



**THE COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
ST. GEORGE AND ST. RUEISS CHURCH
SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM**

GRADE NINE

Revised Edition 2021

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Παποστολος

Πάσιος

Μαρκος





THE THRICE-BLESSED POPE SHENOUDA III
OF BLESSED MEMORY



HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Deir Anba Ruciss, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,

CAIRO, EGYPT.

CABLE : ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.

ΠΡΩΤΟΠΡΑΡΧΗΣ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΥ
ΜΟΡΦΟΔΟΤΟΣ

بطريركيسة الأقباط الأرثوذكسيين

Date | / / 19
| / / 17

+

الى الدبنيه المباركيه القوم مرقس الياس عبد المسيح
والذين تادرس يعقوب ملطي

سلام رحبه وبعد ،

زارني ابننا د. محفوظ وسعه المنهج القترح لدارس
التبئية الكنسية بالمهجر . وقد درست معه الخطوط الاساسية
للمنهج ، دوره الدخول في التفاصيل . وأبدت له بعض ملاحظات
من جهة ملاحظة هذه العقيدة والحقق : وفي الواقع أنه الجهد المبذول
جهد كبير جداً بآله الشكر . ومع ذلك تحتاج دروس الكتاب
المقدم الى زيادة . وسأرسل لكم ملاحظات اخري بالتفصيل بمشيئة
الرب .

فليبارك الرب كل ما قام به ابننا محفوظ من جهود في إعداد
المنهج ، وفي جميع المادة ، وفي عمل الترجمة . وليبارك الرب
أيضاً كل من اشتركوا في العمل ، وفي المراجعة
وليكنه هدفنا هو ما نلتجئ اليه من كان على قدر
امكاناتنا . ويمكنه تزويد المنهج أيضاً بالصورة المناسبة والتي
تقدمها كنيتنا من النواحي العقيدية والطبقية والتاريخية
الرب معكم . كعادتنا خيرا

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سيد القديس اغناطيوس

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Deir Anba Ruciss, Ramses Avenue, ABBASSIYA,

CAIRO, EGYPT.

CABLE : ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.



To my blessed two sons: Hegomain Fr. Marcous Elias Abdel Massih and Hegomain Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty.

Peace and love be with you.

Dr. Mahfouz has visited me and brought with him the suggested Sunday school curriculum for the land of immigration. I have studied with him the basic topics of the curriculum without getting into details. Although that I have pointed out some concerns on the doctrine and dogma curriculum, it is clear that the amount of work spent on preparing the curriculum is huge and worth thanking. Nonetheless, the Bible study part of the curriculum needs to be increased. God willing, I will also send you additional details on this curriculum.

May the Lord bless all the effort that our son Mahfouz has done in preparing the Sunday school curriculum, in collecting the relevant topics, and in performing the translation of subjects. May the Lord also bless all those who have joined him in preparing this project and those who revised the topics.

Let our goal be performing our best to try and arrive at perfection given what we have from abilities. Lastly, I would also suggest the addition of different recognized pictures according to our doctrine, dogma and history to the Sunday school curriculum.

May the Lord be with you. Be in peace.

Signed

Pope Shenouda III

22 August 1986

The feast of St. Mary





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IMPORTANT RULES

FOR TEACHING

IMPORTANT RULES FOR TEACHING THE YOUTH IN THE LAND OF IMMIGRATION

Our youth in the land of immigration are influenced by the society and the culture they live in, this is considered perfectly normal and inevitable.

Despite the similarities in the content of the Sunday school curriculum and the youth meeting topics across all the churches in the world, the difference lies in the presentation of the topic and the ability to tailor the content to fit the audience's background, culture and spiritual needs. This would greatly increase the topic's comprehension and its receptiveness.

In Saint Paul's sermon to the Jews (Acts 13: 16-41) he spoke to them regarding Moses the arch-prophet and gave an account of their experiences with our Lord throughout their history. Moreover, in another instance, he spoke to the Greek philosophers (Acts 17: 18-33) in a manner that suits their cultural background. In both cases the content is equivalent, both sermons aim to convey the message of salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ granted us on the cross.

Therefore, whether the Sunday school / youth servants are first generation immigrants or are born in the land of immigration, it is important to observe the following guidelines in conveying the topic:

1. Correctness of the language and its clarity...the servant must prepare the topic in an accurate, clear & coherent language. This language should be the audience's preferred first language
2. Organization...Our children live in a society where organization and punctuality are governing characteristics, hence, it is imperative to adopt those characteristics to portray to our children that our services and our churches are adhering to the norms of the society.
3. Respect...mutual respect is the prevailing trait in the western societies, as a result respect ought to be maintained at all times between the servant and those being served. This is manifested in good communication skills such as listening without interjecting and using appropriate words depicting respect.
4. Dialogue...constructive discussions and valuing each other's opinions are fundamental in the western societies. Dialogue often leads to persuasion and mutual love as opposed to just giving orders.

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5. Give pertinent examples from the children's day to day life...during the topic we must reference examples that are suitable and related for emphasis and clarification.
6. Questioning everything said or heard...Due to all the strong intellectual movements in the society, we as servants must be cognizant of any new infiltrating thoughts, this is achieved through research and analysis to be in a position to answer our youth's questions in a convincing intellectual dialogue.
7. Love between the servant and the children...our children often yearn for compassion and love in our fast pace materialistic society. Thus, it is extremely important that the servant uses expressions of love, affection and harmony.
8. Establish and maintain the bond between the children and the mother church...this is essential to our unity and there ought not to be any division or separation of any sort from the mother church nor its beliefs, holiness, saints, organization or any other matter.
9. We ask all Sunday school / youth servants to abide by the orthodox faith and dogma in all the topics and to use ample biblical examples and references.
10. We ask all Sunday school / youth servants to establish a good spiritual relationship with all those being served.

INTRODUCTION TO

THE Sunday SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Principal Goal of Christian Up-Bringing.

The child had and still has, first as a person and second as a child, a special importance to our Lord Jesus Christ. He called the children and considered them models of perfection, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:3-5).

Therefore, children are beloved ones to Christ and are His friends with their simplicity and purity of heart. Christ called them, blessed them and asked His Disciples and Apostles after Him to take care of bringing up children and prepare the suitable environment for their spiritual growth.

St. Paul advises parents saying, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged", (Colossians 3:21). From a Christian point of view, the general principal goal of religious up - bringing is the formation of the perfect man of God who is following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Also, our Lord said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Hence, a Christian up-bringing is not merely an education to be given or a curriculum to be taught, but it is rather a life that is given through example and behavior through teaching and discipleship. The saintly Fathers of the church have emphasized this fact. St. John said about his practice of life with the Lord "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

The same fact was emphasized by St. Paul when he was talking to his disciple Timothy "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at

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Antioch, at Iconium ... But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:10-15). Also in the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 3:17, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern". Therefore, the principal goal of the Christian up-bringing is to change the life of our children to the life of Christ in them, i.e. to a life based on the work of Christ in them as true Christians and not just religious persons who fear God but deny Him.

The Starting Point in Achieving the Goal of Religious Upbringing.

The teacher should not start with the student from power Zero. The student comes equipped with many social and religious experiences. His religious experience, although it is limited, it has a strong basis that is ready for spiritual growth. In the Sacrament of Baptism, the student has already obtained the spiritual birth i.e. he became spiritually re-born. After his baptism he was anointed with the Holy Myroun (Chrism) and the Holy Spirit dwelt in him. St. John said "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you; and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him" (1 John 2:27).

Therefore, by obtaining these two Holy Sacraments and the Sacrament of Eucharist, the student becomes a member in the body of the Lord and a living part of the body of the Holy Church. This means that religious up-bringing is not something foreign with respect to the student. The student is a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in him. This means that it is not the teacher who makes the student live a life for Christ, but it is the inside work of the Holy Spirit that makes the whole difference. The role of the teacher is to make the student aware of the effect and the work of the Spirit. In this sense the student becomes aware of the secret grace inside him and as a result the divine word inside him grows as the seed grows inside the earth.

The Difference Between Religious Education and Religious Upbringing.

We should not aim at providing lessons in the form of giving information, i.e. a mere religious education. In this case religious experience will never exceed the circle of the mind and will never affect the heart and practice of the student. If we consider religious education as an element in religious bringing-up, we are in this case following Christ's plan in the development and building of the Christian personality. Christ with His example and His perfection gave us a model which should be

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followed and achieved. As for His teachings, they are meant to clear the way for us in order to follow them as examples and models.

The Need of our Church for a Coptic Orthodox Sunday School Program.

There is one basic difference between Eastern and Western theology; the latter depends on study, analysis and using scientific means, whereas Eastern theology is based on experience and depth which is mainly lead to true Christian life. The Eastern Church respects the role of the mind but it works under the supervision of faith.

The majority of recent Western Sunday School programs follow a pure analytical way of explaining the Bible. For example, miracles are explained through psychological and scientific factors. The man of God must accept miracles and believe them as they are. St. Athanasius said, "Our knowledge must not control (or have authority over) the word, but the word itself must have the control and authority over the mind".

Another basic difference is that our traditional Church uses the rites in education as a key in the process of living what is being taught.

Over and above what was mentioned before in relation to the basic differences in religious education between Eastern and Western churches, there are also basic differences in the various beliefs and the way Christianity is lived by in actual life.

We, as parents, teachers and clergy, are responsible in front of God to bring up our children according to the same spiritual Orthodox principles that we received from our saintly Fathers who shed their blood to perpetuate the perfect Orthodox faith . Therefore, our children must learn from the same source from which we learned before them.

The Sunday School program in your hands is a fruit of love granted by our Lord Jesus Christ to our children and a gift from Him to them. This program is purely Coptic Orthodox. All its references without exception are Coptic Orthodox (please review the reference list at the end of the book. In this manner all the information that is in this book (as well as all the books in this series) can be used with total confidence as it is devised according to our glorified church. The spirit of the lessons is indeed the same spirit of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

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About the Books in Your Hands.

These books in your hands are integrated series of books which were written for children from age 4 to 18. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, if the child at age 4 follows this series of lessons until age 18, he will obtain an all-rounded spiritual background. The books (covering the teachings from pre-schoolers to grade 12) cover a study of most of the major Biblical subjects of the Old and New Testaments, the celebrations of the church of our Master's feasts, the life of the Saints and their feasts, the divine liturgy with its rites and spirituality, the true Christian life and Christian behavior, church sacraments, fasting, prayers, the creed and its explanation, the Ecumenical Councils, the difference between the various major Christian sects, the Christian family, the history of our church, the major personalities in the Holy Bible, ... etc. The program is indeed comprehensive and it covers all the key areas of our Orthodox church. If these lessons were given in the spiritual way that was emphasized before, great results will be expected with the work of the Holy Spirit.

General Rules and Principles to be Followed by the Sunday School Teachers.

- 1) The teacher must know the stage and the characteristics of growth of the children that he or she is teaching. A child who is 12 years old is different than a child who is 8 years old. The teacher must know the level of his/her students, their abilities to receive information that he/she is giving and the differences between the various abilities in the same class.
- 2) The positive participation of the students is very important during the lesson and the effectiveness of teaching. One of the key incentives for the student is to give importance to the lesson and have an effective communication with the teacher and, above all, to define clearly the purpose behind it and present the lesson in the form of problems that attract their attention.
- 3) The teacher must follow a psychological order of the facts he is presenting. Our Lord Jesus Christ used effectively the psychological method of teaching through His parables. The parables in their simplicity are drawn from the daily life of the people. We must emphasize here that the psychological method is not the only method of spiritual teaching. We should mention this method as one of the methods used. It is quite important to note that spiritual teaching must be imparted with certain goals in mind which are connected with the life of the children and related to the problems they face. We should provide guidance that is mostly needed for them.

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- 4) The teacher must present the lesson and illustrate it with relevant information and present it as a coherent unity without ambiguity or contradiction. He may use illustrations to help him explain what he means.
- 5) Application of Christian principles to the actual social life must be emphasized in every lesson. The teacher should use stories (from the Old or New Testaments or from church history or church books) to attract the attention of the students and show the Christian principle in an applied manner. The teacher also may divide the subject into stages or small subjects. A good practice is to summarize the lesson or better still, ask the students themselves to summarize it.
- 6) The manner of expressing the lesson to the students is also very important. A teacher who is living by what he/she teaches will definitely be more effective in giving his/her message across. A teacher who is teaching under spiritual influence with compatible emotions to what he/she teaches will be definitely more effective than a teacher who is giving information.

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From someone who is not capable, and does not know anything, was taken and lead by hand, step by step, from the smallest to the largest thing for this work to be done.

“He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.” Isaiah 40:29

“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:3

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox children and youth, who are going to benefit a great deal from this revised Sunday School Program, I would like to express a word of appreciation and gratitude to:

The Thrice-Blessed Pope Shenouda III of Blessed Memory

This program leans quite heavily on the writings of His Holiness the Late Pope Shenouda III. The majority of the contents of the lessons and their attachments are based on His Holiness' writings. This is a very bright and important aspect of this program. In 1986, during the time in which there was no Coptic Orthodox Sunday School program in the land of immigration, His Holiness reviewed the general contents of the program, commented and modified many key subjects, and then authorized the use of this program in all churches outside of Egypt, on a preliminary basis.

I can safely say that, if it was not for His Holiness the Late Pope Shenouda III's support, wisdom, and writings, these series of books would not exist. The whole generation is in debt to His Holiness the Late Pope Shenouda III, not only because of his great teachings and writings, but also because of his love and leadership.

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

I had the blessing of meeting His Holiness in 2013 in Austria and I suggested to him about updating and revising the previous version of the Sunday School Program. His encouragement, wisdom, and follow up were key to the development and completion of this program.

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His Grace Bishop Reweiss has been behind us all the way with his love and guidance. He wrote the forward for our previous version of the program in 1986.

His Grace Bishop Moussa

His Grace Bishop Moussa has provided constant support and encouragement in the completion of the previous program. Of course, His Grace's writings for the youth have been utilized in all the subjects directed towards the youth, in this book.

Fr. Tadros Malaty and Fr. Marcos Marcos

These Beloved Fathers reviewed thoroughly all of the contents of the first six books of the earliest version of the program. Their dedication, experience, and wisdom have been an important factor in the quality of all the material. They contributed greatly towards setting up the lessons, in that sense. Father Tadros Malaty's deep writings, without any doubt, have been a key reference in the majority of the lessons.

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Dr. Fayek Ishak (head of the English Department at Lakehead University) reviewed the first six books of the earliest version of the program. He contributed, immensely, towards the setup of the lessons.

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This beloved father's computer skills were utilized in many functions related to this Sunday School Program. His love and encouragement were key factors to the progress of this program.

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The continuous support and encouragement of Tassoni Ragaa played an essential role in the write-up of the previous version of the program, as well as in this revision. One of the aspects that kept this program centered and on track was her continuous reminder that this program is for generations to come and every effort is worthwhile for the sake of the upbringing of the children and youth.

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The Youth of St. George and St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church

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John Abdel Sayed

Fr. Rueiss Awad



**TEACHER'S GUIDELINES:
HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM?**

1. The teacher should realize that each lesson has been prepared to cover a specific point; starting from the title of the lesson to the end of it.
2. The teacher should read all the materials referred to in the lesson (i.e. the Holy Bible as well as any articles attached to the lesson), and then proceed by emphasizing all the points.
3. The teacher should enlarge the picture ahead of each lesson and use it as a visual aid as he or she is teaching the lesson.
4. The teacher should discuss the practical applications as he or she proceeds with the lesson.
5. The teacher should summarize the main points of the lesson with the students and give prizes.

**Effective teaching in Sunday School:
by Fr Rueiss Awad**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbf9zEPULdU>

FEATURES OF THIS

Sunday SCHOOL

FEATURES OF THIS SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

A COMPREHENSIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

1. This Sunday School program was the very first program to be written in the lands of immigration. This work was initiated in 1974, and the first version was published in 1986. We thank our heavenly Father, Who has given us the opportunity to extensively revise and improve it, in 2005.

2. In this version of the program, any repetition that was in the previous program, has been removed, all lessons were upgraded in both coverage and depth. Moreover, a whole new book, on contemporary issues, has been added.

3. The contemporary issues book covers subjects that are important for children and youth in today's world. These lessons are optional. For churches with regular youth group meetings, these issues would best be discussed during those meetings. On the other hand, for churches that do not hold regular youth group meetings, those issues could be discussed as part of the Sunday School program.

4. This version of the program also includes lessons, which form a basis for a missionary service, a service that should in the ideal situation be practiced by every member of our congregation. The objective is that each child, every youth, and in the long run each Coptic individual can behave and act in a way, which is an embodiment of the teaching and tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In other words, our congregation would become role models in their communities, who attract people to our Lord Jesus Christ through their good practices: sincerity, commitment, hard work and dedication, tolerance, forgiveness, and all the other good qualities that differentiate a good practicing Christian from those who merely have a Christian education.

5. In this Sunday School Program, we depended heavily on the writings of H.H. Pope Shenouda III as a reference for most of the presented material.

6. The lessons in this version of the program have already been tried in Sunday School classes, reviewed, improved and tried again. This ensures that the lessons are relevant and suit the level of the students.

7. In this version of the program, efforts were put forth to ensure that every aspect of the Christian life in the Coptic Orthodox Church is covered.

8. This Sunday School Program is not merely about giving specific education on Christianity to our children and youth but it is rather an attempt to deeply affect their feelings and spirituality. It is believed that such an approach will facilitate the

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practical application of the various aspects involved so that Christianity becomes a way of life for the individual, with deeply rooted Christian values, that are manifested as behavior and attitude.

9. All copyrights of other Sunday School programs, and other writers, have been fully respected.

10. In this version, each lesson comes complete with pictures and songs that are suitable for the lesson.

11. This Sunday School program comes in various formats, for convenience. In addition to being available on this website for widespread use, it is also available, upon request, in hard copy format or on CD.

12. It is our strong belief that this Sunday School program will play a vital role in the spiritual upbringing of our children. May the Lord bless this Sunday School program and all other programs, for the growth of His Kingdom in us.

THE PREPARATION OF

Sunday SCHOOL

THE PREPARATION OF SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

A. What is a Sunday School Lesson?

1. It is not a record of events that we convey to the students with the hopes of appearing to satisfy the required preparation process in front of other people. Neither is it a lecture that we deliver to our audience or student regardless of their interest in the matter.

2. However, it is, on one hand, a fruit of the live reaction between the servant and the lesson and, on the other hand, between the servant and the students. The Holy Spirit matures this fruit and directs this service towards the salvation of the students and towards the glory of God.

For if the servant who teaches the people does not teach himself, the voice of the Lord rebukes him saying, " You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself ? " (Romans 2:21), and again in James 3: 1: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

Therefore, the servant should engage himself in the lesson through prayers, relevant spiritual readings, and practical application, so that when the servant speaks with his students from experience and true knowledge, he says, with St. John the Beloved, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-" (1 John 1:1)

If a servant is not aware of the spiritual level of his students, he may burden them with instructions and lessons which they cannot handle nor apply and this, in turn, may cause the students to go astray and lose their eternal life. Therefore, it is crucial for the servant to establish a healthy, trustworthy, and fruitful relationship with his students, as well as to share in their joys and cheers, and their sadness and fears, all towards Jesus Christ. This is what St. Paul refers to in his epistle to the Galatians when he says, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you..." (Galatians 4:19). This close relationship with the students allows the servant to choose the most appropriate lesson that applies to their needs.

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Hence a Sunday School lesson is:

A live mixture between the personal lives of the servants and the students through the lesson; the Holy Spirit creates this mixture and allows it to result in the bearing of fruit.

B. The Requirements for Sunday School Lessons

1. Humility in prayer before God.

God said, "...for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

My beloved brethren, sit down in peace and tranquility with the Lord and talk to Him about your personal need for Him in your service. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pray saying, " Guide me dear God. What would you like my students and I to learn this week ? " Be obedient to His voice. It would be suitable to maintain a prayer time which equals that of the lesson.

2. Accurate knowledge of the meanings contained within the lesson.

This is achieved through:

a) Occupying yourself throughout the week with understanding the new lesson, beginning from the end of the previous lesson until the beginning of the new one. It is wise to use your free time, time before sleep, and time with fellow servants to increase and enhance your understanding of the lesson.

b) Resorting to spiritual and religious references and literature to help you develop the right understanding and concepts behind the lines.

c) Resorting to general educational references and literature to embody this understanding and these concepts, making them clear in the minds of your students.

3. Aids of presentation.

It is important that you transform your understanding of the lesson into a simple and clear presentation. It has been stated and proved that 85% of knowledge acquired is acquired through the sense of sight and visual learning as opposed to the 10% that is acquired through the sense of hearing. The rest of the knowledge acquired is done so through the other three senses.

THE PREPARATION OF

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In reality, the least effective way of transmitting knowledge to others is by merely talking; this has the weakest influence on the students. In contrast, the most effective way to teach is to use the "Learning by Doing" method, which requires enough time as well as sound experience.

What differentiates between the effectiveness of the two means of presentation are the tools used in the presentation. These tools aid the students in effectively understanding and retaining the purpose of the lesson by engaging both senses of sight and sound. These tools may include audio-visual devices such as pictures and movies, spiritual trips and outings, role playing during class, intellectually stimulating games, etc.

C. Recording the lesson.

It is recommended that the servant records the following during the preparation of the lesson:

- Date of the preparation of the lesson.
- Date of the delivery of the lesson.
- Title of the lesson.

Purpose of the lesson.

- References.
- Preface.
- Lesson.
- Inference.
- Bible verse.
- Homework.
- Aids of presentation.
- Other points for memory.

Songs.

- Personal reflections of the servant.

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Purpose of the lesson:

It is necessary for the servant to clearly understand the purpose of the lesson at the beginning of his preparation. It is also necessary that the purpose of the lesson should agree with the maturity level of the students. For example, it is more appropriate for children to learn about God's love; on the other hand, learning about the power of God in their lives and in the lives of the saints is more appropriate subject matter for youth. As for young adults, learning about Christian virtues and spiritual practices is most appropriate.

Most importantly, the purpose of the lessons should agree with Coptic Orthodox Christian teachings, whether in specific occasions or in general.

References:

References could include:

- a. Stories, examples, verses, etc. from the Holy Bible.
- b. Spiritual books and literature.
- c. General educational books and literature.

Recording the references is very useful for the servant because it helps the servant to refer back to them, if forgotten.

Preface:

The preface is the background of the lesson. It cultivates the thoughts of the students and directs their thoughts towards the lesson. This allows the lesson to be implanted in their minds and to, eventually, bear fruit.

It is important that the preface remain simple, short, and concise. The introduction could be in the form of focused questions, but should not be in the form of stories. Several stories in one lesson may deteriorate its effectiveness.

The Lesson:

The lesson could be divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction - it should be quick and concise and related to the preface. It should introduce the lesson smoothly without interrupting the chain of thoughts.
2. Body of the lesson - it contains the principle subject of the lesson, and follows these guidelines:

THE PREPARATION OF

Sunday SCHOOL

- b. You must be careful when relating events and examples to elucidate the subject of the lesson, in order to properly guide the students' imagination without restricting it.
 - c. You must diligently expose the Coptic Orthodox doctrine in the lesson.
 - d. You should not use more than one story during the lesson and the story used should be relevant to the subject matter.
3. Focal Point - the point during the lesson at which the purpose of the lesson is clearly defined. (Examples: The Lord responds to the prayers of a needy person, or the angels come to give the saints their heavenly crowns and take them to heaven after many trials and persecutions.)
4. Conclusion - it should be, like the introduction, short and concise. It can summarize the purpose of the lesson, without introducing any new concepts.

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Inferences:

Inference is a method used to determine how much the students have absorbed and retained from the lesson. It should be in the form of questions with the following guidelines:

They should clearly show the purpose of the lesson.

- a. They should suit the maturity of the students.
- b. They should be simple and direct.
- c. They should link to each other.
- d. They should not be 'Yes' or 'No' questions.
- e. They should each have one correct answer.

Bible Verse:

The memorization of a Bible verse is an excellent way to help the students remember the purpose of the lesson. The chosen Bible verse should meet the following guidelines:

It should show the purpose of the lesson clearly.

- a. It should be short which allows it to be easily memorized.
- b. Children can easily memorize, as well as understand it.

Homework:

The height of your diligence in preparing the lesson is in choosing the proper and effective homework or application. The homework should have the following characteristics:

- a. It should contain practical applications that apply to everyday life.
- b. It should suit the maturity level of the students.
- c. It should help in mastering the comprehension and retention of the lesson.
- d. It should not include more than one instruction, in order to simplify the application of the lesson.

INTRODUCTION

AGE 14 TO 15 YEARS

INTRODUCTION TEACHING GRADE 9 ADOLESCENCE: AGE 14 TO 15

- 1) By definition adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. The potential intellectual ability reached during this series is equal to that of adults. Adolescents go very rapidly through a period of physical changes which causes awkwardness, self-consciousness, and increased emotional instability.
- 2) One of the main characteristics of this period is the young people's **sensitivity and dissatisfaction**. They are dissatisfied with themselves, with their families and with their own appearance (wherein lies the cause of infatuation with any fashion of the day). Adolescents go through a period of painful dissatisfaction with their social life too. All these traits, though they often seem negative and painful, are part of a positive process. What adolescents are trying to do is to discover themselves and to discover their relationship to others - to adults, to their peers of their own sex as well as of the opposite one.
- 3) The rapid growth of technological civilization during the last decades has made our children much more knowledgeable about sex, social problems, race, crime, violence, science and technology. They are not more mature than adolescents used to be, but they know more, even though they often lack the maturity to digest this knowledge.
- 4) What then is the task of the Church in dealing with our adolescents? Basically, the Church has to offer them **meaningful values** that young people can consciously accept out of their own free choice at this special level of maturity and insecurity. The Church has to give them an image, a taste of what life should be, of what is meant by holiness, what are truth, faith, and loyalty. The Church is where they can find forgiveness, understanding, and love when they have done wrong and are confused and mixed-up. Adolescents need security-in-freedom.
- 5) Our adolescents need urgently two aspects of religious education in order to help them gain maturity. They need the opportunity to make religion a part of their own experience of life, their own thinking, their own motivation, through very informal free discussions, through participation in church work and through friendship. They also need to acquire information that will allow them to think intelligently, and will, at the same time, provide some material for

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- 6) All the teaching they need to acquire about the Bible and about the Church will be better assimilated if they feel a need for it. Thus teaching should be structured around questions and problems that are real to young people. The information must be presented as a means of finding answers. This kind of approach is very demanding on the leader, not only because he or she must be well informed, and must know where he or she can find information, but also because he or she must be flexible and sensitive to what takes place in the students' minds.

Basically adolescents need information in the same areas that shaped our program for younger grades - doctrine, liturgies, Bible study, church history, spirituality, and ethics.

- 7) Most important of all is the kind of relationship that is established between the adult leader and the young people. The leader should earn their trust as a friend, with understanding and sympathy, yet with firmness in his own convictions and genuine interest in their adolescent problems.

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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the children
in the class

SEPTEMBER

FIRST Sunday



SEPTEMBER

FIRST Sunday

others.

- † In the Sermon on the mountain, which lays out the basic principles of Christianity as set out by our Lord Jesus, Jesus said: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:1-2).

We must not judge others because:

- 1) When we judge others, we play the role of God, yet God is the only judge. He is the Creator and the one who examines the hearts.
- 2) When we judge others, we judge according to the outside appearance which may not reflect the inside situation or feelings of the heart which is only known to God. As we seek purity of heart, we should not judge others, as no one knows the heart of man except God.
- 3) When we judge others, we withdraw our hearts from focusing on salvation and our growth to judging and criticizing other people’s behavior. In this case we look like people who have a dead relative; they leave him in the house and go out to cry on another dead person.
- 4) Judging others forces makes us lose our loving nature towards our brethren and causes us to lose the grace and love of God. So, as we judge others we are judged by God.

- † We must learn to control what we say. Read James 3:1-9, St. James is concentrating on controlling ourselves not others. Let us start by considering carefully what we say. Is it easy? No. “But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God” (James 3:8-9).

- † Judging people can lead us to judge God, similar to Elijah when he said to God: “...O Lord my God, have you also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?” (1 Kings 17:20). Please tell the story in detail as found in 1 Kings 17:17-24.

Why does it bother us when someone passes judgment on us? What makes them better than us so that they can do so?

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us not spend time or effort thinking of others' mistakes. This is God's job. We need to have a simple eye towards others' behavior and pray that God may have mercy on us, the sinners, and have mercy also on our brethren. We must only look at the good things in others' behavior and make sure that we are encouraging them rather than judging them.

SEPTEMBER

FIRST Sunday

SONGS 🎵

THY MERCIES, O MY GOD

Thy mercies, O my God
And Thy tender mercies

All the raindrops
And the sand of the sea

How much more are
Manifest before

The sins that I have done
And count not

For Thou has chosen the publican
And the right-hand thief

And me too
Teach me, O my Master

For Thou desirest not
But rather that he

Restore us, O God
And deal with us

For Thou art good
Let Thy tender mercies

Have compassions on us all
And have mercy upon us

Remember those
Be Thou amongst us

My peace I
The peace of My Father

O King of peace
Accord to us Thy peace

Disperse the enemies
Fortify her

are countless
are too plenteous

are counted by Thee
is before Thine eyes.

the sins of my soul
Thee, O my God

remember not my Lord
my iniquities

the adulteress Thou hast saved
Thou hast remembered

the sinner
to offer repentance

the death of a sinner
returns and lives

to Thy salvation
according to Thy goodness.

and merciful
speedily prevent us

O Lord, God and Saviour
according to Thy great mercies.

O Christ our Master
and proclaim and say:

Give unto you
I leave unto you

give us Thy peace
and forgive our sins

of the church
and establish her forever

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Your or Others' Mistakes *By H.H. Pope Shenouda III*

People's view of wrong and right, how they see and judge matters, differ from one person to another according to the contrition or pride of heart.

A humble person concentrates on his own mistakes...

And if he blames, he will only blame himself...

But the proud are only preoccupied with the mistakes of the others... They occupy their mind, enthusiasm and concern... They consume his time and energy...

He makes of himself a watcher over people to watch and judge. Being fond of this, he sets himself as a judge and pronounce his sentences...

If he finds no fault with the others, he imagines them due to his suspicions, doubts, mistrust, hard-heartedness and readiness to listen to what hurts others, no matter how it is not true!

He might think that his condemnation of the others for what he imagines to be wrong puts him in a higher level over them, as if he understands what they do not understand... is better in management or above them in understanding, or in handling and arranging matters...!

And in all this, he forgets himself... He always blames others but does not accept blame...

He reproves but does not accept reproach, criticizes but does not accept criticism.

His considers himself without sin, perfect in his own eyes...

Therefore it is difficult for the proud to repent! For he sees no wrong in himself to repent for!!

The trial which happened to Job the Righteous was due to his being "*righteous in his own eyes.*" (Job. 32:1).

That is why St. Paul the Apostle teaches us, "*Do not be wise in your own opinion.*" (Rom. 12:16).

And wise Solomon says, "*... and lean not on your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes.*" (Prov. 3:5&7).

Happy is the person who condemns himself in everything, who is concerned only about his own eternity not about condemning people.



SEPTEMBER

FIRST Sunday



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**SEPTEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**EL-NAYROUZ FEAST AND THE FEELING OF THE
MARTYRS**

Please read Mark 6:17-29, the attached material entitled “The Nayrouz” Coptic New Year, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To profess our faith and not fear anything, or anyone.

MEMORY VERSE

“It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife” Mark 6:18

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

- † Why does the Church have her own calendar? Why don’t we just use the regular calendar? What happened that’s so important?
- † Start by reviewing what the students recall regarding the Coptic Solar Year. Emphasize the following points:
 - The Pharonic Egyptians were the first to measure time, to date the years and divide them into months. They used the solar calendar in their records.
 - The Coptic (or Egyptian) solar year is a very old one. The ancient Pharaohs created this system 5000 years before the birth of Christ, naming its months after the names of their ancient Egyptian Gods. The Coptic (or Egyptian) year has 13 months; they are: Tout, Baba, Hatour, Kyahek, Toubas, Amshier, Baramahat, Baramouda, Bashonse, Baouna, Abeeb, Messra and ElNassey.

SEPTEMBER

SECOND Sunday

Each of these months has 30 days; except the last month, El-Nassey, which is only 5 days long (or 6 days every four years, i.e., in the year that when divided by 4 will have no remainder)

- Up until now, the Egyptian farmers are using the Coptic solar year system in their timing for agriculture. The farmers divided the year into three seasons each of which has 4 full months: the season of the flood (includes Bashonse, Baouna, Abeeb and Messra), the season of cultivation (includes Tout, Baba, Hatour and Kyahek) and the season of the harvest and fruits (includes Touba, Amshier, Baramehat and Baramouda).
- The calculations for the Coptic solar year were based on the observation of the stars. When we approach the beginning of the Coptic year, i.e. the first of Tout, an intensely shining star appears in the skies before sunrise and it appears close to the sun and only once a year. We now call this star Sirius. The time of its appearance at sunrise on that day was always an auspice of the coming of the flood of the Nile which was the source of life and prosperity.
- The Roman ruler Diocletian horrified the entire world, and Egypt in particular, with his persecution of Christians. Consequently, the Copts considered the AD. 284 as the beginning of their calendar.
- Egypt had only used the Egyptian calendar system until the French came to Egypt in the era of Ismail Pasha and introduced the Western year system (January, February, etc.).

† The Feelings and Characteristics of a Martyr

- 1) A martyr is a faithful person who sticks to his or her faith even to death. No faith is more precious than this, that the person puts his life on earth as a price for his belief. Do we have this kind of faith?
- 2) A martyr is a person who has nothing in the world that pulls him from his beloved God. Otherwise, he/she would prefer to stay in the world for what he/she likes. Therefore, a martyr has already died of everything in the world before his body dies in martyrdom. Do we love the world or God?
- 3) A martyr is a courageous person. He or she faces all types of sufferings. But he still does not fear anything and goes forward towards death with a very strong heart. How courageous are we?
- 4) A martyr does not fear death or what is after death. He/She lives in joy even

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in the midst of sufferings, ready for eternal life with a pure heart, full of love to God and people. Are we ready for eternal life?

- † Let us take an example of martyrs: St. John the Baptist. Please read St. Mark 6: 17-29. St. John did not fear King Herod. He feared God alone and for this reason St. John can only say the truth, and the truth is God. Jesus (God Incarnate) said, “I am the way, the **truth** and the life”. John said to Herod, “**It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife**” (Mark 6:18).
- † Remember St. Paul and St. Peter who were martyred for preaching the word of God.
- † The church has honored its martyrs to the fullest extent and has prepared for each of them on their Memorial Day a certain reading in honor of their martyrdom. This is in terms of hymns, prayers, recitals, and sermons.

Note:

Please ask the students to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Let us pray that God gives us even a touch of the faith, love, joy and courage of the martyrs.
- (2) We must follow the footsteps of our martyrs in their love of Christ, belief in heaven, sticking to their values, and their faith.

SEPTEMBER

SECOND Sunday

SONGS 🎵

FROM ALL THE GENTILES

“A great multitude... Of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” (Rev 7:9)

REFRAIN

From all the gentiles, from all the nations, from all the peoples
From all the gentiles, from all the nations, from all the tongues;
Before the throne they stand, thousands by a thousand
They come from every land.

They come from pain and fears
Dressed in pure gowns
These are the redeemed
I saw them all praise with glee

Before the throne they kneel
From evil they are free
These are the redeemed
I saw them all praise thankfully

They walk through heavy rains
In spirit comforted
These are the redeemed
I saw them all praise joyfully

they come from dark years
their joyful harps they sound
by pure Blood esteemed
as they came many.

being judged without appeal
heaven is all they see
by pure Blood esteemed
as they came many.

accepting prison's chains
with Christ they are ahead
by pure Blood esteemed
as they came many.

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THE NAYROUZ COPTIC NEW YEAR

Pharonic Egypt

The Pharonic Egyptians were the first to measure time, to date the years and divide them into months. They used the solar calendar in their records. They knew that a calendar year was approximately 365 days in length, and they organized their calendar with precision, dividing it into months with every month amounting to 30 days, back in the year 4240 B.C. The famous Greek historian Herodotus says in his writings on Egypt that the Egyptians were led to this conclusion by means of the stars, and that they greatly excelled the Greeks in adjusting their solar year by appending 5 days to the total of 12 months calling it the small month, so that the year should begin exactly according to its schedule.

It is worth drawing the reader's attention to the idea that the Ancient Egyptian solar calendar was based on sidereal calculations and is itself the calendar that all the people of the world have adopted from Egypt.

It is well known about the Coptic solar year that it used to be divided into three seasons and not four as is currently the case. Every season was 4 full months: the season of the flood coming at the head of all the seasons, then the season of cultivation, and thirdly the season of harvest and fruits. This division is still used in the liturgical rites of the church, where the church designated for every season a special prayer, the Afshia (the litany); firstly the afshia of the water, then the afshia of the plants, and finally that of the fruits and the winds, The Coptic year is a Nilotic year of the first degree. The Coptic solar year is based in its delicate calculation on the observation of the stars. If one were to look up into the skies around the time when we approach the beginning of the Coptic year, i.e. the first of Tut toward the orient, before sunrise, an intensely shining star which we now call Sirius, the old Coptic name of which is Stit, one component of the constellation called by the Romans "the Great Dog" (in Latin: *Canis Majoris*). This star was the object of adoration by Egyptians because the time of its appearance at sunrise on that day was always an auspice of the coming of the flood of the Nile which was the source of life and prosperity. It appears close to the sun and only once a year. It was for that reason that the Egyptians called this star the procurer of the flood. They adopted the Coptic year according to the course of the star, considering the moment of its appearance the beginning of the year.

SEPTEMBER

SECOND Sunday

Christian Egypt

The Egyptians kept on numbering their days and months according to their solar calendar intermittently from the dawn of history up to the present day, due to its relationship to the farming of the land, the main source of life and livelihood to them. On the other hand, their civilian records remained conspicuously affected by the kind of government or name of ruling sovereign, regardless of whether he was a native or usurping foreigner. They recorded history according to his reign and conquests as in the case of Alexander the Great. Then came the Roman ruler Diocletian who horrified the entire world and Egypt in particular with his violence and persecution of Christians. No Christian country escaped having its soil smeared with the blood of martyrs. He went as far as shedding the blood of Egypt's Patriarch St. Peter the First, known as the Seal of the Martyrs. He was the last one to have his blood shed during Diocletian's reign. Consequently, the Copts considered the year 284 A.D., the year of the tyrant's ascension to sovereignty, as the beginning of their calendar. In Coptic terms, this year (1980 A.D.) would, for example, be expressed as the year 1695 A.M. (Anno Martiri).

We can understand why Egypt, in particular, was alone in adopting these painful days as the beginning of its calendar when we read the following from the writings of one of the church fathers who was contemporary with Diocletian:

"If the martyrs of the whole world were put on one arm of the balance and the martyrs of Egypt on the other, the balance would tilt in favor of the Egyptians."

It is estimated that the total number of sentences of execution pronounced against the Christians, decreed by Diocletian that were actually implemented, amounted to 800,000 sentences.

A Word about Diocletian

The parents of Emperor Diocletian were both slaves to Anulinus, a member of the Roman Senate. His mother named him after the city in which she was born. After a display of outstanding valor, the boy earned his emancipation. He worked at the Emperor's palace where he was gradually promoted through various offices until he became a consul, then the head of the palace guard. He took part in the Persian war and showed such rare distinction that his rivals were obliged to elect him — although he is slave — to ascend to the Imperial Throne after the death of Neumaryan. He is described base, mean, and hypocritical, yet also courageous, sycophantic and refined.

These contradictory attributes, when combined in one person, may render a

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tough and dangerous personality. Diocletian was a worshiper of Jupiter, the patron god of wealth. Gibbon the historian also says:

Diocletian had astounding perseverance for realizing his goals, with a flexibility for varying the means and great artistry in sub serving his skills and the skills of others to the interests of his ambitions, and in disguising these ambitions with the strongest of pretenses, pretending them to be for the sake of justice and common interest.

All these attributes, the Coptic reader can easily glean from reading the Synaxarium on the description of the ways the martyrs were tortured.

Diocletian held his grip with an iron hand for 21 years after which he withdrew from power and retired to the city of Salona in Salmatia for 9 years, dying afterwards as an invalid.

Calendaring the Martyrs and Celebrating their Memories

Every Christian should be aware that Christianity is a testimony of Christ: You shall be witnesses to Me. The word martyr means witness, and was first given to the Apostles alone as having been the witnesses to the life of Jesus, His death and resurrection. "And be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8).

Yet it happened that the Lord Himself appeared to everyone suffering excessively because of their faith in the name of Christ, and especially to those who submitted to death voluntarily out of love and adoration; this took place at the moment of the soul's release.

Hence, everyone who accepted death in the name of Christ was called a martyr, as he or she entered into an actual vision of the Beloved. And in that manner testimony to Christ by death entered a high degree of honor, side by side with the apostolic degree. Indeed, the martyr is mentioned in the ecclesiastical order immediately after the Apostles and before the great saints, even if his life prior to his martyrdom was at the level of catechumens. This is because bloodshed is considered baptismal, in the deepest sense of baptism, as a tinging with and partnership in the death of Christ.

Early church history has preserved for us, since the second century, splendid examples of the church's bestowal of honors on the martyrs. The ecclesiastic order considered, and still does, the day of martyrdom to be the martyr's true birthday, that is, the heavenly birthday in which he begins his true eternal life.

The church has honored its martyrs to the fullest extent and has commemorated

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their martyrdom on special memorial days. This is done through hymns, prayers, recitals and sermons. Holy communion is then offered and it is considered the peak of celebration and glorification. Ever since the early centuries, the church set up small sanctuaries containing the relics of its martyrs. These sanctuaries or chapels were named Martyrium, that is, the place of testimony. We read about this in the biography of St. Macanus the Great, when he set up a small chapel to contain the bodies of Maximus and Dometius.

When the fathers and visitors met with St. Macanus he used to take them to their cells and say, "Let's go and see the testimony (Martyrium) of the young strangers."

The reader will notice that the word testimony here is a literal translation of the Greek word Martyrium, i.e. a chapel to the memory of the martyr. And this was the ultimate sign of veneration by which St. Macanus was able to immortalize the memory of these two bloodless martyr-monks.

The church still considers its martyrs intercessors on its behalf whose blood pleads before God, and the remains of their bodies a treasure dearer than perishable gold and more precious than any adornments, beauty or splendor. However small and destitute a church might be if it bore the body of a martyr, it should pride itself above the greatest cathedral in the world, even if its walls are of mud. This is not a pride of name or race, land or tongues, but rather the pride of a testimony of God stamped by blood, as the saying of the Gospel: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Indeed the church went through a period when it disregarded any altar as being worthy of consecration unless it contained parts from the relics of a martyr. Moreover, the priest who was appointed to a martyr's altar was considered of a higher rank than any other priest. He was called martyrarius, that is, a servant of martyrdom.

Prayer Rituals for Feasts of the Martyrs

The reader should know that the early active church used to celebrate Christ with prayers and hymns, especially on Saturdays and Sundays, throughout the year. Vigils starting on Saturday would go on with all the trappings of joy and true festive spirit when the liturgical service would be completed with the Divine Oblation on Sunday morning.

Yet, apart from these two days, the church used to congregate once or twice every week, as St. John Chrysostom informs us in his sermon No. 40. This was on the occasion of one of these celebrations with vigilance, prayers and hymns until daybreak to commemorate one of the martyrs, and during which Holy Communion

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was offered as part of the same solemn rite of Sundays. Regarding these vigils for the saints' feasts inside the church, John Chrysostom tells us in his sermon No. 55 on the martyrs:

You have kept vigil yesterday all night long, and have completed the requirements of sanctity, so that you have changed night into day; so now do not change your day into night with drunkenness and dissolution.

Among the earliest reports that describe to us the fashion of commemoration of the martyrs is the report that Eusebius of Caesarea, the historian, relates about the celebrated Bishop Polycarp. The Bishop consummated his martyrdom in 168 A.D. St. John Chrysostom tells us of his church in Smyrna, the center seat of the Bishop's diocese:

They decided by the will of God to congregate around his tomb to celebrate his birthday — i.e. the day of his martyrdom — with joy and jubilation to venerate his sufferings so as to exemplify that to the rising generations!

Tertulian also alludes to the church rituals in his days on occasion of the celebrations of martyrs in the following manner:

The oblations are offered on behalf of those who have passed away on their birthdays as a perpetual commemoration of the day of their martyrdom.

St. Cyprian too elucidates the interest of the church in regards to this, saying:

The church offers the oblation on behalf of them when they set up to commemorate their suffering in the days of their martyrdom as a perpetual annual commemoration.

The liturgical service used to comprise unfailingly a recital from the history of these martyrs that was entrusted to the bishops themselves to be written or revised, so as to meet ecclesiastic standards and to acquire an official status. Indeed the church would not accept a history that was not approved of by a bishop. The council of Carthage instituted a legislation regulating the writing and reciting the histories of martyrs.

