



COPTIC ORTHODOX YOUTH ASSOCIATION (COYA)
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His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

117th Pope, Patriarch and Archbishop of Alexandria and the
See of St Mark the Apostle.



His Grace Bishop Daniel

Bishop of the Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions.

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The Holy Virgin St. Mary

OUR MOTHER THE SAINT VIRGIN

How full of praise are the surnames by which the Church calls her, and which are inspired from the Spirit of the Holy Bible...

She is the mother of God, the mother of all of us, the lady of all of us, the pride of our kind, the queen at the right side of the King, the Virgin with perpetual virginity, the pure, the filled with grace, the saint Mary, the powerful and helpful compassionate mother, the mother of the Light, the mother of mercy and salvation and the true vine.

This is one whom the Church elevates over the rank of archangels, so that we say about her in her hymns and songs:

O Mary, you have been raised above the Cherubim, and have become higher than the seraphim, O Mary. Long generations waited for the birth of this Virgin, so that the fullness of the time would become complete by her (Gal.4:4)...

She has removed the shame of Eve, and saved the reputation of women after sin.

She is the Virgin who makes miracles in numerous places, where we celebrate feasts for her. The stories of her miracle are innumerable...

There is not a human being whom Christians have loved so much as our Lady the Virgin Mary.

In the rites, how many are the compliments, the songs, the veneration, the psalms, the doxologies, (glorifying blessings), which are dedicated to her, especially in the month of Kiahk!

THE GREATNESS OF THE VIRGIN

The greatness of the virgin has been decreed in the sacred Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, which was assembled in 431 AD. Two hundred bishops from the world were present. They formulated the prelude to the Creed of Christian Faith in which it is cited:

"We honour you, O mother of the true Light, and glorify you, O Holy Virgin Mother of God, for you gave birth to the Saviour of the World, He came and saved our souls".

The following are the foundations upon which the Ecumenical Council formulated this prelude:

- ❖ *"For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).*
- ❖ *"At Your right hand stands the queen" (Ps.45:9).*
- ❖ *"Rejoice highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28).*
- ❖ *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).*
- ❖ *"But why is it granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).*

- ❖ *And it happened, when Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in the womb, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41).*
 - ❖ *For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 1:44).*
 - ❖ *“Blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:41-45)*
 - ❖ *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).*
 - ❖ *“Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all” (Prov. 31:29).*
- It is probably This Saint virgin, was in the thought and in the providence of God, since the beginning.*

THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY IN OUR CHURCH’S FAITH

1. She is, in the belief of the Church, the mother of God.
2. The Church believes that the Holy Spirit has sanctified the depository of the Virgin during the pregnancy with Christ.
That was according to what the angel said to her:
“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35)
The sanctifying by the Holy Spirit of her depository, makes the One born of her, be conceived, like all people, and so The Virgin said in her hymn: “my spirit has rejoiced in God my saviour” (Luke 1:47)
That is why the Church does not agree that The Virgin was conceived without the impurity of the original sin, as our brethren the Catholics believe.
3. The Church believes in the intercession of the Virgin.
She places her intercession before the intercession of angels and archangels, because she is the mother of God, and she is Queen who is at the right hand of the King. An evidence of her strong intercession is the wedding at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-10).
4. The Church believes in the perpetuity of the virginity of the Virgin.
The only exception to this rule, are our brethren the Protestants, who claim that The Virgin gave birth to sons after Christ.
5. The Church believes in the Ascent of the body of The Virgin to heaven, and celebrates that feast on the 16th of Mesra.

HER SURNAMES AND SYMBOLS

Surnames as regards her greatness and her relation with God:

1. The Queen who is by the right side of the King.
“At your hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir” (PS. 45:9). That is why, in her icon, she is portrayed at the right hand of the Christ our Lord. And we say about her in the divine mass “the lady and Queen of us all”...
2. Our Mother the Holy Virgin.

When Christ our Lord was on the Cross, He said about that to his disciple the beloved Saint John: "Behold your mother" (John 19:27)

3. The Virgin is also compared to the ladder of Jacob

The ladder which "was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven" (Gen.28:12).

That is the symbol of The Virgin who, by her giving birth to Christ, made the inhabitants of the earth reach to heaven.

4. The Bride.

Because she is the true bride of the Lord of glory, The word of the Lord in the Psalm was realised in her:

"Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him" (Ps 45:10-11).

That is why she was called the friend of Solomon, who is the virgin of the Song of Songs.

It was said of her in the same Psalm: "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the king in robes of many colours" (Ps).

B. Her surnames and symbols as regards her motherhood to Christ our Lord:

5. Theotokos

That is: "the mother of God". This surname has been called upon her by the sacred ecumenical council of Ephesus in 431 ABD. Saint Kirillos the Great insisted on that surname in his response to Nestorius...

Saint Elizabeth addressed her with that surname "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43).

6. The golden censer

We call her "Te Shury" that is the censer in Coptic and sometimes "the censer of Aaron"... As for the fire, which it contains inside her, coal in it symbolises the human nature of Christ, and fire symbolises His divine nature, as it has been said in the Holy Bible: "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

The censer symbolises the womb of The Virgin where divinity was united with humanity. The censer being of gold, that points to the greatness and the purity of The Virgin. Regarding the purity and the sanctity of the virgin, we call The Virgin in her hymns "The golden censer" (Te shury ennub, in Coptic).

7. The second heaven

Because as heaven is the abode of God, so The Virgin Mary was an abode of God during the sacred pregnancy.

8. The city of God

The prophecy in the Psalm is realised in her: "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" (Ps. 87:3). OR what was said of her "the city of the great King", or certain prophecies which were said about Jerusalem, are realised in her... or Zion as it was also said in the psalm. And of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her" (Ps. 87:5).

9. By this quality of motherhood, she has other surnames of which we mention .

The mother of true light, considering that it has been said of the Christ our Lord, that He is "the true Light which gives to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9).

Likewise she was surnamed "the golden lamp" because she bears the Light. And also: "the mother of the Holy One", considering that the angel, when he announced

her with the birth of Christ, said to her. “also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

“The mother of the Saviour”, because the Christ our Lord is the Saviour of the world: “and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

10. The Virgin is compared to the gate in the East.

That which the prophet Ezekiel saw, and of which the Lord said: “This shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut” (Ez. 44:1-2). The prophet saw the glory of the Lord at this gate which is in the East, and the house was filled with it (Ez. 43:2,4,5).

That symbolises the virginity of the Virgin from the countries of the East; and how this virginity remained sealed.

Because she was the gate from the East, she was qualified as:

11. The gate of life, the gate of deliverance.

It was said about our lady the Virgin in the book of Ezekiel: “As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way” (Ez. 44:3).

Since the Lord is the life, then she is the gate of Life. The Lord said “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). That is why the Virgin is the gate of Life, that gate out of which the Lord came, granting life to all those who believe Him...

It is not astonishing that we surname the Virgin “the gate”, because the Church also was surnamed “the gate”. Our father Jacob said about Bethel: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this gate of heaven!” (Gen. 28:17).

HER BLESSINGS

O how many are the blessings that were given to the Virgin!

They were mentioned in the melodies of the church, in the hymns, in the “theotokies” (praise of the mother of God), the songs, the doxologies (praise of benediction), in each day of her feasts days, in the book of praises for the month of kiahk, in the hymns of the Church, and in the book of praises (Psalmody).

The church mentions her before the archangels when citing the names of the assembly of the saints; and so also in all her intercessional prayers. The church, in her blessing of the Virgin, realises the prophecy, which she said in her hymn:

“For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48).

The church offers incense to her, and presents greetings to her. Many are the hymns, which begin with the expression “Hail to Mary”.

We mention her in the book of prayers of the hours, and in the mass, and in all the books of the church:

In the sanaxarium, in the “Katamarus”, in the Psalmody”, and in all the books of hymns and responses... We mention her in the book of the prayers of the hours, in the third paragraph of every prayer in the prayers of the day, asking for her intercession.

We mention her in the creed, and we say in its prelude: “We exalt you, O mother of the True Light and we glorify you, O saint Virgin, mother of God...”

We mention her in the prayer of the benediction, in its beginning and in its end.

We begin the benediction saying: “through the prayers and supplications and implorations which the mother of God, the saint pure Virgin raises every time for our sake”. And after mentioning the names of the angels, the apostles, the prophets, the martyrs, and all the saints, we terminate the benediction saying: “and the blessing of our Lady the Virgin firstly and lastly”...

VIRTUES OF ST. MARY:

The virtues of St. Mary are countless, no one can ever talk about them in full, yet, and we will mention some of these virtues, which are:

❖ **HUMBLENESS:**

When the angel announces to her that she will become of the Mother of the Lord, she said, “Behold, the maidservant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38)

❖ **TOLERANCE:**

St. Mary tolerated all the harsh words said to her by people when getting pregnant through the Holy Spirit. As a mother, she witnessed all the pains and sufferings of her beloved Son Lord Jesus, as Simon the elder prophesied about her and said, “Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that the thought of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:25-35)

❖ **SILENCE AND CONTEMPLATION:**

Very few words are mentioned in the Bible which were said by St. Mary, but she rather “kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51)

❖ **OBEDIENCE**

She lived in complete obedience and submission to the good will of the Lord. This is clear in many occasions such as the Annunciation of the angel about the birth of Lord Jesus and her flight to Egypt with Lord Jesus and Joseph the righteous.

O Theotokos, sweet Mother of God.
With sorrow and much love, You have given us
Your son Jesus, while hanging on the Cross.
We, weak creatures, anchor ourselves to You,
to be worthy sons of this great LOVE and SORROW.
Help us to be humble and simple,
Help us to love all men,
Help us to live in grace,
Always being ready to welcome
Jesus into our hearts.
O Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ,
We by ourselves will never be able
To understand for an instant,
all the infinite love of your Son Jesus,
in giving Himself to us.
AMEN

St. Mary: The Mother of God

“We magnify you, O mother of the True Light and glorify you O Theotokos, the Holy Virgin, for you have born for us the Saviour of the world, Who came and saved us.”

No other personality from the New or Old Testament has been venerated like St. Mary. She has been raised in status above the Cherubim and the Seraphim, for has said through the Holy Spirits, “... *behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.*” (Lk 1:48-49)

Our church, inspired by the Holy Spirit venerates St. Mary more than any other personalities in the Bible, because God took flesh from her. Therefore, she became like a second heaven or a dwelling place for God.

The titles of the Holy Virgin Saint Mary Our Lady, the Mother of God

St. Mary has many titles that are used by the Coptic Orthodox Church such as:

1. The ‘Theotokos’

This is a Greek word composed of two syllables: ‘Theo’ meaning ‘God’, and ‘tokos’ meaning ‘bearer’; that is, ‘she who bore God in her womb’. This theological term has its origins in the Holy Bible, in the following verses:

- Archangel Gabriel announced to St. Mary saying, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore,*

also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Lk 1:35)

- Elizabeth said to St. Mary, *“But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Lk 1:43).*
- Isaiah prophesied concerning St. Mary and said *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Is 7:14 and Mt 1:23).*

2. The ‘Second Heaven’

According to Acts 7:49, *“Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool”,* God dwells in heaven, and therefore we call St. Mary the ‘second heaven’ because God descended and dwelt within her.

