



THE LORD IS MY LIGHT & SALVATION  
WHOM SHALL I FEAR?  
"Ps 27:1"

# MAHRAGAN EL KERAZA 2024!



**English Edition**  
**Grades 7-8**

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Ps 27:1





THE LORD IS MY LIGHT & SALVATION

WHOM SHALL I FEAR? "Ps 27:1"



**H.H. Pope Tawadros II**

Pope of Alexandria &  
Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark



**H.G. Bishop David**

Bishop of the Diocese of New York  
and New England







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# THE LORD IS MY LIGHT & SALVATION

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Generation after generation witnesses to our God; all of His creation sings to Him and declares His might and wonders. The entire universe is the works of His Hands, His Word is a light to our feet and His promises are the secret of our peace. We judge our thoughts by His verses, we trade and profit according to His gifts. Our Church is fathers and martyrs whose struggle is our inheritance, dogma, mysteries, and life. My Church is unique and stands on the solid foundations of faith and doctrine which were handed down to me and serve as the glory of my inheritance.

## *The Lord is my Light and my Salvation (Psalm 27:1)*

This is the theme of the 2024 St. Mark's Mahragan El Keraza, by God's will. "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation" is the first verse of the 27th Psalm of our teacher David the prophet. When David was in distress and being persecuted by king Saul, God filled him with **light** and hope. Therefore, he didn't give up even while being in darkness, as his life was filled with the presence of God, light, and hope.

The Lord brought forth **salvation** to David's life. He saved him from Saul multiple times. He who has God as his Light, sees God's strength and salvation amidst the fears and sorrows of this world, as well as in the fight against his/her sins.







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**"The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1).**

This Psalm declares that God is our **Light**, our **Salvation**, and the **Fortress of our lives**. He saves the believer from his spiritual enemies; thus, his inner eyes can behold the heavenly glories. Therefore, it is a Psalm of trust and victory, as the Lord is our Light and our Salvation.

These are the main themes of this year's slogan:

1. The **Lord**
2. The Lord is **my Light**
3. The Lord is **my Salvation**

### Who is the Lord?

We believe in One God with Three Hypostases: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. The Orthodox faith of the Holy Trinity tells us that The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God - not three gods, but One God. God declared to us that He is One God of Three Hypostases in the Holy Bible throughout the Old and New Testaments. In 1 John 5:7, we read *"For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."* The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in Essence, but the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. To each Hypostasis belongs a certain characteristic differentiating Him from the Other.







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The Father is the **Origin**.

The Son is **Begotten** of the Father.

The Holy Spirit **Proceeds** forth from the Father.

These faithful truths are the teachings of our Coptic Orthodox Church about the Holy Trinity. May the Lord grant us His grace so that we may always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is within us.



## The Lord is my Light and my Salvation

*"Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16)*

Some believe in God Who lives in heaven while others refuse the existence of God. They deny Him because of the darkness that has blinded their poor hearts! Our faith in the Incarnation is the solution to all of man's problems. Through the Incarnation, our Omnipotent, loving God, our Wise Teacher, came down to enlighten man's way, to save him from the filth of sin, and raise him into the eternal heavens. Thus, let us understand Who God is.

### 1. God is eternal, immortal, and everlasting:

God has no beginning nor end, He is eternal, immortal, and everlasting: *"Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even*







*from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." (Psalms 90:2).*

God alone is eternal – without beginning, and immortal – without end. No other being is eternal, immortal, as all of God's creation has a beginning and an end. A creation begins the day it is created, when it is founded or born, before which time it never existed. This entire universe and everything in it were created, it has a beginning as well as an end. Nothing in it is immortal, but God differs from all these:

*"I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills, I was brought forth;"*

*(Proverbs 8:23-25).*

God has no beginning in or out of time and has no end, God forbid! *"But You are the same, And Your years will have no end."*  
*(Psalms 102:27).*

## 2. God is the Creator

God alone created all things. The word created means that God brought forth everything from non-existence, from nothing. God





created the entire universe with the Word of His Mouth, "God spoke and it came about". Not only did God create the material, but He also created the spirit & mind. He created angels, who are spirits. He created life. As the Creator, God Alone gives life to the spirits He created. In His Hands are life and death.

He also created all of nature, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1)* and He has the power to annihilate it.

Let us examine the creation from the beginning. God created the heavens, earth, sun, moon, stars, plants, animals, and mankind. This all happened in the past, when God created the heavens and the earth, and everything in it. He who denies God's existence is blind & cannot see.

### 3. God brings everything into existence

One of the characteristics of God is that He alone can bring things into existence. Thus, it is necessary that He exists. Nothing can come into existence on its own, only God can bring it into existence. God is the essential cause of all that exists. No being, other than God, is described as one who brings things into existence, *"For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself;" (John 5:26)*

### 4. God is limitless

God is limitless, He cannot be contained or limited by time or space: He exists at all times and everywhere; in heaven, on earth, and everywhere in between. No space can hold







Him or limit Him. He is ever present in all, *"which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* (Ephesians 1:23). God fills all generations, and everyone who comes after them, He is completely limitless in all things, and can do all things. Nothing is like Him in this characteristic - no angel, nor human, *"Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me" (Genesis 48:3)*

### 5. God knows all things – He is Omniscient

God Alone knows all things, at all times and in every place. He Alone knows all things before they occur – He knows the future, things unknown; He knows the intricacies of all things seen & unseen; He knows the past, present, and future; His knowledge of all things is complete, whole, & present; all things appear before Him simultaneously! *"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."* (Hebrews 4:13)

### 6. God is Almighty – He is the Pantocrator

It is impossible that anything should happen in the universe, big or small without God's permission. All things that occur in the universe are according to God's plan and His economy, *"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."* (Matthew 10:30)





### 7. God does not change

God's ways and judgments are steady, they do not change, *"the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."* (James 1:17). God never changes at all. He does not increase because there is no increase to Him since He is infinite. God is perfect in everything. He does not lack anything as deficiency is incompatible with His Divinity. He does not change because there is no status better than what God is in that He may change into.



### 8. God is All Holy

God's holiness is His infallibility, that is the impossibility of error and His absolute holiness. Infallibility is a word made up of 2 parts:

- 'in' = negates the 'ability'
- 'fallible' = to fall.

Absolute infallibility, infinite holiness is found in none other than God Alone, *"No one is holy like the LORD"* (1 Samuel 2:2). This is one of the most important pieces of evidence that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is the Logos appearing in the Flesh, because He







*"knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He challenged the Jews, saying, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46)*

## 9. God was Incarnate for our Redemption

Some say that is unacceptable to attribute the incarnation to God, but the truth is that the Incarnation:

1. Does not contradict the **Holiness** of God.
2. Does not conflict with God's **power**.
3. Does not conflict with God's **wisdom**.
4. Does not conflict with God's **honor**.



### ✝ The Coming of the Redeemer:

*"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14)*

*"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)*

### ✝ The Redemption was necessary and the redeemer must meet the fol-





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### Requiring specifications:

- He must be a human being, to represent fallen humanity.
- He must die because the wage of sin is death.
- He must be infinite, because Adam's sin is infinite, as it was directed to God Who is infinite.
- The Redeemer must be infinite that He may redeem all of humanity through the ages.
- The Redeemer must be sinless, he who lacks something cannot give it.
- The Redeemer must be the Creator, that He may recreate humankind.



The only one who can meet all these specifications is God Alone Who can become Incarnate and take the form of a man susceptible to death. He is infinite, Holy, without sin, the Creator Who is able to renew humankind and restore him to his original form.

### 10. The Living God, Who does not die

He is the Living One. Is it possible for Life to die? God forbid, for He said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."* (John 11:25). After His death in the flesh on our behalf and His Redemption on the Cross, God Arose by Himself.





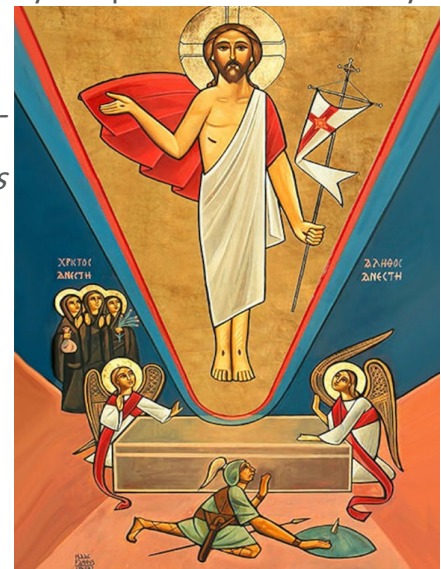
He arose never to die again, as He is God, *"who lives forever and ever"* (Revelation 4:9, 10:6, 15:7).

### 11. God Who abides in us

The word *Immanuel* means "God with us" and the word *Christian* means "God in us."

This is a miraculous gift for humanity from the most powerful God, Who lives in the highest heaven and Who came down to us in the form of 'Immanuel' – He is God Who came down, Who is with us. *"Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."* (Philippians 2:6-7).

After this came another gift; **Immanuel abides in us.** This is the essence of Christianity - the Spirit of God lives in us, and we have become holy temples in which the Holy Spirit dwells. *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* (Colossians 1:27).



## The Lord is my Light

God is the True Light, the Creator, and He is the source of light. "God Who is Light, and abides in light, Who is







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praised by the angels of light, The Light shone from Mary" (Monday Theotokia part 9)

**God is the Light:** He is the One Who said, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."* (John 8:12)

*"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."* (1 John 1:5)

And in the Book of Revelation, it was said of the Lord Jesus Christ when He appeared to St. John, *"and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."* (Revelation 1:16).

In the Morning Doxology, we proclaim, "O the True Light, Who enlightens every man coming into the world... As the daylight shines upon us, O Christ Our God, the true Light, let the luminous senses and the bright thoughts shine within us".

Not only that, but God is *"the Father of lights"* (James 1:17), and abides in light *"dwelling in unapproachable light"* (1 Timothy 6:16).

### God is the Source of light:

God created light when He said, *"Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness."* (Genesis 1:3-4). This was God's first work





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for the sake of humankind, through which they were able to see, perceive, and take pleasure in what the Loving God had bestowed upon them.

The Church teaches us to walk in this Godly light through:

### ✝ The teachings of the Holy Bible:

Our Holy Bible with the Old and New Testaments, is the word of God, commandments and promises, written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is the living Word, received by us through tradition. Let us memorize It and keep Its commandments as:

- *"The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;" (Psalms 19.8).*
- *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalms 119:105).*
- *"For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life," (Proverbs 6:23).*

We need the Word of God in the Holy Bible to distinguish between the dung and the fat, as the Lord Jesus Christ commanded us,

- *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)*
- *"Then Jesus said to them, 'A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.'" (John 12:35)*

### ✝ The Church and its liturgies:





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The Church is a holy, traditional beacon. It resembles the heavens with its stars and angels. It will continuously be a beacon with many lights, like heaven on earth, a reference to the presence of God dwelling in light. He is the glory and splendor of the Church. As the lighthouse gives light to all, the Church gives light, especially when reading from the Word of God. *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."* (Revelation 21:3)



- **The Prayers of Holy Baptism:** We receive the Sacrament of enlightenment when we are baptized. We are enlightened; and when we are enlightened, we become the children of God. When we become children of God, we become perfected through Him.

The father the priest prays for the baptized, saying, "Invite Your servants to Your pure light... open the eyes of their hearts, that they may be enlightened by the Gospel of Your Kingdom ... make them pure vessels, children of Light".

- **During the Fraction to the Father:** The celebrant priest prays "God, the begetter of light, Author of life ... Who has brought us out of the depth into the light ... who made the darkness of error in us to become light through the coming in the flesh of Your only begotten Son."

- **In the Agpeya Prayers:** During the absolution of the Prime Hour Prayer, we en-







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treat, saying, "O God Who causes the light to burst forth, Who lets His sun shine upon the righteous and the wicked, Who created the light which illuminates the whole world, enlighten our minds, our hearts and our understandings, O Master of all, and grant us to please You this present day. Guard us from every bad thing, from every sin, and from every adversative power".

In the Absolution of the Midnight Prayer: "O Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, the Living and Eternal Son of God, enlighten our minds to understand Your life-giving words. Raise us up from the darkness of sin which ruins the soul."

- **In the glorious history of the Church:** This is also a beacon of light for us throughout the ages which was passed down to us through the inheritance of the Fathers – the canons, dogma, doctrines, laid out by the Ecumenical Councils, which may never be changed nor dismissed. The lives and saying of our great Fathers, and their interpretations of the Holy Bible are lights and lamps along our way to Eternal Life. Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox Church struggles to keep the One True Upright Faith, the right teachings, and the well-established doctrines as we received them from those great Fathers like St. Athanasius, St. Cyril the Great, St. Dionisius and many others.

### ✝ The illuminated lives of the saints:

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to enlighten the world, and He allowed His disciples to reflect His light as the moon reflects the light of the sun and He commanded us to live the life of holiness: *"Be holy, for I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:16). Thus, the Church is filled with saints who are lights for us, as we read their biographies daily in the Synaxarium.

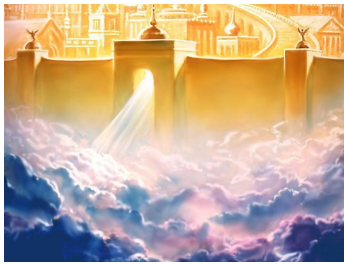




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During Holy week, we conclude the homilies of the holy Fathers by saying, "Let us conclude the homily of our Father, saint... who enlightened our hearts and minds by his beneficial teachings." And we walk on their path, as commanded, *"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering*



*the outcome of their conduct."* (Hebrews 13.7)

### ✝ The lives of the righteous are a light for us:

The Midnight Praises begin with: "Arise, children of Light to praise the Lord of hosts."

*"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8)*

As a sign of the light within him, the believer shines in his speech, walk of life, peace, actions, and in everything he does. The light of Christ shines through the believer, defeating the evil of darkness and attracts those around him.

### ✝ The Light of Eternal Life:

The first thing mentioned in the Holy Bible is God creating light on the first day and the Holy Bible also ends by mentioning the Heavenly Jerusalem full of Light saying, *"The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Rev 21:23)*. In the resurrection, also, the righteous will arise in their enlightened, spiritual, heavenly, holy bodies unto eternal lie with Christ and the





saints.

We must be lights shining in the world. As the Light of Christ has shone upon us, and as the moon reflects the light of the sun, we reflect His light. Let us give thanks to the Lord, Who has made us light unto the world, as He abides in us and shines His Divine Image through us. He is able to enlighten our lives internally, and lead our way to His Kingdom

## *The Lord is my Salvation: What is the meaning of My Salvation?*

in our Coptic Orthodox understanding, the meaning of Salvation is found in the Holy Bible and the Fathers:

- Man sinned and transgressed God's commandment; the punishment of which is death. Therefore, the whole humankind was penalized with death and the human nature was corrupted. Thus, mankind was in great need of a Savior to save us from all of this, so that we may return to Paradise, to live with God.
- This Salvation continues throughout one's entire life – it begins in the church by partaking of the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, the Eucharist, is perfected by Repentance & Confession, and concludes by the changing of the physical body into a spiritual and heavenly body.

Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox Church refuses the saying, "I've been saved" and the idea of "salvation in a moment", not for the sake of arguing against doctrines, but because this is very distant from the work of Salvation.







