idea: The Orthodox Church believes in the real presence of the Holy Body and the Holy Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

Bible Text: 1Cor11:23-30, Luke22:19, 20.

Bible Verse: John6:53, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ Institution of the Sacrament (Matt26:26-28).
- ✖ Transmission of Holy Tradition (1Cor11:23-26).
- ✖ The real presence of the Holy Body and Holy Blood of Christ in the Eucharist (John6:52-66, 1Cor11:30, 1Cor10:15-16).
- ✖ The Eucharist is a sacrifice (Mark14:4, Heb13:10).
- ✖ Historically, the Eucharist has been the central act of worship (Acts20:7, Justin, Apology 1, 66).
- ✖ Benefits of the Sacrament.
- ✖ The horizontal dimension of the Eucharist.
- ✖ Worthy partaking of Holy Communion (1Cor11:28, Matt5:23-24, 1Cor4:4).
- ✖ Regular partaking of Holy Communion (Acts20:7).
- ✖ Those prevented from partaking of Holy Communion.
- ✖ We come to take and give.

Feel: Privileged and unworthy of the great honour of partaking of the Holy Body and Holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist.

Do:

- ✖Partake of the Sacrament with due preparation and respect.
- ✖See Christ in our neighbours and His little brothers and establish a relationship of love and forgiveness with them.



THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST



In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, believers eat the Lord Jesus Christ's Holy Body and drink His precious Blood under the physical appearance of bread and wine. This Sacrament is called the Sacrament of all Sacraments and/or the crown of the Sacraments. In the Coptic Orthodox Church, no Sacrament is to be administered (on the same day) after the person has partaken of the Holy Communion.

INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT

Our Lord instituted this Sacrament on Holy Thursday, just a few hours before His arrest and trial. After He had washed the feet of the disciples, as a sign of their repentance and preparation, "He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat: this is my Body". Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it all of you, for this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins," (Matt 26:26-28). St Paul said, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of Me". In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me, for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes," 1Cor11:23-26. Here St Paul was referring to the transmission of the Holy Tradition. St Paul, by quoting the words of Christ in Luke22:19, 20, was instructing the Corinthians concerning the Eucharist, the giving of thanks.

THE REAL PRESENCE OF THE LORD'S BODY AND BLOOD IN THE EUCHARIST

For the first one thousand years of Christian History, when the Church was visibly one and undivided, the holy gifts of the Body and Blood of Christ were received as just that: His Body and Blood. The Church confessed this was a mystery: the bread is truly His Body, that which is in the cup is truly His Blood, but one cannot say how they become so.



Our Lord spoke about this Sacrament openly to the Jews but



they "quarreled among themselves saying, 'how can this Man give us His flesh to eat?'" John6:52. Moreover, many of the disciples protested saying, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" John6:60. When our Lord Jesus Christ explicitly emphasized His real presence in the Sacrament, it was written, "many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more," John6:66. The question of the real presence is of considerable importance in relation to the differences which have emerged within Christianity since the time of the so-called 'Reformation'.

A particularly important witness to the early Christian understanding of this Sacrament is provided by the 'Catechetical Lectures' of St Cyril of Jerusalem. This is a series of 24 lectures of instruction on the beliefs and practices of the Christian Church, given at some point around 350AD to those preparing for Baptism. They are an important witness to the ideas that prevailed in the Jerusalem Church around this point. It is clear that **St Cyril of Jerusalem** regarded the bread and wine as becoming the real Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said, *[Jesus Christ], by His will, once changed water into wine at Cana of Galilee. So why should we not believe that He can change wine into blood? We should therefore have full assurance that we are sharing in the body and blood of Christ. For in the form of bread, His body is given to you, and in the form of wine, His blood is given to you, so that by partaking of the body and blood of Christ you may become of one body and one blood with Him.'*

St John of Damascus wrote, regarding the transformation of the bread and wine, saying, *'And now you ask how the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine and the water become the blood of Christ. I shall tell you. The Holy Spirit comes upon them, and achieves things which surpass every word and thought....Let it be enough for you to understand that this takes place by the Holy Spirit.'*

Although the Holy Body (in the form of bread) is broken and distributed to the congregation and so is the Holy Blood (in the form of wine), they are complete and undivided. This means that every part of the bread and every drop of the wine in this Sacrament is not a part of the Body of Christ and His Blood; but everyone partaking of the Eucharist receives the whole Body of Christ and the whole Blood of Christ.



THE EUCHARIST IS A SACRIFICE

The Orthodox Church believes and confesses that the Eucharist



is a sacrifice and an offering to God in addition to being a Sacrament.

- In the **first** place, this is supported by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many," Matt26:28, Mark14:24, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you," Luke22:20, "This is My body which is broken for you," 1Cor11:24, "This is My body which is given for you," Luke22:19. Undoubtedly, the terms "broken body" and "shed blood" refer to a sacrifice.
- **Secondly**, the presence of an altar in the Church confirms that the Eucharist is a sacrifice. St Paul said, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle (Jews) have no right to eat," Heb 13:10. Isaiah the Prophet said, "In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt," Isa19:19. This is a specific prophecy about the Coptic (Egyptian) Church which proves the presence of altars in the Christian era and consequently the presence of sacrifice (the Eucharist).
- **Thirdly**, Malachi the Prophet prophesied about the New Testament offering saying, "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles. In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts," Mal 1:10-11. This "pure offering" is nothing but the Eucharistic offering that Christians offer on their altars, for at which point in history did the Gentiles "in every place" offer an offering to the Lord?
- **Fourthly**, St Paul said, "Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idol is anything (else)? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's Table and the table of demons," Cor10:18-21. The apostle is comparing the table (altar) of the Lord to the altar of the pagans upon which unacceptable demonic sacrifices were offered, which proves that the Eucharist that is offered on the Christian altar is indeed a sacrifice.



Comparing the Sacrifice of the Cross and the Eucharist

THE CROSS	THE EUCHARIST
The Holy Body and Precious Blood are offered visibly.	The Holy Body and Precious Blood are offered as sacramental bread and wine.
The sacrifice was our Lord Himself; it was offered by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief High Priest (Psa110:4).	It is offered by the New Testament Priests according to the order of Melchizedek.
The Lamb of God was slain; His Blood was shed and He died.	It is a bloodless sacrifice: no shedding of blood and no death.
The sacrifice of the cross was offered once on Good Friday.	It is offered several times from its institution till the second coming of Christ, our Lord.

THE EUCHARISTIC WORSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Historically, from New Testament days on, the central act of worship, the very apex of spiritual sacrifice, took place "on the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread," Acts20:7. The Eucharist has always been that supreme act of thanksgiving and praise to God in His Church. In the middle of the second century, Justin specified the conditions for taking part in the Eucharist which is not an ordinary meal.

'This food we call Eucharist , of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins for rebirth and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive this as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Saviour being incarnate by God's word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from Him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus. '(Justin, Apology 1, 66)

BENEFITS OF THE SACRAMENT

Having Holy Communion is not only a great privilege and right of every true



Christian, but is also an obligation. This is mainly clear from the Lord's teaching in the gospel of St John, chapter 6, which includes:

- **Abiding in Lord Jesus Christ:** "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him," John6:56. Consequently we bear the fruits of the spirit, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing," John15:5.
- **Obtaining Eternal Life:** "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day...He who eats this bread will live forever," John6:54, 58.
- **Growth and Maintenance of Our Spiritual Life:** "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you....For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed... he who feeds on Me will live because of Me," John6:53, 55, 57.
- **Salvation and Remission of Sins:** "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins," Matt26:28.
- **Unity of Believers:** "For we, being many, are the one Bread and one Body; for we all partake of that one Bread," 1Cor10:17.

THE HORIZONTAL DIMENSION OF THE EUCHARIST

Most of us are aware of the **vertical** dimension of the Eucharist, of the fact that it unites us to God as His people. "**He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me and I in him,**" said Jesus. It is this Sacrament which makes it possible for us to say with St Paul, "**Christ lives in me**". And through this Sacrament, we can leave the Lord's Table with the glowing courage of the same St Paul who said, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**".

Few Christians, however, realize the **horizontal** dimension of the Eucharist, the fact that it unites us not only to God, but also to each other. Through the Eucharist we all become one in Christ since the same Christ comes to dwell in all of us. The Fathers of the Church take for granted the unity of the individual to God through the Eucharist. What they stress and emphasize greatly is the horizontal dimension of Communion, our becoming one with each other in Christ. The very fact that we all share the one Bread makes us one Body, explains St Paul.



Jesus Christ tells us that the first and greatest commandment is love of God and man. Yet we all know from experience that it is not always easy to love our fellow men. God knew that this was a difficult commandment. That is why He gave us the Sacrament of Communion through which He gives us His own strength to enable us to practice this commandment of love.

Orthodoxy is the religion of love especially because it believes that through the Eucharist, Christ comes to live in us thus making us all a community of brothers and sisters. This is why the liturgy in our Church is never celebrated in private, just by the priest alone, but always with the family of God, the congregation, present. This is done in order to express the horizontal dimension of the Eucharist, i.e., the fact that by receiving the Body and Blood of Christ we are all joined together in one body, one family, the family of God. This means that the same Christ who comes to us in Holy Communion comes to us also in the person of our neighbour, our fellow parishioner, our fellow Christian: Christ lives in every person I meet.

"For as much as you did it unto one of these the least of my brethren you did it to me," said Jesus. The way I treat my fellow men is the way I treat Christ. To honour Christ in the Sacrament of Communion and to dis-honour Him in the person of my fellow men is sacrilege, sin and hypocrisy.

WORTHY PARTAKING OF HOLY COMMUNION

Since the partaking of Holy Communion has such a great honour, blessing and effect on our lives unequalled by all the other spiritual means, we must eagerly and regularly receive this Holy Sacrament (Acts20:7). However, St Paul warns against approaching the Sacrament in an unworthy manner in (1Cor11:29). There is such power in the Body and Blood of Christ communicated to us in the eating and drinking of His gifts (John6:54-56) that to do so in willful disregard of the Lord could result in sickness and even death. St Paul explained it in 1Cor11:27-31 saying, "Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning (recognizing clearly) the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep (die). For, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged".



Worthiness is achieved when the person approaches the Eucharist with the



Orthodox Faith, that is, has no doubt concerning the bread and wine being the true Body and precious Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. To be worthy of Holy Communion, a person must be practicing the Sacrament of **Repentance and Confession** on a regular basis as St Paul said, "Let a man examine himself," 1Cor11:28, and must be **reconciled with others**. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come offer your gift," Matt5:23-24. True worthiness is feeling unworthy. St Paul, the meek and humble apostle said, "I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this," 1Cor4:4.

Besides spiritual worthiness, we need also to be **physically worthy** by obeying Church rules concerning food abstinence before communion, physical cleanliness, and early attendance of the liturgy.

When the Lord invites us to Communion, we should always remember that He is not calling us to **perfection** but to **confession**. If we are not good enough, as none of us is, then let us repent and come to confession to receive the Lord's forgiveness, to let Him cleanse us, to let Him make us worthy. "Him that comes to me I will in no way cast out," says Jesus, John6:37.

WE COME TO TAKE AND GIVE

We come to this Sacrament not only to **take** Communion, but also to **give** ourselves in communion with Christ to God the Father. In the Eucharist we are joined with the Lord Jesus in His offering, in His sacrifice. We are able to be joined with Him because He is the Head of the Body of which we, by Baptism, have been made members. Together with the whole church, living and departed, we are united with Christ in His sacrifice, and with it we put our gifts, our prayers and our sufferings, to be offered by Christ to His Father. We are not only **at** the altar, we are **on** the altar. The bread and wine which the priest places on God's altar represent us. When the Priest offers the bread and the wine to God, we kneel. We remember that these are our gifts the Priest is offering to God: our love, our thanksgiving, our



obedience. We remember that we are on the altar offering ourselves to God with Christ under the forms of bread and wine.



The Sacrament of the Eucharist is given to us primarily not that we may do something but that we may be someone, that each one of us, upon receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, may go out and be another CHRIST in the world today, that we may be possessed with a divine restlessness about the situation of the world, that we may go out and plunge ourselves into the midst of the world's problems and bring to them Christ's answer, Christ's solution, Christ's love, Christ's understanding, Christ's peace, Christ's hope.

THOSE WHO MUST BE PREVENTED FROM COMMUNION

The unrepentant: Sinners who still live in sin and do not repent must not take Communion. The Lord Jesus said repeatedly, "**Unless you repent you will all likewise perish,**" Luke 13:3, 5. If the unrepentant insists on taking Communion, out of ignorance, it is the duty of the priest to prevent him, or else he will bring on himself curse and condemnation instead of blessing.

The non-confessors: Confession is an essential element of repentance. "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,**" 1 John 1:9. It is necessary to have a father of confession and a spiritual guide. The priest is God's representative (1 Cor 4:1). When you confess your sins and repent, he will deliver to you God's absolution and solution. Jesus breathed on His disciples and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained,**" John 20:22-23, Matt 18:18. If you tried to take Communion without confession, you are both liable and a loser at the same time, and it is better for you to correct your situation

The disputers: All kinds of hostile disputes, strife, fighting and hatred, are obstacles and **must** prevent one from having communion. The Lord says it clearly, "**If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift,**" Matt 5:23-24. For this specific reason, the church starts her Liturgy with prayer of reconciliation and the deacon asks all believers in attendance of the sacred service to greet each other with a holy kiss. This is not just a reminder of the importance of reconciliation, but also an obvious declaration of the pure Christian love. If you were the one at fault, admit it and apologize; if you were the victim, forgive and forget. Otherwise, don't even think of having Holy Communion.





The tardy: Those who come to church late, or in the middle of the service or at the end of the Liturgy **must not** try to take Holy Communion. We should attend before the absolution of the servants or at least before the 'Gospel Reading', unless the excuse is an emergency. **"I love those who love Me and those who seek Me diligently," Pro8:17.**

The divorced: A person, who is divorced for any reason other than the spouse committing adultery or the spouse changing religion or in the case of annulment, is prohibited from having Holy Communion. The spouse who is declared the victim by the report of the confession father or who has received permission from the Clerical Council is not prohibited.



Those who falter between two opinions: The prophet Elijah said to the people, **"How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God then follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him,"**

1Kin18:21. Along the same lines, Jesus said, **"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters abroad,"** **Matt12:30.** He also said, **"I could wish you were cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of My mouth,"** **Rev3:15-16.** St Paul instructed the Corinthians saying, **"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons,"** **1Cor10:21.** So, faltering and limping between God's love and the love of the world is a big stumbling block which disqualifies one from partaking of Holy Communion.



Those who neglect the means of Grace: Neglecting to pray and read the Bible, or fasting, especially nine hours before Holy Communion, are serious obstacles.

Those who wear indecent attire and/or make-up: Worship and prayer must be united with quiet and godly behavior (1Tim2:8-10).

Those who are disrespectful and reckless: Despising the Church or spiritual life by any means, such as showing disrespect, laughing, mocking or making fun of anyone or anything during the holy service, disqualifies one from Holy Communion.



THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE

Big Idea: Salvation, forgiveness and justification are based entirely upon the atoning work of Christ.

Bible Text: Rom5:6-11, Ezek18:19-32.

Bible Verse: 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The four fundamental steps of repentance:
 - Godly sorrow and contrition.
 - Determination to forsake sin.
 - Faith in the saving blood of Christ.
 - Confession in the hearing of a priest.
- ✖ The need to bear fruit that befits repentance (Matt3:8).
- ✖ That repentance is the main aim of the service.

Feel: Grateful for the saving grace of the Blood of Christ.

Do:

- ✖ Respond to Christ's invitation, "come to me, all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest," Matt11:28.
- ✖ Help others find rest in Christ.



THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE



Repentance is one of the Seven Sacraments of the Church. By this sacrament, we receive salvation, forgiveness and justification extended to us by the atoning work of Christ. Repentance is a revolution against the evil in oneself. It takes **four fundamental steps**.

Change of mind

This involves acknowledgement of sin and godly remorse. When we do something we know is sinful, we lose our self-respect. We have difficulty living with ourselves. We cannot stand the guilt, the pangs of conscience, the sleepless nights.

There are two things we can do with these guilt feelings. We can try to push them out of mind, or forget them since to remember them causes us such great pain. We call this repression. But repression doesn't work. Repressed guilt feelings are one of the greatest causes of mental illness. The alternative to repression is repentance which means that one is honest before God. **Instead of trying to repress or hide his sin, one admits it to God in confession and seeks His forgiveness.** God not only forgives but also accepts the penitent. As a result the former sinner is better able to accept himself and live with himself.

Repentance requires a **changed mind**. In fact, the Greek word for repentance **metanoia** means just that, a changed mind. It means that one comes to see the wrongness of the whole attitude of mind which made him act as he did. We experience a changed mind as a result of looking at our model, Christ. Everybody who is confronted with Christ knows that he needs cleansing. "**Depart from me, Lord**", said Peter when Jesus approached him, "**for I am a sinful man**". The first thing necessary for repentance is the vision of God in Christ. In true repentance, a changed mind leads to a changed heart.

A changed heart is one that experiences true sorrow for its sins. Sorrow is more than regret. A certain youth embezzled his employer's money. His



employer found out. The prosecution was about to begin. The boy's pastor pleaded with the employer to be merciful. This would break the heart of the boy's good parents. The money, he promised, would be returned. The employer relented. The prosecution was called off. When the pastor informed the young boy about this, he smiled and seemed to think it was a pity the money had to be paid back. He wasn't sorry for his sins at all. He was only sorry for the price he thought he had to pay.

True repentance means I am sorry not because I have been apprehended in my crime but because I have offended God. David said in his great penitential psalm, "**Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,**" Psa50:6. There must be that determination to forsake sin i.e. to change one's attitude towards self, towards sin and towards God.

The second factor involved in true repentance is a changed direction. The change of mind and heart in repentance is so thorough that it leads to a changed direction of life.



The Jewish word for repentance means "to turn". This is exactly what true repentance is, a turning away from evil and turning towards God. St Paul made a "U-turn" on the Road to Damascus. If repentance is anything, it is a U-turn, a reversing of the direction of life so that we face God. Because we have taken one step down a wrong road is no reason why we should take two.

Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son to dramatize what He meant by the word repent. The Prodigal Son realized and acknowledged his sin when "**he came to himself,**" Luke15:17 and repented. He did not just sit still and feel sorry about all his sins. He got up and left. He turned his feet in the other direction. He sought out his father and humbled himself before him, and then he was forgiven. Judas was sorry enough to hang himself. It was an admission of guilt without true repentance.

The third factor is faith in the atoning blood of Christ. There is no torture that you can give your body, no trials you can set for your mind that will be pleasing to Almighty God. No suffering that we can undergo will lead us to repentance. Even reformation is not enough. Our sins were atoned for by Christ on the cross. There, He suffered sin's penalty. "**Without the shedding**



of blood there is no remission," Rom6:23. Consequently, there is no salvation except through the Blood of Jesus Christ because:

- The Blood of Jesus Christ forgives our sins i.e. all past sins to the present (Col 1:14, Heb9:22). No sin is too great to be forgiven by His precious Blood.
- The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us i.e. takes away all our present sins, the ones we know and the others we do not know (1John1:7).
- The Blood of Christ makes us Holy i.e. consecrates us i.e. makes us belong to Christ who is Holy (Heb13:12).
- The Blood of Christ makes us abide in Him (John6:56); we become one with Him as He and the Father are one.
- The Blood of Christ gives us eternal life (John6:54); we do not depend on our weak selves but on the grace of God and the reviving power of His Blood.

The fourth requisite of the Sacrament of Repentance is confession to a Priest. The Priest has the authority to loose or retain sins (John20:21-23). **Origen** said, '*A filial method of forgiveness, albeit hard and laborious is the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner . . . does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine, after the manner of him who say, "I said, to the Lord, I will accuse myself of my iniquity.'* (Homilies in Leviticus2:4, 248 AD)



Basil the Great said, '*It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God's mysteries is entrusted. Those doing penance of old are found to have done it before the saints. It is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist [Matt. 3:6], but in Acts [19:18] they confessed to the apostles.'* (Rules Briefly Treated 288, 374 AD)

Confession is a biblical need (Matt18:18, Acts19:18). Confession is also a practical need for guidance (1Tim4:12-14). Confession is a psychological need for relief of the weary and struggling soul (Matt11:28).

Confession helps us become more submissive to the Lord and more fruitful for His kingdom. Hence, self-examination and assessment help us prepare to stand before God and give an account of ourselves (Rom14:12).



A changed mind, a changed heart, and a changed direction lead to a **changed life**. "Bear fruit that befits **repentance**," said Jesus. It is not enough merely to repent and confess our sins. We must now express our repentance with a new life. "A **good tree brings forth good fruit**," said Jesus. Repentance takes place inside a man, but it can be seen on the outside. Ugly words are replaced by kind ones, dishonesty by honesty, pride by humility, hatred by love. This is demonstrated by Zacchaeus in Luke19:8.

A changed life will lead to a **changed service**. When the Lord asked Peter three times "Do you love me?" He deepened Peter's repentance for the three times he had denied Him. But at the same time as the Lord deepened Peter's repentance, He called him again to the service. "Feed my lambs," He told Peter. **True repentance means that we cease serving sin, self and idols, and we turn to the worship and service of the one, true God.**

Repentance is then followed by spiritual struggle and growth. In the process of growing, every Christian should go about calling souls for repentance. Hence, **repentance is the first aim of the service** (Luke13:3, 5; Acts17:30; 2:38). John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," Matt3:2. Jesus came announcing the good news and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel," Mark1:15. The disciples went everywhere and preached that people should repent (Mark6:12).

The servant should lead a life of repentance. At the same time, he must not look down to the people he serves as beginners in the spiritual path compared to himself as advanced. According to Luke13:3, 5, we all need to repent daily and to struggle continuously until we measure up to Christ.