3. The ‘Golden lampstand’ and the ‘Mother of True Light’

St. Mary carried our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the True Light of the world (Jn 8:12), and for this reason, we give her this title. In the introduction to the Creed, we also say *‘We exalt you the Mother of true Light...’*

4. The ‘Golden Censor’

St. Mary carried our Lord Jesus Christ, the ‘Sweet Aroma’. *On another point, the union, within the censor, of charcoal and fire, symbolizes the unity between the Divinity and Humanity of our Lord, and thus we call her The ‘golden censor’ because she carried the incarnate God in her womb.*

5. The ‘Burning Bush’

Moses saw a burning bush that was not consumed, “And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed” (Ex 3:2).

The fire is a symbol of God, “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24), and the burning bush, which was not consumed by fire, is a symbol of St. Mary, who carried the fire of the Divinity in her womb and was not consumed by it.

6. ‘Aaron’s Rod’

This rod sprouted, put forth buds, produced blossoms, and yielded ripe almonds without being planted nor watered (Num 17:1-11), and for this reason, it is a symbol of St. Mary, who being virgin, gave birth to God the Logo.

7. The ‘Ever Virgin’

In the fraction of advent , the priest says “She being virgin, gave birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ezekiel prophesied regarding her virginity and said ***‘Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me; this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it, therefore it shall be shut.’*** (Ez. 44:1-2). This closed gate is a symbol of St. Mary’s perpetual virginity.

8. **‘Jacob’s ladder’**

“Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” (Gn. 28:12). This ladder is a symbol of St. Mary because our Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to earth by taking flesh through her, and thus she was the junction between heaven and earth.

9. **The ‘Manna Pot’**

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the ‘True Manna’ Who descended from heaven and gave life to the world- “This is the bread, which came down from heaven- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.” (Jn. 6:58). Thus St. Mary is the ‘golden pot’ who carried the ‘True Manna’ in her womb (Ex. 16:32-33).

10. **The ‘Ark of the Covenant’**

“...and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it with the Cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.’ (Heb. 9:3-5)

This ark was overlaid on all sides with gold, and this is a symbol of St. Mary’s purity that is like the pure gold. It contained the manna, which is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ‘Living Bread’, and the tablets of the covenant, which are a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ the word (Jn. 1:1). It also had placed above it the Cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat, which is why in the icon of St. Mary we see angels overshadowing her.

For two thousand years the church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary as the prototype of all Christians- model of what we are to become through Christ. St. Mary was truly pure and unconditionally obedient to God. The tradition of the church holds that St. Mary remained a virgin all her life. While life long celibacy is not a requirement for all Christians to follow, St. Mary’s spiritual (her whole hearted devotion to God) is certain to be emulated.

St Mary is also our model in that she was the first person to receive our Lord Jesus Christ. Because she bore Christ in her womb physically, all Christians now have the privilege of bearing God within them spiritually. The honor we give to St. Mary also signifies our view of who Jesus is. From early times the church has called her Mother of God (Theotokos), a title which her Son is both full man and full God. As His mother, she was the source of His human nature; even though the One she bore in her womb was the eternal God. Therefore, because of her character and her role in God's plan of salvation, we appropriately honor St. Mary of the first among the Saints. Archangel Gabriel initiated his honor to her when he addressed her with the good news of the Annunciation, as did Elizabeth (Lk 1:28- 42). St. Mary herself, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, predicted the honor that would be given to her throughout history (Lk 1:48).

In obedience to God's new intention, our church honors St. Mary through icons, hymns, and special feast days. We entreat her as the special human being who is the most intimate to Christ on earth to intercede with her Son on our behalf. We ask her, as the first believer and the mother of the church for guidance and protection. We venerate her, but do not worship her for worship belongs to God alone. We remember her in all our prayers, which gives her a unique place in our church and hearts. We still remember her miracles and her awesome apparel in our churches.

We ask you St. Mary, oh faithful advocate, to remember us before our Lord, to ask His forgiveness of our many sins.

Amen

St. Mary – Queen of Heaven and Earth

1. St. Mary is the heavenly queen for the following reasons:

1.1. Because St. Mary is on the right hand of the heavenly King and the head of the earthly King our God Jesus Christ.

1.1.1. At your right stands the queen in gold (Psalm 45:9).

1.1.2. From Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first born from the dead and the ruler over the Kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5).

1.2. Because St. Mary is above all the heavenly and earthly creatures.

1.2.1. “You are greatly exalted more than the Cherubim and honorable more than the Seraphim.” (Sunday’s epsali).

1.2.2. She is higher than the Cherubim and Seraphim.

1.2.3. “All the exalted names of the incorporeal did not reach the exaltness of your blessedness.” (Sunday’s epsali).

1.2.4. “You are exceedingly exalted above the patriarchs and prophets.” (Sunday’s Theotokis no. 1). See how in our prayers and our praises we honour and exalt the holy theotokos the Mother of God.!!!

1.3. Because St. Mary is clothed with heavenly glories.

1.3.1. You are clothed with the glory of divinity, inside and out.

1.3.2. The ranks of heaven and hosts of the righteous glorify your blessedness.

1.3.3. And you also, O Mary the virgin, clothed with the glory of the Lord of hosts.

1.3.4. Your glory O Mary is higher than heaven and you are more honoured than those on earth and its dwellings (Sunday theotokia).

1.4. Because St. Mary wore the dress of the heavenlies or dressed in heavenly garments.

1.4.1. You who have been clothed with the dress of the heavenlies that you covered Adam with the dress of grace (Sunday theotokia).

1.5. Because the heavenly creatures serve St. Mary.

1.5.1. And you also, O Mary, thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads (ten thousands) over shadow you (Sunday theotokia).

- 1.5.2. The Seraphim with six wings overshadow you with joy (Sunday theotokia).

1.6. Because St. Mary watches over her people.

- 1.6.1. Be our pleader in the highest, where you are Our Lady, Mother of God, the ever-virgin Saint Mary (Conclusion of the Doxologies prayed every vespers and matins).

1.7. Because St. Mary intercessions are never rejected.

- 1.7.1. She said to the servants at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, "They have no wine." Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." And they filled them upto the brim...(John 2:3-10)

Usually you offer the good wine first and when the guest have drunk well, you offer the low quality wine.

1.8. Because St. Mary's intercessions are never rejected like the intercessions of the mothers of the earthly kings.

- 1.8.1. You are worthy more than all the Saints to pray for us, O full of grace (Sunday Theotokia).
- 1.8.2. And you have found more favour than the Cherubim and the Seraphim (Sunday Theotokia).
- 1.8.3. 1 Kings 2:19-25. Here, the intercessions of the king's mother from the King her Son.

2. The earthly kings seek to offer a better life to their nations/people.

- 2.1. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of righteousness (Malachi)
- 2.2. He healed us from our sins and transgressions and eternal death
- 2.3. So therefore we were granted eternal life which is a better life
- 2.4. If we walk in the path of righteousness
- 2.5. St. Mary is the Mother of heavenlies and earthlies for she bore to us the Son of righteousness who as our Lord and King desires and seeks holiness. His children walk in the path of righteousness and purity and holiness to attain heaven.
"You are more luminous than the sun and brighter than the Cherubim."
- 2.6. For He is the Son of righteousness and you gave birth to Him and cured us of our sins (Sunday theotokia).

St. Mary Mother of God

The entire life and character of St. Mary is one of inner glories and riches, *“for the Lord does not see as man sees for man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.”* (1 Samuel 16:7). For this reason St. Paul says, *“We do not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal”.* (2 Corinthians 4:18).



i. **St. Mary = Possessed Inner Glory**

“You are the ark, overlaid with gold on all sides, which is made of undecaying wood, for she was clothed with the glory of the divinity from within and without (Sunday Theotokia)”. “The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold”. (Psalm 45:13). On the exterior, St. Mary had nothing for which others could envy her; she was not famous, nor rich, she kept content and silent in her inner glory. She gloried in her Lord and Saviour, *“My soul rejoices in God my Saviour.”* (Luke 1:46-47).

ii. **St. Mary = Possessed Inner Riches**

St. Mary was rich in grace; Archangel Gabriel greets her: *“Rejoice highly favoured one...do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. (Luke 1:28-30). “Hail to you full of grace, hail to you who has found grace, hail to you who has given birth to Christ, the Lord is with you”.* (Saturday Theotokia). *“Many daughters have done well but you excel them all.”* (Proverbs 31:29). St. Mary possessed the inner richness of a submissive and obedient heart, deep prayer and praises, contemplation and meditations, gentle spirit and powerful faith in Christ. Therefore Elizabeth exalts St. Mary saying, *“Blessed are you among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb and blessed is she who believed that there shall be a fulfillment of these things”.* (Luke 1:42-44). The humble St. Mary *“kept all these things in her heart and pondered them in her heart”* (Luke 2:19).

iii. **St. Mary = Possessed Inner Beauty**

“The Father looked from above and could not find any one like you. He

came and was incarnated from you". (Wednesday Theotokia). In the Morning Prayer we beseech St. Mary, the Father chose you, the Holy Spirit over shadowed you and the Son, in humility, was born from you asking to redeem the world He created. St. Mary's inner beauty radiated great joy to all humanity as we chant saying, "Hail to St. Mary the joy of Generations". St. Mary's inner beauty is reflected in her concern for others. Over the mountains she traveled with haste to assist her frail cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:39). At the wedding of Cana of Galilee she tells her Son and Lord they have no wine (John 2:3). This inner beauty made St. Mary a second heaven where God the Logos dwelt. St. Peter stresses inner beauty by saying, "Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God." (1 Peter 3:3-4).

iv. **St. Mary = Possessed Inner Purity**

St. Mary was most pure in mind, heart and thoughts. Thus, St. Mary became a living sanctuary for the Lord of Hosts to dwell. David the Prophet asks, "*How can a young man cleanse his way, by taking heed to your word. (Psalm 119:9).* Christ clarified this saying, "*You have been made clean already by the words I have spoken to you, abide in Me and I in you". (John 15:3).* Indeed, "*blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5:8). St. Paul adds, "*To the pure all things are pure but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure but even their minds and conscience are defiled.*" (Titus 1:15). "*You have become the stock of purity and the vessel that carries the true Manna; O pure Mother of God, O honoured Virgin*" (Theotokia of Tuesday).

v. **St. Mary = Possessed Inner Honour**

"You are higher than the Cherubim and found more honourable than the Seraphim (Sunday Theotokia). This honour was because St. Mary was clothed with authentic humility (1 Peter 5:5), "for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Indeed the more we, "humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up" (James 4:10). St. Mary always perceived herself as the handmaid of the Lord. "Blessed and perfect are you, O who has found all grace, before the King of glory, our True Lord. You deserved all honour, more than any one on Earth, for the Word of the Father, came and was incarnate of you." (Wednesday Theotokia).

In St. Mary we have a faithful intercessor whose inner life is a model to

meditate upon. May this Holy Fast be spiritually rich in which our inner person is filled with grace upon grace.

Why Christ was Incarnated?