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- His Holiness Pope Shenouda III said, in his book, *The Heresy of Salvation in a Moment, You, my brother were in Adam when he sinned and when he was punished, and when death entered into him, so you inherited all of these from him, and as a part of him, you received through him the judgement of death, and sin entered into your nature. Therefore you lost your image of God, thus you became in need of salvation from this original, ancestral sin, and from all of its ramifications, and these, its punishments, of which our teacher St. Paul said, "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life."* (Romans 5:18)

### Thus, we are in need our Lord Jesus Christ, Who:

- Saves from the original, ancestral sin, which we inherited from our father Adam & our mother Eve
- Saves us from the corruption of human nature which became inclined to sinning after the fall
- Saves us from the four deaths:
  - The **death of the body**, through the resurrection from the dead.
  - The **spiritual death**, when we enter into a relationship with Him and He abides in us.
  - **Eternal death**, when we become His children and partakers of His divine nature.
  - **Everlasting death**, when we enter the Heavenly Kingdom.
- Saves us from personal sins, which have sway over us because of our frequent falls, the sins of thought, feelings, flesh, relationships, etc.
- *"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* (John 16.33)





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- Saves us from our sins of the weak flesh (which falls even unto the last breath) by the power of the resurrection, unto a glorious body full of light.
- Saves us from the devil's temptations and the deceit of the enemy of good which will lead to our perishing. Thus, we are assured, *"the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."* (Romans 16:20)

### Pillars of Salvation (How we are saved):

- At the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior was born. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and the ransom at the same time. There is no Salvation without redemption, no redemption without the Incarnation, and no Incarnation without birth.
- The Lord Jesus Christ provided the salvation, which is sufficient for all sinners - all over the world and for all ages - but not everyone was saved. Everyone who believes in Him will be saved, but to obtain Salvation the following conditions must be met:

**Faith in Jesus Christ, the Only Savior:** Our teacher St. Peter said, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts

4:12) St. John the Beloved also writes; *"That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16)

- In the Annunciation of





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the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ it was said, *"she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). When the angels announced the Birth of Christ they said, *"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* (Luke 2:12)

- Therefore, we cannot be saved from our sins by just believing in the existence of God as even Akhenaten (one of old pharos) believed in God's existence. Rather, salvation is achieved when we believe that our Great God was Incarnate in the form of a human from the Holy Virgin Mary, was crucified on the cross, died and rose for our salvation. He then ascended with His Body of Light to heaven, and sent to us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and He founded the Holy Church for us. He established in her the salvific Sacraments, without which there is no salvation for mankind.
- He clarified that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is essential for salvation when He said,
  - *"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."* (John 3:16)
  - *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."* (Mark 16:16)
  - *"Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (1 John 5:5)

**Practicing the Holy Sacraments:** The Holy Bible teaches of the importance of the







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Sacraments for salvation:

### ✝ The Sacrament of Baptism:

- *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3.5)*
- *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16.16)*



### ✝ The Sacrament of Chrismation:

- *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One," (1 John 2.20) that we may be holy temples indwelt by the Holy Spirit.*

### ✝ The Sacrament of Repentance & Confession:

- *"He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23)*

### ✝ The Sacrament of Holy Communion:

- *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6.56)*

The above four Sacraments are necessary for salvation.

### ✝ The Sacrament of Unction of the Sick:

- *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them*





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*pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5.14-15)*

### ✝ The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony:

- Holy matrimony is unity between one man and one woman, as God ordained, in purity and chastity for the rest of their lives. One of the goals of this sacrament is to establish a family in the fear of God. This is a Holy Sacrament, as the Holy



Spirit comes upon the bride & groom and unites them, then they become one heart and one flesh. Since the beginning, God created Eve for Adam as *"a helper comparable to him."* (Genesis 2:18). The Holy Bible says of marriage, *"this is a great mystery"* (Ephesians 5:32). Our Church teaches us the life of

purity; therefore, we refuse homosexual marriages, which are contrary to the Holy Bible.

### ✝ The Sacrament of the Priesthood:

- Priests are the servants of the mystery of salvation. The Church appoints them to shepherd, teach, and carry out the Holy Sacraments.
- *"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach" (1 Timothy 3.2)*
- *"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." (1 Timothy 4:16)*





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- *"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Corinthians 4:1)*

### Good works:

- *"Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20)*
- *"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)*
- *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)*
- Righteous works are essential to salvation because they demonstrate the sincerity of the true faith, as a fruit from fruit.

### Transfiguration of the body:

This means that the bodies with which we live on earth were tainted by sin, which causes us to transgress from time to time. The Christian struggles not to sin, but because of this body of sin in which we live, he is weak and transgresses. But we are taught to quickly rise in regret and return through repentance, being faithful in confession. Thus, the righteous person says to sin,

- *"Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me." (Micah 7:8)*



As long as we are in the body of sin, which

is liable to falling, disease, and death, our salvation will not be complete. We must put







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off the body of dust, humiliation, and weakness, and put on the luminous, heavenly, glorious body, which is not liable to disease, fall, or death.

The heavenly, luminous, glorious body will be as the Lord Jesus Christ's body, with which He rose from the dead.

This is what we call the 'Transfiguration of the body'.

- o 'trans' = change
- o 'figure' = form.

The form of our body will change into the luminous, spiritual body given to us by the Lord. This is the body with which we will ascend when the Lord Jesus Christ appears in His Second Glorious Coming to take us on the clouds. All will be raised with this glorious body,

- *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." (Philippians 3:20-21)*
- *"And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." (1 Corinthians 15:49)*

### ✝ The 4 Pillars of Salvation are:

- **Faith in Christ:** Let us live for Him with strong faith in His Incarnation and Redemption for us.
- **The Holy Sacraments:** Let us practice them faithfully so they may make us holy.
- **Good works:** Let us partake in them as evidence and fruit of the truth of our faith.





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- **Transfiguration of the body:** Which the Lord will grant us in His Second Coming.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of our lives and the Savior of our souls. He gives us strength, hope, comfort and peace and He establishes us, therefore:

- We must never be afraid of tribulations, no matter what. Throughout the ages, the Church has struggled against warfare, people who caused doubts, and various deviations against the faith and doctrine. **God allowed the church to overcome** these tribulations and the Church remains strong, unique, one, holy, established, a beacon of light for the world, a shining sun, a terrible army – from which all the devils tremble *"and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18).

- We are not afraid because **we are united with the Lord internally**. Through partaking of the Holy Communion, we abide in Him and He in us. Through this union we receive God's grace, Who comforts us and grants us peace, destroys the deception of evil, and lights our way.



- We are not afraid because **we are the children of God**.

- *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."* (Revelation 3:21)

- *"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God"* (Romans 8:14).

- He gives us the power of His cross, victory, and supremacy and therefore we boast in Him the power of God for our salvation.

- *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us*





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*who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)*

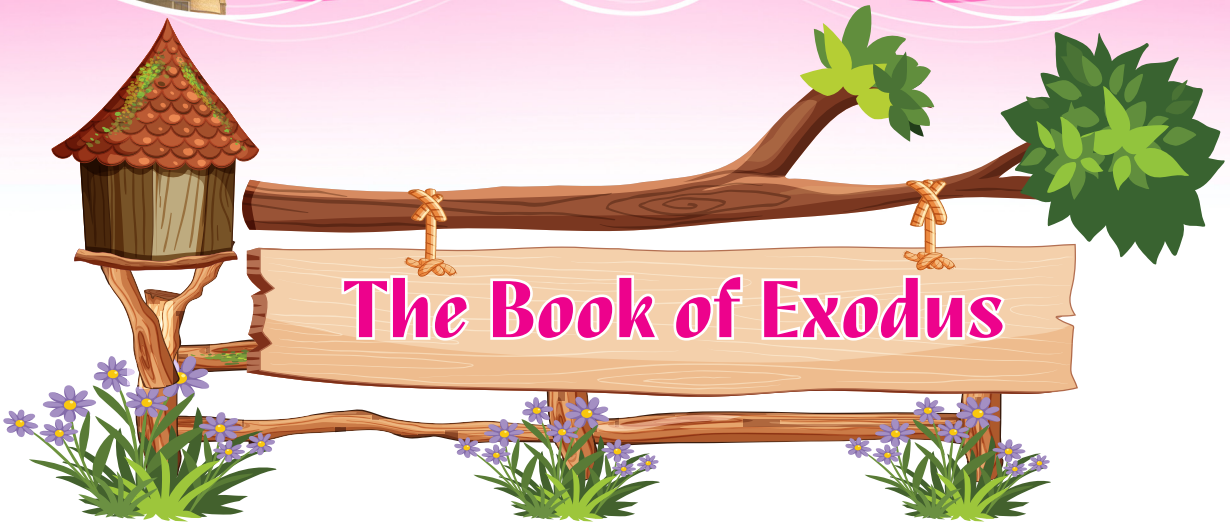
- This is the faith of all the righteous martyrs of the Church over the ages and what the world saw in the martyrdom of the 21 martyrs of Libya. Let us not be afraid because we hope in eternal life.

- *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Revelation 3:21)."*

May the Lord grant this Mahragan to be fulfilling for our souls, spiritually edifying and filled with peace that we may become fruitful branches in God's vineyard. May He fill our lives with His goodness so that we may live for Him and be faithful witnesses to His Holy Name daily.







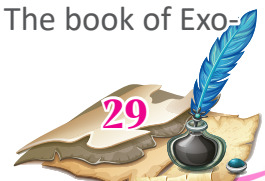
*"But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."*

*(Exodus 10:23)*

The Holy Bible is composed of 2 Testaments: New and Old. The Old Testament contains 46 Books and the New Testament has 27 Books. The Book of Exodus, which follows Genesis, is the 2nd Book of the Old Testament. It is called 'Exodus' because it is about the **exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt**. It is composed of 40 chapters.

In a symbolic way, the Book of Exodus declares God's Salvation which is freely given to all mankind. God's Hand brought out the people from the land of slavery to the liberty of the children of God. This freedom from slavery is a type of God's free Salvation for humankind. The Book presents people, symbols, and sacrifices which point to the Incarnation of our God and His Salvific work for us.

Exodus begins with the word, **"Now"** denoting a continuation from the book of Genesis as the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses the prophet. The book of Exo-





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Exodus starts with the slavery of the people under Pharaoh's tyrannical rule and continues throughout the lives of the Israelites from the death of Joseph to the 2nd year after the exodus out of Egypt, which totals to about 450 years.

The book portrays how God's promises to the fathers were fulfilled; the people of Israel became an organized nation with leaders, priesthood, and God dwelt among His people in the Tabernacle. Throughout the journey of the Book of Exodus, we see how God led the people from persecution and humiliation to the Glory of God in the Tabernacle of Meeting. Part of this journey required the Passover through the Blood of the Lamb, who purifies, justifies, and saves from our sins.

The events surrounding the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt symbolize **God's free Salvation and Redemption**. Egypt became a symbol of the land of **slavery**, and exiting it pointed to the **freedom** of God's people. Therefore, the Book of Exodus is not just a historical account, but a story of the Israelites' and our own salvation. On the same token, Pharaoh symbolizes the **devil** who enslaved God's people. Additionally, the people's desire to eat Egypt's leeks and caldrons of meat symbolize man's **misconstrued desires for worldly things**.

## Characters

Moses was of *"The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of Levi according to their generations."* (Exodus 6:19) Moses' brother was Aaron and his sister was Mariam. His life can be studied in 3 parts, 40 years to each part:





### ✝ Birth to age 40:

• Pharaoh's daughter found Moses on the bank of the Nile; after his mother daubed a basket with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the riverbank. Moses' mother did this for his protection as Pharaoh commanded that all male infants of the Israelite people ought to be killed. Pharaoh's daughter adopted him, called him **Moses** which means "taken from the water," and gave him to his mother to nurse him. Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace until the age of 40.

### ✝ Age 40 –80:



• Moses fled from Egypt and from Pharaoh as a **wanted man** after he killed an Egyptian man. During this time, he lived in the house of a priest of Midian after he married his daughter Zipporah from whom Gershom, his son, was born to him.

### ✝ Age 80–120:

• After 40 years in Midian, God appeared to Moses in the **burning bush** and sent him to free His people from Egypt. He led the people in the wilderness for 40 years but **did not enter the Promised Land**. He died at the age of 120 years on Mount Nebo. Moses represents the Old Testament, as he spoke with God, led the people to freedom, and received the Commandments. When the Lord Transfigured







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on Mount Tabor, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him (Matthew 17:1-8). In the Book of Revelation, the victorious ones sing the song of Moses (Revelation 15:3) Moses was **slow of speech**, he stuttered when he talked. We read about Moses being a **harsh** man when he killed the Egyptian. He was **fearful** as he fled after killing the Egyptian man. Moses often made excuses such that he angered God, and when Pharaoh refused his original petition, he blamed God in an unacceptable manner. But later, we come to know that Moses became **more patient than all men**.

- *"Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people." (Exodus 11:3) He was a successful leader and judge for the people of Israel. No one - before or after - was like Moses the Prophet (Exodus 34:1-12).*



The Church celebrates the feast of Moses the Prophet every year on the **8th of Tout**.

## Exodus Chapters 1 & 2:

*The World Destroys, but Grace Uplifts*

- Jacob, his children, and grandchildren entered Egypt as one family when Israel (Jacob) went to see his son Joseph alive. After this, the nation of Israel was established in Egypt and their first leader was Moses the prophet.





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- *"But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them." (Exodus 1:7)* **They knew the true God** and increased their worship & knowledge of Him.

- Joseph symbolized **Our Lord Jesus Christ when he ruled as the 2nd man of Egypt.**

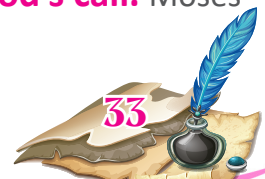
Here, God's inspired word makes a strong connection between Joseph's death and the increase of God's people; meaning, the Church could only grow through the Death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- After Joseph's death, a new Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph became king. He persecuted the people of Israel as their number increased abundantly. **Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites** and used them to build the cities of **Ramses and Pithom on the Eastern border of Egypt.** Ultimately, however, Pharaoh ordered the Egyptian midwives to kill their male infants at birth. He commanded that the male Israelite infants be drowned before anyone could see them.

- Similarly, the **fruitfulness of the Church and every soul** stirs up the enemy of good & preoccupies them with things like brickmaking - working in the mud to build cities and focusing on the earthly abundance - **to prevent them from rising from the earth and pursuing heavenly matters.**

- Moses was born of Amram & Jochebed of the **tribe of Levi** (Exodus 6:20). His mother hid him in a basket and placed him in the reeds of the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter found him, adopted him, and gave him to **Jochebed (his mother)** to nurse him. Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses.

- Moses grew in stature; he went on his own to check on his Israelite brethren without God calling him - symbolizing **those who serve without God's call.** Moses'





first attempt to save the people stemmed from human compassion which lacked God's perfect timing, it was premature and involved pride and a reliance on his human power like when he killed the Egyptian. When Pharaoh heard of this attempt, he wanted to kill Moses, but Moses was fearful and fled from Pharaoh's face. This means that if one presumes a calling and serves without being sent by God, **this will lead to struggle and the end result will be failure.**

- Moses met the seven daughters of the priest of Midian by a well and helped them water their flocks; the priest of Midian, named Reuel invited him to his house and permitted him to stay. Moses married Zipporah, Reuel's daughter and had a son, whom he named **Gershon** which means 'stranger.'
- Throughout the death of Joseph and the persecution of God's people under slavery, God looked upon the humiliation of His people.
  - *"But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." (Exodus 1:12)*

## Prophecies & Symbols

Origen the scholar contemplates that Pharaoh's daughter symbolizes the church of the gentiles which accepted Moses – **a symbol of the Law** - from the Jews through the river – a symbol of the sacrament of Baptism - so she believed in him and took him with her to the







palace.

- *"She left her father's house and came to the water to be washed of her sins. This is the church which came out of the nations to find Moses who was rejected by his people." (Origen)*

The name "Moses" means **"taken from the water"** and is prophetic of his role in taking the people of God out of Egypt through the Red Sea.