"Repent," said Jesus, "for the kingdom of God is at hand." What is the kingdom of God? It is nothing more than a state in which God is the king and rules. God invaded the world at Christmas. He came to forgive, to enlighten, to lead, to make all things new. He came to reign not on some earthly throne, but on the throne of your heart and mine. Those who trust Jesus enough to repent, to make a complete right-about-face from sin and self to God will find, as Jesus said, that "the kingdom of God is within you," Luke17:21.



WHAT TO AVOID WHEN CONFESSING

Confession is not to sit and tell stories without referring to what wrong you have done. Confession is not to complain about others and explain people's wrong doings to you. It is to condemn yourself.

Confession is not just about being freed from old sins to fall in new ones, without changing your spiritual status.

Confession is not asking your Confession Father to agree with what you would like to do and if he did not agree you become upset and persist in asking his approval. Then you pretend you are acting on the advice of your Confession Father.

Confession is not just sitting with the Priest anywhere or in a friendly way. Again, it is not a matter of talking to him and letting him use his intelligence to guess what sin you fell in.

We must not be content with the casual examination of our lives, thinking that only the sins which seem to give us the most trouble are worthy of being confessed. Instead as we prayerfully study the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will convict us of other areas of sin which need confessing. We must confess not only what we think is sin, but what the Holy Spirit labels as sin, as we read the Word of God. **"All the scripture is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction for instruction in righteousness,"** 2Tim3:16.

"Return to Me and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts," Mal 3:7. When Christ enters into the human heart, He expects to be Lord and Master. He demands complete surrender. He demands control of your intellectual processes. He requires that your body be subject to Him. He expects you to surrender your talents and abilities to Him. He expects nothing less than that all your work and labour will be performed in His name. **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all your soul, and all your strength".**





We point our fingers at the heathen and at the idol worshippers of old, but we are not different. We have come to worship things, status, fame, popularity, money, security. Anything that comes between God and our self is idolatry. **Jesus demands Lordship over all such things.** He wants you to yield everything concerning your social life, your family life, your business life to Him. He must have first place in everything you do or think or say, for when you truly repent you turn toward God in everything. Don't say, "I'll give up some of my sins and hang on to some others. I'll leave part of my life for Jesus and part for my own desires". **Jesus expects 100% surrender.**

When you have determined that you are renouncing sin, forsaking sin, and yielding all to Christ you have taken another step toward peace with God. "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,**" 1 John 1:9.



PRAYER

I offer You O Lord, my soul, my body, my intellect and my will
for I offer You all that I am and have,
all that I do and say.

I offer You O Lord, all my joys, my sorrows of today, my work with its fatigue,
my cross with its bitterness.

I offer You O Lord all those whom I love, those who do me good,
who have done me good and
those who have recommended themselves to my prayer
Amen.



THE SACRAMENT OF UNCTION OF THE SICK

Big Idea: The ministry of Christ was one of numerous occurrences of healing "of all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease," Matt4:23. In the New Testament, the healing ministry was established as part of the Sacramental life of the Church.

Bible Text: James5:13-15.

Bible Verse: Mark6:13, "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The healing ministry of Christ (Luke4:18, Matt4:23, Matt10:1, Matt6:12-13, Matt10:8).
- ✖ The New Testament healing ministry is part of the Sacramental life of the Church (1Cor12:9, Acts9:34, James5:14, 15).
- ✖ The elements of the Sacrament (James5:14, 15, Matt8:17).
- ✖ Purpose of the Sacrament.
- ✖ The practice of the Sacrament in the Church (Phil 2:25-27, 2Cor12:710).
 - at any time
 - last Friday of Lent.
- ✖ The proper way to treat the holy oil of the Sacrament.

Feel: Grateful to the Holy Spirit for continuing to deliver to us the healing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do: Practice the Sacrament with diligence as many times as needed for the healing of the body, soul and spirit.



THE SACRAMENT OF UNCTION OF THE SICK



One of the great prophetic themes of the Old Testament concerning the promised Messiah is that the Father would send His Son "to heal the broken hearted and to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of the sight to the blind," Luke 4:18, Isa 61:1. The ministry of Christ was one of numerous occurrences of healings of "all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease," Matt 4:23. In addition, Jesus healed darkened hearts and minds as He released people from demonic oppression.



When Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach, He gave them power to perform miracles, power over unclean Spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease (Matt 10:1). So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them (Mark 6: 12-13).

The apostles attributed their miracles to the risen and ascended Christ (Acts 9:34). St Paul identified healing as a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:9). Thus the New Testament foundation was established for the healing ministry to be a part of the Sacramental life of the Church (Jam 5:14-15).

THE ELEMENTS OF THE SACRAMENT

1. The priest (Jam 5:14).
2. The prayer of faith which will save (Matt 8:17).
3. The work of Christ Himself for the Lord will raise us up.
4. The work of the Holy Spirit manifested in the oil.
5. Repentance and confession of sins prior to anointing of the oil (Jam 5:15).

The Sacrament has to be conducted by the **priest** who is given certain gifts at ordination by the laying on of the hands (1 Tim 4:14). The priest also intercedes on behalf of the sick as Moses did on behalf of Miriam his sister (Num 12:10-15, James 5:16).

Faith is a very important element for healing (Mark 9:17-24, Mark 6:5-6). We learn of miracles of healing performed by the saints in Matt 9:20-22, Mark 3:1-12, John 4:46-53, Acts 5:15, Acts 19:11-12. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and



greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father," John14:12. The greater works indicate that Christ working through mere humans after Pentecost is greater than His performing signs and wonders directly. In Acts3:1-16, the lame man is healed by the power of Christ, through St Peter. Christ is our Suffering Servant, offering Himself on our behalf; and "by whose stripes you were healed," 1Pet2:24. As a sacrament the anointing of the sick takes its power and efficacy from the atoning death of Jesus Christ which "was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases,'" Matt8:17.

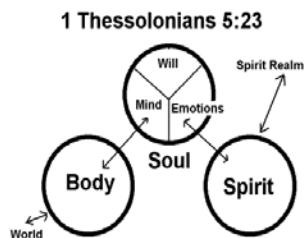


Healing is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1Cor12:9). Every true gift and ministry in the Church manifests the Holy Trinity. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the growth of the whole Church. Every member of Christ's body is important to the overall life and work of the Church.

Very often sickness is a result of sin, as in the case of the paralytic (John5:4). Sins that destroy the soul lead to a far worse result than an affliction of the body. The only hope is to **repent** and flee from sin altogether (Prov7:26-27, 1Sam5:6-12, Mark3:1-12).

PURPOSE OF THE SACRAMENT

The Sacrament of healing manifests God's presence in the Church and confirms the message of the gospel. Salvation deals with the whole person, for each human being is a unity, body, soul and spirit (1Thess5:23). There are weaknesses and diseases of the body (Gal 5:17), of the soul (Jude1:18-19) and of the spirit (Jam3:14).



The greatest disease of the spirit is sin and it is healed by the purifying power of the precious Blood of Christ. The spirit needs to overcome the works of the soul and body and in turn be led by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit enlightens us, we need to bring our weaknesses and diseases to the healing power of our Lord Jesus Christ, in faith.

The Church rejects magicians and sorcerers for healing; as this means they seek the devil for healing and this is an extreme disbelief and abandonment of Christianity. "Some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons," 1Tim4:1. But consulting a doctor for healing is acceptable and praised by the Church as all the medicines that doctors give to the patients, are made for human benefit.



"God created them to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving," 1 Tim 4:3-4.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH

The Orthodox Church has a special service of healing, which may be performed at any time. The priest prays for the ill person and anoints him with oil. As Orthodox Christians, we pray neither commanding God to heal, nor doubting His ability to heal, but pleading for His promised mercy upon all who are ill (Phil 2:25-27). **Bishop Serapion** writes in the year 350 A D, '*We beseech you, Saviour of all men, you that have all virtue and power, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we pray that you send down from heaven the healing power of the only-begotten Son upon this oil, so that for those who are anointed . . . it may be effected for the casting out of every disease and every bodily infirmity . . . for good grace and remission of sins.*' (The Sacramentary of Serapion 29:1).

Some reasons why some patients do not recover from the sickness or even die after the accomplishment of the Sacrament of Unction of the sick are:

- Lack of faith of the patient like the people of Nazareth. The Lord Jesus "did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief," Matt 13:58.
- Their unworthiness of healing due to their evil doing and unwillingness to repent and return to God who says, "Return you backsliding children and I will heal your backsliding," Jer 3:22.
- Sickness may be for death which is the great recovery and salvation from all the bodily pains.
- The sickness may be a chastisement and God may erase it when its mission is accomplished, like the disease of Job who was sick for seven years.
- Sometimes a disease continues with a person for divine wisdom, which we cannot understand or interpret. "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unreachable are his judgments and his ways past finding out," Rom 11:33. The sickness of St Paul remained with him and when he prayed for healing God refused saying to him "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Cor 12:9. God worked unusual miracles by



the hands of St Paul "So that even hankerchiefs and aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them," Acts 19:12.

THE RITE OF THE SACRAMENT

A plate of oil containing seven pieces of cotton wool, shaped like a wick are lit, each one at the beginning of every prayer of the seven prayers of the Sacrament. This complete number denotes the seven Spirits of God mentioned in the Book of Revelations (Rev 3:1). The Spirit of God dwells and sanctifies the oil to heal those anointed by it and the seven lamps should be placed like a Cross.

- The Priest must be fasting for nine hours and the sick must be fasting for six hours, but in extreme cases of sickness this period may be decreased by an absolution from the Priest.
- The Priest must pray all the seven prayers completely.

How Should The Holy Oil Remaining After The Sacramental Rite Be Treated?

- The Priest may take the remaining oil and leave a little oil in the dish for the patient to anoint himself for seven consecutive days as the Rite of the Sacrament orders.
- Sometimes every house keeps a special bottle to keep the oil as a continuous blessing at home.
- The oil should not be used to anoint any unbeliever, as it is Holy Sacramental Oil given only to the baptized. If a non-believer asks to be anointed, then the Priest will bless some common oil three times by the sign of the Cross and then prays the litany of the sick and anoints the patient.
- No one should be anointed directly after Holy Communion as Holy Communion is the perfection of the Sacraments with which all the Sacraments are sealed.

Why Does The Church Perform This Sacrament To The Whole Congregation On The Last Friday Of The Lent?

During the Holy Week of Passion (Pascha), the Church does not perform this Sacrament and therefore performs it and anoints the entire congregation on the Last Friday of Lent. Moreover, many are weak from fasting and this unction helps them to continue with the scheduled prayers and food abstinence during the Pascha.





THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY

Big Idea: Marriage is the oldest human institution, ordained of the Lord for the procreation of the race and the establishment of homes where happiness and joy can reign. "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him," Gen 2:18.

Bible Text: Matt19:1-6, Eph5:22-32 and others

Bible Verse: Heb13:4, "Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Students will

Know:

- ✖ Characteristics and blessings of the Sacrament.
- ✖ Institution of the Sacrament.
- ✖ Characteristics of the Orthodox Marriage.
- ✖ Engagement and courtship.
- ✖ The goal of the Orthodox marriage.
- ✖ Equality and office of Christian partners.

Feel: Respect for Holy Matrimony as Christ designed it to be at ease regarding equality and order in the Christian marriage.

Do: Approach marriage with the appropriate attitude and preparation.



THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY



Marriage is and has been a universal practice for almost every civilized culture throughout history, yet it is considered to be a Sacrament in the Orthodox Church. A Sacrament is a visible form of an invisible grace, it's a *mystery*, an open door through which mankind passes from the realm of the physical and earthly, into the reality of the spiritual and heavenly - the realm of communion with God. A Sacrament is seen in the context of created reality (for example, wine and bread in the Eucharist, water in Baptism, and oil in Confirmation, etc...). This created reality is then projected into the Kingdom of God and transformed into a higher reality, which belongs to the spiritual realm.

As a result of our Lord Jesus Christ's work of redemption, marriage is raised to a new level that transcends human procreation and legal contracts. Marriage is, on one level, a created reality, which is indeed a universal practice. Men and women are attracted to each other, fall in love, and marry. But this created reality of marriage can be assumed into the Kingdom of God and sanctified. When a man and a woman come to Church to be married, they are experiencing the transfiguration of their earthly marriage into the reality of the Kingdom of God.

In the Holy Gospel according to John 2:1-11, we read about our Lord Jesus Christ attending a wedding ceremony in Cana of Galilee. By attending this wedding and in performing His first miracle there, our Lord Jesus Christ forever blessed marriage and set it apart as a "sanctified" way of life. This first miracle performed by the Lord at the wedding of Cana of Galilee is also symbolic of the first wedding in the Garden of Eden; the transformation of water into wine is symbolic of the Sacramental transformation of the earthly reality of marriage into something heavenly and spiritual. (Adapted from an article by Fr John Meyendorff).

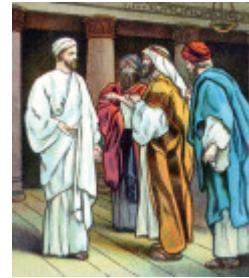
Marriage, as a Sacrament, belongs to an entirely different order than the mere union of man and woman through civil contract. Basically, it regards the husband and wife as symbols of another marriage namely, the marriage of our Lord Jesus and the Church: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything," Eph 5:22, 24.



"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it ... so husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church," Eph5:25, 28-29.

INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT

Holy Scripture does not explicitly mention when our Lord instituted this Sacrament. Nevertheless, some Fathers have said that He instituted it when He attended and blessed the wedding at Cana of Galilee (John2:1-11). Others have said that the Lord instituted it during His discussion with the Pharisees about divorce when He said,



"What God has joined together, let no man separate," Matt19:6. In any case, St Paul explicitly calls marriage "a great mystery (Sacrament)," Eph5:32.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORTHODOX MARRIAGE

- **No Mixed Marriage**

In 2Cor6:14-16, St Paul gave six reasons why a believer should not marry an unbeliever. "Do not be equally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temples of the living God". These reasons include:

1. God's command, "Do not be equally yoked together with unbelievers".
2. Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness.
3. Light has no communion with darkness.
4. Christ has no concord with Belial.
5. Believers have no part with unbelievers.
6. The temple of God has no agreement with idols.

When St Paul said, in 1Cor7:14, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband", he was talking to people who believed and were already married but their spouses had not accepted the Faith yet. Immediately before the above verse he said, "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with



her, let her not divorce him," 1Cor7:12-13. Then he also said, "if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases," 1Cor7:15.

- **Monogamy**

"Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband," 1Cor7:2.

- **Divorce For Sexual Immorality Only**

"Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery," Matt19:9. Adultery and fornication lead to hell (Pro7:27; 9:13-17; 1Cor6:9, 10).

ENGAGEMENT AND COURTSHIP

An engagement is the honourable announcement to the community that the couple plans to marry soon, likely within a year. To the couple, it is a time of getting better acquainted and ascertaining whether or not they are prepared for marriage and are really meant for one another.

It is natural that engaged couples will be together, talk together, and will exchange views on marriage, children, birth control, likes, ambitions etc. But they must not take liberties one with another, for they are not married. Marriage privileges must be reserved until after marriage, lest love turns to hate and mutual respect be lost completely (2Sam13:15).

Avoid petting and caressing lest passion override reason and will, and ruin it all. Let the couple be honest and sincere with one another. Do nothing that will hinder your private prayer or spiritual purity. It is very important for future happiness that both be virgins at marriage.

THE GOAL OF THE ORTHODOX MARRIAGE

Very often couples get married for the purpose of fulfilling certain needs that they have in their own personal lives. Therefore, they come to marriage expecting happiness, emotional well-being and personal satisfaction, without even having to work for them. When they don't get these things, they feel cheated or blame their spouse. As Orthodox Christians, we approach marriage very differently. The goal of marriage is not the fulfilling of one's needs; rather, the ultimate goal of marriage is heaven.



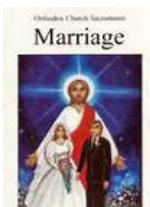
EQUALITY AND OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN PARTNERS

In modern society, as well as in Christendom, a recurring debate is going on. It deals with the tension between equality of the partners in marriage and office or order in marriage. Often, this tension has turned into a polarity between men and women, and sometimes even breeds hostility. There are two elements in the Orthodox service of marriage which serve to heal such tension, while making clear the teaching of the Church on the twin themes of equality and order concerning husband and wife.

As to equality, during the ceremony crowns are placed on the heads of the bride and groom. This act is symbolic of their citizenship in the Kingdom of God, where "**there is neither male nor female**," Gal 2:28 and of their dying to each other (the crown is often a symbol of martyrdom; see Rev2:10). The words of St Paul are clear on marital equality: "**The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does**," 1Cor7:4. Husband and wife belong to each other as martyrs, they belong to God as royalty, and they are called to treat each other accordingly.

But within marital equality there is also order. The epistle passage read at the Sacrament of Marriage is Ephesians5:20-33; the exhortation to husbands and wives which begins with a call to submit to each other (Eph5:20). The husband is to serve God as head of his wife, as Christ is head of the Church (Eph5:23). The wife is to be subject to her husband as the Church is subject to Christ (Eph 5:24). There is nothing here to suggest that the wife is oppressed in marriage, anymore than one would call the Church oppressed in relationship to Christ. He who calls us "brethren" (Heb2:11) and "friends" (John15:15) exhorts the husband to love his wife, to nourish and cherish her as He Himself does the Church (Eph5:28, 29).

Thus, marriage is a sacrament: holy, blessed, and everlasting in the sight of God and His Church. Within the bonds of marriage, husband and wife experience a union with one another in love, and hopefully the fruit of children and one day the joy of grandchildren. And within the bonds of marriage there is both a fullness of equality between husband and wife, and clarity of order with the husband as the icon of Christ, the wife as the icon of the Church.



(Adapted from "The Church Sacraments" by Habeeb Guirguis).



THE SACRAMENT OF PRIESTHOOD (HOLY ORDERS)

Big Idea: The eternal priesthood of Melchizedek, in contrast to the earthly or Levitical priesthood, is fulfilled in Christ.

Bible Text: Heb7

Bible Verse: Psa110:4, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The characteristics of the Sacrament of Priesthood.
- ✖ It is founded by Christ (Luke6:12-16).
- ✖ It is an apostolic succession (Acts 1:20, 26).
- ✖ It is a calling (Mark3:13-15; Heb5:4).
- ✖ It is after the order of Melchizedek (Heb7).
- ✖ It is a teaching commitment (1Tim4:16; 2Tim2:2).
- ✖ It is ministry of the sacraments (John20:20-23).
- ✖ Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the ranks of Priesthood.
- ✖ Our attitude towards Priests (Matt10:40-42, Mal 2:7, 8).

Feel: Grateful to Jesus for the Sacrament of Priesthood by which we can appropriate all other Sacraments.

Do: Respect our Priests as God's representatives (Luke10:16; John12:26).



THE SACRAMENT OF PRIESTHOOD (HOLY ORDERS)

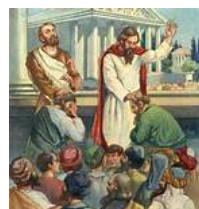


The Sacrament of Priesthood is the Holy Sacrament by which the Bishop lays his hand on the elected candidate in order for the Holy Spirit to descend on this person to grant him one of the ranks of priesthood. As a result, the ordained person is granted the authority to perform the ministry of the Church, whether the Holy Sacraments, teaching or others. This is called "Laying of hands" or "Ordination".

IT IS FOUNDED BY CHRIST

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this Sacrament when He chose the twelve of His followers and consecrated them for ministry; "**He called His disciples to Him and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles,**" Luke6:13. He gave them the authority of absolution and binding; "**He breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained,**" John20:22-23. Note that this took place before Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit here is the gift of Ordination. Only to them He said, "**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**" Matt28:19 and only to them He delivered the mystery of His Body and Blood (the Eucharist).

Through the consecration and empowerment of the Apostles by the Lord and through their ordination of others to continue their apostolic mission, Christ's own Holy Priesthood is communicated specifically to the Bishops and Priests of the Church and generally to all through Holy Baptism.



IT IS AN APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

Both the New Testament and the Church Fathers recognize the Twelve as the first Bishops or overseers in the Church. When Judas had fallen away and the disciples were considering his successor, St Peter said, "**Let another take his office,**" Acts1:20. This bishopric was given to Matthias (Acts1:26). The Apostles, the first Bishops, in turn ordained presbyters and deacons. The account of the first ordination of deacons (Acts6:1-6) is quite detailed. The first account of the ordination of



elders or presbyters is in Acts14:23 and Tit1:5.

IT IS A CALLING

This is supported by the following verses:

- "And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God," **Heb5:4**.
- "And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He himself wanted and they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons," **Luke3:13-15**.
- "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles," **Luke6:12-13**.
- "You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain," **John15:16**.
- "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go," **Luke10:1**.
- "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. Then, having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away," **Acts13:2-3**.

Saul and Barnabas are sent, not self-ordained or self-appointed. The work of the Church is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the church that sends them out and it is the Holy Spirit who calls them. Those who are called are ordained into three orders, namely, the deacons, the presbyters and the bishops.

The **deacons** are literally "ministers" ordained to serve the Church and must meet high qualifications (1Tim3:8-13). Besides serving the material needs of the people (Acts6:3), deacons occupy a crucial role in the liturgical life of the Church.

The **presbyters** or elders are to "rule", "labour in the Word" and "teach true doctrine" to the local congregation (1Tim5:17). From the word "Presbyter", there came the shorter form "Prest" and finally it became "Priest".



The **Bishop** is the "overseer" of the congregation and clergy in a given area. The Bishop is the leader of elders. The qualifications for Bishop listed in (1Tim3:1-7) and (Tit1:7-9) underscore this role. Jobs of a bishop include shepherding (pastoral care), teaching the Word, ordaining priests and building and consecrating churches. The authority of the bishop is not over the Church, but within the Church. He is an icon of Jesus Christ, "**the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls,**" 1Pet2:25.