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**SEPTEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY**

**THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF EGYPT
A BRIEF SYNOPSIS**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

Familiarization with the Coptic Orthodox church. We must be familiar enough about our own church for our own benefit as well as being ready to answer others.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Out of Egypt I called My Son “Matthew 2:15

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

✝ What’s so special about our Coptic Orthodox church?

✝ **Introduction**

The term “Copt” is a derivative of the Greek “Aigyptos” which means Egypt. The Coptic language is directly derived from the ancient Egyptian demotic language which was the language of the common people. By the middle of the second century B.C. Greek became the official language. It is only by adding seven characters that we have the Coptic alphabet.

✝ **Christianity in Egypt**

Christianity was introduced into Egypt by St. Mark the Apostle in the year 61 AD. Actually the new religion had an easy accession because of the striking similarities between the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians and the Christian

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doctrines.

Worthy of notice is that the land of Egypt was the refuge of the Holy Family after their flight from Herod. Before the turn of the century St. Mark was martyred in Alexandria in 68A.D. Waves of persecution followed and they reached their highest level of Satanism in the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305 AD.).

† **Martyrdom in Egypt:**

Under the reign of Diocletian (284-305 AD.) many martyrs died in Egypt, likely more than any other region in the world.

† **Monasticism in Egypt:**

This gave rise to the spread of monasteries in the desert and Egypt came to be widely known as the home of Christian monasticism. Mention must be made here of the great St. Antony whose ascetic life is expounded in the *Vita Antonii* of St. Athanasius the Great and St. Pachomius, whose monastic rules were copied in many European monasteries and convents.

† **The School of Alexandria:**

Before the turn of the second century, the Catechetical School of Alexandria was founded. It was founded, according to Jerome, by St. Mark himself. Highly renowned teachers like Clement, Pantaenus, and the prolific Origen maintained a high standard of scholarship.

† **The Coptic Church in the Ecumenical Councils:**

The Coptic Orthodox Church also took leading steps in eradicating heresy and defending Orthodoxy against the onslaught of Arianism and other heresies in the Council of Nicea (325 AD.), Constantinople (381 AD.) and Ephesus (431AD.).

† **The Divine Liturgies in the Coptic Church:**

The Divine Liturgies currently in use are the liturgies of St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Cyril the Great. The Cyrillian Liturgy is an adaptation of the original liturgy of St. Mark.

† **Coptic Art:**

Coptic art has its origins in the exuberance of Pharonic art. With the Christianization of Egypt the Byzantine influence became apparent but the Coptic art soon gained its individual identity. The Byzantine influence is

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noticeable in the White and Red monasteries in Upper Egypt and the Suspended Church of our Lady in the Babylonian fort in Old Cairo.

† Coptic Music:

As for Coptic music the world-renowned specialist in Coptic musicology Mr. Ernest Newlandsmith has asserted that the Coptic chant is an extension of the ancient Egyptian vocal music which was handed down generation after generation in monasteries and churches.

† Coptic Missionary Work:

Missionary work started in Africa and it soon extended to Spain, Southern France, Switzerland and to Ireland where the desert monastic “Order” was adopted and later it flourished in medieval Europe.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) We belong to a very old, respectable, and well-known church with a rich pedigree. Our church is unparalleled in its leadership in so many areas. As we appreciate our church we must follow its teachings.
- (2) We have very important duty to preach Christianity to the whole world. Our church must take a leading role in missionary work.

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SONGS 🎵

MY COPTIC CHURCH

My Coptic Orthodox Church
In Nubia and Ethiopia
Also in African nations
In the European countries

you have spread Christianity
and in Western cities
as well as in Sudan
you witnessed through the land

REFRAIN

O my church the strong
We defend you with our blood

O great place of prayer
we defend you with our life.

At the Nicean Council
Your deacon Athanasius
With Clement and Origen
And Cyril and Discoros

you stood firm and remained
is the hero of faith
with Anthony and Paul
all of your saints stood tall.

My beloved Coptic Church
You are so sweet and radiant
Our eyes do look toward you
O great place of prayer

a house of beauty bright
we defend you with our love.
and our hearts adore you
we always come to you

Jesus came and visited you
And the blood of St. Mark
St. George and St. Demiana
The blood of Abba Peter

with His Mother He blessed you
established your faith true.
were martyred for the faith
ended the pagan ways.

Mother of seven sacraments
The wicked persecuted you
The oldest of all churches
The love of all our martyrs

as well as of our saints
but God kept strong your gates
in the world a bright light
you are the way of paradise

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Fourth Sunday



**SEPTEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**THE FEAST OF THE CROSS
“THE CROSS IS THE EMBLEM OF CHRISTIANITY”**

Please read the attached materials entitled “The Appearance of the Cross in the Sky”, “The Day of the Cross Feast”, “The Cross in our life”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

The importance of the Cross in my life. In this lesson we study the types of Crosses in our life.

MEMORY VERSE

“But even if you suffer for righteousness sake, you are learned” 1 Pet. 3:14

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

- ✠ What’s so special about the Cross? Why do we have it around our necks, on our wrists, on top of the church, so on?
- ✠ The Cross is a sign of glory, salvation and strength. Explain from the attached material “the Appearances of the Cross” and “the two Cross feasts”.
- ✠ With Jesus’ crucifixion and His hanging on the Cross between heaven and earth, He restored again the relationship between heaven and earth.
- ✠ Paradise was opened again for us after Christ was crucified on the Cross. Jesus

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said to him (i.e. the right-hand robber), “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

- † When we cross ourselves we gain strength: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

† **The Cross in our Life:**

- 1) The first relationship between the Cross and ourselves is in Baptism. In Baptism we crucify our “old humanity” so that we are not slaves to sin anymore.
- 2) The church has carried the Cross in the martyrdom period and in all the persecutions which the church faced throughout the centuries. Most importantly is that the church carried the Cross with complete joy, patience, and thanksgiving.

The Cross in the life of the church turned into a very favorable thing and the way the Christians who were facing death saw in it strong faith in the happy eternal life and the triviality of this world astonished the persecutors.

The prisons turned into halls of prayers and the sound of hymns and praise from Christians waiting for their martyrdom was heard.

- 3) The third opportunity of carrying the Cross is in entering through the narrow door. There the person stays away from the lusts of the world. The carrier of the Cross spends his time in fasts; he accepts others’ insults and exercises full control over himself.

Under this type as well, is the Cross of doing work and service for the sake of God. Of course “each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Corinthians 3:8).

- 4) Christianity cannot be separated from the Cross. Jesus had made it clear: “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). But then He assured the believers of total victory, joy and peace: “Peace I leave with you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

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“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:38) “Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come take up the cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 10:21)

- † Keep a Cross in your room where you are praying to remember Jesus’ love all the time. Also it will give you a special blessing. Remember that the Cross is followed by resurrection, victory and eternal joy.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) The Cross has a special blessing in our life. We must follow Jesus’ footsteps in carrying the Cross of witnessing to faith, bearing other people’s insults, controlling what we say and do, and staying away from all the welcoming attractions of the world.
- (2) We should start to practice in our life to live with something inconvenient and endure suffering without complaining.

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SONGS 🎵

SHERE PI ESTAVROS

***But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(Gal 6:14)***

Christ has come to us
With His blood He redeemed us

from heaven to save us
Shere pi estavros

Because Jesus loves us
He died for us

He came and lived with us
Shere pi estavros

He was crucified
With wondrous authority

and obtained victory
Shere pi estavros

The cross is my life
The starting of my prayer

my strength and my hope
Shere pi estavros

A lot of the saints
Conquered the devils

with the sign of the cross
Shere pi estavros

They moved many mountains
Exactly as He said

and the dead arose
Shere pi estavros

And I am their son
I will follow them

proud of the cross
Shere pi estavros

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THE CROSS IN OUR LIFE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

On the occasion of the feast of the Cross, we mention the following points:

✝ Our first relationship with the Cross starts by baptism, where our old Adam is crucified so that sin will never enslave us.

✝ The Church has carried the Cross during the martyrdom period and in all the persecutions that followed it during the lapse of time...

✝ The beauty of the Cross is that the Church carried it with joy and patience,... without any complaint or grumbling...

The Cross changed into a longing that the Church desires and proceeds towards.

The way in which the Christians received death puzzled the pagans. It was a reflection of the Christians' faith in eternal joy and disdain of the world, with all its pleasures and enjoyments...

The prisons turned into temples, where hymns and prayers echoed from the Christians who were joyful to receive death...

✝ The third field where we carry the Cross is narrow gate...

A person might constrain himself for the sake of God. He isolates himself from the world and all its desire. He disclaims everything for God's sake... by fasting devoutness, self-control and enduring others' offences.

✝ The Cross of weariness could also be included this field...

One toils in one's services for God and labors in (crucifying the flesh with its passions), as the Apostle says, *"He toils in struggling and crucifying the thought and overcoming oneself,"* knowing all the time that he *"will receive his own reward according to his own labor."* (1Cor 3:8)

Christianity could never be separated from the Cross....

The Lord Jesus told us plainly that *"... In the world you will have tribulation"* and he also said, *"and you will be hated by all for my name's sake."* (Mt 10:22)

✝ We welcome and rejoice with the Cross, and see our strength in it. As the Apostle said, *"For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God"* (1Cor. 1:18)



THE APPEARANCE OF THE CROSS IN THE SKY

This happened TWICE times:

1. The FIRST time, it appeared in the sky to the Emperor Constantine the Great to assure him of victory before he was set to go to war. He and his officers saw it like a pillar of light in the sky surrounded by the following words: “With it (the Cross) you will conquer. Constantine was encouraged, became a Christian, went to war and was victorious.
2. (Julius Caesar lived and died before Jesus was born).
3. The Cross appeared again for a SECOND time to all the people of Jerusalem. This happened in the sacred days of the Pentecostal Feast, to be exact, on the 8th of May, 351 A.D. at 3:00 pm, when a big Cross appeared in the sky on Golgotha stretching to Mount Olive. It was very clear and was seen not only by one or two, but by all the people of the city. It remained for many hours shining brighter than the rays of the sun. All the people of the city came out to see the apparition. They were astounded, scared, but with great joy they witnessed that heavenly scene. Old and young, men and women of all ages, Christians and non-Christians, from all places praised Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

THE DAY OF THE CROSS FEAST

In the day of the Cross Feast we remember the appearance of the glorious Cross of Jesus Christ our Lord. When the Jews found out the very large number of miracles done in the name of Jesus' tomb, they became angry and asked everyone in the Jewish nation to collect all the garbage and put it on top of the tomb to bury it. The Jews continued to do that for over 200 years until a very large pile of dirt was formed. Saint Helena, the mother of King Constantine, went to Jerusalem and asked about the location of the Cross. Nobody told her until she met an old man who told her that the Cross is underneath that pile of dirt. She then ordered that the pile of dirt should be removed. It was then easy to get out the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ. Afterwards she built a church on that site and the Christians go to visit the Cross and the Church.

St. Helena did that because she loved the Cross that appeared to her son, King Constantine, before he went to war and he won that war.

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OCTOBER FIRST SUNDAY

HOW TO PRAY?

Please read the attached materials entitled “What is Mental or Inner Prayer, and of What Kind Can it be?”, “How to Learn to Pray in this Way?” and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn how to pray in words, in mind, and in heart. To learn that without an effective prayer, one would be very weak spiritually.

MEMORY VERSE

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” Matthew 7:7

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† Introduction:

1) What is Prayer?

This is not an easy question. Even the Disciples of the Lord wondered about it and so they asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Even the Saints have various answers in defining prayer. Every Saint has defined prayer as he has experienced it not as he heard about it or read about it.

St. Augustine defined prayer as, “a key to the heaven, with its strength you can do all things, it is a protection for the soul, a source of all righteousness, a ladder

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by which we go to God, an angelical act and a basis of faith.”

St. Basil the Great said that “prayer is an attachment with God in all moments of life and its circumstances. In this way the whole life becomes one prayer without interruption.”

St. Isaac the Syrian also said that “prayer is the continuous mentioning of God in the hearts of the people who fear Him...It is flying of our **minds** to God ... it is a total departure of our consciousness from all the present worldly situations...”

In short, one may say that prayer is the method by which man gets close to God and it is the essence or the heart of religion.

2) **The Effect of Prayer and our Need for it:**

Man needs prayer for both his spiritual and physical needs combined. Without prayer the spiritual life of man cannot go forward: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:13)

† **How to Pray?**

Forms of Prayers

- **Prayer with Words:**

The tongue says the holy words of prayer, while the mind wanders away somewhere. Prayer which is merely words, is not prayer at all.

- **Prayer with the Mind:**

The mind understands the words of prayer, but the heart does not respond to them with feelings. In this type of prayer words are connected with mental prayer and this is an imperfect and incomplete prayer.

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- **Real Prayer:**

This is attained when praying words and praying thoughts are combined with praying feelings. One should pray not only in words but also in mind, and not only in mind but also in heart.

- **Prayer of the Heart:**

This prayer belongs to the perfect. In it the Holy Spirit moves in the heart; the man who prays is conscious of it, but does not do it; it acts by itself.

Hence, if we want our prayer to bring much fruit, never be content by oral prayer alone, but pray also with your mind and heart.

† How to learn to have a full or real prayer as described above?
In short, the answer is training.

Please see the 8 steps in the attached material that can be used as guidance to facilitate having a full prayer.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) We must be serious in learning to have an effective prayer, that is praying words and praying thoughts are combined with praying feelings.
- (2) The devil rejoices when our prayers become only routine work without any positive effect on us. We can lose our share in eternal life if we continued to pray this routine way until the end of our time on earth.

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SONGS 🎵:

OUT OF THE DEPTH, O LORD

“I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me.” (Jon 2:2)

Out of the depth, O Lord
Consider my afflictions
I am in need

I’ve cried with all my heart
accept my invocations
I am in need

When I pour myself before Thee
Before Thee, O my Lord
Please hear my voice, O Lord

let my prayer be accepted
as rising sweet incense
Please hear my voice, O Lord

May the lifting up of my hands
To purge all my iniquities
I praise Thee, O Lord

be like evening oblation
and purify my heart
I praise Thee, O Lord



WHAT IS MENTAL OR INNER PRAYER?

Mental or inner prayer is when a man at prayer collects his mind in the heart, and from there sends out his prayer to God, not aloud but in silent words, praising and thanking Him, confessing to Him his sins with contrition and begging for his needs in spiritual and bodily blessings. One should pray not only with words but also in mind and heart, so that the mind sees and understands clearly what is said in words, and the heart feels what the mind thinks, All this yoked together is real prayer, and if something of this is lacking in prayer, it is either imperfect prayer or not prayer at all.

You have heard expressions: prayer with words, prayer with the mind, prayer with the heart; you may also have heard explanations of each of them separately. What is the reason for this division of prayer into its component parts? The reason is that owing to our negligence it sometimes happens that the tongue says the holy words of prayer, while the mind wanders away somewhere, or the mind understands the words of prayer, but the heart does not respond to them with feeling. In the first case prayer is merely words, and is not prayer at all; in the second — prayer with words is connected with mental prayer, and this is imperfect, incomplete prayer. Full and real prayer is when praying words and praying thoughts are combined with praying feelings.

There also exists, through the grace of God, prayer of the heart only, and this is spiritual prayer, when the Holy Spirit moves in the heart; the man who prays is conscious of it, but does not do it; it acts by itself. This prayer belongs to those who are seeking perfection. The form of prayer accessible to all and demanded of all is that form through which the mind and feeling are always combined with the words of prayer.

There is yet another form of prayer, which is called standing in the presence of God, when the man who prays is wholly concentrating and inwardly contemplating God as being present to him and within him, with corresponding feelings — either of fear of God and the feeling of wonder and awe before His greatness, or of faith and hope, or of love and submission to His will, or of contrition and readiness for any sacrifice. Such a state comes when a man becomes deeply immersed in prayer by word, mind and heart. If a man prays in the right way and for a long time, these states come to him more and more often, and finally this state can become permanent; then it is called walking before God and in constant prayer. This was the state of David, who says of himself: “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Ps.xvi. 8).

Thus, my brother, if you wish your prayer to bring much fruit, never be content

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by oral prayer alone, but pray also with your mind and heart — using your mind to understand and be conscious of all that is said in words, and your heart will feel it all. Above all, pray with your heart. Prayer bursting from the heart is like a streak of lightning, which takes but a moment to cross the heavens and appear before the throne of the all-merciful God. God hears it and inclines towards it. This was the prayer with which Moses prayed standing before the Red Sea; and immediately he heard God's voice: "Why do you cry to Me?" (Ex. 14:15): and God gave him the power to free his people from the danger which threatened them.

How to learn to pray in this way?

But how to learn to pray this way? The answer is: train yourself always to pray precisely in the way indicated; that is, not only in words, but also in mind and heart — and you will learn. How did you learn to read? You began to work at it and then you learned. How did you learn to write? You began to write, and you learnt. In the same way you will learn to pray as I have indicated, if you begin to pray in precisely this way.

You know the words of prayer — you were taught them from childhood. They are found in our prayer-books and the book of church services. They are prayers that poured out of the hearts of saintly men and women when, moved by the Holy Spirit, they expressed before God the desires of their heart. The spirit of prayer is contained in them; so, if you read them as you should, you too will be filled with this spirit; just as the spirit of a writer is communicated to one who reads with full attention. Everyone has experienced this, and I am sure you have had the same experience.

These words of prayer are collected in our prayer-books, so you have no need to work at collecting them. Acquire a prayer-book and, at times fixed for prayer, usually in the morning and evening, read the prescribed prayers, paying attention to every word, thinking the thoughts expressed there and trying to reproduce in your heart the same feelings as stir in the prayer you read. This is all there is to it; and this is what all people usually do.

While everyone has a proper prayer book, some still do not practice proper prayer. They will open the prayer-book, stand before the icons and read, they do not bring their mind and heart into it; the mind wanders and the heart follows its own pleasures, instead of praying. But when you pray you should confine your mind to the words of prayer and make your heart absorb what they say — and you will at once taste the fruit of such recital of prayer.

Thus, since you have the words of prayer and know what it means to understand and feel them, the rest depends on you: prayer and success in it is in your hands.

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Strive diligently and you will succeed. Yet I shall add some words of guidance to explain this view.

- 1) Try to ponder over and feel the prayers you have to read, not at the hour of prayer, but at some other free time. If you do this, then, at the time set for prayer, you will have no difficulty in reproducing the whole content of the prayer you read. As soon as you begin some prayer, the thoughts and feelings contained in it will at once present themselves to your consciousness, and you will utter the words as though they were your own, born in your own heart and pouring out of it, instead of having been brought into it.
- 2) Having thought about and felt the prayers, take care to learn them by heart. When you have done this, you will assimilate them. While they are in the prayer-book they are outside you; but when you have learnt them by heart, they become within you, so that, whatever the circumstances may be, you will always have your prayer-book with you. By memorizing the prayers, you engrave the praying thoughts and feelings more deeply in yourself, than if you have merely pondered over and felt their meaning. This study of prayer, when you do not only learn the words by heart but also preserve in yourself the thoughts and feelings they contain, will build in you a structure of prayer. This is the best method of forming the habit of proper prayer.
- 3) When the time comes for recital of prayers, do not begin to say them as soon as you have torn yourself from your ordinary occupations, but first prepare yourself: “stand for a while in silence, until your feelings calm down” as the prayer-book teaches, and remember what you are about to approach and to perform, who you are, who are about to pray, and who is He and before Whom you are about to recite your prayers, what exactly you are to say and how? This preparation is made necessary — in the morning, because the soul is heavy from immersion in sleep and because the cares of the coming day flood you immediately upon awakening — and in the evening by the varied impressions of the day, and especially things that stand out as striking, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Try to sweep all this out of your consciousness, so that the work of prayer occupies your whole attention and you can devote the time before you exclusively to prayer. If some matters have struck you, and you have not succeeded in dealing with them, turn them into a subject for prayer, or thanksgiving, or ask for help and liberation, or commit them, yourself and all that you have to God’s will.
- 4) Just before you begin to recite prayers, bring yourself to the consciousness and feeling of standing in the presence of God with reverent awe. Bring to life in your heart the faith that God sees and hears you, that He does not turn away

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from those who pray to Him. Look with benevolence on them and on you in this hour of prayer. Let your prayer be winged with hope that He is ready to grant, and will actually grant your request, if it is for the good of your soul.

- 5) Having brought yourself to this state, say your prayers, with the deepest attention, taking every care to make them come from the heart, as though they were your own, although they were learned by heart. Do not let your attention wander off, nor your thoughts slip away. As soon as you notice this happening, bring your thoughts back within, and resume your prayers from the point at which your attention strayed to something else. Remember that attention does not stray when the heart is filled with feelings of prayer. So your first care should be for these feelings. Do not let yourself hurry in reciting prayers, but continue to the end reverently and with patience, as befits a sacred doing.
- 6) If, while saying prayers, observing this method and attitude, some subject of prayer especially touches your heart, captures your attention as something very akin to your own circumstances, and incites you to pray in your own words, do not let this occasion slip by, but pause and pray in your own words, until the need or feeling for prayer that had arisen is satisfied.
- 7) If you strive to practice the recital of prayer in this way, you will gain the spirit of prayer, which you must try to preserve in force as much as you can. For this reason, do not throw yourself at once into daily affairs and never think that, having performed your rule of prayer, you have finished with your duty to God and can now give rein to your thoughts and feelings. No, for the rest of the day you must also try to keep yourself as during your prayer rule. To succeed in this never forget that you are walking before God and that His hand alone keeps you above the abyss of nothingness. Keeping this in mind, do everything, both great and small, as God wishes it, asking His blessing and turning everything to the glory of His name. Acting thus you will retain the right state for prayer up to the hour of your evening rule. Having performed the evening rule in the same way, you will sleep rightly at night. Thus you will have lived a day and a night in a good prayerful state. In this way pass day after day, and in a few months, or perhaps even weeks, you will see your prayer gain in strength and, like a lamp that never goes out, prayer will constantly burn in your heart.
- 8) I will add another small rule, namely, the necessity for this work of prayer to go on without interruption from the moment it is begun until some success is attained ... But if today you pray well and keep the state of prayer in you, but tomorrow become slack and spend the day dispersed, then, acting thus you will never achieve any success in prayer. It will be the same as building and pulling down. In the end, prayer may dry up altogether and the soul may become incapable of it. Having once begun, one must patiently remain in

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prayer, never weakening and pandering to oneself by special dispensations and indulgences.

*** Note: "Mina El Khalas" Magazine – St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Troy, Mich. USA.**

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**OCTOBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THANKSGIVING TO GOD LET US GIVE THANKS TO
GOD FOR HE HAS COVERED US**

Please read Psalm 103:1-22, the attached material entitled “The Prayer of Thanksgiving”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To be thankful to God at all times; He has covered us.

MEMORY VERSE

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! “Psalm 10 7:1

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

✙ What’s the first thing we pray at a divine liturgy? At a baptism? At a funeral? Why?

✙ **Let us Give Thanks**

- Thanksgiving as a principle of the relationship with God has been established by our Lord Jesus. As He established the Lord’s Prayer, (Luke 11:2-4), He also established the thanksgiving prayer when He said: “...Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me...”, (John 11:41-42). Jesus also said: “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes” (Luke 10:21). Remember that Jesus did this Thanksgiving Prayer to teach us, on one hand, and to thank the Father on our behalf for His love and the salvation, on the other hand.

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- Therefore, thanksgiving as an attitude of communication between man and his creator is established by our Lord Jesus. The reverse to thanksgiving is dissatisfaction and un-appreciation.
- The Israelites thanked the Lord after He brought them out of Egypt and passed through the Red Sea. However, later on they became dissatisfied with both God and Moses and wanted to go back to Egypt. When our Lord Jesus came, they rejected Him as they rejected John the Baptist and nothing could make them satisfied or thankful. “To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep’. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon’. The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Luke 7:31-34)

† Please tell the miracle of healing the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19).

- We must learn to say thank you. A person who is thankful is much easier to deal with than a person who is always complaining and dissatisfied.
- Please read Psalm 103.
- Benefits of thanksgiving are:
 - 1) God does not need our thanksgiving. But when we thank God, we remember His blessings for us, His love to us and as we are assured of God’s love to us we develop a loving relationship with God. In this way we benefit from thanksgiving.
 - 2) When we thank God we remember what He had done for us in the past and this gives us hope that God is going to help us in the future too and we rely on Him more.
 - 3) Our thanksgiving to God gives us more blessings from Him. St. Isaac the Syrian said, “No blessings are without increase except those that are without thankfulness.”

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†He has Covered us:

- Focus on “He has covered us”. So many times we sin against God but He does not let this be known to others so that they do not think bad of us. If God declares to other people all our thoughts, all our hidden plans and all our lusts and sins, we lose respect in their sight.
- The covering also means that at the last instant we might be in trouble but the Lord comes to our rescue. Tell the story of the wedding in Cana of Galilee as an example. Jesus covered them, i.e. He was kind to them.
- God knows all our weaknesses and sins yet has mercy on us But the people, if they knew them, they may not have mercy on us, “Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man” (2 Samuel 24:14).
- Even for the sins that we confess and declare, God, because of His mercy, allowed confession to be in secret and to one person: the priest. The priest is committed to church laws that do not allow him to say a word of the people’s confession.
- The Bible says “With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Mark 4:24). This means if one wants God to cover him, he must also cover the sins of others. God who is Holy covers me, a sinner, then I must cover my brother who is also a sinner like me.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) Let us be thankful and not chronic complainers. Let us thank the Lord at all times for He has covered us.
- 2) We must never rejoice in people’s sins or problems. But we must cover them up and not tell anyone.

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Second Sunday

SONGS 🎵

AMEN AMEN AMEN

Amen Amen Amen; Ton
Thanaton so kyrie
Katangelomen: Ke teen
Agiaan soo anastasin: Ke
Teen ana lee epsin so
Entees oo ranis se e molo
Goomen. Se e noo men
Se evlo goomen se ev
Kharis tomen kirie; ke theo
Meta soo o theos emon.

Amen Amen Amen :
Your death O Lord we proclaim.
Your holy resurrection and
Ascension we confess.
We praise You, we bless You
We thank You, O Lord, and we
Entreat You, O our God.

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THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Let us give thanks to the beneficent and merciful God, the Father of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, for He has covered us, supported us, preserved us, accepted us unto Him, had compassion on us, sustained us and brought us to this hour.

Let us then entreat Him, the Almighty Lord our God, to keep us in all peace this holy day and all the days of our life.

O Master, Lord, God Almighty, Father of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, we thank Thee upon every condition, for any condition, and in whatever condition, for Thou hast covered us, supported us, preserved us, accepted us unto Thee, had compassion on us, sustained us and brought us unto this hour.

Wherefore, we pray and entreat Thy goodness, O lover-of-mankind. Grant us to complete this holy day and all the days of our life in all peace with Thy fear. All envy, all temptation, all the works of Satan, the intrigue of wicked people, the rising up of enemies, hidden and manifest, do Thou cast away from us and from Thy people, and from this, Thy holy place.

Whereas of things that are good and useful dost thou grant us, for thou art Him that gavest us the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Through the grace and mercies and love of Thine only Begotten Son, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, through Whom is due unto Thee, glory and honor and power, together with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is consubstantial with Thee now and ever, and to the age of all ages.

Amen

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**OCTOBER
THIRD SUNDAY**

**WHEN WE MEET JESUS OUR LIFE WILL CHANGE -
ST. MOSES THE BLACK**

Please read the attached material entitled “St. Moses the Ethiopian, His Life and Spirituality”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

To learn that when we repent and come back to the Father, He forgives us and accepts us for we are His children.

MEMORY VERSE

“I am the light of the world” John 8:12

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:



Introduction:

A sin is an action against God and separates the sinful man (whose heart becomes dark and impure) from God (Who is all-Light and all-pure). Repentance is a change of heart and change of life from a sinful and dark life to pure and enlightened life.

Repentance should not be Delayed:

In the parable of the prodigal son who left the house of his father, when he realized that he is in trouble away from his father, he said: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you’ (Luke 15:18). He did not delay repentance. Please read Luke 15:11-32.

Repentance is not just words, it is a change of heart:

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When “a woman in the city who was a sinner” came to the Pharisee’s house, she stood at Jesus’ feet behind Him weeping, she began to wash His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. This woman did not say one word. She showed what is in her heart: tears, kissing and anointing Jesus’ feet. She showed a change of heart.

† **Highlights of Saint Moses the Ethiopian:**

(Please read and mention the details as in the attached material.)

- **St. Moses was born about 332A.D. He was a slave, was** driven out of the house of his master because of his dishonesty and then he became the head of a gang of seventy robbers.
- **Early Life:**
His life is a good example of repentance moving from a very sinful life to a high spiritual life. He is similar, to some extent, to St. Augustine who said about himself, “for what sin could I not have committed?”
- **With St. Macarius at Scetis:**
We do not know the circumstances of Moses’ conversion. When we next see him, he was in Scetis in the western desert of Egypt. An elder found him and led him to St. Macarius the great at Petra in the northern end of Scetis.
- **Moses with his Spiritual Director:**
Moses was received by the priest of Scetis St. Isidore. He was fortunate enough to have such an experienced and pious elder as his spiritual director. As a catechumen, Moses received the basic Christian teachings from St. Isidore. During his confession, St. Macarius saw a tablet which was all black representing the sins of Moses. An angel was wiping off every sin when it was confessed until finally all the tablet became white.
- **Struggle against Temptation:**
For Moses, the white robe of baptism and the monk’s style of life did not mean that he entered into the domain of contemplation. He entered into a fierce struggle with the flesh, the devil, and the world. He was successful by fasting, prayers, and the support of the angels who were sent to help him.

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this time onward the devils shall have no sway on thee. Draw nigh then, and participate in the Holy Mysteries, and thou shalt be free from all impurity both in the flesh and of the spirit.” And it happened and all the suffering of Moses came to an end. In fact he was casting away demons and was given the power to heal the sick.

† Spirituality of St. Moses:

- **His Humility:**

At the council of Scetis, the Fathers wanted to test him saying, “Why does this black man come among us? We don’t want a thief in our midst.” He kept silent. When they asked him, “Father, were you not troubled?” He said, “Although I was troubled, yet I said nothing.”

- **His Love:**

There was a council in Scetis that was called to discuss the fault of an individual. When St. Moses was invited, he carried a basket with a hole in it, filled it with sand and carried it upon his shoulders. When the monks saw him coming in this shape, they asked him “What is this, Father?” He said to them, “These are my sins which are running down behind me, and I have come today to judge the errors of another.” Then the council ended on this note.

- **His Crown of Martyrdom:**

In the year 407AD., when the Berber attacked the desert tribes, St. Moses gained the crown of martyrdom.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) We must never lose hope. No matter of how bad is our life, let us now commit ourselves to live with Jesus. His arms are widely open to receive us.
- (2) True repentance means we do not fall into the same mistakes again. But we must learn from our mistakes, be careful and not fall again.

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SONGS 🎵

CHANGE MY HEART O GOD

Change my heart O God
Change my heart O God

make it ever true
may I be like You

You are the potter
Mold me and make me

I am the clay
this is what I pray

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SAINT MOSES THE ETHIOPIAN HIS LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY (332 A.D. — 407 A.D.)

Early Life:

Had Saint Moses the Ethiopian written his autobiography, he would have given us similar words to what St. Augustine gave in his Confessions:

“What evil is there that I have not wrought by my deeds, or if not by my deeds at least by my words, or if not by my words at least by my will? ... For Thou hast forgiven in me so great and so many wicked deeds, and hast dissolved my sins like ice ... for what sin could I not have committed? ... All these sins I acknowledge to have been forgiven; both those which, by my will, I have committed, and those which, by the help, I have not committed. I fell from Thee, Oh my God, and wandered far, too far from thy stability in that youth of mine; and I became unto myself thereby a land of want and misery.”

But Moses who lived to become one of the fourth century Desert Fathers did not leave an autobiography. We have some sketches of his early life from Palladius. He was born about 332 A.D. In his youth, he was the slave of a high government official who could not tolerate his dishonesty and his violence. It was said that he even went so far as to commit murder. Finally his master drove him out of his house. Moses became the head of a gang of seventy robbers. He was a strong and fierce man of huge stature. Once, he wanted to kill a shepherd who pastured his sheep on the other bank of the Nile, which was then in full flood and more than a mile across. Moses put his sword between his teeth, placed his clothes on his head and swam across the river. The shepherd was able to hide by burying himself in the sand. The sheep were left for Moses, who chose four of the best rams, slew them, and tying them with a rope, he took them with him back across the river. He then came to a small village where he skinned the rams, ate the best portions of them, and sold the rest for wine.

With St. Macarius at Scetis:

We do not know the circumstances of Moses' conversion. It was mentioned that he used to address the sun saying, “If thou art the god let me know, and thou the God whom I know not lead me to Thyself.”

When next we see him, he was in Scetis in the western desert of Egypt. An elder found him and led him to St. Macarius the Great at Petra in the northern end of Scetis. It was about the year A.D. 365 when Moses arrived there. Thousands of



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monks had followed St. Macarius after he came to the area about A.D. 340. They first settled in the northern part of the valley. There they dug a well and built a church. It is now the area of the Monastery of Our Lady, Al-Baramus. Soon Scetis extended to the south, and when St. Cassian visited it in AD 385, he found there four flourishing monastic settlements with four churches. These early monasteries were not localized places surrounded by walls as we see the monasteries now; each monk, however, had to build his cell or live in a cave which he roofed with palm branches. Monks only met in church on Saturdays and Sundays every week where they celebrated the Eucharist and heard the teaching of St. Macarius or of one of the elders chosen by him.

Moses and his Spiritual Director:

Moses was received by the priest of Scetis St. Isidore. He was fortunate enough to have such an experienced and pious elder as his spiritual director. Had St. Isidore done nothing except leading Moses safely during a very turbulent period of his life, he would have proven himself a great saint. St. Rufinus and St. Jerome consider him, one of the great elders of Scetis. He was one of the early Fathers who moved from Cellia with St. Macarius when he came to Scetis in AD. 340. Although we have only a few of his sayings in the 'Apophthegmata Patrum', yet they are enough to show us a very loving Father who was strict with himself, but knew how to be tolerant to his brethren and spiritual sons. He used to say, "When you are working in a certain place, the strength is not in departing from there because of too much labor; as for me, I wrap myself up in my cloak and I go to the place where labor is, and labor becomes unto me a pleasure." Till his old age he used to plait a bundle of palms every night. When the brethren advised him to have some rest, he answered, "Even if Isidore was burned, and his ashes thrown to the winds, I would not allow myself any relaxation, because the Son of God came to the earth for my sake." His main labor was not the manual work, but prayer to which he set no time limit whether by day or by night. According to him sanctity is reached by denying oneself and denying one's own will for the sake of following God's will.

His brotherly love was reflected in the one teaching he often repeated when he addressed the monks in the church, "My brethren, it is written, 'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you'" (Matt. 6:14). From the day he became a monk, he never allowed himself to be angry with anybody. Once he went to sell some goods in the market place and was about to lose his temper; he simply left his goods and fled. When any of the elders wanted to dismiss a brother who was sick, or careless or abusive, St. Isidore used to take charge of him, and by his long suffering, he would lead him to salvation.

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Baptism:

As a catechumen, Moses received the basic Christian teachings from St. Isidore. The light was too much for the newly converted Moses, heavily burdened with sin. Frequently he exploded in tears and had to find relief in kneeling before his director and confessing his sins. When time for his baptism came, he confessed all his past evil deeds publicly in the church. During his confession, St. Macarius saw a tablet which was all black representing the sins of Moses. An angel was wiping off every sin when it was confessed till finally all the tablet became white.

Struggle with the Carnal Desires:

For Moses, the white robe of baptism and the monk's style of life did not mean that he entered into the domain of contemplation. On the contrary, he had in front of him many years of strife and fierce struggle with the carnal desires, the devil and the world. Although he was surrounded by giants of the spiritual life whose counsel he could seek any time, and he was aided by the church mysteries and means of grace, yet it was with utmost difficulty that he won the long, successive and violent battles of the flesh. After he came to the desert, he still enjoyed his former bodily strength; but also his old evil passions were as powerful as before. Of the former, Palladius mentions how, after a seven day fast, he could overpower four thieves who went into his cell. He tied them all together with cords and lifted them up on his shoulders like a bag of straw and brought them to the church and said to the monks, "Since I have not the power to do evil to any man, what do you want me to do with these who rose up against me to slay me?" When the thieves knew that he was the former robber they were quickly led to repentance.

On the other hand, Palladius describes how the saint was tempted against chastity to such an extent that he nearly failed in his resolution, "And whilst fasting often, and during the time of prayer and silent contemplation, that devil of error, who brings back to the remembrance of the mind the wickedness of former habits, would come to him, and tempt him to such a degree that even as he himself hath told us, it wanted exceedingly little to make him fall from his covenant."

He used to go to St. Isidore asking his advice. At first the saint advised him to stand firm and continue his fasting and prayer; his temptations would finally be subdued. He told him that these were only the beginnings, and he gave him the example of a dog that is accustomed to go to a meat market. Once it finds the market closed up and no one gives it anything, it stops going.

Moses increased his disciplines. He ate only ten ounces of dry bread daily and had to recite fifty prayers every day. But the more he dried up his body, the more he was

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vexed and consumed by dreams. On one occasion it came to the point that he could not endure being in his cell. St. Isidore advised him to return to it, but he refused. The old man then took him up to the roof of his cell where Moses could see many devils on one side and innumerable angels on the other side. He was convinced that he had much more heavenly help as compared to the power of the enemy. He took courage and returned to his cell without fear.

Once more he went to another one of the Desert Fathers and asked him, “What shall I do, for thoughts of lust which arise from my former habits attack me?” He was advised to increase his prayers, vigils and fasts in order to dispel those images from his mind. Moses took the advice literally, went back to his cell, and plunged for seven years into more severe ascetic practices. Was he mistaken in leaving his regular spiritual director and, contrary to the desert tradition, asking the advice of another Father? He spent whole nights standing for prayer and would not lie down or even bend his knees or close his eyes. After this he used to get out during the nights, go to the cells of the old monks, take their water pitchers and fill them with water without their knowledge. The monks lived far from one another and those cells were two to five miles from water. Moses consumed his body doing this for years, with long vigils and strict fasts, till one night he lost his consciousness and fell beside the water well. Palladius attributed this to the devil who gave him a blow across his back. The next morning he was found half dead by one of the brethren and he was carried to the church. During his sickness that lasted for one year, he was taken care of by St. Isidore. He advised Moses to give himself rest, because “there is moderation in everything, even in the works of ascetic life.” Still Moses argued with his director and insisted on continuing to wage war with the devils till they departed from him. The wise and experienced Abba Isidore gave him his conclusive answer,

“In the Name of Jesus Christ, from this time onward the devils shall cease from attacking thee. Draw nigh then, and participate in the Holy Mysteries, and thou shalt be free from all impurity both of the flesh and of the spirit.”

With this Moses returned to his cell. Abba Isidore came to him after two months and asked about his condition. Moses said he no longer suffered anything. He even had power over the demons as Palladius adds,

“Now he was also held to be worthy of the gift of Divine Grace, and he could chase away the devils from many folks..., and as flies take to flight before us so did the devils depart from before him.”

But why did Abba Isidore advise St. Moses that it was time to put a limit to his ascetic disciplines? The Apophthegmata, or the Sayings of the Fathers, later addressed itself to this question,

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“Because at the beginning Abba Moses was ignorant of the rule of the ascetic life, and because he was healthy of body, he worked over much, and he thought that he would be able to prevail mightily against devils by the multitude of his works alone, and that he would be able to vanquish them. Therefore, because the devils perceived his object, they attacked him more severely with frequent wars, both secretly and openly. But Abba Isidore, wishing to teach him the truth, and to make him acquire humility, said unto him, ‘Without the power of the Spirit which our Lord gave us in baptism for the fulfilling of His commandments, that which is confirmed in us each day by the taking of His Body and Blood, we cannot be purified from the passions, and we cannot vanquish devils, and we cannot perform the works of spiritual excellence.’”

Life of St. Moses in Scetis and his Ordination:

St. Moses enjoyed great fame among the Fathers of Scetis because of his humility, his meekness and his love for strangers. His solitude was frequently interrupted by the influx of visitors. He went to complain to St. Macarius, “Father, I desire to live in silence, but the brethren never leave me.” The saint advised him to move to an isolated cell in Petra. Petra (literally ‘rock’) is the northern rock of Scetis, known also as Calamus. It was a far area and difficult to reach and its water was scanty. Moses became tired on his way to Petra, and he said to himself, “How can I bring water for myself into this place?” Then he heard an assuring voice, “Go on and fear not.” One day, a large number of visitors came to see him and his small supply of water ran out while he was boiling some lentils for them. But through his prayer a great amount of rain poured from heaven and filled all the water vessels.

St. Moses lived in Petra for six years in a cave which he dug for himself in the rock. He came to be known as Abba Moses of Petra. The cave remained at least till the eleventh century when it was mentioned by a Coptic historian. A monastery named after the saint was established around it.

St. Moses was later chosen to be a priest in Scetis — either to assist the old Isidore or in his place in the church of northern Scetis, when he moved to the south with St. Macarius to the new monastic settlement which became the nucleus of St. Macarius’ monastery. This must have been after 384 A.D. because it was Pope Theophilus who laid his hand on him. On the day of the ordination the Pope wanted to prove the sanctity of Moses. He ordered the priests to drive Moses out of the sanctuary once he came. When he came, the priests abused him and drove him out saying, “Outside, black man.” When he went out he was heard saying to himself, “They have treated you rightly, O you whose skin is dark and black; and since you are not human, why do you come to meet men?” The saint passed the test beyond all expectation. When after his ordination he was dressed in the white priestly ephod, the Pope addressed

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him, "Behold Abba Moses, now you are entirely white." He answered, "I would wish that this is also from the inside as it is from the outside."

Spirituality of St. Moses:

Like the other Desert Fathers, St. Moses based his spiritual life and teaching upon Scripture. One of his famous sayings,

"Four virtues aid the young monk: Continuous meditation on the word of God, watchfulness, fervent prayer, and considering himself as nothing."

One of his other sayings may summarize for us his spirituality, "Humility of heart precedes all virtues, and the desire of the belly is the source of all passions. Pride is the basis of all vices, and love is the origin of all goodness."

Humility:

Once, the Fathers in Scetis were holding a council, and they treated St. Moses with contempt in order to test him, saying, "Why does this black man come among us? We don't want a thief in our midst." The saint kept silence, and when the council was dismissed, they asked him, "Father, were you not troubled in your heart when you were reviled?" He answered, "Although I was troubled, yet I said nothing."

We can understand his attitude from some of his sayings in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, "If you bear disgrace and affliction in the name of the Lord, you become a martyr. If you show your feebleness and poverty before Him, He sustains you. If you become foolish for His sake, He makes you wise."

"Accepting rebuke and scorn will lead you into humility."

"Whoever denies himself lives in peace, and whoever thinks that he is without fault, has already in himself all faults."

When the sanctity of Moses became well-known, he had to flee away from fame. The governor of the region came once to Scetis to see him. When Moses heard he fled to the marsh. But there he was met by the governor and his companions who asked, "Old man, tell us where the cell of Abba Moses is." The saint said, "What do you want with him? He is a fool who has no place to go to." The governor then went to the church and told what happened to the monks. They were offended and asked, "What kind of an old man who dared to speak like that about the holy man?" The governor described him saying, "A big black old man wearing old clothes." They knew then that it was none other than St. Moses himself. The governor went away

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greatly edified.

Fasting:

St. Moses knew how fasting helped him in his early spiritual combats. He used to say,

“You should not yield to gluttony, otherwise Amalek may surround you.”

“These four lead to fornication: eating and drinking, oversleeping, negligence and decoration of clothes.”

“If you want to repent to God, beware of living in luxury, for this stimulates all passions and dispels the fear of God from the heart.”

“Control of the body diminishes the effects of other desires. Desire of food awakens the passions and emotions; they are controlled by fasting.”

Love:

The grace of God worked in Moses to the extent that as much as he hated mankind before his conversion, in Scetis he came to love everybody. He received all his visitors with joy. The Apophthemata mentions the story of a brother who came to visit St. Arsenius. Offended by the cold reception he received, he then asked to see St. Moses who did not fail to welcome and refresh him. On another occasion a private fast was declared in Scetis. During the week fast some brethren came from Egypt to Abba Moses. While he was preparing some food for them, the neighboring monks saw the smoke of his fire rising up and wondered how St. Moses did not keep the fast. They told the clergy who promised to settle the matter with him in church. The clergy knew the habits of the saint, and when he came to church on Saturday, they spoke to him before the whole assembly of monks saying, “O Abba Moses, though you break the commandment of men, you establish that of God.”

Love of the neighbor was one of the main virtues he stressed to his disciples. Lacking this leads us to judge one another. Among his sayings are:

“Let us love all with sincere love in order to get rid of jealousy and envy.”

“We must always honor our neighbors, in order to escape judging them.”

“Never suffer yourself to hear about the fall of a brother lest you should judge him without knowing it.”