Some 800 years before the glorious incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Isaiah the prophet urged God saying, “Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!” (Isaiah 64:1). Jesus Christ, the Word of God, accepted this request, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His Glory.” (John 1:14). In Christ we have seen God in His infinite love, mercy, kindness, wisdom, power, holiness.

1. Christ Came to Grant Me Salvation:

”For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10). “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” (John 3:17).

St. Paul captures this by stating that, “God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4).

2. Christ Came to Grant Me Life:

”I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10). Christ declared, “I am the Resurrection and life.” (John 11:25). “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6).

3. Christ Came Seeking My Repentance:

”For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Matthew 9:13). “For the Son of Man came to seek that which is lost.” (Luke 19:10).

4. Christ Came to Grant Light:

”I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” (John 12:46). “In Him was life and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4).

5. Christ Came to Serve Me:

”Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28).

6. Christ Came to be Crucified for Me:

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." (John 12:27,33).

7. Christ Came to Fulfill the Law for Me:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17).

8. Christ Came to Grant Me Witness to the Truth:

"Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'" (John 18:37).

Let us diligently prepare our hearts and minds to receive the Incarnated Lord by focusing on how great is the mystery of Godliness, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." (1 Timothy 3:16).

The Feast of the Epiphany - 2007

On Friday, 19th January 2007 our Church will celebrate the Glorious Feast of the Epiphany, commemorating the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. This Feast is also known as 'Feast of Light', for in Baptism we obtain spiritual illumination. The Lord's pure light casts out Satan's darkness.

In his homily on this great Feast in the year 381, St. Gregory Nazianzen (or the Theologian) mentioned 5 types of Baptism:

a. **The Baptism of Moses**

St. Gregory first says, "Moses baptized but it was in water, and before that in the cloud and in the sea..." When Moses and the children of Israel escaped their slavery in Egypt, they passed through the Red Sea (Exodus 14, 15). The Church has always been this symbol of baptism. St. Paul wrote, *"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."* (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). As Israel escaped the bondage of Pharaoh by crossing the sea, we also escape the slavery of Satan and death and corruption by entering the waters of baptism. Also, as Israel started its wilderness journey toward the Promised Land, baptism marks the start of a new life, a new spiritual journey towards heaven.

b. **The Baptism of Saint John the Baptist**

St. Gregory continues, "John also baptized; but this was not only in water, but also 'unto repentance'. St. John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord saying, *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* (Matthew 3:11).

c. **The Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ**

St. Gregory says, "Jesus also baptized but in the Spirit. This is the perfect baptism." While St. John baptized with water unto repentance, the 'perfect baptism' was by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and disciples as tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4). He has since guided the Church and is received by all her members after baptism through the Mystery of Chrismation. As our Lord came out of the baptismal waters with the Holy Spirit alighting upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16), we too, after baptism, are anointed with the oil of Holy Chrism (Myroun) and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

d. **The Baptism of Martyrdom**

St. Gregory says, "I know also a fourth Baptism – that by Martyrdom and blood, which also Christ Himself underwent; - and this one is far more august than all the others, inasmuch as it cannot be defiled by

after-stains.” If baptism is sharing in the death of Christ, then martyrdom seems the ultimate form of baptism. St. Gregory calls this far more ‘august’, more majestic and admirable. Unlike the person who struggles against sin after baptism, the martyr receives the heavenly crown and cannot commit any sins thereafter.

e. **The Baptism of Tears**

Finally, St. Gregory says, “Yes, and I know of a fifth also, which is that of tears, and is much more laborious, received by him who washes his bed every night and his couch with tears...” As much as we might wish for a clean slate and a new baptism every time we sin, the Church only administers this sacrament once for each of her members. However, we can regularly experience baptism through the work of tears and repentance. When our Lord Jesus Christ washed the feet of His disciples, He said to them, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean.” (John 13:10). As we continue walking in this life, we do not need to rewash the entire body, but only the members that become filthy as a consequence of this difficult trek; namely, washing the ‘feet’, through the work of repentance.

In baptism, we put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), but we tarnish our spiritual garment whenever we sin. The baptism of tears and repentance makes it beautiful again. We can only find inner comfort and spiritual rest in constantly fleeing to Christ in repentance and confession. To ask for His mercy and to have a part with Him once again (John 13:8) is to find perfect peace and joy.

The Church teaches us to fast the Baramoun, ie. Preparation for the fast on Wednesday, 17th January and Thursday, 18th January and then celebrate the Eve of the Feast of the Epiphany on Thursday night (18th January).

The Liturgy of the Feast starts with the Laqan Service in which we pray and read passages from Scripture thereby sanctifying the waters. The Trisagion changes from Holy God... who was born...who was crucified... who arose **to** who was baptized in the Jordan, have mercy upon us.

We pray thus:

- Sanctify this water and grant it the blessings of the Jordan. Amen.
- Water for purity. Amen.
- Water filled with power of the Angels. Amen.
- Water for purity of Body, Soul and Spirit. Amen.
- Water for healing. Amen.
- Water for beneficial growth. Amen.
- Water a well of blessings. Amen.

The Fathers anoint the forehead with this water and many take home bottles of water for blessings. Thereafter we commence the Liturgy of the Oblation and conclude by receiving Holy Communion.

Let us fast with a contrite heart and attend the Holy Liturgy and Laqan and receive abundant grace upon grace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

May we hear God's gentle voice saying to us, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased (not displeased).

Behold, a greater than Jonah is here
(Matthew 12:41)

Jonah	Christ
1. Jonah received a message from God to Nineveh warning it and calling on its people to repent otherwise it would be destroyed and ruined.	1. Christ received a message from the Heavenly Father for the salvation of the world and for seeking and reconciling it.
2. Jonah did not accept the mission. He rejected it and fled from it.	2. Christ accepted the Father's message and gladly accomplished it. He said, " My food is to do the will of Him who sent me" and, " I have finished the work you gave Me to do" Jn17
3. Jonah disobeyed God and fled from duty and responsibility. He became stubborn and ignorantly hid in a ship sailing in the opposite direction.	3. But Christ obeyed fully, all the way to death, His death on the cross.
4. Jonah refused to serve Nineveh because of his arrogance and stubbornness and because he feared the cruelty of the people of Nineveh who were a continuous danger to Israel so he wanted them to perish. He was also scared that what he said would not come true if they repented and God forgave them.	4. Christ preached to the Jews and to the gentiles after the Jews had rejected Him. He said, " This is how God loved the world" and He gave Himself up for everyone, friends and enemies.
5. Jonah got on the ship and slept a sound sleep. This is the sleep of the conscience and avoiding thinking about responsibility, the problem and the consequences. He was about to drown but for his repentance inside the belly of the fish where God's mercy reached him.	5. Christ got on a ship and slept because He was tired and exhausted from the numerous services and from staying awake praying for a long time at night.
6. Passengers on the ship awoke Jonah in anger and fury. They admonished him saying, "Why are you asleep? Get up and call upon your God".	6. The disciples woke Jesus up and said, " Teacher, don't you care that we are about to perish?"
7. A mighty tempest came upon the ship where Jonah was. It was so violent that the ship was likely to break up and sink. The storm never stopped until Jonah was cast into the sea because he was guilty, rebellious against nature's God.	7. A mighty tempest came upon the ship where Jesus was. The disciples screamed with fear but He commanded the sea and the wind and there was a great calm because He is holy and without sin.
8. In his stubbornness, Jonah preferred to be cast into the sea (and commit suicide), he preferred this to saving the people of Nineveh.	8. In His love, Christ sacrificed His life for the salvation of every soul in the world.
9. Jonah's mission would not have cost him anything	9. The mission of Christ cost Him His life and all sorts of indignation and torture.

10. Jonah continued to descend lower and lower because of his disobedience. He went down to Joppa then he went down to a ship then he went down to the depth of the sea then he went down into the belly of the whale. He said in his prayers that he went down to the bottom of the abyss and that he was about to perish but for his confession of his error and his repentance.	10. But Christ, of His own free will, came down from high Heaven until He reached "the depth of the earth". He descended into Hades through the cross. He accepted this for our salvation and to give freedom to those in captivity, therefore," God (the Father) raised Him and gave Him the name that is greater than any other name. So, in honour of the name of Christ, all beings in Heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees". (Phil2: 5-10)
11. Jonah stayed in the belly of the whale for three days and came out alive by means of a miracle.	11. The miracle of Jonah is a symbol of the death of Christ and His resurrection after three days with His own authority, which is the greatest miracle of them all. (John 2: 18-19)
12. The message of Jonah was one of warning, judgement and threat of devastation and destruction of Nineveh after forty days. This message was not accompanied with any wonders or miracles.	12. But the message of Christ was a message of love, grace, forgiveness, healing and satisfaction. It was accompanied with daily wonders and miracles of mercy.
13. The message of Jonah succeeded 100%. All the people of Nineveh repented under the leadership of their king. They fasted and prayed asking for mercy and forgiveness.	13. Strangely, the message of Christ who is greater than Jonah was met with rejection and ingratitude from the leadership of the evil head priests of the Jews.
14. It was strange for Jonah to become angry, grieved and enraged to death because of the success of his message and the salvation of more than one hundred twenty thousand people.	14. But Christ rejoices and the angels rejoice with Him whenever a sinner repents.
15. Jonah, who was not happy with the salvation of the people of Nineveh, was happy with a plant that gave him shade for one day.	15. Christ, who appeared on the transfiguration mountain in great glory and His face was shining as the sun, refused to have shades made for Him and preferred to suffer death for everybody because He took pity on His creation.

For these reasons, Lord Jesus Christ considered the people of Nineveh better than the people of His generation because they repented by means of Jonah's preaching and behold, a greater than Jonah is here (Matthew 12:41).

Jonah's Fast

Every year our Orthodox Church observes Jonah's Fast a fortnight prior to the commencement of the Great Fast (Lent) resurrecting and directing our hearts to offer true repentance. This year the focus of our contemplation is the following verse:

What do you mean sleeper" (Jonah 1:6).

In other words, "How can you sleep?" It is directed from the chief of the crew to Jonah, the fleeing prophet. He was amazed how can anyone sleep while such a terrible storm raged? How can he sleep when his life is threatened with death? How can he sleep among the screams of terror and the loud prayers of the mariners to their gods? No doubt it was a strange sleep described in the Bible as a deep sleep (1:5)! In fact, it was the sleep of the conscience and disobedience of the command of the Lord to Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn it from destruction. It was the sleep that resulted from stubbornness and indifference while hundreds of thousands were going to perish unless he goes on this mission. Thus we pray daily with David saying, "Enlighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death." (Psalm 13:3).

The shameful and dangerous thing is the sleep of God's children in the time that needs more vigilance, prayer, fasting, preaching and teaching. Equally or more shameful is when the blame comes from the pagans to God's children, "Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." (1:7). Thereafter, in the belly of the fish, a repentant Jonah prayed saying, "I cried to the Lord because of my affliction and He answered me....When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord and my prayer went up to you into Your holy temple." (Jonah 2:2,7).