Ordination is seen as an eternal appointment, "**for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable,**" Rom11:29. Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders in His Church, Christ entrusts to the shepherd the very salvation of His people's souls.

IT IS AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

When Jesus ordained His disciples Bishops (John20:20-23), He likened their ministry and mission to His own. This was evident from His saying, "**As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,**" John20:21. Our Lord Jesus Christ was sent to this world as the new and eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb5:6, 10).

Jesus sent them to be priests as His Father sent Him to be a Priest. Their priesthood is to the order of His priesthood. They do not offer any blood sacrifices, but rather they administer His Perpetual Sacrifice i.e. His Body and His Blood to His people, as well as the authority to give the Sacramental gifts of the Holy Spirit to the members of His Church.

In no way is the ordained Christian priesthood seen as a throwback to, or reenacting of the Old Testament priesthood. Rather, joined to Christ who is our High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek", the Orthodox Priest is likewise a minister of a New Covenant which supersedes the old (Heb7:20-24).

The mysterious figure of Melchizedek represents an entirely different kind of priesthood. Melchizedek appears in Genesis (Gen14:18-20), long before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. He is given no genealogy, and nothing is said of his death. He receives tithes from Abraham, implying he is





superior to Abraham in rank, and by extension, superior to Abraham's descendants, the Levites. Melchizedek is not only a priest but a king as well. In this dual office he is able to reconcile the justice of God (the business of a king) with His mercy (the business of a priest). His name means "King of Righteousness", and his title "King of Salem" (Gen14:18) means "King of Peace". Melchizedek may be a theophany or a pre-incarnation appearance of Christ; at the very least he is a type of Christ, as St Paul in Hebrews⁷ explains in detail.

There are several specific points of contrast between the priesthood of Levi and the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is fulfilled in Christ.

Priesthood of Levi	Priesthood of Melchizedek
Genealogical requirement: The Levitical priesthood is limited to one tribe. It cannot transform mortal and corrupt humanity, because it consists of mere men.	As Melchizedek was without earthly genealogy, so is Christ by virtue of His virgin birth. He is God incarnate, immortal and sinless, and therefore His priesthood is able to transform humanity.
Ordination: The power given at ordination is incomplete. The Levitical priesthood is weak, its sacrifices have to be repeated, and it cannot perfect the worshipers. It cannot reconcile people to God, nor give them the inner power to obey. The ordination is without direct confirmation from God.	The power given at ordination is strong and effective. The power of Christ's priesthood is perfect and draws us near to God. His sacrifice is offered once for all. The Father Himself ordains the Son.
Term of Office: The Levitical priesthood is temporary. Since it is composed of mortal men, it requires many members.	Since Christ is immortal, the priesthood of Melchizedek needs only one, eternal priest.
Moral and spiritual requirements: These must be less than perfection, for the Levitical priests are all created beings subject to sin.	The requirement of perfect holiness is met in Christ, 'the only sinless One'. He is more than mere man - He is the Son of God.



Hence, the priesthood of Christianity is one that offers bread and wine and not animal sacrifices, it is not inherited and it is higher than that of Aaron.

IT IS A TEACHING COMMITMENT (1Tim4:16, 2Tim2:2)

The priest is engaged and trusted with the salvation of souls. This is done through teaching the Word of God. The priest is also concerned with combating false teaching with sound doctrine, developing qualified leadership and encouraging Christian conduct. St Paul advises St Timothy saying, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you," 1Tim4:16. In 2Tim2:2, St Paul also establishes a clear chain of witnesses to oral tradition. Christian tradition is for all believers, belonging to the whole Church and must be passed down to the others unhindered.

IT IS MINISTRY OF THE SACRAMENTS

All the sacraments of the Church are to be ministered by a priest (1Cor4:1-2) who has the authority to summon the Holy Spirit to bless the nature of the material used in the Sacrament. The material then acquires supernatural efficacy.

According to John20:20-23, any Sacrament administered by the holiest person on earth but not by a priest, is not spiritually effective. Water in Baptism without the Holy Spirit cannot produce new birth. So is the oil in Confirmation. The bread and wine in the Eucharist cannot be transformed. The person hearing the confession cannot bind or lose in heaven or even on earth. The two partners in matrimony do not become one flesh. The oil in Unction of the sick remains ordinary oil. The apostolic succession in priesthood cannot be continued. Jesus Himself respects priesthood as in the conversion of Saul (Acts9:1-18) and Cornelius (Acts10:1-23).

THE RANKS AND DUTIES OF PRIESTHOOD

Our Lord Jesus Christ practiced certain services that became the essence of the Church ranks. These are:

Epsaltos: The person who holds this rank is required to learn and sing the Church hymns. Our Lord Jesus Christ sang a hymn with His disciples before going to Gethsemane, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives," Matt26:30.



Agnostis: The most important work of this rank is reading the Holy Scriptures in Church during the Liturgy. Our Lord practiced the work of the reader when He went in the synagogue and stood up to read (Luke4:16).

Epideacon: His most important work is keeping the Church organized. The Lord did the same when He drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple (Matt21:12).

Deacon: One of the duties of the Deacon is to pour water for the priest to wash his hands at the start of the Mass. Our Lord poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet (John13:5).

Priest: The main work of the priest is to sanctify the bread and wine during the Holy Liturgy and to give communion to the congregation. The Lord did the same on Holy Thursday (Luke14:22-26).

Hegomen: The role of the Hegomen is to provide for the Church services. It is obvious that our Lord did the same. When He said to Judas, "What you do, do quickly", John 13:27, the disciples thought that since Judas had the money box, the Lord had asked him to buy what they need for the feast or to give to the poor (John 13:29).

Bishop: The bishop is the shepherd of the flock. St Peter refers to Lord Jesus as the shepherd and overseer of our souls (1Pet2:25) and the Lord said about Himself, "**I am the good Shepherd,**" John10:14.

Patriarch: Only the Pope can ordain bishops and our Lord breathed on His apostles and gave them the authority to bind and loose sins (John20:22-23).

Church leadership does not consist of one or more of the orders functioning without the others. Rather the Church, with Christ as Head, is conducted like a symphony orchestra, a family, the body of Christ, where all the members in their given offices work together as the dwelling place of the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, we find our Lord Jesus Christ practicing most of the priestly ranks despite their variation so that every person may find in Him a good example to follow and to know that however small his rank may seem, it is not lowly since the Lord Himself practiced and blessed it. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "**For their sakes I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified by the truth,**" John17:19. To sanctify means to consecrate. Our Lord has consecrated Himself for the ministry and redemption. Likewise, all ranks of the Priesthood are consecrated for the ministry according to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest.



Clement of Alexandria said, 'Even here in the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the apostles, and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the gospel.' (Stromateis6:13:107:2; post-202 AD).

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRIESTS

"He who receives you receives Me... he shall by no means lose his reward", Matt10:40-42, Mal 2:7-8. The disciples and missionaries are ambassadors who represent Jesus. All who extend help to them will receive God's reward (Luke10:16, John12:26). In 1Tim5:17, St Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine".

We must not judge the Priest under any condition even if he worshipped idols. When Mary and Aaron murmured against Moses, they were struck by leprosy. In the story of the evil priest, the devils left him when he was praying the mass; and went back to him after he left the Church. The Lord would listen to the Priest for the sake of His Holy Name. The life of Eli the High priest was not pleasing to God; yet God fulfilled to Hanna the mother of Samuel, the blessing he uttered.

Ignatius of Antioch wrote, 'Follow your bishop, every one of you, as obediently as Jesus Christ followed the Father. Obey your clergy too as you would the apostles; give your deacons the same reverence that you would to a command of God. Make sure that no step affecting the Church is ever taken by anyone without the bishop's sanction. Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as, wherever Jesus Christ is present, there is the Catholic Church'. (Letter to the Smyrneans 8:2; 110AD).

In like manner let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, and just as they respect the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and college of the apostles. Without these, it cannot be called a Church. (Letter to the Trallians 3:1-2; 110AD).

(Adapted from a lecture by His Grace Bishop Youssef)

FEASTS OF THE CHURCH

Contents



14. Feasts in the Orthodox Concept
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22. Feast of the Transfiguration
23. Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt
24. Holy Week
25. Feast of the Precious Cross
26. Feast of Nayrooz



FEASTS IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT

Big Idea: Feasts are not a commemoration of historical events, but living expressions of the Christian Orthodox Faith.

Bible Text: Lev25: 8-55 and Lev23.

Bible Verse: Rom12:1, 2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what that good and acceptable will of God is."

Students will

Know:

- ✖ Types of feasts.
- ✖ Why we have feasts (Lev23:4, Lev25:8).
- ✖ Purpose of the feasts (Exo5:1, John7:37-39, 1Cor11:23-26).
- ✖ How to celebrate feasts:
 - With gladness (Isa30: 29, Lev25).
 - With repentance (1Cor5:7, 8).
 - With freedom and liberty (Rom6:20; John8:36; Luke4:18, 19; 1Cor6:12; Lev25:10).
 - With faith (Rom10:4, 9-13).
- ✖ The Jubilee Year.

Feel: Eager to celebrate feasts spiritually.

Do: Use every feast as an opportunity to review their spiritual life and grow in their faith.



FEASTS IN THE ORTHODOX CONCEPT



The Christian calendar year of feasts and festivals is designed to stimulate a sense of joy and wonder. It commemorates God's great acts for His people. The feasts are occasions for the people to respond to God's goodness with thanksgiving and joyful praise. Feasts are categorized into three different types namely, feasts of the Lord, feasts of Saints and feasts of the Cross.

WHY FEASTS?

- God established the feasts (Lev23: 1-4, Lev25: 8).
- Christ attended the feasts (John2: 2, 3, John13:1).

PURPOSE OF THE FEASTS

- Worship God (Exo5:1).
- Illustrate a spiritual truth (John7:37-39).
- Foretell the Messiah (1Cor11:23-26) e.g. in the mass.

HOW TO CELEBRATE THE FEASTS

With Gladness (Isa30:29, Lev25).

We rejoice when we remember what God has done for us (e.g. in the mass). When we count our blessings, we are encouraged not to complain like the older brother of the prodigal son. With thanksgiving and relying on God's loving mercy, we have hope of victory over trials and tribulations (Rom12:12), e.g. feasts of the saints.

With Repentance (1Cor5:7, 8).

We repent and renew our covenant with the Lord who forgives and forgets (1John1:6-10, Luke15:7, 10; Isa1:18). Though we do sin, we should strive not to sin. Salvation in Christ is a process of growth into sinlessness (1Cor5:7). We proclaim, "I love You Lord and I do not want to offend You, Lord. I refute all sin because sin offends You".

With Freedom and Liberty (Rom6:20, John8:36, 1Cor6:12).

Though we choose our master freely, we are always a slave to someone or something. Only obedience to God leads us to righteousness. We are often



enslaved to a favoured sin, some weakness, bad habits, bad thoughts, and sinful practices whether seen or unseen, known by people or unknown by people. If I say "It's hard", then God is weak, since "I can do everything through Christ Jesus who strengthens me", Phil 4:13. If I say "It's impossible", then I love sin more than God. Jesus saves us from the penalty of sin as well as from sin itself. He takes away our sins and gives us His righteousness.

With Faith (Rom10:4, 9-13).

Christ has always been the way of salvation in both Testaments. The Law prepared the people to Him. His coming was the end of the Law and the fulfillment of God's righteousness. St Paul teaches us that the mouth confesses the Lord Jesus, that the Saviour (Jesus) is God (Lord). The heart believes that the Father raised the Son from the dead. That is, it believes in the Holy Trinity, the Resurrection and in the works of the Incarnate Son.

Believing and confessing are two Old Testament themes. Isaiah emphasizing the faith of the heart (Rom10:11), and Joel, the confession of the mouth (Rom10:13). Both prophets teach that grace and faith are universal, meaning that God makes no distinction between persons. All may come freely if they will.

Faith always succeeds, for faith does not doubt, though righteousness is beyond human possibility without Christ. Faith is not a distant accomplishment but is near, having a vision of Christ as present and easily accessible. Faith transforms the whole person, the soul (heart) working with the body (mouth) makes it real. We surrender our whole self to Christ.

Rightly understood, then, the times of feasts in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras were times for **joy** and **celebration**. Evidently, in the Orthodox Church, feasts are not commemoration of historical events, but rather, living expressions of the Christian Orthodox Faith to renew the spirituality of the Orthodox faithful.

THE JUBILEE YEAR

The Jubilee year, also known as the "year of liberty" (Ezek46:1) was proclaimed on the fiftieth year after seven cycles of seven years. The word



Jubilee comes from a Hebrew word meaning "ram's horn" or trumpet. The Jubilee year was launched with a blast from a ram's horn on the Day of Atonement signifying a call to **celebration**, liberation and the beginning of a year of "doing justice" and "loving mercy".

The fiftieth year was a special year in which to proclaim liberty throughout all the land (Lev25:10). This 50th year was a time when specific instructions about property and slavery outlined in the Jewish Law took effect (Lev25:8-55). Individuals who had sold themselves as slaves or indentured servants because of indebtedness were released from their debts, and set free. If a family's land had been taken away because of indebtedness, this land was returned to the original owner in the Jubilee year.

God apparently established the Jubilee year to prevent the Israelites from oppressing and cheating one another (Lev25:17). This law prevented a paramount system of classes from developing; it gives everyone the opportunity to start over, economically and socially.

The Jubilee year reminds us of God's concern for human liberty. God wants people to be free (Luke4:18-19), calling into question any social practice that leads to permanent bondage and loss of economic opportunities. It also stands as a witness to God's desire for justice on earth.



Rev19:11-16



DATES OF FEASTS

Big Idea: Determining the dates of Christmas and Easter as well as Advent and Lent.

Bible Text: Matt2:1-12; 26:17; 27:1, 2; 28:1-15.

Bible Verse: Matt27:11, "Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him saying, 'Are you the King of the Jews?', Jesus said to him, 'it is as you say'."

Students will

Know: The date of Christmas.
 The date of Easter.
 The Epact System.
 Pope Demetrius the Vinedresser.

Feel: Grateful to the Orthodox Church for abiding with the canons of the Apostles and the Ecumenical Councils.

Do: Celebrate Christmas and Easter joyfully in the Spirit.



DATES OF FEASTS

THE DATE OF CHRISTMAS



The Son of God who was born of the Father before all ages is the second Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. No one knows the exact date on which our Lord Jesus Christ was born. However, it was agreed upon by all the Churches of the world that Christmas should be celebrated on the 29th day of the 4th Egyptian month, Kiyahk, which corresponded to the Julian 25th December.

The Julian calendar is the Roman adaptation of the Egyptian calendar introduced by Julius Caesar, with the technical aid of the Alexandrian astronomer Sosigenes, in 46 BC. The Alexandrian calendar, which is the Coptic Calendar, was being used by the Egyptians long before that and they divided the year into 365 days and 6 hours.

Since 5 AD, the Coptic calendar began on Julian 29th August in a common year and on Julian 30th August in a leap year. In this way, Christmas always fell on the Coptic 29th Kiyahk (Julian 25th December).

The Julian calendar remained in general use in the western world until it was replaced by the Gregorian calendar, which was a reform of the Julian calendar, by Pope Gregory XIII of Rome in 1582. At the time of its introduction, 10 days (from 5-14 October 1582) were dropped from the solar calendar, so that the mean vernal (spring) equinox would occur on 20th March instead of 11th March, as it did at the time of the reform.





While most of the western world had changed to the Gregorian calendar by 1924, the Copts still used their old Egyptian calendar of 365 days and 6 hours, with a difference of 11 minutes and 14 seconds per year. This difference would add up a day every 128 years, and would add up to 13 days in our present time. In this way, Christmas is always celebrated on Coptic 29th Kiyahk which occurs on 7th January of the Gregorian calendar. While in the western world, Christmas is celebrated according to the Gregorian calendar, the Copts will continue to celebrate Christmas on the 29th day of Kiyahk, according to the teachings of the Church; but the corresponding Gregorian date will keep changing every 128 years.

THE DATE OF EASTER



Since the beginning of Christianity, the Resurrection of the Lord of Glory has been the centre of the preaching of the Apostles and Early Fathers. They considered it to be the basis of the Christian faith, for "if Christ is not risen, our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain," 1Cor15:14; and their proof of Christ's divinity was His Resurrection, "...and (He) was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead," Rom1:4. For this reason, Christians have always found it important to celebrate the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord.

Since the dates of these two events were linked to the Jewish Passover, the faithful preferred to keep the tradition of tying Easter to the Passover, yet celebrating it afterwards. The teachings of the apostles stated that the celebration of our Lord's Resurrection must be on the Sunday that followed the Jewish Passover.



THE EPACT SYSTEM

The determination of the date of the Resurrection Feast remained a matter of research and change, until Pope Demetrius, the twelfth patriarch of Alexandria, came up with the **Epact Calculation** (Remainder Calculation) after consulting with the scientists of his time, such as Ptolemy Farmawy. Based on this system, the date of Lent, the Resurrection, Pentecost and the length of the Apostles' Fast are determined. Pope Demetrius sent his formula to the Patriarchs of the other Churches, who accepted it and celebrated Easter according to it.

When the first Ecumenical Council convened at Nicaea in 325 AD, it endorsed and confirmed the Epact Calculation. A further resolution of the Council was that the Patriarch of Alexandria was to determine the date of the Feast of the Resurrection according to this formula, and send it to the whole world with a paschal letter to be read in the whole world on the occasion of the Christian Easter.

Briefly, the Epact formula is a means of calculating the full moon following the vernal (spring) equinox, and the date of the slaying of the Passover lamb. We celebrate the Resurrection on the Sunday following these dates. Since the cycle of the Julian (Roman) or Coptic year (that is, the period after which the day of the year falls on the same day of the week of the previous cycle) is 28 years (every 28 years being identical as far as the starts and ends of their months and weeks), and since the cycle of the Jewish year, the basis of calculation of the Jewish Passover, is 19 years (every 19 Jewish years being similar in the starts and ends of their months), the date of the Feast of the Resurrection is the same every 19×28 years, that is every 532 years. Some have written tables, called 'vines,' of 532 years, to determine the dates of Lent and feasts in every year of the cycle according to the Coptic calendar.

The whole Christian world celebrated according to these vines and formula, until the sixteenth century, when Pope Gregory of Rome changed the Roman calendar. He established a different calculation for the Feast of the Resurrection, a clear infraction against the canon of the Nicene Council, which



had confirmed the Epact Calculation and had given the Patriarch of Alexandria the right to set the Feast's date. Pope Gregory decided to set the date to be the Sunday following the full moon which followed the vernal equinox, not considering the Passover lamb, or the canon of the Council of Nicaea, or the spirituality of the teaching of the Holy Apostles. The western world now celebrates according to these innovations.

In most years, when the Jews determine their feast, it falls just before our feast, but the feast of the western Churches falls before, during or after, or even far from the Jewish Passover in most years. This caused them to press Rome, in some instances, to correct the Gregorian formula. The Church of Rome has even permitted her followers in the Eastern and Orthodox countries, such as Egypt, to celebrate with us according to the canons of the Fathers and of the Councils.

Determining the Orthodox Feast of Resurrection for 2002 AD by the Epact Formula

Divide 2002 by 19 (lunar cycle) = 105 complete cycles. Remainder = 7 years.

Difference between solar and lunar years = 11 days Total difference for this year = $7 \times 11 = 77$ days.

Subtract the number of complete Coptic months: $77 - 60 = 17$ days.

Subtract from 40 (a constant) $40-17=23$ (If higher than 30, reduce by 30).

Lunar Epact for this year = 23 [Lunar Epact = Passover day in Baramuda (if from 1 to 24) or = Passover day in Baramhat (if from 25 to 30)].

Slaying of Passover lamb this year = 23 Baramuda = May 1st, and is a Wednesday.

Resurrection Feast is the following Sunday, 27 Baramuda, i.e. May 5th.

Determining the Western Easter for 2002 AD

Divide 2002 by 19 = 105, Remainder 7 = A

Divide 2002 by 4 = 500. Remainder 2 = B

Divide 2002 by 7 = 286. Remainder 0 = C

$Y = (19 \times A) + M$ (M is a Constant = 24, between 1900 & 2099 AD)



$$Y = (19 \times 7) + 24 = 157$$

Divide 157 by 30 = 5 Remainder 7 = D

Z = 2B + 4C + 6D + N (N is a constant = 5, bet. 1900 & 2099 AD)

$$Z = 4 + 0 + 42 + 5 = 51$$

Divide 51 by 7 = 7 Remainder 2 = E

$$F = D + E = 9$$

X (number of days between 22 March and Western Easter) is determined as follows:

X = F If f < 34 or f = 34 and d is not 28

X = F - 7 if f = 34 and d = 28 or f = 35

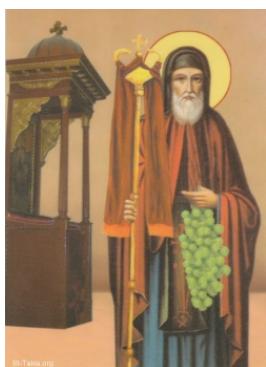
In 2002 AD, X = F = 9

Easter (in the West) = 22 + 9 = 31 March.

May the blessing of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be upon us all Amen.

POPE DEMETRIUS THE VINEDRESSER

On 12th Babah / 22nd October of the year 224 AD, Abba Demetrius I, the twelfth Pope of Alexandria departed. When the departure of Saint Julian, the eleventh Pope of Alexandria, drew near the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a vision and told him about this saint, and instructed that he was to be Patriarch after him. He gave him a sign and said to him, 'Tomorrow a man shall



come to you having a cluster of grapes, ordain him'. He then awoke from his sleep and told the bishops and the priests who were with him about this vision.