## Exodus Chapters 3 & 4:

### *The Divine Mission*

God appeared to Moses in the burning bush amidst the flame of fire on Mount Horeb in the wilderness.

- The wilderness is the depth of practical experiences with God.
- Horeb, the mountain of God, refers to communion with God.
- The bush is God's people, the church.
- The thorns represent slavery and persecutions.

The bush did not burn despite the fire inside it. *"Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight," (Exodus 3:3).* Moses was eager to see this great sight, thus God called him from the midst of the bush & sent him to His people in Egypt.

*"Take your sandals off your feet" (Exodus 3:5)*

- The sandals represent the world which is full of sin, and God, by appearing in that place made it holy.

*"But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh," (Exodus 3:11)*

- It took Moses 40 years to learn the humility required for him to proclaim this





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statement. He spent 40 years in the house of Midian and there was a big difference between Moses, who went out to rescue his brethren through his own strength by killing the Egyptian, and the Moses sent by God.

For the first time, God declares his name, **Yahweh**, which means **I AM**.

As the Egyptians robbed the Israelites and enslaved them, when they fled Egypt, the Israelites took the Egyptian's gold and silver. Similarly, **when we are released from slavery to the devil, all is returned back to us** - our **souls**, our **thoughts**, and our **time**.

Moses becomes hesitant, at first, he refuses to go back to Egypt (Exodus 4:10-13). Moses was not hesitant because of humility but because he looked only to his own power and could not believe that God would send him to undertake this service.

- Through God's grace, however, *"the people believed; ... and worshiped."* (Exodus 4:13)

- The people believed Moses because this was truly a **divine mission**. They worshipped, meaning, they truly loved and worshipped God spiritually.

- *"Come now, then, and I will send you to Pharaoh, and bring out my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."* (Exodus 3:10)

The **burning bush** is a symbol of the **Holy Virgin Mary** who carried the divinity in her womb and **was not consumed**. **Moses** is a symbol of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, Who would **free His people** from the slavery of Pharaoh who symbolizes the devil.

### Doctrine

Zipporah circumcised her son, which is a symbol of baptism by the Blood of Christ.

- *"So I have come down to deliver them"* (Exodus 3:8) represents the **Incarna-**





tion.

- "To bring them up from that land to a good and large land" (Exodus 3:8) represents the **Resurrection**.

The three-day journey represents the Resurrection, and the sacrifice to the Lord in the wilderness (Exodus 3:18) represents the slain Lamb who is Christ, the Word of God.

- "The Lord is my light and my salvation." (Psalms 27:1)

## Rites

We remove our shoes when receiving Holy Communion and upon entering the sanctuary, declaring that we have **left the love of the world** and are now **entering union with God** in this holy place.

# Exodus Chapters 5, 6 & 7:

## *A Difficult Beginning*

*"Hold a feast to Me" (Exodus 5:1)*

- The worship of God is joy and exaltation - a three-day journey, "and sacrifice" (Exodus 5:3). This is a feast symbolizing the Resurrection of the Lord three days after His Crucifixion, which became a feast, freedom, jubilation, and exaltation.







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Pharaoh imposed strict orders on the people and did not release them. He accused them of being lazy which is a reminder that **Satan's wars begin when the soul sets out on a path to worship God** and to know Him.

- The "officers of the children of Israel" were certain people from Israel who were to submit the quota demanded by Pharaoh daily to the taskmasters.
- The people went to complain to Pharaoh, but he would not listen to them. When they left Pharaoh, Moses was waiting for them to find out the outcome but they complained against Moses. **This was the first time they complained against Moses and against God.** This complaining was a common characteristic of this people all their days in the wilderness.

Moses pleads with God:

- It is a beautiful thing for a servant to plead with God when one understands his failures and declares his shortcomings.
  - The Lord began by saying, *"I am the Lord."* (Exodus 6:2) He also concluded his conversation with Moses by saying, *"I am the Lord."* (Exodus 6:8).
  - This means **I am the Lord who will fulfill My promise.** It is very important and empowering to trust in the promises of the Lord which he made to the fathers. He hears the wailing of His people, and He will deliver them. **He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

Paul records the names of two Egyptian magicians, *"Jannes and Jambres"* (2 Timothy 3:8) which were passed down by the Jewish tradition. They resisted Moses, not through fear or threatening, but with a very dangerous warfare of **deception.** The most dangerous warfare against the Church comes from those who put on a servant's role, disfigure





the doctrine, and split the Body of Christ.

- *"Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians'" (Exodus 6:6)*

### Prophecies and Symbols:

- *"And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Exodus 6:6)*
- The Outstretched arm is a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Exodus Chapters 7, 8, 9, & 10:

### First Eight plagues

#### The goal of the 10 plagues:

- Proof of Moses and Aaron's commission.
- To give Pharaoh and his people a chance to **repent**.
- God used them to defend His oppressed people. God sent the plagues to pressure Pharaoh repent and release His children.
- God also used the plagues to teach us that **there is no salvation without the Blood of Christ**.
- The ten plagues began with blood - the Nile River turning to blood - and ended with blood - the killing of the firstborn.

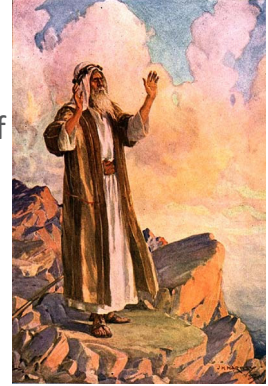




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- The plagues were a warning to Pharaoh and a prologue to the greatest one of them all, Pharaoh and his army drowning in the Red Sea.
- The miraculous plagues declared the weakness of the gods of Egypt and the pagan gods. This was to teach the Egyptians that their gods were nothing, and that the God of the children of Israel was the true God. Additionally, the plagues taught the children of Israel about the power of God, Whom they serve - they are a school of faith.



The first few plagues were relatively less intense, followed by more severe plagues, until the most painful plague, which was the death of the firstborn. When Pharaoh failed to understand God's message after all this, he perished with his army in the Red Sea. It is important to remember that the plagues were from God and the children of Israel did nothing to cause them; **God defends His people by His mighty hand.**

Pharaoh and his people were given warnings before the plagues happened and God gave them advice on how to avoid the plagues. At one point, Pharaoh agreed to let only the men go, but **Moses refused negotiation.** From this we learn that God's children must never negotiate with sin. During each of the plagues, Moses held his hands up to heaven, denoting that God is the only and True source of strength, and proving Moses' and Aaron's divine commission.

### **The First Plague - The Nile River turns to Blood (Exodus 7:14-25):**

✝ The plagues began by turning the waters of the Nile River into blood. The plagues begin with blood to teach us that the penalty of sin is death. They also end with blood,







through the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb. This shows us that **blood was necessary for the salvation of the people.** The concept of Redemption implies shedding of blood for the sake of blood. This plague was directed against the god of the Egyptians since the Egyptians worshipped the Nile River. Seeing the Nile River become defiled with blood thus caused great confusion for the Egyptian people.

### The Second Plague - The Frogs (Exodus 8:1-14):

✝ Frogs were dedicated to the god Osiris and they were a symbol of **fruitfulness and growth.** During the plague, the frogs died and decayed, pointing to the **falsehood of the Egyptian gods.**



Frogs, with their disturbing sounds, symbolize idle, nonsense words which do not produce good works. Similarly, Pharaoh brought multiple plagues on himself through his stubbornness.

### The Third Plague - Lice (Exodus 8:16-19):

✝ The Egyptians were the cleanest nation of their time. Their priests used to bathe morning and evening. They used to put on pure linen and never touched anything unclean. They were extremely careful not to be defiled by lice. Therefore, God plagued them with lice. **The Egyptian sorcerers were unable to duplicate this plague or any other plague after this one.** They even confessed their weakness by saying, *"This is the finger of God."* (Exodus 8:19)





### The Fourth Plague - Flies (Exodus 8:21-24):

✝ The Egyptians used to worship gods who got rid of flies. This plague once again portrayed the impotence of their gods. This is the first time Holy Scripture mentions that God differentiated between the land of the Egyptians and the land of Goshen, where the people of God dwelt, which was not affected by any of the plagues. Because of this plague, Pharaoh permitted the Israelites to sacrifice to and worship God. But he told them they must do it in the land of Egypt. Satan, likewise, tries to continually **postpone our return to God**, never wanting to let his victim go. Satan wishes that the sinner would worship him his whole life. However, Moses refused to negotiate with Pharaoh, He gave a great defense:

- *"And Moses said, "It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us?" (Exodus 8:26)*
- *Pharaoh said, "you shall not go very far away" (Exodus 8:28)*

### The Fifth Plague – The Diseased Livestock (Exodus 9:1-7):

✝ The Egyptians thought that the calf Apis was possessed by their god Osiris. The plague of the diseased livestock refuted this wrong belief.

### The Sixth Plague - The Boils (Exodus 9:8-12):

✝ Moses took ashes from the oven where





they used to make bricks. He threw the ashes into the air and the wind spread the ashes, they landed on the priests, the people, and the animals. The Egyptians then became plagued with boils and sores. **The boils were so severe that the magicians were ashamed to stand before Moses** because of the sores which plagued them.

### **The Seventh Plague - Lightning, Hail, Cold & Fire (Exodus 9:13–35):**

✝ Hail is balls of ice that land on the earth. This plague was very severe and affected the Egyptians severely as they were not used to this type of severe cold. The hail also killed the plants of the Egyptians. Lightning attacked the Egyptians' homes and trees and put them on fire, representing God's many warnings. Fire burned throughout the land, also due to the friction caused by the hail. This severe plague was purposed against **Pharaoh's stubborn heart**; *"that I may show My power" (Exodus 9:15)*. Pharaoh should have realized God's power and repented.

- Ultimately, God's plagues are a warning and a call to faith and repentance (Verse 19). Out of God's mercy, He guided Pharaoh to protect the animals so that they may not perish. All who responded to God's warnings live (Verses 20 and 21).
- "That you may know that the earth is the Lord's" (Exodus 9:29)
- This opposed the opinions of the pagans who believed that each land had a god who protected it.
- The timing of this plague destroyed the flax and the barley, but the **wheat and the spelt** were not destroyed because they are **late crops**.

### **The Eighth Plague - The Locusts (Exodus 10:1–10):**







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✝ Locusts destroy crops, they eat all green plants. The gods of the Egyptians were completely unable to stop the plague of the locusts. When locusts attack, they come in swarms of armies. Because of their magnitude, the locusts covered the entire land. **The late crops (wheat and spelt) that were not destroyed by the hail were destroyed by the locusts.** Pharaoh again wished to delay them from leaving, as this is also what Satan does. (Verse 10), he said, *"Beware, for evil is ahead of you."* By this Pharaoh meant that if he let them go into the wilderness, the Israelites would have to face enemies, as well as hunger and thirst.



- *Go now, you who are men, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desired."*
- Pharaoh is trying to say here that if the Israelites wish to worship, only the men should go, because worshipping is the men's job. But this is opposed to what Moses requested, that all must go. And obviously, if only the men went, they would have to return for their wives and children. This is what Satan does to sinners – he tries to draw them back into a life of sin by any means that they may not leave him.
- *"And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land."* (Exodus 8:22)

### Prophecies and Symbols:

God commanded Moses to take his staff with him, as the staff symbolizes the cross. It is impossible to be victorious without the cross.





### The Ninth Plague - The Darkness (Exodus 10: 21- 28):

This plague came without warning to Pharaoh. This plague was to oppose their greatest god – **Ra** – which means **"The Sun."** Their sun god went dark and this alone was extremely frightening for them. They became terrified and were unable to move from their places. **"Darkness which may even be felt"**, this darkness was not just like the nighttime darkness but it was extreme, unusual darkness. Unfortunately, however, Pharaoh continued to be stubborn and he decided to let the people go but not the herds.



- *"They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." (Exodus 10:23)*

### Prophecies and Symbols:

The darkness continued for 3 days representing **nature's wrath** similar to what happened during the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ when there was **darkness over the land for three hours**, from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. Once again, this darkness was in opposition to Pharaoh's stubbornness and rebellion against God. The world was in darkness before the Lord Jesus Christ's first coming. His salvation for mankind then shined the light of His resurrection upon all the faithful. There is darkness in the world, but then





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the **Lord Jesus Christ the Sun of righteousness** will appear again in His second coming; He will give to each one according to his deeds. After the darkness comes light and salvation from the angel of death but whoever walks in darkness will perish in the plague of the firstborn.

### **The Tenth Plague: The Death of the Firstborn (Exodus 11, 12:29–33):**

This was the last of the plagues in which Satan, who worked with Pharaoh and his magicians, was defeated by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Through this plague, the Egyptians



paid the price for killing the Hebrew infants. This was God's way of **edifying them**, through the cross, Satan paid a great price for trying to destroy God's children. This plague also represents how God destroys evil.

During this plague, the firstborns of the animals were also killed, which the Egyptians considered holy and worshipped them. It was customary for masters to give their slaves or strangers whatever they needed for their journeys so God's children left Egypt loaded with herds and treasures. Similarly, **after we struggle against Satan, we are loaded with spiritual experiences, strong faith, and comfort.**

- *"Moses was very great"* (Exodus 11:3): This did not oppose Moses' humility, but explained why the Egyptians gave their riches to the people as they left. The Egyptians used to worship Pharaoh as a god, but when Moses opposed him and was







victorious over him, Moses became very great in their sight.

- *"But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue," (Exodus 11:7):* God offers great protection for his people. Not even a dog can move its tongue against them. Even the Egyptian army did not dare attack them as they left Egypt.

*"So that you may know that the Lord distinguishes between the Egyptians and Israel" (Exodus 11:7)*

### Prophecies and Symbols:

The death of the firstborn represents the annihilation of Satan's power and the root of all evil, which was accomplished through the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. **The firstborn represents strength** (Genesis 49:3). God annihilated Satan and obliterated his strength. He tied him up through the cross to give us freedom from our slavery.

The last plague is connected to the Passover lamb because it clearly represents the **cross**. Thus, the story of the Passover lamb comes at this instance.

The events of the 10th plague – (Exodus 12:1-28) - are connected to the Exodus



of the people that same night. Our Lord Jesus Christ, through his crucifixion, defeated the power of the devil to **free us from slavery that we may be able to go to Canaan, which symbolizes the heavenly kingdom.**





## Exodus Chapter 12: The Passover Lamb

Pascha is a Hebrew word meaning **"to pass over"** in the Coptic language. This refers to the angel of death passing over the homes of the Hebrews without destroying the first-born because of the **lamb's blood on the doorposts**. The Passover of Israel from the land of slavery to enter the promised land became a reminder of all that God did for them. This exodus is not just a historical event that happened in the past, but a work that is present and continuous, through the work of God in the lives of His people.

There is a connection between the rites of the Passover and that of the unleavened bread. The people were to eat unleavened bread (bread without yeast) for an entire week. **Yeast represents evil**. This feast typifies the children of God who are to live their whole lives, represented by the week, struggling against sin after being redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ's precious blood, passing over **from evil works to the life of virtue** (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

- The Passover was accomplished during the month of Abib. This is the 7th month of the Hebrew calendar, but God made it the 1st month of the year. Thus, Passover became the **beginning of life**. As for us, the redemption is the beginning of our new life. Through every divine liturgy, we live this new life, which is renewed in the Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice at all times.

The sacrifice of the Passover lamb is one symbolizing unity among the congregation of Israel. This is the first time the word **'assembly'** of Israel was mentioned. They became an assembly on the foundation of the **unified sacrifice of the Passover lamb**. The lamb was to be **one year old male** and **without blemish**. God is forever new in our lives,





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even though He is before time and everlasting. Calling on the neighbors and the families represents the calling of the nations into the faith. All are called to this great sacrifice.