"What do you mean sleeper?" – It is a question which not only renounces, the physical sleep of the servant of God sometimes, but also the spiritual sleep which threatens the lives of people (Jonah, the mariners and the dwellers of Nineveh). The servant of Christ who does not feel the need of those whom they serve, or those who are offended by them, or leave Christ or the Church because of them, is certainly in deep sleep. The Lord, in the garden of Gethsemane, rebuked His disciples saying, "Why do you sleep?" (Luke 22:46). The Lord continued, "Rise and pray lest you fall into temptation." (Luke 22:46).

The servant who reaches this degree of sleeping is in need of a storm or an earthquake or some kind of fish to swallow him in order to wake him up. The person, who uses his mind, liberty and authority in an erroneous way and trusts much in his own wisdom (Romans 12:16) to the point of colliding with the great will of God, is in deep sleep! Therefore, the Bible warns us saying: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12), also, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5).

Therefore, let us apply diligently St. Paul's sharp warning in the three days of Jonah's Fast: "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, let us put on the armour of light." (Romans 13:11-12).

In the 12th hour of the Agpyea Prayer, we say: “Rise up from your laziness and implore the Saviour in repentance saying, ‘Lord have mercy upon me and save me.’” In the same hour we request the assistance of St. Mary saying: “Raise my frail soul to stay awake and pray because it has been lying long in deep sleep.”

May Christ our gracious and merciful Lord accept our prayers, liturgies, fastings and metanias offered to Him and grant us three spiritually uplifting and fruitful days, remembering the words of Christ: “Behold I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments.” (Revelation 6:15).

Jonah Who Couldn't Run Fast Enough!!

The story of Jonah has puzzled many. Theologians argued about its interpretation, scoffers sneered at its message, but everybody, for one reason or another, found it interesting. There are three schools of interpretation:

1. Those that deny and destroy it. They state it is unacceptable because it is not based on historical fact. They say it is only a legend!
2. There are others who doubt and distort it. They affirm it is a parable, a story with an application. Jonah was swallowed by the fish god of Babylon, and his experiences illustrate the seventy years of captivity known by Israel.
3. There are others who defend and declare it to be the Word of God. Jesus was among that number, for He said that, as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the fish, so would He be in the heart of the earth. That Jonah was a real man with a real ministry is seen from 2 Kings 14:25.

The Stubborn Soul

Jonah the prophet was commissioned by God to go to Nineveh to denounce the sins of the people who lived there. "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa. The question has often been asked, 'Why did Jonah do this?' Three replies have been forthcoming:

1. He was a fanatical Jew refusing to have any association with a Gentile city.
2. He feared the brutality of the Ninevites. The British Museum in London, England has many exhibits that depict the ferocity of the Ninevites of Jonah's generation. Bronze and marble statues show them plunging spears into defenseless victims; they were people without mercy.
3. Jonah, so it is said, knew the Ninevites were planning to invade Israel and that their ultimate victory was assured. He therefore refused to urge repentance, hoping God would destroy Nineveh before its citizens destroyed Israel.

The Stormy Sea

The law stated that, if a watchman was aware of approaching danger and neglected to warn a threatened city and if the city fell, the blood of its slain citizens would be required at the hands of the negligent watchman. Jonah, by refusing to warn Nineveh, became subject to that law. If Nineveh perished, its blood would be upon the soul of the preacher who was aware of the danger, but gave no warning.

However worthy or unworthy his motives might have been, the actions of the disobedient prophet threatened to destroy his soul. Jonah was aware of this fact but persisted in running from his duty. He could not outrun God! Having purchased a passage on the ship bound for Tarshish in Spain, the runaway Jonah retired to the lower deck to sleep. He did not realize God was already on the ship. The Lord issued a silent command and the waves became tempestuous. The ship was thrown around as if it had been a cork, and yet Jonah never awakened! He was content thinking even God could not catch him now! Poor man!

The Startled Seamen

When the captain of the ship gently shook the sleeping prophet to ask, “What do you mean sleeper?” and when the crew discovered by casting lots that Jonah was the cause of their peril, they began pestering him with questions. Fears and superstition ruined their peace of mind; they did not wish to die prematurely. When Jonah asked to be thrown overboard, he probably did so with delight. “Yes, drown me, the sooner I die, the more quickly I shall be beyond the reach of God.” Probably his conscience was already reminding him of the indivisibility of trying to outrun the Lord.

David discovered the same truth. He wrote: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I take the wings of the morning and swell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me and Your right hand shall hold me.” (Psalm 139:7-10).

The Subdued Speaker

“So they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (1:15-17). Poor man! He got the surprise of his life. The story is eloquent in its details. God commanded the waves and they obeyed Him; God used Jonah as a preacher to the seamen and “they offered a sacrifice and made vows.” Yet, at the same time, the Lord was dealing with His rebellious preacher and making him what he should have been from the beginning. It is never safe nor wise to flee from responsibility; a sense of duty is inextricably woven into our conscience. Poor Jonah, he had a lot to learn and so do we.

Sanctify a Fast – Lent 2008

Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise for disobeying God's command not to eat (ie. fast) of the tree. Christ our Lord (the Second Adam), in His mission to restore us again to Paradise, began by fasting! We too fast in this Lenten Season, bringing our bodies under subjection, humbly returning again to our Loving Father!

The Degrees of Fasting

St. Paphnotious, in his dialogue with St. John Cassian, divides fasting into 3 areas:

1. Concerning the body – the person abstains from food and drink.
2. Concerning the morals – the person abstains from sin and evil behaviour.
3. Concerning the soul – the person loves the Crucified Lord, leaving everything with joy to be occupied with Him.

God asks of Abraham the same things:

1. To leave his own country – first degree.
2. To leave his own kindred – second degree.
3. To leave his father and family – to accept God as his Father.

Solomon wrote three books:

1. Proverbs – in which he asks us to leave the worldly lusts.
2. Ecclesiastes – in which he declares the vanity of the world, so that we abstain from worldly matters resident in the inner heart.
3. The Song of Songs – in which the soul is occupied with the Lord, her Bridegroom.

Our holy Fathers, who treasured and practiced fasting, focused consistently on the inner person not the outer, in fulfillment of St. Paul's words, "Though our outward man is perishing our inner man is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16). Thus, our Fathers found in fasting liberation to the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit to fly towards the Heavenly Kingdom.

1. St. Isaac the Syrian: "Merely by beginning to fast, the heart and mind is eager for union with God."
2. St. Felix (269-274): "The desire of the stomach is against the desire of the spirit, so the two cannot be combined. Thus, fasting is the way to the Paradise. It is the narrow path that leads to eternal life."
3. St. John Chrysostom (347-407): "How can we achieve external fasting without first achieving internal fasting? We should fast our hearts, senses, minds and intentions, and through this we shall achieve external fasting."
4. St. Basil the Great (330-379): "If we fast from bread and water but still persecute and judge others, what benefit do we gain? If your body is hungry and thirsty but your heart and mind are full of lust and desire what benefit do you gain?"

5. St. Augustine (354-430): “Do you want your prayers to rise up to heaven? Let your prayers have two wings which are fasting and alms.

May we rise above the physical fast and nourish ourselves with deep, fervent prayers, holy liturgies, meditation on the word of God, offering matanias of contrition and powerful repentance, spiritual retreats, week by week (see the attached program) in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), and thereafter experience the Power of His Glorious Resurrection.

Let us sanctify this holy fast by pouring, “our heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands towards Him.” (Lamentations 2:19).

The Transfiguration

The incident of 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: who He is, the nature of His mission, and His relation to God the Father. This incident was related by three of the four evangelists: Mathew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13, and Luke 9:28-36. The Coptic Orthodox Church values this incident and counts it as one of the seven minor feasts of our Lord. The Feast of Transfiguration is celebrated in August of every year. The Gospel on the Transfiguration is read on the first Saturday after the Feast of Resurrection. The fact that two dates were used (six days and the eighth day) by the evangelists is not an indication of discrepancy or lack of credibility. The matter of fact is that each of the two had looked at the incident date and thus calculated it differently in relation to including or excluding the Transfiguration day and the first day. Spiritually, number six symbolizes the Crucifixion; whereas eight symbolizes the Resurrection.

Before the Transfiguration

Eight days before the Transfiguration, our Lord Jesus Christ, talking to His disciples, established four very important truths about himself.

- **Assertion of His Deity:** *"You are Christ the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16) was the answer the Holy Spirit had put on Peters tongue after our Lord had asked His three disciples *"...and who do you say that I am?"* (Matthew 16:15). The Lord commended Peter not for his person, but for his faith upon which he promised to build His church. *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed [this] to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 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. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:17-19). The words "Petros" and "Petra" are two different words. "Petros" is a small stone whereas "Petra" is a big rock.
- **Proclamation of His Death on the Cross:** Following the assertion of His Deity, our Lord Jesus Christ told them that this Messiah that Peter had just proclaimed the Son of God came to the world to be handed over to the Jews, who would also deliver Him to the hands of the gentiles. *"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day"* (Matthew 16:20). Satan tried to hinder this proclamation by the same Peter who had proclaimed Him Son of God. *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men"* (Matthew 16:23). These were the Lords rebuking words in response to Peters who did not want him to suffer saying, *"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"* (Matthew 16:22)
- **Conditions of Discipleship to Christ:** Following that the Lord laid it down explicitly that if anyone wanted to be a disciple of this Messiah, they had to follow his steps by denying themselves, carrying their cross and following

him. *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26) and *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:25).

- **His Second Coming:** *"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom"* (Matthew 16:28). That is how our Lord ended his conversation by declaring His second coming.

During the Transfiguration

Eight days later, the Lord took Peter, John and James and went up on Mount Tabor. These three disciples were usually the ones that went with Christ on special events; for example, to Gethsemane and at the miraculous raising of Jairus daughter. On the mountain something very strange happened. His face started to shine like the sun; not only his face but also his robe. Then two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Moses appeared with him in glory. These two prophets were immediately recognized by the disciples, confirming the fact that in paradise saints will recognize each other just as the rich man recognized Abraham calling him by name. Then the Lord spoke with them about His decease (crucifixion and death) which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem in a weeks time.

The beauty of the scene of Christ in His glory was irresistible and conducive to a yearning for a long lasting duration. Forgetting about himself, and his family, Peter confessed ecstatically, *"It is good to be here"* suggesting upholding three tabernacles; for the Lord and the two guest prophets in order to ensure longer enjoyment of that irresistible magnificence and grandeur. That is how the saints in Paradise feel in the presence of the Lord and the saints. Then a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voiced was heard saying *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear him"* (Matthew 17:5). A cloud is a sign of Gods presence. The Old Testament registers many incidents whereby God showed His presence through a cloud.