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“Four things darken the mind: Hating a brother, despising, envying or suspecting him.”

Once a brother in Scetis committed a fault and a council was called to discuss it. Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to come. The priest went to him saying, “Come, for all the people are expecting you.” He rose up, took a basket with a hole in it, filled it with sand and carried it upon his shoulders. When the monks saw him coming in this shape, they asked, “What is this, Father?” He said to them, “These are my sins which are running down behind me, and I have come today to judge the errors of another.” When they heard this, they forgave the brother and the matter was not further discussed.

Solitude:

A brother went to Abba Moses and asked him for a word of advice. The old man said to him, “Go and sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.” Of his other sayings, “Discourse with men of the world and mixing with them darken the soul and make her forget contemplation.”

Watchfulness:

The Desert Fathers were strict in disciplining themselves everyday till the last day of their lives, We can learn this in the life of St. Moses from his sayings which were collected in his last years and kept by St. Poemen. He asked the saint to write them for him. Poemen went to Scetis about A.D. 390 Among these sayings are:

“Be prepared to meet the Lord so you may do His will, Examine yourself here to detect what you lack so as to escape trouble at the time of death.”

“Do not think that you have reached any good till the end of your life. Do not be proud ... for you can never trust your enemies. Never trust yourself as long as you are in the flesh.”

“Salvation of the heart is in continual watchfulness. Too much sleep gives birth to improper visions, but vigil with knowledge, is better than whoever keeps vigil in vain discourse. Mourning dismisses all types of sins.”

Crown of Martyrdom:

About 370A.D., St. Moses, St. Evagrius, St. Cronius, St. Pambo and three other Desert Fathers went to visit St. Macarius the Great in the southern rock of Scetis. When he saw them he said, “My brethren, I see one of you worthy of the crown of martyrdom and he is going to shed his blood in the wilderness.” St. Moses answered at once, ‘Probably I am the one, in order to fulfill the words of the Lord: “all they

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that take with the sword shall perish with the sword.”

The prophecy of St. Macarius was fulfilled in A.D. 407 when the Berber, the Macarius desert tribes, made their first raid over Scetis and destroyed its four churches. St. Moses was seventy-five years old and he had under him seventy disciples.

On the day of the raid St. Moses was sitting with seven of his disciples and he told them, “Behold, today the barbarians are coming to Scetis; rise up and flee.” They asked, “Will you not flee, Father?” He said to them, “I have been waiting for this day to come for many years past, so that the words of our Savior may be fulfilled, ‘For all who take the sword shall perish by the sword’” (Matthew 26:52). The monks preferred to stay with their Father. After a while he said, “Behold, the barbarians have drawn near to the door”, and the barbarians entered and slew them, One of the monks fled and hid behind the palm leaves, and he saw seven crowns coming down and crowning them.

The monks of Dair Al-Baramus at Scetis have faithfully kept the body of St. Moses, which remains till this day beside the body of his spiritual father, St. Isidore inside the main church of the monastery. Even in death, the disciple was not separated from his director.

The church calls him in the Divine Liturgy, ‘the mighty Saint Abba Moses’, The Coptic Church commemorates him on June 18 (Bawunah 24), when her hymns rise in his praise saying,

“The first saint and martyr who was better perfected in the mount of Scetis is our Father and saint Abba Moses.

“For he became an athlete and was feared by the demons, He stood upon the rock (Petra) as if on the Cross.

“With his great patience and travail of tortures he was given the crown of martyrdom.

“He went in spirit to heaven, to the places of rest which the Lord had prepared for those who love His holy Name.

“And for us he left his body and his holy cave where we may fulfill his blessed commemoration.

“In which we cry saying: Oh God of Abba Moses and of those perfected with

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him, have mercy upon our souls.

“And let us gain the promises prepared for the saints who satisfied Him from the beginning by their love for Him.

“Ask the Lord for us, Oh my master and Father Abba Moses and his sons the cross bearers, so that He may forgive us our sins,

*** Note: From the books of Fr. Tadros Malaty – St. George Church, Alexandria, Egypt.**

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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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**OCTOBER
FOURTH SUNDAY**

THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Please read the attached material entitled “The Great Ecumenical Council”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

In this first lesson in a two-lesson series about the ecumenical councils, we cover an introduction about the Councils and the Council of Nicea.

MEMORY VERSE

“tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” Matthew 18:17

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

Why are there different denominations of Christianity?

†Introduction

The Lord Jesus gave great importance to the judgment of the church. So in dealing with a sinning brother, Jesus said, “tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17).

If we read the book of Acts Chapter 15, we will find that there was a major problem in the early church regarding acceptance of the people that were not originally Jewish (i.e., heathen) into Christianity. The Apostles met in Jerusalem with St. James as the chairman and discussed this problem and reached a solution with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 15*). This was the first council in the history of the church. (Please describe briefly the issue in this council (*Acts 15:1-2*) and the resolution of this council (*Acts 15:22-29*).

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† Types of Councils in the Church:

a) Local Councils:

These are the councils of all the Bishops to discuss and solve church matters. They are usually held twice a year or when there is an urgency.

There are also the councils of a Bishop with his priests and deacons to discuss local matters in their area of service.

b) Ecumenical Councils:

These are the councils in which Bishops from all over the world meet. These councils are generally held when there is a wrong teaching (heresy) or a controversy which requires that the church take a stand.

And in the history of the Coptic church there were only three canonical Ecumenical Councils:

- 1) The Council of Nicea — Year 325 AD.
This is the first Ecumenical Council and it dealt with the heresy of Arius.
- 2) The Council of Constantinople — Year 381 AD.
It dealt with the heresy of Macedonius
- 3) The Council of Ephesus — Year 431 AD.
It dealt with the heresy of Nestorius.

The Council of Nicea (The Great Ecumenical Council):

This council was held in **year 325 AD** in the city of Nicea in Asia Minor. The reason for holding this council was to discuss the Arian controversy that Jesus is created, not born, and that God the Father is greater than the Son.

Emperor Constantine invited 318 bishops from all over the world in the city of Nicea in year 325 to discuss this serious teaching.

From Alexandria attended Abba Alexandros with twenty of his bishops and his deacon Athanasius who was 25 years old. Athanasius later on became the Pope of Alexandria. St. Athanasius was the hero of this council. His talents, awareness of the scriptures and eloquence of speech made him the target of the Arians throughout his life. But he withstood and overcame all and at the end, his spiritual and moral victory was total. Because of his victory to defend the faith, he was called “St. Athanasius the Apostolic”.

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The fruit of this council was the formation of the first part of the Creed as follows:

“We believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth the visible and the invisible.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son, born of the Father before all ages, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not created, consubstantial with the Father by whom were all things made; this is He Who for us humans and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary; He was incarnate, crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures. He ascended up to heaven and sitteth at the right hand of His Father, from whence He shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead for whose kingdom there is no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit.”

“As for those who do not believe in the above, let them be Anathemized”.

Emperor Constantine considered the creed as a revelation of the Holy Spirit speaking through the saints.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Our Coptic Orthodox church has had a leading role in maintaining the true faith. Let us follow the teachings of our church.

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SONGS 🎵

SAINT ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC

The Defender of the Faith,
The great Saint Athanasius,
Who rescued the whole Church
From the heresy of Arius.

When he was yet a child,
Playing on the beach,
He solemnly preformed
A sacrament of the church.

But he was not aware,
That the Pope, Saint Alexander,
From his palace afar
Was watching with wonder.

The Pope then decided
To adopt him as a son,
And that was the start
Of the course he had to run.

He studied the scriptures
And the Gospels, word by word,
Till he found the mystery of
The divinity of the Lord.

When Arius began to deny
The divinity of the Son,
He knew that he was destined
For a war that has to be won.

Against the heretics
He began to preach and write,
Proclaiming the truth of God.
With all courage and might.

At the Council of Nicea,
The Faith he did uphold,
Defending the Trinity,
And the doctrines taught of old.

He fought for the Faith,
By word and by deed.
And when the war was won,
He bequeathed to us the Creed.

When the Pope's time had come
That before Christ he should stand,
He called Saint Athanasius
And laid upon him the hand.

Pope Athanasius endured,
For forty years and some,
Defending all his flock
From whatever may come.

Time after time,
To exile he went,
Carrying the Cross, with Him
Whom the Father sent.

Rejoice, Saint Athanasius
In the heavenly Paradise.
O great one among the saints,
And the prudent and the wise.

O beloved of the Son of God,
Who did uphold His cause,
The angles proclaim and say,
Axios! Axios! Axios!

O friend of Saint Anthony
Who taught us about his way;
Remember us before the Lord
On that fearful day.

From now till eternity,
All generations shall pray,
For Saint Athanasius' sake,
Lord hear us when we say:

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THE GREAT ECUMENICAL COUNCIL *

The Bishops Assembled:

Before describing what took place in the ever memorable Council of Nicea, let us pause for a moment in the presence of the principal prelates who assembled there and ponder some of the deeds of the great host -- the King of Kings. Among the three hundred and eighteen trained servants of the Most High, were men who carried within their bodies the scars of their fearless Confessions during the persecutions; men in whom all the Apostolic gifts still dwelt in their pristine vigor; men who not only had the power of binding and loosening in Heaven, but of healing the diseased, and raising the dead on earth. They gathered from every province to bear witness to the Truth of the same Holy Spirit Who spoke by all, that they may invest traditional Faith with infallible words, and raise an everlasting bulwark between the Church and heresy. They assembled for the Verity of the Creed, and the Glory of the Co-essential or Consubstantial. Among others were St. Macanus of Jerusalem, illustrious for many miracles; St. Eustathius of Antioch, who had raised a dead man to life; St. Leontius of Caesarea, in Cappadocia, 'the equal of the angels'; St. Hypatius of Gangra, who years later attained the crown of martyrdom himself, and breathed out his spirit in a petition for his murderers; St. Paul of Neocaesarea, who had been mutilated in the persecutions of Licinius; St. Achilleus of Larissa, St. Athanasius and St. Alexander, at whose supplication Divine Vengeance overwhelmed Arius in later years.

The Council of Nicea was outstandingly universal, it counted among its members bishops from as far as Spain to the West; from Persia, Scythia and all churches of the East.

Pope Alexandros and his Delegation:

To this reverent company came St. Alexandros, Pope of Alexandria with twenty of his bishops, among them were St. Potamon of Heracla, who was martyred some years later by the Arians, and St. Paphnuti from the Thebaid, renowned for his confession and his sanctity.

The most outstanding and most formidable personality to come from the ancient land of the Nile was Athanasius. He was only twenty-five years old and a deacon, two reasons which instigated his antagonists to protest against his presence. Soon, however, Athanasius displayed such deep learning, such acquaintance with the Scriptures and power of argument, and such eloquence of speech, that his friends

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rejoiced and his opponents were aghast. His talents and assets immediately made him the target of the Arians' implacable hatred, which pursued him to the end of his days. But he withstood and overcome all, and, at the end, his spiritual and moral victory was total.

Emperor Constantine's Invitation:

Eusebius of Caesarea says that "The Emperor requested the bishops of all countries to assemble promptly at Nicea, by very respectful letters"; while Rufinus says that the Emperor invited Arius also.

Constantine the Great expended every effort to facilitate the voyage of the Council members to Nicea and to make their stay memorable for them.

Council's Inaugural Session:

The Council was solemnly inaugurated on June 20th when Constantine arrived after celebrating the anniversary of his victories in Nicodemia. While the Bishops were awaiting the Emperor's arrival, they met and debated together, clergy and laymen participating in their debates. All the ancient writers witness to this fact affirming that Arius was given a chance to expose his doctrine freely (in spite of all the ill-will he had already shown). A number of his friends were with him, and they, too, were listened to patiently while they stoutly defended him.

Election of Hosius of Cordova to Preside over the Council:

When the Emperor arrived, all members gathered in the building designated for the meetings, and each sat in the place assigned to him. The Council was formally declared opened, and its first order of business was to elect the presiding Bishop. The choice fell on Hosius of Cordova who was elected both for his age and his sanctity.

Patient Thrashing of the Arian Heresy:

After an exchange of courteous speeches the Council proceeded with its order of business, the first of which was to deliberate on the Arian heresy. According to Rufinus the Council held daily sessions, for the members wanted to give such a grave and weighty matter full study and consideration before passing their final judgment. Arius was often called in and his doctrine seriously questioned — and counter-questioned. Finally the overwhelming majority, including all the Confessors, after thrashing the subject thoroughly, decided that the Arian doctrine was a heresy, and that — to preserve the Christian faith as it had been handed down

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to them by the Apostolic Church Founders - they had to sum up its elements and give them a crystal clear definition. Thus was born the idea of the Creed, and it was this Council of venerable Christian Fathers that formulated the Nicene Creed, the first in the history of Christianity. To this day this is the Creed which is still used either in its entirety or its main bases in many churches both in the East and the West. Only six of the three hundred and eighteen members of the Council were from the West. The Creed is, therefore, the Legacy of the Orient given to the Church Universal.

The Careful Wording of the Creed:

When the Council members discussed the need for the creed, its wording and its contents, they all agreed that it had to be worded with extreme care and precision, and to be free from any ambiguous terms. For they knew that the Greek language — which they all used and in which it was to be written — lent itself easily to subtle nuances. For example, Arius had declared that Christ, the Son, was of like substance to the Father's — “**Homoiousios**” — but the Orthodox clergymen affirmed that He was of the Father's Very Substance or essence “**Homoousios**”.

The Council, then, selected three members to word the Creed, and they were Alexandros, Pope of Alexandria, his deacon Athanasius who had so distinguished himself, and Leontius, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia: namely two Egyptians and the third a Syrian.

The three agreed that the Creed must affirm the divinity of the Son, so as to be the basis of the true Christian faith of the Church Universal for all time. To increase its forcefulness, they appended to it a statement of anathema that would constitute a warning to those who digressed from the established principles of the Faith, as Arius had done.

The text worded by the three is as follows:

“WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, AND OF ALL THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE.

WE BELIEVE IN ONE LORD, JESUS THE CHRIST, THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD; BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL AGES; LIGHT OUT OF LIGHT; TRUE GOD OUT OF TRUE GOD; BEGOTTEN NOT MADE; OF ONE ESSENCE WITH THE FATHER; BY WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE; WHO, FOR US MEN AND FOR OUR SALVATION, CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND WAS INCARNATE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AND BECAME MAN. HE WAS CRUCIFIED FOR US UNDER PONTIUS

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PILATE; HE SUFFERED, WAS BURIED, AND ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES. HE ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN AND SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF HIS FATHER. HE SHALL COME AGAIN IN HIS GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, FOR WHOSE KINGDOM THERE IS NO END. WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

A Statement of Anathema Appended to the Creed:

The statement of anathema was worded as follows:-

“And as for them that say concerning the Son of God, there was a time when He was not, and He was not before He was produced, and He was produced from things that are not, and He is of another substance or essence, or created, or subject to conversion or mutation, the Universal-Apostolic Church Saith: let them be anathema.”

The Creed Receives Unanimous Approval:

When the Creed, and its appended statement, were presented to the Council, all members with the exception of three approved and signed it. The three were Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognius of Nicea, and Mans of Chalcedon. The zeal of the Emperor was so kindled, however, that he declared that whoever refuses to sign will be deposed and exiled. This firm resolve of the Emperor led the three to change their attitudes. The former two signed the Creed but not the ‘anathema’; the third signed both, in spite of his reluctance to do so. Thus the Creed was signed unanimously.

Emperor Banishes Arius and Orders his Writings to be Burned:

Emperor Constantine considered the Creed as a revelation of the Holy Spirit speaking through the saints. To put it into immediate effect, he issued a decree banishing Arius to Illyria. He also ordered that all his writings be consigned to the flames, menacing those who hid any of them with death.

*** Note: From the books of Iris Habib Elmasry, up to June 1986.**

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Fourth Sunday

NOTES

[illegible]

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October

Fifth Sunday



**OCTOBER
FIFTH SUNDAY**

ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Please read the attached material entitled “The Second Ecumenical Council”, “The Third Ecumenical Council”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson two in a two-lesson series about the Ecumenical Councils.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

The Council of Constantinople:

Another heresy was being proclaimed by Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople, who had announced his denial of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. One hundred and fifty Bishops attended this council.

The council condemned the new heresy and emphasized the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They added a new part in the creed related to the Holy Spirit as an addition to the older part prepared in Nicea. The new part reads “Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.”

The Council of Ephesus:

Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople came up with a new heresy that Christ was of two separate persons: the one divine and beyond the reach of human frailty and the other is the human which is susceptible to all the fragility of the flesh. The divine Christ could neither suffer nor die, and therefore, on the Cross, it was the human Christ alone who suffered and died apart from the divine Christ.

Pope Cyril of Alexandria did not accept this interpretation. He declared our orthodox doctrine of the indivisible union of the divine and human natures of Christ and how this was the faith that was taught both by the scriptures and the Nicene Fathers and to

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which all true believers should adhere.

One of the metaphors Cyril used to illustrate his defense was that of iron molten in an extremely high degree of heat. In that state the iron and the heat were united into one, and though their substances were two, their union was complete without mixing, nor fusion nor change. No one could either separate or divide them. Such were the two natures of the Son of God.

A further point made by Nestorius and strongly contested by Cyril related to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Nestorius had spoken out against calling Her “Theotokos” or “Mother of God”. St. Cyril made his stand crystal clear: If Jesus Christ is God, it follows that his mother is the “Mother” who bore him, forever.

When the controversy became so heated, the Emperor called for the third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus. Two Hundred bishops from all over the world attended the council.

St. Cyril and the rest of the bishops were against Nestorius and declared that Jesus’ divine nature was never separated from His human nature and that the Virgin Mary is the “Mother of God”.

For his indefatigable efforts, St. Cyril was called “The Pillar of Faith”.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Our Coptic Orthodox Church’s beliefs are completely in agreement with the Ecumenical Councils. This gives us a sense of confidence in what our church is teaching us.

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Fifth Sunday

SONGS 🎵

SAINT ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC

The Defender of the Faith,
The great Saint Athanasius,
Who rescued the whole Church
From the heresy of Arius.

When he was yet a child,
Playing on the beach,
He solemnly preformed
A sacrament of the church.

But he was not aware,
That the Pope, Saint Alexander,
From his palace afar
Was watching with wonder.

The Pope then decided
To adopt him as a son,
And that was the start
Of the course he had to run.

He studied the scriptures
And the Gospels, word by word,
Till he found the mystery of
The divinity of the Lord.

When Arius began to den
The divinity of the Son,
He knew that he was destined
For a war that has to be won.

Against the heretics
He began to preach and write,
Proclaiming the truth of God.
With all courage and might.

At the Council of Nicea,
The Faith he did uphold,
Defending the Trinity,

And the doctrines taught of old.
He fought for the Faith,
By word and by deed.
And when the war was won,
He bequeathed to us the Creed.

When the Pope's time had come
That before Christ he should stand,
He called Saint Athanasius
And laid upon him the hand.

Pope Athanasius endured,
For forty years and some,
Defending all his flock
From whatever may come.

Time after time,
To exile he went,
Carrying the Cross, with Him
Whom the Father sent.

Rejoice, Saint Athanasius
In the heavenly Paradise.
O great one among the saints,
And the prudent and the wise.

O beloved of the Son of God,
Who did uphold His cause,
The angles proclaim and say,
Axios! Axios! Axios!
O friend of Saint Anthony
Who taught us about his way;
Remember us before the Lord
On that fearful day.
From now till eternity,
All generations shall pray,
For Saint Athanasius' sake,
Lord hear us when we say:



THE SECOND ECUMENICAL COUNCIL *

Timotheos, a Priest of Alexandria, Succeeds St. Peter II:

When the Chair of Alexandria became vacant at the death of St. Peter II, Timotheos, another disciple of Athanasius, and an illustrious priest and teacher was elected to fill it. He had distinguished himself as one of those who had been sent to Constantinople to help in rehabilitating its Church. For his various faithful services he was consecrated the twenty-second successor of St. Mark the Apostle.

Second Ecumenical Council Convoked at Constantinople:

At that time another heresy was being proclaimed by Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople, who had announced his denial of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Bishops of the Orthodox Faith, who considered themselves trustees of the Apostolic legacy, exchanged views on this subject, and came to the conclusion that another ecumenical council was imperative. Emperor Theodosius himself shared their view concerning the need for calling such an assembly and hence issued an invitation to all Bishops to convene in Constantinople in May of the year A.D. 381. One hundred and fifty of them responded to his invitation, and their meeting together constituted the second ecumenical council. Emperor Theodosius attended the inaugural session and gave an address in which he welcomed the members and expressed his joy at their assembly.

The Council Condemns Heresy and Adds to the Nicene Creed:

The Council of Constantinople discussed a number of matters of interest to all churches, top priority being given to the examination of the Macedonian heresy. After a thorough consideration, it was unanimously condemned, and in consequence, the Council expanded the Nicene Creed by adding to it the clause concerning the Holy Spirit, and thus putting it in the form still upheld to the present day by all Orthodox Churches. The expansion included also the affirmation of the faith in the Church Universal, the oneness of baptism and awaiting the resurrection of the dead and life eternal.

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Fifth Sunday

THE THIRD ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

The Rise of the Nestorian Heresy:

One of the main causes that motivated St. Cyril to do so much writing was the rise, during his time, of a new interpretation of the mystery of the Incarnation which, in the light of the Nicene Creed and of the Orthodox faith, was a heresy. The promulgator of this interpretation was Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople. According to the Nestorian concept, Christ was of two separate persons, the one divine and beyond the reach of human frailty, and the other human and susceptible to all the fragility of the flesh. The divine Christ could neither suffer nor die, and therefore, on the Cross, it was the human Christ alone who suffered and died apart from the divine Christ.

St. Cyril could neither accept this interpretation nor keep quiet about it. In his Paschal letters, special epistles to his own as well as other churches, and in full-length books, he expounded the Orthodox doctrine of the indivisible union of the divine and human natures of Christ, and how this was the faith that was taught both by the Scriptures and the Nicene Fathers, and to which all true believers should adhere. One of the metaphors St. Cyril used to illustrate his defense was that of the iron molten in an excessively high degree of heat. In that state the iron and the heat were united into one, and though their substances were two, their union was complete without mixing, nor fusion nor change. No one could either separate or divide them. Such were the two natures of the Son of God, were united in one nature.

A further point made by Nestorius and strongly contested by St. Cyril related to the blessed Virgin Mary. The Orthodox believers glorified and honored her by calling her the “Theotokos” or “Mother-of-God”. Nestorius had spoken out against this title, and here, again, St. Cyril made his stand crystal clear. “I am astounded”, he said in one of his letters, “that some can hesitate to call the Blessed Virgin ‘Theotokos’. If Jesus Christ is God, it follows that His mother is the ‘Mother’ who bore Him forever. This is what the apostles taught us and the doctrine of our Fathers. Not that the nature of the Word originated with Mary — but because within her was formed the sacred Body to which the Word was hypostatically united we exclaim with John the Evangelist, ‘the Word was made flesh’. And just as the human mother, has no share in creating the soul of her child, yet is considered the mother of the whole person, and not merely the mother of his physical nature; so it is with Mary who is the Mother of Christ in His entirety and hence is indeed the Mother-of-God”.

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On the other hand, St. Cyril convoked a second Council at Alexandria. This second Alexandrian Council again resolved to try to convince Nestorius of his error. A decision was made to write to him another letter the first part of which was to be an exposition of the Nicene Creed, and the second part an affirmation of the true faith, followed by twelve anathemas. It reads thus:

“Conforming to the Faith of the Fathers, we declare that the unique Logos of God has taken flesh of the Virgin, has made this flesh His very own, submitted Himself to human birth, passed out of the Virgin’s womb as a child without ceasing to be what He is and remaining in the body as He is — namely Very God by nature. The flesh was not changed into the nature of the divine, just as the divine Logos was not changed into the nature of the flesh for It was not submitted to any change. Being yet a child, and even while in the womb of His Mother, the Logos filled the entire world, He governed it conjointly with His Father and the Holy Spirit — for Divinity knows no limit. The Logos is united to the flesh hypostatically. We therefore believe in One Single Son and Lord Jesus Christ; we separate not the man from the God; we do not believe that He is simply united under the semblance of dignity and power; these are new words alien to the Faith. If we, too, say as did St. Paul (in Col. 2:9) that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, we apperceive that God dwells not in Him as He dwells in His saints, but that the divine and the human were united in Christ in the fashion that the soul is united to the body in a human being. There is, therefore, One Christ, One Son, One Lord.”

If he were really ‘Orthodox’ as he had claimed, Nestorius was asked to prove it by signing both the letter and the anathemas. Thus he would vindicate himself and clarify his attitude before all believers.

Emperor Convokes Third Ecumenical Council:

Besides, the Nestorian controversy had already involved so many people and aroused so much reaction among both the high and the lowly that it could not be resolved by just an imperial letter carrying a threat to St. Cyril. More decisive action on an ecumenical scale had to be taken, and the Emperor himself realized when the people of Constantinople themselves urged him to call a Council of all the bishops to deal with this subject, he responded to their plea and issued an invitation to the Bishops of all Churches to attend its convocation at the city of Ephesus in June of the year 431A.D., St. Cyril was invited on the authority of his own dignity but the attitudes of the Emperor and of Nestorius towards him had not been changed.

When the letter of convocation reached the bishops of Africa, they decided by common consent to entrust St. Cyril to the responsibility of representing them. In this decision they declared that he was the organ of Orthodoxy. Celestinus had also

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said to him, “the power of our See is with you.” Thus he united in his person three authorities: the authority of his own See, as well as that of the Seeds of Africa and of Rome. Nonetheless, the Bishop of Rome sent his delegates to the Council to represent his Church and his person.

St. Cyril received the Emperor’s invitation as soon as he made plans to sail for Ephesus, even though he had heard of the letter that Nestorius had sent to Celestinus telling him that should “the proud Pharaoh” set foot in Ephesus, he will have, to give a strict account of his deeds and his words, Being one of the most intrepid men of all times, he disregarded all danger and threats to his own person in his fiery zeal to defend the faith. When he sailed, he took with him a strong delegation of Coptic ecclesiastics which included his outstanding contemporary Abba Shenouda of Akhmim. Upon arrival, Memnon, Bishop of Ephesus, an Egyptian by birth, met them with warm cordiality and a fraternal welcome.

Celestinus, Bishop of Rome, sent three delegates: the Bishops Arcadius and Projectus to represent the Roman council, and the priest Philip to represent him personally.

As the date fixed for the council drew near, the Bishops gradually joined each other: two hundred of them hastened to stand and once more defend the faith and prove themselves indeed the worthy successors of the Nicene Fathers.

Desirous to intimidate the august Bishops, Nestorius came to Ephesus as a man going to battle, surrounded by forty partisans and a big number of armed men. One of his companions was Irenaeus, an influential nobleman of Constantinople. In addition, Candidianus, the imperial commissioner representing Emperor Theodosius at the council, waived aside his neutrality and stood by Nestorius even though he had been only commissioned to see that order prevailed. Instead of keeping his strict impartiality, however, he allowed his troops to stand sentinels round the house of Nestorius.

Unanimous Condemnation of Nestorius:

The following morning, the Fathers met for the third session. The delegates of the West asked to hear the minutes of the first session. On hearing them, they readily signed the excommunication of Nestorius. A letter was sent to Emperor Theodosius in which he was informed that the church, in the East and the West, agreed on excommunicating Nestorius. All those present signed the letter, and also requested the Emperor to withdraw his annulment and to permit them to go back to their respective Sees.

*** Note: From the books of Iris Habib Elmasry, up to June 1986**

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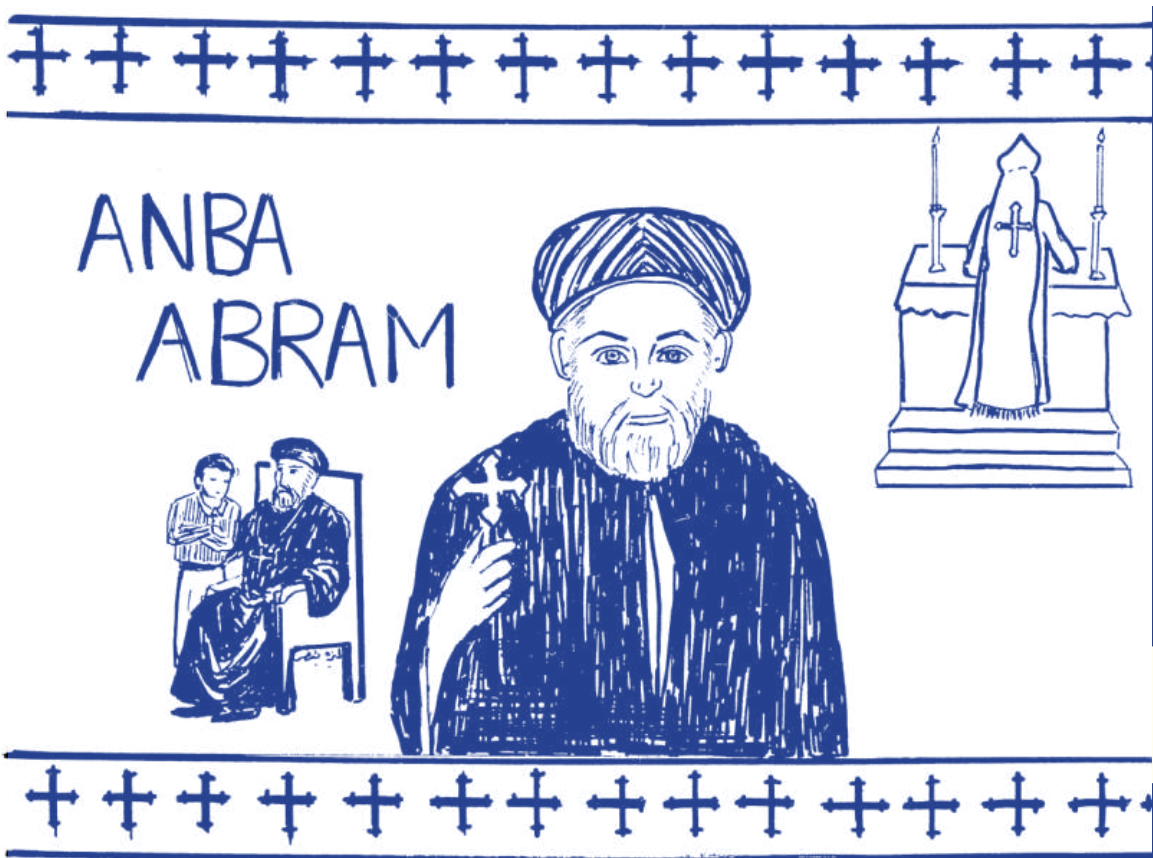
For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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**NOVEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY**

ALMS GIVING AND THE LIFE OF SAINT ABRAAM

Please read Matthew 6:1-4 and Luke 21:1-4, the attached notes entitled “Saint Anba Abraam”, the attached material entitled “Those who give”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To take the practice giving alms to the poor and the needy seriously. (as they begin searching for part-time paying jobs.)

MEMORY VERSE

“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon” Luke 16:9

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † **“He who gives with Liberality”** (Romans 12:8):
- St. Paul talked about alms giving as one of the talents that are granted from God to man. So many people give to the poor, but the person who is given the “talent of giving”, gives in a special way. He gives everyone who asks him, “Give to everyone who asks of you” (Luke 6:30). He gives whoever asks him not paying attention to whether he deserves it or not. In this way he is a worshiper and not a judge.
 - St. Paul said, “He who gives with liberality, gives in quantity and in love.” When a person gives in love, he also gives in happiness “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).
 - The poor widow putting in her two mites, “out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had” (Luke 21:1-4).

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- We must give alms in secret so that no one would know about it. Then we get full reward from God.

Explain the memory verse as follows:

God and the church do not accept money which is obtained from unjust or unlawful source. However, this verse may have two meanings:

- a) If you receive some money (from a good source), the church follows a 10% tithe. If you do not, then your usage of this money is unfair and unjust because you took it from our poor friends to yourself.
 - b) All the money which we earn is actually not ours. It is God's because He is the One who gave us the strength, talents, even life itself. "For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You" (1 Chr. 29:14). Since it is not our money and we are spending it for ourselves, it is called "unrighteous mammon". The friends that we make for ourselves are the poor.
- Giving out 1/10 is a law of the Old Testament; In the New Testament we must give more (the 1/10 is the very minimum).

† Anba Abraam's Life: (1829-1914)

Please read the attached material in detail. A summary of his life is as follows:

- In the year A.D. 1829, the child Boulos Ghobrial was born in a village west of Mallawi, Egypt.
- He was sent to the church school where he learned reading, writing, arithmetic and the Holy Scriptures. He was very intelligent.
- At the age of fifteen he was ordained as deacon. Then he joined the Monastery of St. Mary "El-Meharraq" and was ordained as a monk when he was nineteen. His new name was Father Boulos El-Meharraqi.
- He was well known for
 - a) His patience and self-control;
 - b) His interest in alms giving.
- The monks, later on, chose him to be the Abbot of the monastery. He opened the doors of the monastery to poor people. He devoted all his time to prayers and study... but his deep love to the poor people did not cease.

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- In A.D. 1881 he was ordained bishop and named “Anba Abraam” the bishop of Fayoum. Even the rulers and governors were pleased in his presence. So the simple bishop’s home became their resting place.
- After he had spent 33 years as a bishop, being deep in his fellowship with God and real worship, serving everybody sincerely, tiring continuously for the poor, using the gift of healing and exorcism of evil spirits, he fell ill in bed for a month. So the people gathered to have his blessing, especially when they knew that he refused to call a doctor saying “I am flying to the Lord Jesus.” And it happened on Thursday June 9, 1914 that he departed to the other world.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us be generous in alms-giving: in quantity and in love.

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SONGS 🎵

ST ABRAAM

Please stay next to me O St Abraam

You bring me close to my Lord all the time,
And to Jesus I will give
All my love, all my heart
You are in my heart St Abraam

From your childhood you always liked to pray,
And from the Lord you asked night and day,
“A clean heart in my create”
And “Have mercy” you would say,
You’re always in my heart St Abraam.

You loved God’s word and read it all the time,
You knew that the Bible guides to heaven
Read it all in forty days
And kept reading it again
You are always in my hearty St Abraam.

A saint of the twentieth century
Loving the poor, the orphans and the hungry,
When they came to you in need
They left you feeling happy



ANBA ABRAAM BISHOP OF FAYOUM

(A) A Friend of the Poor:

Whoever accepts our Lord Jesus, who for our sake became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich, does not cease from groaning inwardly, longing to spend and be spent for every man, especially those who are incapable of giving back what they receive.

He would be willing to bear the burdens of all people, walking in the way of Golgotha, following the steps of our Master, leaving everything behind, suffering for the sake of all men and singing "I have been crucified with Christ".

Our Father Anba Abraam experienced practical fellowship with the Lord, loving the brethren of the Lord. Whenever he went, he was surrounded by them, for in him they found their comfort and felt his loving fatherhood.

Once, on an Easter night, his disciple told him that Hanna Bey Nakhla had sent various kinds of food and a turkey. The Father blessed the sender, and with a gentle sweet smile asked his disciple to put the food on the tables, and call the poor people, the blind and the patients who were in the first floor of his home to come and eat. He stood watching his children and taking care of them as they ate. Yet he ate only radishes and some butter milk.

Our Father, the Bishop, asked a nun, the superior in a convent in Cairo, to be in charge of the poor. Shortly thereafter, he decided to visit those poor people while they were eating. He was surprised to find that the food offered to him was a better quality than that offered to the poor. This made him very upset and he dismissed the nun at once.

Another time, a poor woman complained to him of her poverty, he reached his hand under the pillow but did not find any money, he gave her a new shawl, which one of his children had given him. The next day the owner of the shawl visited our father and asked him about it. He replied, "My son, the shawl is above? Then the man presented it to him saying that he had bought it from the poor woman to return it to him. "Perhaps you have oppressed her, my son!", he replied. "No, my father, I gave her the whole price."

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Mr. Leeder, a British writer, says about the bishop:

“I have spoken of the poor robe in which the old Bishop was wrapped. It was literally like the robe of an early Coptic recluse, one Abba Isaac, who maintained that “the manner of the apparel which a monk ought to wear should be such that if it were cast outside the cell for three days no one would carry it away.”

It is said that the employees of the Bishopric saw that the Bishop’s home was not suitable, so they agreed with their father to renew and widen it. They collected money for the Bishop’s house, and when it totalled about L.E. 10,000, a valuable sum at that time, they brought it to him asking him to make an appointment with a building contractor to agree upon the remodeling of the building. The Bishop looked at them saying, “My sons, I have already built, I have built.”

“Where is the building, our father? There is no change in the building!”

“I have built a house for you in the Eternal Life.”

(B) A Man of Prayer

The mystery of the greatness in our father Anba Abraam is that he was a man of prayer.

Prayer in our church is not a troublesome routine, nor a hard law we are subject to, but a taste of sweetness of our being Sons to God, and a practice in fellowship with Him. Prayer is love!

Our holy father devoted his life for prayer as he loved his God, the Lord Jesus. He was filled with power. He was accustomed to gather his children every evening at his home to recite the Psalms and to read some chapters of the Holy Bible and help them understand them.

The people who slept in the room close to his house related that he used to rise up at midnight to recite the Psalms and stay up until dawn. And he used to repeat the words: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me,” praying it with zeal.

All who met him testified that his prayers were very deep in spirit until his very old age.

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The English writer Leeder says:

“It was with deep emotion that I looked into the face of this modern saint. To doubt his right to the title was impossible for the power of a pure and beautiful soul made itself felt at once, with a force that was almost overwhelming.

The eyes looked out of a calm, grave face, fringed with a small white beard, which in no way obscured the sensitive mouth. The turban was worn further back than is usual, leaving the broad unwrinkled forehead to suggest that the ascetic, in this case, had been governed by a fine intelligence.”

(C) His Abstinence

“I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

As much as the heart is emptied from the mortal love of the world, it will be qualified to be filled with heavenly things. And as far as it is filled with the heavenly things, man will not desire any earthly thing.

So our father struggled, refusing everything in order to gain the food of his soul “Jesus Christ”.

His food was beans and lentils; and during non-fasting days it was skimmed milk.

Once he desired to eat a chicken. He asked his disciple to cook it and bring it to him. When the table was prepared he prayed and asked his disciple to take the chicken away and to bring it the next day. The same thing happened on the second and the third days. And on the fourth day the food was spoiled, he looked at it saying to himself, “O myself, eat from what you desired!”

The same thing happened with his disciple “Anba Marcos” who was later ordained metropolitan of Esna.

(D) The Modest Bishop:

The man of God, Anba Abraam, loved Jesus Christ, and had communion with God envisaging the way to Golgotha following the Cross, where he left everything willingly and was then refused and humiliated by people for the sake of the heavenly glory.

He left all his personal dignity with will and joy and without grumbling.

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He was a loving and kind father to the poor and the rich alike, and he was never conceited.

The British author, Mr. Leeder, investigated everything about the character and life of our father after he had visited him.

He said that he always saw our bishop hiding his hands with the sleeves of his garment in order to prevent anyone from kissing his hands.

Mr. Leeder said:

“It is usual, I believe, in every Christian church to kneel in receiving a bishop’s blessing; but on no account would Anba Abraam consent to any person kneeling before him, “To God alone” he said, “was such obeisance due”. “He was distressed that I felt obliged to kneel, but when I explained that my first reverence was to God, and then to His good servant, he gently gave way.”

(E) His Firmness:

Everyone who met our father Anba Abraam felt the touch of his kindly fatherhood and his distinguishing between meekness and slackness.

It is true that our father, the man of God, was famous for his kindness and modesty, but he was also firm. Kamel Saleh Nakhla relates: “He speaks frankly, giving attention to the truth itself, without taking into consideration to whom it was told.

The priest of St. Mark Church in Cairo once wronged a metropolitan. A council was assembled to judge him. Our father asked the metropolitan to forgive him but he refused. While they were praying, the bishop asked the metropolitan to say the Lord’s Prayer. When the metropolitan began asking God to forgive our sins as we forgive the sins of our debtors, the bishop interrupted saying, “If you believe in this prayer then go to your brother and kiss his head, or else you are deceiving God by saying this prayer”. The metropolitan went to the priest and asked for his forgiveness.

(F) His Power in Exorcism of Evil Spirits:

God saw that the bishop’s heart was open widely full of love to the poor and rich, to faithful and unfaithful men, so he bestowed to him the grace of the exorcism of evil spirits.

The English writer says, “The bishop’s power in exorcism of evil spirits has perhaps

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brought him more visitors from distant parts than any of the other gifts for which he is famous.”

The son of a blind singer of the Cathedral of Cairo, who was a very intelligent young Copt and held a responsible position in the government, related to the English writer about the large number of people, Moslems and Christians, who were relieved from the evil spirits by the prayers of the bishop. The young Copt also related in detail how the bishop healed his aunt from evil spirits.

(G) His Departure:

Rev. Fr. Mikhail Saad conveyed to us a simple image of the last moments of our father Anba Abraam before and after his departure. He received his information from the Bishop's contemporaries who are still alive.

The wife of the Late Nassif Mahrous said that before our father's departure he summoned Fr. Abd-El-Sayed and some deacons, and asked them to recite the Psalms outside his room and not to open his door before half an hour had passed. When they opened the door they found him resting in Christ.

On the day of his death, all the people of Fayoum wept bitterly and many came from all the provinces of Egypt. Someone said that those who attended the funeral were about twenty-five thousand, and others said that there were more than ten thousand,

Our father Anba Abraam departed from the world, but he did not depart from the Church, for his love had no end nor did he become unfeeling. Now with a wide heart he prays for us in paradise.

The things which he left are:

1. The material things are a simple mattress, a pillow, a quilt, a wooden seat, a small bed and some old furniture.
2. Lists of the monthly gifts offered to the poor families.
3. He left us his glorious life as a precious treasure.

*** Note: From "Athanasius" Magazine – Virgin Mary and St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Church, Mississauga, Canada.**

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**NOVEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR IN A PERMISSIVE
SOCIETY**

Please read 1 Timothy 6:3-6, the attached article entitled “The Christian behavior”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn how to live and behave as good Christians in a permissive society.

MEMORY VERSE

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” 1 Peter 2:9

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

Can we be Christians in a country where anything goes?

The Challenge for Parents and Sunday School Teachers:

Our Christian young people are always caught between sticking to their principles which they have learned both at home and in Church since their childhood, and being accepted by “the crowd”. It is extremely important for us parents and Sunday School teachers not to ignore at any time the power of peer-pressure especially at that age.

The question before us now is this: why do young people feel a strong temptation to succumb to peer-pressure? One of the most important reasons is the fact that a teenager feels secure in following the crowd and being like the rest. Otherwise, he or she feels alienated. Besides, if he gets caught or finds himself entangled in these century’s problems of sex, alcoholism or drugs, he can always reiterate the usual

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excuse: "Look, don't blame me; everybody is doing it."

How many times did you hear your teenager say to you:

"Dad, I don't want to be different" or, "Mom, haven't you heard, when in Rome do as the Romans do?"

Our Task:

Now as parents and Sunday School teachers, how can we convince our young people that in some ways they can conform while in others they should be different? How can we help them to be "in the world but not of the world"? How can we encourage them to live and behave as Christians in an evil world? This is our task in this lesson. We have to explain to them the following:

†First: God created us as Original Individuals not as Imitators

It is an established fact that no two persons, among the billions of people inhabiting this globe, are created exactly the same, or have the same finger-prints, or have the same personality ... etc. Everyone has his own uniqueness. Instead of being glad and thankful for your individuality, some people decide to be like everyone else in the group. This is extremely dangerous, harmful and downgrading because:

- 1) An imitation can never have the same quality or value of an original. You are born original ... Don't end up being a copy.
- 2) By letting the group run your life, you are actually losing your freedom to run your own life according to what you believe and feel is right and good for you.
- 3) In accepting peer-pressure, you develop a weak personality. You cannot think or act on your own. You always want somebody to tell you what to do or where to go. You are no longer a unique person ... you are a number in the crowd, a cog in the machine.

† Second: Watch out ... You're being Tricked:

You know quite well that when someone wants to trick you he wouldn't come right out and says: "Now, let me trick you." The same goes for Satan. He wouldn't come straight up and say, "Come, let me lead you to sin." Instead, he disguises himself appearing sometimes even as "an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14) and say: "Go ahead there is nothing wrong with it ... don't hesitate or even give it a second thought don't be ashamed, everybody is doing it." Or, "if

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you don't do that, people will think you're queer, sick or behind the times." Or, "if everybody is doing it, it can't be wrong." Now, when Satan tries to trick you in this way, you can answer him by saying: "Not even if everybody is doing it, still it can be wrong." An idea or an opinion cannot be right because it is popular. Truth does not need popular support. How many decisions were taken on popular demand and they proved to be very wrong? Pontius Pilate declared three times, "I find no fault in this man (Jesus)", but the popular demand was "Crucify him". The result was ... a sheer murder of an innocent person (Read Luke 23:14-25). If we go into history, we find that almost every outstanding leader, discoverer, pioneer or inventor became so because he did not bend to public opinion. Columbus did not accept public opinion that the world was flat, nor did the Wright brothers accept the idea that man can never fly.