So it happened that on the next day that Saint Demetrios found a cluster of grapes out of season. He carried it to Saint Julian, so that he might be blessed by him. The Pope took him by the hand and said to those present, 'This is your patriarch who will be chosen after me'. He then prayed over him and they held him and kept him until the departure of Pope Julian. Then they completed the prayers of ordination over him and he was filled with heavenly grace.



The Lord enlightened his mind and he learned how to read and write. He studied the Church books and their interpretations; and words of grace flew from his mouth when he preached.

Pope Demetrius established the reckoning of the Epact system by which the dates of fasting were determined on a fixed basis. The Christians used to fast the holy forty days of Lent right after the Epiphany, as the Lord Christ fasted after His baptism. Then they would fast the Week of Passion separately. They also used to celebrate Easter on the fourteenth of Nissan (April) and that meant they celebrated with the Jews, not recognizing that the Christian Passover was to be in memory of the Resurrection of the Lord Christ which was after the Mosaic Passover. For this reason, Pope Demetrius took care to establish fixed bases for fasts and Christian holy days. He joined the Holy Lenten fast to the Week of Passion. In this respect, Pope Demetrius sent to Aghabius, Bishop of Jerusalem, to Maximus, Patriarch of Antioch, to the Patriarch of Rome and to others and all approved of it.

Since the third century, the prime credit in determining the date of Easter was attributed to the popes of the Coptic Church, and they thus sent their Easter messages all over the world, so that the Christians would celebrate Easter on the same day, forming a universal joy. All the Christian Churches continued to follow this rule up until the present, with the exception of the Church of Rome which deviated from that and followed the Gregorian calendar, since the sixteen century.

God was with this Father because of his purity of heart. He was given a special gift through which, after he finished the Liturgy and the people came forward to partake of the Holy Mysteries, he used to see the Lord Jesus Christ allowing forward with His Hand those who were worthy. But if an unrepentant came forward, he would see his sins and would not allow him to partake of the Holy Communion until he confessed his sins and the Father absolved him of them. His flocks were straightened during his time.

Because he rebuked the sinners much, and urged them to repent to lead a



chaste life, some of them murmured and said, "This man is married, how can he rebuke us?" The Lord Almighty wished to show them his virtues. So the angel of the Lord came to him at night and said to him, 'Demetrius do not seek your salvation and let others be destroyed by their doubt.' The Holy Father asked him to clarify this statement and the angel continued, saying, "you must reveal the secret which is between yourself and your wife to the people, that you might remove any doubt from them."

On the following morning, after he had celebrated the Divine Liturgy, he ordered the people not to leave the church. He took red-hot coal and placed it in his wife's veil and his garment. Then they went around in the church and their clothes did not burn. The people were amazed at this miracle. He told them that he and his wife did not know each other as married people till that day. The doubt was removed from the people and they realized the purity of this Father and his celibacy.

During the days of his papacy, Pope Demetrius never stopped teaching and confirming the believers in the Orthodox Faith. When he had grown old and became weak, they carried him on a stretcher to church to teach the people. He departed in peace at the age of one hundred and five years old, having spent fifteen years unmarried, forty-seven years until he became patriarch and forty-three years in office; then. May the blessing of his prayers be with us Amen.



CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Big Idea: The best gift we can give Jesus is to give our hearts to Him.

Bible Verse: Pro23:25, "My son give Me your heart and let your eyes observe My ways".

Bible Text: Luke 1:26-28.

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The gift of Christ (John3:16; Psa20).
- ✖ That Christ is ready to give us special gifts:
 - A new name (Exo32, Matt 16:16).
 - A new heart that is:
 - a) Open heart (Luke24:45).
 - b) Pure heart (Matt5:8, Psa51:12).
- ✖ Our gift to Christ is a relinquished heart (Luke1:38; Acts9:6).

Feel:

- ✖ That God has a plan for them.

Do:

- ✖ Eager to receive God's special gift for each one.

Do:

- ✖ Relinquish themselves before God.

Do:

- ✖ Thank God and praise Him.



CHRISTMAS GIFTS



God created man in His likeness (Gen1:26) i.e. in His likeness of sanctity and righteousness yet all men have sinned and fell short of the glory of God (Rom3:9-23).

But the kindness and the love of God our saviour toward man appeared when He gave us the gift of His Son, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," John3:16.**

THE GIFT OF CHRIST (Matt1:18-25)

The gift of Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of God's love for the world. The purpose of Christ's coming is to save; but the result is also condemnation for those who do not believe (John3:17, 18).

Salvation obviously, is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit3:475). We are washed and regenerated by Baptism (John3:3). **"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold old things have become new," 2Cor5:17.** By confessing our sins we regain the holiness of the new creation.

The angel of the Lord appeared to St Joseph in a dream and announced to him the miraculous conception of Christ in his betrothed wife (Matt1:20). The angel also explained, **"and she will bring forth a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins," Matt1:21.**

Jesus means saviour and He did save us and saves now and forever. Jesus saves us from the punishment of sin (wages of sin) and from sin itself. The name of Jesus makes the devil tremble and flee away. The name of Jesus gives us victory. In the old, David sang Psa20:9, **"Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call".** The Apostles proclaimed, **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," Acts4:12.** Certainly, salvation is in the name of Jesus alone.



The Prophet Isaiah, in the Old Testament, said, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son and they shall call His name Immanuel," Isa7:14. Immanuel means God is with us. St Paul exhorts us saying, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Rom8:31. Jesus lived up to His name and went about doing good and saved us from all the evil powers.

What Is Your Name?

I ask because you might be unconsciously living up or living down to the name you know. In the story of **Jacob and Esau**, we find a clear example of someone who lived up to his name. **Jacob** means supplanter or in other words "cheat". He lived up to his name. He cheated his brother of his inheritance; he cheated his father and he cheated his father in-law. Then there came a turning point in his life, when he was on his way back to his home town. He heard his brother Esau was coming to meet him with a large force of men.

Then, Jacob was like a man who has been fiddling with his income tax for years and here is the tax inspector at hand. He is like a student who has been putting off studying all the year and suddenly realizes that the exam is next week. Your brother is coming. Jacob realises suddenly, he is face to face with a life of deceit. He is ready to hear what God has to say to him.

Then we read in the Bible that Jacob wrestled all night with God and refused to let go until he received a blessing from Him. Then that strange question by God "What is your name?" My name is Jacob. God said your name is no longer Jacob. It is Israel. In other words "You cheat have become a prince". This is your real name and after you, a whole nation will be called. The cheat becomes a prince; the spiritual founder of a faith because God called him by his rightful name and worked a miracle of change in him.

CHRIST'S GIFTS TO US

A New Name

Throughout the Bible, when a person is ready for a blessing, he gets a new name: Simon becomes Peter and Saul becomes Paul and a new person is born.

What name are you known by? Like Jacob you are probably living up to it, be it positive or negative. If it is negative, know that God wants to bless you and give you a new possibility as you live it all (Isa62:20). What is your



name: is it timid or self-conscious, reserved, faithful, indefinite wavering, defeated, apathetic or what? If you are ready for a blessing, God would give you a brand new name (Rev2:17). The name God gives you would be just the opposite. Your name may be generous, confident, encouraging, courageous, faithful, loving or overcoming (Rev3:12).

Do you know what God would like to call you this New Year? What is a year? It is the time taken for the earth to make one complete orbit of the sun, about $365\frac{1}{4}$ days or 12 months. What is life? Is it a number of (years) days? David in Psa90:10 says, " **the days of our lives are seventy years, and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow**". St James in his letter tells us " **for what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away**," Jam4:14.

This may sound rather depressing. However, St Paul encourages us by saying "**therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing yet the inward man is being renewed day by day**," 2Cor4:16. This is a paradox but very true and fills us with hope. According to our Orthodox faith, salvation includes a process of spiritual growth and maturation (2Pet1:2-8). It is this process of our salvation which St Paul describes as being renewed day by day.

A New Heart

In Eph4:17-29, St Paul advises us that our relationship with Christ must be renewed and Christ must be put on. This process requires our free-will commitment to walk in righteousness and holiness. While grace makes man heavenly, righteousness is a both a gift and a goal, a present reality and a promise to be striven for.

Many of us decide to live up to the new life in Jesus Christ. So we plan to take our spiritual life more seriously i.e. pray with Agpeya, do all the Fasts, stop bad habits and sins, go to church more regularly, do the Sacraments especially confession and Holy Communion etc... Such a wonderful plan is only good for great saints.

You start on your plan all determined to keep all your resolutions. However, you are not yet half-way through one day and you find all your plans have fallen apart. Jesus said, "apart from Me you can do nothing". Just come to



the Lord with a helpless but contrite heart like the tax collector (Luke18:9-14).

The Lord is prepared to give us a new heart that is pure. He promises in Ezek36:25-27, "then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean, I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will keep My judgments and do them".

When Jesus was with the Disciples, "He opened their understanding, that they may comprehend the Scriptures," Luke24:45. Understanding is not merely intellectual, but a full experiential, spiritual understanding. To comprehend and receive the spiritual value of the Scriptures is a gift of the risen Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW MAN

Renewed in Knowledge: The new man grows from one stage of perfection to another becoming the image of Jesus Christ and throughout eternity remaining the image of Him who created him (Col 3:10). In Psa51:6, King David cries, "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom".

St Paul beseeches us in Rom12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God". The will of God is always good, acceptable and perfect. We must be willing to obey His will in complete trust and surrender.

Our Good God promised to implant His Law in our heart as is written in Jer31:33, "I will surely put My laws into their minds and write them on their hearts". God often guides through verses of Scripture that speak loudly to us. We need to saturate ourselves with the Word of God so that the Lord can bring various portions to our mind. God's will is never contrary to the Bible.

Renewed in Strength: What a wonderful promise we have in Isa40:31, "But those who wait on God shall renew their strength; they shall



mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not hunger".

Full of Hope and Joy: No matter the gravity of our sins, our hope is always in the love and mercy of God, as is written in Lam3:22-24, "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who will seek Him, the Good One. He will wait for and quietly expect the salvation of the Lord".

Thinking of Heaven: Jesus Christ promised us in John14:3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Me, that where I am, there you may be also". We look forward to be with Him for eternity.

Indeed even though our outward man is perishing (i.e. getting older), yet the inward man is being renewed day by day (i.e. becoming spiritually stronger and wiser).

OUR GIFT TO CHRIST

At Christmas time, we give each other gifts. We give gifts of our money, time, effort, kind words etc. We give gifts of hope and encouragement. We give gifts of ourselves to others as the Father gave His Son Jesus Christ to us.

What gift shall we give Jesus on His Birthday? The best gift we can give Jesus is to give ourselves to Him. We commit ourselves and our whole life to Jesus Christ, our God. This is a total self-giving. In other words, I say "I give myself, I surrender myself, I commit myself, I relinquish myself completely to you, O Christ, my God".

A great example of relinquishment was the Theotokos, St Mary. When the angel appeared to her with the Lord's request that she bear His son, the Saviour of the world, she replied, "I am the Lord's servant, let it be done to me as you have said". This is complete relinquishment to God's will. The Incarnation began with the relinquishment of St Mary.

At the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ the angels were proclaiming, "Glory be to God in highest, and on earth Peace, good will toward men," Luke2:14. By relinquishing ourselves to Christ, our God, we give Him glory



as our Lord and King. We acknowledge His Lordship and His Almighty Power. In return, we receive peace and joy.

Another example of relinquishment is St Paul. When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, in complete relinquishment St Paul said, "**Who are you Lord and what would You like me to do?**" Having practiced the prayer of relinquishment, St Paul came to experience its inevitable fruit: the peace of God; and he wrote to the Philippians, "**Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,**" Phil 4:6-7.

To relinquish ourselves to Christ our God, is the total giving of ourselves to Christ our God, holding back nothing: 'God, I abandon myself into Your hands; do with me what You will. Whatever You may do, I thank You. I am ready for all; I accept all. Let only Your will be done in me, and in all Your creation. I wish no more than this'.

By relinquishing ourselves to Christ, our God, we experience the presence of God. David the prophet prayed in Psa16:11, "**You show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**" St Peter who experienced relinquishment at the last supper said, "**You rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,**" Pet1:8.

As a gift to our Lord Jesus Christ on His Birthday, let us relinquish ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.

O Lord, into Your hands I commend my soul

I offer it to You with all the love of my heart, for I love You, O Lord

And so I need to give myself, to surrender myself into Your hands

Without reserve, and with boundless confidence

For You are my God. Amen.



FEAST OF CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST

Big Idea: Characteristics of circumcision in the Old and New Testaments

Bible Text: Gen17:9-27; Col2:11-14.

Bible Verse: Rom2:29, "but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God".

Students will Know:

- ✖ God's Covenant with Abraham (Gen15:1-18).
- ✖ Circumcision was the sign of the covenant (Gen17:13-14).
- ✖ Circumcision was replaced by Baptism in the New Testament.
- ✖ Dispute regarding Circumcision in the New Testament.
- ✖ Significance of the Feast of Circumcision of Christ.

Feel: Encouraged to have pure hearts dedicated to Christ.

Do:

- ✖ Ask the Lord to support us with the grace of His humility in the struggle for purity.
- ✖ Commit to a life of faithful service to God leading others to the Lord.



FEAST OF CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST



The glorious Feast of Circumcision is celebrated on Tobe 6th, eight days after Christmas. This is one of the seven minor feasts observed by the Coptic Orthodox Church. This feast commemorates the circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ on the eighth day after His birth, in fulfilment of the Law.

CIRCUMCISION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God promised Abraham that He will bless him and that in him all the tribes of the earth will be blessed (Gen12:1-3). Abraham was getting old and became fearful that the promise God has given him will not be fulfilled for he had no heir (Gen15:1-18). So, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and commanded him to be circumcised and do the same with every male descendant and inhabitant in his house, eight days following birth (Gen17:4, 13, and 14). In this manner, circumcision in the Old Testament became a pronounced physical sign of the covenant between the Lord and His chosen people.

God gave circumcision as a sign, not as the completion of righteousness. This is proven by the inability of the female sex organ to receive fleshly circumcision. The symbolism of circumcision was given to remind the people of Israel to devote themselves and their hearts to the Lord (Jer4:4).

During the days of Moses, the ancient rite of circumcision was related to puberty and preparation for marriage. On his way back to Egypt, Moses stopped "...at a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin; and touched Moses feet with it," Exo4:24-26. Moses' wife, Zipporah said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me," Exo4:25. Most Biblical accounts believe her to be saying "...bridegroom of blood by circumcision." Through this incident, God was abruptly reminding Moses that the penalty for uncircumcision was to be "cut off from His people" (Gen17:14).

Thus, this rite of circumcision, or the covenant of belonging to God did not



begin with Moses but with Abraham. Because at that time, circumcision was considered a covenant signifying belonging to God, it was generally performed at the earliest time possible.

CIRCUMCISION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

After the redemptive act of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Holy Cross, circumcision took a different turn along the road of practices and observances. It was no longer the bodily circumcision, but that of the heart in faith, hope, love, and readiness to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and become His disciple labouring for the advancement of His Kingdom "*but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God*", Rom 2:29.

In the New Testament teachings, the Sacrament of holy Baptism replaced the rite of circumcision (Col2:11-14). Tertullian (C.197) stated, "*We do not follow the Jews in their peculiarities in regard to food, nor in their sacred days, nor even in their well-known bodily sign.*" However, with the beginning and early growth of the New Testament Church, circumcision became one of the first issues of debate.

Dispute over Circumcision

During the early days of the New Testament Church when the Gentiles were becoming believers, they were forced to accept the Jewish Law and all of its provisions, particularly circumcision. For many of non-Jewish descent, it was a source of contention and one which faced St Paul in his evangelization of the Gentiles. It was the first major dispute in the New Testament Church.

St Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing; and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*", 1Cor7:19.

This issue of the necessity for circumcision has been adamantly addressed by St Paul in his letter to the Galatians. He instructs the Galatians to ignore those who insist that Jewish traditions are compulsory for Christians to follow and apply. Further, St Paul insists that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is far more important than the works of the Law.



The further justification for the Gentiles entering into the Church disregarding the Jewish traditions was the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. While St Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his friends, and family, "**the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the Word**", **Acts10:44**. The circumcised (Jewish) believers with St Peter were astonished that the Gentiles in attendance were "**speaking in tongues and exalting God**". St Peter considered it a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit "**being poured out even on the Gentiles**", **Acts10:45-46**.

This one time outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the Gentiles was most probably destined to demonstrate to the Jews the validity of the Gentiles' salvation. It was typical for the gift of the Holy Spirit to follow the Sacrament of Baptism, but in this particular incident, it did not follow the Sacrament of Baptism, but rather came before it. Some Biblical scholars consider this Holy Spirit outpouring on the Gentiles their atypical baptism.

Resolution of the Dispute

Although the controversy surrounding circumcision began in Antioch, it was to be resolved in Jerusalem. "**From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door to faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples**", **Acts14:26-28**.

The dispute over circumcision was taken to the Council of Apostles in Jerusalem where the apostles and elders could resolve the doctrinal dispute in an official forum. St Paul, the faithful servant "**gave no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed**", **2Cor6:3**. He, together with St Barnabas, humbly agreed to allow their work among the Gentiles to be judged by God through the common agreement of the Council of Apostles for the sake of unity in the Church. St Paul's missionary work was appropriately judged by the Apostolic Council agreeing that Gentile converts need not be circumcised.

The practice of resolving disputes through Council remains the same in the Coptic Orthodox Church today. The Holy Synod, at present, composed of His Holiness the Pope and all the Coptic Orthodox Bishops, constitute this Council which resolves doctrinal disputes; thus confirming that from ancient times to the present, the Church policy has remained unchanged.



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEAST OF CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST

Today, circumcision for a male child is merely a hygienic practice, having nothing to do with the old Jewish tradition. It is not only practised among Christians, but also among people of other religions, directly after birth, as medical protection and prevention from some diseases.

The Glorious Feast of Circumcision of Christ is a reminder of our belonging to God and to His service rather than a concern for puberty or marriage. For "**in Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ**", *Col 2:11*.

Each of us is called to a life of faithful service to God. This is certainly true of St Paul. He was in constant faithful service using his talents of preaching and teaching to lead others to the Lord Jesus Christ. St Paul was courageous yet humble in the face of adversity. The Lord said to Ananias concerning St Paul, "**He is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My Name before the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel**", *Acts9:15*. Joshua, the son of Sirach advised the faithful servant, "**My son, when you start serving the Lord, you should prepare yourself for difficulties**", *WSir2:1*. The signs of faithful servanthood were demonstrated by St Paul through humility and forbearance in tribulations, which overcame cultural disparity.

The spiritual faithfulness of this great servant of the Lord Jesus Christ does certainly emphasize to each of us that salvation is for all those Christians who hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings not a birthright of a particular culture. "**Blessed is the man who has not walked in the council of the ungodly, and has not stood in the way of sinners, and has not sat in the seat of evil men. But his will is in the law of the Lord, and in His Law he shall meditate day and night. He shall be like the tree planted by the streams of water, which shall yield its fruits in its season; and his leaf shall not scatter, and in everything he does he prospers**", *Psa1:1-3*.

As we commemorate this glorious feast, let us remember the covenant of belonging to God undertaken by Abraham and the New Testament teachings of St Paul, the good and faithful servant, who taught us the basic premises of evangelizing. We pray to the Lord, as did St Paul, to help us faithfully walk the journey worthy of the calling with which we have been called.



EPIPHANY

Big Idea: The Holy Trinity Acting in unity with reference to Epiphany.

Bible Text: Matt3:13-17; Luke4:18, 19; Isa61:1, 2

Bible Verse: 2Cor13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The meaning of the word "Epiphany".
- ✖ Significance of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan
- ✖ The rites of consecrating a High Priest in the Old Testament.
- ✖ The purpose of the revelation of the Holy Trinity at the Baptism of Jesus.
- ✖ Work of the Holy Trinity in
 - the Creation,
 - the Incarnation,
 - the Redemption,
 - the Regeneration,
 - prayer,
 - benediction and
 - the service

Feel: Grateful to God for manifesting the Holy Trinity at Epiphany.

Do:

- ✖ Believe the mystery of the Holy Trinity even though they cannot fully comprehend it.
- ✖ Worship the One God who is so superior to us.
- ✖ Thank each member of the Trinity, the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for that which they have personally done for us.



EPIPHANY



The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ is called Epiphany which means the divine proclamation and revelation. This is because the three hypostases (persons) of the Holy Trinity have been proclaimed publicly: the Son (The Logos) in the water, the Holy Spirit of God descending like a dove when the heavens were opened and the voice of the Father was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", Matt3:16, 17.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

The Baptism performed by John the Baptist was for purification which means repentance from sin and return to the Covenant between God and the people of God. Our Lord did not need purification. He has done it on behalf of mankind. By making the purification of mankind His own, He would wash away our sins, grant regeneration and reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Thus, the purpose of His Baptism was the same as that of His birth, mainly to identify Himself with sinful humanity. In His Baptism, He identifies Himself with His Church that is to be, prefiguring our going down to death in Baptism (Rom6:1-6). By thus entering the waters of the Jordan, He sanctified forever the waters of Baptism.

The Baptism of Christ in the Jordan was a prelude to the baptism of which He would speak later, the **baptism of His passion**. The Lord referred twice to this baptism. The first time was when James and John, His disciples, asked Him if they could sit on either side of Him in His Kingdom. The Lord answered, asking them if they were ready to be baptized with the baptism which He was going to receive (Matt20:22). The second time was when He said to His Apostles: "**I have a baptism to be baptized with and how distressed I am, till it is accomplished**", Luke12:50.

Thus His baptism of water was to be followed by His baptism of blood and He looked forward to it. In the water of the Jordan, He was identified with sinners, and in the baptism of His death, He bore the full burden of their guilt.