Implications of the Transfiguration

Is there a link between the events of Transfiguration and what happened eight days before it? Of course there is a link; and it was by no means accidental; rather orchestrated by the Holy Trinity for vital reasons to the human race. St. Peters confirmation and declaration that Jesus is Christ the Son of the living God was followed, a week later, at Transfiguration, by yet other confirmations that Jesus Christ is God Incarnate. These were:

1. The voice of the Father from heaven saying *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear him"* (Matthew 17:5).
2. The appearance of Moses and Elijah who spoke about his suffering and crucifixion outside Jerusalem. *"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts"* (2 Peter 1:19). This was necessary in order to keep the faith of St. Peter and all the disciples intact when they see their Master being beaten and abandoned. It was because of all

these details that St. Peter could boldly write in his second epistle, "*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty*" (2 Peter 1:16). Such words of eye witnessing stand defiantly before any doubt against the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. For He is not a man who was made God; but God Who became man. Professing the first is blasphemy, whereas believing the second is a noble act of love. St. Athanasius eloquently expressed this seeming paradox by saying that God became the Son of man to make man the son of God. Moses and Elijah covered almost all of the Old Testament, the era of the Law and the prophets with the former representing the first and the latter representing the second. Thus, the presence of the two men proves that both the Law and the prophets witnessed to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

3. According to the Jewish law, the verification of any incident requires the presence of three witnesses. The three disciples were those eye witnesses for Christ's glory and majesty which He had received from the Father while on the Mount of Transfiguration. Although St. John did not write about the incident of Transfiguration in detail, he writes about "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14) referring to the incident by "*and we beheld His glory*" (John 1:14). The glory he had seen Christ in during the Transfiguration.
4. The Lord Jesus Christ concluded His conversation by saying, "*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom*" (Matthew 16:28), as a confirmation to them that He Himself is the Son of the Living God. The Transfiguration was a very powerful happening, which was needed to manifest Christ's Divinity and His Glory to them on the eighth day. From these events, it can be deduced, that prior to talking to the disciples about His Cross and Passion, the Lord Jesus, wanted to confirm their faith in Him as the Son of the Living God. This was necessary in order that they would not be shaken seeing Him upon the Holy Cross. That is why He rebuked St. Peter: "*Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!*" (Matthew 16:22) declaring that the main condition of following Him was carrying the Cross. He again confirmed to them that He was the Son of the Living God who shall come in His Father's Glory to reward each according to his works.

When Heaven Speaks, Earth Listens

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" This expression was repeated several times in the Holy Bible by:

1. The Father, at Baptism when a voice was heard from heaven declaring "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matthew 3:17).
2. The Son, Three times by our Lord, "*He, who has ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:43).
3. The Holy Spirit, in the Holy Book of Revelation "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" (Revelation 2:7)

There are three messages in this verse:

- *My Beloved Son*

God the Father is confirming the revelation declared by St. Peter eight days before. On the day of Baptism, God the Father confirmed to the whole world that the Lamb of God is the only begotten Son. So, when Peter, James, and John heard the same voice again repeating the same words, it was a confirmation that Jesus, transfigured before them, is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world.

- *In Whom I am well pleased*

The Son had offered himself as an acceptable sweet-smelling burning offering. That is the reason behind the Father's satisfaction. In Leviticus 1:9 *"And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord."* This is the hymn that we chant on Covenant Thursday, Good Friday, and the feasts of the Cross *"He, Who offered Himself as an accepted sacrifice on the Cross, for the salvation of our race. His Good Father smelled His aroma at the Evening on Golgotha."* So, when the Father said those words, He was referring to the same offering as an acceptable offering and pleasing to Him. The first Adam disobeyed and displeased God, whereas the second Adam (Christ) came in order to please God on our behalf. Consequently when we are united with the Son, we become pleasing to the Father. This unity became possible only after the Son's death outside Jerusalem, the death Moses and Elijah had spoken of.

- *Hear*

Him

This is an order from the Father to listen to the Son. The emphasis on "hearing" is worth examining. The Holy Bible identifies two types of listeners.

1. **Dull of Hearing:**

These are the people whose ears have become so heavy that they do not internalize what their ears hear. Our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned it after the parable of the Sower, saying *"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive. For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them"* (Matthew 13:14,15). St. Paul sensed this problem in Rome, and also among the Hebrews. So, he wrote to them saying, *"Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing"* (Hebrews 5:11). He is telling them that this is hard to explain not because the subject is difficult nor the speaker is ineloquent, but because they have become dull of hearing. The problem is neither in the subject nor the speaker; but in the listener. The problem of dull hearing starts first and foremost in the heart manifesting itself in the shutting off of the ears from listening. Biblical examples of people "dull of hearing".

1. Cain, who after his offering had been rejected by God, got angry. God explained to him his mistake; showing him His readiness to forgive him, *"If you do well, will you not be*

accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door and its desire is for you" (Genesis 4:7). But Cain was dull of hearing. Had he listened, he would not have perished. God is saying the same thing to us today. Sin is at our door. She has a desire for us; but we should rule over it.

2. Pharaoh was another example of a man, dull of hearing. Ten times God sent Moses and Aaron to him in order for him to free the people to worship God in the desert. The result was a punishment in the form of ten plagues. After each plague, pharaoh would forget and return back to his old pattern.
3. Judas the Iscariot listened to all the teachings and all the warnings coming from the Lord; *"It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish" (Mark 14:20). "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born" (Mark 14:21).* But his love for money had dulled his ears to the truth.

Nowadays, there are many people who are living totally for their materialistic desires, love for fame and money; and who have developed a dull waxed ear as a consequence of leading such a life. Coming to church and attending services do not help them that much spiritually because of their dull hearing.

2. **Those with itching ears:**

These are people who have no tolerance for rebuke or chastisement. Therefore in order to avoid what they do not like to hear, they change churches, spiritual fathers, and seek other worship groups in the hope of finding who would tell them what they would like to hear. Words of praise, false pretences and false fables appeal to them. *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3,4).* Examples of people with itching ears are youth who leave home in order to avoid hearing their parents, or Sunday school to avoid hearing their teachers. Also, those who leave their original church seeking another that would grant them a divorce, exempt them from fasting, or offer short services. A Biblical example is during Jeremiah's time when God sent him with a very clear message to either submit to the king of the Babylon since the city would be delivered to the Babylonians anyway; or be killed with the sword, epidemics or famine. But they did not like this message and put Jeremiah in jail (Jeremiah 27:12).

Conclusion

Comprised of different Divine instruments, each playing a different purposeful, heavenly melody; the incident of the Transfiguration is the most perfect symphony orchestrated by the Holy Trinity; producing the most harmonious symphony that had announced to humanity the very good news about the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and His second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. On Mount Tabor, our Lord Jesus has been revealed as the Son of God, the sweet-smelling Burning Offering

of God and the Redeemer of the world from Satans captivity. In order for us to benefit from all these revelations, we need to become followers of Jesus Christ; ready to carry our cross and be good listeners. To develop sharp ears we need firstly to pray that the Lord may open our ears like Lydia who "*the Lord opened her heart to hear the things said by Paul*" (Acts 16:14). Secondly, we need to listen with the fear of God; for the fear of God sharpens our ears through the wisdom we receive. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Proverbs 9:10). May the Lord grant us sharp ears and eyes that we may hearken to His word, and be ready to carry our cross and follow him that we may be changed from glory to glory and become like Him when we see Him face to face.

The Crucified Saviour

Isaiah Chapter 53

Almost 800 years before Christ, Isaiah the Prophet saw vividly the sufferings and Crucifixion of our Saviour. He expressed these prophecies so accurately as they were fulfilled in the person of Christ:

	Isaiah Chapter 53	Prophecies Fulfilled
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who has believed our report? ▪ And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They did not believe in Him (Jn 12:37). ▪ Revealed them to babes not the wise and prudent (Lk 10:21).
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant. ▪ And as a root out of dry ground. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Christ says, I am the true vine (Jn 15:1).
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He is despised and rejected by men. ▪ A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. ▪ And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. ▪ He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him (Mt 27:29). ▪ My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death (Mk 14:34). ▪ Jesus wept (Jn 11:35). You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life (Jn 5:40). ▪ To the Jews the Cross a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness (1Cor 1:23).
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He has borne our griefs ▪ And carried our sorrows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In all points tempted as we are (Heb 4:15). Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb (Jn 11:38).
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He was wounded for our transgressions. ▪ He was bruised for our iniquities. ▪ The chastisement for our peace was upon Him. ▪ By His stripes we are healed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust (1Pet 3:18). Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him (Jn 19:1). ▪ Having made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20). ▪ We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb 10:10).
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All we like sheep have gone astray. ▪ We have turned, every one, to his own way. ▪ And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). ▪ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:21). ▪ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (2Cor 5:21).
7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He was oppressed and He was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When He suffered, He did not

	<p>afflicted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yet He opened not His mouth. ▪ He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. ▪ As a sheep before its shearers is silent. 	<p>threaten (1 Pet 2:23).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When reviled did not revile in return (1 Peter 2:23). ▪ And led Him away to be crucified (Mat 27:31). ▪ But He answered him not one word (Mat 27:14).
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He was taken from prison and from judgement. ▪ He was cut off from the land of the living. ▪ For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas (Jn 18:24). ▪ You have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death (Acts 2:23). ▪ He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation (Jn 11:51).
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ And they made His grave with the wicked. ▪ But with the rich at His death. ▪ Because He had done no violence. ▪ Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. ... and asked for the body of Jesus ... and laid it in his new tomb (Mat 27:57 – 60). ▪ Who committed no sin (1 Pet 2:22). Nor was deceit found in His mouth (1 Pet 2:22).
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. ▪ He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin. ▪ And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8:32). ▪ 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 (Jn 3:16). ▪ I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do (Jn 17:4).
11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. ▪ He shall bear their inequities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (Heb 12:2). ▪ Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).
12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because He poured His soul unto death. ▪ And He was numbered with the transgressors. ▪ And He bore the sin of many. ▪ And He made intercession for the transgressors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I lay down my life for the sheep (Jn 10:15). ▪ With Him they also crucified two robbers (Mk 15:27). ▪ So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many (Heb 9:28). ▪ Father, forgive them (Lk 23:34). ▪ He always lives to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25).

In the Fraction addressed to God the Son we pray thus:

“We sinned and He bore our punishment. We were condemned and He bore the death sentence. For our sake, He preferred death to glory and burden to rest. He loved the Cross more than His Throne which is carried by the Throne-bearers.

He was tied with ropes to free us from the bonds and fetters of our sins. He was humbled to exalt us, He hungered to feed us, He thirsted to give us the Living Water, and He was raised on the Cross to cover us with the garments of Righteousness.

His side was opened and we entered to dwell in Him eternally. O my Lord, the evils I have performed are the Thrones that pierced Your Holy Head. I displeased Your Heart with my love of the dead world.

What is this path leading to Your death that You are walking in my God and Saviour? What are You carrying on Your Shoulders? It is the Cross of disgrace that You carry instead of me.

What is this my Saviour? What made You accept this? What a great shame! Why is the Glorious One beaten? Why is the Exalted lowered?

How great is Your love!!!”