For us Christians, the principle is set by Jesus Christ Himself when He declared: "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18). Our authority for right and wrong does not come from public opinion, but from God Himself. Public opinion changes with time, but God's word does not.

Third: As a Christian, you should be Different:

The Christian is "in the world ... but not of the world". He has a mission to the world ... to bring the kingdom of God to the world. He is to affect the world, not to be affected by the world. He is not like a thermometer responding to the climate around it, rather he is like a thermostat that controls the climate around it. He is to be a light amidst a dark world. "You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14)

The Christian is different because he is "in Christ". He is the ambassador of Christ to this world. He is actually not separated from Christ at any time. He walks with Him every day. He talks with Him all the time. The Body of Christ is an inseparable part of his own body and the Blood of Christ runs in his veins.

The Christian is different because he is called to be as such. St. Peter called the early Christians a different people:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, Its own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1Peter 2:9).

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†Fourth: Commit yourself to Christ:

Like what happened at Jesus' Baptism, when you were baptized as an infant, God declared: "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." Now, as you grow up, God expects to 'hear a similar declaration: "You are my God, my Lord and my Master to whom I commit myself." It is time now to commit yourself to Him. In this way you really become a full member of the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation and God's own special people. Whether you like it or not, sooner or later, you are going to submit yourself to something or someone bigger and stronger than yourself. You are going to submit to a Master whether it is work, money, pleasures of the flesh, Christ ... etc. It is really good to submit yourself now when it is easy to direct your life to satisfy and serve that master. The only true Master who is worth serving is none but the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is God...He alone can help you find happiness and purpose in life... He alone is able to give you exceedingly more than what you ask for.

As Father Antony Coniars puts it, committing yourself to anything less than Christ is like wanting to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a carton box instead of an ocean liner or a jet plane. Committing yourself to Christ is like giving yourself to the strongest Person in the whole universe.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Christian principles and values do not change with the passage of time.
- (2) We have to preserve and enhance our own uniqueness and not be influenced by peer-pressure.
- (3) Whether it is sex, smoking, alcohol, drugs or the like, even if everybody is doing it, this does not make it right.
- (4) As Christians, we should be different.
- (5) From now on, we should commit ourselves to Christ.

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SONGS 🎵

I PUT MY LIFE INTO YOUR HANDS

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
(Mat 11:28)*

I put my life into Your hands
Lead me and guide, hold my hand
Please protect me lest I fall
Bless me and sanctify my soul

my Saviour and my Lord
and help me serve Your word
Your Holy name I always call
until I see the Lord

REFRAIN

Your tender voice I hear
Come to Me O troubled come
Come to Me heavy laden come

whether I am far or near
I will help you to overcome
and I shall give you rest

When life's troubles worry me
All the clouds will disappear
The Lord is my shield and my hope
His love protects me from the foe

when darkness is so near
when the Lord's light appear
He is my strength and my goal
until I see the Lord

Lord, have control over my life
I call Your sweet name day and night
That I may return back again
I ask You to strengthen my faith

and guide me through Your way
so please answer my prayer
to fill my heart with Your grace
until I see the Lord

When my life's end becomes so near
The Lord will come in a glorious scene
The Good Lord will wipe every tear
His love to me, His cross revealed

I feel a great relief
and take me to His feast
and fill my heart with His peace
I long to see the Lord

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CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Some think that life with God means just faith or love or spirit without caring much about virtues or behaviour.

But the Bible is concerned with the Christian behaviour, especially about condemnation, as it says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit."* (Rom 8:1). Then one's behaviour in the spirit is what protects one from condemnation.

This spiritual behaviour is considered an evidence of being firm in God. The Apostle, expects a very high level by saying, *"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."* (1 Jn 2:6)

Therefore, we are also expected to act according to the spirit, by taking the behaviour of the Lord Jesus as an example to follow...

The importance of Christian behaviour is shown in God's saying, *"You will know them by their fruits."* (Mt 7:16)

This behaviour has two sides: positive and negative. Each side has its own danger. Therefore, St. John, the Apostle says, *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."* (1 Jn 1:7). This shows the positive side.

As for the negative side, the Apostle says, *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth."* (1 Jn 1:6)

Therefore, our Christian behaviour is an evidence of our fellowship with God. It is also an evidence of our fellowship with the Church...

Accordingly, the Church sets apart anyone who does not behave properly, as in St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, *"Put away from yourselves the evil person."* (1 Cor 5:13)

St John also says, *"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."* (2 Thess 3:6)

If behaviour is considered of no significance and only faith is important, why then did the Apostle consider it the top of joy, when he said, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* (3 Jn 4)

We are believers, but we have to, *"... walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."* (Eph 4:1). We also have to bear fruit, *"Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire..."* (Mt 3:10)

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**NOVEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY**

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Please read John 3:1-17, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To understand some aspects of the Kingdom of God.

MEMORY VERSE

***“I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God
“John 3:3***

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

As Christians, do we belong to the kingdom of sin, or the Kingdom of God? What is the kingdom of God?

† The Kingdom is the Work of the Lord Jesus, Glory be to Him:

- “He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). And the multitude as they followed Him, “He sent them to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2). The Kingdom was the subject of His teachings and parables (Matthew 13). “Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying: The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1 :14-15).
- When Jesus sent His disciples, He sent them for the sake of the Kingdom of God. He ordered them to say to the people “The Kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9). Once, a person wanted to excuse himself to bury

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his father, then Jesus said to him “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). In the final 40 days which Jesus spent with His disciples after His resurrection “He was speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3)

- The Apostles obeyed the Lord’s request and concentrated their preaching on the Kingdom of God. Philip was in Samaria “as he preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12). Also, when St. Paul was in Rome he “explained and solemnly testified of the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

† What is the Kingdom of God that Jesus and the Apostles worked for?

- It is that the Lord rules over earth and what is on it so that it becomes for Him, “For the Lord is earth in all its fullness”. The Kingdom as well is that He reigns over all souls. He controls all the feelings, all thinking and all senses and desires.
- In the Apostolic age, people saw the Kingdom of God coming strongly not in words but in strength “For the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20).
- The Kingdom of God was spreading very quickly and God was reigning over new souls every day, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

† The Kingdom of God Must Start First Inside the Soul:

- Jesus said, “For indeed the Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). There is something spiritual called by the saints “tasting the Kingdom”. The person who does not taste the kingdom here cannot enjoy it there (i.e. in heaven or after passing away). The Kingdom inside the heart must precede the heavenly Kingdom. Let us then examine the extent of God’s reigning over us. Are we in the hands of God or in the hands of the world? Who actually rules over us? If a certain sin has made me weak in front of it and ruled over me, then the Lord is not ruling over me and the Kingdom of God is not inside me. With the dwelling of God in the hearts of the people, the Kingdom is spreading. St. Augustine said in his book The City of God that there were two cities: the city of the world and the city of God. Do we belong to the city of God? The heavenly city that God owns on earth and on

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it His will and His love are spread.

- The people who love the world are busy with the land, their lust and the life on earth. But the people who love God are busy working for His Kingdom. God wanted the Kingdom to be the subject that has the highest priority. He said, “Seek **first** the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”.

† **Without God’s Support we cannot be Part of His Kingdom:**

- Jesus said to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God ,... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5).
- When we are baptized we separate ourselves from the old creation and are cleansed from the original sin. We are newly reborn in the Kingdom of God because we are reborn from water and the Holy Spirit. The only thing remaining is to struggle against the temptations of the devil who tries to pull us outside the Kingdom “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fasting; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (2 Corinthians 6:4-7).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us examine ourselves, are we part of the Kingdom of God? Let us give this our utmost importance.

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SONGS 🎵

I PUT MY LIFE INTO YOUR HANDS

I put my life into Your hands
Lead me and guide, hold my hand
Please protect me lest I fall
Bless me and sanctify my soul

my Saviour and my Lord
and help me serve Your word
Your Holy name I always call
until I see the Lord

REFRAIN

Your tender voice I hear
Come to Me o troubled come
Come to Me heavy laden come

whether I am far or near
I will help you to overcome
and I shall give you rest

When life's troubles worry me
All the clouds will disappear
The Lord is my shield and my hope
His love protects me from the foe

when darkness is so near
when the Lord's light appear
He is my strength and my goal
until I see the Lord

Lord, have control over my life
I call Your sweet name day and night
That I may return back again
I ask You to strengthen my faith

and guide me through Your way
so please answer my prayer
to fill my heart with Your grace
until I see the Lord

When my life's end becomes so near
The Lord will come in a glorious scene
The Good Lord will wipe every tear
His love to me, His cross revealed

I feel a great relief
and take me to His feast
and fill my heart with His peace
I long to see the Lord

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**NOVEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY**

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Please read Luke 16:19 to the end, the attached material entitled “Your eternal life”, and give lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To discuss our church’s belief about life after death.

MEMORY VERSE

*“Those Lord, whose souls Thou hast taken, do Thou repose in the Paradise of joy,
in the region of the living forever, in the Heavenly Jerusalem, in that place.
“Divine Liturgy*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

What do you imagine heaven to be like?



In Reference to the Memory Verse:

- a) Luke 23:43 “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”
- b) Luke 16:19 to the end. (Please describe in detail.)
 - “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.”
 - “The rich man also died and was buried, and being in torments in Hades ...”

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c) Revelation 21:1-7. “there shall be no more death.”

† **All True Believers who Struggle by the Divine Grace will have Rest with God:**

Please read Hebrews 4:1-11.

- “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.”
- “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

† **There is Life after Death:**

Please read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20. “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1Cor. 15:12)

Then St. Paul continues and says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1Cor. 15:19).

† **The Completion of the Memory Verse:**

“And we too sojourners in this place, preserve us in Thy faith and grant us Thy peace unto the end”, the Liturgy of St. Basil. This means that we are praying to reach our heavenly destination in peace, having the true faith that qualifies us to enter the heavenly Jerusalem.

† **These Things are Written about Life after Death:**

- **Life on Earth:**

Life is as swift as an eagle (Job 9:25-26); it cannot be restarted. “Now my days are swifter than a runner; they flee away, they see no good. **They pass** by like swift ships, like an eagle swooping on its prey.”

- Life is like water spilled on the ground (2 Samuel 14:14) i.e., it cannot be recovered, “For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.”
- Life is like a shadow (Job 8:9); it cannot be retained. “because our days on earth are a shadow.”

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- After Death:

The universal answer to Job's heartfelt cry "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14) has always been a firm answer "Yes".

- The Possession of Life after Death:

"He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25)

† The Prayer for the Departed (from our Divine Liturgy):

(Please read it in class.)

Kindly, O Lord, let all their souls repose in the bosoms of our saintly fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Send them in green pastures by the waters of comfort in the paradise of Grace. The place from which all distress, sorrow and sighing have fled — a spot of Thine illuminated Saints.

Raise up their bodies on the day which you have appointed, according to your true and faithful promises. Grant them the blessings of Thy promises: that which no eye has yet seen, nor ear heard, neither has occurred to the heart of man. That which Thou, O Lord, hast prepared for those who love Thine Holy Name.

For there is no death for Thy servants, but rather a departure. And if they have been careless or negligent like all human beings who live in this world in the flesh, kindly, O Lord, forgive them, for Thou art good and Thou art the lover of mankind.

Your Orthodox servants all over the world from east to west and from north to south, each and every one by his or her name, Lord, kindly let their souls repose and forgive their sins. For no one is free from sin even if his life is just a single day on earth.

All those whose souls Thou hast taken, O Lord, let them repose and grant that they deserve the Kingdom of Heaven.

To all of us, kindly, O Lord, grant us the Christian perfection which would be pleasing unto Thee. Grant them and us too, a share and an inheritance with all

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Thy saints.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Our life on earth is not even equal a twinkling of an eye if it is compared to eternity. Our life on earth is a preparation for the eternal life. Therefore, we must work for our eternity. Everything else becomes cheap when compared to it. St. Paul said “While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are **eternal**” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

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SONGS 🎵

O SEEKER TO MEET JESUS

O seeker to meet Jesus
Your food is the Bread of life

forget your hunger and thirst
and you'll drink from His wounded side

You traveler, forget the past
If you suffer on the road

and go steadfast in the path
remember for you He died

The trumpet will be heard soon
A great feast above the clouds

with happiness and sound of joy
and a crown for the watchful

He'll prepare a place for you
His heart is longing for you

he is always waiting for you
blessed are you if you are prepared

You are a part in Jesus Christ
Have no fear from all dangers

you who lives among the rocks
you're protected by the Lord

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Fourth Sunday

YOUR ETERNITY
By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Most people think only of their lives on earth, all their wishes are concentrated on this earthly life. All their efforts and struggle are for its sake, but as for their eternity, perhaps they never think of it...

Your whole life on earth is not worth a twinkle of an eye, if compared with the endless eternity...

Your life on earth is just the preparation for such an eternity, the immortal life...

Maybe sticking to a worldly honour makes you lose all the respect that the saints receive in the everlasting glory...

Nevertheless, you still stick to this worldly honour and sacrifice your eternity, as if you do not care!!

Perhaps your sticking to some of the temporary or passing worldly pleasures deprives you of eternal happiness...

Therefore, you have to be convinced of the importance of eternity, put it always in front of your eyes. Everything becomes of small value compared to it.

How good is the saying of the Apostle, St Paul, to the Corinthians, *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but all the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal. "* (2 Cor 4:18)

Truly, in this view, the main difference between a wise person and an ignorant person is quite clear.

The ignorant is short sighted, his look does not proceed beyond the visible things. But the wise person looks too far, to even after death... and keeps thinking: What will become of me after I take off this body? Where shall I go? What shall I be?

And you, brother, with what are you busy...?

Where did you leave your heart? Here or there?...

For where your heart is, there your treasures will be also...

The wise feel they are strangers on earth and do not concentrate their hopes on earth, but *"... he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. "* (Heb 11:10)

He who gives importance to his eternity is raised above the earth and all earthly things. Nothing in this world attracts him.

The whole world is behind him and not in front of him...

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First Sunday



**DECEMBER
FIRST SUNDAY**

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Please read Luke 24:13-27, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To illustrate the personality of Jesus in the Old Testament.

MEMORY VERSE

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes “Romans 10:4

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

We know the New Testament is the story of Jesus Christ and how He saved us. But do we know anything about Jesus Christ from the Old Testament?

† **Introduction:**

Many people think falsely that our Lord Jesus Christ goes back in history about 2,000 years. Jesus said to the two disciples of Emmaus “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:25-27)

† **The Old Testament:**

It is the account of the work of God in history from the creation until the coming

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of the Messiah. It includes the agreement between God and man throughout that period. It is written in 39 books.

† The New Testament:

It extends from the Incarnation of Jesus Christ to the end of the world. It is written in 27 books.

Christianity:

It goes back to creation to include the Old Testament as a basis for the New Testament.

† Jesus Refers to the Old Testament:

- Our Lord Jesus wanted to emphasize that our Christianity goes back to creation and that the Bible of the New Testament is based on and a completion and fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy **but to fulfill.**” (Matthew 5:17)
- St. Paul said “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4).

† Christ in the Old Testament:

- The prophets mentioned all things related to Jesus long before His Incarnation. Everything was fulfilled: His birth, His miracles, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension.
- Some personalities in the Old Testament gave analogy to Jesus in some aspects. Our Lord Jesus drew our attention to this point when He said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:39-40)

St. Paul as well emphasized the same thing when he said about Adam “who is a type of Him who was to come” (Romans 5:14).

† Jonah:

Explain the resurrection of Jesus after 3 days. Jonah came out of the great

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fish after 3 days.

† Adam:

He was the beginning of the “old creation”. Jesus is called the second Adam and He is the beginning of the “new creation”. In the church hymns one of the names of the Lord is the “Second Adam”.

† Isaac:

He carried the wood for the fire, while Jesus carried the Cross. Isaac at the end came back alive and Jesus also came back alive.

Note: There are of course some differences between these personalities and the personality of Jesus, but we mean here to refer to the similarities.

† Christ and the Laws of the Old Testament:

1) The Law of Leper for the Day of his Cleansing:

Please read Leviticus 14:1-7 and explain the relationship between of these two birds with Jesus’ death and resurrection as follows:

- The “slaughtered bird” represents our Lord Jesus who died on the Cross to purify us with His blood. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).
- The “living bird” who was let loose in the open field took from the blood of the killed bird. This bird was a symbol of Christ who resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all” (Hebrews 9:12).

2) Passover Lamb:

The Passover Lamb was a symbol of Christ through whom we passed over from death to life “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast” (1Corinthians 5:7-8).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- † Our Lord Jesus Christ is God incarnate. Even in the Old Testament the face of our Lord could be seen. Several symbols were given as preparation for His coming so that the people who believe in Him will gain salvation.
- † A clear evidence that our Christianity is correct is that everything related to our Lord Jesus Christ was prophesied about hundreds and thousands of years before his birth from St. Mary the Virgin and were fulfilled within.

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First Sunday

SONGS 🎵

OUR LIFE IS FILLED WITH JOY

“I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” (Ps 9:2)

Our life is filled with joy
O my Lord Jesus Christ

All creations glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Seven times in every day
O my Lord Jesus Christ

From the morning to the eve
O my Lord Jesus Christ

All the sins that I have done
O my Lord Jesus Christ

The son of God in His glory
O my Lord Jesus Christ

To give each one of us all
O my Lord Jesus Christ

May we then not hear that sound
O my Lord Jesus Christ

But with Your sweet tender voice
O my Lord Jesus Christ

To inherit everlasting life
O my Lord Jesus Christ

The martyrs will be standing
O my Lord Jesus Christ

to remember Your Holy name
my Redeemer and Saviour

those on earth and in heaven
my Redeemer and Saviour

to the Lord I stand and pray
my Redeemer and Saviour

Your Holy name is in my heart
my Redeemer and Saviour

please forgive O blessed Son
my Redeemer and Saviour

will come again on judgment day
my Redeemer and Saviour

according to what we have done
my Redeemer and Saviour

that proclaims I know you not
my Redeemer and Saviour

you say My children do come in
my Redeemer and Saviour

from now and forever more
my Redeemer and Saviour

their sufferings will be declared
my Redeemer and Saviour

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Second Sunday



**DECEMBER
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND
THE BIRTH OF JESUS WERE ANNOUNCED**

Please read Luke 1:5-38, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To rejoice with the happy news in the two events. The emphasis here will be on the humility of the Virgin Mary that made her deserve all these glories.

MEMORY VERSE

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord “Luke 1:38

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

How do you respond to praise?

† **John’s Birth Announced to Zacharias:**
(Luke 1:5-25)

Highlights:

- When the time was near for God to incarnate as Man it was necessary that God send someone before Him to prepare the way. This person (John the Baptist) was described by Jesus when He said: “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11). John was born from parents who “were righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”.
- “But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both

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well advanced in years”.

The barren woman was judged since the Messiah will not come from her. This was the utmost desire of all women. So, it was shameful not to have a child. “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people” (Luke 1:25).

- “His lot fell to burn incense”. This lot was looked at by Zecharias and the other priests as just luck or coincidence. The truth of the matter is that **it was God’s plan** to give Zecharias the good news.
- The angel of the Lord is always “standing on the right side of the altar”. The angel takes up to heaven all the offerings and prayers but we do not see him because of our limited vision. As we draw near the altar and offer the incense of our prayers, we remember that the angel is standing there and at due time will say to me “Your prayer is heard”.

† **Christ’s Birth Announced to Mary** (Luke 1:26-38):

Highlights:

- **The Angel’s Greeting:**

The angel’s greeting reveals the true image of the Virgin Mary in front of God. She is called — even before her conception with Christ — full of grace and blessed.

- **“Rejoice, Highly Favored One”**

To be highly favored by God, one must empty the heart from all lusts and desires of the world. St. Mary lived for God and God favored her over all who were living on earth, “Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all” (Proverbs 3 1:29).

- **“The Lord is with You”**

No one has experienced the life of being with God as St. Mary did. The angel admitted that the Lord is with her because she humbled herself before Him to the extent that when He looked from heaven He did not find anyone like her.

- **“Blessed are You among Women”**

Because of Eve, the sin has come to the human race and separated it from

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God. Because of St. Mary the salvation for the whole world was made. St. Mary became the blessing for all nations. “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You” (Luke 11:27).

- “When she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.”

How great is your humility, St. Mary? In your own eyes, you did not feel deserving all these greetings. You did not accept any praise from any man and never accepted any reward from anyone. Your life was a secret one with God. You always feared the praise of people. Oh mother of God teach me to be humble and say with my Master “glory from men I do not accept”. This is not easy because it is against my desire which requires the praise of people.

O mother of God teach me to pray in secret, to hate the praise of people and to be troubled even if an angel praised me. St. Mary was not troubled from the look of the angel as Zecharias did, but she was troubled from his greetings and his praise for her.

- **“Bring Forth a Son, and shall Call His Name Jesus”**

The name Jesus means Savior. The saints knew the value of this blessed name, the name of salvation. They loved this name and it became in their mouths a continuous praise, prayer and source of joy. St. Mary was the first to be in touch with Jesus at the level of unity.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us not look for and try to get the praise of people. Let us not be joyful with that. We should rejoice when we have a secret and deep life with God as St. Mary did.



SONGS 🎵

WE GREET YOU WITH GABRIEL

We greet you with Gabriel
The angel saying
“Hail to you full of grace
The Lord be with you.”

Therefore we glorify you
O Mother of God the Theotokos
Pray to the Lord on our behalf
That he may forgive us our sins

You are worthy to be honored
With your cousin Elizabeth
Blessed are you among women
And blessed is the fruit of your womb

Therefore we glorify you
O Mother of God the Theotokos
Pray to the Lord on our behalf
That He may forgive us our sins

Blessed be the Father and the Son
And the Holy Spirit
The perfect Trinity
We worship Him glorify Him.

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Third Sunday



**DECEMBER
THIRD SUNDAY**

ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY

Please read Luke 1:39-80, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To discuss of the two parts mentioned in Zacharias' prophecy. The emphasis here will be on the prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1:68-80).

MEMORY VERSE

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel "Luke 1:68

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Let the students read Luke 1:39-80 and discuss as you go along and answer questions.
- † When John the Baptist was born, his father believed what the angel told him and then he was able to speak. When their neighbors saw this miracle (that Zaharias was able to speak again) they were afraid and surprised because they were not used to any miracles for a long time. The people in all the mountains of Judea were talking about all these events: the vision that Zacharias had seen in the altar; Elizabeth who was barren gave birth to a child; and Zacharias, after he was unable to speak or hear for nine months, has his faculties return miraculously.

Note: Zacharias was not able to **hear** or **speak**. A lot of people think **wrongly** that he was not able to speak only. "**So they made signs** to his father — what he would have him called" (Luke 1:62). This was what the people did in order to ask Zacharias what to call the new born boy.

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† “Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit” and prophesied as mentioned in Luke 1:68-80. Some of the main items in his prophecy are as follows:

- Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is prophecy.
- **His prophecy had two parts:**
 - 1) His son John was the one mentioned by many prophets to come and prepare the way for the Savior Jesus. This is as mentioned in Isaiah 40:3-5, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
 - 2) The second part of Zacharias’ prophecy is when he said, “Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death”. He meant that indeed the prophecy of Isaiah of the birth of Jesus Son of God from the Virgin was now fulfilled. “Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shone. 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. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:1,2,6,7).

In this way started the announcement that the Messiah, Son of God, the Savior of the human race, has finally come to earth to live with the people. This is consistent with the angel’s talk to the Virgin as he announced to her about the birth of a Son called “Emmanuel” which means in Hebrew “God with us”.

† From the prophecy of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, it is then known that Jesus is the Son of God who came to the world fulfilling all the prophecies

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about Him

- † The explanation of “**And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel**” is as follows:

When King Herod sent his soldiers to kill all children who were about two years old mainly to kill the child Jesus, John the Baptist was one of these children. When the soldiers came to kill John in his father's house, Zacharias told them that he will give John to them from the same place he took him, that is from the altar. Zacharias ran to the altar carrying his son John and the soldiers ran after him. When Zacharias reached the altar, he prayed and cried to God to do something to save John. Therefore, the Angel of the Lord took John to the wilderness where he stayed until he appeared to the Jews at the Jordan River. When the soldiers did not find John they killed the old man Zacharias with the sword. The angels looked after all John's needs until the time came when he came from the wilderness to tell the people about Jesus. Until this time John the Baptist did not see Jesus. This is why it is said in John 1:31 and 33 “I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

- † John was a priest, as his father Zacharias, from the tribe of Aaron. According to the law it was not permitted that John would do a religious service as a priest or a prophet before age 30. Therefore, John stayed in the wilderness until he reached age 30 and then he showed himself to Israel to do the job that he was assigned to do.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

God prepared very our salvation, and all the forces of the devil could not defeat this plan. All these forces are still trying to block our utilization of the salvation that the Lord Jesus did for us. But as these forces were defeated in the past, they could be defeated in our life by the support of God who gave us authority to step on the serpents and all the forces of the enemy.

St. George and St. Rueiss

Coptic Orthodox Church



SONGS 🎵

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Hiten ni epresveya ente
Pisengenees en
Emmanueel Youannis
Epshiri en Zakareyas
Epchois.

*Through the intercessions
Of the kinsman of Emmanuel
John the son of Zachariah
O Lord grant us the forgiveness
Of our sins.*

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**DECEMBER
FOURTH SUNDAY**

THE NEW YEAR — THE PURITY OF HEART

Please read Ezekiel 36:25-38, the attached material entitled “The New Year Prayer”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn that if we intend to live with God, as a commitment of the New Year, we have to have a complete change of heart, and not just an improvement in one or two areas.

MEMORY VERSE

“Cleanse me from my sin “Psalm 51:2

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

How can we obtain a pure heart this upcoming New Year?

†Introduction

What did we do? What are we going to do? For ourselves, for the Kingdom of God and for the day in which we are going to give an account for our deeds before God. Our Lord Jesus said, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).

God has trusted us in this generation to be witnesses for Him and to have the people see in us His image. What did we show to the people? What was our witness? Was it a clear and effective witnessing to the society in which we live?

How about our hearts? Were they pure and suitable for the dwelling of God? Do

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we live with God in an honest way? Or do we betray God who loved us to the end and died for us on the Cross?

† Purity of Heart (or the New Heart) is from God:

- Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart O God".
- Please read Ezekiel 36:25-38, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:25-26).
- Please read Ephesians 4:17-24, "...and put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

† How does the Pure in Heart Look at Things?

- The person who has a pure heart looks at others and finds in them the image of God: he loves them all; he has mercy on them all; he takes care of all people and gives his love to all people.
- The person who has a pure heart does not judge other people, but always has mercy on the sinners.

One of the monks committed a sin and a council of monks was held to judge him. To this council, St. Moses the Black was invited. When he went, he took a basket with a hole in it, filled it with sand and carried it upon his shoulders. When the fathers saw him coming in this manner, they asked him, "What is this?" He said, "These are my sins; I am throwing them behind me and I come today to judge others". To this note the council ended and they forgave the sinner and did not sadden him.

- The person who has a pure heart looks at beauty either in people or things and glorifies God. But the person who has an impure heart looks at things with lust, envy, and a sense of possessing them to himself even if this act was hurting others. Example:

King Ahab when he took the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite and killed him (See 1 Kings 21:1-16).

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† How Can we Acquire the New Heart?

- 1) We always like to have it both ways, to love God and love the world simultaneously. “Love of the world is hatred to God. We must overcome this doubling effect and “love the Lord from the **whole** heart.”

How can we love the Lord from the core of our heart? We have to pray earnestly to God. Jacob said to God, “I will not leave you before you bless me.”

David was using all methods so that his heart was filled with God’s love.

- 2) If we maintain steadily our eyes, ears and tongues so that no impurity would enter our hearts, then our hearts will be purified quickly. As our hearts become clean we do not say or think or look at unholy things.

We have to control our tongues, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” James 1:26. Our tongue which prays, praises the Lord and takes communion must be dedicated to God, not to evil things. Talking about dedication, the saints who wrote the Bible were using a special pen to write the name of God. This pen was not used to write other words. Therefore, the faithful must dedicate their tongues to God.

- 3) Reading the word of God purifies our hearts, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

† Let us be determined in the new year to live with God and not look back to our sins and desire them.

- Examples of people who looked back desiring the sinful life: Lot’s wife when she looked back while they were escaping from Sodom and she turned into a pillar of salt.
- St. Paul said, “I forget what was in the back and I proceed to the front.”
- I will start, helped by God and the intercession of St. Mary, the angels and all the saints, to live with God from now on.

† Instead of concentrating on improving small things in my life, I like to concentrate on having something big which is “A new heart” that is full of love to the Lord and the people. This big change is the ultimate goal and is achieved through the grace of the Lord and my modest efforts.

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Fourth Sunday

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

We hope to be more honest this coming year, more spiritual and closer to God who is totally pure to achieve purity of heart.

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SONGS 🎵

THE NEW YEAR

*“You crown the year with Your goodness and Your paths drip with abundance.”
(Ps 65:11)*

REFRAIN

Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness And Thy paths drip with fatness,
Our hearts overflow with gladness And our lips rejoice with thankfulness

Come ye thankful people, come
All be safely gathered in
God, our Maker, does provide
Come to God’s own temple, come

raise the song of harvest—home
before the winter storms begin
for our wants to be supplied
raise the song of harvest-home

All this world is God’s own field
Wheat and tares together sown
First the blade and then the ear
Lord of harvest, grant that we

fruit unto His praise to yield
unto joy or sorrow grown
then the full corn shall appear
wholesome grain and pure may be

For the Lord our God shall come
From His field shall purge away
Gave His angels charge, at last
But the fruitful wheat to store

and shall take His harvest home
all that does offend today
in the fire the tares to cast
in His barn for evermore.

Then, thou Church triumphant come
All be safely gathered in
There forever purified
Come, ten thousands angels, come

raise the song of harvest-home
free from sorrow, free from sin
in God’s garner to abide
raise the song of harvest-home

December

Fourth Sunday

THE NEW YEAR PRAYER

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Lord, make it a blessed year...
A pure year to please You...
A year in which Your Spirit prevails...
And joins in working with us...
Hold our hands and guide our thoughts from the beginning of the year till its end...

Let this year be Yours, to please You...
It is a New Year, spotless; let us not tarnish it with our sins or impurities...
Lord, be with us in every work we intend to do this year...
Silent we will be and you will do everything...
Let us rejoice in all Your deeds, and say with John the Evangelist:
"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (Jn 1:3)

Let this year, O Lord, be a happy year...
Put a smile on each face and gladden every heart...
Let Your grace emerge in our trials and help those who are tempted...
Grant us peace and quietness of mind...
Give those who are in need, cure the sick and console the grieved...

We do not ask You, God, only for ourselves...
But we ask for the whole, because they are Yours...
You created them to rejoice in You. Then make them happy with You...
We ask You for the Church, for Your mission, that your word may reach every heart...
We ask you for our Country, for the world's peace that Your Kingdom may come everywhere.

Let it be a fruitful year, full of goodness...
Every day and every hour has its own work...
Do not allow a futile moment...
Fill our life with activity, work, and production...
Grant us the blessing of a productive and holy toil.
Let the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us in all our deeds...

We thank you, God, for you have kept us till this hour and granted us this year, that we may bless you...



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January

First Sunday



**JANUARY
FIRST SUNDAY**

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

- † Christmas Songs
- † Thank God for the previous year
- † Preparation for the new year

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SONGS 🎵

THE NEW YEAR

*“You crown the year with Your goodness and Your paths drip with abundance.”
(Ps 65:11)*

REFRAIN

Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness And Thy paths drip with fatness,
Our hearts overflow with gladness And our lips rejoice with thankfulness

Come ye thankful people, come raise the song of harvest-home
All be safely gathered in before the winter storms begin
God, our Maker, does provide for our wants to be supplied
Come to God’s own temple, come raise the song of harvest-home

All this world is God’s own field fruit unto His praise to yield
Wheat and tares together sown unto joy or sorrow grown
First the blade and then the ear then the full corn shall appear
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be

For the Lord our God shall come and shall take His harvest home
From His field shall purge away all that does offend today
Gave His angels charge, at last in the fire the tares to cast
But the fruitful wheat to store in His barn for evermore.

Then, thou Church triumphant come raise the song of harvest-home
All be safely gathered in free from sorrow, free from sin
There forever purified in God’s garner to abide
Come, ten thousands angels, come raise the song of harvest-home

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First Sunday



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**JANUARY
SECOND SUNDAY**

OUR NEED FOR CHRIST

Please read the attached material entitled “Our Need for Christ”, Matthew 2:1-12, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To understand that Christ is the sole need for our life.

MEMORY VERSE

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” Luke 2:11

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

As humans we need food, water, shelter, and so on but as Christians what do we need?

† Please let the students read in the class Matthew 2:1-12 and discuss the good news and the wise men from the east visiting the Child Jesus. “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2). And the Jews who were waiting and waiting for Christ answered them immediately saying “In Bethlehem of Judea” (Matthew 2:5).

† **Introduction**

Christ, the Desire of all Nations:

Christ, the desire of all nations, was the one that Haggai prophesied saying, “I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all

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Second Sunday

nations, and they shall come to the Desire **of All Nations**" (Haggai 2:6-7).

Before Christ, darkness has filled the world and the inner and outer life of the people. The world had two unequal groups: a very small minority who were the Jews and a very great majority who were the Gentiles. The best description for the status of the Gentiles before Christ is in Romans 1:18-32, a life of total corruption. The Jews as well, although they were supposed to follow the Law, they had a hidden darkness and corruption prevailed. They were called "Brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7) and "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51).

Therefore, the men of God in the Old Testament were so anxious for the Messiah the Saviour to come:

"Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down" (Isaiah 64:1).

"You who dwell between the cherubim shine forth! Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength and come and save us!" (Psalm 80:1-2)

After all this desire and long waiting, what was the great need for Christ? Or what did He give humanity?

- † Christ is the sole need of our life. The more distant we are from Him, the greater is our need for the material things of this world, and the more is our worrying regarding things of this life.

† **Human Nature:**

It has two contradictory elements: the carnal and the spiritual. The two are opposing each other. Reconciliation between the ideals of the spirit and the realities of the flesh was impossible in the Old Testament.

† **Christ Appears in Full Humanity and Full Divinity:**

The reconciliation fulfilled by Christ is a personal conciliation achieved in Christ Himself through His power. The result surpasses human understanding.

† **Man is Reconciled to Himself:**

Man is reconciled to himself, for God was reconciled in the body of our humanity which belongs to Christ. Hence we say confidentially that we are

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reconciled with God in Christ. It is a highly personal reconciliation, a sort of unique mediation undertaken by this sole mediator, Christ, between God and man.

† When Christ Enters our Life:

- 1) When Christ enters our life our problems fall at once and we rise to the level of Christ's commandments without the least personal skill, i.e., through Christ in our life the two opposing forces of physical and spiritual power disappear.

Without Christ we cannot do Christ's commandments. The Lord said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is He who loves Me." (John 14:21), i.e., first Christ's person, then follows all that is Christ's.

- 2) When Christ enters our life we live with Him and in Him. The Lord Jesus Christ talked about Himself saying "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst," (John 6:35). Then Jesus continued saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:47-51). This means that Christ is the substance of our life.

Also, Christ is the living water without which no one can live. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14).

Therefore, when Jesus called Himself "the bread of life" and "the living water" it is clear to us how essential is the Lord Jesus for our life.

† Net Result:

Humanity will remain meaningless and miserable until it finds God. It will not find God except in Christ who took our flesh: worked with it, suffered with it and then died on the Cross with it. Then Christ took this flesh and rose it from the dead and ascended it to heaven. As it is said in one of our church hymns "He took what we have and gave us what He has." He sanctifies all aspects of our life; our bodies, our souls, our minds and our gifts.

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Second Sunday

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Let us make sure that life to me is to have Christ live in me; if Christ truly lives in me, then I am reconciled with myself and with God as well.
- (2) As I carry Christ in me I have a duty towards the society that I live in. I must be a candle in this world. I must defend the truth of the Gospel. I should never be silent against any of corruption of the world.

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SONGS 🎵

WE COME TO WORSHIP YOU

"They saw the young Child with Mary His Mother, and fell down and worshipped Him" (Mat 2:11)

Oh Holy Child, Oh Holy Light
Oh Glorious sight

Now in your presence
We praise you

Babe in a manger gift supreme
Oh glorious king

the prince of Heaven
will reign forever

REFRAIN

We come to worship you
Lord no one else will come before you

to praise and magnify, honor, adore You
You fill our life, our every need

We come to worship You
Oh Lord most high Oh Lord most Holy

to Lift your Name, exalt, proclaim, adore You, Your glory
we come to worship You

Bring now on me. Set this spirit free
Till Your face I shall see

come now in Your glory
You are the face I shall see

We come to worship You
Oh Lord most high, Oh Lord most Holy

To lift Your name, exalt. Proclaim, your glory
we come to worship You

We come to worship You
To praise You with a song Oh

to honor You
my dear Saviour we Come to worship You

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OUR NEED FOR CHRIST

The greatest experience which strongly drew my attention during my early Christian life is that whenever I felt want of so many things in my dealings with the people, the church or the monks, I got so distressed and agonized that my energy, ministry and influence upon others were consequently emasculated. But the moment I approach the person of my Lord Jesus and become aware of Him as though He were coming back after an absence of which I was always the cause, my heart leaps with joy and my mind gathers up so that all sense of want falls away from me and Christ rises over the horizon of my whole life. Then I see Him more than all my needs and feel His fullness overflowing and sweeping my life in the tide of His love which transcends the mind.

In the same measure I had this sense whenever I was so troubled with storming thoughts about the ways of God and His care for individuals and people that my spirit was sorely distressed within me. For I was always eager to see God supreme at all levels, of mercy or of justice and chastening, of tender fatherhood or sovereignty and grace, and remained thus torn asunder with conflicting feelings which gave me no rest or peace. But once I feel Him approaching me, my soul calms down immediately, all my questions and worries vanish from me, and Christ appears transcending all my mental criteria concerning mercy or justice, fatherhood or sovereignty. At such moments Christ reveals to us the mystery of His will.

Through these two experiences, I have been assured that Christ is the sole need of our life, and that the more distant we are from Him the greater our needs for so many things of this world, and the more our worrying regarding things particular or general in our life.

Why then is it that the person of Christ appears in this way as though He were the fullness of everything and the sole answer which copes with a thousand questions, or rather does away with every question?

To answer this we must realize that human nature comprises two contradictory worlds, the physical and the spiritual. This spiritual world, which runs through man's being, contrasts with a materialistic and degenerate reality in the life of man which leads him to commit acts of utter baseness. A man may kill his brother for a morsel of bread or sell his heavenly heritage for a meal of pottage (Gen. 27). The history of civilization, philosophy and science proves that there is no hope of establishing a natural reconciliation in the tension and disruption inherent in man's being between the ideals of the spirit and the realities of the flesh — whether through the interference of wisdom, the refinement of skills or the mere following of the commandments of God. For as soon as human instincts rage, man rebels against all spiritual values, and a temporary spiritual blindness overpowers him and drives him to commit the grossest transgressions even against himself.

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Here appears Christ in his full humanity and full divinity as the great miracle which reconciled the human reality — apparent in man's instincts and passions in his dealings with the world, and his needs and infirmities — with spiritual ideals, or rather with God Himself. The conciliation is complete, perpetual and eternal, deeply rooted in the depth of man himself, for all that belongs to Christ has come to belong to mankind.

Here Christ has become at once man's miracle and God's miracle — man's miracle because He has reached the depth of God's nature, and God's miracle because He has penetrated to the depth of man's nature. In order to enter into the light of this miracle we have to realize that this conciliation does not rest on a theory however elaborate, nor on the mere following of commandments. The conciliation fulfilled by Christ is a personal conciliation achieved in Christ Himself, not through our power but through His power, and the result surpasses the mind of man. It is enough to realize that the moment it was fulfilled through the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ, it comprised all humanity in the person of Jesus who represents it before God the Father.

Man is reconciled to himself, for God was concealed in the body of our humanity which belongs to Christ and which He took from us. Hence we say confidently and succinctly that we are reconciled with God in Christ. It is a highly personal reconciliation, a sort of unique mediation undertaken by this sole mediator, Christ, between God and man, giving rise to a new force which entered earth or rather heaven.

The lesser and weaker image of our Christianity is our vain attempts to apply the commandments of Christ to our daily problems without Christ Himself, while the stronger and greater image is obtained when "the person of Christ" enters our life. Then all our problems fall at once and we rise to the level of Christ's commandments without the least personal skill.

The bitterness experienced by the Christian within himself as a result of the daily disruption whenever he comes up against Christ's commandments and finds himself incapable of catching up with them although he loves them, is the outcome of his attempt to fulfill the commandments of Christ without Christ, which is impossible. Christ laid down the commandment that we may prove by it His presence: "Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified." (2 Cor. 13:5)

Hence the Lord says: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me" (John 14:21) in the sense that he who loves me is he who can follow my commandments. First Christ's person, then follow all that is Christ's.

The Christian is required at all times to declare his Christianity before Christians and

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non-Christians alike. This persistent demand puts him in a perpetual tension, for he is bound to rise to the level of truth that he may see and reveal it, and to the level of faith that he may act in accordance with it before he declares it, or else he would disgrace himself and Christ alike.

But who can declare Christ who is unattainable in His stature? For He is the zenith of all that is in heaven and earth, and He recapitulates everything in His own person. Above all He is the visible image of God the invisible. Therefore who can declare or interpret Him? The mind of man, his eloquence, his logic—all fall short of this.

Christ alone is capable of revealing Christ; whenever I feel Him approaching me I lay down all my weapons, or rather they fall off on their own accord. He alone is the mouthpiece of my truth and faith who speaks within me. He can reveal Himself in countless ways and with inexpressible ease, for the person of Christ is an infinite force that reveals itself in man without any effort on the part of man. Rather the effort of man is the major impediment to the revelation of Christ. Our greatest need is to feel His coming to us and to receive Him with all our being, then leave Him to speak and act within us.

The critical attitude of others toward our Christianity is not focused on the person of Christ but on the absence of Christ from our Christianity. If Christ in His “divinity” were present in our lives nobody would find fault with the divinity of Christ.

People stumble at Christ because they put Christ in their lives on the same level as other needs, the level of seeking their bread, and even the level of pleasure, diversion, knowledge and politics. Christ within them then appears a thousand times less than His real stature. Since Christ is God, He should be higher and greater than everything in our life, even greater than our life itself. Our dire need is that our Christianity be Christ Himself and not our principles, ambitions, pride, malice or lust for the vain worldly glory which we conceal behind the name of Christ.

People do not hate Christ at all. Christ is beloved and indeed He is the “Son of Love”—love itself with all its depth which every man craves. But people do hate our character, our behavior and our false traits which we falsely attribute to the name of Christ.

The discrepancy between Christianity and Christ has more than ever become manifest in us and even out crying against us. Our deeds and words merely proceed as Christian, but they never proceed from Christ. They are devoid of the fragrant spirit of Christ; no wonder then that our Christianity is not liked by people.

Our greatest need is to appeal once more to the person of Christ that He may show up in our life. Then will emerge an awakening where our false deeds are swept away to give place to the deeds of truth which witness to Him with any interference by our mortal skill. People want to come to Christ not to our earthly persons. Do we accept

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this? The major problem that obstructs our way to Christ is that, although we get hold of Christ, yet in time of danger or fatigue, it is not Christ that is manifest but ourselves.

Most dangerous in this delusion is that we seem good in our eyes, and so we find it needless to let go of ourselves and get hold of Christ, while the real Christ remains hidden from the eyes and ears of people. Even if our inner selves sometimes appear to us mean, false and delusive as they preach Christ while Christ is totally absent from them, they are incapable of transformation and lack the conviction to take the risk and die, so that Christ may revive them for Himself. For life in terms of this world is so delectable to the soul that seeks its own glory, particularly when it seeks backing from Scriptural sayings and thus takes the form of false resplendent glory. This self-seeking soul cannot be detected except by those who possess the true light of Christ. When are we going to believe the verse which says: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake" (2Cor. 4:5)?

Many preachers attempted to preach and win people but could not without the action of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence and significance of testimony which is affected through the mediation of the Holy Spirit who knows all that belongs to Christ and is eager to witness Him in us properly. How many times have we grieved the Holy Spirit and obstructed His testimony by utilizing the testimony of Jesus for our own glory and interest! We badly need to be delivered from ourselves. Do we accept this?

Who will read the life of Jesus Christ and will not feel in his heart that Christ is the most beautiful and most clear image of God? If God is Christ, then God is actually a loving and compassionate Father, while an infinitely omnipotent God. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9)

Humanity will remain miserable until it finds God, and it will not find God except in Christ. Christ would have found in our lives an opportunity to prove His eternal power and divinity, that men may believe that He is truly the Son of God, and attain salvation and eternal life through Him, and that they may truly see the Father in Him. But we are to blame for impeding belief in Christ by presenting ourselves instead of the real Christ, so that our humanity is glorified at the expense of His divinity.