THE RITES OF CONSECRATING A HIGH PRIEST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus Christ came as High Priest to obtain for us eternal redemption with His own Blood (Heb9:11, 12). In the Old Testament, there were three rites which were carried out by Moses to consecrate priests. First was the baptism of water, when he brought Aaron and his sons to the door of the Tabernacle and washed them with water. This was followed by a baptism of oil, when Moses poured oil on Aaron's head to sanctify him. The third was one of blood, when Moses took the blood of the ram of consecration and put it upon Aaron's right ear and the thumb of his right hand and the great toe of his right foot (Exo29:4-20). The ritual deed implied a gradual consecration. These baptisms would have their counterparts in the Jordan, the Transfiguration and the Cross.

In the Jordan, the voice of the Father declared Jesus to be the Beloved Son of the Eternal Father. In His good pleasure the Father was declaring Jesus publicly a mediator between God and man (John3:16). The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon our Lord as a symbol of submission to sacrifice.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVELATION OF THE HOLY TRINITY AT THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

The voice of the Father which declared Jesus to be the Beloved Son of the Eternal Father was not announcing a new fact or a new sonship of our Lord since that sonship existed from all eternity. Instead the voice manifested that the Sacrifice of the Beloved Son would be pleasing to the eternal Father and declared the divinity of Christ.

Jesus did not become the Son of God that day; rather, in His baptism the eternal Son of God was revealed to humanity. The Holy Spirit was always with the Son, with awesome gentleness. In the water of the Jordan, the Holy Spirit crowned the Son as King and dedicated Him to be an eternal sacrifice and High Priest and declared Him as Prophet (Luke4:18, 19; Isa61:1, 2).

THE TRINITY ACTING IN UNITY

In the Creation

God the Father spoke, (Gen1:3), God the Son was the Logos (John1:1) and God



the Holy Spirit moved upon the face of the waters (Gen1:2, Job26:12, 13). The Spirit of God hovered over the water at the first creation. At Epiphany the Holy Spirit comes in the form of a dove to anoint the Messiah, the Son of God, at the beginning of the new creation.

In the Incarnation

God the Father gave His only son (John3:1), God the Son was born into the world (Luke2:11) and God the Spirit came upon St Mary to cause conception (Luke1: 35).

In the Redemption

God the Father accepted the sacrifice of Calvary (Heb9: 14), God the Son offered Himself as our substitute (Heb9:14) and Jesus offered Himself through the Eternal Spirit (Heb9:14).

In Regeneration

God the Father records the new name in glory (Luke10: 20), God the Son cleanses sin in His precious Blood (Eph1:7) and God the Spirit performs the transforming miracle of the new birth (John3:3-6).

In Prayer

God the Father is the One who receives the requests (John16: 23), God the Son is the One in whose Name we pray (John16: 23) and God the Spirit intercedes for us in our requests (Rom8:26).

In Benediction

We receive the blessing of the Holy Trinity, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen", 2Cor13:14.

In Serving

We do so in the name of the Holy Trinity as commissioned by Jesus Christ, "And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", Matt28:18, 19.



The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a mystery and will remain a mystery until we meet the Lord in glory. However, this does not mean that we cannot believe it. We must believe it. God is so different from us: He is a Spirit and we are human beings. I believe that God is honoured and pleased by our believing this doctrine.

THE RITE OF CELEBRATING EPIPHANY

This includes the 'liturgy of the Basin' or 'LAQQAN' before the liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Basin "LAQQAN"

In most ancient churches, especially in our monasteries, the LAQQAN basin may be found inlaid in the floor at the western end of the nave of the church. It is a hemispherical basin, generally made of marble, surrounded by a rectangular marble slab. It is used during the services on three important occasions throughout the year. These occasions are:

The Feast of Epiphany (11th Tubah / 19th January)

This commemorates the Baptism of our Lord by Saint John the Baptist in the River Jordan (Matt3: 13-17; Mark1:9-11; Luke3:21-22; John1:29-34). The liturgy of the water (LAQQAN) is prayed after Vespers and before Matins.

The priest blesses the congregation by making the sign of the Cross with a cloth, wetted with the consecrated water, on the forehead of each one. This is to remind us to renew our baptismal vows of renouncing the devil and all his works and following Jesus with all our mind, heart and strength; as also instructed by St Paul, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God," Rom12:2.

Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday of Passion Week)

This LAQQAN service is held after the sixth hour of the Pascha prayer and before the Maundy Thursday liturgy. It commemorates our Lord's washing of the feet of His disciples. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to



wash the disciple's feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded," John13:3- 5.

The priest girds himself with a towel and washes the feet of the male congregation following the example of Jesus Christ, and sprinkles the female congregation with the blessed water.

The Feast of the Apostles (5th Abib / 12th July)

The Feast of the Apostles commemorates the martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul. In this feast all the apostles of our Lord are represented: St Peter preached to the circumcised, and St Paul to the Gentiles.

In the LAQQAN service of this feast, we remember the Lord's instruction to the apostles regarding their service, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you," John13:14-15.

The apostles washed the feet of the whole world. We are to continue their work in our service and be "the light of the world and salt of the earth", to proclaim the gospel of Christ and do good works to glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Let us worship this great God, this One who is superior to us.

Let us thank each member of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for that which they have personally done for us.

Let us specially thank God for manifesting to us the Holy Trinity at Epiphany.

Let us renew our covenant with the Lord when we were baptized to renounce the devil and all his works and obey Jesus our King and Savior. May we obey His commandment to make disciples of all nations and "who will believe and is baptized will be saved", Mark16:16.



FEAST OF THE WEDDING IN CANA OF GALILEE

Big Idea: To understand the intercession of the saints.

Bible Text: John 2:1-12 and others.

Bible Verse: Jam 5:16, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The difference between the mediation of the Lord Jesus and the intercession of the saints.
- ✖ The intercession of St Mary at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.
- ✖ The intercession of the saints who may be living or departed.
- ✖ The communication between heaven and earth i.e. between the Victorious Church in heaven and the Militant Church on earth.
- ✖ The reasons why we celebrate the Feast of the Wedding in Cana of Galilee.

Feel:

- ✖ Joyful that there is a relationship between us and the saints in heaven.
- ✖ Feel grateful for the intercession of St Mary, our mother.

Do:

- ✖ Ask the intercession of St Mary in humility, that her Son our Lord Jesus Christ helps us overcome our weaknesses and forgive us our sins.
- ✖ Ask the prayers and blessings of the saints on our behalf.



FEAST OF THE WEDDING IN CANA OF GALILEE



Our Lord Jesus Christ went with His mother the Virgin St Mary to the wedding in Cana of Galilee. It was said in the tradition that it was the wedding of the son of St Mary (sister of the Virgin St Mary), wife of Clopas. When the wine ran out, they had nothing to give to their guests, and the bridegroom faced a great embarrassment which the Virgin St Mary felt. She asked her Son, Jesus Christ, to do something to relieve the situation. Our Lord Jesus Christ listened immediately to her intercession and the water was changed to wine and all those who were drunk became sober.

MEDIATION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ mediates on behalf of the faithful before God the Father to remove the wrath of God and have them readopted as His children. The Son became the one mediator by becoming Man through the Holy Spirit and a virgin, that is through God and man (1Tim2:5, 1John2:1, Isa53:6). Christ was made to be sin for us. How? The incarnate Son of God voluntarily assumed the consequences of our sins, corruption and death without sinning Himself. He submitted to unjust suffering because of the sinful passions of men and angels. This means salvation is more than forgiveness of sins. It is new life, our reconciliation with God (2Cor5:18-20).

THE INTERCESSION OF THE SAINTS

God's people intercede for one another (Dan9:3-5). Daniel takes on himself the sins of the people and repents before the Lord, begging His mercy for their sakes, in the spirit of true intercessory prayer. The prayer of faith will save (Jam5:16, Eph6:18-19, 2Thess3:1).

God requests people to ask the intercession of the righteous living persons for the sake of other living people. The following are some examples: Abraham and King Abimelech (Gen20:7), Job and his three friends (Job42:7-8), Abraham for Sodom (Gen18:17, Gen18:26-32), and Moses for the people of Israel (Exo32:7-14).

The departed have greater favour with God as in the case of David and



Solomon (1Kin11:12-13). In Psa132:10, David pleads with the Lord, "For Your servant David's sake, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed". If David has such favour with God, how much more will the Virgin St Mary, the angels, John the Baptist and the martyrs. Even though they departed, yet they are still members of the Church, the Victorious Church.

DO ANGELS AND SAINTS KNOW OUR CONDITION ON EARTH?

They know because they carry our prayer (Rev8:3-4). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham recognizes the rich man (Luke16:25). There will be joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke15:7). St Paul explains, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as also am known," 1Cor13:12.

INTERCESSION OF SAINT MARY

"For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed," Luke1: 48. Because of St Mary's intercession, Jesus turned water into wine (John2:4).

THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

The living Church (the body of Christ) prays for the dead in Christ, until "we are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be together with the Lord", 1Thess4:17.

WHY WE CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF THE WEDDING IN CANA OF GALILEE

Our Church celebrates this feast for a few reasons. Firstly, our Lord performed His first miracle at the wedding "and manifested His Glory and His disciples believed in Him", John2:11. Secondly, our Lord Jesus Christ blessed the Sacrament of Marriage by attending this wedding. In addition, it is a practical lesson for us to learn to rejoice with those who are rejoicing, in fulfillment of the commandment, "Rejoice with those who rejoice," Rom12:15.



FEAST OF THE ASCENSION

Big Idea: The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to Heaven opened for us the gates of Heaven.

Bible Text: Acts 1:9-12, Eph2:1-6, Luke24:52.

Bible Verse: Eph2:6, "And raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the Heavenly places in Christ Jesus".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ How sin resulted in spiritual and physical death of mankind.
- ✖ God's plan of salvation.
- ✖ The Resurrection of Christ raised us from death to life with Him.
- ✖ Because of the Ascension of Christ, it is possible to live in the heavenly places.
- ✖ What we should do to keep our hearts in heaven.
- ✖ That our spiritual life with Christ is a permanent connection with heaven.

Feel:

- ✖ Joyful and assured of their salvation.
- ✖ Eager to spread the good news.

Do: Witness to Christ to everyone.



FEAST OF THE ASCENSION



Adam and Eve were created as living beings, both physically and spiritually, able to walk with their Creator. Adam and Eve could have lived in this state of divine fellowship forever. However, their disobedience caused their spiritual death which separated them from God. Since then, all of their offspring, although born physically and biologically alive, knowing good from evil, right from wrong, are born spiritually dead and destined to die physically after a certain span of time. In other words, the nature of Adam and his offspring became corrupt (Eph2:1-3).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

In this state of spiritual death, we are born into a world of spiritual darkness and disobedience, knowing no better than to satisfy our natural human instincts. We are no longer God's by birth, nor do we bear the mark of His likeness that was bestowed upon Adam. **We are born dead!** God the Father, in His great love and mercy, designed a five-point plan for our salvation:

1. The Incarnation of the Logos,
2. The Atonement (2Cor5:18-21),
3. The Resurrection,
4. The Ascension and
5. The Sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (John16:7, Acts2:33).

He sent the Logos, from the power and glory of the heavenly places to earth in the form of man, to offer His Life for the life of Adam's offspring, for us. By Christ's Resurrection, man's three great enemies: death, Satan and hell had been dealt their death blow. Then, having completed His mission in this world as the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ returned to the Father in heaven. The Father had accepted the atoning work of the Son and His righteous demands had been met. **"For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life", John3:16.** In ascending to the Father, He raised earth to heaven with Him, **"and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus", Eph2:6.** Jesus Christ opened the gates of



heaven. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to help us get in through the gates.



When we believe in Jesus Christ we pass from death to life (Gal 2:20). We are no longer just ordinary human beings; we are a new creation linked with the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. **"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For, if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him"**, Rom6:4, 5.

RAISED UP TO SIT IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES

By His Ascension, our Lord Jesus Christ reclaimed His Glory before His Incarnation (John17:5; Phil 2:5-11, Heb2:9, Heb1:3). His Body, therefore, is glorious conforming to eternal living. Now that we have been identified with the Lord, His life has become our life. **"He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with Him"**, 1Cor6:17; **"You in Me and I in You"**, John14:20. Because we are members of His Body (1Cor6:15) which is in Heaven, then we can acquire the nature of living forever with Him in Heaven. We are raised with Him through faith.



As a new creation, we ought to walk with the Risen Christ, with our minds on heavenly things. As God's children, our citizenship, our loyalty, our life and our worship should be in heaven with Christ. **"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God,"** Col 3:1.

To sit in the heavenly places in our present state is to have our minds above; **"set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth,"** Col 3:2. "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally





minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace", Rom8:5-6.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO TO KEEP OUR HEARTS IN HEAVEN?

Think of Heaven

Heaven is a perfect place (Rev22:1-5). Look forward to it. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people (John14:2). A king gave to his clown a walking stick in honour of his being the best clown, the biggest fool. It was only to be given to one who was a greater fool. One day the king was dying and the clown came to visit him. The clown asked him what preparations he has made for going to heaven. "None", answered the king. Then the clown gave the king the walking stick remarking, "You are the greatest fool."



Stand Firm in the Faith

"Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life", Rev2:10. We are empowered by God to live the Christian life because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John16:13, 14). Living the Christian life under the Spirit's power does not mean that the believer does nothing but rather, live the Christian life through the Spirit's power (Rom8:13).

Strive to Obey God's Commandments

The Christian who struggles in his own strength to live the Christian life will fail. He must by faith appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit by prayer, Bible reading, Repentance and Holy Communion and good works.

Witness for Christ to Everybody (Mark16:15, 20; Luke24:46-47)

Making of disciples cannot be done in the strength of man, but only in the power of God. The reality of the Resurrection refers not only to its historicity, apostolic witness and necessity for faith, but also to its power in our Christian life and mission. The resurrected Son of God, living in us and energizing us, makes possible the salvation of all.

There are at least six compelling reasons for sharing our faith in Christ with those who have not experienced new life in Christ. These are:

1. Because God has commanded us to do so. The final words of Jesus while on earth before He ascended into heaven were, **"Go therefore and make**



disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age," Matt28:19-20.

2. Because it demonstrates our love for God. Christ said that if we truly loved Him we would keep His commandments (John14:15).
3. Because all are lost (Rom3:10, 23). It is the Lord's desire that "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth", 1Tim2:4.
4. Because our sharing is God's chosen method to tell all people. He could have chosen angels, but He didn't (Rom10:14-17; Acts8:3).
5. Because God desires to save all people (Acts4:12).
6. Because someone once shared his faith with us; we are expected to do to others what has been done for us.



Our spiritual life with Christ is a continual growth upwards until we reach the life of perfection. It is the permanent connection with heaven. This is possible because we have been given great power and blessings, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ", Eph1:3.





PENTECOST

Big Idea: The need for the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit helps us get in through the gates of heaven.

Bible Text: Gal 4:6, 7; Acts 2:1- 4

Bible Verse: John 16:7, "if I do not go away the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ God's five point plan of salvation.
- ✖ The work of the Holy Spirit in the believers.
- ✖ What is Heaven?
- ✖ The glory of heaven.
- ✖ The heavenly crowns.
- ✖ How can we go to heaven?

Feel: Assured that we can go to heaven.

Do:

- ✖ Ask the Holy Spirit to empower us.
- ✖ Pray the prayer of the third hour more diligently.



PENTECOST



When Jesus was teaching His disciples, preparing them for what He knew was the end, He promised to send them the Helper. He said, "But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you," John16:5-7.

The coming of the Holy Spirit proved to the disciples that Christ had entered the heavenly sanctuary (Acts2:33). He was seated at the right hand of God the Father, for His atoning work was finished. The advent of the Holy Spirit fulfilled Christ's promise; and it also testified that God's righteousness had been vindicated.

GOD'S FIVE POINT PLAN OF SALVATION

Unquestionably, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost marked a crucial point in the history of God's dealings with the human race. It is one of five past events, all of which are essential components of God's plan of Salvation. The five points are the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost.

The Incarnation, the **first event**, marked the redemptive entrance of God into human life as true man. The Atonement, the **second event**, was the means by which God could remain just and yet justify guilty men. The **third event**, the Resurrection, demonstrated that man's three great enemies- death, Satan and hell- had been dealt their death blow. The **fourth**, the Ascension, showed that the Father had accepted the atoning work of the Son and that His righteous demands had been met. Pentecost, the **fifth event**, assures us that the Spirit of God has come to achieve His certain purposes in the world, in the Church and in the individual believers.

THE NEED FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit reproves the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John16:7-11). In the Church, the Holy Spirit works through the Sacraments



(1Cor12:13, 14). Believers become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Eph2:22).

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BELIEVERS

Our Lord Jesus Christ opened the gates of heaven. The Holy Spirit gives great power to the believers so that we can enter through these gates. The Holy Spirit **illuminates** (enlightens) the Christian's mind (1Cor2:10; Rom 12:2; Eph4:23). The Holy Spirit **comforts** us (John14:16-17, 26; Acts 9:31; Rom5:5). The Holy Spirit **guides** us (John16:13; Acts8:29). The Holy Spirit **helps** in our infirmities (Rom8:26). The Holy Spirit **sanctifies** us (Rom15:16).

The Scripture teaches us the Holy Spirit witnesses to the truth of every promise God has given us in His Work. The Spirit, who inspired the written Word of God, also works in our hearts to assure us that its promises are true and that they are for us (John5:11-13). "**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**" Rom8:16, Gal 4:6, 7. Because we are declared sons of God by the Spirit, we are then heirs of heaven through God.

HEAVEN

"**In the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth,**" Gen1:1. What is Heaven? There are four heavens: the first is the heaven of birds; the second is the outer atmosphere of the planets, the third is Paradise which was described by St Paul (2Cor12:2-4) and the fourth is Heaven or the Heaven of heavens where God is in His Glory (Psa68:34).

Heaven is the throne of God, and the earth is His footstool. Heaven is far more beautiful than earth. God is not limited by place or time. God is everywhere. He created heaven and its residents, the angels, before He created the earth and its residents, the birds, animals and men. In the Heaven of Heavens (Psa68:34), there is the glory of God, His holiness and greatness and His angels. Nobody has been there except the One who has come down from Heaven and who is in Heaven. God opened a door in Heaven so that St John can look into it. What did he see? (Rev21). Heaven is a hoping place. "**God will wipe away all tears,**" Rev7:17. Heaven is a perfect place (Rev22:1-5) where we shall see the Lord's face and be in perfect glory; together we shall reign forever and





ever. Heaven is the home of the Lord God, "Our Father who art in heaven", Matt6:9. It is the Kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph5:5).

Jesus taught us to pray to **our Father who art in heaven**. Jesus wanted us to think about heaven and concentrate at being in and reaching heaven. "**Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**," He said, "**for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**," Matt6:19, 20. We are encouraged to feel estranged on earth and look forward to being in heaven (Phil 1: 23).

THE GLORY OF HEAVEN

In heaven, we will be able to gaze on the wonderful face of Jesus and behold His glory. "**Father, I desire that they, also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me**," John17:24. In heaven, we will be glorified with Christ. "**And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us**", Rom8:17, 18. It, surely, is going to be marvelously wonderful.

THE HEAVENLY CROWNS

You can win several heavenly crowns:

An Incorruptible Crown (1Cor:24, 25) which is eternal.



The Crown of Rejoicing for soul winners (1Thess2:19). Perhaps each soul we win for heaven will be a jewel in that crown.

The Crown of Righteousness (2Tim4:8). Everyone ought to win this crown. Each one of us ought to be watching and waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is the Crown of Righteousness? On earth we have a struggle between doing good and doing bad. Many times we fail to do good works because of our weakness and because we freely chose to do evil. When



we receive the Crown of Righteousness, it is impossible for us to do evil; all evil will be wiped of our minds and wills. We can only do good works; praise God with the angels and enjoy being with God forever. The amount of joy depends on how much we thought of and struggled to be in heaven while we are on earth.



The Crown of Life for those who endure temptation and overcome evil, love the Lord and are faithful unto death. "Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him," Jam1:12. The third condition is "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life," Rev2:10. Being faithful "unto death" means enduring to the end. Not only being faithful to death, the end of life, but even to martyrdom.

The Crown of Glory for servants of the Lord and teachers of the Word; for those who are faithful over the Lord's heritage. "And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that does not fade away," 1Pet5:4.

Crowns of Gold for all the redeemed, ".... And they had on their heads crowns of gold," Rev4:4.

The challenge is to faithfulness. It is possible to earn a crown and then lose it again (Rev.3:11). In **Revelation 4:10-11**, the priests take their crowns and give them to Jesus saying, "You are worthy a Lord to receive glory and honour and power". Jesus wins the crowns for us as we yield to Him. The crown is rightly His, for He has won. I desire to be able to lay many crowns at His blessed feet.

HOW CAN WE GO TO HEAVEN?

Believe in Jesus as your King and Saviour. **Obey** His commandments and struggle to **do good** works on earth worthy of your faith. Jesus opened Paradise for us after He died on the Cross. The first one to enter it was the thief crucified on the right hand side of Jesus (Luke23:43), then all those who were in Hades who died before the redemption believing in salvation.

In Paradise, are also the souls of all those who believed in Jesus for the past 2000 years and fought the good fight of faith. Now they are there awaiting the last Day of Judgment when these souls will put on glorified bodies and go into the Kingdom of God or the Heaven of Heavens. On the last day, in the Second Coming of Jesus, they will receive the crown of righteousness (2Tim4:8).





FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

Big Idea: The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ on Mt Tabor is a token of the transfiguration of the human nature in the after-life.

Bible Text: Matt17:1-8 and others.

Bible Verse: John17:22, "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one."

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ is a "Theophany" (Matt17:2, 5).
- ✖ The Transfiguration of the Lord shows that Christ is Messiah and God.
- ✖ St Peter's experience of the Transfiguration (2Pet1:16-18).
- ✖ St John's experience of the Transfiguration (Rev1:13-17).
- ✖ Our transfiguration (1Cor15:42-49; Phil 3:20, 21; John17:22).

Feel: Eager to be one with Christ and enjoy His Glory.