The Prophet Elisha – ‘a type’ of Christ

	The Prophet Elisha (God is Salvation)	Christ our Saviour
1.	Elisha was filled with the Spirit, <i>“Please let a double portion of your Spirit be upon me.”</i> (2 Kings 2:9).	Christ had the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1-14).
2.	Elisha experienced death and resurrection with Christ through crossing the Jordan.	Christ descended to the Jordan to sanctify all humanity and renewed our nature (Luke 3:21-22; Romans 6:4).
3.	Elisha raised the dead, the only son of the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:19-36).	Christ raised the dead, the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17).
4.	Elisha was able to feed the hungry, happened twice (2 Kings 4:42-44).	Christ feed 5,000 and 7,000 people. He nourished all humanity (Luke 9:17).
5.	Elisha cleansed the lepers, Namaan the Syrian (2 Kings 5:10-14).	Christ healed the 10 lepers (Matthew 8:1-3)
6.	Elisha opened the eyes of the blind (2 Kings 6:12-20).	Christ opened the eyes of the blind; Bartimaous and the blind man in John 9.
7.	Elisha was able to know the unknown; i. Knew what Gehazi did (Amos 3:7), ii. Knew about King of Syria (2 Kings 6:12).	Christ knew their thoughts; i. After healing the paralytic, ii. Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7), iii. Samaritan woman, told her past (John 4)
8.	Elisha gave life through death (2 Kings 13:20-21). His bones resurrected the dead.	Through Christ’s death and resurrection we are restored to God. The Cross became our glory (Galatians 6:14).
9.	Elisha restores dignity and respect to God from the Israelites (2 Kings 2:23-24).	Christ restored and reconciled broken humanity to God.
10.	Elisha gave generously and healed the sick and did not seek any human reward.	Christ says, <i>“Freely you received, freely give.”</i> (Matthew 10:8).
11.	Elisha was able to defy the laws of nature, ie. The iron floating on water (2 Kings 6:1-7).	<i>Christ’s ascension defied the laws of nature</i> (Acts).
12.	Elisha lived by and applied Godly and pious principles with Syrian army (2 Kings 6:22-23).	Christ says, <i>“Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you.”</i> (Matthew 5:44). <i>“Overcome evil with good.”</i> (Romans 12:21).

The Glorious Feast of the Ascension

On Thursday, 28th May the Church will celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, 40 days following His Glorious Resurrection.

1. The Ascension = Confirms the Divinity of Christ

Christ said, "I came forth from the Father. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16:28). Some 3000 years ago, Solomon the wise king asked, "Who ascended to heaven and descended?" (Proverbs 30:4). The only Person who could answer this puzzle, was Jesus Christ who said to Nicodemus, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." (John 3:13). Jesus, by His ascension, proved that He is heavenly and of heavenly origin and after He accomplished redemption, He went again to His royal and divine residence in heaven. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has come to reveal the hidden mystery of Christ and that He is equal to God the Father and without the Holy Spirit, no one can say that Jesus is Lord." (1 Corinthians 12:3).

2. The Ascension = Prepares me to receive the Holy Spirit

Christ said, "I will not leave you orphans, I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper that He may abide with you forever...He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 16). Before the ascension, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you." But the means of having this peace is through the Holy Spirit. This might be well explained by St. Cyril of Alexandria when he said, "Everything is from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit."

3. The Ascension = Prepares for me a Heavenly Place

Christ said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house there are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 will be also." (John 14:1-3). Moreover, Christ said, "Do not fear little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." (Luke 12:32). St. Paul reminds us, "For our citizenship is in heaven." (Philippians 3:20). "For God has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16). Thus we labour and strive diligently in order to hear the words of Jesus, "Come you that are blessed by My Father, come inherit the Kingdom." (Matthew 25:34).

4. The Ascension = Directs my Heart, Mind and Life to Heaven

"If then you were raised with Christ," says St. Paul, "seek those things which are above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:5). "Lay hold on to eternal life," writes St. Paul to Timothy, "to which you were called". (1

Timothy 6:12). Let us therefore sow in the Spirit that we may reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8).

5. **The Ascension = Reminds me of the Second Coming of Christ**

“This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven”, said the angels to the disciples, “will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11). “Behold I am coming quickly and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. (Revelation 22:12-13). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

6. **The Ascension = Restoration and Glorification**

Christ is preparing a heavenly place for us, and the Holy Spirit is preparing us to inherit that heavenly place with Christ. Therefore, as in marriage, the Holy Spirit is uniting the bride and the groom together, similarly in this eternal love relation, the Holy Spirit is uniting Christ and with the faithful soul that He loved and redeemed with His blood (Revelation 1:5). The Ascension was the final act of the earthly mission of Christ. It represented the ultimate restoration and glorification of humanity; its being enthroned at the right hand of the Father in the realm of Divine existence known as heaven. Christ and all humanity in Him were accepted into the life of the Holy Trinity (Ephesians 1:20).

7. **The Ascension = My Spiritual Ascendancy**

The spiritual life, as Pope Shenouda reminds us, is a perpetual ascendancy towards the bosom of the Father. St. Peter urges us to, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18). He also says, “Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful” (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Wishing you a blessed and joyous Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, remembering the words of our Saviour, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” (Matthew 6:33). May you always feel and see ‘a door standing open in heaven’ (Revelation 4:1).

In Christ
COYA Servants

Symbols of the Holy Spirit

1. The Wind

The mighty wind that filled the upper room reveals the power of the Holy Spirit who filled everyone present. This wind had such a strong sound that filled the whole house and the assembly felt its power. The Lord tried to explain to Nicodemus the relationship between the wind and our birth of the Spirit, *"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* (John 3:8). Christ our Lord 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). It was also mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, in the visions of the dry bones, that the Lord said to him: *"Prophesy to the breath, prophesy son of man and say to the breath, 'thus says the Lord God: 'Come from the four winds, O breath and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'"* (Ezekiel 37:9).

2. The Oil

In ancient times oil was used in treatment of wounds (Isaiah 1:6; Mark 6:13; James 5:14). It is used spiritually as a sign of consecration (Genesis 28:18; 35:14). The oil was used by Samuel the prophet to anoint King Saul and King David (Samuel 10:1,6; 16:13) and the Spirit of God came upon them (Exodus 30:22-29). Elijah the prophet anointed with oil two kings and the prophet Elisha as commanded by God (1 King 20:15-16; 2 Kings 9:3).

The altar and its Holy Vessels are anointed with the holy oil (the Myron) to be holy for worshipping and offering the sacrifices. The oil is used for healing the sick in the name of the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of unction of the sick (James 5:14). It was used for lighting the candles; the Holy Spirit enlightens those who keep Him working in them; thus keeping their vessels full of oil (Matthew 25:3-4) and the Holy Spirit makes the believers the light of the world, shining by their good deeds (Matthew 5:14-16).

3. The Dove

The dove is an innocent, meek and harmless bird (Matthew 10:16) and when our Lord was baptised in the river of Jordan by St. John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in a bodily form like a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). It is a sign of good news and salvation, as happened with Noah's dove (Genesis 8:11). King Solomon addressed the human soul (the bride of Christ) saying, *"My dove and my perfect one."* (Song of Solomon 5:2). When the Holy Spirit dwells inside the believers, they will become innocent, harmless and blameless as doves.

4. **The Water**

The living water is given by God, as He described Himself as the fountain of living water (Jeremiah 2:13) because from Him comes the Holy Spirit who gives us life (John 14:26). When our Lord talked to the Samaritan woman He said, *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, 'give Me a drink', you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."* (John 4:10). He also continued, *"Who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:13-14).

The Lord meant by that water, the Holy Spirit whom He gave to His believers. This is clear from the Lord's speech to the Jews on the great day of the feast, *"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* The gospel added saying, *"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."* (John 7:38-39). For this reason the Church calls baptism (the washing of the second birth), *"the birth from the water and the Spirit,"* as was said by the Lord to Nicodemus (John 3:5). It is known that water cleanses our bodies, quenches our thirst and the Holy Spirit washes away our sins and nourishes us and keeps us ready for eternal life.

5. **The Fire**

The fire is a symbol of the presence of God. In the Holy Bible the fire has several meanings:

a. The fire of God's protection and guidance

God was leading Israel in the wilderness of Sinai by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day during the forty years of their travel (Exodus 13:22; Deuteronomy 1:33; Psalm 78:14).

b. The Fire of God's presence and call

The fire was always kept burning on the altar, a sign of God's presence (Leviticus 6:12-13). The Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and the bush was not consumed (Exodus 3:2-6). It was mentioned that God is a consuming fire (Exodus 24:17; Hebrews 12:29). Daniel the prophet, saw the throne of God a fiery flame and its wheels a burning fire (Daniel 7:9).

c. The Fire of cleaning and purifying

When Isaiah the prophet saw the glory of God, he felt unclean and he said, *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes*

have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it and said; 'behold this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away and your sin purged.'" (Isaiah 6:5-7).

d. The fire of accepting the sacrifice

When Moses the prophet and his brother Aaron offered a sacrifice, fire came and consumed the burnt offering that was on the altar (Leviticus 9:24). David the King, offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, the Lord answered from heaven by fire on the offerings (1 Chronicles 21:26). The same happened when King Solomon finished building the temple, prayed and offered sacrifices and fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices (2 Chronicles 7:1), when Elijah offered a burnt sacrifice and licked up the water that was in the trench (1 King 18:38).

e. The fire of preaching and evangelism

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of the Lord in form of tongues of fire and sat upon each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in various languages (Acts 2:3-4). The Lord has given His disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit, before His crucifixion, saying, *"He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."* (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit guided them into all truth, told them all things to come (John 16:13), as the Lord told them, *"He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."* (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit still makes us spiritually fervent, guides us into all truth, and tells us things to come (John 16:13).

f. The fire of punishment for the wicked

The Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens (Genesis 19:24). When Ahaziah, the evil king of Samaria, sent to Elijah a captain of fifty with his fifty men and asked him to come down from the top of the hill, the man of God was sad for the wickedness of the king. He let fire to come down from heaven and consumed the captain and his fifty men. This happened twice. (2 Kings 1:7-12).

g. The fire of condemnation

This fire is prepared for Satan and his soldiers, as well as the sinful, the wicked and the unprofitable people. The Lord will say to them, *"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matthew 25:41). He also declared this to the

Jews, saying, *“Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire.”* (Matthew 13:40-42). It was also revealed to St. John that on the judgement day, the beast, the false prophet, and their followers would be cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, to be tormented forever (Revelation 14:10; 20:20).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit...Convicts Me

One of the most devastating effects of sin is that it blinds. It is written about Satan that, *"The god of this world blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of God."* (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Holy Spirit opens our eyes. Only He can convict us of the depth of our sin, and only He can convince us of the truth of the Gospel.

Thus the Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of truth' in John 14:17. In speaking of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said, *"He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment."* (John 16:8).

There is the danger that we may pass the point of no return, and that our hearts may be so hardened by sin that we will no longer hear the voice of the Spirit. No man could have been more hardened, than King Manasseh in the Old Testament, and yet he eventually repented of his sin and was forgiven by God in His grace (2 Chronicles 33). That is why the word of God warns us, *"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."* (Hebrews 3:7).

2. The Holy Spirit...Sanctifies Me

The word sanctification means literally, "to be separate" or "set apart for a certain purpose". St. Paul speaks of the believer as having been "sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16). He wrote to the Corinthians saying that they, having been sanctified, are called to be saints (1 Corinthians 1:2).

We Christians are to be "progressively sanctified" or "made righteous" in holiness as we daily abide in Christ and obey His Word. Abiding and obedience are the keys to a successful Spirit-dominated life. We are as much sanctified, as the Holy Spirit possesses us. It is never a question of how much we have of the Spirit, but how much He has of us!!