- The lamb was acquired on the **10th day** but eaten on the **14th day**. This was to give them time to examine the lamb properly and make sure it was without blemish or disease. All the people of Israel were to sacrifice the lamb. This represented the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ himself for the life of the whole world in the fullness of time. The lamb was to be sacrificed in the **evening**, and the Lord Jesus Christ gave up his spirit at the **ninth hour**, which is about **3PM**. on our time. His body remained on the cross until the **11th hour**, which is around **5PM**.

The blood of the lamb was to be put on the two door posts and on the lintel of the houses. The blood was **not to be placed on the floor** where it could be stepped on (Hebrews 10:29). The blood placed on the lintel and the two door posts represents the fact that the **blood surrounds the house**.

- *"And when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13)*
- *"And without the shedding of blood, there is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22)*
- *"Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8)*

The bitter herbs represent the **bitterness of slavery in Egypt** and the **bitterness of sin** in our lives. We are freed from this bitterness through our Lord Jesus Christ, our Passover. In the sacrament of The Eucharist, our Lord Jesus Christ used leavened bread because He carried in His body the sin of the whole world on the cross.

- *"Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire" (Exodus 12:9)*
- This is because the lamb had to be **eaten speedily**. There was no time to cook it







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or to boil it.

The Israelites were instructed to eat unleavened bread from the eve of the fifteenth day until the eve of the twenty-second and they had to burn any remaining leavened bread in the house. This is similar to how we **must keep our purity** because God gave us life and freedom. This is also what was said to the people leaving Egypt and to us who have been redeemed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- *"You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire." (Ex 12:10)*



The people offered the sacrifice and exited Egypt by night. To prevent the lamb from spoiling, it needed to be **burned**. Likewise, the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ also did not see corruption. The bodies which were hung on the crosses were not left till the morning (Deuteronomy 21:23). Thus,

our Lord Jesus Christ's body was taken down from the cross before the morning. *Salvation was accomplished in the evening and the thief on the right was taken to paradise by our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The lamb shall be eaten entirely, "its head with its legs and its entrails." The **head** represents the **mind of Christ**, and the **legs**, His **ways**. As for his **entrails**, the insides, this represents **Christ's great love and compassion**. The Israelites had to eat the Passover in haste and be ready to leave at any moment. The Jews used to do this ritual exactly as it occurred at the first Passover, to remember their exodus from Egypt in that night.





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- Hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood. This represents the **healing** of our diseases and purification of our souls. Hyssop is a weak plant representing the **humility of our Lord Jesus Christ** and our sharing in his passion on the cross. All who are in the house were spared and survived, representing **those who are in the church**.

The Passover is a continuous feast for the Jews and became an eternal rite and memorial; *"Do this in remembrance of me."* (Luke 19:22). When our Lord Jesus Christ, who was the Antitype, came, this Old Testament type is no longer needed. The Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist was established in the church forever. As **only those who were circumcised could eat of the Passover lamb; the Holy Eucharist can only be received by the baptized**.

- "It must be eaten in one house", That is, the Passover lamb must be eaten by those who are of **the same faith**. All ate of the Passover lamb, old and young, and even slaves who were circumcised. This represented the **acceptance of the gentile nations into baptism as children of God**.

*"And when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13)*

### Prophecies and Symbols:

The Passover Lamb symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was sacrificed for us, on our behalf and passed us over unto Eternal life. **The Lord is my Light and my Salvation**. For this





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reason, we celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection every year, as well as in every Divine Liturgy, that we may experience the power of the Resurrection daily in our lives.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, He was sacrificed as a **silent lamb** taken from the flock and led to the slaughter. The perfect lamb represents our Lord Jesus Christ Who is without blemish, without sin, and a male as He is the Bridegroom of the Church. He resembled us in all things, except He alone is without sin!



The lamb was brought in on the 10th day & offered on the 14th day.

- This represents the entering of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, after which He was handed over to the Jews by Judas on Covenant Thursday. The **10th day** symbolizes Christ giving up of Himself for our sakes as we **disobeyed the 10 commandments**. On the **14th day** there is a full moon, as the **Lord Jesus Christ, our Passover is the Sun of Righteousness**. The Church is the moon, which was filled with light through the Lord Jesus Christ, our Passover.

Placing the blood over the house indicates the **purification**. The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ covers us, purifies us, thus we are saved and will not perish. There is **no salvation except through His Precious Blood** and faith in His salvific work.

- **Eating:** points to union with our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Roasted over the fire:** indicates that Jesus Christ passes through the fire of Godly justices.
- **Bitter herbs:** points to the bitterness of the sin that Jesus Christ carried instead







of us.

- **Unleavened bread:** represents how each believer with Jesus Christ must live holy and innocent each day of his life.

After the Passover ritual, they were to burn all that remained of the Passover lamb. Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox Church is careful not to have anything leftover of the Holy Communion.

*"Nor shall you break one of its bones." (Exodus 12:45)*

- This is seen clearly in our Lord Jesus Christ. When the soldiers were about to break His legs on the cross, they found Him already dead (John 19:36), so they did not break His legs. This represents the **perfect sacrifice of the Passover and His perfect work of salvation**. Thus, the Church is of His Flesh and of His Bones; the Church of Christ is not broken, He keeps His body. And as they were instructed not to break the bones of the Passover lamb, it is the same with the righteous who are united to Christ, their bones shall not be broken (Psalms 34:20). **The bones are the living faith, which will never be broken.**

## Exodus Chapters 12 and 13: The Exodus and The Passing Over

- The angel of death went through Egypt at midnight, representing the judgement of Satan on Judgement Day, which will be for Satan a day of darkness. It was not only Pharaoh, but all the Egyptians, who wanted the Hebrews to leave and they gave the Hebrews everything they requested so that they may **leave quickly and not be delayed by**





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anything. They were afraid of more plagues which might come upon them. See what the extreme pride of Pharaoh, his army & his people led to!

- The believer lives this life as a **stranger** in the world. The beginning of **freedom** was marked by **leaving the land of sin**; **70 people**, not including their women & slaves entered Egypt, and the nation of Israel left Egypt with around **600,000** members.

In order to make the people remember this night, God asked them to offer three things:

- **Holiness:** *"To make holy"* means to set aside for the Lord. Holiness must occur before passing over, otherwise it would be passing over from one form of slavery to another.
- **Passover:** This is not just a commandment, but a promise and a gift, that similar to the people leaving the center of slavery to advance to the highest heavenly Jerusalem; the believer also enters the center of God's kingdom and becomes a living member of the Divine Kingdom.
- **The Firstborn:** This is a symbol of the family's most precious member. God desires that we present Him with our most precious things. This is the **first commandment** that Moses presented, which God gave to Moses immediately after the Passover. The **clean animals** which were offered as sacrifices represent the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the **unclean animals** represent the **natural man which cannot be saved by an animal sacrifice**. Thus, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not redeemed us, we would have all perished.

The way from Egypt to Canaan through the north coast was easy, but God did not lead





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them through there, taking them another way. The usual route from Egypt to Canaan was lined with Egyptian soldiers, and God did not want them to go through a war as **they were not ready to fight**. This way the people would not regret leaving Egypt and return back to it. Also, God wanted them to spend time in the wilderness being **purified from slavery**. This is a difficult period of **spiritual struggle** & testing. How could they have entered



Canaan (God's land) in their idolatry, with the spirit of slavery ruling over them?

-  
God made the people ready by having them walk in strict order, as soldiers, not like those who fled, but in orderly fashion. They also carried the **bones of Joseph** with them, as they were commanded.

- Etham was the 3rd stop (Rameses the 1st and Succoth was the 2nd). **Etham** means **fortress** or **great wall**. The first time we hear about the pillar of Cloud is when Etham is mentioned. The cloud represents the **Holy Spirit** Who guides the Church, Who was given to the Church after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on the third day. Thus, we hear about this Cloud at the **third stop** after a **three-day journey**.

*"He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before*







the people."

(Exodus 13:22)

### Prophecies and Symbols:

- The bones of Joseph were with the people throughout their journey. This represents how **the church carries the memory of the saints** who have passed through the *Synaxarium* and the *Commemoration of the Saints*.

## Exodus Chapter 14: The People Pass & Pharaoh's Army Destroyed

God puts the people into a difficult examination so that they may know that the right-



eous path is not easy, but it is one of **continuous struggle**. The sea represents the *tribulations of the world before us*. **Pharaoh**, behind us, represents the *enemy of good* with his armies. God allowed for this great tribulation, so that His Holy Name may be

glorified among the people.

- Pharaoh went after the people with his strong army of 600 chariots. That is, with his entire human power (6x100). Although, **they did not have any heavenly power**, as the people of God did. Therefore, *Pharaoh and his armies failed and perished*.
- The Israelites' weak faith was apparent within the first tribulation, as was their complaining spirit, and they *yearned to return to the slavery of Egypt once more*,





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instead of striving in the life of struggle.

- Moses encouraged the people to have hope in the salvation of God. In his heart, he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord heard him. **God did not tell Moses to stop crying out, but to continue praying and moving the people along.** No matter how fierce the enemies of the church get, **the Lord will be glorified in the end.**
- Moses struck the sea with his rod, and the people passed through *by faith* on dry land and were saved. When Pharaoh saw the Red Sea split in two, he also went after the people without any fear.

God lit the way for the Israelites by the pillar of cloud during the day and the pillar of fire in the night, which represents the **Holy Spirit, who guides our way.** The tabernacle represents the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of his people. The cloud represents the Holy Spirit who gives water to the fruits. The fire also represents the Holy Spirit as he came upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost.

- ***The early morning watch:*** This phrase appears in the changing of the guard four times a night. The night began at 6 o'clock PM and lasted for 12 hours until 6 AM. The night was divided into four watches, 3 hours each. The last watch is called the fourth watch, or the morning watch.

As the Egyptians rushed into the sea after the people, the sea began to close and return to its original state. As the Egyptians went into the sea, they drowned. They were escaping from the plagues and the terror and had **no hope of getting out, heading to their destruction.**

*"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."*

*(Exodus 14:14)*





### Prophecies and Symbols:

- Passing through the sea is a symbol of **baptism**, where we **die**, are **buried with Christ** in His passion, and **rise again** through His resurrection.
- Moses struck the sea once more with his rod and it returned back to its normal state. This represents how the **Lord Jesus Christ struck Satan through His Cross** unto destruction.
- Now to us, who have been given the gift of the cross through baptism, go through the wilderness of this world with our Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, until we enter the **heavenly Jerusalem**.
- As God sent Moses to free His people from slavery, the Father sent His Only Begotten Son to save us from Satan's slavery.

## Exodus Chapter 15: The Hymn of Victory and Salvation

- Before the Passover, all the people did was complain and doubt, but once they passed over into freedom, they began praising God with joy for their salvation from slavery. *The soul that is enslaved to sin cannot praise*, but **once it is freed** from the slavery of sin, *it cannot do anything besides praise God*.
- This hymn which was written by Moses is the first hymn mentioned in the Holy Bible. It represents the hymn of the redeemed in Heaven,







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who were saved by God, having passed them over from the world to Heaven (Revelation 15:3).

- Moses understood that **God is his salvation**. Thus, he worshipped Him and praised Him as He is God, the God of his fathers, Whose **greatness is evident in His works**. Those who praise are the people who are saved and baptized through escaping along the Red Sea.
- God is victorious in the wars and the attacks of the enemies. This represents the **Incarnate God who fought and was victorious through the cross**.

**Who is like you, oh Lord?** No one is as great as God in His power, His love, and His nature. He is **invisible** and **inconceivable**; He **does not change**. He is all-holy, and **all creation glorifies His holiness and praises Him in reverence**.

- As Miriam led the praise of Moses, it is a great work for someone to lead God's people into His praise with cymbals and rejoicing. It was tradition to dance during praise as David danced before the Ark of the Covenant. This tradition no longer exists as dance has become used for evil intentions.
- After the passing over, and the rejoicing of the people, tribulations and sorrows followed. They felt great thirst, and they complained against Moses, because they found bitter water which they could not drink. God led Moses to a tree, which he threw into the water, and the water became sweet so that the people could drink of it. This was **the first lesson in the school of faith**, which the people failed at - **that God can do all things**.

The first plague was the **changing of the water into blood**. Similarly, the first miracle in the wilderness was the **changing of bitter water into sweet**. Additionally, the first miracle





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of our Lord Jesus Christ was **changing the water into wine**, which represents joy. **This is the mystery of the cross.** He who would carry the cross after the Lord Jesus Christ finds that **his life becomes sweet** because inside him dwells the **joy of the Resurrection.**

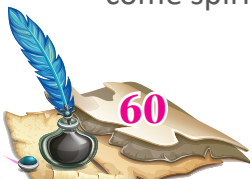
- Next, God brings us over from the bitterness to **Elam**. Elam was full of many comforts, palm trees and abundance of water. Through our external struggle in life, we pass through periods of sorrows and tribulations to periods of comfort. In every step we grow in our faith, little by little. These periods of comfort are our guarantee for the joy of heaven, as *Elam was a guarantee to pass over into Canaan, where the people were directed.* There were **12 pools of water** representing the **12 disciples** and **70 palm trees** representing the **70 apostles** passing over from the Old Testament to the New Testament. These pools of water and palm trees also represent the **12 tribes and the 70 elders** which reminds us that God takes care of every one of his people. He feeds and comforts each one.

*"The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation" (Exodus 15:2)*

### Prophecies and Symbols:

The praise of Moses is a **song of thanksgiving** to God. Thus, the church placed it in the midnight praises. It is the **first canticle** in the Psalmody to reiterate to the church that we must praise God and thank Him continuously for His salvific work on our behalf.

- The Coptic Orthodox Church is a church of hymnology, praise, and Psalmody. She teaches us through these to thank God for His great works with us. We must praise God for the grace He pours upon us, and **we must praise Him immediately, as the people did when they passed over.** We must praise him before we become spiritually cold and forget His works.







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This epistle was a specific personal letter to Philemon which St. Paul The Apostle wrote regarding Onesimus, Philemon's slave, who had fled from him.

### People mentioned in the epistle:

✝ **Philemon:** This is a Greek name meaning "loving." He lived in Colosse and learned the Christian faith through St. Paul the apostle (Philemon 1:19). He turned his house into a church and St. Paul called him, "*our beloved friend and fellow laborer*" (Philemon 1:1). He had Christian zeal and was generous, caring, and refreshed the hearts of the saints (Philemon 1:5-7).

✝ **Archippus:** This name means "he who has control over horses" in Greek. Archippus was also a Christian from Colosse and some say he was the son of Philemon. He was a deacon of the Church of Colosse and St. Paul the Apostle sent him salutations in this epistle and also in Colossians 4:17.

✝ **Apphia:** This was a Phrygian name which means "comforts." Apphia was a Christian woman who served in the Church of Colosse. Some say she was the wife of Phile-





mon (Philemon 1:2).

### General Details about the Epistle:

The epistle to Philemon is one of the **"prison epistles"** along with the epistles to the **Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians**, which were written by St. Paul the Apostle during his first imprisonment in Rome around 62 - 63 A.D. This Epistle is full of love. It has practical ways to carry out Christian virtue such as;

- **Fatherly spiritual care:** Pastoral care was offered by St. Paul the Apostle, who, despite his very busy service, cared for the slave Onesimus who had fled from his master Philemon. He forgot about his own personal pains of imprisonment and poured forth his overflowing love onto Philemon and Onesimus.