Do: Walk as children of light (Eph5:11; 1John3:2, 3).



FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION



The Transfiguration is one of the major incidents in the Holy Bible which bears a lot of significance to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It sheds light on the Person of Jesus, the nature of His mission, and His relation to God the Father. In the Coptic Orthodox Church it is considered one of the seven minor feasts of our Lord. The Feast of the Transfiguration is celebrated in August of every year, forty days before the Feast of the Holy Cross. The Gospel reading on the Transfiguration is also read on the first Saturday after the Feast of the Resurrection.

The Transfiguration is related in Matt17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13, and Luke 9:28-36. While Matthew and Mark mention that the Transfiguration happened **six** days after some important teachings of Jesus, Luke relates the same incidents as **eight** days apart. This variation is not an indication of discrepancy or lack of credibility of the Holy Bible. Matthew and Mark exclude the Transfiguration day and the earlier day, but Luke includes both days. Alternatively, in spiritual symbolism, number six symbolizes the Crucifixion: whereas eight symbolizes the Resurrection.

The Transfiguration is a **Theophany**, a manifestation of God, especially of the Divinity of Christ. It is a display of His Uncreated, Divine energy. "**And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as White as the light**", Matt17:2. Additional parallel to this description is seen later by St John at Patmos (Rev1:13-17).

Several elements of the Transfiguration show that Christ is Messiah and God (2Pet1:16-18):

"God is light", 1John1:5. Therefore, the bright cloud, the shining of Jesus face like the sun, and the whiteness of His garment (Matt17:2, 5) all demonstrate that Jesus is God.

The Father bears witness from heaven concerning His Son. He does not say, "This has become my beloved Son", but "**This is my beloved Son**", Matt17:5, indicating that the manifested divine glory belongs to Christ by nature,



infinitely before Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. In so saying, the Father has declared that Jesus is God's Son, fully sharing in the essence of the Father. Jesus Christ is God of God (John17:5, 24). The Transfiguration not only proclaims Christ's Divine son-ship, but foreshadows His future Glory when He, as the Messiah, will usher in the long awaited Kingdom (Matt16:27).

The cloud recalls temple worship (Exo40:34) and the cloud that went before the Israelites in the wilderness, the visible sign of God being extraordinarily present. St Peter sees this as a sign that the Kingdom has come. Knowing that the Feast of Tabernacles is the Feast of the Coming Kingdom, he asks to build booths (Matt17:4) as is done at this feast; the booths serve as a symbol of God's dwelling among the just in the Kingdom of Heaven (2Chr5:13, Acts1:9-11, Matt24:30).

Moses represents the Law and all those who have died. **Elijah** represents the Prophets and, since he did not experience death, all those who are alive in Christ. Their presence shows that the Law and the Prophets, the living and the dead, all bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the whole Old Testament.

The presence of Moses and Elijah also manifests the communion of the saints (Heb12:1). Both men are immediately recognizable, and talk with the Lord. The disciples are able to understand Jesus' words that "**Elijah has come already**", Matt17:12, referring to John the Baptist. Their eyes have been opened to the fact that Malachi's Prophecy (Matt4:5, 6) refers to one coming "**in the spirit and power of Elijah**" (Luke1:17), rather than to Elijah himself.

Finally, the Holy Trinity is manifest here, for Christ is transfigured (Matt17:2), the Father speaks from heaven testifying to Jesus' divine son-ship (Matt17:5), and the Holy Spirit is present in the form of a dazzling light surrounding Christ's person, overshadowing the whole mountain (Matt17:5).

OUR TRANSFIGURATION

The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ with both Moses and Elijah is a token of the Transfiguration of humanity as a whole. This transfiguration is a release for our nature from materialism and its weight. It is also a promise from the Lord that He will save us from the slavery of corruption and the



slavery of substance and that we may become spiritual and luminous. Then we will become worthy of living in the Kingdom that is prepared for us. In eternity, we will be free from the slavery of the flesh and blood and their demands. We will be like God's angels in heaven.

This transfiguration will be granted only to those who never submitted to materiality during their life on earth. They will become luminous in eternity. There are also those who will become luminous because they acted as the children of light and never dealt with fruitless acts of darkness during their life on earth. On the contrary, they followed the words of the Bible, "**Walk as children of light. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them**", Eph5:11. This is because those who had fellowship with the works of darkness will be thrown out in the outside darkness of eternity, far from the city of light and the fellowship of the luminous in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Our transfiguration in eternity is not going to be only for the body, but also for the spirit. We will be released from the defile of the body and spirit. Transfiguration of the spirit means that the spirit will be crowned with righteousness and therefore, fault and sin will not have any authority over man any more.

This transfiguration is our return to God's image. Adam and Eve were created to God's image in purity, righteousness and simplicity. But the transfiguration in eternity will take a more sublime way than the nature of Adam and Eve. Humans will be released from the material body, and become spiritual and closer to God's Image, as Jesus on Mount Tabor.

We should prepare ourselves now to become worthy of this transfiguration, by acting according to the Spirit, so that we may become worthy of having spiritual bodies in eternity, like God's angels in heaven.





FLIGHT OF THE HOLY FAMILY INTO EGYPT

Big Idea: The spiritual meaning learnt from the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt.

Bible Text: Matt2:13-15, Isa19:1, 19, 25.

Bible Verse: Hos11:1, "Out of Egypt I called My Son".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The need for steadfastness in tribulation.
- ✖ Trust in God's protection from evil.
- ✖ Why Jesus escaped to Egypt.
- ✖ Jesus humility illustrated.
- ✖ Jesus is concerned about our eternity.

Feel: Encouraged during tribulation to follow Christ's example.

Do: Act humbly and wisely as we go through the narrow gate.



FLIGHT OF THE HOLY FAMILY INTO EGYPT



Egypt was a refuge to many of God's people throughout history. Abraham went briefly to Egypt when a famine struck Canaan (Gen12:10). Later his great-grandson, Joseph, rose from slavery to become second-in-command of that great land (Gen39-50). Joseph brought his family to Egypt, and settled them in the land of Goshen. For some four hundred years the Israelites remained in Egypt, where they were at last enslaved. Yet in secure Egypt they multiplied rapidly (Exo1:6, 7), something that could never have happened in Canaan, which at that time was divided into warring city-states.

When the time was right, God sent Moses to bring His people out of Egypt and lead them back to Canaan. The Jews' deliverance from Egypt by God's intervention stands not as a turning point in history, but as a dramatic revelation of God. The God of the Bible, the God of Israel, is a redeeming God, who has power to act in this world, and who remains ever faithful to His people.

In New Testament times, St Joseph the carpenter and husband of St Mary, being a man of faith, responded to divine guidance given in a dream and fled with his family to Egypt. St Joseph fled to Egypt to protect the Christ-child, in fulfilment of God's plan for His people, "**Out of Egypt I called My Son,**" Hos11:1.

STAND FIRM IN TRIBULATIONS (Matt2:13-15; Isa19:19, 25)

The Lord did not prevent tribulations from coming His way during His incarnate life on earth. The Holy Family had to go through a very long and hard journey. The only means through mountains and valleys and deserts was on the donkey. They had no shelter from heat or cold. They had communication problems because of the language. They had to elude civil power in order to do God's will.

This comforts us when we come across trouble (as in migration, language difficulties and discomfort in a new environment) because Christ has gone through it Himself. "**In all their afflictions, He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them,**" Isa63:9. Jesus identifies with people who are in trouble. "**Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the**



Lord delivers him out of them all," **Psa34:19**. He encourages us not to be troubled at afflictions but to enter through the narrow gate (Luke13:24). The most important thing is to stand firm in all troubles and make no mistakes.

GOD'S PROTECTION FROM EVIL

Herod was evil plotting all evil to kill Jesus. He could not wait until Jesus grew up and then he would fight Him. Instead the desire for power blinded him. Herod could not benefit from the Magi who told him about the star or from the priests who told him about the prophecies of the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. He was impatient and cunningly led by a great desire to kill and no respect for anything that's holy.

Herod orders the killing of all children two years old and younger to ensure the definite death of Jesus. The cruelty of Herod was prefigured at Moses' birth, when pharaoh attempted to kill all the male children in order to destroy the first Israel (Exo1:16, 22).

However, God has His own way of protecting His people and destroying the counsel of the wicked (Psa33:10). Herod killed 144,000 children and Jesus was not among them. All the males were killed and Moses was saved. Paradoxically, Herod died but Jesus did not; the Lord intervened by dreams to St Joseph, first to go to Egypt and then to come back.

We need to go in life submitting our life in the hands of the Almighty who is in control over both the good and evil. We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and direct us; and to be ready and willing to follow His guidance.

We should believe and trust God who is love and that all things work together for good for those who love God. St Joseph and St Mary did not doubt or question that Jesus was the Saviour and King who will sit on the throne of David despite all these troubles. We must not doubt the promises of the Lord who promised to deliver us from all our afflictions. The Lord provided for this very harsh trip by the gifts that were presented to Jesus by the Magi.

JESUS CONCEALS HIS DIVINITY

Jesus could have chosen to destroy Herod by His Divine Power in order to comfort Himself but He decided to escape to Egypt instead. This is to conceal His Divine identity from the devil despite all the announcement of



the angels. At the same time he would hide to teach us to avoid evil and never to negotiate with it. Jesus' escape wasn't out of cowardice but full of wisdom and long-suffering.

JESUS' HUMILITY

During the trip many miracles happened, however, the Bible did not mention them. The apparent weakness of Jesus was written but His greatness was concealed. Jesus said, "**Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest in your souls,**" **Matt12:29**. The crucifixion was watched by hundreds of people from different nations. On the other hand, the ascension into Heaven in glory was watched by a few people. People tend to hide their weaknesses and show their areas of power and strength.

JESUS IS CONCERNED ABOUT OUR ETERNITY

The massacre of the children of Bethlehem is horrible and atrocious. However, the Lord allowed it, because He was concerned about our eternal life more than our earthly life. Those children were the first martyrs. They went into paradise with Christ and received crowns.

In short, the flight of Jesus and His family to Egypt is for us a source of encouragement, wisdom, humility and strength. "**If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things,**" **Rom8:31,32.**





THE HOLY WEEK

Big Idea: Identifying with Jesus in the Holy Week.

Bible Text: John15:2-16 and others.

Bible Verse: John16:22, "Therefore, you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The need to focus, Luke9:51-53.
- ✖ The need to attend the Holy Week with an open heart.
- ✖ The need to be with Jesus at the foot of the cross.

Feel: Blessed to identify with Jesus on the cross as we serve and as we carry our cross daily (Joel 2:15).

Do: Attend the Holy Week with an open mind and heart.



THE HOLY WEEK



The Holy week of the Passion of Christ is the week of the whole year. In it we accumulate all the spiritual blessings and energy we need to go through the whole year. It is therefore essential to attend the prayers wholeheartedly, seeking to identify with Jesus day by day and also every hour of each day. In order to achieve this great spiritual goal during the Holy Week, we must realize the following needs:

THE NEED TO FOCUS (Luke9:51-53).

Jesus steadfastly set His face towards His goal (Luke9:51). In a similar fashion, we need to focus in those areas.

Focus to benefit of the Holy Week

Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king: His wish is to reign over me and over every child in my class. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Focus within me

The Lord wishes to reign over all areas of my heart. Have you ever submitted your life to God? Have you ever confessed your sin to Him, and repented of your sin as best as you know how? Are there particular sins that are obstacles to your full commitment? Are there other sins which you have not even begun to admit? Most of all have you ever told God -as fully and as simply as you know how- that you want His will in your life, whatever it may be? We should pray that God will take possession of our lives totally and completely. We should pray that we will be emptied of self: self-love, self-will, self-ambition, and are placed completely at His disposal. **"Therefore, shake off your complacency and repent. See, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me," Rev3:19, 20.**

Focus in the service

I need to define my service. The Fathers taught us that 'there is no service on account of another service.' The Apostles became so tied up with the daily ministrations to the multiplied new believers that they were unable to devote themselves fully to the ministry of the Word. So they asked for seven men to be appointed for this practical job, a job of administration.



There is no credit in spreading ourselves over so many services without doing anyone of them as well as we should.

Focus to produce fruit (John15:2-16 especially V8).

The fruit of the Spirit is God's expectation in our lives. In Matt13, Jesus told the familiar parable of the seed and the soils. He likens the work of anyone who declares the Word of God to a man sowing seeds. The fourth group of seeds falls into good soil, takes root, and brings forth fruit abundantly. So you and I are to bear fruit, as the Word of God begins to work in our lives in the power of the Spirit.

Focus to finish the work (John17:4).

We need to be able to proclaim with Jesus, "I have finished the work which You have given me to do; I have fulfilled my promise which I make every mass to proclaim Your death and resurrection". St Paul wrote to the Colossians, "and say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfil it," Col 4:17. Remember Jesus says all the way, "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice," John16:22.

THE NEED TO ATTEND THE HOLY WEEK WITH AN OPEN HEART

During the Holy Week, the Word of God is read in abundance. As we attend the readings we need:

- **To listen and to respond**

When we realize that there is a special message for us, let us respond "for the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of the soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart," Heb4:12.

- **To submit to the Word of God** in relinquishment, waiting for the Grace of God to come and visit us for "the kingdom of God does not come with observation," Luke17:20.
- **To serve with an open heart** to edify the body of Christ. Remember, Jesus says, "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice," John 16:22.

THE NEED TO BE WITH JESUS AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

As we repent and receive Christ as our Lord and Saviour, our perception of life will have a new dimension. As we contemplate on the Cross, we realize:



- **The need for the unity and integrity of the Body of Christ.** We realize why Jesus was crucified and not beheaded. In the service, we need to be work in unity. It takes humility and cooperation (1Cor6:20; 7:23). You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's. To illustrate, consider the following story:

I NOT ONLY MADE YOU; I BOUGHT YOU!

A little boy spent many days making a sailboat. When it was finished, he took it down to the stream to try it out. The boat started to sail beautifully in the breeze. The little boy was very proud. Suddenly an expected wind blew up and pushed the sailboat way out to the middle of the stream where he couldn't reach it. Gradually it disappeared from his sight! You can imagine how sad and heartbroken the lad was when he returned home that evening without his boat. Weeks later, he saw his sailboat in a pawnshop window: the very boat which he had made and rigged and painted with such great care. He ran in and began to tell the owner: "That's my boat. I made it with my own hands..... I want you to give me back my boat!" His heart sank when the man replied "I will give it to you if you pay the price which is marked on this tag"! Sadly the boy replied, "Save it for me. Don't sell it to anyone else. I'll go out and earn the money to buy it back".

Weeks later when the boy had earned the money, he came to the pawnshop, placed the money on the counter and said, "Mister, I'd like to have my boat". As he left the store with the boat in his hand, he looked at it with feeling of pride and joy and love which little boys lavish over things that they have made with their own fingers, and said: You are mine, little boat! You are mine twice-over! Once, because I made you, Twice, because I bought you"!

The way that boy felt about his boat is the way God feels about us!!! The Bible says: God not only made us, He also bought us back from sin with a price. The price was the precious Blood of Christ. What a comfort it is to know that beyond the reaches of the universe there is a Father in heaven who looks down on each one of us and says, "You are Mine. You are Mine twice-over. Once because I made you Twice, because I bought you"!

- **At the foot of the Cross we need to sacrifice and discipline ourselves**



In our service we carry the cross. On that cross we put our need to rest, to sleep, to eat etc. **"Now no discipline seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it,"** Heb12:11. The following true story illustrates how the Lord rewarded a diligent servant.

YOUR SCORE IS THE NUMBER OF CROSSES ON YOU!

There was a young lady who served in Sunday School and was a Pharmacy student in her final year. Despite the great load of work at exam time, she never missed to do her service. One day after she has prepared her lesson on the "Holy Cross", she decided to stop by the church bookshop and buy a bag of little crosses for her class, on her way to her oral exam. She did very well in her exam. Her examiner, who was a discriminating Muslim, told her that her answers were excellent but he would give her a mark equivalent to the number of crosses that are on her. In so saying, he expected a maximum of three or four e.g. two earrings, a necklace and a tattooed cross. The young lady's eyes brightened and asked him if he would keep his word for that. He assured her. So she took the bag of crosses from her bag and on counting all the crosses, they added up to ninety eight! So she received 98% to the disappointment of the examiner.

In the service, we sacrifice our time and put some effort. St Paul encourages us saying, **"If indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together,"** Rom8:17. Remember in our pain Jesus says, "I will see again and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take it from you".

- **We need to anoint Jesus' Body (Mark14:8)**

At the cross Jesus cares for St John and St Mary. He is asking us to give special care to His children. Any care we give to His children is like anointing His Body to honour Him and to love Him. In our struggle, service, sacrifice and pain, let us remember Jesus says, "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you".

Let us consecrate a fast and call a sacred assembly (Joel 2:15) and let us attend the Holy Week with an open heart and in a renewed Spirit!

The following chart summarises the events of Good Friday, hour by hour.



JESUS

His hours upon the cross

*Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in

paradise." Lk23:43

*But the other criminal rebuked him ... Then he said ... "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Lk 23:40-42

*One of the criminals said "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us." Lk 23:39

*And the soldiers also mocked him "If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself". Lk 23:36-37

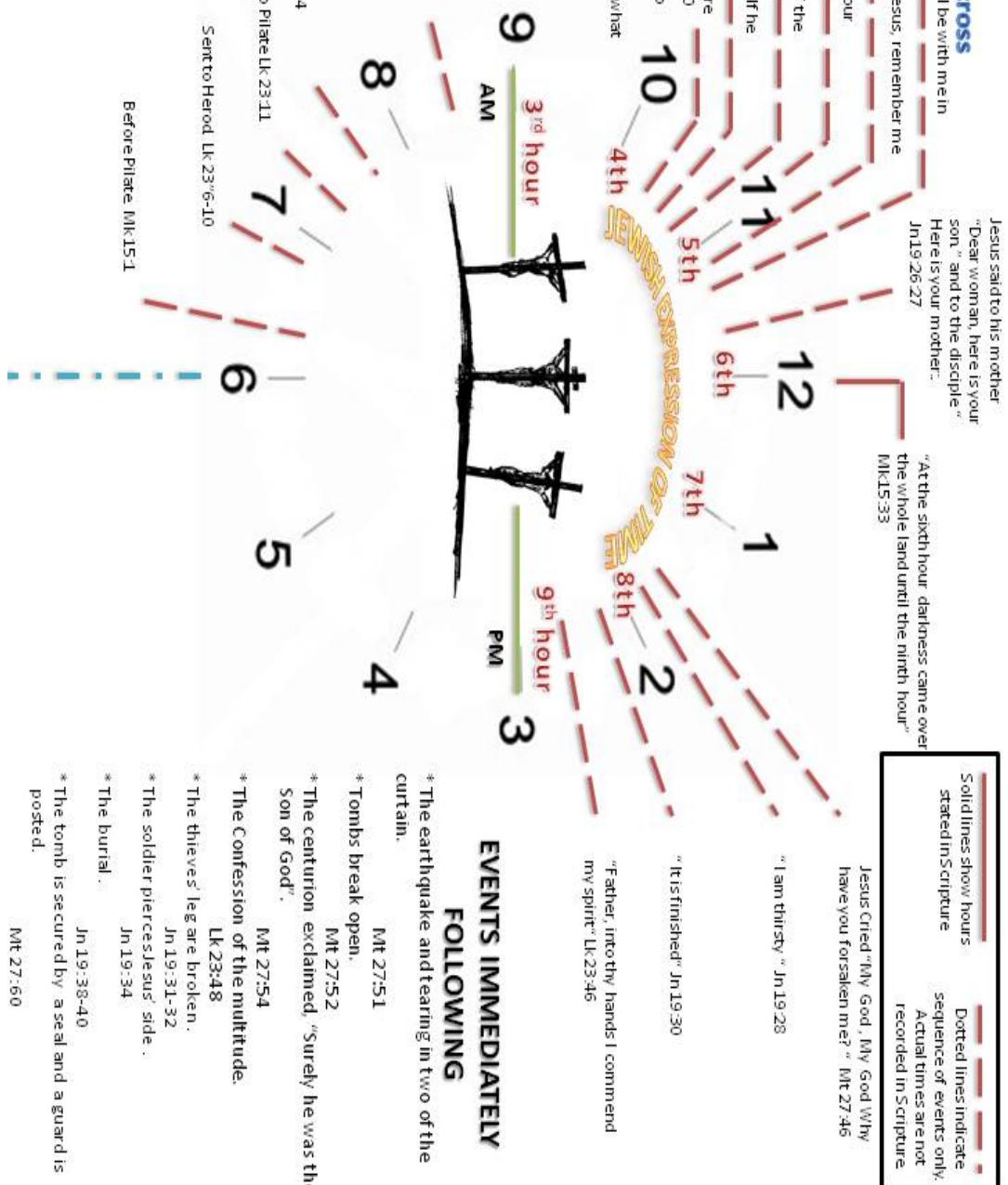
*The chief priests mocking said "He saved others; himself he cannot save". Mk15:31

*Those who passed by blasphemed Him saying, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross". Mt 27:39-40

*The soldiers divided his clothes, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. Mk15:24

*Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" Lk 23:34

THE CRUCIFIXION





FEAST OF THE PRECIOUS CROSS

Big Idea: The Feast of the raising of the Precious Cross commemorates the discovery and recovery of the precious cross.

Bible Text: John3:14-16

Bible Verse: Matt16:24, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ The history of discovering the precious cross and later recovering it.
- ✖ History behind the terms "basil" and "touch wood".
- ✖ Rites of celebrating the Feast of raising the Precious Cross at vespers: three rounds in church, while singing "kyrie eleison" in Palm Sunday tune.
- ✖ Doxology and responses, all joyous even during lent.
- ✖ At matins, the Procession of the Cross consists of twelve Gospel readings before twelve icons in the church and concludes in the sanctuary.
- ✖ Significance of the Procession.