St. Gregory Nazianzen expresses the Holy Spirit desires to draw us day after day from our human frailty unto the perfect likeness of Christ. Constantly He 'hovers over the water' (Genesis 1:2), in which our inner earth is formless and void, in order to replace our darkness with His light and establish within us a new Spiritual state, that is the Kingdom of God.

3. The Holy Spirit...Guides Me

The Lord said, *"When He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."* (John 16:13-15).

The Holy Spirit guides, *“And the Spirit said to Phillip, ‘Go up and join his chariot...’” (Acts 8:14).* *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Romans 8:14).* The Holy Spirit enlightens the Christian’s mind, *“For to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10).* *“Therefore he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.” (Revelation 2:7).*

4. The Holy Spirit...Comforts Me

One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to comfort. His name is the “Comforter” and the “Helper” (John 14:16 & John 15:26). He comforts us when we repent or feel disappointed and disillusioned and helps us grow in our spiritual path.

5. The Holy Spirit...Makes Me Fruitful

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we bring fruits as the Lord said, *“By their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:20).* Also the Lord said, *“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” (Matthew 12:35).* The fruits of the Spirit, *“Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23).*

6. The Holy Spirit...Grants Me Gifts

The Holy Spirit distributes to each one of us at least one, if not more, than one gift (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4 give a summary of those gifts. The purpose of the gifts granted by the Holy Spirit is mainly the edification of the body of Christ. This edification implies supporting one another, with words and deeds to the measure that pleases the heart of God and kindles the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives.

7. The Holy Spirit...Renews Me

Renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives *“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.” (Titus 3:5).*

No person can ever remain dry, thirsty or empty, as long as he/she does not, grief (Ephesians 4:30) or quench (1 Thessalonians 5:9) or resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). For He renews us daily when we have daily fellowship with Him thereby become fervent in Spirit (Romans 12), *“And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” (Ephesians 4:23).*

Let us attend Church early on Pentecost Sunday, participate in the Heavenly procession during Early Raising of Incense, join in the prayers (O heavenly King, the Comforter, treasurer of goodness...) and hymns of the Holy Spirit sung joyfully following the reading of the Acts (Acts 2:1-28). Attend the kneeling prayers seeking

that the Holy Spirit fill our hearts, lives and Churches with abundant grace (Zechariah 12:10).

Feast of the Cross 2009

"If anyone desires to come after Me", says Jesus, "let him deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24).

"And he who does not take his Cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:38).

The Cross is the centre of our Christian life as Father Bishoy Kamel says, *"There is no Christianity without the Cross, it is like a bride without her groom."*

1. In the Cross = Reconciliation with God

"And by Him", writes St. Paul, "to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him whether things on earth or things in Heaven, having made peace through the blood of the Cross." (Colossians 1:20).

Christ's reconciling work is significant, *"as He broke down the middle wall of divisions between us...that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the Cross thereby putting to death the enmity." (Ephesians 2:13,16).*

2. In the Cross = Salvation and Redemption

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19).

On the Feasts of the Cross, the Church chants the following hymn, *"He who lifted Himself up as an acceptable sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of our race. He was accepted by the good Father in the evening on Golgotha."*

3. In the Cross = Power and Strength

The Cross of Christ is powerful, *"for the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing," writes St. Paul, "but to us who are being saved it is the Power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18).*

Indeed the Power of the Cross is not understood properly as St. Paul says, *"for the Jews seek a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness but to those who are called Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).*

4. In the Cross = Forgiveness of Sins

"All of mankind was stained and corrupted by sin, Christ came to earth and bore our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter 2:24). "In Him", says St. Paul, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:7).

When we gaze at the Cross we feel the depth of forgiveness and remember the words of St. Paul, *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."* (Hebrews 9:22).

5. In the Cross = Victory and Triumph

"But thanks be to God," says St. Paul, "who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:16).

In the doxology of the Cross, we say, *"Hail to the Cross, weapon of our victory; You are the joy of all Christians, You are the victory against all enemies, You are our strength."*

6. In the Cross = Freedom from Sin

Christ says, *"whoever commits sin is a slave of sin and a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides in the house forever."* (John 8:34).

"If the Son makes you free," says Jesus, "you shall be free indeed." (John 8:36). This is the gospel of the vespers of the Feast of the Cross. St. Paul, who experienced this freedom said, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." (Romans 6:6).

7. In the Cross = Indescribable Love

"But God demonstrated His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8).

"Greater love has no one than this," says Jesus, "to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13).

St. John the beloved says, *"to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Revelations 1:5).*

Love, therefore, became the visible sign of the children of the Cross. St. Paul urges us saying, *"walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma." (Ephesians 5:2).*

Feast of the Cross 2008

On Wednesday, 19th March 2008, our Church will celebrate the Glorious Feast of the Holy Cross.

St. Paul experienced the depth and power of the Cross of Christ and stated, “For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the Power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Indeed St. Paul’s whole world was in orbit around the Cross. It filled his vision, illuminated his life and warmed his spirit. He ‘gloried’ in it. In his epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul highlighted how the Cross liberates the soul by crucifying the flesh, the ego and the world.

1. Through the Cross = I Crucify my Flesh

”And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
(Galatians 5:24).

The flesh is not essentially sinful but it is the lusts of the flesh which leads to destruction; these include adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outburst of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like.
(Galatians 5:19-21).

“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we should also live with Him.” (Romans 6:6-8). The Holy Fast is an excellent opportunity to purify the eyes, cleanse the heart, wash the tongue and clean the ears.

Father Bishoy Kamel (1931-1979), who loved the Cross of Christ, consistently urged his children to gaze and contemplate daily on the Cross as a means of cleansing our souls from the lusts of the flesh. This Friday, 21st March, we shall celebrate the 29th Anniversary of Father Bishoy Kamel’s departure to heaven and cherish his inspiring words, “A soul without the Cross is like a bride without her groom.”

2. Through the Cross = I Crucify my Ego

”I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20).

Our number one enemy is our ego. Pride is the principal source of all our sins, deficiencies and weaknesses in the spiritual path. For this reason Christ taught

us, "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself, will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:11-12).

In crucifying our egos we seek to embrace meekness and humility, knowing that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). Our meek Lord, who ascended to the Cross to crucify our egos, taught us saying, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24).

3. **Through the Cross = I Crucify the World**

"But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14).

The Apostle James, in similar vein, warns us saying, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4).

St. Paul applauds the great Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who although affluent, dwelt in tents, "awaiting for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:10).

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20).

His Holiness Pope Shenouda repeatedly guides us saying, "Live in the world but do not allow the world to live in you."

Let us joyfully celebrate the Glorious Feast of the Cross by attending Vespers (Tuesday night, 18th March 2008) participating in the heavenly procession and attending the Holy Liturgy and partake of the Holy Sacraments which is the sacrifice of the Cross.

The Feast of the Cross 2006

On Wednesday, 27th September 2006 our Church will celebrate the Feast of the Cross. Our Lord Jesus Christ, having endured the shame, the curse and the disgrace of the Cross on our behalf became The Worthy, Slain Lamb who is worshipped by all creation proclaiming, *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12).*

Let us examine each of the features attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified for our salvation and redemption.

1. **Power:** The Cross speaks of defeat. The powers of the world moved to crush Christ and to do away with Him, but, in reality, *"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."* (Colossians 2:15).
2. **Wealth:** The Cross is the ultimate expression of poverty. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who never owned a home of His own and had few, if any, possessions, was in the end stripped of everything, even His clothes, and was crucified naked. Yet the poverty of Christ crucified was to enrich our lives beyond imagination, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."* (2 Corinthians 8:9).
3. **Wisdom:** The Cross is the height of folly. No-one in his right mind would have put himself in a position to be crucified. The sophisticated world had devised it as a way of disposing of the foolish. Yet, in truth, the crucified Christ was, *"The wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).
4. **Strength:** The Cross epitomizes weakness. The powers of the world combined to subject Christ to total helplessness and defenselessness. He, *"was crucified in weakness."* Yet, in reality, it was God's power at work, for, to those whom God has called, Christ crucified is the power of God, and *"The weakness of God is stronger than human strength."* (1 Corinthians 1:25).
5. **Honour:** The Cross represents shame. It is designed to degrade and humiliate its victims. It held Christ up to the mockery of the crowds and the ridicule of the Chief Priests and Pharisees. Yet, paradoxically, the Cross was both His throne and the way to His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into Heaven. Thus we hear St. Paul rightly say, *"God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11).
6. **Glory:** The Cross was a place of dark disgrace. It was hard to find any glory at Calvary. Yet shining through the gloom came the irrepressible glimmer of glory. St. John testified that, *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14). St. Paul rightly says, *"But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Galatians 6:14).

7. **Praise:** The Cross stood for a curse. People who ended up nailed to the crosses were to be blamed, not blessed. The Law said that, “*anyone that is hanged is accursed of God.*” (Deuteronomy 21:23). But God had so arranged it that, “*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.*” (Galatians 3:13). So now He has become the object of our praise.

Please meditate carefully and diligently upon the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as the Apostle St. Paul said, “*But we preach Christ crucified. To the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness...but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” (1 Corinthians 1:18-34).. Let us joyfully celebrate the Feast of the Cross and partake of the sacrifice of the Lamb with a humble and contrite heart.

The Feast of the Cross Message to the Youth

Indeed the Cross of Christ was not an accident or just a historical fact, but it was planned from God beforehand and before the foundation of the world.

St. Peter says: *"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times for you."* (1 Peter 1:18; Acts 2:22-24).

There are many symbols, shadows and types of the Lord's Cross and redemption in the books of the Old Testament:

1. Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac (Genesis 22)

This event is a living symbol of God's salvation, through the Cross. The Church meditates on that event on Covenant Thursday liturgy, remembering the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice during the fraction of the Lamb. The wood of the burnt offering that Isaac carried till he reached the place of offering (Mount Moria) was a symbol of the cross carried by Christ on the way to Golgotha.

Isaac (the sacrifice) was the only son of Abraham, and so the Lord Jesus is the only Son of the Father. Thus, the Lord said to Nicodemus: *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."* (John 3:16). St. Paul also said: *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."* (Romans 8:32).

After the three days walk to that mount, Isaac returned back alive with his father; likewise is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus on the third day. St. Clement of Alexandria said: *"Abraham's soul was comforted on the third day, when he knew the mystery of the resurrection of the crucified, and he rejoiced as he saw it in his son."* (John 8:56).

2. The Heavenly Ladder of Jacob (Genesis 28:12-22).

This ladder is a symbol of the Cross of our Lord. St. Jerome said: *"By faith we ascend through the Cross to enjoy the heavenly glory. The Cross of our Saviour is the ladder of Jacob, on which he saw the angels descending and ascending. This vision happened when Jacob was on his way to his Uncle to take for himself a wife. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ (the actual Jacob) was crucified and died on the Cross (the ladder) before taking to Himself His Church. He offered His blood on the Cross as a dowry for His Kingdom."*

3. The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:3-7).

The Passover Lamb was roasted in fire on two crossed iron rods, resembling the Cross. After the Passover, the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh's

slavery. Our Lord is our Passover who was sacrificed for us. (1 Corinthians 5:7) and He suffered the fiery agony of crucifixion to pay our debts to the divine justice, and freed us from the slavery of Satan.