The redemptive work of Christ, in the last analysis, sums up our becoming like Him, bearing His qualities once He has filled our life and reigned on us, not through teaching and instruction, but as St. Paul says, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." (Eph. 3:17)

If Christ dwelt in men and they consequently adopted His qualities, this would mean that humanity transcended itself and bypassed all its impotence, illness and death, and entered upon its glorified phase which is by no means related to its dead earthly

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Second Sunday

heritage. This is man's new creation, and the divine power of Christ to uplift man over himself so that he may surpass it and, through Christ's power and effective life, enter the field of action and divine liberty. Man would then freely, consciously and joyfully respond to God and all His intimations. This is the future of the new man in Christ, and this is his new birth. Hence Christ was truly named Adam the Second.

How then can we be born to God without Christ? This is impossible.

Let us not forget that Christ founded His work in mankind upon the Cross. Although the Cross entered the life of Christ as primarily a redemptive act, He handed it to us as a model of life and behavior. He who does not live or think in terms of the Cross shall never realize the glory of Christ which He attained through the Cross, nor shall he understand and value the real significance of redemption. But if we experience the Cross in our life and taste it with consciousness and joy; this will be the mystical initiation to the knowledge and glory of His power. Through communion in the sufferings of the Cross we enter with Christ in an eternal covenant as inheritors to all the glories and consolations of the Father in heaven.

How wonderful is the mystery of Christ, nay, the mystery of Christ in man! In Christ, the Father finds His "rest" or "Sabbath" as He finds the representative of all humanity in the obedience of love. Also, in Christ, humanity finds its "rest" or "Sabbath" as it finds God's love in its perfect form.

*** Note: "Mina El Khalas" Magazine – St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Troy, Mich. USA.**

NOTES

[illegible]

January

Third Sunday



**JANUARY
THIRD SUNDAY**

THE CIRCUMCISION FEAST

Please read Luke 2:21-39, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn that two things happened in the circumcision feast: the Lord Jesus was circumcised and was given the name Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE

“And when eight days were completed forth circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus “Luke 2:21

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

†Our Church Celebrates 14 Feasts for our Lord Jesus

- 7 Major Feasts for Jesus our Master:

- 1) The Annunciation
- 2) Birth of Christ
- 3) Epiphany
- 4) Palm Sunday
- 5) Easter
- 6) Ascension
- 7) Pentecost

- 7 Minor Feasts for Jesus our Master:

- 1) Circumcision
- 2) His first entry to the altar (the feast of Presentation)
- 3) The flight to Egypt
- 4) The wedding at Cana Galilee

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- 5) Transfiguration
- 6) Last Supper
- 7) Thomas' Sunday

† Please discuss these 14 feasts briefly with the students. They are called "The Lord's Feasts". Seven of them are major and seven are minor.

† In the circumcision feast two things happened as the memory verse indicates: Jesus was circumcised and also was given the name Jesus.

A) The Circumcision of the Savior:

Why was Jesus Circumcised?

For three reasons:

1) He was Circumcised as a Son of Abraham:

As a Jew from Israel he had all the responsibilities and duties of the Jews. God made an agreement with Abraham that circumcision becomes a sign of all his people to distinguish them from all other people (Genesis 17).

St. Paul said "Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers" (Romans 15:8).

Hence, Jesus as Man born from the loins of Abraham was also circumcised as St. Paul said "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17).

2) Jesus was Circumcised to Fulfill the Law:

St. Paul said, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4).

Jesus also said to John the Baptist: "Permit it to be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

3) Jesus was Circumcised when He was in the Flesh to Lead us to be Circumcised in the Heart by the Spirit:

Circumcision in itself is only a symbol of purity that represents rejection of the sinful life and having purity of heart.

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Moses said, “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart” (Deuteronomy 10:16).

Moses also said, “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

St. Paul said, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15).

In his feast Jesus is calling on us to purify our lives and our hearts.

As Jesus accepted circumcision while He was young, our young children accept baptism through which we accept Christ who purifies us from our sins. St. Paul said “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross” (Colossians 2:11-14).

The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) indicated the insignificance of circumcision in the New Testament and gave all the importance to the new birth through Baptism and the life according to God’s commandments. St. Paul said “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Corinthians 7:19).

B) Naming Him Jesus:

- When Abraham was circumcised, he was given a new name to suit his faith, His name was Abram, then he was called Abraham which means a Father to many nations.
- Christ was called Jesus on the day of His circumcision as He was called by the angel before He was conceived in St. Mary’s womb. And when the angel appeared in a dream to Joseph, he said to him: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21).

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- The name “Jesus” means the Saviour. This is the work of Christ:

† **Salvation from the Snares of Sin:**

Jesus said “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Zacharias the priest said “to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear. In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74-75).

† **Salvation from the Wages or the Result of Sin:**

The wages of sin is death. The One who saved us now will also save us from death, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55)

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Let us totally attach ourselves to our Lord Jesus so that we gain the purity of heart, salvation from our sins and eternal life.
- (2) Since we were baptized and Chrismated we became Christians and must lead a pure life. God did not create us to live a mixed life of good and bad; but just one good life away from sin. This similar to circumcision which need to happen once.

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Third Sunday

[SONGS](#) 🎵

GOSPEL RESPONSE FOR CIRCUMCISION FEAST

Alleluia, Alleluia.
Isos Pekhrestos epshiri emevnoti
afshia eron empisebi
Fai ere pi-o-ou...

Alleluia Alleluia.
Jesus Christ, the Son of God
Accepted the Circumcision
This is to Whom...

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[illegible]

January

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**JANUARY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

EPIPHANY — CHRIST THE LOWLY IN HEART

Please read Matthew 3:13-17, John 1:18-34 and Matthew 11:25-29, the attached notes “The Baptism of Jesus Christ”, the attached material entitled “Three Virtues” and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn that the Lord Jesus is teaching us a lesson to be lowly and humble.

MEMORY VERSE

*“I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him
“John 1:32*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Please review the main events that lead to St. John baptizing the Lord Jesus (see attached material).
- † The word Epiphany is a Greek word which means “showing forth” or “manifestation”. In this event, Jesus Christ was not only declared by God, the Father, to be His only Begotten Son, but also He showed forth the three Persons of the Holy Trinity; the Father speaking from heaven, the Son in the Jordan River being baptized and the Holy Spirit descending from heaven as a dove.
- † On Christmas eve, we see Jesus who is God of heaven and earth being very lowly and humble. He chose to be born in a manger. After 30 years from His birth we see Him coming from Nazareth to Jordan to St. John the Baptist to be baptized by him.

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- † The baptism of St. John was for repentance. It was also a preparation for the forgiveness of sins on the Holy Cross. St. John's baptism was to be replaced by Christian baptism or the baptism of water and Spirit.
- † A great number of people came to John to repent and be baptized and to cleanse themselves from their sins; Jesus who had no sin came with those. Certainly, He was gentle and lowly as He said: "learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29).
- † St. John felt he could not put his hand on the head of Jesus therefore he said, "I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14), but Jesus answered and said to him "Permit it to be so now".
- † Remember that St. John was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was in his mother's womb and "leaped with joy". Our Lord Jesus stated, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). But John felt that he is full of weaknesses and he needed to be baptized by Christ with the baptism of the spiritually purifying fire. So, St. John said, "I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me" (Matthew 3:14). This teaches us that it is good for every person to know the reality of his life. Let us not praise ourselves. Let us learn from our Lord Jesus to be lowly. Jesus who is Son of God was lowly; how about us who are sinners and weak? The reality is that we should put ourselves last. When we put ourselves last, then we can gain the blessings of God. As St. Mary said, "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52).
- † Elizabeth the mother of John had the same feeling when St. Mary visited her and said to St. Mary, "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43)
- † All the saints have one thing in common: they are all lowly in heart. If they were not, they would not be able to gain the grace of God. If they cannot get the grace of God, no matter what they do of personal efforts, they cannot be saints.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) The Lord Jesus who is God was humble. We are weak and sinners and should not be proud of ourselves over other people.
- (2) The meaning of the word “Epiphany” is manifestation.
- (3) Although Jesus was very lowly, He was exalted by the declaration from heaven: the Holy Spirit descending as a dove on Him and the voice of God the Father saying: “This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”
- (4) Every time we feel and behave in a lowly way, excellent achievement will happen because God will help us. The reverse in time; If we behave in pride, we will not benefit from the mercy of God on us.

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Fourth Sunday

SONGS 🎵

THE EPIPHANY

“...This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Mat 3:17)

On Epiphany every year
We celebrate once a year

we are happy with one accord
the baptism of our Lord

On the Jordan shores there stood
Preaching, teaching, all good

John the Baptist baptizing
the people repent, sin despising

Jesus came to John the saintly
He said “ No, I am not worthy

asking him to be baptized
I am in need to be baptized”

Jesus stood in the Jordan
John saw the Holy Spirit

to be baptized by John instead
as a dove above Christ’s head

There opened were the heavens
This is My Beloved Son

the voice of the Father heeded
in whom I am well pleased

We are immersed in baptism
Our sins are forgiven

three times in holy water
new birth we have with our Father

Alleluia, Alleluia
Jesus Christ the Son of God

Alleluia, Alleluia
was baptized in the Jordan

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THREE VIRTUES

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Three virtues should be in each moral goodness to make it a real virtue: love, humility and wisdom.

Any valuable quality void of love is not considered a virtue. The same applies to any virtue void of humility and wisdom.

Any action far from love is far from God.

God takes from each virtue the amount of love that is in it. If He finds no love, He casts it away completely.

Also any virtue that has no humility, is rejected by God and considered food for self righteousness and vain glory. Pride is most hated by God. The Bible said, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet 5:5)

Therefore, each virtue should be practised in wisdom, understanding and discretion... Without wisdom and understanding, virtue is not considered a virtue...

For this reason, the Saints used to practise the virtues under the supervision of wise, knowledgeable fathers, to teach them how to be discrete and explain to them how a virtue should be...

History tells us about those who acted in virtue without knowledge and how they fell and perished...

Many dealt with fasting without wisdom and were exhausted both physically and spiritually. Many adopted silence without wisdom and fell in many problems and faults. To them, silence was not a virtue.

Others dealt with offering without knowledge. They gave God's money to swindlers, instead of giving it to the needy...

Therefore, St Anthony said that being discrete is one of the greatest virtues, as it controls and considers all of them...

Pastoral care and service without discretion could complicate matters instead of settling them. Accordingly, our fathers, the Apostles made it conditional that deacons must be, "... full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom..." (Act 6:3)

Wisdom gives a virtue depth and truthfulness... And love gives a virtue depth a virtue sentiment and feeling...

As for humility, it hides virtue from the devil's envy, and by this, gives its possessor modesty as well as affection in the hearts of people...

Let us examine ourselves: are what we have deep inside us virtues?

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Fourth Sunday

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST

January 19

(according to the Julian Calendar)

Geographical Setting:

At the very end of the Jordan River and just before it spills its waters into the Dead Sea, there is a shallow area in the river that could be crossed by wading called now the ford of 'Bethabara' (the crossing way). There, for many years, merchants and travelers from Arabia, Persia and India have crossed the river on their way to Jerusalem, Egypt and Africa. It is a very rugged spot. During the summer, the heat is terrible, the air is heavy, and the surface of the Dead Sea is the color of lead. There too was located the lost cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13-19). The smell of Sulphur still hangs in the air as if to remind man forever that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom.6:23).

Winter is a bit better because a cooling breeze blows down the Jordan Valley in the evening to replace the heat of summer.

Introduction

In this unfriendly spot of land, one day, a prophet or a messenger of God appeared around the year A.D. 30. He was strange, rough looking man. His only garment was camel skin caught at the waist by a strip of leather. His food was locusts and wild honey.

The message of that man was not more attractive than his appearance. He cried to everyone who passed by and, out of curiosity, stopped a moment to listen: "The reign of God is about to begin. Right now, God has His axe set ready at the base of the tree of your life. Unless you repent of your wicked ways, and submit your life to His rule, He will chop you down and throw you into the fire."

However, there was a happy side to his preaching. Everyone who truly repented would be forgiven. But, how would the repentant be forgiven? The messenger did not explain. Instead, he led his hearers to the river's edge and dipped their sweaty, dust-covered bodies into the refreshing water. Just as the water of the Jordan River cleansed their bodies, so God would clean their filthy, sin stained souls. The prophet called this 'baptism'. That is why we call that messenger of God 'John the Baptist'.

The word 'baptism' is derived from the Greek word 'baptismos' which means 'emersion'.

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Crowds Come to John the Baptist:

In the early Jewish tradition, and until the coming of the Messiah, God used to send every hundred years or so a prophet to preach to the Jews to return back to their God and to foretell about the coming of the Messiah, the Savior who would release them from their bondage. When John the Baptist appeared at the Jordan River, it was more than 300 years since the Jews had a prophet to tell them, "Thus saith the Lord...". The Jews were waiting for either another prophet or the Messiah Himself. Therefore, the word spread like fire through the land, "There is a new prophet preaching at the Jordan river. There is a message that has come from God."

The Baptism of the Messiah:

People came from far and near to see and listen to the new prophet. Among the crowds were the rich and the poor, the officials of the church and those of the government, the sophisticated and the plain ordinary people. As they listened, their consciences awoke and they remembered their past sins. They streamed into the water to be baptized by John ... to be cleansed from their sins.

One day, someone asked another, "Can this be the promised Saviour, the Messiah?" In few minutes, everyone was asking the same question. Right away John answered: "I am only a voice crying in the wilderness, a voice preparing you for the coming of the Saviour. Soon, someone will come after me, someone greater than I that I am not fit to untie His shoes. He will baptize you with the fire of the Holy Spirit."

Among the crowds, there was a stranger from a faraway city called Galilee. He also stepped into the water to be baptized. But this particular man was different from all other men.

This man alone has no sins. He is the only Man who does not need to be baptized. Why then does He join the wicked and the sinners at the water's edge? This thought came to John himself, and the Baptist said to Jesus Christ: "It is I who need baptism from you, and yet You come to me?" But Jesus insisted ... Do you know why? Because Jesus is carrying on His back a heavy burden ... all the sins of all those people who ever lived or will ever live who trust God's salvation. That is why He is called the Saviour.

Something else happened at His baptism. After His emersion into the water, as Jesus stood up, suddenly above His head, as if a crack happened in the sky, and the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove and rested on Him; and God the Father Himself said: "This is my Son, the Beloved, my favor rests on Him." (Matthew 3 and Luke 3)



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Epiphany in the Orthodox Church:

We, in the Orthodox Church, consider this event, the Baptism of Jesus Christ, one of the major feasts of the church. It is called the 'Epiphany' which is a Greek word that means 'showing forth' or 'manifestation'. In this event, Jesus Christ was not only declared by God the Father to be His only Begotten Son, but it shows forth also the three Persons of the Holy Trinity; the Father speaks from heaven, the Son in the Jordan River being baptized, and the Holy Spirit descends from heaven taking the shape of a dove.

On Epiphany eve, and just before the Divine Liturgy, a special service is held in the Orthodox Church, It is called the 'Lankan' which means 'the blessing of the water', This is to commemorate the blessing of the water of the Jordan by having Christ baptized in it and by having the Holy Spirit descended on our Lord while standing in it. In this service, the priest asks God's blessing of this water. He says: "Bless this water that is set before Thee and give it the blessing that you gave to the Jordan by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Let it be a fountain of blessing, a holy gift, a healer of the sickness of the body and the soul... and a blessing to the homes ..."

At the end of the service, the priest blesses the people with that water by crossing their foreheads three times. The people also fill small bottles with that water and take them home to use when there is sickness in the family or to bless a new home, office, business, car, etc.

*** Note: From "The Building" Magazine, St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Scarborough, Canada.**



CONTEMPLATION ON THE EPIPHANY (EL GHETAS)

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Adam sinned and did not ask for forgiveness or seek it...

As for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy and the only one without sin, **He stood in front of the Baptist as a repentant, representing Adam and his descendants. The Lord offered on their behalf, a baptism of repentance in its most sublime form.**

He carried their sins not only during his crucifixion, but in His life as a Son of Man. Therefore, God was pleased with Him and said, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Mt. 3:17)

It does not please God to see one justifying himself, finding excuses as Adam and Eve did. Instead of judging themselves in front of God they started blaming some one else.

The Lord Jesus did not blame anyone. He took the sin of another, carried it instead of him and offered a baptism of repentance. Therefore, He pleased the Father who said, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Mt. 3:17)

The one who is without sin, carried sin for our sake... He did not feel ashamed to walk forward with the sinners and ask his servant, John, to baptize Him. When the great prophet became shy of the situation, He gently said to him, *"Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* (Mt. 3:15)

By doing this He gave us a practical lesson. **He gave a lesson to carry the sins of others...**

To happily pay the price on their behalf...

Not to justify ourselves, no matter how innocent we are...

And by this we fulfill all righteousness...

Would you be able to train yourself to gain this virtue?

St. John Chrysostom says, "If you are unable to carry the sins of others and relate them to yourself, try at least not to judge another, and let him carry your sins..."

If we fail to carry the sins of other people, try at least to endure their failings towards us and forgive them...

In this manner, we become like Christ, and become worthy of being called sons of God. And with the same kindness that we deal with people, God is going to deal with us...

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Fourth Sunday

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January

Fifth Sunday



**JANUARY
FIFTH SUNDAY**

**THOSE WHO WALK IN PRIDE, GOD IS ABLE TO
ABASE**

Please read Daniel Chapters 4 and 5, the attached summary of Daniel and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

Two kings: Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar both were crushed by God because they did not fear Him and they were very severe on God's people. Let us not walk in pride.

MEMORY VERSE

"Your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules "Daniel 4:26

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Review the events that led to the severe punishment of the two kings Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar.
- † King Nebuchadnezzar did not believe in God. When He defeated the Hebrews, he took some prisoners with him , such as Daniel.
- † Daniel was talented in explaining the dreams. King Nebuchadnezzar behaved like an animal for seven years because he walked in pride This was foretold by Daniel
- † When his son became a king, he did the same mistake. He ordered the vessels of

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gold and silver which his father brought from the temple in Jerusalem to be brought, so that the king and his people drink can wine from them. Immediately, as soon as they started to drink from them, a man's hand appeared and wrote on the wall some words that were explained later by Daniel as: MENE = God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end, TEKEL = you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting and PARSIN = your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

† After Daniel explained these writings to the king, the King was slain on the same night and everything happened as Daniel explained.

† **“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6):**

- God resists the proud. The sin of pride is hated by God because the proud person is like a thief who is stealing glory, honor and greatness from God, the only one who deserves these things. God rejects that as He says “I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 42:8).

No wonder that we say that God hates the sin of pride more than anything. Although God hates sin in general because it is a rebellion against His Divine nature, He hates in particular the sin of pride. This sin contains several other sins. Therefore, St. James said, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

The proud is deprived of the Divine grace and this is the worst state in which man can ever fall.

- * The sin which made Satan to fall from his heavenly rank and become the devil was the sin of pride. Satan said, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds” Isaiah 14:14. Then Satan tempted Adam and Eve with the same sin of pride when he said, “You will be like God, knowing good and evil” Gen 3:5. Therefore, the person who is living in pride wants to make himself or herself equal to God.

† **Do you want to know whether you are proud or humble?**

Answer the following questions:

- Do you enjoy hearing people praise you?
- Do you get mad at people blaming you?
- Do you find it difficult to obey your parents?
- Do you find it difficult to accept an advice or guidance from

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someone?

- How do you feel towards people that are less than you in knowledge, wisdom, righteousness and money?

Let us answer these questions quite honestly so that we can have a fair assessment of ourselves towards this sin.

† **How can a person deal with his pride?**

- Refer all goodness to the work of God.
- Hide your righteousness and talents and do not talk about them in front of others. “When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, we are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). Hide your virtues so that you can grow.
- Remember your sins. “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:3).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us review our behavior and realize whether we are proud or humble. Let us pray that God would help us to know our real-self and honestly face our weaknesses and hence we can humble ourselves.

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SONGS 🎵

O TAKE MY HAND DEAR SAVIOUR

“Lead me and guide me .. For You are my strength.” (Ps 31:3,4)

O take my hand Dear Saviour
Till at my journey's ending

and please lead me
I'll dwell with Thee

REFRAIN

I need Thee, O Lord
O bless me, my Lord

I need Thee
I come to Thee

Thou Mighty God of ages
When the tempest rages

O be Thou near
I need not fear

When evening shadows lengthen
My faith heart Saviour strengthen

the night has come
and bring me home

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**THOSE WHO WALK IN PRIDE
GOD IS ABLE TO ABASE
SUMMARY**

One time Nebuchadnezzar had another troubling dream which he could not understand. He called all his magicians who, as it turned out, could not interpret it. Then he told it to Daniel:

“I saw a great tree in the midst of the earth. It grew so high that it reached to heaven. Its leaves were beautiful, it gave much fruit, the beasts could rest in its shade and the birds of the air nested in it. Then an angel came and said, “Hew down the tree, cut off the branches; shake off the leaves and scatter the fruit, But let the stump remain in the earth, and let a beast’s mind be given it instead of a man’s for seven years.”

At first Daniel refused to tell the king what the dream meant. Finally, he said, “The tree which grew so fair and strong is you. For seven years you will be driven out, away from all people. You will live with the beasts of the field, and you will eat grass as they do until you realize that the Most High God rules and gives the kingdom to whomsoever He wills.”

It happened as Daniel had predicted. For seven years the king lived like an animal. But then he lifted his eyes to heaven and his reason returned to him.

After Nebuchadnezzar’s death, his son Belshazzar succeeded to the throne. One day he entertained a thousand of his lords at a great feast, When he was drinking the wine, he suddenly ordered the gold and silver cups, the holy cups that his father had taken when he captured the temple in Jerusalem, be brought in so that his princes and wives could drink from them. Just at that moment, the king saw the fingers of a man on the wall. The king grew pale and his knees began to shake. He called for the magicians and astrologers and promised great rewards to anyone who could read the writing. No one could. Then the queen remembered Daniel and suggested that he be brought to the king.

When he came in, he told the king, “Although you knew how God punished your father for his pride, yet you have raised yourself up against the Lord of heaven, using the very cups of His temple for your wine-drinking, while you praise the gods of silver, gold and wood and stone, gods which can neither see nor hear. And you have not glorified the God who holds your life in His hands. Therefore, this is the message which He sends to you in the handwriting:

Mene, Tekel, Parsin.

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“And this is the interpretation: Mene means numbered. God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. Tekel means weighed. You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Parsin means divided. Your kingdom will be divided between the Medes and the Persians.

Daniel was honored, even given third rank in the kingdom, but Belshazzar was slain that very night.

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**FEBRUARY
FIRST SUNDAY**

THE ORTHODOX CREED (I)

Please read the attached material entitled “Our Coptic Orthodox Doctrine”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson one of a four-lesson series on our Orthodox Creed. In this lesson we study the first part of the creed.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

Can anyone say the Creed? What does it mean?

†Historical:

- 1) The first part of the creed was written in the year 325 by the council of Nicea which was attended by 318 bishops from all over the world. This first part ends just before “Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit...”. Pope Alexandros represented the Coptic Church and brought with him his deacon Athanasius. The council was held because of the Heresy of Arius who said that Christ is not the eternal Son of God but He is merely a created being similar, in a way, to any other person. Alexandros tried his best to sway Arius from this wrong opinion but he rejected all advice.
- 2) Emperor Constantine attended the first meeting of the council of Nicea in which Athanasius was the hero, defending the Divinity of Christ in front of Arius and succeeded in getting the Council to decide on ex-communicating Arius.
- 3) The second part of the creed (from Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit up to the end) was written in the year 381 A.D. by the council held in Constantinople. This council was held because of the heresy of Macedonius

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who denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit.

† Truly We Believe in One God:

The statement “Truly we believe in one God” contains two facts: (A) the existence of God, (B) the Oneness of God.

A) The Existence of God:

The order in the world and the laws of nature is a clear proof of the existence of God. The general public usually says that, “no one saw God but people knew Him by their minds” and that is true. This means that no one has the ability to see God as He is, but one can judge using his mind that God exists and that He created the world in such an order from nothing. The Lord said to Moses, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). St. Paul also said “Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:16).

Truly we cannot see God now while we have these five senses in our nature: vision, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. But we will be able to see Him when we leave the limitation and thickness of our bodies, when we depart from this world to the next. As long as we are still in the limitation of this body we cannot see God. We cannot even see far away things or hear far away weak sounds. We cannot see the air, but we believe that air exists when it moves. Therefore, if you want to see God here in this world look at His creation and the mysterious order of nature and its laws, because all these things prove the existence of God.

Man with his senses alone cannot see or know God. But God in His love purifies our senses to accept the declaration of knowing God as a divine gift. However, this knowledge is only in part and becomes complete in the eternal life when we meet God face to face.

B) The Oneness of God:

Our church has a firm belief in the oneness of God. This means that God is One and that there is no other God. Unlike the pagans who believe in many gods, our church and our religion is a monotheistic one.

- In the Old Testament:

“I am the Lord, and there is no other, there is no God besides Me” (Isaiah 45:5).

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“Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior, there is none besides Me” (Isaiah 45:21).

- **In the New Testament:**

Our Lord Jesus said, “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Matt. 19:17), and also “There is no other God but One” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

- **The Unity and Oneness of the Holy Trinity:**

God is One in essence. He wanted to explain to us His essence and in order to do so He taught us about His Trinity or the Three Persons. Jesus said to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

When our Lord Jesus was baptized, the Three Persons of the Trinity (the One God) were manifested: the Father speaking, and the Son in the water and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. St. John said, “For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 John 5:7).

Therefore, we believe in Three Persons and in the One Essence of God and not in Three essences. When we cross ourselves we say: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God Amen”. So, we do not say in the names ... and we end it with “One God”. The Three Persons are equal and of the same essence. The Father is not begotten and is not proceeding from another Person, the Son is begotten from the Father and the Holy Spirit fourthly proceeds from the Father. Through this classification we can distinguish between the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

† **The Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all Things, Visible and Invisible:**

He created everything:

Visible: everything we see: sky, world, plants, people, etc.

Invisible: the angels and the spirits which have no bodies but may appear to

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some people in some circumstances.

The angels are spirits created by God to glorify Him, to protect the world and to protect the people. The guardian angel is an angel sent from God to a person to protect him and guide him to do good.

Review Matt. 6:26-30 and Matt. 10:29-31. “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; **yet your Heavenly Father feeds them**” (Matthew 6:26).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

The creed is what the Christians believe in accordance to the apostolic teaching. Remember what St. Paul said “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)



OUR COPTIC ORTHODOX DOCTRINE

The Existence of God. The oneness of God. The triune God. The Divinity of the Lord Jesus. The Divinity of the Holy Spirit.

(1) The Existence of God:

No one can see God through his own limited and weak physical state. In the book of Exodus, God explains to Moses this exact point. "...You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." (Exodus 33:20). In his first epistle, St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy about God, "who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen" (1 Tim 6:16).

Whenever man extricates himself from the mortal, sinful world, he is able to see the Lord. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." (1 Cor 13:9-12.) Thus, we do not see God now but we believe and trust that He is present and his existence is everlasting. We believe that all the creations that we see now, whether it is human beings, seas, rivers, birds, plants, etc. is God's creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Gen 1:1. In our practical life, there are many things we do not see, but we are certain of their existence because of their work or effectiveness. Let's take the air as an example. The air is all around us and we feel it but we cannot see it. The Lord Jesus says: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes." (John 3:8). But we as Christians have a basic proof for God's existence and that is His appearance in the flesh in the personality of the Lord Jesus Christ. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18.)

Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself showed us God's love, justice, and power - all unlimited characteristics of God. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said to His disciple Philip "No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him. ...He who has seen Me has seen the Father; ... I am in the Father, and the Father in Me." (John 14:6-10.)

In His last prayer written in John 17, the Lord Jesus addresses the Father and says: "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world." (John 17:6). He goes on to say, "And I have declared to them Your name" John 17:26.

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We thus conclude that the human being's knowledge and faith of God is very limited outside the circle of Our Lord Jesus, but through Jesus, who is God incarnate, our knowledge is strong and clear. St. Paul says "The Lord is at hand" Ph 4:5.

Conclusion:

God is not created, we do not see Him with our limited senses, but He is present and He is the Creator of all things. We know many of his attributes for He has infinite love, righteousness, and omnipotence through His incarnation and becoming man in the Lord Jesus Christ. God in His love to us makes our limited senses accept and believe in His existence as a gift from Him.

(2) We believe in One God. The Oneness of God. God is one and has no partners

We believe in One God and that He has no equal. Our belief is Monotheistic, unlike the pagans who believe in many gods. The Bible in both its testaments confirms that God is one. The Lord Jesus Christ says "... No one is good but One, that is, God." Matthew 19:17. St. Paul also says "... an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one." 1 Co 8:4.

Also in the Book Deuteronomy "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (De. 6:4). In the book of Isaiah, God states "I am the LORD, and there is no other, there is no God besides Me." (Is. 45:5). Further down the passage God continues, "...Have not I, The LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior, there is none besides ME." (Is. 45:21)

(3) God is One with three "Persons":

The Greek correspondence to the word "**Person**" is "**Hypostasis**" which means an attribute or a characteristic of God. Therefore the hypostasis is a characteristic or an attribute of God inherent in Him and without it the essence of God cannot exist. Therefore, the Divine essence has three characteristics:

a)The characteristic of "existence":

God exists and His existence is a must because without Him we cannot explain existence. If God does not have the characteristic of existence, then He becomes null. This personal characteristic in God is what we call the "Father". The word "father" in the Syrian language and other Semitic languages mean "**Origin**". Therefore, the father of the child is called the "father" because he is the origin of his existence.

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name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you." Ex 3:13-14

b) The Characteristic of Reasoning and Wisdom:

God is all wise, all-knowing and omnipotent. He is the Creator of all the reasoning creations. Since the Divine Reason is manifested in the universe, beauty of nature and the laws that govern this universe, it speaks of God's greatest reason and proves it, some of the Greek philosophers called the laws of nature and this universe by the word "logos", or the "word" because it is a manifestation of the greatest reason, since the Divine Reason cannot be seen, but we can see it through the world and the laws of nature. The Holy Bible borrowed this term the "**Word**" or the "**Logos**" to indicate the seen entity for an unseen God. The seen entity is incarnated in Jesus and He is the "**Logos**" or the Divine Reason incarnate in the Word because Reason is unseen but it can be seen and incarnate in the "Word".

c) The Characteristic of Life:

God is alive, not just that, but he is the source of Life. If God is not alive, then He would be dead, and therefore he would not exist. Therefore, the characteristic of Life in God is what we call the "Holy Spirit".

The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples about the three "**hypostasis**" saying "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Mat 28:19. Also in the Book of John it is outlined "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:7).

In this life, Man was created in the image and the likeness of God. The human being exists through his body, mind and spirit (3 characteristics in one). We cannot separate one characteristic from the other and the person lives. Similarly, the sun exists by its form and has its light and heat and we cannot separate one from the other.

Conclusion:

The Hypostasis are characteristics in the essence of God and He cannot be without them. Therefore, the essence is one, but the personal characteristics are three and we call them "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".

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(4) The Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

The Lord Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and He is not a man who became God, but God who became Man “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.” 1 Tim 3:16.

We have three types of evidence for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and that He is God manifested in the flesh.

(a) Clear and Direct Verses:

The Gospel of St. John focuses on showing the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. John started his Gospel as such: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”(John 1:1), then he continues saying “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” John 1:14 and then “I and My Father are one.” (John 10:30.) When the Lord Jesus says “I and My Father are one” He means it from the Divinity, and the essence and not from the hypostasis point of view. The hypostasis of the Son is the knowledge i.e. God’s Mind, or the “Logos” in Greek. When St. Paul talked about the service in the Church he said “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28.) Thus, Christ is God who shed His blood for the Church.

(b) God’s Unlimited Characteristics that existed in the Lord Jesus Christ:

† His omnipresence

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” John 3:13, and as such, the coming of Jesus Christ to the world and the fact that He was still in Heaven is like the sun ray that comes out of the sun and it still exists in the sun.

God is present everywhere and the Lord Jesus is present everywhere, and He said: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Mat 18:20. Similarly St. Stephen when he was gazing into the heavens, the bible said: “... and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” Acts 7:55.

† He is timeless:

When the Lord Jesus was talking to the Jews who were proud to be related to Abraham the patriarch, He told them: “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” John 8:58. In His last prayer that showed what was in our Savior’s

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heart, He said: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” John 17:5.

†Characteristic of Creation:

God created the world by His Son, i.e. His mind. When God came to our world in the flesh, He performed many miracles of creation. He fed the five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (it is the only miracle mentioned in the four gospels). In this miracle, the Lord created a large number of bread and fish to feed the multitude and a much was left over.

Also, when He transformed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. This was an act of creation. Also, when he created the eyes to the born blind in John 9.

† Characteristic of Life-giving:

God is the life-giver. The Lord Jesus raised people from the dead by His order saying “Lazarus, come forth, And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes ...” John 11:43-44.

† Characteristic of Total authority over Nature:

When the disciples were distressed in the storm “Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.” Mat 14:25 “And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.” Mat 14:32. Also in the miracle of the two dimes. The Lord said to Peter “... go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.” Mat 17:27.

† Characteristic of Total authority over the Angels and the demons:

The Lord Jesus conquered the demons and cast them out of many people with great authority. He did not accept witness from the devil “And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.” Luke 4:41.

As for total authority over the angels, it was clear in many situations; “And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.” Mark 1:13. During His passion, “And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, "Put your

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sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

Mat 26:51-53.

(c) The Transfiguration, The Resurrection and The Ascension:

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mountain before his disciples Peter, James and John was not just obtaining light from outside, but the Lord permitted his Divine Light to emit from within Him, even for a short blink of an eye "and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." Mat 17:2. Also calling Moses and Elijah from the other world to come to the mountain is a full disclosure of His Divinity.

Then when the great time of salvation on the Cross came, He put down His life by His own free will when all the people conspired against Him and all the Kings of the earth rose against the Lord and His anointed one and He knew that beforehand. When the soldiers came to the garden where He was praying "Jesus said to them, "I am He." ... they drew back and fell to the ground. ... I have told you that I am He. ... let these go their way," John 18:5-8.

During his crucifixion He performed miracles greater than all miracles. He performed when He walked in the flesh before the cross. That is why we sing in the church saying "Holy is the One who performed in His weakness greater acts than in His Power." Then when He was buried in the grave for three days and He rose by Himself without anyone raising Him becoming first fruit of the dead. The glory of the resurrection was so great and He conquered death and the devil by His own death, raising us with Him. This resurrection is unique because He rose by Himself and there was no death after it. He even appeared to his disciples and to choose people for forty days "... whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ... Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.... This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. "Acts 1:2-11

(5) The Divinity of the Holy Spirit

The belief of the Church is based on the word of God written in the Holy Bible and it clearly confirms the Divinity of the Holy Spirit and His equality with the Father and the Son in essence and in Divine Perfection.

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†God is the Creator ... The Holy Spirit is the Creator

In the book of Job he says: “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” Job 33:4. From the beginning of the Holy Bible, where it started with the creation it says “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.” Gen 1:1-2.

†God Knows Everything ... The Holy Spirit Knows Everything

When St. Paul wanted to declare the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His knowledge of everything thing at all times he said “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. “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”

1 Cor 2:9-10.

When the apostles were performing their missionary work, they were under total guidance from the Holy Spirit who knows everything at all times so that their mission would be successful. “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” Acts 13:2-3.

† God is Omnipresent...the Holy Spirit is omnipresent

David in his psalms said: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,” Psalm 139: 7-9.

†God is the One who raises People from the Dead ... The Holy Spirit is the One who raises People from the Dead:

When St. Paul spoke about the work of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus in our lives, and that His resurrection will raise us from the dead and give us life; this transfer of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus to us is through the Holy Spirit of God that works within us “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” Rom 8:11.

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†God is the only One who Knows the Future ... The Holy Spirit is the One who revealed the Future to the prophets

The Holy Spirit spoke on the tongues of the prophets “for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21. He is the one who spoke on the tongues of the martyrs and the confessors as the Lord has promised: “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Lk 12:11-12.

During the time when St. Stephen, the archdeacon, was being martyred, the book of Acts says “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” Acts 6:10.

†Sayings by the Lord Jesus Christ:

When He was talking to the Samaritan woman about the true worship of God He explained to her; “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24.

During the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan river “When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.” Luke 3:21-22.

Regarding the eternity of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” John 14:16.

Thus, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. God is alive with His Spirit. God speaks His Word through His Spirit and the Word is God. The Holy Spirit is eternal as God is and He is equal to the Father and the Son in essence and He is One in the Divinity of the Father and the Son.

*** Note: This article is taken from the "Heaven" Magazine issue # 71, dated September 2004, written by Fr. Rueiss Awad.**

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SONGS 🎵

OUR LIFE IS FILLED WITH JOY

“I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” (Ps 9:2)

Our life is filled with joy
O my Lord Jesus Christ

to remember Your Holy name
my Redeemer and Saviour

All creations glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ

those on earth and in heaven
my Redeemer and Saviour

Seven times in every day
O my Lord Jesus Christ

to the Lord I stand and pray
my Redeemer and Saviour

From the morning to the eve
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Your Holy name is in my heart
my Redeemer and Saviour

All the sins that I have done
O my Lord Jesus Christ

please forgive O blessed Son
my Redeemer and Saviour

The son of God in His glory
O my Lord Jesus Christ

will come again on judgment day
my Redeemer and Saviour

To give each one of us all
O my Lord Jesus Christ

according to what we have done
my Redeemer and Saviour

May we then not hear that sound
O my Lord Jesus Christ

that proclaims I know you not
my Redeemer and Saviour



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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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**FEBRUARY
SECOND SUNDAY**

THE ORTHODOX CREED (II)

Please read the attached material to the previous lesson “Our Coptic Orthodox Doctrine”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson two in a four-lesson series on our Orthodox Creed.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Start by briefly reviewing the previous lesson and then continue.
- † **We Believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God; Begotten of the Father Before all Ages:**

The Second Person (of the Holy Trinity) the Lord Jesus Christ, is One Lord, the Word of God, the Incarnated God, God Who took flesh and became man, the Person of the Holy Trinity Who manifested God the Father to man, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:18)

He is called the Son of God because His divinity is in essence the same as that of the Father (example a human being gets a son or daughter as a human being). Jesus is the only Begotten Son of God because there is no other person who is also begotten.

For this reason, our Lord Jesus said to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father ... believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (John 14:9-11). Jesus also said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God because there is no other similar relationship between a father and his son. The Son-Father relationship in the Holy Trinity is not similar to the son-father relationship in the world of man.

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The son— father relationship in the world of man is by flesh and the father is before his son in time. Isaac, for example, is the son of Abraham who existed before Isaac. The Son in the Holy Trinity is eternal with the Father and there has been no moment in which the Father and the Son have not been together.

Therefore, Jesus Christ the Son, existed before the incarnation, before creation and before all ages.

† Light out of Light, True God out of True God:

Truly, He is light out of light. The Son-Father relationship in the Holy Trinity is not son-father relationship from the flesh's or time's point of view. It is a spiritual Son-Father relationship as the birth of light from light.

The Divinity of the Son is the same as the Divinity of the Father. The Son is a true God as the Father is a true God. The Father and the Son are One God.

Remember that we are made sons of God only by adoption and not by the natural Father-Son relationship which existed between God the Father and God the Son before all ages.

† Begotten not Made:

The Son was incarnate at a certain time. He was born in a way above our comprehension and understanding because it has no similarity in the world of creatures. St. Paul said, “great is the **mystery** of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Jesus was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary.

† Of one Essence with the Father; by Whom all Things were Made:

Our Lord Jesus said: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

In this way, our Lord Jesus is declaring that He and the Father are one essence, one Divinity. There is no more than one essence which is the essence of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together.

“By whom all things were made”, means that the Son is God the creator. This is the same attribute that is for God the Father because we say “The Father creator of the visible and the invisible in heaven and on earth”. About the Son being a creator, St. John said “In the beginning was the Word, and

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the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4). Also St. Paul said, “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, **has in these last days spoken to us by His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds”; (Hebrews 1:1-2). Christ our Lord is the Word of God. Everything that was created was created by the Word of God. We read in the first Chapter of the Book of Genesis:

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light ...” (Gen.1:3). Therefore, the Word of God is the Creator; and that is why we say in the Creed, “We believe in One **Lord Jesus Christ ...** by Whom all things were made ...”.

† **Who, for us Men and for our Salvation, Came Down from Heaven, and was Incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and Became Man:**

Review what we said before in the previous lessons about salvation and incarnation.

The previous statements in the creed are talking about Christ before His incarnation. Afterward, the creed talks about Christ’s incarnation. Hence, Christ in whom we believe is eternal and has existed before all ages. He wanted to save Adam from his sins and save us from our fallen nature that was produced from the original sin. We inherited the fallen nature through our natural birth from Adam. Therefore, the Word came from heaven taking the shape of humanity and in the thickness of the flesh. But this incarnation did not occur through natural birth, but it came from the Holy Spirit and from the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon our Lady the pure Virgin Mary and her blood and flesh were united with the Divine Word and hence, God was incarnated (= became Man) and was born from the Virgin Mary. Therefore, the Virgin Mary became in a true sense the “Mother of God”. It does not mean that she is the origin of the Divinity, but she is indeed the Mother of the Incarnated God.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

God became Man to raise man to being the son of God, i.e., “that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:5). We must do our best to gain all these blessings of salvation in our lives.

St. George and St. Rueiss

Coptic Orthodox Church



SONGS 🎵

OUR LIFE IS FILLED WITH JOY

“I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” (Ps 9:2)

Our life is filled with joy
O my Lord Jesus Christ

to remember Your Holy name
my Redeemer and Saviour

All creations glorify Thee
O my Lord Jesus Christ

those on earth and in heaven
my Redeemer and Saviour

Seven times in every day
O my Lord Jesus Christ

to the Lord I stand and pray
my Redeemer and Saviour

From the morning to the eve
O my Lord Jesus Christ

Your Holy name is in my heart
my Redeemer and Saviour

All the sins that I have done
O my Lord Jesus Christ

please forgive O blessed Son
my Redeemer and Saviour

The son of God in His glory
O my Lord Jesus Christ

will come again on judgment day
my Redeemer and Saviour

To give each one of us all
O my Lord Jesus Christ

according to what we have done
my Redeemer and Saviour

May we then not hear that sound
O my Lord Jesus Christ

that proclaims I know you not
my Redeemer and Saviour

But with Your sweet tender voice
O my Lord Jesus Christ

you say My children do come in
my Redeemer and Saviour

To inherit everlasting life
O my Lord Jesus Christ

from now and forever more
my Redeemer and Saviour

The martyrs will be standing
O my Lord Jesus Christ

their sufferings will be declared
my Redeemer and Saviour

February

Second Sunday



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HOLY BIBLE

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**FEBRUARY
THIRD SUNDAY**

THE ORTHODOX CREED (III)

Please read the attached material to lesson (I) of this series entitled “Our Coptic Orthodox Doctrine”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson three in a four-lesson series on our Orthodox Creed.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Start by briefly reviewing the previous two lessons.
- † **“He was crucified for us at the time of Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; arose from the dead on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; He ascended unto the Heavens and hath sat at the right hand of His Father; He shall also come back in glory to judge the living and the dead; of whose kingdom there shall be no end.”**

This part talks about

- a) The sufferings and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered and died in the flesh, i.e., in the human nature only and not in the Divine nature because Divinity cannot die. He gave Himself up by His own free will for our salvation for the remission of our sins.
- b) Then Jesus resurrected from the dead in accordance with the prophecies. His resurrection and victory over death gave us also victory over death.
- c) He ascended to heaven with and in the flesh which He took from the Virgin Mary.
- d) Then Jesus will come again to earth and make His final judgment, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He



February

Third Sunday

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

When we are baptized we are newly born in Christ with the Holy Spirit. We must listen and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking within us. In fact we must give the Holy Spirit control to fully guide our lives.

St. George and St. Rueiss

Coptic Orthodox Church



SONGS 🎵

THE PRIME DOXOLOGY

We worship the Father, the Son
Hail to the Church

Hail to the Virgin
Hail to Gabriel

Hail to Cherubim
Hail to all

Hail to John
Hail to the

Hail to our father
The destroyer

Hail to Stephen
Hail to George

Hail to all the choirs
Hail to Abba Anthony

Hail to all the choirs
Hail to all the saints

Through their prayers
Accord to us mercy

O Thou True Light
That comes

Thou hast come to the world
All the creation

Thou hast saved Adam
Thou hast delivered Eve

Thou hast granted us
We praise Thee; we bless thee

When the morning hour
O Christ our Lord

Let the thoughts of light
And let not the darkness

That we may praise Thee
With David

and the Holy Spirit
the house of the angels

who brought forth our Saviour
who brought her good news.

Hail to Seraphim
the heavenly orders

the great fore-runner
twelve Apostles.