Feel:

- ✖ Rejoice because we are restored to paradise through the Cross.
- ✖ Empowered to serve our crucified Lord.

Do: Celebrate the feast with a repentant heart.



FEAST OF THE PRECIOUS CROSS



The feast of Raising of the Precious Cross commemorates the discovery of the precious cross. The cross, as you may recall, remained lost for nearly four hundred years. It was discovered in the fourth century by St Helen, Constantine's mother. St John Chrysostom, in 395 AD, speaks of the three crosses discovered by the Empress Helen beneath the mound of Golgotha: that of Christ was identified because it was found in the middle and bore the inscription.



A certain legend states that the Empress Helen did not know where on Golgotha to look for the Cross. As she searched a huge mound of rubbish, she came upon a sweet-smelling plant and decided to dig under the spot. It was there that she found the Cross. From that time on, according to tradition, the plant was named Basilikos in Greek, Basil in English, which means literally, royal, regal, or "the plant of the king." Basil is often used in the religious ceremonies. It has taken the place of another plant, hyssop, which was used in the religious ceremonies in the Old Testament.

To celebrate the discovery of the Precious Cross the bishop, standing on a platform in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, raised the Cross as the faithful sang "*Kyrie eleison.*" This ceremony of the "*ipsosisis*," or "raising" was celebrated in the early Church since the fourth century to commemorate the discovery and the raising of the Cross out of the mound on Golgotha where it lay hidden for nearly 400 years.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, in 349 AD, said, "Already the whole universe is filled with fragments of the wood of the Cross." There is an interesting custom that we still practice today back to that time. Most Christians at that time carried with them pieces of wood which they believed were parts of the original Cross. When danger threatened, they would touch the wood, thereby signifying that by the power of God through the Cross they would be able to endure. This is how the habit of "knocking on wood" to avoid danger originated. Originally it was not "knocking" on wood but touching a piece of wood which they believed to be a fragment of the Cross.



In the year 628 AD the infidel Persians succeeded in pushing back the Byzantine armies. They captured Jerusalem, then belonging to the Christian empire. Among the booty they carried off, was the very Cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ had been crucified. The Christian Empire could not tolerate such irreverence and desecration. Fresh forces were organized to recapture Jerusalem and win back the precious Cross from the pagan enemies. Under Emperor Heraclius III the Persians were repulsed and the precious Cross was recovered.

The victory was celebrated in a most fitting manner. The ceremony of the Raising of the Precious Cross was again performed amid great rejoicing; this time to celebrate not only its *discovery* by St Helen, but also its *recovery* from the hands of the infidel. The chanting of the "Kyrie eleisor" (Lord have mercy) arose in unison as the Cross was raised once again before the adoring eyes of thousands of Christians.

This centuries-old ceremony is repeated every year on the Feast of the Precious Cross. The precious cross of Christ, surrounded by sweet-smelling basil, is first lowered to the ground, to denote that for 400 years it was buried, lost, and then it is raised to commemorate its discovery by St Helen in the fourth century and its eventual recovery from the Persians in the seventh century.

THE PROCESSION OF THE CROSS

The Procession of the Cross commences and concludes in the Sanctuary around the Altar which represents the Cross. On the Altar, the love of the Holy Trinity to all mankind is declared. It is the most joyous meeting between the heavenly Bridegroom and His Bride.

It is a great celebration in which the Priests and Deacons go around the Altar and the Nave of the church three times while singing "Lord have mercy", followed by the hymns of the Cross.

This is followed by twelve sets of readings of selected Psalms and passages from the Gospels in twelve different locations in the Nave. After each set of readings, the Deacons lead the congregation in singing a small relevant hymn.

The significance of each step and the corresponding set of readings are explained as follows:



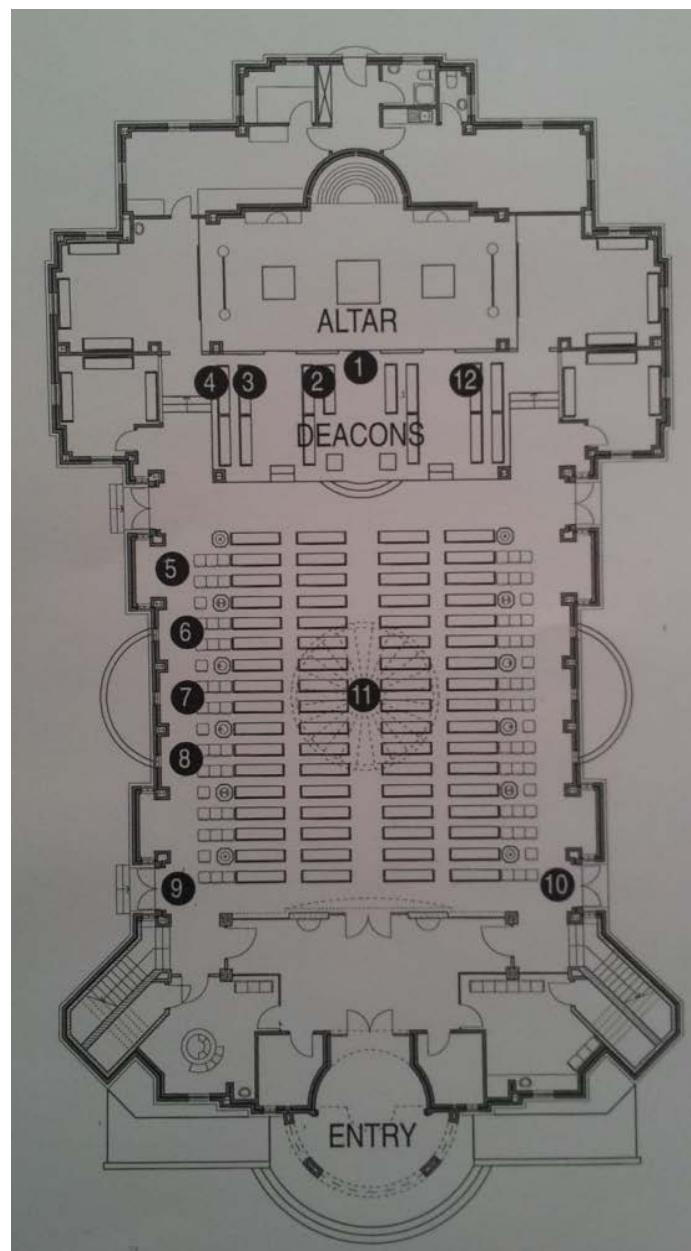
1. **At the Royal Door** outside the Sanctuary, before the Altar where we partake of the Lord's Body broken for us, and His Blood shed for our salvation. The readings are: Psa104:4, 138:1, 2; John1:44-52.
2. **At the Icon of St Mary** who was first to bear the cross of Faith and submission, "Let it be to me according to your word," Luke1:38. She also bore the cross of forbearance (Luke2:35). The readings are: Psa87:3, 5, 7; Luke1:39-56.
3. **At the Icon of Archangel Gabriel** who announced to St Mary the mystery of the Incarnation, the first step to the Cross. The readings are: Psa34:7, 9; Luke1:26-38.
4. **At the Icon of Archangel Michael** who preached the Resurrection of our Lord. He is the servant of the mystery of victory over the devil. The readings are: Psa103:20, 21; Matt13:44-53.
5. **At the Icon of St Mark** who represents the cross of evangelism and witnessing for the faith. The readings are: Psa68:11, 12; Luke10:1-12.
6. **At the Icon of St Peter and St Paul** who represent the cross of the service and martyrdom. The readings are: Psa19:13, 14; Matt10:1-8.
7. **At the Icon of St George** who represents the cross of persecution and suffering. The readings are: Psa97:11, 12; Luke21:12-19.
8. **At the Icon of St Anthony** who represents the cross of spiritual struggle in seeking the Kingdom of God with perfect honesty. The readings are: Psa68:34, 35, 3; Matt16:24-28.
9. **At the Northern Door of the Church** which represents the cross of protection of the faith. The readings are: Psa84:1; Luke13:23-30.
10. **At the Southern Door of the Church** where donations to the poor used to be received. It represents the cross of love and perfect sacrifice. The readings are: Psa118:19, 20; Matt21:1-11.
11. **At the Basin** which represents the cross of humility and washing of feet in perfect self-denial. The readings are: Psa29:3, 4; Matt3:13-17.



12. At the Icon of St John the Baptist who represents the cross of repentance and witnessing to the truth boldly. The readings are: Psa52:8; Luke7:28-35.

As we complete the procession of the Cross, we feel empowered to continue to carry the cross every day in imitation of Christ.

The different steps of the procession are illustrated in the diagram below.



The twelve steps of the Procession of the Cross



FEAST OF NAYROOZ

Big Idea: Celebrating the martyrs on the Coptic New Year's Day.

Bible Text: Heb11:13-16.

Bible Verse: Heb11:13, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth".

Students will

Know:

- ✖What the Coptic New Year and the Coptic Calendar are.
- ✖Contemplations on the virtues of the martyrs.
- ✖The spirit of martyrdom today.

Feel: Proud to be children of the martyrs.

Do: Live out the faith and strength of the martyrs.



FEAST OF NAYROOZ



The Feast of Nayrooz is a national feast celebrated by the Copts who are the Christians of Egypt. The Copts commenced their calendar in the year 284 AD at the commencement of the rule of Emperor Diocletian, the most violent Roman ruler who shed the blood of the Copts especially and Christians in general.

The Copts considered that the greatest mark in their history was that of the violent persecution and started their calendar with it. All who entered into martyrdom entered this history. Perhaps they wished to remember that era constantly lest they forgot it.

The Coptic calendar is dated "*Anno Martyr*" i.e. "*Year of the Martyrs*". Thus, on each day of our Coptic calendar we remember the martyrs, and how they played an integral part in the history of our Church. We stand proud to be the children of the martyrs.

The commencement of the New Year with the commemoration of martyrs reminds us of the commencement of the next life and its importance. The martyrs began their true everlasting life on the day of their martyrdom. Their life on earth was merely preparation, or a test of the manner of their love and their firmness in the faith. True life began on the day on which the period of their alienation on earth ended, and on which they entered "**the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,**" *Heb11:10*, to live in association with the saints in everlasting life.

The month of Tute reminds the Copts of their Egyptian heritage and their long history on earth which was sanctified by the blood of the martyrs and by Christ in His visit to Egypt. This calendar says to them, 'you are the children of the martyrs, the children of Egypt and of the Pharaohs'; you have a strong origin, spiritually as well as civilly. It also



reminds them that they are surrounded by "a cloud of witnesses" (Heb12:1) who witnessed with their lives and with their blood. They witnessed for the next life with their desire for it and their renunciation of all that was in this materialistic world. They witnessed for their faith, not only with words, but with bravery of heart, firmness and endurance.

CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE VIRTUES OF THE MARTYRS

The stories of the martyrs are filled with remarkable love for God and the Cross, firmness in the faith, and an ever preparedness for the new after-life. The Church places the martyrs in a position above all saints- above popes, bishops and monks. This means that the martyrs are greater than the saints of meditation and the saints of service because of their sacrifice that springs from their deep love. As the Bible says, "**Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends,**" **John15:13**. They have loved God more than anything and anyone else, and accepted to part with everything and everyone for the sake of that love.

They Were Deeply Ascetic

In the martyrs' acceptance of death, is found the perfect form of asceticism. For, if they had any desire for anything, they would not accept to die, lest death should deprive them of that desire. Thus, the martyrs were deeply ascetic. The words of the Bible in **1John2:15**, '**Do not love the world or the things in the world**' truly apply to them. There is no doubt that at the hour of death, their hearts had already died to all the desires of the world, as they were no longer attracted to anything on earth.

They Were Extremely Brave

The martyrs did not fear death, torture, pain or trials, and they were not disturbed by insults. Nothing at all frightened them. On the contrary, they went through all this in rare velour that astonished the rulers. When they were put in prison, they filled their cells with praise, singing, joy and prayer, as though they were in a party. The prison-



keepers were surprised at the joy with which they faced death: no worry, no weariness and no discomfort, but rather, more joyful to die than to live.

When Saint Fam went to his death, he was very happy and he wore his best clothes, saying, 'this is my wedding day.' Some of the martyrs kissed the chains with which they were bound. They were full of trust, and thus they faced death with joy. They gave their lives cheerfully, following the words of the Bible in 2Cor9:7, "**God loves a cheerful giver.**" The best that man can ever give is to give his life, and they gave their lives without hesitation or regret, but rather, with absolute joy and courage.

They Stood Firm in the Faith

They did not fear any means of torture, but faced it with courage and endurance. All sorts of pain failed to shake their faith. Their wondrous courage and steadfastness amazed the non-Christian audience who, as a result, accepted the Christian Faith and went on to their martyrdom. For those who died before being baptized, their martyrdom was in itself regarded as baptism, for baptism is death with Christ. Like the thief who was crucified on the right hand side of the Lord, they have actually died, and they were thus baptized with their own blood.

They Witnessed To Christ

The martyrs testified to the Lord: to His Divinity, Crucifixion and Resurrection. They confessed the Christian Faith and led others to accept it. Thus they are regarded as heroes and heroines who have preserved the Faith with their blood. In the most difficult moments, they went out to the streets, praising the Lord and crying before the processions of rulers, 'We are Christians! We are Christians!' They went to the courts where they were condemned, proclaiming! 'We are Christians!'

These martyrs encouraged their brethren in prisons to proclaim their faith. It is sad to learn that some could very easily give up their faith for



the sake of a partner, a job, money or for any other worldly desire! How can these ever be the children of the martyrs?

They Were Not Seduced

Martyrs, on the other hand, paid no heed to seduction and torture. They were stronger than the Roman Empire with all its power. They were above the cruelty of torturers. They were greater than pain, as they conquered pain. They were men of faith; they believed in Christ and in eternity, knowing that they were strangers to this world. They did not fear death because they believed in life after death and they loved it. They admitted that they were strangers on earth and held on to nothing in their land of estrangement, but rather contemplated upon "**the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God,**" **Heb11:10.** As they admitted their estrangement, they longed for deliverance to be with Christ, which is far better.

They Loved God

For the martyrs, Christ was an end not a means. Some people love the Lord because He is the source of goodness and blessing, and because He satisfies all their needs. However, the martyrs received pain, suffering, persecution, torture, chains, death and defamation in return for their love of God. Yet, they accepted pain for His sake without hesitation.

Many people, on facing distress, doubt the love of God and start to grumble saying, 'Where is the Lord our God?' They might even blaspheme. God has warned us that the gate is narrow and the way difficult, saying that "**in the world you will have tribulation,**" **John6:33.** Therefore, if distress is the way to God, then it is most welcome. How beautiful is the gate to God, no matter how painful it is!

They Saw God

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said to him, "**The Lord is with you, you mighty man of the armies,**" he answered, "**If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?**" **Judges6:13.** Unlike Gideon, the martyrs could visualize the Lord in their



tribulations. They did not need to ask Gideon's question. Had not God been with them in their pain, they could never have endured it. The torture they were exposed to, was beyond human endurance; but God was with them and He granted them power which was above any human power. He even gave them miracles and wonders to strengthen their faith as well as the faith of people around them.

How wonderful it is to experience the Lord's goodness in time of pain! It is then that you can sing with David, "**Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved,**" **Acts2:25.** This is how martyrs were. In the time of pain, God was with them. His angels and the spirit of His saints granted them comfort, endurance, courage and steadfastness!

They Were Holy

The Church used to deliver lectures and sermons to urge people to sacrifice their lives, so that martyrdom became the desire of their hearts. Mothers used to encourage their children to die as martyrs. Families taught their children to hold on to their faith and to defend it, even to their death. Thus, a strong generation was brought up; a generation that was ready for martyrdom, for the kingdom and for meeting the Lord at any time. Those who were ready to die must have been penitent getting ready for their eternity in purity and "**holiness without which no one can see God,**" **Heb12:14.**

The generation of martyrs, who were characterized by their asceticism, velour and faith, and who were ready for their eternity through purity and holiness, was a generation that loved celibacy and reclusion. They loved worship and quietness. They were a generation of prayer and meditation. They died to the world and its lusts; that is why martyrdom was easy for them. They were ready. Their hearts had parted with the world before their bodies did; the world had gone out of their hearts before they actually left it. Their hearts was filled with the love of God that is above all else, and the love of eternity and the Kingdom. **I** wonder, if we are as ready as they were. Is the Church or the family able to train her children to be martyrs?



The Spirit of Martyrdom Today

Martyrdom is not just accepting death for the preservation of faith. It is the culmination of a number of virtues that paved the way for the acceptance of death.

One of the believers once asked St Augustine, 'Are we deprived of the crown of martyrdom because we do not live in the age of martyrs?' St Augustine answered, 'martyrdom is the preparedness of the heart before facing death. If you have the spirit of a martyr, that is, if you have this preparedness of the heart, then you are regarded as a martyr, even though your blood is not shed.' Martyrdom was a characteristic of that age; that is why there was sometimes collective martyrdom where entire towns were martyred, such as Esna, Akhmim and other towns.

We are indebted to these martyrs as they preserved the faith intact and handed it over to us. That is why we celebrate their feasts till this very day. The day of the saint's martyrdom is a feast which the Church celebrates and which is mentioned in the Synexarion, as he or she had ended his or her life in sanctity and deserved the crown.

When we remember the martyrs, we remember their virtues hoping to train ourselves to acquire their character and preparedness, and to raise our children on the love of martyrdom, not just boasting that we are the children of the martyrs.

(Adapted from a lecture by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III).

THE HOLY BIBLE

Contents



27. The Holy Book of Books
28. History of Salvation in the Bible
29. Our Use of the Bible



THE HOLY BOOK OF BOOKS

Big Idea: The Bible is the Word of God which Christians recognize as authoritative in matters of faith and morals.

Bible Text: 2Tim3:16, 17, Rom15:4.

Bible Verse: 2Pet1:21, "For prophecy was never made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God".

Students will

Know:

- ✖ History of the Bible.
- ✖ First and Second Canonical Books of the Old Testament.
- ✖ Relationship between the Old and New Testaments.
- ✖ The Author of the Bible.
- ✖ Some supposed contradictions in the Bible.
- ✖ Seven symbols used to illustrate the Word of God.

Feel: The Bible is supreme, for it has the answer to questions of life and death.

Do: Build our lives on the solid foundation of hearing, reading and putting into practice the Word of our God.



THE HOLY BOOK OF BOOKS



The Holy Bible is the sacred scriptures of the Christian Church. The name "Bible" comes from the Greek *bibles*, "book", which derives from the papyrus reed (Byblos) once used to make paper on which documents were written. By the fifth century AD the collection of writings which had been known as "The books" (biblia) began to be called "the Book", the Bible. The Bible itself is the collection of Old and New Testament writings, which Christians recognize as authoritative in matters of faith and morals.

HISTORY

A firm tradition holds that the first books of the Old Testament date back to Moses, perhaps 1,400 years before Christ. Other books were written in the course of time, with the Old Testament's last book Malachi, completed about 400 BC. The bulk of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with smaller portions during the Persian period (in Daniel and Ezra) written in Aramaic.

Probably around 200 BC, a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek was completed for those many Jews scattered throughout the world who no longer understood Hebrew. This translation is known as the Septuagint and often abbreviated as LXX (i.e.70). The name reflects the tradition that the translation was the work of 70 Jewish elders, working in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphius' (284-247 BC).

The New Testament was written in Greek and was completed in the decades between Christ's Resurrection and about the end of the first century (a period of about 60 years). The present books of the New Testament were officially determined with the 39th Paschal Letter of Athanasius at the Council of Hippo in 367 AD. The western Church approved the same canon in 397 AD at the Council of Cartage.

BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament was divided into three sections (Luke 24:44):

The Law (Torah) composed of the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.



The Prophets include both Old Testament historical and prophetic books. **The Writings** include the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther, plus the books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.

These are the **First Canonical Books** and total to 66 books. The Septuagint included seven additional books and two sequels in the "Writings" section. These are the **Second Canonical Books** (also mistakenly called the Apocrypha) and they include the books of Tobit, Judith, Sequel of Esther, Wisdom (of Solomon), Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach, Baruch, Sequel of Daniel, 1Maccabees and 2Maccabees. These writings emerged during the long silence that fell between the death of the last Old Testament Prophet Malachi (about 400 BC) and the appearance of John the Baptist. The Coptic and all other Orthodox Churches recognize them as Canon. By definition "Canon" is a collection of writings considered authoritative. On the other hand, "Apocrypha" is a Greek word meaning "hidden" or "obscure". In current Christian usage, this term has come to mean "set-aside" or "withdrawn".

BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament has been accepted by the great majority of Christians, for the past 1,600 years as comprising 27 books. These 27 books fall naturally into 4 divisions:

- The four gospels.
- The Acts of the Apostles - History.
- Letters written by the apostles; of these 14 were written by St Paul including the letter to the Hebrews.
- The Revelation - Apocalypse.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

The Old Testament is preparatory in character. What God "spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets" waited for its completion in the Word which "in these last days" He has "spoken unto us by a Son" (Heb1:1). The words of the Old Testament prophets receive their fulfillment in Christ. The Old Testament records the witness of those who saw the day of Christ before it dawned. The New Testament records the witness of those who saw and heard Him in the days of His flesh.