4. The Rod of Moses (Exodus 14:15-29).

Moses lifted up his rod and stretched his hand over the Red Sea and divided it, and the Israelites passed over it and were saved from Pharaoh and his horsemen. Our Lord Jesus stretched His hands on Calvary and struck Satan by the wood of the Cross (the Rod), saying: *"It is finished."* (John 19:30). Christ descended into Hades and saved mankind from eternal death. When we believe in Christ's crucifixion we go through the baptismal water (the Red Sea), as was said by St. Paul: *"All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."* (1 Corinthians 10:2). While we are in the wilderness of this world, we follow our Saviour, as the Israelites followed Moses, till we enter the promised heavenly Jerusalem.

5. The Green Tree Cast by Moses into the Bitter Water in Marah (Exodus 15:23-25).

The Lord asked Moses to cast the tree into the bitter waters in Marah and the water was made sweet, and the people could drink. The tree resembles the Cross, as without it and without believing in the crucified Christ, man would perish by the bitterness of sin. Also, through the power of the Cross (the Green Tree) we can fulfill the commandments of God, and their seeming difficulty is turned to ease.

6. The Defeat of Amalek by Moses' Prayers and Stretched Hands (Exodus 17:10-15).

When the Israelites started to fight Amalek (the Giants), Moses stretched his hands in the shape of the Cross, till they defeated Amalek. It was written: *"Aaron and Hur supported his hands one on one side and the other on the other side and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek."* (Exodus 17:12-13). The same, when Christ stretched His hands on the Cross, He defeated Satan (Amalek), and saved us from eternal death and He will lead us in triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14) and we will be more than conquerors.

7. The Bronze Serpent on a Pole (Numbers 21:4-9)

The Lord sent the fiery serpents among the people and they bit them and many of the people died. When the people came to Moses and admitted their sins against God and Moses, he prayed for them and the Lord told him to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole and whoever was bitten would be healed, when he looked to the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4-9).

Lifting the bronze serpent on a pole was a symbol of the death of Christ on the Cross. All those who believe in the Lord Jesus and His Cross receive

salvation, and are saved from eternal death. When the Lord said to Nicodemus: *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."* He added: *"Whoever believes in Him (who was lifted up on the Cross) should not perish, but have everlasting life."* So, the fiery serpents that killed many people are Satan,, the old serpent, who killed many with his poison, and all who were slain by him were strong men (Proverbs 7:26).

8. Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh

"And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand towards Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand towards Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly for Manasseh as the first born." (Genesis 48:13-14). In so doing, Jacob formed the sign of the Cross by both arms. This prophesy is read on the third hour of Good Friday.

At the offertory the priest stretches his hands to select the Lamb in exactly the same manner as Jacob, for the chosen Lamb will be converted to the Body of Christ. This blessing of the Cross is used by the priest in the final phase of the wedding ceremony as the Bride and Groom kneel before the altar.

9. The Iron Float

During the time of Elisha the Prophet, some men were felling the trees and lopping the branches, a rod of iron fell into the water. They all started to shout and sought the advice of Elisha the Prophet, a man of God. He advised that they throw a log of timber into the water and the rod of iron would float (2 Kings 6:1-7). With the wooden Cross, we carry everything that is heavy, floats and thus breaking the law of nature. Whatever is impossible for man is possible for God (Luke 18:27).

Let us carry the Cross joyfully, unite with Christ sincerely and say with St. Paul: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20). He also said: *"But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."* (Galatians 6:14).

Types of Fools

By Father Matthew Attia

In the dictionary, one definition is that a fool is “a person deficient in judgment.” Another meaning of fool is “one who is a professional jester or a clown.” In the Bible, the word “fool” has a moral meaning.

The verses seem almost paradoxical. In Proverbs we read, “Fools despise wisdom,” (Proverbs 1:7) and in 1 Corinthians we read, “Let him become a fool” (1 Corinthians 3:18). In the first passage, the fool is an unthinking, thoughtless, careless person, one without true understanding. In the second passage, the fool is someone who has received Christ and is laughed at by the world and called foolish.

1. The Atheistic Fool

Repeated twice in the Psalms are the words: “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’.*” (Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1).

Every person believes innately that there is a Supreme Being. To be an atheist or an agnostic, you have to block out of your mind the realities of birth and life and death and the entire universe. Who can look at the heavens and read all that the astronomers tell us and see all that our satellites have discovered, without believing that there must be a Supreme Being behind this universe with all its galaxies?

Then there is the practicing atheist. Many people are not really believing atheists, but they are practicing atheists in that they live like atheists. They profess to believe in God, but they live as if there is no God. They believe in God with their minds. They may attend church, but they live as though God does not exist, “*They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for very good work.*” (Titus 1:16).

2. The Mocking Fool

“*Fools make a mock at sin.*” (Proverbs 14:9). The Bible tells us that we have sinned against God and His holiness, that we have broken His commandments and that we are under the sentence of death: “*The wages of sin is death.*” (Romans 6:23). We all have sinned and have broken the commandments of God. And so we all are sentenced to die (Romans 3:23).

We will die physically, but sin also causes spiritual death. Physically we are alive, but our soul is dead toward God. We are under the sentence of death – eternal death, the judgment to come. We are under that sentence of death, and in that sense every one of us on a dangerous path when we do not repent, for Christ says twice, “*unless you repent you shall likewise perish.*” (Luke 13:3, 5). On judgment God will not ask why did you sin, rather why did you not repent, for God said, “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are*

willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword.” (Isaiah 1:18-20).

3. The Slandering Fool

“He that hides hatred with lying lips, and he that utters a slander, is a fool.” (Proverbs 10:18). That includes passing along an evil story about others, maligning other people’s characters, wrecking their reputations by evil gossip. This common sin results in a wealth of destruction to lives of people, *“The Hypocrite says the scriptures with his mouth destroys his neighbor” (Proverbs 11:9).* The Bible says that gossiping is a sin. And yet how frequently that sin is committed, even by persons who call themselves Christian! Gossiping is a terrible sin in the sight of God, and God says that person is a fool. *“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver.” (Proverbs 10:19-20).* *“The lips of the righteous feed many.” (Proverbs 10:21).*

4. The Doubting Fool

After our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and was raised again, he appeared before two disciples who were on the way to Emmaus, outside of Jerusalem. The disciples were sad, disappointed and disillusioned. They were mumbling and groaning.

Then Christ our Lord joined them, but they didn’t recognize Him. As He talked with them, He asked, *“Why are you so sad?” (Luke 24:17).* They answered, *“Haven’t You heard all the happenings in Jerusalem during the past week about this Jesus who did wonderful things? We thought He was the Messiah. We thought He had come to save the world, but He was killed. Now the third day is passed, and we heard rumors that He was raised from the dead.” (Luke 24:18-24).* And then Jesus said, *“O fools.” (Luke 24:25).*

He expounded to them the Scriptures, from Moses through the prophets, as to who He was. Then He spent the evening with them. As He sat in their home in Emmaus, He blessed the bread and gave it to them, and suddenly their eyes were opened and they saw that it was Jesus. Do not allow the devil to sow doubts in your heart and mind about promises of God, the sacraments, the Church, the authority of the Bible.

In other words, the doubting fool is one who has the Word of God in his hands, who reads it and yet doubts the promises of God.

5. The Covetous Fool

Jesus told the story about a rich man and his barns. The man built his barns bigger and he said that he was going to retire because he had made enough money. He said, *“Soul you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” (Luke 12:19).* But God said, *“You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you.” (Luke 12:20).*

Jesus said, “*So is he that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*” (Luke 12:21). You see, the rich man tried to find happiness, stability and security in the wrong place – money. If you had asked this man, “What is your name?” He probably would have answered, “My name is the rich man.” Or, “I am an eminent person in the Australian/Coptic community. But if you asked God, “Lord, what is this man’s name?” The answer would have been: “Fool”. The rich man had been called by his family name, his given name, his rank, his titles, his wealth, the flatteries of men. But in the sight of God his name was “Fool”. That is all we know about the rich man, that he was a rich fool who had laid up treasures on earth but nothing in heaven. How many of us are in this same category?

6. The Saved Fool

The sixth and last is the “fool” who has received salvation: “*The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*” (1 Corinthians 1:18). What the world counts as foolish we have rested our eternal salvation on. When you turn your back on the pleasures and the sensual lusts and materialism of this world, people will think you are a fool!

Those who have the Lord Jesus Christ abiding in their hearts daily (Proverbs 23:26), the Holy Spirit produces love and joy and peace, like a mighty river flowing through our hearts (John 7:38), no matter what the troubles and the circumstances may be. Oh, yes, we may go through a lot of suffering and we go through death, but it is not the same as with a nonbeliever. For the Christian, the sting of death has been removed (Hosea).

Whatever happens to us, Christ is with us in every circumstance. And then we have all glory ahead, eternity forever with Him!

Are you one of the devil’s fools? Or are you willing to be a fool for Christ’s sake? You have to make a choice.

The Christians Place in the World

1. Sent into the World

"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." (John 17:18).

"Then Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'" (John 20:21).

2. Preaching to the World

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" (Mark 16:15).

3. The Light of the World

"that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15)

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14)

4. Live Godly in the World

"teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." (Titus 2:12).

5. Not Conformed to the World

"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." (Romans 12:2).

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." (John 17:15).

6. Love not the World

"For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 John 2:16).

"for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia." (2 Timothy 4:10).

7. Passing through the World

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11).

8. No Friendship with the World

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world

makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4).

”Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27).

The Divine Unity of the Servants

1. Children in one Family – One Father

"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" (John 20:17).

2. Disciples in one School – One Teacher

"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed our 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. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." (John 13:13-16).

3. Sheep in one Flock – One Shepherd

"As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:15-16).

4. Members of one Body – One Head

"but, speaking the faith in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ." (Ephesians 4:15).

5. Stones in one Building – One Foundation

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Why Christians Should Not Be Anxious!!

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10).

1. God’s Presence.....Secures me.

”Fear not, for I am with you.” (Isaiah 41:10).

”Do not fear little flock for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” (Luke 12:32).

”The Lord is my light and my salvation of whom shall I fear. The Lord is the strength of my life of whom shall I be afraid.” (Psalm 27:1).

2. God’s Peace.....Satisfies me.

”Be not dismayed; for I am your God.”

”The satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every better thing is sweet.” (Proverbs 27:7).

”He who dwells in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” (Psalm 91:1).

”I have come that I you may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10).

3. God’s Power.....Strengthens me.

”I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13).

”God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.” (Psalm 46:1).

4. God’s Provision.....Supplies me.

”Yes, I will help you.”

”My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19).

”I am your shield.” (Genesis 15:1).

5. God’s Promise.....Sustains me.

”I will uphold you with the My righteous right hand.”

”I have set the Lord always before me because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad and my glory rejoices.” (Psalm 16:8,9).

”Be anxious for nothing but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God

which surpasses all understanding, fill your hearts and guard your minds.”
(Philippians 4:6,7).