- St. Paul wanted to give Philemon a chance to forgive Onesimus, that he may receive a **heavenly crown**. He wanted him to have the freedom to choose to accept Onesimus, who had fled from him. This request was fitting as the apostle St. Paul **did not order Philemon to accept Onesimus but asked him in humility.**

- **Destroying the concept of slavery:** Saint Paul turned the slave into a brother, equal to the free man, because our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, bought us all with His Precious Blood. By doing so, **we have all become God's children**. Saint Paul the Apostle did not destroy the concept of slavery through attacking the laws of the land, but through **Christian love.**

- Saint Paul mentions that he himself is a slave in verses 1, 10, and 23; and expresses that he hopes to be freed from his imprisonment. He also asks Philemon to prepare a place for him when he comes in verse 22.





- Onesimus was the one who **carried the epistle to Philemon from Rome to Colosse**. The same people who Saint Paul saluted in this epistle, he saluted in his epistle to Colosse.

### The Introduction of the Epistle, (verses 1 to 3):

- **"a prisoner of Christ Jesus"** - Paul presents himself as a **slave** and he also shows camaraderie with the slave who was supposed to be imprisoned. He chooses not to mention that he is an apostle as he uses love over his rightful power. Saint Paul willingly lost his freedom for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, Philemon was also instructed to give up his power **for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ** and forgive his slave.

- **"Timothy"** - St. Paul **adjoins St. Timothy** in asking for the freedom of Onesimus.

- **"Fellow laborer"** - Philemon, as a mature servant, was careful to walk in the steps of the apostleship and look for the **salvation of every soul**. Thus, he was instructed to care for the soul of Onesimus.



- **"Apphia, Archippus"** - St. John

Chrysostom says that Apphia was the wife of Philemon, and Archippus was his son. Notice the words of **love and encouragement** which St. Paul uses here.

- **"The church in your house"** - Philemon turned his house into a church where the







believers were accustomed to **assemble together**.

- **"Grace to you and peace"** - **Grace is the forgiveness** which our Lord Jesus Christ bestowed upon us. Saint Paul mentions this so that Philemon can forgive Onesimus and be filled with peace.

### **Overwhelming love, (verses 4–7):**

St. Paul did not want St. Philemon to refuse his request to forgive Onesimus and he did not forget about him amidst his chains, but prayed for him, cared for him, impressed him by his faith, and offered gratitude to God for His grace.

- **"Hearing of your love and faith which you have"** – this faith resulted in love to all the saints.
- **"That the sharing of your faith may become effective"** – St. Paul prays that his faith might be active in others and that he may be an **example** for them.
- **"Of every good thing"** - This was St. Paul's introduction to Philemon to portray his **righteousness** that he may forgive Onesimus.
- **"Because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother."** - How sweet is the love and unity of the church - she rejoices over shepherding her flock spiritually and rejoices in their spiritual growth.

Onesimus is a Greek name which means **"helpful."** He was the slave of Philemon, one of the righteous Christians in Colosse. He stole from his master and fled to Rome. There he found St. Paul the apostle and came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was baptized by the hands of St. Paul who sent him back to Colosse with the Epistle to Philemon, in





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which he asked Philemon to accept Onesimus, not as a slave, but as **a brother**. Tychicus went with Onesimus on this journey from Rome to Colosse (Colossians 4:9). Through tradition we know that Onesimus became the **bishop of Berea** afterwards and died a martyr.

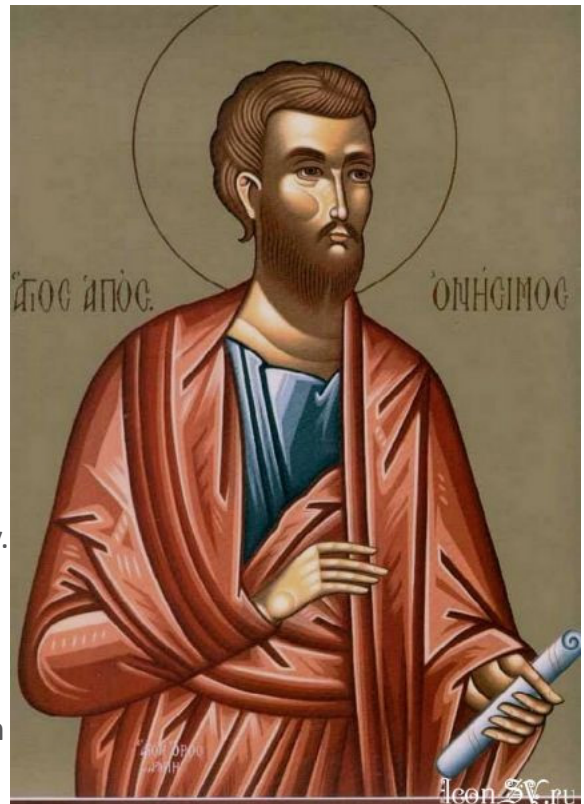
### He asks with wisdom, (verses 8 –16):

✝ Through Christ, St. Paul had the authority not only to ask, but to command.

Through the spirit of **apostleship**, we understand the meaning of;

- *"Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you"* (verses 8 - 9). Therefore, it is a command through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

✝ **"Paul, the aged"** – Noting that Paul is an elder denotes his priestly and fatherly authority. This is the fatherly love of our teacher, St. Paul the Apostle, to his son Philemon. He wishes that his son would not lose the chance in return to do good and forgive him who became his brother in Christ.



✝ **"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains"**

- This news that Onesimus became Christian should make Philemon's heart rejoice as he was baptized and became a son to St. Paul the Apostle, like Philemon who became his





son before him. This **increases Onesimus' dignity** as St. Paul the Apostle became his father in the faith during his imprisonment which was his great battle and trial for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Here, St. Paul the Apostle is trying to say is that Onesimus is truly helpful and is worthy of praise.

✝ **"That is, my own heart"** - Onesimus knew that he wronged Philemon and Saint Paul asked him to go back to reconcile with his master. Saint Paul truly loved Onesimus and rejoiced that he became **e a new man in Christ.**

- **"That your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary."**  
**(Verses 13-16):**

- St. Paul wanted to give Philemon a chance to forgive Onesimus **willingly.** God does not force anyone to do good but gives everybody the freedom of choice. Thus did St. Paul with Philemon. With the freedom of choice, **God gives the goodwill and the good works;** with His grace He supports us and guides us. He begins the way for us, continues with us, and finishes the work without compulsion.

✝ **All things work together for good.** The fleeing of Onesimus led him to the faith, and he became a son of St. Paul the Apostle and a brother to Philemon. However, we have to make note that **fleeing itself was not good.** Ultimately though, through God's grace, Onesimus and Philemon became brothers and were filled with love for one another. Philemon held Onesimus as a **brother, even to death.**

✝ St. Paul the Apostle, in his wisdom and in trying to ease the way for Philemon, expresses gentleness toward Onesimus by saying the he **"departed"** instead of saying he "fled" (verse 15).







### Complete confidence (Verses 17– 21):

*"As you would me"* – St. Paul loves Onesimus as himself, so he is telling Philemon, if you accept Onesimus **it is as if you have accepted me.**

In these verses, St. Paul presents himself as a **fellow of Onesimus**, the slave who fled from his master. He tells Philemon that if Onesimus has wronged him or owes anything, to put that on St. Paul's account.

✝ *"I will repay you – not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self."* (Verse 19)

- St. Paul the Apostle will have joy over Philemon when he sees the **fruit of love** in his forgiveness to the slave, Onesimus. Thus, Christianity does not work through bloody revolutions and secular battles to free slaves, but through Christian love.



### Salutary Conclusion (Verses 22 – 25):

*"I shall be granted to you."* - St. Paul, the Apostle expected to be freed from his imprisonment. Thus, he asked Philemon to prepare a place for him when he comes. He was not awaiting Philemon's answer regarding Onesimus because **he had confidence in Philemon's obedience and love.** Then he offered him the peace of the servants who worked with him. He mentioned their names as **intercessors on behalf of Onesimus**, as the





servants of the church are always in unity and in love.

- *"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you," (Verse 23)*

### Summary of St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon:

✝ Faith in Christ is the beginning of our life with Him. This is the faith that Saint Paul the Apostle praised about Philemon. And it was **the cause of love between the two saints Onesimus and Philemon**, who represent the faithful and the believers. Faith is also the foundation of everything good in us. Not inactive, didactic faith, but **faith which works through love.**

- *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)*

- St. Paul mentions the faith of Philemon firstly as a **foundation of all of his virtues**, the first of which was **love.**

✝ **"That is, my own heart,"** Onesimus knew that he had wronged Philemon and St. Paul asked him to go back and reconcile with his master. Meanwhile, he was preparing Philemon's heart to **accept the repentance of Onesimus.**

- This is a practical application of the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ: *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."* (Matthew 6:14). When we forgive one another, this opens the door to be forgiven by God. Thus, we inherit the kingdom of heaven by calling to mind that **the Lord is my Salvation.**

✝ St. Paul the Apostle destroys the concept of slavery and **the slave becomes a brother.** The slave is made free because the Lord bought both the free and the slave





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with **His Precious Blood** and both became children of God equally. St. Paul did not destroy the concept of slavery through revolution against the current laws, but through Christian love. Philemon forgave Onesimus and freed him bringing to light how **the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ enlightens our minds such that we see all as our brothers and sisters in the one body of our Lord Jesus Christ- *The Lord is my Light.***

✝ Through the epistle to Philemon, we learn not to imagine anyone in a bad light.

- *"Who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me." (Philemon 1:11)*
  - Onesimus was a thief who stole from his master Philemon while he served him in his house and then fled, leading to his imprisonment. By God's grace he was imprisoned with Saint Paul the Apostle and his life changed. Many times, we think people are bad and refuse to change our minds about them, but **God can change everyone.** If you think someone can't change or is unprofitable, remember that **God is still working in them.**

### People who worked with St. Paul:

✝ **Epaphras** – The name Epaphras is most likely a contracted form of **Epaphroditus**; a Greek name which means **"lovely."** He was a zealous servant in the church of **Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.** He gave St. Paul the Apostle a good report about the church of Colosse during his imprisonment (Colossians 1:7-8, and 4:12-13) and also became St. Paul's aide (Philemon 1:23). St. Paul esteemed him highly saying, *"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, my fellow laborer."*

✝ **Aristarchus** – This is a Greek name meaning **"the best prince."** He was a Mace-







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donian man from Thessalonica who accompanied Saint Paul the Apostle on his journeys. He was taken and beaten by the mob who worshiped Artemis (Acts 19:29). He accompanied St. Paul the Apostle from Greece to Macedonia, then he went to Troas (Acts 20:4,6). He journeyed with St. Paul the Apostle to Rome (Acts 27:2) and he was imprisoned there, as St. Paul mentions in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 1:24.

✝ **Demas** – This is a Greek name which is likely contracted from **Demetrius** which is the God of culture in Greece meaning **"earth lover."** He accompanied St. Paul the Apostle in his service. Along with others, *St. Paul saluted Demas from Rome* in his epistle to the Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 1:24. Demas left the service with St. Paul the Apostle





## Light of Light

In the creed, we proclaim, "We believe in one God... **Light of Light.**" Let us begin by understanding the truths of our Christian faith.

In our Coptic Orthodox Church, we believe:

- ✙ God is one essence.
- ✙ God is Triune, with three hypostases.
  - We believe in the Divinity of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ who is the incarnate Word of God.
- ✙ We believe in the incarnation of God.
- ✙ We believe in the One Redeemer.
- ✙ We believe in the one Church.
- ✙ We believe in the infallibility of the Holy Bible and hold true that it is impossible to change the Word of God.

***These are seven essential truths differentiating the Christian faith. Without these, the faith is incomplete.***

- ***The Truth of the One God:*** We believe in one God. Thus, we proclaim daily in the creed, saying, "Truly we believe in one God." And we make the sign of the cross, saying, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. **We don't say in the names, but in the Name.** And we end the sign of the Cross, we say, "One God." The entire Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, has numerous verses which verify the Oneness of God.







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● **The Truth of the Holy Trinity:** Our One God is three Hypostases. Exactly as the one person has a spirit, a mind, and a soul, these three are in one person. Similarly, the one sun is fire, light, and heat; these three, although different, are *inseparable*. And at the end of the day, it is one sun which shines in the sky.

● **The Truth of the Divinity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ:** Our Lord Jesus Christ proved this when He was on earth. He came, was born in a miraculous way, and lived an ultimate, perfect holiness, which was completely infallible and completely without sin. He portrayed His authority over material things - plants, animals all of nature, the demons, sin, and even over the thoughts. He healed all kinds of diseases, raised many from the dead, created eyes for the blind, and He

arose from the dead with a luminous Body. He arose never to die again, forever.

● **The Truth of the Divine Incarnation:** "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).

The Divine Incarnation was essential for our salvation and redemption, in order for Christ to die for us and







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take away the judgment of death. His humanity united with His Divinity to renew our fallen nature, through the work of His Divinity which was united to His humanity. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ saved us from two extremely critical matters, **the judgment of death** and **the corrupt nature** which we attained after the fall.

- **The Truth of the Glorious Salvation:** *"And without shedding of blood, there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Once Christ died for us and lifted the judgment of death. He died and shed his Pure Blood in order to purify us with His Pure Blood, forgiving our sins. He was crucified and died to wash mankind and the earth from the curse. As it is written, "cursed is he who hangs on a tree (Galatians 3:13). The Holy Divine Precious Blood is extremely effective in our lives to **forgive our sins and purify us**, to **make us holy** and to **keep us in Christ** and grant us **eternal life**.*
- **The Truth of the One Church:** When the Lord Jesus Christ saved us, He established His Church. He sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and made us *"members of His body, of his flesh and of his bones."* (Ephesians 5:30). Thus, we proclaim, *"For we, though many, are one bread and one body."* (1 Corinthians 10:17). The **Head of the body is our Lord Jesus Christ** and its **members are His saints in heaven and the faithful on earth**.
- **The Truth of the Infallibility of the Holy Bible:** The Holy Bible is the inspired word of God in the Old and the New Testament, *"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:21) and *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16). Thus, believers must study the word of God in





order for them to be enlightened by **His commandments** and receive the numerous proofs of the **infallibility** of the Holy Bible.

### **The Doctrine of The Divine Incarnation:**

The essence of the Christian faith is the mystery of the Incarnation which is **the mysterious appearance of God in the flesh**. It is very important that we establish our goals in the essence of the true Christian faith. Therefore, we must answer questions, such as the following:

#### ***Is it possible for God to take flesh?***

✝ It's undoubtedly possible for God to take flesh in any form. The simple proof of this is that **God can do all things**. If it was necessary for God, Who is Spirit and invisible to appear in a visible manner, there is no doubt that God is capable to do this.

✝ The mystery of the incarnation lies in the fact that God became man **without losing His Divinity**. He Who is **invisible was seen**. He Who is **untouchable was touched**. He Who had no body took a body in the flesh. Just like the television waves which fill the atmosphere without anyone seeing them as they travel, can be seen with the eyes through a television. Also, like the thoughts in your mind, no one can know them unless they are spoken out loud. Another example can be seen in electric waves which travel through wires without being seen, you can only see them when you turn on the light (lamp/bulb), motors (or fan), sound waves in a microphone, or heat which cannot be seen but can be felt.

✝ The Old Testament is filled with the appearances of our great God which **prepare us for the Divine Incarnation**. Some of them are:





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- He appeared to Adam and Eve multiple times in the Garden of Eden, speaking with them and walking with them in paradise.
- He appeared to Abraham in the **form of a man** with two angels who were also in the form of men. And again, He appeared to him to *declare the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* and promise him the *birth of Isaac*.
- He appeared to Jacob in the form of a man who **wrestled with him** until the dawn and blessed him. He called him **Israel**, one who wrestles with God, one who struggles in conversation with God and he asked for blessings.
- He appeared to **Moses** in the form of **fire in the bush**,
- to **Joshua** the son of Nun in the form of a **commander of an army**.
- to **Manoah** and his wife, the parents of Samson in the form of **a man**.
- to **Gideon** in the form of the **Angel of the Lord**.
- to **Daniel** in the form of the **Ancient of Days**.