SOME SUPPOSED CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE

1	John 1:18 Exo24:10	<p>"No man has seen God at any time"; "And they saw the God of Israel"; Answer: Actually both statements are correct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They did not see God for He is a Spirit but they saw a physical reflection of God.• When I look in the mirror I see reflection of my face but I have never seen my face as others see it.
2	Num25:9 1Cor10:8	<p>24,000 died in the plague; 23,000 fell in one day; Answer: 23,000 is the number that fell in one day and 24,000 the total number that died.</p>
3	2 Sam24:24 1Cor21:25	<p>David paid 50 shekels of silver for the threshing floor; David paid 600 shekels of gold; Answer: There are two distinct transactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• first David bought the threshing floor for 50 shekels of silver and• later bought the whole farm (estate) for 600 shekels of gold.
4	1Tim6:16 1 Kings8:12	<p>God dwells in light; God dwells in thick darkness; Answer: Both are true for God is omnipresent, dwelling everywhere.</p>
5	Isa40:28 Exo31:17	<p>God never gets tired and never needs rest; God created the world in 6 days and rested and was refreshed on the seventh day. Answer: It does not say that God rested because He was tired; God does not get tired. God rested on the seventh day to appreciate that which He had created.</p>
6	John13:27 Luke22:3,4,7	<p>Satan entered into Judas during the Last Supper; It is obvious that Satan entered into Judas before the Last Supper.</p>



		Answer: Satan entered into Judas twice, the second time more completely.
7	Acts1:9-12 Luke24:50, 51	Jesus ascended from Mount Olivet; Jesus ascended from Bethany; Answer: Both are correct for Bethany is a place on the side of Mount Olivet.
8	Acts9:7 Acts:22:9, 26:14	Paul's companions heard the voice; Paul's companions did not hear the voice; Answer: The companions heard a sound like thunder but did not understand the words.
9	1Kings6	Gives the period between Exodus and the beginning of building the Temple as 480 years; actually according to history it was 573 years. Answer: The difference of 93 years is exactly the period of the Captivity under the Judges and not reckoned in Jewish history. Years spent away from God are lost years, wasted, and not reckoned with the Lord.
10	1Sam6:19	Says God smote 50,070 for looking into the Ark of the Covenant; Josephus the historian says that only 70 people were smitten. Answer: Probably both are correct; God may have killed 70 people outright on the spot and the 50,000 later or as a consequence of this incident.
11	Luke18:35, 43 Mark10:46, 52 Matt20:29-34	Jesus healed one blind man as they came near Jericho; Jesus healed one man as they departed from Jericho; Jesus healed two unnamed men some distance from Jericho. Answer: These are three separate, distinct instances and not 3 reports of one story.

Other apparent contradictions are as easily explained; the Bible is inerrant, or "free from error".



THE AUTHOR OF THE HOLY BIBLE

The Holy Bible is a library of seventy books written by forty authors over a period of nearly two thousand years by different types of people in different parts of the world. Despite all this diversity in time, civilization, education, background and conditions, yet there is great harmony in all the books of the Bible. There are no conflicts and the spirit of the written Word remains the same and unified. Therefore, the Holy Bible must have been written by God and as such it is the Greatest Book.



The author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit; the pages of the Bible are an authoritative revelation in written form of God's nature and purposes. The Bible is a constant fountain for faith, conduct and inspiration from which we drink daily (2Tim3:16). We do not know how exactly the Holy Spirit imprinted His message on the minds of those He chose to write His Word, but we know He did lead them to write what He wanted. **"For prophecy was never made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God", 2Pet1:21.**

The Holy Spirit in His work does not by-pass the human processes, but instead, He works through them. He uses living human minds and guides their thoughts according to His divine purposes (inspiration). We cannot have inspired ideas without inspired words. The Holy Spirit was miraculously present, preserving accuracy in the writings. Holy men of God, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, wrote at His command; thus they were kept from all error as they recorded things known or unknown to them.

SEVEN SYMBOLS USED TO ILLUSTRATE THE WORD OF GOD

A Sword: The Bible is a pointed sword that convicts the hearer. **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," Heb4:12.**

A Hammer: The Bible is powerful and breaks the resistance of the hearer. **"Is not My Word like a fire?" says the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" Jer23:29.**



A Seed: The Bible is a living Word regenerating the hearer. "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever," 1Pet1:23.

A Mirror: The Bible is a faithful Word, revealing the individual to himself. "If anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the Word, this one will be blessed in what he does," Jam1:23-25.

A Fire: The Bible is a burning Word, consuming the dross in the hearer. "But His Word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones," Jer20:9.

A Lamp: The Bible is an illuminating Word guiding the believer day by day. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path," Psa119:105.

Food: The Bible is nourishing food, feeding the soul. "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby," 1Pet2:2. "I feed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able," 1Cor3:2.

"So then faith comes by hearing. And hearing by the Word of God," Rom10:17.

The Word of God convicts, breaks, regenerates, reveals, consumes, illuminates and nourishes the individual.





HISTORY OF SALVATION IN THE BIBLE

Big Idea: To learn the history of man's life with God.

Bible Text: Acts 7:2-53; Gen 3:8-24

Bible verse: John 1:12-13, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God".

Students will

Know: ✕ History of man's life with God in the Old Testament:

- Creation of man,
- Fall of man,
- Promise of new life, and
- Preparation for man to return to God.

✕ History of the restoration of man's life with God in the New Testament:

- God comes to man: The Incarnation,
- God's Son gives His life for man: Redemption,
- The New time with God: the Church, and
- Salvation and eternal life with God: The Kingdom of God and Man.

Feel: ✕ Grateful to the Lord who kept His promise of salvation

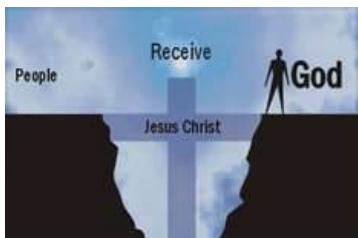
✕ Look forward to be with Christ in His Second Coming.

Do: ✕ Stand firm in the faith through repentance

✕ Tell others about the free gift of salvation.



HISTORY OF SALVATION IN THE BIBLE



In the Bible we know about God's plan of Salvation of mankind and how it is fulfilled.

In the first few chapters of Genesis, we learn about the creation of the world, life and the first Man.

Adam and Eve had communion with God (Gen3:8). They alone, among the living creatures of the world, were equipped for fellowship with their Creator. They freely ate from the "Tree of Life" planted in the Garden of Eden. The fruit of this tree would enable Adam and Eve to "live forever" (Gen3:22).

In the Garden of Eden, there was another tree known as the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil". Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat from its fruit. The two violated the divine command, and through this act of disobedience, sin (Rom5:12-14) and consequently death (Gen2:9) entered the human race. Adam and Eve fell from their state of innocence. All their children thereafter became corrupt and were separated from God (Gen3:23-24).

Tragically, human beings plunged by Adam and Eve's act into a state in which that knowledge of good and evil was to be gained by experience. God grasps the full reality of good and evil, yet never does evil. Finite humanity can only truly grasp the meaning of what is experienced? In a sense, human history, marred as it is by brutality, wars, injustice, and holocausts, is still plumbing in the depths of the knowledge of good and evil that Eve mistakenly gained through what was desirable.

THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

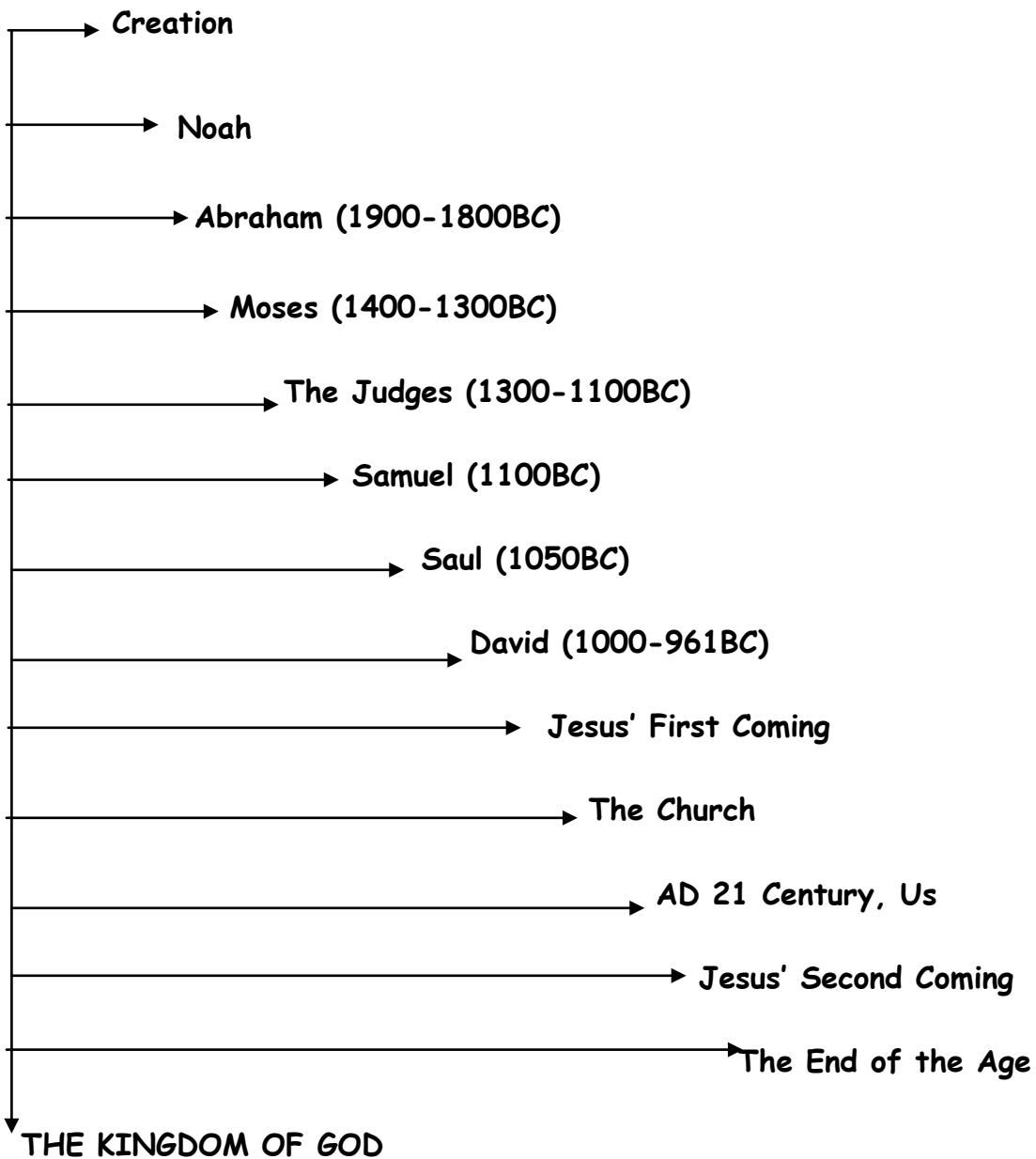
After their fall, Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden and the "Tree of Life" was guarded by armed Cherubim (Gen3:24). However, they left Eden with a promise of new life and hope of salvation (Gen3:15). The Messiah, according to the flesh is Abraham's son and provides salvation to the entire world (Gen12:1-3).

The following timeline shows the past, present and future history of the ages.





TIMELINE OF THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE AGE



In the book of Acts 7:2-53, St Stephen recalled to us how God was preparing for the return of man to God from Moses to the prophets. After establishing Israel, God made a covenant with him. This covenant was ratified through the blood of sacrifices (Exo24:4-8). He gave them the tabernacle (tent) that He may dwell among them (Exo25:8-9). They were given the Law (the Ten Commandments) which, according to St Paul, was our Tutor to Christ (Gal 3:24).



The tabernacle was replaced later by the Temple. God sent them the prophets to urge the people to repentance and assure the coming of the Messiah (John6:45; Luke24:25-27, 44).

FIRST COMING OF CHRIST

Man could not go back to God; in His Love and Mercy, God came to man. God the Father sent His Only-Begotten Son to the world. He took the form of man and became Incarnate (Matt1:20-21). Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sinless, took upon Himself the sins of man and gave His life for him. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son that whoever believes in Him does not perish but have eternal life", John3:16.** Our Lord Jesus Christ builds His Church on the Rock of Faith (Matt16:16). In His Church, we have new time with God. We receive new life in Jesus Christ (John1:12-13; 2Cor5:17; John5:24; Col1:13; John6:47-63; John17:21-22). In the new life, we enter a new personal relationship with God that gives us a fullness of spiritual vitality through the Sacraments.



SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The ultimate fulfilment of Salvation is in Jesus' Second Coming (Heb9:28). Jesus Christ will come again physically in person as promised by the angel who announced at Jesus' ascension, **"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you to heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven," Acts1:11.** Christ will come as a Judge (2Tim4:1). He will give us life forever (John14:3). We will live again in communion with God forever.

The Old Testament implies a second coming of the Messiah, portraying Him as both a suffering saviour and the one who will establish justice on earth (Isa53). Zechariah describes Jesus' reappearance when he spoke of a day when the Messiah will stand on the Mount of Olives, which **"will be split in two from east to west,"** and **"the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him," Zech14:4, 5.**

What the Old Testament implies, the New Testament explicitly teaches. A number of events are associated with Jesus' Second Coming: a terrible tribulation; an angelic gathering of the saved; and a divine judgment on ungodliness through war, famine, earthquakes. An empire will be established,



and then destroyed, followed by the dissolution of the present universe in roaring flames.

While these events are drawn in clear and decisive language, the New Testament gives no sequence of events. And we cannot be sure how long a time span these events cover. Christ said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father," **Matt24:36**. Since we cannot place Christ's return in any given century or decade, Christians are told to "keep watch". Jesus taught, "You also must be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him," **Matt24:42-44**.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life to come. Amen. May we stand firm in our faith and enjoy the forgiveness of our sins through the Blood of Christ by daily repentance. May the Lord give us the strength and grace to tell others about His free Gift of Salvation. May we be all ready to be with Christ when He comes again. "**And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'**". "**"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly'**". Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!" **Rev22:17, 20**.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

After our first parents were expelled from Paradise, the Kingdom of was closed to mankind (**Gen3:24**). Through new life in Jesus Christ, we are brought back by God's mercy into the new creation, His everlasting Kingdom. The Church at worship enters or ascends to the heavenly Kingdom. We come liturgically "**to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all**," **Heb12:22, 23**.

In this life, we experience a foretaste of the Kingdom in the Church. This inspires us to seek its fullness. The Apostle John writes, "**Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure**," **1 John3:2, 3**. In response to the teaching of Jesus Christ and through faith in His saving work, man can be restored to a true relationship with God and so enter the Kingdom of God.



OUR USE OF THE HOLY BIBLE

Big Idea: God gave us the Holy Bible so that we might come to know Him and live according to His will.

Bible Text: Acts22:8-10.

Bible Verse: John17:17, "Thy Word is Truth".

Students will

Know: ✕ The need to use the Holy Bible.
 ✕ How to read and study the Holy Bible.

Feel: Wiser because of the Holy Bible.

Do: Build our lives on the teachings of the Holy Bible.



OUR USE OF THE HOLY BIBLE



The Christian Scriptures are unique among the world's Sacred Writings. We can have confidence that the Bible truly is the Word of God and that the Bible we read is essentially identical with the original writings themselves. Yet it is not enough to have a high view of the Scriptures. The Bible was given to us for a purpose. God wants us to **use** the Bible, so that we might come to know Him and to rightly order our lives.

Perhaps the words of Jesus express these themes best. Christ corrected one group of questioners by saying, "**you are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God**," Matt22:29. To others He said, "**You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me**," John5:39. We do not want to fall into error for lack of knowing the Word of God, yet we do not want to miss its central message - that Jesus Christ is the giver of eternal life.

After we have come to know Jesus, the Scriptures must play an increasingly important role in our lives. Again we hear Jesus' words: "**Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock**", Matt17:24. As the people of God, we must build our lives on the solid foundation of hearing, and putting into practice, the Word of our God.

READING THE BIBLE

When we read the Word of God, the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds and opens our hearts (Jer15:16; Isa40:8).

The reading of the Scriptures itself enables the Holy Spirit to do His work in us, while we read the Word, its message saturates our hearts, whether we are conscious of what is happening or not. The Word with all its mysterious power touches our lives and gives us its power. "**You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you**," John15:3. Also in 1Cor2:9, 10, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God had prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them into us by His Spirit". Again, "**We have received, not the spirit of the world but the Spirit**



who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God," 1Cor2:12.

If the role of the Holy Spirit is to teach, ours is to be diligent students of the Word. The written Word of God is a living word, "**Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your Law**" Psa119:18.

When we preach or teach the Scriptures, we open the door for the Holy Spirit to do His Work. He has said that it will not return to Him "empty" (Isa55:11). It is the Word of God which changes our lives. God has given us His Word "**for teaching, for reproofing, for correction, for training, in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work**", 2Tim3:16, 17.

Are these things happening in our lives? Are we learning God's truth? Jesus said, "**Your word is truth**", John17:17. Are we being convicted of sin in our lives and our need of God's correction and God's righteousness, as we read the Word of God? The Bible says, "**For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account**", Heb4:12, 13. Let Job's statement be ours: "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food", Job23:12.

Much would be said about the daily nourishment and reinforcement of faith we all receive from studying the Word of God and the wisdom it provides us for day-to-day living. It reminds me of Heb11:32, "**And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah, also of David and the Prophets**". Tens of thousands of God's saints and sufferers through the ages have found their dark nights lightened and tortured souls strengthened because they found help from the Spirit in the Word of God.

As we approach the end of the age, persecution is going to be intensified. We are already seeing evidences in many parts of the world. The Scriptures you memorize **now** and the teachings of the Word of God you



learn now will sustain you in that hour, if you are called to suffer physically and mentally for the name of Christ.

HOW DO WE READ THE BIBLE?

✳ In the Spirit (Psa119:18, 32)

We need the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Bible, to explain His Words to our Spirit. We cannot subject faith to logic.

✳ With Reverence

It is the message of the Heavenly Father to us, his children (Mal 1:6)

✳ In Humility

The Lord does not reveal His secrets except to those who are as humble as children (Matt11:52).

✳ To benefit

The Word of God is to everybody but especially for me. It is not merely material for learning, teaching in Sunday School etc..., but for me it is life (John6:63, Rom15:4).

✳ Read it daily

Not just on Sundays but every day of your life read a portion.

✳ Read it systematically

Read right through the Bible, not just selected portions.

✳ Read it resolutely

I will obey that which my Father teaches me from His Book.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

There are many ways to study the Bible. Here is one way:

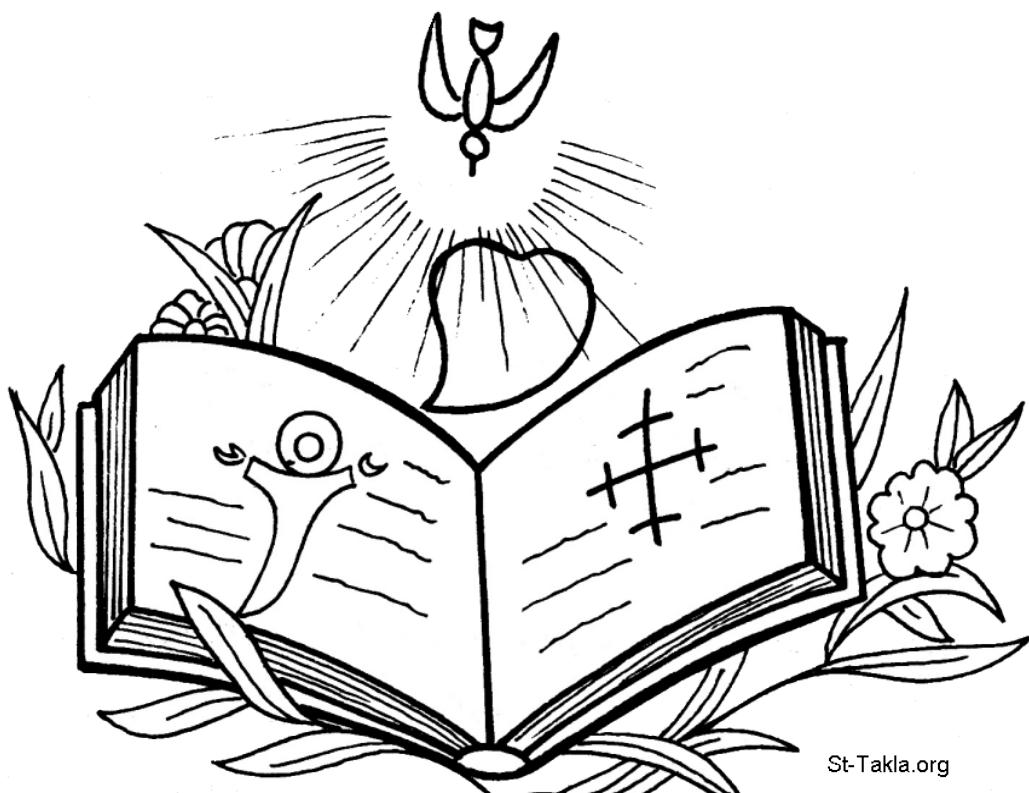
1. Fix a daily appointment with God. Write it into your diary. Any time becomes no time.
2. Pray for understanding (Psa119:18) and then read through your chosen passage for the day.
3. After reading the passage, ask yourself what you learnt in that passage about God or Christ. Take notes on it, memorize parts of it.
4. The goal of your Bible reading can be reached by asking the same two questions that St Paul asked on the Damascus Road. "Who are you Lord?" and "what will you have me to do?" (Acts22:8-10).
5. In that holy time before the Book, have double goals: to know God and to obey Him. Don't hurry. Don't quit too soon "who are you Lord?"
6. Also observe what you see is God's will for you "what will you have me to do?"
7. Then pray it into your day's plans.



CONCLUSION

Make the Bible your constant guide and companion in life. The Bible is the Word of God; it is worthy of being believed. Breathe a prayer for the Holy Spirit to help you understand the sacred pages.

Let us say with Jeremiah "Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart," Jer15:16.



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“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near,”
Isa55:6.

BOOK2

ZOOM INTO THE HEAVENY PLACES

In this second volume, the author outlines distinctive aspects of Coptic Orthodox Christian faith and Tradition that, once mastered, should equip the budding servant with the basic knowledge required for service. It will be valuable both as a textbook for people enrolled in courses preparing them for Christian service as well as a resource book for veteran servants.

Fr Ant (Fr Antonios Kaldas)