Mark the Evangelist
of the idols.

the first martyr.
the morning star.

of the martyrs.
and the three Macarii.

of the cross-bearers
who have pleased the Lord

O Christ our king
in thy kingdom.

which lights every man
into the World

through Thy love for man
has rejoiced at Thy coming.

from the beguiling
from the pangs of death

the Spirit of Sonship
with Tine angels

comes upon us
the True Light.

abound within us
of passion cover us.

with understanding
and proclaim and say:

February

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NOTES

St. George and St. Rueiss

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February

Fourth Sunday



**FEBRUARY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

THE ORTHODOX CREED (IV)

Please read the attached material entitled “The Holy Spirit in your life”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson four in a four-lesson series on our Orthodox creed.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† Start by briefly reviewing the previous three lessons then continue.

† **One Holy Church:**

- The unity of the church stems from the fact that all Christian believers together form the body of Christ, i.e., the church. “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30). Also St. Paul said, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).
- All Christians have one faith, one God and one baptism. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:1-6).
- The church is Holy because its head is Christ Himself. The source of holiness is the Holy Spirit who works in the church. St. Paul said, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the

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Coptic Orthodox Church



washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be Holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

† Catholic:

Means universal. The church is for all people from all nations of different tongues. It also means that the church has all degrees of priesthood: patriarch, bishops, priests and deacons. The church also has men, women and children all united in Christ.

† Apostolic:

Our church is apostolic because it is founded on the basis of the Apostles and Jesus Christ Himself the cornerstone. St. Paul talks about Christ as the cornerstone of the church “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

† We Acknowledge one Baptism for the Remission of Sins:

- Jesus said to Nicodemus: “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).
- Baptism is never repeated because it is our death and burial with Christ and our resurrection with Him in the newness of life; and Christ’s death and resurrection happened but once. St. Paul said, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

† We Look for the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Life of the World to Come. Amen

- We believe that our spirits are eternal and never die. When the flesh dies, the spirit either goes to Paradise or to Hades (Hell).
- In the last judgment day at the second coming of Jesus, everyone will be judged according to his deeds. The bad will be subject to eternal suffering and the good will move further from paradise to eternal life in the kingdom of God.

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Fourth Sunday

- Let us pray that we all live having the expectation of the resurrection from the dead and waiting for the second coming of the Lord and the glorification of His kingdom. St. John said, at the end of Revelation “Surely I am coming quickly. Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us give the utmost importance to our salvation so that when we die we can go to paradise and at the second coming of Christ we will be with Him forever. Our life here on earth is but preparation for our eternal life.

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SONGS 🎵

THE PRIME DOXOLOGY

We worship the Father, the Son	and the Holy Spirit
Hail to the Church	the house of the angels
Hail to the Virgin	who brought forth our Saviour
Hail to Gabriel	who brought her good news.
Hail to Cherubim	Hail to Seraphim
Hail to all	the heavenly orders
Hail to John	the great fore-runner
Hail to the	twelve Apostles.
Hail to our father	Mark the Evangelist
The destroyer	of the idols.
Hail to Stephen	the first martyr.
Hail to George	the morning star.
Hail to all the choirs	of the martyrs.
Hail to Abba Anthony	and the three Macarii.
Hail to all the choirs	of the cross-bearers
Hail to all the saints	who have pleased the Lord
Through their prayers	O Christ our king
Accord to us mercy	in thy kingdom.
O Thou True Light	which lights every man
That comes	into the World
Thou hast come to the world	through Thy love for man
All the creation	has rejoiced at Thy coming.
Thou hast saved Adam	from the beguiling
Thou hast delivered Eve	from the pangs of death
Thou hast granted us	the Spirit of Sonship
We praise Thee; we bless thee	with Tine angels
When the morning hour	comes upon us
O Christ our Lord	the True Light.
Let the thoughts of light	abound within us
And let not the darkness	of passion cover us.
That we may praise Thee	with understanding
With David	and proclaim and say:

February

Fourth Sunday

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR LIFE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit since you were anointed with the Holy Chrism (Myron) after your baptism?

Do you feel your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit of God dwells and works in you?

Did you enter into communion with the Holy Spirit which the priest mentions in the blessing prayer?

Does the Spirit of God partake in every deed you perform?

Or you work alone without the Spirit of God independent with your opinion, will management and personal desires?

Does the work of the Spirit give you special warmth, either in your prayers or contemplations, in your service or your love to God, His church and kingdom?

Are you able to carry out the commandment of the Apostle which says, "... *be filled with the Spirit.* " (Eph. 5:18).

Does the Spirit of God speak on your tongue as it was said, "*For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you?.*" (Matt. 10:20). If it is so, certainly your words will have power and effect on the hearts of your listeners...

Or do you talk by yourself and the Spirit does not open your mouth?

Do you have the fruits of the Spirit about which the Apostle St. Paul talked in (Gal. 5:22) when he said, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control.* " Or does your life bear no fruit or you wish for the gifts of the Holy Spirit without having the fruit of the Spirit?!

Do you sometimes feel that you "*grieve the Holy Spirit of God.* " (Eph. 4:30) with certain conduct which does not agree with the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

Do you "*quench the Spirit.* " (1 Thess. 5:19). with the life of lukewarmness and lack of response to the work of the Spirit in you?!

Would you re-consider the extent of your relationship with the Holy spirit and then ask:

Is your life a spiritual life? Are your words spiritual?



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MARCH

First Sunday



**MARCH
FIRST SUNDAY**

**THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OUR
ORTHODOX FAITH AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
FAITH**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn the main differences between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic beliefs.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Introduction

When we study these differences, the intention is not to raise any fruitless arguments with our Roman Catholic friends. The intention here is to learn the differences and be ready and better equipped to answer for our beliefs when we are asked about them.

Besides, when we understand our Orthodox faith we gain the following:

- 1) We appreciate what we have and thank God that we are born in this faith.
- 2) We understand the reason for which our forefathers suffered willingly all kinds of persecution and even martyrdom to defend this faith.
- 3) We hold strongly to this faith and become encouraged to live according to what it teaches. We do not get shaken when we come face to face with other unorthodox beliefs.
- 4) We become ready and able, by the power of God, to answer for what we believe in as St. Peter instructs us to do: "... and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (I Peter 3:15).

Historical Background:

† The Church was one since its birth on the day of Pentecost. It continued to be

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so until the first schism as mentioned here below. However, during that period, heresies (= unorthodox or wrong teachings and dogmas) did arise. But the Church held ecumenical councils, heard the heretics out, examined thoroughly their teachings in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Apostles, and if found guilty of heresy, the Church by the authority vested in her, excommunicated the heretics. An example of this is what happened at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325A.D.) when Arius was ex-communicated.

- † The Church continued to be one after the First, Second and Third Ecumenical Councils, namely, Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus.
- † What happened in the Fourth Ecumenical Council (451A.D.) was really sad. Though it appeared to be a theological debate, it actually was not. It was, in fact, a struggle for power. Up until that date, Alexandria (the Coptic Church) was officially taking the lead in Church matters as was decided by the First Ecumenical Council (Nicea), and the Patriarch of Alexandria was the Pope of the Church at large. He was not by any means the supreme head of the Church because that place is only Christ's; but he was, by definition, "first among equals".
- † The Patriarch of Rome (Leo I) wanted to take that position of leadership from the Pope of Alexandria (Dioscorus), so he claimed that, since he was the successor of St. Peter, and since St. Peter was the head of the Apostles, then, the Pope of Rome should be the head of the Church. To reach his goal, he misinterpreted a sentence in the Papal message of Pope Dioscorus and accused him of falling into heresy. The Emperor, who was on the side of Pope Leo I, called for a council to convene in Chalcedon (451A.D.) and to be chaired by the Emperor and not by Pope Dioscorus. In other words, Pope Dioscorus had been in actuality condemned as a heretic without even having the Council hear him out. To this, the Pope, the Patriarchs and bishops of the Oriental Churches (Alexandria, Syria, Armenia, India and Ethiopia) opposed strongly. When the Council decided to try Pope Dioscorus '*in absentia*' without even giving him a chance to defend himself, the Oriental Patriarchs and bishops walked out of the Council declaring that that Council was un-canonical. That was the first schism in the Church. The Oriental Churches called themselves the Orthodox Church, and the Western Churches called themselves the Roman Catholic church.
- † Shortly after the schism, the Roman Empire fell and the Vatican became, not only a Church but a state as well, and the Pope of Rome assumed supreme power-both civil and religious.

MARCH

First Sunday

The Main Differences between the Orthodox and Catholic:

1) Was St. Peter Really the Head of the Disciples?

The Roman Catholic Church says “yes” and it bases its answer on the following verses:

- a) Jesus said to St. Peter, “But I have prayed for you; that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32). They say that the mere fact that he was commissioned by our Lord to strengthen his brethren gives him the supremacy over them. We say that this is not so. On the contrary, when you read the following two verses it becomes evident that Jesus said this statement because He knew beforehand that Peter would deny Him and would fall more than all the other Disciples. Our Lord actually dedicated a special prayer for St. Peter because of a weakness in his faith at that time rather than a strength.
- b) Jesus said to St. Peter: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19). We say again that this is not an indication that Peter is the head of the Disciples. In this, the Lord Jesus was praising St. Peter for his faith in the Divinity of Christ which he declared, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The rock is Christ Himself, or the faith in Christ as the Son of the living God, but it cannot be Peter who was weak at some point and denied the Lord in front of a servant. As an evidence that Christ is the rock, St. Peter himself declared: “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders which has become the chief cornerstone.” (Acts 4:11). Review also I Peter 2:6 and Romans 9:33. As for giving Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus gave the same to the rest of the Disciples. “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18).
- c) The Gospel according to St. Matthew said, “Now, the names of the twelve apostles are these; first, Simon, who is called Peter, and ...”(Matthew 10:2). We say that, to have Peter’s name mentioned first does not imply that he is higher in rank than the rest of the Disciples. In another location the name of St. James was mentioned first: “And when James, Cephas (i.e. Peter) and John, who seemed to be pillars ...” (Galatians 2:9). Besides, when you read the discussion, which happened in the Jerusalem Council, you find that the last and decisive word was not Peter’s but James’ (Acts 15:6-29).

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2) What about the Indulgences?

During what is known as the Dark Ages, particularly at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church introduced this teaching and put it into practice. It says that the Pope, by the authority vested in him to forgive and bind sins can issue documents of forgiveness of sins to whom he wished. This dogma was further misused to the extent that these documents were sold for money and issued to forgive not only the sins that were already committed, but those that would be committed in the future. The dogma is based on what Jesus said to His Disciples: “Assuredly, I say to you whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18). To explain this we say that the forgiveness of sins is not given except to the repentant who comes confessing his sins. After his confession, he is absolved of his sins by God through the priest. But buying documents of forgiveness makes the rich inherit the kingdom of heaven, and the poor become outcasts. This is certainly a clear violation of Biblical teaching and it clashes with the spirit of Christianity. For further Biblical reference please read: 1 John 1:9, James 5:16, 1 John 2:1-2 and 1 Timothy 2:5.

3) The Extra Merits of the Saints:

This also is a dogma that was introduced by the Roman Catholic Church in the course of the Middle Ages. It states that the saints were extra-righteous and acquired extra merits more than they needed for their salvation. These extra merits are at the disposal of the Popes of the Church to distribute at will. Again this dogma, which has no Biblical foundation whatsoever, was misused by the Popes that period and those merits were granted to those who could afford them.

A question here might be asked: If these dogmas have no Biblical bases, how could they be introduced in the Church and why didn't the Church theologians stop them from being issued? The answer is simple. As discussed, the Popes were declared by the Church infallible, so whatever they said became law and could not be wrong. The same happened with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which says that the Virgin Mary herself was conceived of without the natural marital relation between her father and her mother.

Regarding the extra merits of the saint, we will just state the following two Biblical quotations:

- a) Jesus said: “... so likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done what was our duty to do.” (Luke 17:10).

MARCH

First Sunday

- b) St. Paul wrote: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14).

4) The Purgatory:

Again, the dogma of the purgatory was introduced in the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. The purgatory is an intermediate place between Paradise and Hades (hell). It is a purifying phase through which all people will go and suffer for a time that differs from one to the other according to each one's sins; therefore, when he goes to heaven he would be completely sanctified. And again there is no Biblical foundation on which this dogma would rest. The Biblical evidence proves that there is no purgatory. Read Matthew 25:46: “... and these will go away into **everlasting** punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Besides, Christ our Lord mentioned only two places in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Moreover, we know that Christ while on the Cross told the repenting thief: “Assuredly, I say to you, **today** you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43). Our salvation and purification is affected by the redemptive work of Christ our Lord on the Cross. There are some other differences like the infallibility of the Pope which we are not going to study in the course of this lesson.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Our Orthodox Church does not deviate from the Biblical and Apostolic teachings in spite of all the difficulties she has passed through during its long history. Our forefathers' steadfastness in the faith has become an example for the whole world to see. That is why the Orthodox Church is called even by Western historians and theologians “the main stream of Christianity”. We do thank God for bringing us up in the Orthodox faith.

St. George and St. Rueiss

Coptic Orthodox Church



SONGS 🎵

O OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

O our Lord Jesus Christ
Count us with Thy sheep

And in Thy second coming
May never hear Thee say

Rather may we be worthy
Which is full of joy

Come ye unto Me
And inherit the life

All the martyrs shall come
And the righteous shall come

The Son of God shall also come
To reward everyone

O Christ, Logos of the Father
Grant us Thy peace

As Thou has said unto
Likewise say unto us

My peace, which I have taken
I leave unto you

O angel of the day/evening
Remember us before the Lord

The sick, O Lord, heal them
And all our brethren in distress

May God bless us

who carries the sin of the word
who shall stand upon Thy right

awesome and full of glory
I know ye not

to hear Thy tender voice
proclaiming and saying:

O blessed of My Father
that endures forever

bearing their afflictions
bearing all their virtues.

in His Father's glory
according to his works

the Only-Begotten God
which is full of joy.

Thine holy Apostles
My peace I give to you.

from My Good Father
now and forever

flying up high with this hymn
that He may forgive us our sins

those who slept, repose them
help us, O Lord, and all of them

and let us bless His Holy name

MARCH

First Sunday

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

St. George and St. Rueiss

Coptic Orthodox Church



MARCH

Second Sunday



**MARCH
SECOND SUNDAY**

**THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE
ORTHODOX FAITH AND THE PROTESTANT FAITH**

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To study the main differences as indicated above.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- 1) The Protestant belief was established in Germany by Martin Luther. He was a Roman Catholic monk who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century. He found out that the Roman Catholic church had deviated far away from the main stream of Christianity. He tried very sincerely to correct the wrongs from within the Church. However, all his attempts failed and he was opposed, ridiculed and threatened by the Cardinals of the church. As a result he revolted against the Roman Catholic Church by burning the documents of forgiveness in 1526 A.D. In his revolt he went to the other extreme by abolishing the priesthood and many of the sacraments.
- 2) As a direct result of Martin Luther's teaching that the Bible is so simple to understand that even a child of the age of seven can read it, without putting any safeguards regarding its interpretation, hundreds of Protestant churches stemmed out of the Lutheran church.

Some of the Major Differences:

1) About the Sacraments of the Church:

In the Protestant church, a new and unorthodox definition of the "Church Sacrament" was introduced. A Sacrament is defined by the Protestants as only "a sign and a seal"... It is no longer a "grace-bearing act" as established by Christ Himself and as we believe. Therefore, the importance of any Sacrament has become insignificant. Besides, the seven Sacraments were reduced by some Protestant churches to two only, namely Baptism and Eucharist, and were reduced by the others to none.

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We cannot study in this lesson the differences in all the sacraments, therefore, let us give only a few examples.

2) An Attack against the Sacrament of Holy Orders (the Priesthood):

Martin Luther, seeing that the authority given to the Roman Catholic Pope and the priests was gravely misused, he went to the other extreme and opposed even the validity of the whole sacrament of Holy Orders. He based his opposition on the following Scriptural verses: St. Peter wrote, “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (I Peter 2:5). He wrote also, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (I Peter 2:9). We also read in the Book of Revelation, “And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.” (Revelation 1:6).

To explain these above-mentioned verses, let us go back in history to St. John Chrysostom. He explained that calling the Christians as “priests” (or the priesthood of all believers) is similar to calling them as “kings”; it is not intended to be taken literally but allegorically. If we review other verses in the Bible, we find that a certain group was given the authority to bind and loose, and this group gave this authority to their successors by the laying on of hands and so on in an unbroken chain until the present time. Let us review some of these Biblical verses. “And when it was day, He (Christ) called His disciples to Himself, **and from them He chose twelve whom He also named Apostles.**” (Luke 6:13). Then we find St. Paul instructing his disciple Bishop Timothy to deliver this authority to others that would be worthy of it; “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (II Timothy 2:1-2). Please review also Matthew 28:19, Luke 22:19, and John 20:23.

3) What about Baptism?

The verb “to baptize” is taken from the Greek word “baptismos” which means “to dye”. The only way you can dye a garment is to immerse it completely in that dye, and not sprinkle or pour few drops of dye on it. All through history, and starting as far back as the baptism of John the Baptist, Baptism was administered by immersion. This is because Baptism is in fact a new birth or being born (out) of water and Spirit. Jesus said: “unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:5). It is also a “burial” with Christ and “resurrection” with Him in the new life. Let us read what St.

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Second Sunday

Paul wrote: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4). Read also Colossians 2:12. Again, because of the insignificance the Protestant church put in the Sacrament of Baptism to the extent that it has become just a sign for being a Christian, its ministers administer it by sprinkling or pouring, forgetting even the meaning of the word itself and the practice of the Church all through history. John the Baptist was baptizing by immersion; Jesus Himself was baptized the same way, “... when He had been baptized, Jesus **came up immediately from the water...**”(Matthew 3:16), and Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch by immersion too, “... And both Philip and the eunuch **went down into the water,** and he baptized him. Now when they **came up out of the water...**” (Acts 8:38-39). There is no justification whatsoever in changing the way Baptism is administered in the Church. Once we allow changes like this to happen we can never stop. A clear indication of this is what has happened in the Roman Catholic Church and in the hundreds of denominations in the Protestant church. Christ Himself has warned us against making such changes when He said, “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law ... Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven ...” (Matthew 5:18-19). St. Paul warned us also when he wrote: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8).

4) The Protestant’s Stance on Honoring the Virgin Mary and the Saints:

As mentioned in the previous lesson, the Virgin Mary and the saints were considered by the Roman Catholic Church as having extra merits, at the disposal of the Popes. As a revolt against Catholicism, the Protestant Church took the other extreme and tore away all honor from them. Their support for this action is that honoring the saints reduces our honoring of God.

But, all through the history of the Church, the saints have had a special honor and recognition. By honoring them we are, in fact, honoring God whom they represent. Just as an example ... When we honor an Ambassador, aren’t we, in actuality, honoring the head of the country who sent him? Besides, didn’t Christ Himself say to His Disciples, “He who receives you receives Me.” (Matthew 10:40). He also said, “He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me.” (Luke 10:16). Even in the Old Testament, God honored His saints: “Behold, I send an angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared ...” (Exodus23:20). Moreover, what did Christ our Lord say about the woman who anointed His head with the very costly oil of

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spikenard? Didn't He say, "Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also **be told as memorial to her**" (Mark 14:9).

As for the Virgin Mary, the holy Mother of God (the Theotokos) who the angel called "blessed" and through whose mouth the Holy Spirit foretold that, "... henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lukel:48); the church holds the first place of honor for Her among all the saints.

There are so many other differences that we cannot go through in the scope of this lesson. Some of these differences are the intercession of the saints, fasting, the use of icons, etc... But we feel that this suffices to assure our students that their Orthodox Church is the Church that follows very strictly the teaching of the Bible and the practice of the early Apostolic Church.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

As mentioned above, we know now that our Church's teaching is the original apostolic teaching handed down from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself through the Apostles to the Church for all generations. Let us pray that God would give us faith so that we can live according to His word in our daily life.

MARCH

Second Sunday

SONGS 🎵

O OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

O our Lord Jesus Christ
Count us with Thy sheep

And in Thy second coming
May never hear Thee say

Rather may we be worthy
Which is full of joy

Come ye unto Me
And inherit the life

All the martyrs shall come
And the righteous shall come

The Son of God shall also come
To reward everyone

O Christ, Logos of the Father
Grant us Thy peace

As Thou has said unto
Likewise say unto us

My peace, which I have taken
I leave unto you

O angel of the day/evening
Remember us before the Lord

The sick, O Lord, heal them
And all our brethren in distress

May God bless us
And may His praise be

Blessed be the Father and Son
The perfect Trinity

who carries the sin of the world
who shall stand upon Thy right

awesome and full of glory
I know ye not

to hear Thy tender voice
proclaiming and saying:

O blessed of My Father
that endures forever

bearing their afflictions
bearing all their virtues.

in His Father's glory
according to his works

the Only-Begotten God
which is full of joy.

Thine holy Apostles
My peace I give to you.

from My Good Father
now and forever

flying up high with this hymn
that He may forgive us our sins

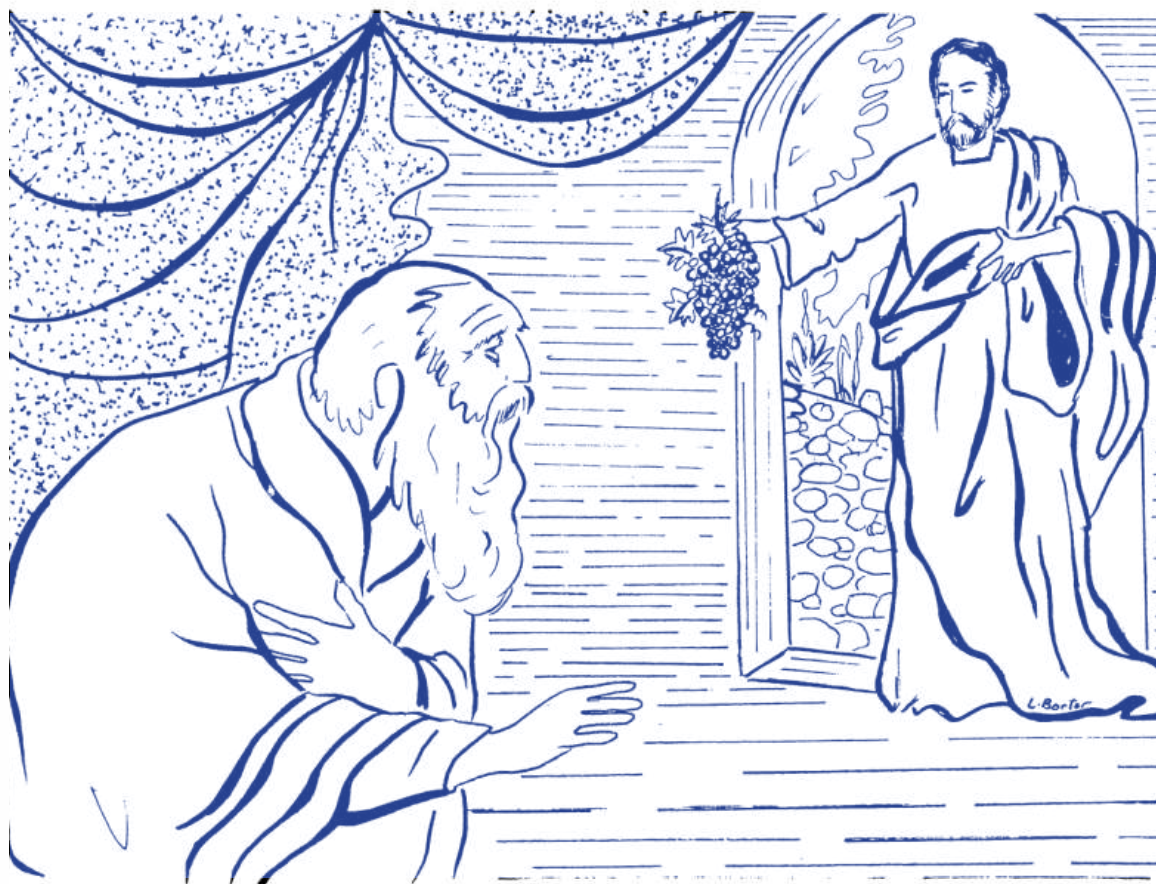
those who slept, repose them
help us, O Lord, and all of them

and let us bless His Holy name
always on our lips

and the Holy spirit
we worship Him and glorify Him.

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March

Third Sunday



**MARCH
THIRD SUNDAY**

**DEMETRIUS, THE VINEDRESSER - "THE LIFE OF
LEARNING"**

Please read the attached materials entitled "Demetrius, the Vinedresser", the attached material entitled "Learning", and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

Learn from the life of Pope Demetrius. Our church celebrates his feast on Baramhat 12.

MEMORY VERSE

***"He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly
"Luke 1:52***

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Describe first, how Pope Demetrius was elected or chosen as a Pope. His predecessor, Abba Yulianus had seen a vision that a man would be coming to him with a bunch of grapes. Demetrius the Vinedresser became the 12th successor of St. Mark the Apostle in the year 199 A.D.
- † St. Demetrius was married when they made him Pope. He was the only Pope in the history of the Church who was married. Some of his people thought of him as not deserving to be a Pope because he was married. The angel appeared to Pope Demetrius and asked him to clear the doubts from the people and prove to them that he was living with his wife only as brother and sister. On the next day Pope Demetrius celebrated the Divine Liturgy and after the service he asked his people not to depart the church. He called on his wife to come forward, and he

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took an amount of burning charcoal and put it on his clothes and on his wife's and the clothes did not burn. The people were surprised and asked him why he did this. The Pope explained that he and his wife were living in complete purity as brother and sister. This clarified the doubts of his people.

Notice that the Popes and the Bishops of our Church are not married.

- † St. Demetrius, who was of very little knowledge, used to sit at the feet of the teachers (after he became Pope) until he became one of the most knowledgeable Patriarchs of the church. "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52).
- † Explain Abba Demetrius's method (known as the Epact computation) of calculating the date for the Easter celebration which is now followed by all Eastern churches. He made correlation between the Jewish lunar calendar and the solar Egyptian year. Hence, he was able to make our Easter Sunday following the Jewish Passover always, just like the first Easter Sunday, according to the historical Biblical event. Abba Demetrius' Epact calculations were approved by the Ecumenical Council of Nicea in the year A.D. 325 and all the churches continued to use it until A.D. 1582 when Pope Gregory XIII of Rome changed the calendar and since then the Western churches departed from it, and now they observe Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox, regardless of the Jewish Passover, The Eastern churches still adhere to Abba Demetrius' calculations. Hence the divergence occurred between the Eastern and Western churches regarding the date of Easter celebration.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM HIS LIFE?

- 1) Respect our teachers. He was a Pope and used to sit at the feet of his teachers.
- 2) We keep learning at each stage of our life. Live and learn. It never stops.
- 3) Never think badly about other people even if it is obvious. The people thought he was married and was not supposed to accept the Pope's position. He showed them his purity.
- 4) Our Easter Sunday always comes after the Jewish Passover. This is the correct one. Even the Western churches admit that the calculation made by Pope Demetrius is correct.

March

Third Sunday

SONGS 🎵

DO NOT LEAVE ME ALONE

Do not leave me alone
Be always near to help me

O shepherd of my soul
and hear me when I call

REFRAIN

My Lord, I'm nothing without Thee
So take my right hand
Forever in Thy way

I am nothing at all
O Lord, and lead me

Do not leave me alone
And hold me lest I fall

My guardian and my guide
whenever my footsteps slide

Do not leave me alone
When outward things are strong

if I'm tempted to sin
keep watch, O Lord, within

Do not leave me alone
Subdue Satan before me

whenever I feel frail
and let him not prevail

Do not leave me alone
But take my hand and lead me

when I have gone astray
again into Thy way

Do not leave me alone
But rather, Lord, forgive me

whenever sins abound
and turn my life around

Do not leave me alone
But rather reassure me

when hope has fled away
and teach me to watch and pray

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Coptic Orthodox Church LEARNING

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III



Learning starts during the person's life, but it never ends...

This learning takes different shapes, which vary according to the stages of life that one experiences...

Childhood represents the type of learning that believes in everything...

It is the type of learning that requires education, asks and seeks knowledge, accepts everything without argument and picks up many things by following the example of others.

During the primary and preparatory period, another type of learning takes place, which understands and absorbs. In secondary school, learning is based on discussion and argument, then storing information after examining it...

During the university period, it is another type of learning which partakes in examining and preparing information and, to a certain extent, depends on itself.

After the university years, another type of learning begins, when the person sets out to practical life.

This period does not follow defined programmes or fixed dates for exams. One is practically tested at any time, in anything and without previous preparation or readiness... You too, need to be prepared for the trials of life...

You might be able to learn from others' experiences, beside learning from the elderly, the instructors and spiritual fathers. You can also learn from books...

Man needs to drink from all springs of knowledge, with wisdom and care, by examining and sifting information.

You need to know life and learn how to act and deal with people and superiors and how to talk to them:

When does a person talk and how; when does one need to be firm and when to be flexible; when to be precise, when to punish and when to forgive...

The one who loves learning learns from everything...

He learns from the ant how to be active, and learns to have faith from the birds who neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet our Heavenly Father feeds them...

Happy is the one who learns throughout his life...

He learns more than what others teach. He increases every day in knowledge and insight. He will acquire the humility by which he accepts learning from anyone and from everything...



March

Third Sunday

DEMETRIUS, THE VINEDRESSER

In the year of Grace 199, the tide of Coptic history was taking a turn: the peace that had been enjoyed by the church up till then was about to be disturbed. Abba Demetrius, a simple vinedresser, was chosen to sit on the Chair of St. Mark. The choice came about when his predecessor, Abba Yulianus, had seen a vision, wherein he was told by an angel that his departure from this world was imminent, and that he was to choose as his successor the man who came to him on the following day with a bunch of grapes. On the morrow, Demetrius, the Vinedresser, appeared carrying a bunch of grapes, the first fruit of the season, as a gift to his Pope. Abba Yulianus immediately retained him and related his vision to those around him. On that very same day he died and was gathered unto his forebears. The people, true to the counsel of Yulianus, declared Demetrius as his successor. Thus he became the 12th successor of St. Mark the Apostle.

Demetrius had been a man of little learning. When he was chosen Pope, the first goal he set for himself was to seek learning assiduously and diligently, and to make himself worthy of serving his people. It is said of him that he used to sit at the feet of his teachers saying, “Let men seek knowledge with true humility and an ardent desire to learn, forgetful of rank or position.”

As time went on, Demetrius became one of the most learned of prelates — a bright and shining star in the firmament of the Coptic Church which was destined to be filled with shining stars.

One of the many significant original achievements of Abba Demetrius is the method he devised for calculating the date of Easter so that it would always follow the Jewish Passover, just like the first Easter Sunday, according to the historical Biblical events. This method is known as the “Epact”, and to this day it is followed by all Eastern Orthodox Churches in determining their Easter date many years in advance. It involved making a correlation between the lunar Jewish year and the solar Egyptian year. This was necessary because the lunar year is shorter than the solar year by eleven days, and a fixed date in it can fall in any season as the years go by, and would deviate Easter from the Passover.

When Abba Demetrius made the Epact computation, he convoked the Holy Council, and explained it to its members. They approved it and decided to abide by it. Many years later, in 325 A.D. when the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea met, this computation was submitted to it, and again approved unanimously. It continued to be followed by all Christian Churches until A.D. 1582 when the calendar was changed by Pope Gregory XIII of Rome. Since then the Western Churches departed from it, and now they observe Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon

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following the Vernal equinox, regardless of the Jewish Passover. The Eastern Churches, however, still adhere to this old computation. Hence the divergence between the Eastern and Western Churches on the date of Easter celebration.

The first few years after Abba Demetrius had taken the helm of the Church were peaceful years. Then the severe persecutions of Emperor Severus broke out, and many staunch believers were martyred. Among them was St. Leonidas, father of one of the most famous figures of the early Christian Church, Origen. During the persecutions, a Roman prefect marched with his troops into the Church of St. Mark and robbed it of all its holy vessels. Then he seized Abba Demetrius, and sent him into exile to a town called Wissim, where he remained until the persecutions ceased.

On his return to his See, Abba Demetrius learned that Clement, Dean of the School of Alexandria, had gone to his rest. The school was thus in dire need of a new Dean to give it a strong impetus. The Christians of the city who had been enduring the trials and tribulations of those hard times, all witnessed the great heroism, ardent Christian zeal, and brilliance which characterized the young Origen. Upon hearing of this, Abba Demetrius immediately appointed him Dean of the school. He was then exceedingly young, only eighteen years old. Nevertheless, he got the appointment because of what had been said of him.

Origen proved that his Christian ardour and his passionate interest in the School more than made up for his youth. Through his efforts it flourished again, and a period of constructive work followed. The faithful increased in number continually; Abba Demetrius found it necessary to consecrate several new bishops, to shepherd the people and keep the lamp of their newly acquired faith burnished bright.

About the year AD. 228 Abba Demetrius, discerning how brilliant Origen had become, sent him on an evangelistic mission to Achaia, to teach and preach about the Living Word of God. When he terminated his mission and was returning home, he passed through Palestine; there Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem, one of his former fellow-students, and Theostite, Bishop of Caesarea, detained him and ordained him bishop without asking permission of Abba Demetrius. This angered the Pope, and he convoked a council wherein, despite Origen's towering personality, he excommunicated him. He based this on two reasons: the first, he considered the ordination of any Egyptian priest the prerogative of the head of the Church of Egypt; and, the second, and more importantly, Origen had committed a sin against his own body, having made himself an eunuch, and thus had lost the right to priestly ordination, for only men without blemish could be ordained.

Abba Demetrius lived to be one hundred and five years old. Yet he ceased not



March

Third Sunday

to teach and to preach to the very end of his life. Like unto John the beloved apostle, he used to be seated on a chair and carried to the church, where he would speak words of comfort to his people.

Then, having governed the church for thirty-two years and seven months, during which he traded diligently with the talents entrusted to him by his Lord, he joined his forebears, shortly before the terrible persecutions of Maximin fell heavily on the faithful.

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March

Fourth Sunday



**MARCH
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**THE GREAT LENT (I):
“THE BENEFITS OF FASTING”**

Please read Matthew 4:1-11, the attached materials entitled “Fasting And Its Spirituality”, “What is Fasting?”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson one in a three-lesson series on “The Great Lent”. The purpose of this lesson is to convince the students about the importance of fasting; so they practice it.

MEMORY VERSE

“Consecrate a fast; call a sacred assembly” Joel 2:15

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† The great Lent is one of the first fasts that the church has kept following the acts of her Lord, Jesus Christ, the teachings of the Apostles, and the decisions of the holy councils.

† **The Teaching of our Lord Jesus about Fasting:**

- Matthew 6:17 “But **you, when you fast, anoint** your head and wash your face.” (do not show off)
- John 6:27 “Do not labor for food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life.”
- Luke 6:25 “Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger.”

† **What is the Meaning of Fasting?**

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- How many years did you fast the great lent? If you did not take blessings from all these Lents, then the drawback is not in fasting but in your method and understanding of fasting.

The spirituality of fasting is measured in two ways: the purpose of fasting and its method. There is someone who fasts with the intention of imposing punishment and suffering on the flesh. This in itself as a goal does not please God.

Another one may fast for “the forgiveness” of his sins. This is a theological mistake because forgiveness of sins can **only** be obtained through the blood of Christ.

There is another person who fasts just to obey the church and God’s commandments. In this way he lives by the rigidity of the law without understanding the essence of fasting. This is a mistake.

If the goal of fasting is not clear, the person who is fasting does not gain any benefit, perhaps he hates fasting as a burden he wants to get rid of.

Our goal in fasting is the love of God. We fast so that we rise above the materialistic level and so the Spirit takes its opportunity to communicate with God and enjoy His love.

Unfortunately, many people have a relationship with fasting through the flesh only. All their attention in fasting is the type of food, its quantities and its times. All these do not enter the depth of the spirituality of fasting. This type of fasting is not acceptable to God and is not beneficial. This is similar to the fasting of the Pharisee who was proud because he fasts two days every week and did not end up to be justified as the tax collector. Fasting was an action to be proud of.

- It is a **method** to enter into a living relationship with God and proceed in a spiritual life by reducing an element of material life. Therefore fasting is not a goal in itself but it is a method for spiritual enrichment. Fasting is a period of time for spiritual enrichment and not lack of food to the body. But the lack of food to the body is just a mean to enrich the soul.

Fasting is not harmful to the body but it strengthens it. In fact the excess of food is what hurts the health. Many diseases are cured by reducing certain types of food. Our saints who used to fast several days without any food lived a lot longer and their health was a lot better than others living in the world and

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Fourth Sunday

eating all types of food.

So, fasting is beneficial for both the body and the soul.

† Practical Applications of Fasting:

- In repentance, like the people of Nineveh who fasted for repentance when Jonah called them. “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5).
- Before starting to serve God
“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) they sent them away (Acts 13:3). This is why after the ordination of a priest and before starting his pastoral ministry he goes to a monastery for forty days fasting and praying.
- Moses fasted for forty days before taking the commandments from God.
- Fasting was the factor that saved Daniel from the lions. Remember, Daniel refused to eat from the king’s food. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8). Please tell here that Daniel and his friends were healthier than the others who ate the king’s delicacies (Daniel 1:5-19).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us start fasting, but be careful! The memory verse said “Consecrate a fast”. This means it is not only the food that we abstain from, but fasting is abstaining from all evil things that we are used to do and also fasting is an environment of life that leads to spiritual growth.

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SONGS 🎵

Our Father

“when you pray say: Our Father in Heaven...” (Lk11:2)

Our Father Who art in heaven
We cry unto you in afflictions

hallowed be Thy name
Our Father Who art in Heaven

Your name will be glorified O Helper
Have mercy on Your servants

and blessed at all times
Our Father who art in Heaven

Your kingdom come O my Lord
This is my prayer and pleading

And Your Holy spirit fills my heart
Our Father Who art in Heaven

Your will be done on earth
Makes us obedient to your word

fulfilled and we submit to it
Our Father Who art in Heaven

Your will be done in heaven
Save us all from trials

on earth, You are our Master
Our Father who art in Heaven

This our daily bread
Your mercies are multiplied

Give us, O glorious God
Our Father who art in Heaven

March

Fourth Sunday

FASTING AND ITS SPIRITUALITY

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Fasting is not just a bodily virtue... It is not just abstaining from food for a period of time then not eating food with animal fat. There is a spiritual element in it...

The first spiritual element is controlling the will. With the same will that regulated food, one can command one's talking by not using unsuitable expressions as well as controlling thoughts and feelings. Mar Isaac said, *"Abstinence of the tongue is better than abstinence of the mouth; and abstinence of the heart is better than both."*

The second element in the spiritual fast is repentance:

In the fasting of Nineveh, we notice that the people did not only abstain from eating but, "everyone turned from his evil way and from the violence that was in his hands. " God looked to the repentance more than the fasting, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. " (Jn 3:8-10).

So fasting has to be accompanied by humility and contrition in front of God as it was clear in the fasting of the people of Nineveh. They also covered themselves with sackcloth and sat in ashes. It is also clear in Joel, *"Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly... Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, let them say, spare your people, O Lord..."* (Joel 2: 15 - 17).

Fasting does not mean just depriving the body of its food, but there must be a positive side, which is the feeding of the spirit.

Therefore, fasting is connected with prayer as in the Church's prayers and as it happened in all the well-known fasts in the Bible such as that of Nehemiah, Ezra, Daniel and the people of Nineveh.

This is evident in the saying, *"call a sacred assembly..."*

It is a spiritual opportunity to mortify the body in order to elevate the spirit:

Mortifying the body is just a means, but the aim is to elevate the spirit through prayers, meditation, readings and all the means of grace, far from bodily hindrances...

We have to remember here that God rejects the fasting which is not spiritual: as the hypocrites' fasting (Mt 6:2), and the Pharisee (Lk 18:11) and the wrong way of fasting, described by Isaiah. (Is. 58:3-7).



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WHAT IS FASTING?

The purpose of fasting is to master yourself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is also to liberate yourself from depending on the things of this world in order to concentrate on the things of the Kingdom of God. It is to give power to the spirit so that it would not yield to temptation and sin.

People fast to be delivered from carnal passion through the humiliation of the flesh.

Fasting without effort in virtue is wholly in vain.

In fasting the spirit is working through prayers and contemplation. The heart is working through love of God and mankind.

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free ... is it not to share your bread with the hungry” (Isaiah 58:6-7).

In fasting one must not only obey the rule against gluttony in regard to food but also refrain from every sin so that while fasting, the tongue may also fast, refraining from slander, lies, evil talking, degrading one's brother, anger and every sin committed by the tongue.

One should also fast with eyes that do not look at vain things, not look shamefully or fearlessly at anyone.

A man who fasts wisely, wins purity and comes to humility and proves himself a skillful builder.

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Fourth Sunday

NOTES

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April

First Sunday



**APRIL
FIRST SUNDAY**

**THE GREAT LENT (II):
“THE HEAVENLY TREASURE”**

Please read the attached material entitled “The Holy Forty-day Fast”, “Your Eternity” and give the lesson with emphasis on the points.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson two of a three-lesson series on the great lent. The purpose of this lesson is to show that our treasure in heaven is the most important thing in our lives.

MEMORY VERSE

“And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights “Matthew 4:2

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † In this lesson, it is suggested to cover: (a) the historical background of the great lent and (b) the first, second and third Sunday Gospel readings in our church and the spiritual lessons that they teach.
- † Pope Demetrius the 12th, the Pope of Alexandria, put forth the system for the Holy fasting observed by all of us now and its connection with the Holy week. Remember that when we studied the life of Pope Demetrius, we said that he established the called “Epact” system for the calculation of the date of Easter which is changeable every year.
- † **The Great Lent is divided into:**
 - (a) The Preparation Week
 - (b) The Holy Forty Days during which Christ our Lord fasted in the

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wilderness and it contains six Sundays, the last being Palm Sunday

(c) The Holy Week

† The Preparation Week is needed for the gradual entrance into this fasting exercise achieving a degree of spiritual enrichment on which we can spiritually capitalize the whole year long.

† **First Sunday: Man Cannot Worship both God and Money:**

- Gospel reading: Matthew 6:19-33. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).
- Our Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has arranged the Biblical readings during this season in a certain way to lead its fasting members from one spiritual exercise to the next. Therefore, the Great Lent would become indeed a spiritual springtime for the soul which blossoms with the fruits of the spirit..." love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23). Do not miss any of the Divine Liturgies during this season.
- The Church starts the season by directing our attention to our real home in heaven. Since this is our real home, then we should lay up our treasures there. All the treasures that we accumulate here, will be left behind at the end of our temporal life on this earth, but whatever we accumulate there is going to work for us and intercede on our behalf and stay with us eternally.

The question is: "How can we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven?" To this question St. Augustine answers saying: "The poor people are carriers who carry our goods from earth to heaven, therefore give them what you want them to carry for you there. Don't you remember what the Lord Jesus said, Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink... inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" (Matthew 25:34-40).

† **Second Sunday: Temptation on the Way:**

Gospel reading: Matthew 4:1-11

“It is written, ...”

April

First Sunday

Jesus used what is written in the Bible to defeat the devil in the three types of temptations and every time He started His answer to the Devil's temptation by saying: "**It is written**". This is then a lesson for us to **read** the Bible and **apply** it to our life as the power that can help us overcome temptation. St. Augustine said, "Jesus our leader allowed Himself to go through temptation to teach us how to fight."

The Lord did not remove the temptations of the devil but permitted them. St. John Chrysostom offered the following reasons:

- (a) To continue to be humble and to be able to overcome the sin of pride that might quietly find its way to you as a result of the many talents given to you by God.
- (b) Having him defeated in these temptations, the devil will know that you have left him and that you are no longer under his authority.
- (c) Through temptations you are training and developing your soul, thus, you become stronger in the spirit.

† **Third Sunday: Repentance Means Returning to the Father:**

Gospel reading: Luke 15:11-32

The prodigal son and his return to the father, the welcome of the father and the application of this parable to our life of repentance. We must never delay repentance because:

- a) The incentive for repentance may disappear.
- b) The devil will do his best while we are delaying our repentance to divert us from it.
- c) Maybe our life on earth will end sooner than we think and then we lose our chance to repent and gain eternal life.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

Let us follow our church readings during the Great Lent and meditate on them and apply them to our life. Let us concentrate our thinking, our lifestyle and our worship on building a treasure in heaven. Building a treasure in heaven would require that we overcome the temptation of the Devil and lead a life of repentance.