### *Does the Divine Incarnation oppose the honor and holiness of God?*

✝ **Obviously not.** Because man is one of God's creations. Not only is man His creation, but He is the crown and priest of God's creation. *Man was created in the image and likeness of God.* So, what is wrong with God taking the form of a man? Man is God's most honorable creation.

✝ The Incarnation is **not opposed to God's holiness**. For example, **the sun can purify things without becoming defiled**. Thus, when the Lord took flesh, He purified our fallen







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nature **without losing any of His holiness**. Because God's holiness is ultimate holiness, it has no end.

✝ Some think we are saying our Lord Jesus Christ was a man and became God. But we don't actually say this. Additionally, others believe that God simply cannot come down to earth and become man.

- In truth, however, we speak of the Incarnation of God; not that man became God. **It is impossible for man to become God**. But God becoming man is possible because God can do all things. If we think that man became God, it's like saying the peasant became the king. But God becoming man is like saying the king put on the clothes of a peasant.

- Simply put, **our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself**, came down and took the form of a slave. What is the problem with this? Why do you think it is so difficult for humans to comprehend?

- Many believe that the humanity is undignified.

Therefore, they're unable to believe that God would become man. But this belief is not true at all, because **man is master over creation** and created in the image and likeness of God. God respects, loves and honors mankind. Therefore, it is not absurd for God to come down and take flesh and unite himself with us, even if humankind is undignified in the eyes of some.

Through the incarnation, **God restored mankind's dignity** and made us partakers of the divine nature.





### *Why the Incarnation?*

✝ God pronounced the judgment on man if he sinned, saying,

- "Dying you will die." (Genesis 2:17)

- "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)

- Death is **separation from God** and **corruption of the image of man**. Through the fall, we inherited sin and the corrupted human nature.

- Because of God's love to mankind and His graciousness, **God reconciled man to Himself**. We must remember that God does not wish the death of man, nor does He wish that he perishes.

- God, as a wise teacher, saw that *He ought to be incarnate to teach us the way of eternal life*. Therefore, this is very possible with God the Pantocrator, but for us to go up to God's level, this is impossible.

- God restored our human nature which fell and become corrupt, **restoring us once more to His image and likeness**. This is the **crown jewel** we receive in the mystery of holy baptism.

- He died instead of man to lift the decree of death.

- It was **God's will that He saves us**. He took our human nature, without sin. In His body the decree of death was fulfilled, which we deserved because of our sins. He desires to dwell and abide within us; in His humility and meekness, it is God's will to be united with us. The lover of mankind came to those whom He loves, to protect us from the enemy of evil, and from the divine judgment.

### *How was the Incarnation fulfilled?*





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- Was God's apparition to Abraham in the Old Testament considered an incarnation?

**Of course not.**

- Did the Lord Jesus Christ come with a body that he brought from heaven and went through the Holy Virgin, Saint Mary, like a tube or a treasure box? **Again, No.**

- Did God enter the womb of the Virgin and find an embryo whose name was Jesus, then exit her womb as a man united with God? **Again, No.**

- *So, what happened?*

- The incarnation happened at the moment of the **Holy Annunciation**. The Divinity which entered into the womb of the Virgin took flesh from her and became man like us with a human body, human spirit, and human soul, but **without sin**.

God the Word entered the womb of the Virgin who was unmarried. She had no embryo in her womb. The Holy Spirit sanctified her womb and the Lord took His humanity from her blood and flesh and made for Himself an embryo. So, He who was born of the Virgin is the **Incarnate God** and non-other.

- God took our nature and united Himself with us, therefore God became the Son of Man. He has our blood and our human nature; and **He resembled us in all things except for sin alone**. An example is if a physician entered the police academy and graduated as a commander without losing his licensure as a physician. The physician became a commander without giving up his previously attained characteristics and without mixture between his role as a physician and as a commander.







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On the night of the Apocalypse (Bright Saturday), we sing a hymn after reading the book of Revelation, saying, *"The heavenly Jerusalem, with her precious stones, is built. The heavenly Jerusalem is lit with the light of our God. The heavenly Jerusalem is protected by the protection of the Lamb. Our Savior is in its midst, placing crowns on the heads of those who love Him."*

Let us learn the meaning of the apocalypse and what happens on that special night.

## The meaning of the word Apocalypse:



✝ This night is an angelic vigil in which the soul is lifted up to heavenly Jerusalem, where the Lord of glory, risen from the dead, is, and where the angels and the saints are. We read the whole book of Revelation that night, which begins with, **"The revelation of Jesus Christ"**. The word revelation in Greek is **apocalypse**. Thus, it is called the apocalypse night.





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- This night is also called the eve of Bright Saturday, or the eve of the Joyful Saturday.
- **Bright Saturday:** In this night, the Lord illuminated those who live in darkness and the shadow of death. He illuminated Hades with His Divinity when He went to Hades through the Cross, released those who had died in the hope of salvation and opened for them the door of paradise.
- **Joyful Saturday:** During this day, the saints who were restored by the Lord Jesus Christ from Hades to Paradise rejoiced. Therefore, the church presents joyful hymns of thanksgiving to our Savior in that night because of His great salvation and redemption.

## What happened during that night?

- In His divine power, the Lord went to Hades, freed the souls of the righteous who died in the hope of the Resurrection, and opened the doors of paradise. **He gave joy to the creation** through His victory and salvation and illumined the whole world. The Light of our Lord Jesus Christ shone on those who were living in darkness and in Hades through His Divinity.

*There are three cycles of Praises and Readings which the Church prays on this eventful night:*

- **The Lord** is the living God who does not die, even if He died in the flesh on the Cross and was buried in the tomb. He rose from the dead and He **remains alive** through His Divinity, which did not part from His humanity, not even for a single moment, nor a twinkling of an eye.







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- **My Light** - Our Lord shines upon us a great, joyful, life-giving Light which illuminates the righteous who were in the darkness of Hades while awaiting the Redeemer, the great Savior, to shine on them with His life-giving eternal light.
- **My Salvation** - Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Salvation on the Cross for all of humanity, and the great joy which enlightened the righteous who were living in the darkness of Hades. We rejoice in His salvation.

After we leave church on Good Friday, we go home to eat and rest until the time of the Apocalypse Night, when we return to the church for a vigil, by the tomb of our Savior, in a joyful rite which is divided into three parts:

### First, we sing joyful hymns of salvation:

✝ Readings from both the Old and New Testaments testify that the Lord has fulfilled salvation as He proclaimed on the Cross, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30). He went down to Hades to free those who were taken captive, entering with them into paradise. The victory and joy in the praises of the prophets clarify that they were brought over **from death to life**, from **captivity to victory**, and from **darkness to light**. This is what the Lord did when He saved and redeemed us on the cross. Some of the praises include:

- **Psalm 151:** The church begins her prayers with Psalm 151, a beautiful hymn, which is only sung on this special night. This psalm was removed by the Protestant church. It begins with the words *"I was small among my brothers..."* and it tells the story of David's victory over Goliath. David was unable to withstand the Goliath's taunting of God's people. So, he withstood him and was victorious over him. Likewise, **the Lord Jesus Christ could not bear Satan's taunting over His children.** He came to save His people, was victorious over Satan through the Cross and gave





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us the ability to be **victorious over the devil** through Him.

- **The Song of Moses the prophet and his people after crossing the Red Sea:** This song relates how the Lord miraculously allowed His people to cross over, saving them from perishing and rescuing them from Pharaoh. This represents the **salvation of our Lord for humanity.**

- **The Prayer of Hannah, the Mother of Samuel:** Hannah was unable to bear children and felt great shame. God heard her prayers and gave her Samuel, the great prophet.

- **The Prayer of Jonah the Prophet who represented our Lord Jesus Christ:** This praise declares the **glorious gift of passing over from death to life.** As Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, our Lord Jesus Christ was in the tomb for three days and three nights. When Jonah was cast into the sea, the ship was saved. Similarly, **when our Lord Jesus Christ was placed in the tomb, humanity was saved.**



Jonah entered the belly of the fish which no one had ever entered, and the Lord was buried in a tomb within which no one was ever buried. As Jonah was sentenced to death by being thrown into the sea and came out alive, **our Lord Jesus Christ carried the decree of death, on our behalf,** and was placed in the tomb but arose alive.

- **The Prayer of Manasseh:** Manasseh was one of the kings of Judah who was very evil and worshipped idols. God's wrath came upon him, and he was defeated





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and taken captive. In his imprisonment, **he humbled himself and prayed to God and God restored his kingdom to him once more.** Likewise, when humanity sinned, we became enslaved to Satan in Hades. But God shone with His Divinity upon all humans who lived in repentance and died in hope of salvation, bringing them **from slavery to freedom.**

- **The Hymn of the Three Sainly Youth:** The three youth refused to worship the idol which Nebuchadnezzar built and **commanded that everyone worship.** God saved them from the burning fiery furnace wherein they walked freely praising and rejoicing.



- **The Story of Susanna the Pure:** Susanna was sentenced to death by the envy of Satan but **God delivered her through Daniel the Prophet.** This represents the great salvation which our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for humanity. He saved us from death which entered into the world by the **envy of Satan.** Daniel, being sent by God to save Susanna represents **our Lord Jesus Christ Who took flesh to save humanity.** As the two evil elderly men were arrested and given over to death, so also by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, for our sakes, He arrested Satan in Hades.

### **Second, We read the entire Book of Revelation:**

✝ As heaven was opened, **eternity was restored to us** after the end of this temporal life. The Book of Revelation relates the story of the face-off between the children of God and Satan, the struggle and victory over him, that we may enjoy our lives with our Lord Jesus Christ in His heavenly kingdom. *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered*

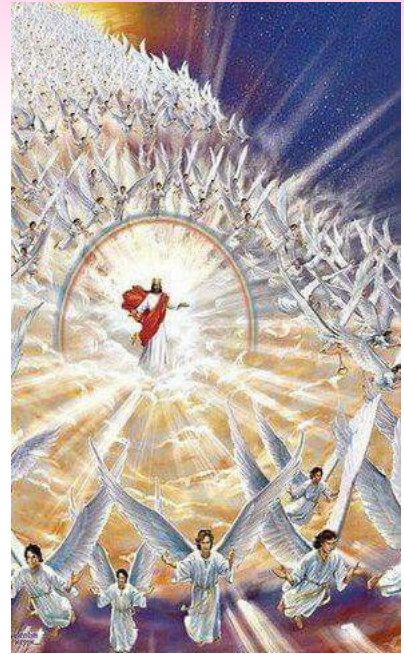






*into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9).*

- As the Book of Revelation is being read, a bowl with pure olive oil is placed, and seven wicks are lit, representing the **seven churches and the seven angels of the churches**, with a cross in the middle, representing our Lord Jesus Christ. After reading the book of Revelation, the whole church is lit with candles, and a procession of the priests and the deacons around the church, with lit candles, takes place while we sing hymns reminding us of the heavenly Jerusalem, expressing our great joy for the marvelous salvation which God has performed. The whole church sings of the heavenly Jerusalem and its foundations. **Chapter 21** of the book of Revelation is dedicated to **describing heavenly Jerusalem and its children who live in it**. The precious stones mentioned in this chapter portray its glory and the beauty which are the children of God. *"The city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."* (Revelation 21:23).



### **Third, The Liturgy of Bright Saturday:**

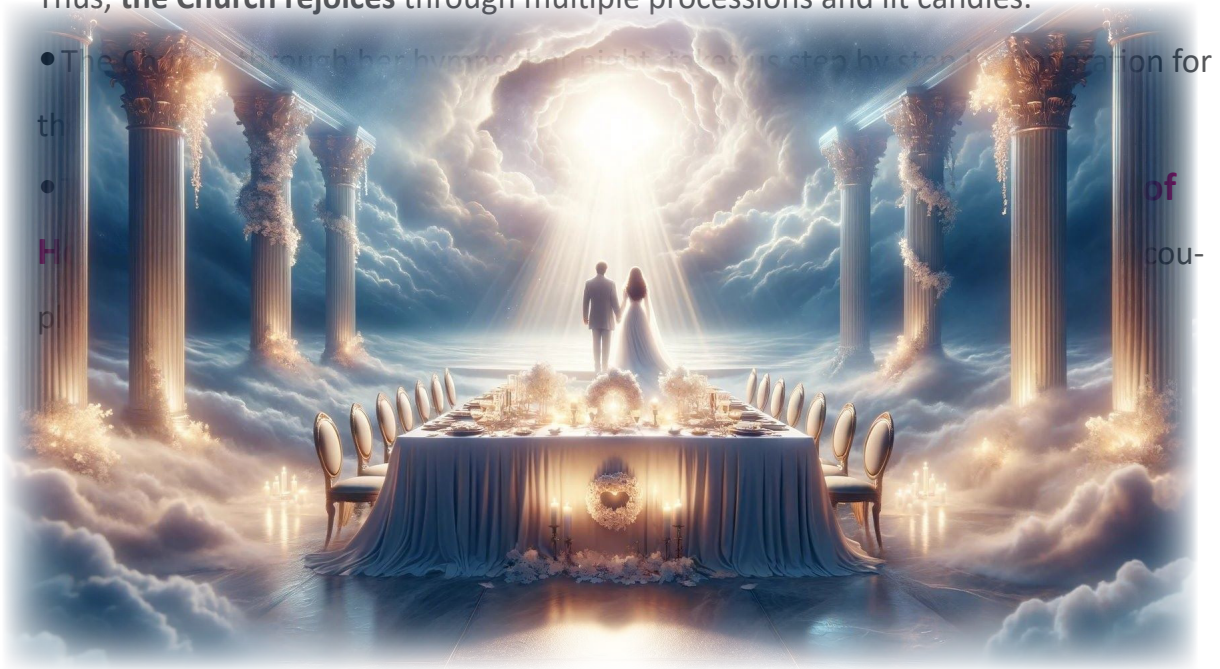
✝ In this Liturgy, **we rejoice in Christ who surely will rise early Sunday morning**, after He accomplished the great Salvation, through which the Paradise was opened, as the Lord said to the thief on His right hand, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today, you will be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23.43)





## Special Characteristics of Bright Saturday:

- The rites and hymns of this special night are concerned with The Lord; thus, some are sung in the **sorrowful tone** as **we remember Christ in the tomb** after He endured the Passion for our sakes, and some in the **joyful tone**, rejoicing in the **Salvation and His resurrection**. This is because the Night of the Apocalypse is between *Good Friday, the epitome of sorrows*, and the *Resurrection Feast, which is the epitome of our joy*. All the banners are changed from black to white, indicating victory, salvation, and joy in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- All the readings of the Church are about **victory and salvation** from tribulation in remembrance of the victory that the Lord brought us through His Redemption. Thus, **the Church rejoices** through multiple processions and lit candles.





### *The Orthodox Creed:*

Our Coptic Church is a powerful Church with a great history. It has been saved throughout the ages by **God's light**, despite her passing through many tribulations - persecutions, heresies, and wrong teachings - but her faithful saints stood up for her & defended her with faithfulness & complete loyalty, enduring many sorrows & tribulations. Let us learn about some of the most important events & personalities of the 4th century which was filled with persecution, heresies, and the ultimate victory of the church through God's mighty Hand.

### *The most important events and contributions of the Coptic Church in the 4th century:*

- Establishing a church in Ethiopia by the hard-working Copts.
- The spread of **monasticism** to the whole world through the patriarchs of Alexandria. Many came to Egypt to learn the practice of monasticism.
- The spread of Christianity among the **Sudanese and Bedouins** through the Copts.