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SONGS 🎵

TEMPTATION SUNDAY

“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Mat 17:21)

Refrain

Blessed are those who have mercy
The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts

Moses fasted for forty days
To receive the ten commandments

Fasting and prayer of the prophet
The Lord kept shut the lions’ mouths

Elijah fasted and prayed that the sky
That the Israelites who went astray

Fasting and prayers of Nineveh
When they repented were forgiven

Fasting and prayers of the disciples
Baptizing and preaching the Gospel

Fasting and prayers of the martyrs
knowing that even losing their lives

Fasting and prayers of the righteous
In caves and deserts and mountains

who give to the poor, fast and pray
and obtain mercy on judgment day

to be cleansed in body and spirit
which our Lord did write

Saved his life in the lions’ den
for God protects his holy men

for forty months would not rain
would feel hunger and pain

as they appealed to God above
and God filled them with his love

spread God’s word to every nation
healing and bringing salvation

gave them the power to stand the
pains nothing compared to their gain.

and cross bearers kept them living
for their love for Christ the King

April

First Sunday

YOUR ETERNITY

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Most people think only of their lives on earth, all their wishes are concentrated on this earthly life. All their efforts and struggle are for its sake, but as for their eternity, perhaps they never think of it...

Your whole life on earth is not worth a twinkle of an eye, if compared with the endless eternity...

Your life on earth is just the preparation for such an eternity, the immortal life...

Maybe sticking to a worldly honour makes you lose all the respect that the saints receive in the everlasting glory...

Nevertheless, you still stick to this worldly honour and sacrifice your eternity, as if you do not care!!

Perhaps your sticking to some of the temporary or passing worldly pleasures deprives you of eternal happiness...

Therefore, you have to be convinced of the importance of eternity, put it always in front of your eyes. Everything becomes of small value compared to it.

How good is the saying of the Apostle, St Paul, to the Corinthians, *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but all the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal. " (2 Cor 4:18)*

Truly, in this view, the main difference between a wise person and an ignorant person is quite clear.

The ignorant is short sighted, his look does not proceed beyond the visible things. But the wise person looks too far, to even after death... and keeps thinking: What will become of me after I take off this body? Where shall I go? What shall I be?

And you, brother, with what are you busy...?

Where did you leave your heart? Here or there?...

For where your heart is, there your treasures will be also...

The wise feel they are strangers on earth and do not concentrate their hopes on earth, but *"... he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. " (Heb 11:10)*

He who gives importance to his eternity is raised above the earth and all earthly things. Nothing in this world attracts him.

The whole world is behind him and not in front of him...



THE HOLY FORTY-DAY FAST

Our beloved church lives these days throughout a period of fasting. One of the best fasting seasons of the year is called “The Great Lent”. This fast differs from the rest of the fasting days in its ways, feelings, and procedures in the church, since it is the fast that Jesus Christ Himself fasted for us for forty days and forty nights. The Great Lent can be subdivided into the preparation week, the holy forty days and the holy week.

Historical

Historically, the Holy Forty days started the following day after Epiphany. This is according to what is mentioned in the Bible; “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” (Matthew 4:1-3) At the end of their fast, the apostles and the rest of the people made a celebration. Then after a few weeks they celebrated the holy week and finally they celebrated Easter. This continued until Pope Demetrius the 12th, Pope of Alexandria, who was guided by the Holy Spirit to put forth the system for the Holy Fast observed by all of us now in the present time and its connection with the Holy Week.

Spiritual

During the preparation week, everyone seeks forgiveness of his sins and the mercy of the Lord. This preparation is done in order that the spirit would enter the Great Lent with humility and thankfulness. The Great Lent — including the Preparation Week — contains six Sundays, the seventh being Palm Sunday.

The First Week

In this week, the Lord has revealed to us in the Bible our goal in praying during and after fasting. Praying must be aimed at asking for eternal life, not for materialistic things which the Lord knows and provides for us, more than we need.

The Second Week:

The second week represents the temptation of Jesus by the devil on the Mountain. Jesus conquered the devil and so our life is the life of victory over the devil. “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you Satan! For it is written you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve’” (Matthew 4:10-11)

April

First Sunday

The Third Week:

This week is for remembering the return of the sinful son to his father after he squandered his money and lost everything. The father was filled with happiness and accepted his son. Similarly, when we return to the Father confessing our sins and asking His mercy, He accepts us and the angels in heaven rejoice. Also when we remember this, it encourages us to confess and take communion; afterwards, the Lord accepts us as the sinful son (Luke 15:11-32).

The Fourth Week:

This is in remembrance of the return of the Samaritan woman from her bad life, her confession and her love of Jesus. She said to the people, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (John 4:29). Afterwards, she knew Jesus and loved Him and she went to tell the people about Him so that they can also love Him and have faith in Him. This teaches us that we must tell other people about our faith and our love of Jesus.

The Fifth Week:

Jesus travels all through the lands performing miracles and healing the sick people. In this week we remember that Jesus healed the paralytic and that He is able to cure our diseases and wounds. (Matthew 9:1-8)

The Sixth Week:

This is the week in which Jesus made the blind man see. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means lent). So he went and washed and came back seeing." (John 9). This is why the church calls this particular Sunday "Baptism Sunday". May the Lord illuminate our hearts to see the things that satisfy Him, in order that we may do them.

The Holy Week:

In the Holy week we remember the details that led to the crucifixion of Jesus; supper in Bethany, Palm Sunday, preparation for the Last Supper, the Last Supper, Jesus in Gethsemane, Jesus' betrayal in a garden, Peter's denial, the meeting between Jesus and Pilate, and the crucifixion of Jesus. Let us hope that we deserve to participate in fasting in order that we may gain peace for our spirits, feel for needy people and help them, and ask the mercy of the Lord and His forgiveness of our sins.

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April

Second Sunday



**APRIL
SECOND SUNDAY**

THE GREAT LENT (III)

Please read the attached materials entitled “The Holy Forty-day Fast” – in the previous lesson - “Joy ... and Joy”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson three in a three-lesson series on “The Great Lent”. In this lesson we learn how to draw joy from the richness of God in our life; a true joy.”

MEMORY VERSE

“Go to the pool of Siloam and wash “John 9:11

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† This completes the previous lesson on the Gospel readings arranged by our church with the guidance of the Holy Spirit during the Great Lent.

† **The Fourth Week: Face-to-Face with Jesus:**

Gospel reading: John 4:1-42

- Discuss briefly the story of the Samaritan woman.

- Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

a) “Give me a drink”

Christ started the talk with the woman in a very modest way. He made Himself poor and needy although He is the creator of heaven and earth. He is teaching us to ask for what we need.

b) “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you ‘Give Me

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a drink' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Jesus Christ is the "gift of God," the highest manifestation of God's love for us. The living water is the "Holy Spirit" that is given to the believers through Jesus Christ.

- c) "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

The water of Jacob's well offers only temporary satisfaction. It is not better than any other water. On the other hand, whoever drinks of the living water will never thirst. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "If you know the gift of God." Yes we know that the gift of God to man is none other than Jesus Christ: "This is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

It is very clear here that Jesus Christ our Lord speaks of Himself as the gift of God and the living water. The thirst of the soul for God cannot be quenched except by Christ Himself, the living water, Who, if He lives in us will become "a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14). In the Book of Revelation we read about this living water: "I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts".

- She said the truth confessing her sins and deserved to gain His acceptance. She went and told the people "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did." (John 4:29). The people believed what she said.

† The Fifth Week: Never Lose Hope:

Gospel reading: John 5:1-18

- When Jesus came to Jerusalem, He did not visit palaces but hospitals. This shows His kindness and humility. Jesus healed the paralytic beside the pool. There were many sick people beside the pool but Jesus selected this one because he remained there more than anyone else. Why? Because that man was persistent. For 38 years he never lost hope. His faith in the healing power of God was unshakable; and because of that faith he was healed. "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him." (Psalm 91:14).
- When asked, the paralytic said: "Sir, I have no man..." Do we offer help?

April

Second Sunday

A true Christian must be sensitive and responsive to the needs of others.

† The Sixth Week: Seeing God:

Gospel reading: John 9:1-42

- Jesus gave sight to the man who was born blind. Out of clay He created eyes for him. Does this tell us anything? If any, it tells us that Christ is God with all His creative power.
- There are two kinds of blindness, the physical one and the spiritual one. Christ healed both. When the physical blindness was healed the man came back seeing the physical world. When the spiritual blindness was healed, he saw God... How? Very strongly he answered the Pharisees that that man was from God. Later, when he met with Christ, he believed in Him as the Son of God. (John 9:35-38). Christ is the only eye-opener of the spirit. Through Him, we see God. Please read John 1:18 and 1 John 1:1.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) “If you know the gift of God”, we will proceed in our life through this heavenly gift of God. To draw from the gift of God we have to be honest and clear with God (the Samaritan woman), we should never lose hope (the man sick for 38 years) and we should be obedient (the man born blind).
- (2) An evidence of our true love to God is helping the poor, the sick and the needy whatever the need is. If we are not helping, then our love is not true or at least it is not enough.

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SONGS 🎵

FORGIVE ME MY REDEEMER

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” (Ps 32:1)

REFRAIN

Forgive me my redeemer
My eyes are filled with tears

You are the living God
You'll come and forgive us

With all the world's temptations
O strengthen us, Lord Jesus

Lord overlook our sins
And place your hands upon us

We are Your Hands' creation
All sinners and believers

O Lord we are not worthy
Your love is overwhelming

Our hearts you are seeking
With all his heart repenting

and bless me O Lord Jesus
pleading for forgiveness.

very soon You will come
and wipe away our tears.

we fall into tribulations
we are pleading O Lord.

be gracious unto us
please bless us one and all.

Your servants and Your children
lead us to still waters.

Your gifts we're not deserving
in reverence we bow down.

and blessed is the one listening
and with no turning back.

April

Second Sunday

JOY... AND JOY

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

There is a trivial joy for perishable, worldly affairs and pleasures...

Like Solomon's joy with what he toiled under the sun (Eccles 1:3) and Jonah's joy with the plant more than with the Salvation of Nineveh. The same kind of joy is that of the elder son, when he said to his father, "You never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends. " (Lk. 15:29)

One type of the false joy is the joy of some people over their talents as the disciples were joyful in casting evil spirits, so the Lord said to them, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice rather because your names are written in heaven." (Lk. 10:20)

The worst type of joy is being joyful over other's suffering. About this the Apostle said, "Love does not rejoice in iniquity." (1 Cor. 13:6) as those who rejoice in people's loss. Solomon says, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls. " (Prov. 24:17) This wicked joy is called gloating. As for the holy joy, it is from the fruits of the spirit. (Gal. 5:23)

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord, and the Magi when they saw the star and the righteous rejoiced over the fruits of their holy toil, "Those who sow in tears, reap in joy." (Ps. 126:5). The Bible has explained to us the joy of your salvation and the joy of the shepherds when the Angel said to them, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy... for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour... ". The Psalmist says about the joy of salvation, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation. " (Ps. 51:12). And the Father said, "It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again. (Lk. 15:32).

The joy of the repentance of a sinner is in heaven and earth! When the Good Shepherd found the lost sheep, "He lays it on his shoulders rejoicing, " (Lk. 15:5). He also says, "...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.. " (Lk. 15:7). The widow also rejoiced when she found her lost coin and called all her neighbours to rejoice with her. We also rejoice over all means of grace... "I rejoiced over your testimonies".. "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' " (Ps. 122:1), "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God.' (Ps. 46:4)

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The righteous rejoice over temptations and reproach: (James 1)

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" so I rejoice over tribulations. The greatest joy is that of the Kingdom:

"Enter into the joy of your Lord. " (Mt 25:21). This is the real joy, where we rejoice in the Lord, and in his company. Although we have not reached His Kingdom yet, we rejoice while waiting in hope. As the Apostle says, "Rejoice in hope. " (Rom. 12:12)

April

Second Sunday

NOTES

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April

Third Sunday



APRIL THIRD SUNDAY

PALM SUNDAY - JESUS THE KING AND THE LAMB OF GOD

Please read Matthew 21:1-11 and John 12:13-19, the attached material entitled “Firmness”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

We would like to understand that Jesus entered the city as a heavenly King and as the “Lamb of God”. In this lesson we learn to make the Lord Jesus the true King of our life. He becomes my personal king and personal savior.

MEMORY VERSE

***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel
“John 12:13***

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† **Jesus “the Lamb of God” entered Jerusalem:**

The Jewish Passover was on the fourteenth day of the same month in which Jesus entered Jerusalem. Jesus entered the city on the tenth day of the month. This is the same day on which the Jews used to get the lamb for the Passover according to the Law of Moses. “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household’ (Exodus 12:3). The lamb of the Jews is kept to be slaughtered in the Passover.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on the same day as the lamb was brought (i.e., on the

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10th day), thus declaring that He is the lamb of God. John the Baptist said about Jesus “This is the Lamb of God who carries the sin of the whole world.” St. Paul also said that “indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Because Christ is our Passover, He came before being delivered to His enemies by four days. He came early before His crucifixion by five days. He came to be crucified and His coming was for that purpose. The Greeks who came to celebrate the feast asked Philip to see Jesus. Jesus saw in their request a signal for His kingdom over the gentiles. But Jesus decided that His reign over the gentiles does not come except on the basis of His death and sacrifice. For this reason He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24)

† Jesus “the King of Peace” entered Jerusalem:

Jerusalem was the city selected by God to have the only altar in the Old Testament. No sacrifice can be offered except on that altar, including the Passover lamb. It was expected that this city will be the first to receive Jesus Christ, accept Him and believe in Him. On the contrary, the people of Jerusalem refused Him and continued their evil deeds. Please read Ezekiel 22:3-31 to see what God was saying through the prophet Ezekiel about Jerusalem.

As we read in the Gospel of St. Luke 19:28-44 when Christ our Lord came close to the city in the middle of all that noise and welcoming shouts, He looked at the city and wept. Why? He wept over it because it was in full darkness in front of the bright light of Jesus. The city was sick in front of the real physician who can make her whole. The city was hungry in front of the bread of life. The Savior came to it but it gave Him a blind eye and rejected His salvation. Jesus said: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing. See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Luke 13:34-35). In His entrance to Jerusalem, Jesus wept and said, “If you had known, even you, **especially in this your day**, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41-44).

✠ Jesus is giving Jerusalem the last chance by entering it as a humble king with a

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Third Sunday

declaration from His Disciples and the multitude “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, King of Israel”. Hosanna means “save us”. In this verse it means glory to our **Saviour who is sent from God** and who is the King of Israel.

† The entrance of the lord Jesus to Jerusalem is not just a historical event for us to celebrate. But it should be a celebration for abiding with Christ committing to Him and rejoicing with Him.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) If the Lord Christ is the king of our life, then we would be dedicated to him, follow His footsteps in life and enjoy of the richness in His kingdom.
- 2) Let us pray: “Jesus please enter our hearts as Thee hast entered Jerusalem. Let our hearts respond in true acceptance of Thee as the king of our lives. Open our hearts to see and recognize Thee.

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SONGS 🎵

THE HYMN OF PALM SUNDAY

***“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the lord! The King of Israel”
(Jn 12:13)***

He Who is above the Cherubim
With great glory riding a colt

today appeared in Jerusalem
surrounded by ranks of ni-angelos.

REFRAIN

Oussana khi ni - et – chocee
Ef-es-marō- enjevi-ethni-yo

fai pe epouro empi - Israel
khen efran em epchoice ente nigom.

On the way they spread garments
With joy and praise they did sing

from the trees they cut branches
Hosanna to the Son of David.

Today God fulfilled many words
As Zachariah prophesied

the prophecies and the proverbs
this prediction of Jesus Christ.

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Third Sunday

FIRMNESS

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

How easy it is for one to start a spiritual life and live with God for days or weeks then relapses and regresses backwards losing everything... !

It is important then for the one who starts, to continue, settle and become firm.

Therefore, the Lord said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. " (John 15:4).

He explained to us the importance of the branch's firmness in the vine in order to bear fruit. He praised His saintly disciples not only because they stood by His side during trials, but as He said, *"But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. " (Luke 22:28).* So He praised their firmness.

In the parable of the sower the Lord tells us about those who were not firm, "... and because they had no root, they withered away... and the thorns sprang up and choked them. " (Matt 13:6)

Therefore, St. Paul the apostle does not talk only about the importance of faith but more about being firm in faith.

He says, *"...on those who fell, severity; but towards you goodness if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. " (Rom. 11:22).*

He also says to the Colossians, *"...to present you holy... if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast. " (Col. 1:22-23).* And he blames the Galatians who, *"having begun in the spirit". but did not continue and, "...are now being made perfect by the flesh. " (Gal. 3:3).*

Many are those whom the Apostle tearfully mentioned, because they did not continue in firmness.

Some started serving actively, but did not continue... !

Others loved the idea of consecration, but did not abide!

And others started by loving God, then left their first love!

How grim it is for one to live the life of the tabernacle and altar with Abraham, then ends up in Sodom.

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Or starts as one of the twelve, then betrays Jesus.

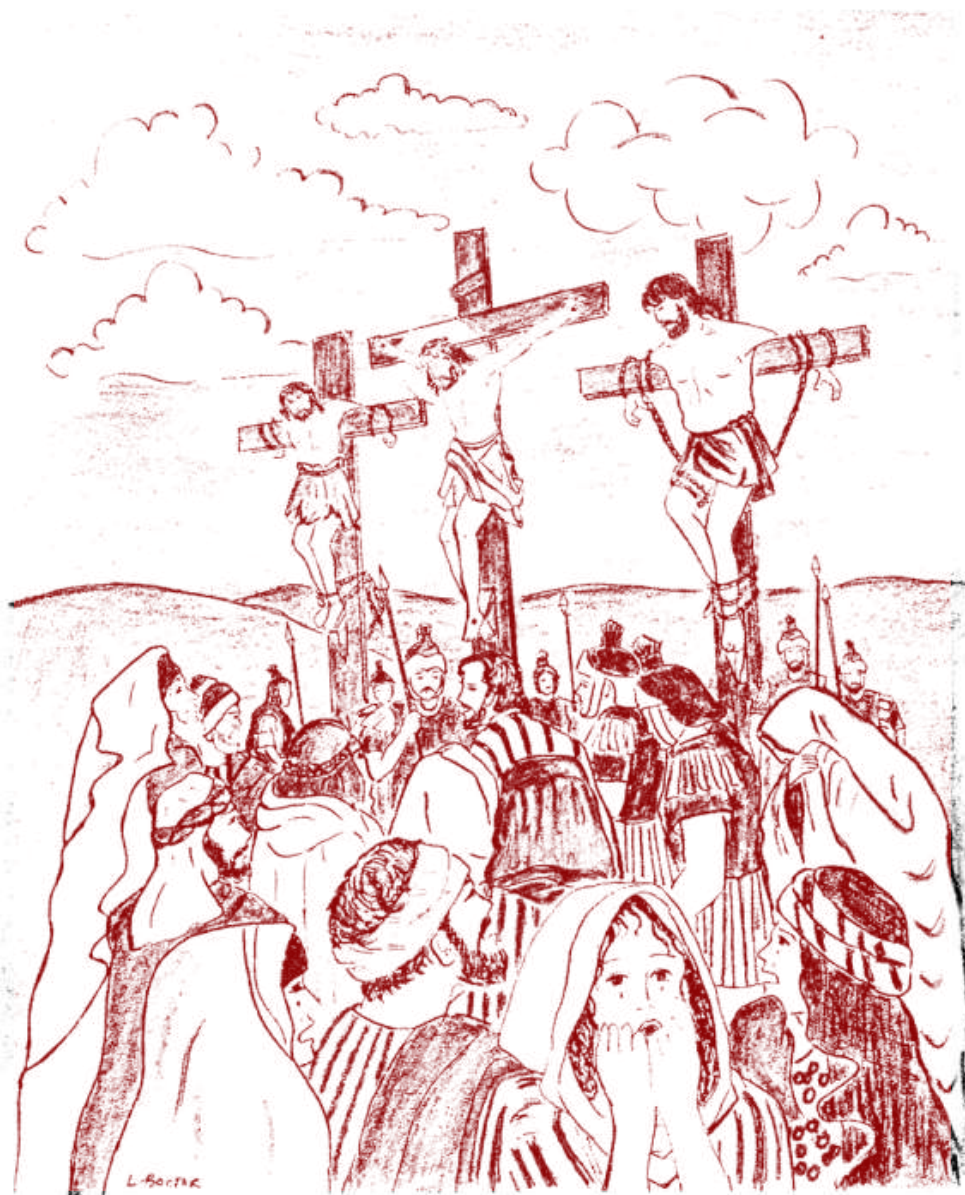
Or starts his life as a mighty victorious and a Nazirite to God and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him then ends up shaving his hair and pulling the grinder... !

Abiding in the spirit is a test for our will in the midst of tribulations. Therefore, the Bible says, *"Remember those... whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. "* (Heb. 13:7). They were steadfast and were made perfect in faith.



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**APRIL
FOURTH SUNDAY**

THE 7 PHRASES OF OUR LORD ON THE CROSS (I)

Please read the attached materials entitled “Good Friday”, “Carry your Cross ... Be Crucified, not a Crucifier”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson one in a two-lesson series to explain and learn from the 7 Phrases that Jesus said on the Cross. In this lesson we focus on forgiveness of others who harm. It is better for us to carry our Cross rather than crucifying others.

MEMORY VERSE

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do “Luke 23:34

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † From the attached notes on “Good Friday” mention a summary of the events: Palm Sunday, Thursday (Last Supper), and the trial on Good Friday. Then concentrate on the words of Jesus on the Cross.

Introduction

- † The Lord Jesus during the trial talked very little and even when they were beating Him, He did not speak. He accepted all insults and did not pay any attention to His rights “because love does not seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). However, while He was on the Cross, He talked. What did He say? What do we learn from it?
- † We will observe in the 7 phrases of Jesus on the Cross the element of “Giving”: He gave to the people who crucified Him the forgiveness, He allowed the right hand robber to be with Him in paradise, He gave the Virgin Mary a spiritual

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Fourth Sunday

son, He gave John the blessed Virgin Mary, He gave to the Father the price of justice and gave all of us salvation when He said: “It is finished”.

- † The first three words were related to forgiveness and caring for people and the last four words were a declaration of the work of salvation and its completion. We observe in His words with the Father that He used the two expressions “My Father” and “My God”. In using the expression My Father He declared that He is the Son of God and in using the expression My God He declared His humanity. From both He manifested Himself to be God Incarnate.

On the Cross He did not only talk to the Father, but He also talked to the saints represented by St. Mary and St. John and to the sinners represented by the right hand robber.

- † **First Phrase: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”** (Luke 23:34).

- Christ our kind Lord, while He was in the depth of His suffering on the Cross, was busy with others rather than with Himself. He did not mention His sufferings and pains.
- The Lord concerned Himself with His enemies first. When He taught us to love our enemies, He applied this to Himself.
- The Lord did not only ask for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him, but also gave them an excuse as not knowing what they were doing. Those people even if they wanted to find an excuse for themselves, they would not find. They said, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25).
- We must learn from our Lord to forgive those who hurt us and commit mistakes against us.
- When Jesus said, “Father, forgive them” it does not mean the forgiveness of all the people who crucified Him, it implies only those who would believe and repent. “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).
- This statement is the first of the new era of forgiveness. This is the forgiveness which had been paid for.

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† **Second Phrase: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)**

- The first person to whom Jesus talked was the robber. The robber did not start his life as a righteous man or a religious man. In fact, sin accompanied him up to the Cross because he was insulting the Lord with the other robber (Matthew 27:43). But he changed suddenly and faith entered his heart.
- Maybe the robber was affected by the kindness of Jesus and His forgiveness of those who crucified Him.
- The robber mentioned one brief prayer and it was accepted very quickly by Jesus. The robber said, “Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom”. Jesus answered him quickly saying, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” So, Jesus Christ corrected what the robber said “in your kingdom” to “the paradise”. As when a person dies he first goes to paradise until the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment when the souls in paradise go to the kingdom of heaven.
- In the statement of the robber he declared that Jesus is the Lord and that He is the Heavenly king.
- This robber was the only one to be on Jesus’ side and talk in favor of Him.
- We hope that everyone of us says like this robber “Remember me Lord.”

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) The Lord Jesus is our example in everything. He talked about love and forgiveness and applied it clearly on the Cross. We have to apply what we talk about. If we are true Christians we have to pray to those who harm for us, and forgive them.
- (2) Let everyone of us cry with the right hand robber “remember me”. Let our future in heaven be what concerns us the most. Yet let us not also forget that our goal in life is not simply to go to heaven, but to bring heaven to earth through our demonstration of Christ’s love to other people.

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Fourth Sunday

SONGS 🎵

NEAR THE CROSS

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1Cor 1:18)

Jesus keep me near the cross
Free to all, a healing stream

there a precious fountain
flows from Calvary's mountain

REFRAIN

In the cross, in the cross
Till my raptured soul shall find

by my glory ever
rest beyond the river

Near the cross, a trembling soul
There the bright and morning Star

love and mercy found me
sheds His beams around me

Near the cross, O Lamb of God
Help me walk from day to day

bring its scenes before me
with its shadows over me

Near the cross, I'll watch and wait
Till I reach the golden strand

hoping trusting ever
just beyond the river

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CARRY YOUR CROSS... BE CRUCIFIED, NOT A CRUCIFIER *By H.H. Pope Shenouda III*

If you are crucified, be assured that God will be with you, restoring your right completely, if not in this world, then in Heaven.

But if you are a crucifier of others, surely God will be against you, till He restores others' right from you, and punish you...

If you crucify others, it means that there is an evil element of attack and violence in you. These are all different aspects of injustice that do not agree with the righteousness expected in you or with the human idealism that laymen need...

But if you are crucified, especially for the sake of truth or faith, be confident that any pain you suffer is counted by God. It has its crown in Heaven and its blessing on earth...

Be sure that Heaven is completely on your side: God, the Angels, and the Saints...

All those who follow what is right, suffer for its sake.

All those who remained firm in faith, paid a price for their faith...

The history of martyrs has many stories of those whose blood was shed for the sake of their faith... Our history, in particular, is full of such stories...

Anyone can be violent, but it does not prove idealism. Injustice is easy and within the reach of anyone but there is no religion that agrees with it...

Therefore, keep your idealism and temper and carry your cross. The falsity that frightens you will never remain forever...

The Lord Jesus who tasted the bitterness of pain and endured the cross, is able to help those who suffer and are crucified at any time and in any place...

Look at the picture of Jesus crucified, you will be comforted.

Be confident that after Calvary, there are the glories of Resurrection...

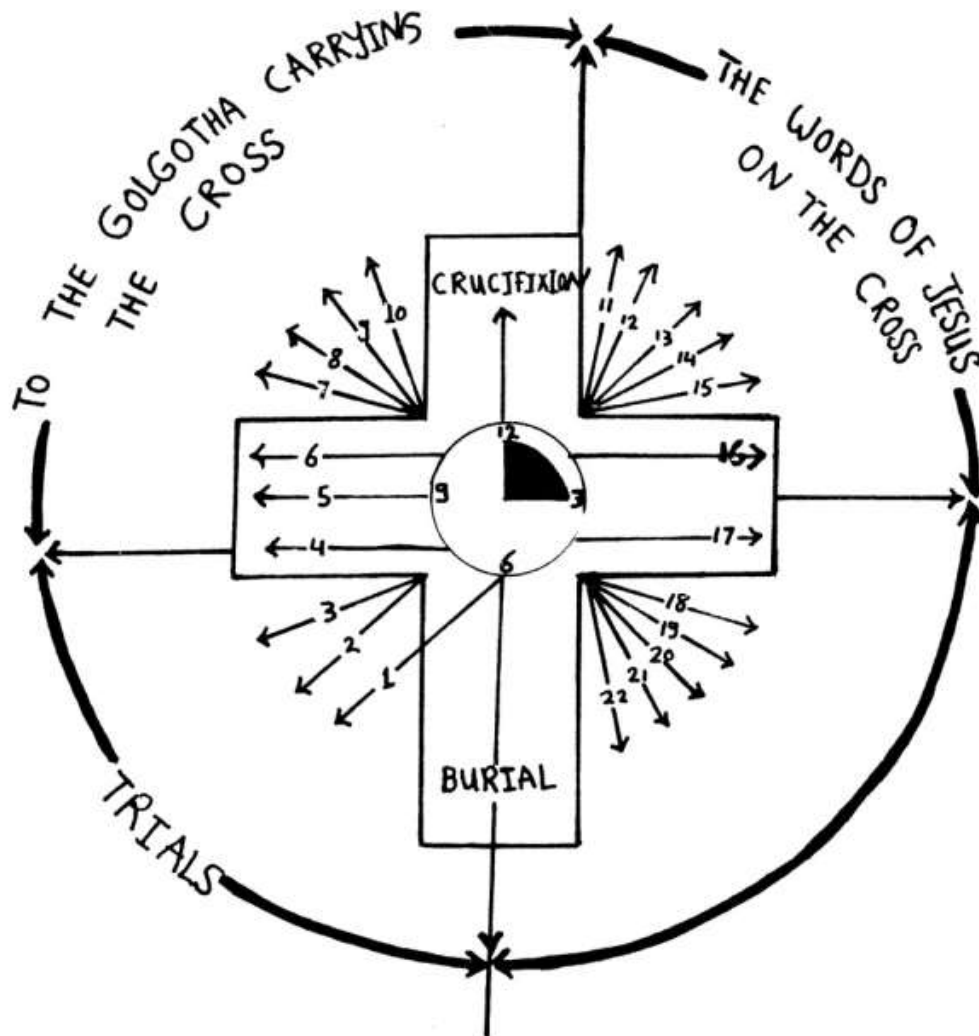
God saw the blood of Naboth the Jezreelite being shed and He did not remain silent. His reaction was strong...

Therefore, *"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Ps 27:14)*

If you are crucified, Christ will be by your side... He will see His image in you... Be then an image of Christ.

April

Fourth Sunday



GOOD FRIDAY

Note: In the Coptic Orthodox Church the service on Good Friday starts at 6 a.m. and terminates at 6 p.m.

Trials from 6-9 a.m.:

- (1) The second trial of Jesus in front of the chief priests (the first trial was done on Tuesday).
- (2) The third trial in front of Pilate.
- (3) The fourth trial in front of Herod.
- (4) The fifth trial in front of Pilate for the second time.

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To the Golgotha carrying the Cross 9-12 P.M.

- (5) The 39 whips
- (6) The crown of thorns and the insult to Jesus.
- (7) The Lord falls under the Cross.
- (8) Simon of Cyrene carries the Cross with Jesus
- (9) Jesus eye-to-eye with His mother.
- (10) Crucifixion and the nails.

The words of Jesus on the Cross 12-3 p.m. From 11 to 17

The events from 3-6 p.m.

- (18) One of the soldiers plunged his spear into Jesus' side.
- (19) The tombs opened and the curtain hanging in the temple was torn into two pieces from top to bottom.
- (20) The rocks cracked and the land shook.
- (21) The leader of one hundred soldiers gained faith.
- (22) The burial of the Son of God.

Note:

We pray "Lord have Mercy" 41 times:

39 whips, 1 for the crown of thorns and 1 for the spear

April

Fourth Sunday



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**APRIL
FIFTH SUNDAY**

THE 7 WORDS OF OUR LORD ON THE CROSS (II)

Please read the attached material entitled “Sacrifice”, and give emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson (II) in a series of two lessons to explain the 7 words of our Lord on the Cross. In this lesson we focus on the life of sacrifice from our part for the sake of others. The greatest sacrifice being the sacrifice of Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit “Luke 23:46

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† **Third Word: “Woman, behold your son Behold, your mother”** (John 19:26-27).

- Jesus looked after His enemies, the right hand robber and then His mother.
- Jesus ‘gave’ His Virgin mother to his beloved Disciple John who followed Him up to the Cross. From this moment on the Disciple took her to his house.
- Jesus looked after His mother to teach us to look after our relatives especially our parents.
- A person in His suffering is the subject of others’ care, but Christ in His suffering was caring for others.

April

Fifth Sunday

- St. Mary's pure face was the first that Jesus saw when He was born and it was also the last He saw before He handed His soul to the Father.
- Jesus looked after His mother in three ways: by talking to her, by looking after her needs, and by giving her John as a spiritual son as a substitute.
- The conversation of Jesus with His mother differs from that with the robber. The robber started the conversation but in this case Jesus started the talk with His mother, to teach us to respect the feelings of our parents.
- St. Mary was a blessing to John and to His house. She was a gift from Christ to John for his love and his following of Jesus to the Cross. We should observe here that our Lord Jesus Christ 'gave' His mother to His Disciple John to look after her in his house. This proves that St. Mary did not have any other children beside Christ as the Protestants falsely say.
- The expression "your son" gives us an idea about spiritual motherhood as well as the honor of the Virgin Mary with respect even to the Apostles.

† **Fourth Word: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

- Jesus said this statement to remind the Jewish people to go to Psalm 22 which starts with this statement. (Please read Psalm 22 to the students.) In those days the **Jewish people did not know the Psalms by their numbers**, but only by the beginning of every Psalm. Psalm 22 prophesies about all what would happen to Jesus in detail at His crucifixion. Jesus Christ wanted to remind the Jewish people that this was written about Him.
- Jesus said, "My God, My God" on behalf of the human race. He said it because "He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). He said this because He "became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the Cross" (Philippians 2:8). Here we see all the human race speaking on Jesus' tongue because all the sins of the human race were put on Him. Therefore, the human race is crying in Jesus' mouth "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me". Remember that Jesus acted on behalf of the human race in so many other times: in fasting, in obeying the Law, in His suffering and His death and in paying off the price for all the sins of man.
- This statement does not mean a separation between His divine nature and His human nature. It only means that the sufferings that He had borne were

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real and that the Father, by agreement, left Him to suffer to complete the salvation.

† **Fifth Word: “I thirst” (John 19:28)**

- Because of my sins and yours, the Lord’s mouth dried up “My strength is dried up like a potsherd. And my tongue clings to My jaws” (Psalm 22:15).
- No doubt, Jesus Christ felt thirsty after all the efforts, the beating and the bleeding that He had to endure. This is a proof that His divine nature did not interfere with His human nature to reduce the pain of his punishment
- Jesus did not say “I thirst” for the people to give Him water because He knew that they were going to give Him a sponge filled with vinegar. He said “I thirst” to fulfill all the prophecies and to declare that the price was paid.

† **Sixth Word: “It is finished” (John 19:30)**

- This has the same meaning as “I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).
- Jesus completed His teachings, His miracles, fulfilled all the prophecies and paid the price of Adam’s sin and all its consequences on the cross. He completed all righteousness and obedience.
- The expression “it is finished” is an expression of victory and joy. He was able to purchase us with His blood, establish His spiritual kingdom and destroy the Devil’s kingdom that was called “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30).

† **Seventh Word: “Father into Your hands I command My spirit” (Luke 23:46)**

- The Lord completed His work on the Cross as He had completed His work that He had before His crucifixion. One thing remained to be completed after He handed His soul on the Cross. He had to descend to Hades and preach to the saints, who were taken there, about the hope of salvation. Salvation was made and those saints were moved from Hades

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Fifth Sunday

to Paradise after Jesus handed His soul on the Cross.

- This has the same meaning as “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28).
- Lesson for us: Every night before we sleep we must say, “Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit”.

A true Christian must not be selfish, on the contrary a true Christian’s life is filled with giving under all conditions. We should sacrifice our time, effort, money, health for the sake of others. The Lord Jesus accepted to die on the Cross to save us.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

At the end of every day before we sleep let us peacefully say “Father into Your hands I commend my spirit”.

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SONGS 🎵

REMEMBER ME O LORD

“Assuredly , I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Lk 23:43)

Remember me O Lord,	when You come into Your kingdom .
Remember me O Holy,	when You come into Your kingdom.
Remember me O Master,	when You come into Your kingdom.
Remember me O God,	when You come into Your kingdom.
Remember me O Saviour,	when You come into Your kingdom.

April

Fifth Sunday

SACRIFICE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

The love which does not sacrifice is a barren love, without fruit.

Love is a productive mother that gives birth to numerous virtues such as compassion and affection, a word of encouragement and a word of consolation, attention and care, forgiveness and seeking the salvation of the soul. This is the spiritual love...

Perhaps the most distinguished quality in love... is sacrifice.

This is the big difference between love and lust: love always seeks to give whereas lust always seeks to take.

Lust seeks to take because it is concentrated around the self, but love, as the Apostle said, "...does not seek its own".

Love that does not sacrifice is not a true love.

Love sacrifices everything, does not keep anything from whom it likes, no matter how this thing is precious or essential to it. It gives from its needs.

The greatest thing a loving person can offer is to sacrifice himself, and the Lord said, *"Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends. " John. 15:13).* This was shown in depth on the cross...

The crucified Jesus is a sacrifice of love... The Bible 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).*

During the Passion Week, many contemplate on the passions of Christ. Christ's passions are merely a natural result of His love. Love here is the origin, while pain is the outer appearance...

I wish we would contemplate on His love which He revealed through His passions.

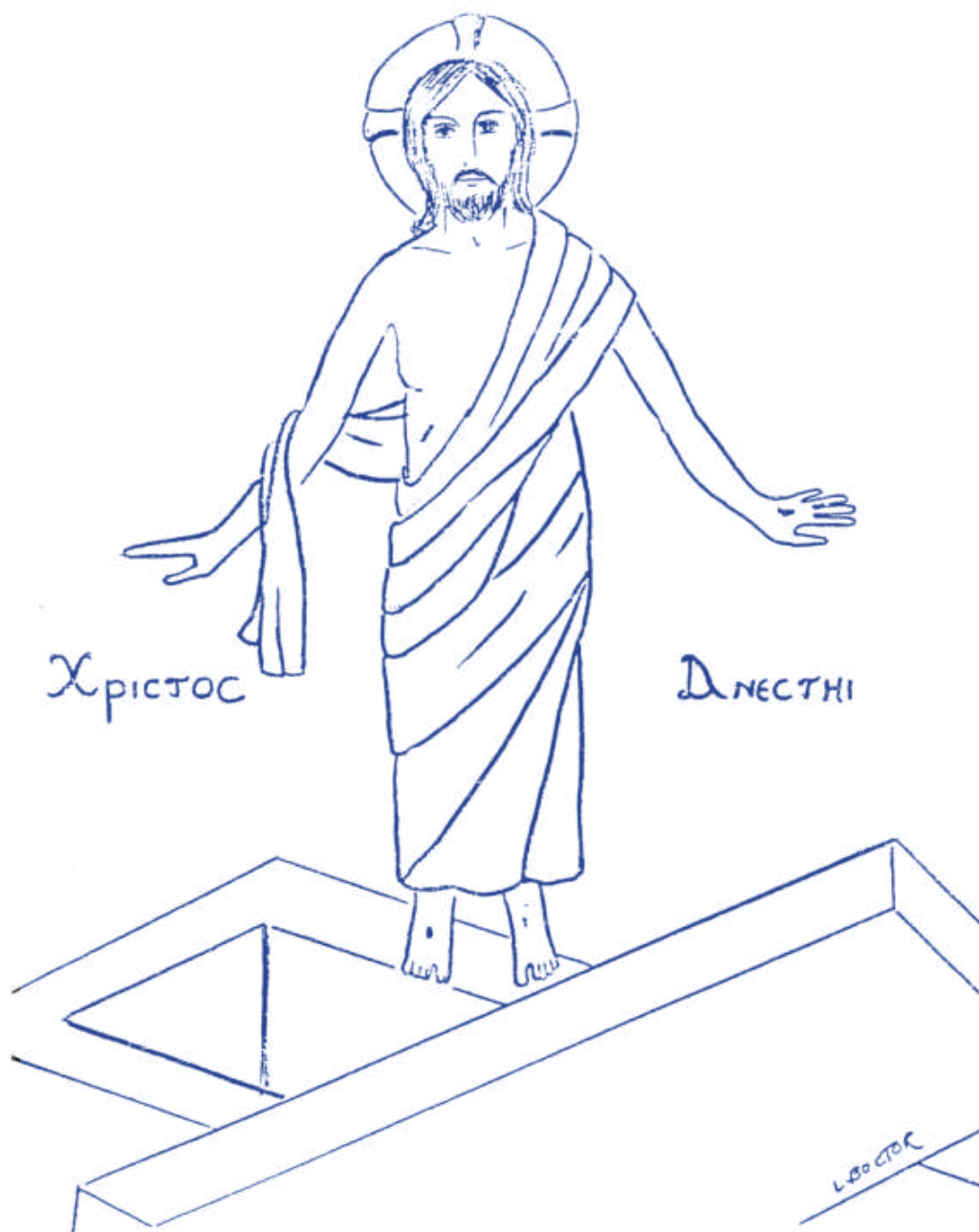
The candle melts to give light to others; this is also a kind of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. So, we put candles before the icons of the saints... as a symbol.

Also the incense burns in fire to give sweet smell which ascends to God... it is a delightful burnt offering to God, and it is also a symbol...



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MAY

First Sunday



**MAY
FIRST SUNDAY**

RESURRECTION AS LIFE

Please read the attached material entitled “The Resurrection as Life”, 1Corinthians 15:35-57, and give the lessons with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gave man hope for eternal life. Christianity is a religion of joy. Even death, which is the most severe enemy of mankind, has been defeated.

MEMORY VERSE

“For You have delivered my soul from death ”Psalm 116:8

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

What is the most important day of the year for Christians? Why is it the Resurrection?

† Describe briefly the events of the resurrection of Jesus as in Matthew 28:1-10.

† **With the Resurrection of Christ, the Judgment of Death has Ended:**

The judgment of death went through all the human race beginning with Adam. This happened when Adam was driven out of Paradise because of the sin. From that moment on, man has been fighting a losing battle against all factors of death and corruption. The battle continued until man was defeated, died and entombed. This result was known to all generations. Every time a man stands

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looking at a tomb, he feels sad because death meant eternal punishment.



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First Sunday

When Jesus was led in the way of the Cross to die, a great multitude of people followed Him, and the women mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me”, Luke 23:27-28. Why? Because the Lord Jesus is the only one Who defeated death and with His death the battle between death and the Lord Jesus was won by His resurrection. Victoriously He declared, as St. Paul puts it: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

† **Resurrection has a Continuous Effect on Man to Resurrect him in Souland Body:**

A result of Jesus’ resurrection was the descent of the Holy Spirit to dwell in man and grant him super Divine strength. This strength bears witness to Christ’s resurrection from the dead “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8).

But this new Divine strength is not only for witnessing, but it has also an inside effect on man by raising him from the dead. This Divine strength is the same strength with which the Lord Jesus rose. The principal work of the Holy Spirit is to give us the fruits of Christ’s death and resurrection. “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-14).

Therefore, through the Holy Spirit we gain the strength that resurrected Christ from the dead “But if the Spirit of Him, who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

Hence, our hope for resurrection from the dead is dependent primarily on our faith in the resurrection of Christ from the dead “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

† People were victorious in various fields except when it comes to death. But after Jesus rose from the dead, death was defeated.

† Our church always prays saying “No death for your people, but it is a transfer.” In our Divine Liturgy “But death which entered into the world through the envy of Satan, Thou hast destroyed through the life-giving manifestation of Thine

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Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

- † By defeating death, man defeated the most difficult enemy and hence St. Paul said, “I can do everything in Christ who strengthens me”. Everything is possible to the believer.
- † In front of every problem stands the picture of Jesus who rose from the dead to give hope for a solution.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) We must always have hope. Never let your problems, however difficult they seem to be, make you lose hope. Even death was defeated by the resurrection of our Lord so that we, as sons and daughters of God, can defeat death along with every problem we face, spiritual or otherwise.
- (2) The Lord Jesus has given to us all things that qualify us to resurrect and meet with Him in his second coming with great joy. We only have to commit ourselves to our faith.

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SONGS 🎵

ALLELUIA RISEN IS THE KING

“Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord.” (Jn 20: 18)

Alleluia, risen is the King of peace.
Alleluia, truly He is risen indeed.

Alleluia Jesus is risen today
Alleluia the great stone is rolled away.

Mary Magdalene went so early to the tomb
For the body she brought spices and perfumes.

Mary stood outside with her eyes full of tears
Looking at the empty tomb she did fear.

She asked the gardener, “Where did they put my Lord?”
She did not know that He was the risen Lord.

Jesus told her, “O Mary rejoice”
She cried, “O Master” as she recognized His voice.

He told her “Go to My brothers and preach the news
Tell them I will come and see them very soon.”

Mary went to the disciples right away
with the joy she preached “Jesus is risen today.”

And Jesus Christ Himself among them appeared
Showed them His wounds and gave them His peace.

For Thomas’ sake He appeared another time
Told him “Come, touch Me and see my wounded side.”

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THE RESURRECTION AS LIFE *

What is the Resurrection? It is a new life given to man by the resurrection of Christ, as the Bible says, “no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (II Cor. 5:15).

So the resurrection is life in Christ and for the sake of Christ alone.

By what signs do we know the man who lives in the fullness of Christ’s resurrection?

The first sign is that he loves Christ so strongly that even death cannot separate him from it.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom.8:35-39).

The second sign is that he loves the brethren to the extent that this type of love overcomes all the possible limitations of the darkness of death that the devil forces upon human relationships:

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:14).

This is the type of love that is expressed not in words or imagination, but in daily experience.

The third sign is that he sees “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28), because he sees every event from a heavenly viewpoint.

What are the sources or means of grace by which we may enter into the resurrection of Christ?

There are three main sources which open up the resurrection for us:

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The first is absolute faith in the words of Christ.