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- The Coptic Orthodox Church stood as a **teacher and light-house** for the world.

### *Important heresies which appeared in the 4th century:*

- False thoughts about the **ever-virginity of St. Mary.**

Some said she had more children after giving birth to the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Meletius of Lycopolis was the bishop of Lycopolis, in Upper Egypt, near Thebes. He was an apostate from the church, he sacrificed to the idols and took advantage of the Patriarch's absence by *sitting in his place* and attempted to wrongfully manage church affairs. Meletius was deposed around **306 A.D.** by Bishop Peter of Alexandria.

- Macedonius, the patriarch of Constantinople, became an **enemy of the Holy Spirit.** He denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit and tried to spread Arianism.



### *What is Arianism and how did it appear?*

✝ The Arian heresy began during the reign of Pope Peter, the 17th pope of Alexandria. The Church always taught that God is one Essence with three Hypostases, never indicating that there was a time difference between the Hypostases (i.e. that one hypostasis existed without the others). **Sabelius** came forward with a **heresy saying that there is no distinction between the Three Hypostases**, claiming that God simply had three names. When he refused to obey the True faith, the Church excommunicated him declaring the Truth which is that the Divinity consists of Three distinct Persons (Hypostases). When





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Arius tried to explain Sabellianism he fell into the following heresy saying:

- The Son is not equal to the Father in Divinity.
- The Son is the Father's first creation.
- The Son was created as a mediator by which the Father created the creation.

✝ Therefore, according to Arius' erroneous ideas, ***the Son is less than the Father in nature & dignity; and the Father precedes the Son.*** Arius spread this heresy to many and confused many people.

The 19th pope of Alexandria, **Pope Alexandros**, defended the true faith against Arius' teaching upholding the Truth that the **Son is equal with the Father and His Nature and Essence are the same as the Father's.** He taught against Arius, who said the Son is not equal to the Father in Essence and that the Son is not eternal.

- Initially, Arius spread his heresy secretly, then he began to declare it openly.

This is what happens now as well. Some people nowadays teach that we are born without sin and that we have not inherited the natural sin. Some others preach the divinity of man, and instead of going back to the Church Fathers to correct this erroneous teaching, they spread wrong ideas and confuse people.

- It is the onus of the Coptic Church to protect the truth in the teachings throughout the ages. Since Christianity is an ancient faith which remains until today, many heresies and strange thoughts have surfaced against the true Christian faith, which we received from our Fathers, the Holy Apostles. **Our**



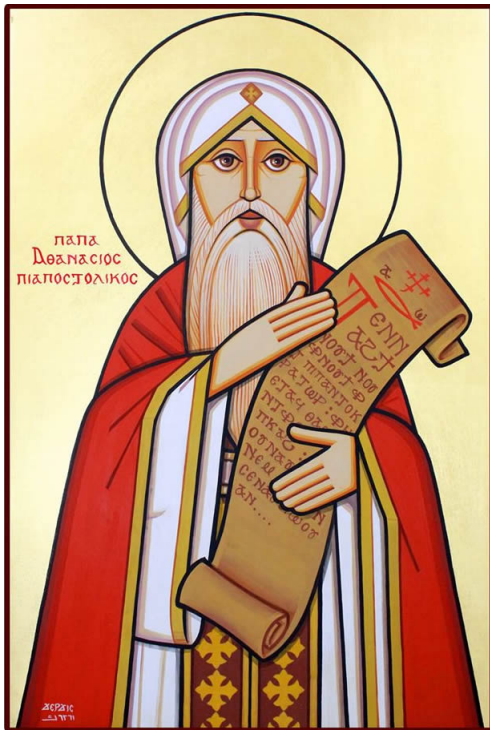


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Church Fathers protected the faith by calling for **ecumenical councils** in which all the bishops from around the world met to discuss strange teachings and heresies. These councils formulated decrees announcing the true faith to the churches and handed them down to subsequent generations so that they may know the great history of the Church.

The most famous councils of the fourth century are the **Council of Nicaea** and the **Council of Constantinople**. The Council of Nicaea was the first Ecumenical Council in **325 A.D.** and it was convened to discuss the heresy of **Arius**. Arianism had split and greatly disturbed the church until our fathers and elders stood firm with St. Athanasius, who



was a deacon at the time to protect the true faith.

The Council of Constantinople was the second Ecumenical Council, in **381 A.D.**, which was convened to discuss the heresy of **Macedonius**, who denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. St. Timothy the Patriarch defended the faith, and from thence the second part of the creed was established beginning from the words, **"Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit."**

### Who is Pope Athanasius?

Pope Athanasius' parents were both pagan. He was born in Alexandria in the year **296 A.D.** He was then ordained Patriarch in the year 328 A.D., over the See

of Alexandria, which is the See of St. Mark. Constantine the Great was Emperor at the







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time, followed by Constantius, Julian, and then Valens. Pope Alexandros, the 19th Patriarch, greatly influenced St. Athanasius throughout his upbringing and call to the papacy. Pope Alexandros departed to the Lord in the year 373 A.D.

Even though St. Athanasius was born to pagan parents, he was very observant and when he noticed his Christian friends acting out some of the rites of the church, namely **baptism**, he wanted to participate. At the time, they refused, because he was not Christian yet so he decided he would become Christian from that point on. It happened that Pope Alexandros was walking by in this instance, and he perceived that this young lad would become someone great in the church. After the death of his father, St. Athanasius' mother took him to Pope Alexandros, who taught them the Christian faith, and baptized her and her son. She gave all of her money to the poor. St. Athanasius learned the doctrines of the church, was ordained a deacon, and became the **secretary of Pope Alexandros**. He became a disciple of **St. Anthony the Great**, as well as a friend, and learned many things from him. St. Athanasius grew to love asceticism, worship, and meditation. Pope Alexandrus then ordained him a priest, so that he would have a place among the bishops in the councils, which convened during that era.

### **Deacon Athanasius' contributions in the Council of Nicaea:**

The Council of Nicaea convened in the year 325 A.D and all of the bishops of the world were invited. 318 bishops met to discuss the heresy of Arius with Pope Alexandros, the Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church and greatest in dignity, led the Council and was accompanied by his disciple and personal secretary, **Saint Athanasius, who was 25 years old at the time**. Through the wisdom which God bestowed on him, Saint





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Athanasius was able to refute all of Arius' heresies. He became the Defender of the Faith during this Council; therefore, he deserves the title given to him, the **Defender of the Faith**. The heresy of Arius was that the Son is not equal to the Father, there was a time when the Father was without the Son, and that He created Him out of nothing. Thus, he separated the essence of the Father from the Son.

*Arius incorrectly interpreted these verses as false support of his heresies:*

- "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). **Thus, the Son is less than the Father and not equal to Him in Nature and Essence.**
- "Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18). **Thus, it was given to him by his father.**
- "I do not seek my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me." (John 5:30) **Suggesting that the Father is higher in authority than the Son.**
- "But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:32) **Implying that the Son lacks knowledge of something.**

*The rebuttal of St. Athanasius:*

✝ **"My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).**

- Here, the Lord is talking about the **Divinity being greater than humanity** but the Father and the Son remain of One Essence. The proof is that our Lord Jesus Christ said, **"He who has seen Me has seen the Father."** (John 14:9). And **"I am in the Father and the Father in me."** (John 14:10). **"All things that the Father has are mine."** (John 16:15).

✝ **"Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all authority has been given to me in**





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*heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18).*

- The **Son is the eternally begotten of the Father** and He is king reigning over all things. He said this because now He is in the flesh. But He said that he was equal to the Father when He said, *"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 28:19)

✝ *"I do not seek my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me."* (John 5:30)

- Many times, the Lord spoke in this manner, because He became man. As he said, "Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from me." (Luke 22:42) Also He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). In other areas, he spoke about His equality with the Father. For example, when He said, *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father in Me."* (John 14:10)

✝ *"But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father."* (Mark 13:32)

- The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples this so that they would not ask about the secret matter of the **Second Coming**, which they were not allowed to know.

During the council of Nicaea, there was a great discussion about how to portray the Equality of the Essence and Nature of God. St. Athanasius suggested using the terms, 'Equal to the Father', 'Equal in Essence to the Father', and 'One in essence'.







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- Eusebius and his followers, who had similar thoughts to Arius, suggested using 'similar to the Father in Essence,' but most of the council members did not agree to this. Most council members agreed to the terms that St. Athanasius used, such that the creed says, "We believe in one God, God the Father the Pantocrator who created heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen. Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father."

After this decision made by the council, the church decided to **excommunicate Arius and his followers**. All the members of the council, minus five, signed this agreement. After Arius was excommunicated by the Council of Nicaea, he was exiled, and all of his books were burned. The decisions of the council were sent to all the churches and included the excommunication of Arius and the refusal of his heresies. The Coptic Church does not accept such heresies against the true faith. The excommunication of Arius was completed by the agreement of the members of the council because **our church is ecumenical**, not patriarchal, as the Roman Catholic Church.

A few years after the council, Pope Alexandros, the 19th Pope of the See of St. Mark, the See of Alexandria, departed in the Lord. Before his departure, he counseled the church to ordain **St. Athanasius Patriarch after him**. When St. Athanasius found out that he would be ordained patriarch, he disappeared into the mountains but the people went after him, looked for him, and brought him back to the bishops to ordain him patriarch in the year **328 A.D.** After his ordination, Pope Athanasius ordained the **first metropolitan for Ethiopia**.





Through a **politically devised plan**, Emperor Constantine commanded Eusebius to tell Pope Athanasius to accept Arius back into the church. However, **Arius deceived Pope Athanasius**, presented **false repentance** and **wrote the creed in a deceptive manner**, so Pope Athanasius refused Arius. These events took place around the year **330 A.D.** Pope Athanasius was exiled **five times** during his papacy from his See, including one time by Emperor Julian, because of lies and false accusations from the Arians to keep him away from the church. His innocence was proven every time through the grace of God. During his exile, Pope Athanasius went to the tomb of **Saint Anthony the Great**. The emperor martyred many of the Orthodox people who followed the true faith of Pope Athanasius but they resisted him unwaveringly. Therefore, the emperor stopped persecuting them and returned Pope Athanasius to his rightful See once again in the year **368 A.D.**

### **Areas of light in the life of Pope Athanasius:**

- Even as a youth, Pope Athanasius' mind was enlightened because he studied divinity and theology.
- He **stood against the great darkness of heresies and wrong teachings**, which could have destroyed the Christian faith and the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- He studied the Holy Bible in great depth and understood the Spirit of the Holy Bible and its intricate works.
- Pope Athanasius left us many sayings and true thought. His most famous work is the book titled **On the Incarnation of the Logos**, in which he clearly explains the doctrine of the Divine Incarnation and the Economy of Salvation, which some denied at the time. He also wrote a work called **Against the Pagans** and another **Against the Arians**, and he included statements in the Orthodox creed to confirm





**the One Essence of the Father and the Son**, completely refuting and refusing the Arian heresy.

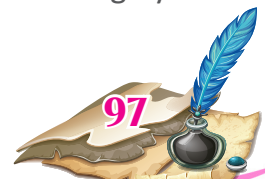
- It was said of Pope Athanasius that he did not die as a martyr but **lived every day as a martyr**.
- It was also said of him, if Athanasius was **made of iron**, he would have **dissolved**. And if he was **made of rock**, he would have **shattered**. But **he did not dissolve nor shatter**. He remained **strong as a mountain** because of God's grace and care for him.

### In our rites and rituals:

- We commemorate St. Athanasius the Apostolic and we read his biography in the Synaxarium on **Bashans 7**.
- During Good Friday, we read his homilies during the 3rd and 11th hours. We conclude these homilies by saying, ***"We conclude the homily of our Father St. Athanasius the Apostolic, who enlightened our minds and the eyes of our hearts in the Name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. One God, Amen."***
- Pope Athanasius is one of the fathers who suffered greatly for the sake of keeping the true Orthodox faith, ***"The faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*** (Jude 1:3).
- Pope Athanasius is one of the fathers who enlightened us being **lamps in the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church**.
- In one of the most famous sayings about Pope Athanasius, St. Jerome said of him, ***"if it was not for Athanasius, the whole world would have been Arian."***

### Lessons from the life of St. Athanasius:

The Orthodox faith is very precious and it is worth defending. We must thoroughly un-



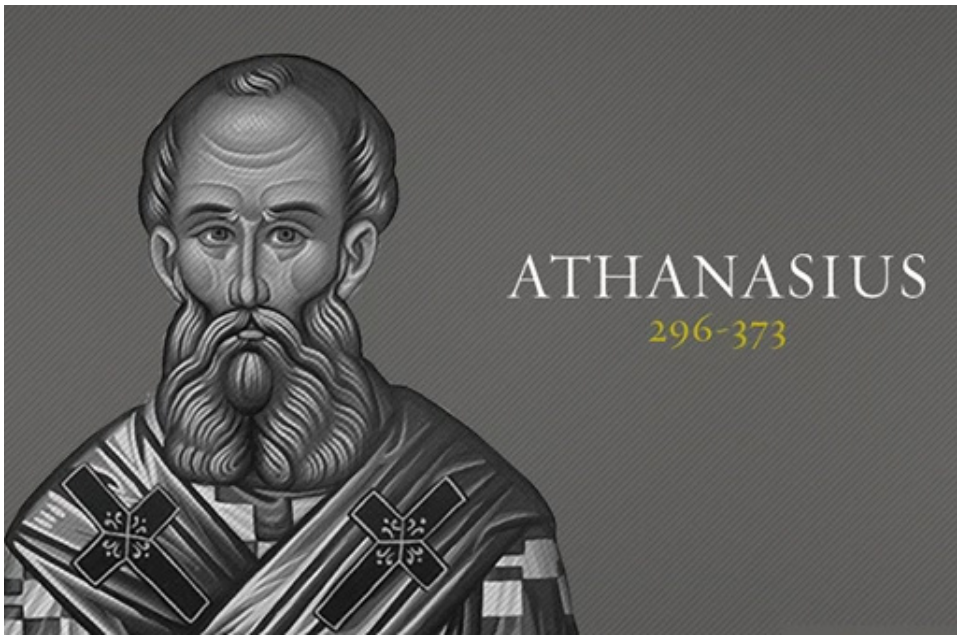




derstand the **responsibility that we've been given towards our faith**. We must close our ears to any strange teachings and carefully review our thoughts. We ought to go back to the early fathers, and properly understand their teachings and sayings. We must be sure of the source from which we receive the doctrine and we must review our sources well.

### ***How does my life compare to St. Athanasius?***

Pope Athanasius' biography is not just a story for us to be amazed at. Rather, we must take this saint and **his defense of the True Faith** as a **living gospel**. Our Lord is the Christ who lives eternally and is everlasting, existing even before the foundation of the world. Pope Athanasius played an instrumental role in the life of the Body of Christ, the church. The stronger connection we have with the Head, our Lord Jesus Christ, the more connected we will be with His members, **the cloud of witnesses which surrounds us, who pray for us at all times**. We should ask ourselves; do we declare the Lord Jesus Christ to all people through our good manners, our good lifestyle, our jobs, the beautiful image of the Lord?





Imagine the initial scientific experiments which utilized wires, bulbs, and a small electric circuit, to light the bulb.

- Do you know who experimented with electricity?
- Imagine how the world was before this experiment! How did people conduct their day?

*"Truly the light is sweet, And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun"*

*(Ecclesiastes 11:7)*

✝ Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. Before this invention, the world relied on natural sunlight to light during the day. During the first absolution of the Prime Prayer, we pray *"The sun to give light by day and the night for rest unto all mankind."* As man came to need more time during the day to work and began to use fire for warmth and light, the light bulb was invented and followed by the invention of electric devices.

✝ If you lived before the invention of the light bulb, how would you conduct your day? How important would light be to you?

- **Light gave life new meaning.** Mankind was able to conduct his work for a lon-





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ger period of time and we became able to take pleasure in sharing more time with our family, friends, and relatives and we ultimately became more productive.

- **How about you?** Are you **beneficial** to those around you? Have you **made a difference** in the lives of those around you?



✝ The **first verses of the Holy Bible** in the book of Genesis read: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."* (Genesis 1:1-3)

✝ Also, **in the last book of the Bible** - the Book of Revelation - we read: *"They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light."* (Revelation 22:5)

The Holy Bible begins and ends with light. Darkness was the first thing God abolished and light was the first thing God decided to create. Imagine that when God was preparing the glorious and majestic life for man, He began by creating light. The first gift from







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God was that He enlightened the way so that we may understand how to proceed in life and how to take pleasure in His creation.

A good practice for taking pleasure in God's creation is to write down three beautiful things, which give you pleasure in this life around you.

One experiment you can do to see the impact of light is to gather a lit candle, a piece of white paper and sit in a dark place. Next, bring the paper closer to the candle and you'll see that the circumference of light is enlarged. Now take the paper away from the candle. Now, you'll find that the area of light has diminished.

### *What is the meaning of this experiment?*

✝ This meaning was explained in the first epistle of our teacher, St. John: "This is the message which we have heard from the beginning and declare to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5).

- God is the source of our true light, which enlightens every man coming into the world. He is the way to light; He is the true light. We are like the paper. When we come close to the True Light, the Source of light, the more enlightened we become. We are enlightened by the word of God, His wisdom, and His commandments.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105).

- May we enlighten everyone around us as we are instructed in the book of Isaiah: "Arise; Shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." (Isaiah 60.1).





## What should I do to become enlightened?

✝ The Biblical and Patristic understanding of enlightenment is that **the light of God**



**shines upon the mind of man.** Thus, man receives **discernment and wisdom**, being led by the Holy Spirit. Thus, he or she makes the correct choices and decisions.

✝ Enlightenment can be defined as **coming closer to the source of light**, like the paper in our experiment, and staying there as God commanded us to dwell in light, not to walk in darkness.

- "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." (John 12:35)
- "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life." (John 8:12)

## Sources of Enlightenment:

### Partaking in the sacraments:

✝ **Baptism:** Man becomes enlightened because the Holy Spirit renews His life when he is born again from water and the Spirit, which **opens our eyes to the spiritual things**. Thus, we see what men cannot see:

- We see **ourselves as we are**. We see **God as a loving Savior**. We see the Way and





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walk through it in peace. We see the Truth and no one deceives us.

- Thus, we can say, *"I was blind but now I see."* (John 9:25). When God removes from us the filth of our desires, the deception of the enemy and the world, we are filled with Divine light in the heart and in the mind. **This light allows us to discern the Truth and become wise.**
- In majesty, glory, and beauty, the Coptic Church is placed as a spiritual and practical way for us to have a relationship with God. When we come out of the baptismal font, **we are born anew**, declaring to all of humanity that we have become members of the **'enlightened world'**.
- Following Baptism, we receive the **sacrament of Chrismation**, when we are anointed with the oil of Myron as a seal, to be freed from the bonds of the enemy of good and have become temples to the Holy Spirit.
- We also receive the **sacrament of the Holy Eucharist**, by which we live and abide in God.
- Furthermore, through the sacrament of repentance and confession, we are purified, and our hearts become light, and light shines to the whole world through this purity.



### Prayer and Reading the Holy Bible

✝ Prayer is the language heard, felt, and seen **between us and God**. He hears our prayers and listens to our needs. The Word of God is *"a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* (Psalm 119:105). *"For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light;"* (Proverbs 6:23).







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- God sends us messages and responses to our prayers through the **Holy Bible**.

Thus, the true Christian never stops reading the Word of God. He keeps it in his heart and reads it continually in love to understand how we must walk and conduct ourselves. Through the reading of the Holy Word of God, the Christian's mind is enlightened, and he learns where to put his feet. If one does not understand the Holy Bible and strive to carry out the commandments in precision, one will not see the light.



### A Holy Environment:

✝ As we constantly abide in the Word of God, and live a life of prayer, we abide in Him through receiving the Holy Eucharist, ***"he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him."*** (John 6:56). We must also surround ourselves with pure hearts that **glorify God and praise His Holy Name** by choosing friends similar to us, who have pure hearts and godly enlightened minds, souls filled with God, thus we can live in blessing and peace.

## What must I do to become light?

✝ Simply plugging in a light fixture is not enough to turn on the light. With time, the bulb will accumulate dust on it and will not be as bright. Thus, we have to continually clean the bulb always, removing any dust or residue from it.

- What residue or dust, what hindrances are there that block the light of Christ inside us from shining to others? What should I do if I become filled with these hindrances again?





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- If we are to become light for others, **we must cleanse our lives constantly.** We must do the commandments and live by them in our personal lives and in the midst of others.
- **Repent and confess** our sins on a regular basis.
- **Pray** for others.
- Walk in **meekness and simplicity.**
- Walk in **honesty and the fear of the Lord** in our words and actions.
- Spread the **Spirit of hope, joy, peace, and love** to all.

✝ Our commandments are a guide and signs which tell us when to stop and when to go on our journey through this life. The danger lies in any hindrances which prevent us from taking care of our spiritual lives.

Let us imagine someone who is always smiling and hopeful in life, and consistent in receiving the Holy Communion. People will find him at peace in spirit. With this personality and these characteristics, he will not cry out or get angry. **He will remain strong in the truth, honest and will strengthen those around him.** He will be loved and honored by all.

✝ What do you think of this person? What do you like about his/her characteristics? Would you like to acquire these characteristics? How could you acquire these characteristics?

- If we meditate deeply, we will find that all of these characteristics are in the Lord to whom is due all glory. **Let us be like him.** In order for us to become like Him, we must be acquainted with Him.





✝ *Spiritual Exercise:* Research the personality of our Lord Jesus Christ to whom be all glory in the four Gospels. Examine His characteristics, His ways, His strength in His actions and words, His friends, and His treatment of those close to Him as well as strangers whom He encountered.

### Is there a false light? What do you think?

✝ We see so many different people walking around us. You may find bloggers or influencers on social media, who are very famous because of their videos and posts on different platforms; like TikTok or Instagram. **All of these vain works are without any meaning.** Do you believe that this is the true light you ought to search for? Did God create you to reach for this light?

- Becoming popular and accumulating wealth and gifts is not a problem in itself, but **if this is the goal, that is a problem.** We must have a higher goal and consider what we can do to benefit others.

- You may use some of these social media platforms to help others give God glory, *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16)

- We may, my friend, use any way, including our presence anywhere, to proclaim the light, love, and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### What do you think can turn off the light?

✝ *Friends:*

- If our friends have different ways than us, such as not fearing God, lying, and dishonesty, you must know that during this period of your life you are greatly influenced by your friends. **They can turn that light within you into darkness** if you are







influenced by their ways, words, and whether or not they are concerned with the spirit of wisdom and the fear of the Lord.

#### ✝ *The ego:*

- If we think we are more important, more wealthy, higher than everyone around us, the light inside us can be darkened. The minute you give your ego a chance, you fall away from light and wisdom. *"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18). Let us imagine if someone thinks he is better than everybody else, believes that he knows everything and presumes that he does not sin at all. How will people look at that person? How will he make room for God, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the spirit of learning to work in him? *If he thinks he knows everything, he will never feel the need for anyone or anything else.*

#### ✝ *Departing from the source of light:*

- Those who do so, **feel unrest**, because they have no longer have peace. Those who leave the source of light, which is life with God, our Light, become darkened. Darkness represents the life of evil and sin.

#### ✝ *Negative emotions:*

- Emotions such as anger, which is likened unto fire, if you let them control your life; will prevent people from seeing the light in you. *"An angry man stirs up strife and a furious man abounds in transgressions."* (Proverbs 29:22). Dishonesty, lack of contentment, and pessimism, deter the true light from filling your life.

#### ✝ *Evil thoughts:*

- Negative and useless thoughts make the mind go astray and deter it from seeing matters in the proper way. Thus, one forfeits the chance to become enlightened.



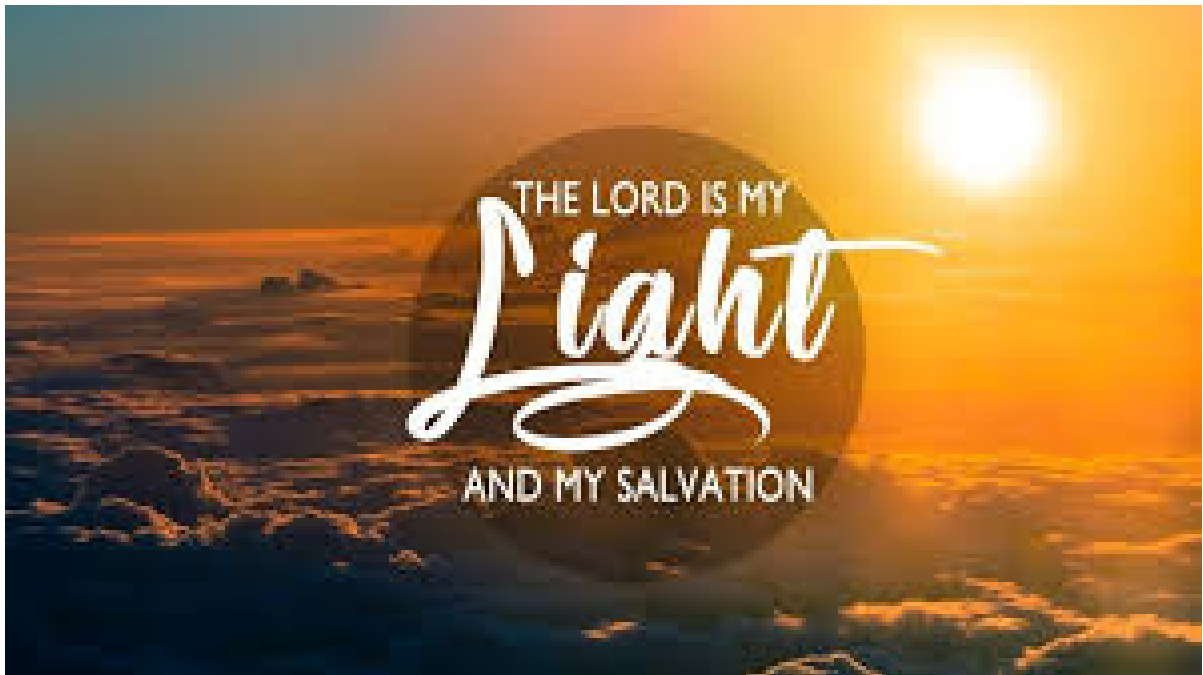


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*Do you know how to preserve the light inside you?*

*Spiritual Exercise:* At the end of the day, write 3 positive things to thank God about every day. Reflect on what you have done to preserve and strengthen the light inside you.





O God, my God, I will rise up early unto You; for my soul has thirsted for You: to make my flesh blossom for You, in a barren land and a trackless and dry place. So I have appeared before You in the Holy, to see Your power and Your glory. For Your mercy is chosen more than life: my lips shall praise You. So I will bless You during my life: I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be filled as with marrow and fatness; and my lips of joy shall praise Your name.

I have remembered You on my bed: in the time of early morning I have usually meditated on You. For You have become unto me a helper, and under the shadow of Your wings I shall rejoice. My soul has kept very close behind You: Your right hand has up-held me. But those who seek to destroy my soul; shall go into the lowest parts of the earth. They shall be delivered up to the hand of the sword; they shall be portions for foxes. But the king shall rejoice in God; everyone who swears by him shall be proud; for the mouths of those who speak unjust things shall be shut. ALLELUIA.







### THE HOLY GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN (1:1-17)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness to the Light. That was the true Light that gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him. He came unto His own, and His own did





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not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of His Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

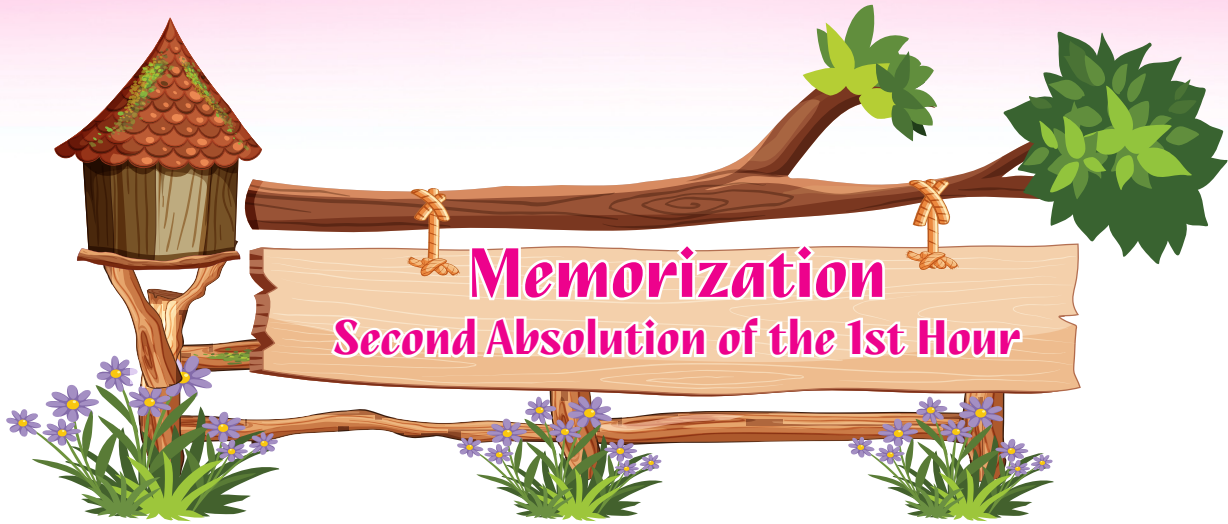




O Lord, God of hosts, who exists before all ages and abides forever, who created the sun for daylight, and the night as rest for all men; we thank You, O King of ages, for You have let us pass through the night in peace, and brought us to the daybreak. Therefore, we ask You, O our Master, the King of all ages, let Your face shine upon us, and the light of Your divine knowledge enlighten us. Grant us, O our Master, to be sons of light and sons of day, to pass this day in righteousness, chastity and good conduct, that we may complete all the rest of the days of our life without offence; through the grace, the compassion and the love of mankind of Your Only-Begotten Son Jesus Christ, and the gift of Your Holy Spirit, now and at all times and forever. Amen.







O God Who causes the light to burst forth, Who lets His sun shine upon the righteous and the wicked, Who created the light which illuminates the whole world, enlighten our minds, our hearts and our understandings, O Master of all, and grant us to please You this present day. Guard us from every bad thing, from every sin, and from every adversative power; through Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom You are blessed, with the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver and one essence with You, now and at all times and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.







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WHOM SHALL I FEAR? "Ps 27:1"

*The*  
**LORD IS MY  
LIGHT**  
AND  MY  
**SALVATION**  
WHOM SHALL I FEAR?  
"PS 27:1"

*Through the grace of God and under the auspices of His Grace Bishop David, Bishop of the Diocese of New York and New England and the current Papal Exarch of the Archdiocese of North America for H.H. Pope Tawadros II, this Mahragan book was translated and formatted by the blessed servants of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of New York and New England. All material was translated from the Arabic Language to the English Language.*





**THE LORD IS MY LIGHT & SALVATION**  
**WHOM SHALL I FEAR?**

“Ps 27:1”



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