“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? I am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in Me though he may die, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn. 11:40, 25-26).

The second is mystical participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism and the Eucharist, in which we are buried and risen with Him in a mystery beyond the grasp of reason.

The third is ascetic striving, bearing the Cross and undergoing death and all suffering deliberately and consciously. For with participation in suffering and death with Christ develops a participation in the resurrection and glory with Him; this is a promise that proves true in experience.

The First Source of the Resurrection

The belief in the Resurrection comes first by faith in the words of Christ, as it is written, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

“But they have not all obeyed the Gospel; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” (Rom. 10:16, Jn. 12:38).

Here it is the word, that is the Gospel, that is the prime basic source from which we take directly the power of the resurrection of Christ. This takes place when the word is met by faith, that is absolute belief and knowledge is then raised to the level of inspiration. This is clear in the verse, “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Is. 53:1). Under inspiration, the resurrection pours forth as a mystical power, as a spirit and life, for the word of God is in itself a power: “For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

It is also spirit and life: “The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life” (Jn. 6:63).

We shouldn't forget that the first creation took place by the word of God, and that the second creation, with the resurrection, took place through Christ and His word. We must remember too that Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus, were raised from the dead by the word of Christ.

Christ is most emphatic that absolute faith in his words is essential for resurrection to

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take place: “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (Jn 1: 40, 25-26).

Gospel Events that Inspire us to have Faith in the Resurrection:

The resurrection was the crux upon which the message of all the missionaries of the New Testament, whether apostles, disciples or preachers, depended from the time they first began to preach the Gospel. The resurrection of the Lord is the foundation on which the whole Christian faith is built, for faith in Christ means faith in the resurrection; Christ is the Son of God because by His divine power, He rose from the dead: “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4).

We find that Christ places great stress on faith in His resurrection; He sternly rebukes the disciples on the road to Emmaus for their lack of faith in the resurrection of the Lord when they heard the news, for He assumed, and still does, that as soon as we hear the news of His resurrection we would believe. “Then He said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luk. 24:25-26). In the same way He also rebuked His Disciples for their lack of belief in the resurrection: “Afterward He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen” (Mk. 16:14).

When Christ rebuked His Disciples severely for their lack of faith, it was not simply because He had on many occasions before His death indicated that He would rise again. It was more because His resurrection was entirely in keeping with His power and divinity, and all His words and deeds. He did not rise from the dead incidentally or by chance, as if there was no previous plan. No, His resurrection was by a power consistent with His former life, and Christ demands of us faith in His resurrection, first because it is a declaration of His supreme authority and power, and second, because it is our new life in Him, given to us on the day of His resurrection. He had spoken of it in detail and told His Disciples to expect it, for it was for them: “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe” (Jn. 14:29). A little while longer, and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19). And Christ did indeed appear, and showed Himself to His Disciples.

The Gospel bears emphatic witness to the resurrection of Christ. In various places in the four Gospels, ten post-resurrection appearances are recorded. Also, in the first

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Epistle to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul bears witness to the resurrection with clear and emphatic certainty, as a participant in it and an eye-witness, both by his vision of the risen Christ while fully awake and alert in broad daylight, and by the evidence of the spirit, the power and the mystical work of the resurrection which he had received in his new self.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (1 C or. 15:1-8).

The testimony of the Apostle Paul to the resurrection of Christ is powerful and ranks high among all the other testimonies, because Paul was a persecutor of Christ, blasphemed and bore witness against Him, and killed those who preached the resurrection, and because he bore witness five years after the resurrection of Christ. He did not, moreover, speak simply as a historian, recording a vision or event, but as a man who had received the power of this resurrection in his own self, in his mind, his body and his spirit. Then we find that the testimony of Paul and the other Apostles is supported by the readiness of them all to stand by it, even under threat of death. They were indeed tortured and imprisoned and suffered the most terrible deaths, and they never ceased to bear witness to Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

The Second Source of Resurrection

The resurrection as a mystical power granted in baptism and the eucharist:

We do not believe in the resurrection of Christ as an event that concerns only Christ Himself, but as something that supremely concerns us too. For Christ rose for our sake; indeed He raised us up, as the Apostle Paul says, “He raised us up with Him” Our faith in the resurrection of Christ is itself our participation in His resurrection, for Christ died for us so that death should no longer have authority over us or be counted a penalty, but that it should rather be a means and a way to resurrection and eternal life!

So the resurrection of the Lord from the dead has become powerful and efficacious to bring new life, or a second birth, to the human race, as the Apostle Peter says,

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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). This verse shows clearly that the resurrection of Christ from the dead was not peculiar to Him alone, but is a divine and comprehensive act, in which the whole of humanity, everyone who believes, is included. Christ has begotten us anew by the resurrection, and so we have become, in the words of the Gospels, “sons of the resurrection.” That is to say, sons of deathlessness, over whom death has dominion no more: “But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Lk. 20:35-36).

So it becomes clear to us how Christ became the second Adam, who by His death and resurrection brought us again to eternal life.

Baptism Imparts the Power Latent in the Resurrection

When Christ spoke to Nicodemus, He set down that, in order that this second birth should take place for us, after we believe in His word, we should be born spiritually of His living and mystical body, by water and the Spirit, through baptism, by the action of the Holy Spirit. Christ attached great importance to this mystical act, especially after His resurrection, as we see at the end of each gospel, for when we are born of the mystical body of Christ we immediately become sons of the living God, sons of resurrection, sons of the Cross and the blood and the empty tomb. Death no longer has dominion over us, or as Christ Himself says: “nor can they die anymore” (Lk. 20:36).

So we receive the power of the resurrection in baptism when we undergo burial in the water, but it remains an invisible and unsubstantiated resurrection power until it is put into effect in earnest spiritual living. It is like the case of a child who is born with the natural ability to stand on his feet and walk, but remains unable to do before he develops and grows strong.

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The Eucharist Imparts the Resurrection as a Steadfast Condition

In the Eucharist, the resurrection begins to appear in its clearest form. Here we eat the mystical body and the life it contains; that is, we eat the resurrection. The power of this expression becomes evident if we realize that the eating takes place at two levels—a physical visible level when we eat the substance of the mystery, the bread and the wine, and a spiritual invisible level perceived by faith, when we partake of the divine body and blood. They are in truth food and drink, and the truth, or alitheia here is something beyond the senses and beyond the limits of our rational powers. This is the alitheia of which Christ spoke when He said, “I am the way, the truth” (Jn, 14:6).

So in the Eucharist we eat Christ, the risen Christ in the form of a spiritual body eaten in the spirit in the same way as the ‘truth’ is eaten. We eat Him and drink Him and are united with Him just as we eat the bread and drink the wine, and they become in us strength and energy for the continuation of physical life. In the Eucharist we eat the resurrection and it becomes a power that flows in our spirit giving it spiritual fervor, light, holiness, purity and all that is needed for the progress of the sons of the resurrection and the kingdom in eternal life. Every time we eat the bread of the Eucharist and drink the cup we are established in the resurrection of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ is established in us day by day so that we may perfect the will of the Father as sons of the resurrection, The Eucharist is the food of the resurrection, the heavenly cure for all the diseases of the sons of death, the wedding feast for those invited now to share in the wedding feast of the Lamb in blissful eternity.

The Third Source of Resurrection

The resurrection as ascetic striving:

We are called to bear the Cross before we are called to the glory of the resurrection, not as a burden or punishment or atonement or discipline, but as the proper path to the resurrection. The resurrection began in Gethsemane, where Jesus repeatedly prostrated Himself, where His sweat fell as drops of blood, where He was oppressed and felt the terror of the nearness of death. Then from Gethsemane to Golgotha by way of Ananias, Caiaphas and Pilate, where He was scorned and insulted. Then death and the tomb. After all that the Cross blossomed and brought forth in the resurrection the sweetest fruit mankind has ever tasted.

In the first source, we have already tasted the resurrection by faith in the word that opens up the mind, which then seeks the light of the joyful resurrection, where the gladness of the mind raises it to eternity and the Kingdom of God.

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In the second source we tasted the resurrection in the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist, as the water of life and the food of truth, from which all who eat will never die — a joy that is simply renewed for us every day on the altar.

But now we are called upon to taste the resurrection in a sure and wonderful way in the depths of the bitterness of pain and grief and tribulation. Christ tasted suffering and injustice and treachery, but found in them all, after the bitterness of death, the savour of the joy of resurrection, with its gladness that is beyond words, perceiving it through the agony of pain.

We are called to sense the resurrection in the pain of all suffering and tribulation, and in self-denial and in labour undertaken for love of Christ and the brethren. When Christ was passing through Gethsemane on His way to Golgotha He saw the dawn of the third day before His mind's eye, and saw clearly too the Mount of Olives from where He ascended, for His sense of resurrection never left Him. He had this sense before His passion and it made the passion bearable and even sweet for Him: "Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" (Jn.18:11).

So Christ gave us the mystery of the resurrection before suffering too, so that it should strengthen us to go through pain as He did. Also, our sense of the resurrection and its power might actually be increased by the pain of suffering. All the suffering we experience builds in us the sense of the resurrection in proportion to the pain, grief or tribulation that it brings. Indeed, the resurrection is only revealed in suffering and tribulations if they are so great that the stench of death is upon them!

Thus the resurrection of Christ has become the strongest support on which we can lean to help us pass through all sufferings and trials, and sufferings and trials have in themselves become the most powerful practical way available to us in daily experience of crossing over from death to resurrection.

So if faith in the word is the first and basic source that opens up for us the truth of the resurrection, and if baptism and the Eucharist are the second and mystical source by which we receive the resurrection as a living fact, suffering remains the daily spring of resurrection and its glories from which the zealous ascetic drinks insatiably till the end.

*** Note: "Mina El Khalas" Magazine – St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Troy, Mich. USA.**

MAY

First Sunday



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May

Second Sunday



MAY SECOND SUNDAY

JESUS GRANTED FAITH TO THE TWO DISCIPLES OF EMMAUS

Please read Luke 24:13-35, the attached material entitled “Resurrection is a Spring of Hope”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead gave assurance that we are worshiping a living God. In Him all the prophecies were fulfilled. The Lord restored the joy to all His beloved ones after they were very sad. We ought never to lose hope.

MEMORY VERSE

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself “Luke 24:27

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† Introduction

+ The Humility of our Lord Jesus in His Resurrection:

The first thing we observe is our Lord’s humility in His resurrection. He allowed all the insults and the crucifixion to take place in front of a lot of people, especially His enemies, but in His glorious resurrection He made it very secret and very private. He did not rise in a glorious way in front of a multitude of people to make up for all the insults and the sufferings at the time of His crucifixion, but He rose from the dead in secret. He did not appear to the people who rejoiced in His crucifixion, but He appeared to Mary Magdalene, the other Marys, Peter, the two Disciples of Emmaus, the

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eleven Disciples, later to Saul of Tarsus and to some beloved brothers.

+ **The Resurrection Caused a Great Fear to the Jews:**

Although the resurrection happened in secret, it caused tremendous fear to the Jews and they tried by all means to, at least, prevent the people from knowing it or believing in it. They did the following:

- 1) They put soldiers at the tomb and put a huge stone on the tomb and sealed it. This failed to prevent the resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead with the stone in its place and the tomb sealed.
- 2) They tried to prevent the resurrection news from reaching the people by lying and paying bribes to the soldiers to say that His Disciples stole His body.
- 3) When the previous attempts failed, they tried to prevent preaching about the resurrection by putting the Disciples in jail, beating them, threatening them, and submitting complaints against them to the rulers.

All the human ways failed to prevent the resurrection or the belief of the people in it.

† **The Resurrection Turned the Situation Around for the Faithful who were just about to Doubt because of the Cross:**

The people were believing in the Lord, but when they saw Him insulted, beaten and crucified, their faith weakened and some of them doubted. The resurrection restored their previous faith.. With the resurrection they came back following Him, loving and believing in Him. In this lesson, we will see that the two Disciples of Emmaus regained their faith when they saw Jesus after His resurrection.

- † Two of Jesus' Disciples were getting away from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus looking for shelter away from all the troubles of Jerusalem. They were sad and afraid from the Jews who were trying their best to hide the resurrection.
- † The two Disciples were sad and Jesus came and walked with them. They explained to Him that they were sad because the Jews crucified their Master who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people (Luke 24:19). . Their problem became more complicated when they heard about His resurrection from the women. The two Disciples could not believe the news.
- † Then Jesus explained to them that all what was written by Moses and the

May

Second Sunday

prophets was about Jesus, the Messiah Son of God. He opened the eyes of their minds to understand and the eyes of their hearts to have faith.

- † Faith is a grantor gift from God. He gives it to the people who, in humility, ask for it.
- † The two Disciples recognized Him when He held the bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave them. Then He left them. Their faith became complete.
- † When they regained their faith, there was no need to escape from Jerusalem. “So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem” (Luke 24:33).
- † When we become true believers (like these two Disciples) we will have no more fears. We can witness to our Orthodox faith in front of the whole world.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) Let us always pray that God grants us unshakable faith. If we keep asking Him that in every prayer He will give it to us because He said “ask and you will be given”.
- 2) The entire Bible, both the **Old** and the **New** Testaments, are primarily concerned with the personality of Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us pray that He consider us worthy for a declaration similar to the two Disciples of Emmaus.
- 3) We must never lose hope. The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus and our resurrection with Him is the biggest source of hope. If the Lord can help me to resurrect from the dead, He certainly can help me in anything else.

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SONGS 🎵

THE GOSPEL HYMN IN EASTER

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Jesus Christ the
King of Glory rose from the
Dead on the third day

This is He to whom the glory
Is due, with His Good Father
And the Holy Spirit, now and
Forever

Blessed be the Father, the
Son and the Holy Spirit, the
Perfect Trinity, we worship
Him and glorify Him

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Isos Pikhrastos eporo
ente epo-oo: aftonf evol khen ni
ethmo-oot

Fai ere pio-oo ereprepi naf
nem pefyot enaghathos: nem
piepnevma ethoo-wab : yesgen
tinoo nem sha – eneh

Je efezmaroot enje efyot nem
epshiri: nem piepnevma ethoo-
wab tietrias et jeek evol : ten
oo-ost emmos ten tio-oonac

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Second Sunday

RESURRECTION IS A SPRING OF HOPE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Man triumphed in hundreds of fields except death. Before death, man stood helpless and hopeless...

Then came the Resurrection to give the first victory over death:

The Apostle says in a challenge, *"O Death, where is your sting?"*

Then, hope in the eternal life entered man's heart and filled it with joy, that he would not perish or come to an end.

Also, the church receives those who pass away with the beautiful chant *"it is not death to your servants but it is a transition "*.

The chanter also says in the psalm, *"The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; the right hand of the Lord is exalted... I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. " (Ps. 118:16,17).*

Victory over death gave hope to triumph over all other things, because who overcomes the stronger certainly can overcome the weaker and a whole army of the enemy.

Thus, through victory over death, the morale of the children of God was elevated and so St. Paul said, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Also, there became nothing difficult, nothing impossible for people... but *"all things are possible to him who believes"*.

The spirit of the Resurrection spread out its hope on everything.

The image of the Lord who rose from the dead stands in case of any difficulty or problem to give hope that after death there is life, and after darkness there is light, and that there is a solution to every problem...

That is how, the children of God lived *"Rejoicing in Hope."* (Rom 12:12). They see that everything and everyone around them *"Even though he dies, he shall live"...* that is why they *"should not sorrow as others who have no hope"*.

Here ends the grieves of Gethsemane and the passion of Golgotha, the suspicion and fear of the upper room but remains the image of the bright angel before the empty tomb to announce the Resurrection....



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**MAY
THIRD SUNDAY**

AN OVERALL VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Please read the attached material entitled “Your relationship with the Holy Bible”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To have an overall view of the contents of the Bible. Have confidence that an Orthodox faith is based upon a very trust-worthy Book; the Holy Bible.

MEMORY VERSE

“For the word of God is living and powerful “Hebrew 4:12

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Opening Questions:

What is the Holy Bible? What is it made up of? And why is it so important?

† The Holy Book is One Unit:

The Holy Book is one book despite the fact that it contains various books (73 books): 46 books of the Old Testament (including the 7 books called Deutero-canonical) and 27 books of the New Testament. There are forty writers from various parts of the world: Jews, Greeks and various others. They wrote the Holy Book at different places: Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, Canaan, Babel, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and Rome. The Holy Book was written by knowledgeable people, people with average knowledge and people with very little knowledge. It was written in a time span of about 2000 years.

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Third Sunday

However, when you read the Bible, you feel that you are reading one book and this is something unheard of in the whole history. In any one book if there was a great separation in time in writing it, you feel that the book is more than one. But the Holy Book, you read it as one book and you feel you live in one theme and under one pen. This is because the Holy Book is one book inspired by one author who is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to write. This is the best proof about the correctness, the validity and the capability of the Holy Book.

The word “testament” means covenant, so the Old Testament means the old covenant between God and His people, before Jesus was born in the flesh. And the New Testament means the new covenant between God and His people after Jesus was born in the flesh.

The Deutero-canonical

These are seven books of the Bible (the Old Testament) that were not recognized as scriptures by some of the Jewish sects. These books were written after the time of Ezra. Because of their importance they were honored by the early church fathers like Saint Augustine. These books are recognized as part of the Holy Scripture by all the Apostolic churches. In the majority of the regular Bibles we do not see these seven books because the Protestants have omitted them. Some versions of the Bible include them such as the Jerusalem Bible and the Roman Catholic Version.

† The Entire Holy Book was Inspired by the Holy Spirit:

- The Old Testament:

The 39 books of the Old Testament (with the exception of the 7 books of the Deutero-canonical) were classified by the Ecumenical Councils according to its subjects as follows:

a) Five Books of Moses or the Books of the Law:

These are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

“Genesis”, the first book of the Old Testament means “beginning”. In Genesis we read about the beginning of the world, man, marriage, sin ... etc.

b) Twelve books which contain the history of the Jewish nation from its entrance to the land of Canaan until the captivity: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra,

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Nehemiah and Esther.

- c) Five books which were primarily written in poetic form: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.
- d) Five major Prophets who wrote large books. These are: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel.
- e) Twelve minor prophets and they were called minor because their books were small in size. These were written by Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

- The New Testament:

a) The Gospels:

The first four books of the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John are called “**Gospels**”, which means “good news”.

The four gospels were referred to in Revelation by the four creatures. “Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.” (Revelation 4:6-7).

St. Matthew: His symbol is a face of man because he started his Gospel with the birth of Jesus Christ as a man (emphasizing His human nature).

St. Mark: His symbol is a face of lion because he started his Gospel with the voice of John the Baptist, who stood like a lion before Herod.

St. Luke: His symbol is a face of an ox because he started his Gospel by talking about Zechariah the priest, and the ox was one of the sacrificial animals in the Old Testament.

St. John: His symbol is a face of a flying eagle because the flying eagle is a symbol of the Divine. John started his Gospel emphasizing the Divine nature of Jesus Christ the Logos.

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b) **The Acts:**

This book gives an account of the life and ministry of the early Christian church in the Apostolic era especially the ministry of the two Apostles Peter and Paul.

c) **The letters of St. Paul to the churches and the individuals:**

These are fourteen letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews.

d) **The universal letters** which were sent to the church in general (although some of them were sent to individuals). These are seven: James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

e) **Revelation** which is a prophetic book written by St. John the Apostle.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) Let us read the Bible every day. There is a message in what we read from God to us. This message will definitely bring fruits to our life. Let us read the Bible with a prayerful spirit, with respect, with understanding, with joy, and let us meditate on what we read.
- 2) The Holy Bible is not a monologue addressed from God to man but a dialogue of mutual love between them.

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SONGS 🎵

CHRIST IS RISEN

Christ is risen from the dead
Trampling death by His death
And upon those in the tomb
He bestowed eternal life

Glory be to the Father, and the
Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Now and at all times, and
Forever and ever . Amen

Khristos anesti eknekron
thanato thanaton patisas
ke tis entis emni masi
zueen kharisaminos

Zoksapatri ke iyou-ke agi
you epnevmaty

kenin ke aa-ee ke is touce
e-on-ace ton e-ono, Amen

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Third Sunday

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY BIBLE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

- + Your relationship with the Holy Bible is concentrated in acquiring the Bible, adhering to it, reading, understanding, contemplating, studying and learning it by heart. And, above all, you should behave according to it and train yourself to follow its commandments.
- + To acquire the Bible does not mean to keep it as a rarity on your desk but to have it for your continual use. You take it with you wherever you go, in your pocket or in your handbag. That makes it easy for you to read it at all times.
- + It is better to read the Bible on regular basis, this must be daily. It is better to read extracts every morning so that they might be the subject of your thoughts and meditations during the day and fill your mind in your getting in and out.
- + Let your reading in the Bible be with understanding, depth and contemplation. It would be better if accompanied by prayer, so you would say with David, "Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your Law."
- + Let your reading be with a solemn spirit so you may benefit from it. Remember how we stand at Church in great reverence to listen to the Holy Bible. Never slacken in reading or be negligent or thoughtless.
- + What is important is not the amount you read but the depth in reading. That comes when the Lord's words penetrate deep into your heart touching your feelings...
- + Try to learn some verses that give certain principles or impressions or some of God's promises and answers to matters that bother you.
- + Repeat these verses in your heart many times with enjoyment that makes them stick to your spirit and depths.
- + Deal with these verses practically. Make them the subject of your spiritual exercises. Thus you turn the Bible into life and it becomes part of you.
- + In your reading do not focus on the letter but the spirit. And if you need help, do not hesitate to ask...

The important thing is to receive a spiritual benefit from reading.



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Fourth Sunday



**MAY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

ST. MARY OF EGYPT

Please read the attached material entitled “St. Mary of Egypt”. (Note: if you have time please let the students read this attached material in the class. It is very interesting), the attached material entitled “Repentance and its Perfection”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To study the life of St. Mary of Egypt and learn from it. In this lesson we like to live a life of daily repentance. Our life can change totally.

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Tell the students about the past life of St. Mary in sin. She was prevented from entering the Holy tomb of Jesus until she knew that the Holy Spirit was preventing her from entering the Holy place because of her sins.
- † She repented in tears and prayed for the help of Virgin Mary to let her go in and kiss the Holy Cross. Then she was able to enter.
- † After that she left the whole world and stayed in the wilderness away by herself for 47 years until she met Abbot Zosima. She told him about her life.
- † St. Mary of Egypt gave full respect to Abbot Zosima. He brought communion for her once a year.
- † Describe what happened to St. Mary of Egypt when she passed away. God sent a lion to dig in the ground for her body so that St. Zosima would bury her.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Let us go back to Jesus. Let us repent and confess our sins. He is ready to accept us as the father accepted his prodigal son.
- (2) Let us not waste any time. Let us have our priorities and let our goal in life be known. What is our goal in life? It must be to live in peace with Jesus our Lord away from the sinful life of the world. We cannot do it alone, but we can do it with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Fourth Sunday

SONGS 🎵

ST MARY OF EGYPT

Let us give thanks to the Beneficent
The Almighty living in the highest,
Let us magnify His majestic kindness,
Whose mercy reached St. Mary of Egypt.

She started a very shameless girl,
Resented family, in lust so swirl,
Worldly pleasures her eyes to glare,
Who would believe this is Mary of Egypt?

Merging with pilgrims she took a boat,
As a young lady she never thought,
In the net of the Spirit she'll be caught,
To become St. Mary of Egypt.

At the church entrance love surrounded her,
Conferred care suddenly stopped her,
And the purity of the Theotokos struck her,
She is not yet St. Mary of Egypt.

She couldn't force her way through,
Till a decision with tears paid her dues,
The wretched girl found her clues,
To become the great St. Mary of Egypt

She was guided to cross the Jordan,
Live in the wilderness and find solace,
There she spent the rest of her days,
The great ascetic St. Mary of Egypt

Abbot Zosima discovered her piety,
Deep asceticism and choice of poverty,
For us he wrote the amazing story,
Of the great St. Mary of Egypt.



REPENTANCE AND ITS PERFECTION

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Repentance has levels and steps that one follows:

1. The first step is the feeling of being in a bad condition and the desire to change it. It is like what happened to the prodigal son, who came to himself and found that he is about to die of starvation. He found that the perfect solution is to return to his Father.
2. The second step is leaving sin and keeping away from all the ways that lead to it. What is meant by leaving sin is not to leave a particular sin but sin in general. At this point one starts to discover himself.

The more one grows in the spirit, the more he discovers new faults that he never realized before. Then he tries to get rid of them. He needs to pass various stages of purifying the self, till it returns to God's image.

3. In a life of repentance, leaving sin must be permanent and firm, with no return, so was the repentance of the Saints. We never heard that Augustine returned to sin once more. The same with Moses the Black, Mary the Egyptian and Pelagia.

Repentance, in the lives of all these Saints was a confirmed turn to God without returning to sin.

4. **The perfection of repentance, as the Saints said, is not just leaving sin, but hating it.**

The one who actually leaves sin, but continues longing for it in his heart, has not really repented. His heart has not yet repented. He is bound to have a relapse with action as well. Nevertheless, the heart is the basis. And the Lord says, "My Son, give me your heart. " (Prov 23:26). So repentance must be from the heart, and the heart becomes for God.

5. Such a repentant person cannot sin again, because all his feelings and desires become opposed to sin and would not accept it. Besides, he would not need to strive to keep away from sin. He automatically stays away from it because of his hatred to it.

6. **Real repentance must have fruits.**

As the Bible says, "*Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.* " (Mt. 3:8) And the first of these fruits is love for God which possesses the heart, changes the life and bears fruits of righteousness.

May

Fourth Sunday

ST. MARY OF EGYPT IN THE WILDERNESS

At the beginning of Lent, the gates of the monastery by the river Jordan were opened, and the monks were going out singing their psalms. They crossed the river and all of them scattered far and wide in different directions to spend the whole period of fast in the desert thinking of nothing except the fatherhood of God, devoting most of their time to the deepest fellowship with our Saviour. On Palm Sunday, they were accustomed to return to the monastery.

Abbot Zosima went far and deep into the desert. He was contemplating the divine grace which helped him to live in one of the monasteries of Palestine, from his childhood till his early fifties.

He was on and off with thoughts of pride asking himself, "Is there a monk on earth who could be of help to me and show me a kind of asceticism that I have not achieved? Is there a man to be found in the wilderness who has surpassed me?"

Suddenly an angel appeared to him and led him to the monastery by the river Jordan, where he witnessed ascetic practice and angelic life. He was humiliated as he witnessed the piety of the monks.

On the 20th day of his spiritual journey, and while he was praying, he caught sight of something that looked like a human form, with long silver grey hair ...

"Is it an illusion?"

"Is it an imagery?"

"Is it the deceit of the devil? He turned his sight and realized that it was a human form, naked, its skin was dark as if burned by the heat of the sun.

He was overjoyed, hoping to find one of the holy hermits of the wilderness, who devoted all their lives for the fellowship with the true friend Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

He ran in pursuit of that figure but it began to run away from him.

When he approached it, he shouted, "Why did you run away from me, O servant of God! Wait for me, in God's name, I tell you. Why do you flee from such an old man as I am?"

As he said these words he saw as if the human figure had fallen into a hole among the rocks. He knelt down and began to cry as a child, and the echo of his crying filled all the desert.

"For Jesus' sake forgive me Abbot Zosima, for I cannot turn towards you. I am a woman and I am naked, Throw me your cloak so that I may cover my body and turn

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to you and ask for your blessing!"

He was astonished for she knew him and called him by his name... He threw his cloak, she picked it up and covered her body. Then she turned to Abbot Zosima and said, "Why did you wish, Abbot Zosima, to see a sinful woman? What do you wish to learn or hear from me?"

He threw himself on the ground and asked for her blessing, but she bowed down before him saying, "Abbot Zosima, it is for you to give blessings. You have been blessed with the grace of priesthood, and for many years you have been standing before the holy altar and offering the sacrifice of the Divine Mysteries."

But with tears he said to her, "O honourable mother, I see that you have died to the world. God granted you wonderful graces, for you have called me by name and recognized that I am a priest though you have never seen me before ... I ask you to give me your blessing for God's sake, for I need your prayers."

In face of his supplications she was obliged to say, "Blessed be God who cares for the salvation of men and their souls." He answered, "Amen".

As they rose up, she asked him, "Why have you come, man of God, to see such woman who is naked and devoid of every virtue?"

Then she asked him about the Christian people, the shepherds, and the kings. Abbot Zosima said, "By your holy prayers, O mother, Christ has granted peace to all. But I beseech you to pray for the whole world, and for me the sinner."

She replied, "You who are a priest, Abbot Zosima, pray for me and for all, for this is your calling. But as we must all be obedient, I will gladly do what you ask."

Then she turned to the east and raising her eyes to heaven and stretching out her hand she began to pray for a long time.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, who opened the heart of all men, so that, even he who is in the desert and does not see anybody, eagerly desires the salvation of all the world.

Though she was in the desert, she was not in isolation from the church, but she was a living member, asking about all her brothers.

IN EGYPT

Waiting for a long time, he looked up at her while she was praying; then he fell on the ground weeping and repeating many times "Lord have mercy".

He could see the woman's feet rising about a cubit from the earth as if she was flying. He doubted if she was a spirit or if her prayers were hypocritically said.

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Fourth Sunday

At this moment she turned round towards him, lifted him up and crossed her body saying to him “May God, O Abbot Zosima, protect us from the evil one and from his snares, for his struggle against us is fierce!”

Hearing and saying this, he asked her to tell him her story and how she had come to the wilderness, saying:

“I beseech you, for the sake of Christ our Lord who was born of the Virgin ... hide not from me, your servant, who you are, and whence and when and how you have come to the wilderness. Tell me everything, that the mighty works of God may be made manifest, for you shall not tell me these things for the sake of vainglory or for some other purpose but in order to disclose the truth to me, the sinful and unworthy. I believe that God for whom you live and serve led me into this wilderness to show me His ways concerning you.

She replied, “I am much ashamed, my father, to tell you about my disgraceful life. Forgive me for the sake of God... I am not running away from vainglory as you have thought, but your ears cannot bear my wickedness. You will run from me as from a snake.”

“I will tell you everything, in order that you may pray unceasingly for me, that I may find mercy in the day of judgment...”

Then she started to tell her story with tears... running down her cheeks: “My motherland was Egypt. When I was 12 years old I rejected my parents’ love and went to Alexandria.

When I remember how I lost my virginity there at the very beginning and gave myself up to sensuality, I become ashamed. It is better to tell about all this shortly, so that you should know about my passion and my love for pleasure.

When I was about 17 years, I lived like a fire of vice that burns people ... I seduced many, not for the sake of gain, but often when they wished to pay me, I refused the money.

I did not believe in God, but I used to say, “I shall do just as I like, and no one will stop me.”

Once I saw a large crowd of Libyans and Egyptians running towards the sea. I asked one of them where these men were hurrying to. He replied they were journeying to Jerusalem for the Exaltation of the Holy Cross of our Lord which was to take place in a few days.

I suddenly desired that I might go with them to have more new lovers who could satisfy my passion.

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In fact, I had no money to pay for the journey or for the food but I had my body which they could take instead of payment...

How shall I narrate to you Abbot Zosima, what happened after this?

I went to the shore and met some young men... I forced those miserable creatures to act even against their will ... I entangled many and many in my net.

I was the vessel of Satan! I was not contented with these youths but I seduced others in Jerusalem.

In my stupidity, I used to boast that I could seduce many by my body, my shameful words, and impudent laughs."

ON THE DOORSTEP

At last in Jerusalem I noticed a great crowd of pilgrims moving towards the church which is built on the Tomb of Christ. I was anxious to see what they would do there.

I tried to enter the church with the crowd which was struggling to get through the doors, but suddenly I felt some power pushing me away from the door.

All could enter easily, but I could not. I felt that some force was pushing me to go back.

At first I laughed, secretly I thought this might have been because I was tired, or because of my weakness, being a woman.

I did my best and tried to enter, and for the second time I was stopped. I was prevented from entering by a secret mighty force,

Having repeated my attempt three or four times, I lost all my strength. I went aside and stood in a corner of the porch. I began to weep and lament and beat my breast, and to sigh from the depth of my heart.

"Why couldn't I enter?

Did my sins prevent me from entering?"

Then I looked up over the door and saw an icon of the Most Holy Mary the "Theotokos", and the purity of her complexion put me to shame.

Now all my past miseries were clearly exhibited before my eyes and my sins tormented me.

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Then I knelt before the icon and begged for another chance to follow my Saviour. I asked the Virgin's help.

I asked my Saviour to save me and lead me in His way.

I vowed that, as soon as I had seen the Holy Tree of the Cross, I would renounce the world and its pleasures and would go wherever He would lead me.

As I prayed, I found myself filled with confidence. I left the place where I stood praying and went again and mingled with the crowd which was struggling to get through the church doors.

Now I had gone as far as the doors which I could not reach before, I entered without difficulty and found myself within the holy place.

Throwing myself on the ground I kissed the Holy Cross with tears and trembling.

I forgot myself until midday. At last I came out of the church and stood by the icon of the Theotokos the Virgin, the place where I had made my vow. I shouted from my heart:

“Glory to God who accepts the repentance of sinners through thee, O Loving Lady.

What more can I say, I who am so sinful? It is time for me, O Lady to fulfill my vow, now lead me by the hand upon the path of repentance!

Then I heard this voice, and believed that it was sounded for me, “If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.” Having heard this voice, I went and cried to the Theotokos, “O Lady, forsake me not.”

With these words I came out of the entrance of the church and hurriedly set off on my journey.

One of the pilgrims glanced at me and gave me three pieces of silver. I took them and bought three loaves of bread which I took for my journey.

I passed the gates of the city and went on my journey in tears. At sunset I reached the Church of St. John the Baptist which stood on the banks of the Jordan. I passed all the night weeping in the church, in the morning, I partook of the Holy Mysteries and went out to the shore and crossed to the other side.

I found myself in the wilderness and then up to this day I have been estranged from

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people, I have been living here cleaving to my God Who delivers all those who turn to Him, from all that defiles them and from all temptations that are stirred against them.

Abbot Zosima asked her, “O lady, how many years have passed since you began to live in this wilderness?”

About forty-seven, I think.

Have you lived all these years without suffering, because of the change that occurred in your life?

You are asking me Abbot Zosima, about things that I tremble to speak about. If I call to mind all the hardships that I have overcome, all the terrible thoughts that have troubled me, I fear that I may come under their influence once more.

Don’t hide anything from me, my lady.

Believe me, Abbot, I spent seventeen years in this wilderness fighting wild beasts. At first, life was extremely hard in the wilderness. I used to yearn for my past life, my friends, the good time we had spent together, and for all the food and drink and the fine things I used to have in Egypt.

Here in the wilderness, it was hard to find even a draught of water to drink. I grieved sorely and was faint from thirst and hunger, and from the heat of the sun. Life was unbearable. I was often sick and I almost died. As the memories of my old life persisted in attacking me, I flung myself on the ground and, in tears, I begged the Lord to help me...

How can I tell you about the thoughts which urged me on towards lust once more? They were like a fire in my miserable heart which seemed to burn it up completely and aroused in me the desire for pleasures.

Finally I felt great peace in my soul, the Lord gave me what I wanted. I had mourned much for my wicked past and I was finally comforted by God...

As Abbot Zosima heard her quoting extracts from the Scriptures, he asked her:

And where did you learn the Holy Scriptures?

I have not seen a human face since I crossed the Jordan, except yours today ... I have not learned from books, but the Word of God Himself alive and acting, gives man knowledge, and this is the end of my story. As I asked you at the beginning, I now also beseech you by the Incarnate Word of God, to pray to the Lord for me as I am a

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sinner.

Having said this, she bowed her head for a moment, in meditation, then turned to Abbot Zosima again saying:

“I beseech you, holy father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, to tell nobody of what I told you until I am set free from this earth and now depart in peace. Next year in Lent, do not Cross the Jordan as is the custom in the monastery. Stay there in the monastery, for even if you wished to go out, it would be impossible for you to do so. On Holy Thursday, wait for me at the banks of the Jordan with the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ in a sacred vessel.”

Then she disappeared in the depths of the wilderness. Abbot Zosima, falling upon his knees, and prostrating himself upon the earth on which her feet had stood, gave glory and thanks to God. And again crossing that wilderness he returned to the monastery on the same day that was assigned for the return of the monks.

For a whole year he kept silent, not daring to tell anyone of what he had seen. He prayed to God to see her again.

That year seemed very long to the saint who wished it could be shortened into one single day.

When Lent began, he was very ill and lay in bed with fever, then he remained in the monastery as she had told him. On Maundy Thursday he took the life-giving Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and put into a basket, some figs and dates and a small quantity of lentils that had been soaked in water. Having reached the bank of the Jordan he sat down waiting for her.

He waited for a long time. Then he began to doubt that his unworthiness might have prevented her from coming or that she had come and not finding him, she went back.

Then he raised his eyes to heaven and began to pray asking God that he might see the face of the ascetic by God's will. After praying, he saw her coming on the surface of water towards him, and when he wanted to prostrate himself, before her she cried to him while still walking on the water, “What are you doing Abbot? You are a priest and you are carrying the Divine mysteries!”

With joy and peace, she asked him to bless her and took part in the Holy Communion.

She raised her arms towards heaven and sighed with tears, saying, “O Lord, now let Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for my eyes have seen Thy

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salvation. "She then looked towards the father and said, "Forgive me, Abbot for I have another favor to ask, go back now to the monastery and may the Grace of God preserve you. Next year, come again to the same place where you first met me. Come and you will see me again for such is the will of God."

He answered her, "I long to go after you in the wilderness following your example."

He asked her to take the small amount of food that he had brought her. She touched the lentils with the tip of her fingers and took three grains, put them in her mouth, saying that the grace of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to keep the nature of the soul undefiled, and again she asked him to pray for her.

Then she crossed the Jordan passing over the water, and disappeared in the wilderness, and he went off sighing sorrowfully.

Another year passed, and he again went into the wilderness. He reached the same spot but he saw her body lying on the sand.

Zosima felt very sad and knelt down beside her, weeping for a long time, praying the psalms that are suitable for such occasions.

After a little while, he began to wonder where he should bury her body. But he noticed, something written on the sand near her head, " Abbot Zosima, on the night of the Lord's passion, Maundy Thursday, I went to my Saviour. Bury the body of humble Mary in this very place. Let dust return to dust and pray to the Lord for me..."

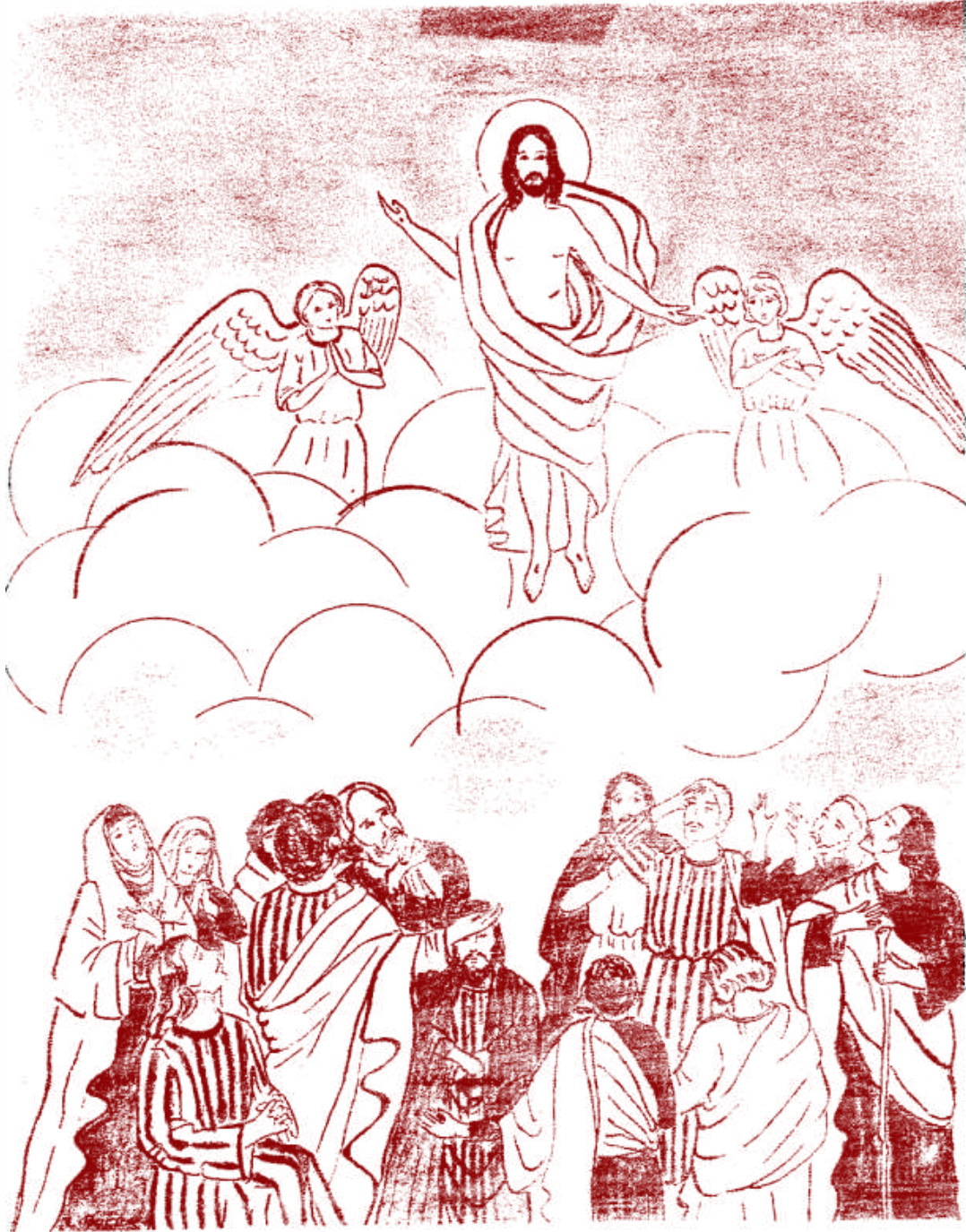
Father Zosima was astonished how she returned to this place after her partaking of the Divine Communion last year on the same day at the same hour and died, and how her body remained without decay throughout the whole year.

At that moment a lion came out of the woods, licked her feet and began to dig a hole large enough to bury the body.

The father washed her feet with his tears, calling on her to pray for all, and then he covered the body with earth.

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**JUNE
FIRST SUNDAY**

**THE ASCENSION FEAST
THE ASCENSION WITH THE GLORIOUS BODY**

Please read Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:1-2, 6-11, Mark 16:19-20, the attached material entitled “The Ascension” and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To learn that our ascension to heaven will be similar to Jesus’ ascension. We like to show that in Christianity, as well as anything else in life, we must look at the total picture (i.e. from the Cross and referring to Ascension glory).

MEMORY VERSE

“Who Will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body “Philippians 3:21

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† Describe first the events of Ascension as mentioned in Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-2, 6-11.

- **“He Led them out as Far as Bethany”**

Jesus led the Disciples away from Jerusalem; away from the great noise and the confusion. We cannot lift up our hearts to heaven unless we stop the noise around us. We need a suitable and quiet place in order to be able to meditate, pray, and lift up our hearts to heavens.

- **He Lifted up His Hands and Blessed them:**

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This was the main purpose of Jesus' coming to start with. He wanted to reign over us to have us as His children and to bless us.

We pray to You our Almighty to raise up Your blessed hands and bless Your people and unite them in Your love. In our Divine Liturgy the priest prays and says "O Lord, Who blessed people at that time, bless us also now."

- † When Jesus arose from the dead, He had a glorious body. This glorious body is not governed by the gravity of the earth. This is why this body went up to Heaven. This body was also able to enter the upper room while the doors were closed. Remember that our Lord Jesus entered into the upper room after His resurrection while the rooms were closed and talked to His Disciples.
- † **"He was Parted from them and was Carried up into Heaven":**
The ascension of Jesus to Heaven was with the glorious body.. God is on earth and in heaven and in between. **God in His divine nature does not go up and down.** God does not go up in heaven because He is in it and does not need to go up and God does not leave the earth because God is in all places. Therefore, Jesus ascended with the glorious body and sat at the right hand of the Father.
- † The right hand of the Father does not mean that God has a left and right. It means that Jesus sat (means settled) at the power of the Father.
- † **The glorious body:** Jesus gave us an example of the glorious body when He took Peter, James and John on the mountain and He was transfigured before their eyes and "His clothes became shining, exceedingly white like snow, as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (Mark 9:1-6).
- † We profess the ascension in our Orthodox creed when we say "He suffered and was buried; arose from the dead on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended unto the heavens and has sat at the right hand of His Father".

In the Old Testament we read about Enoch who walked with God and was not found because God took him, and Elijah who was taken up alive in a chariot of fire. But the ascension of our Lord Jesus was different. Our Lord ascended with His own strength exactly as He arose from the dead with His own strength. But Enoch and Elijah needed the power of God to be raised. They are to come back to earth and die and be resurrected again. This is completely different from the ascension of our Lord Jesus Who is alive forevermore. "I am the First and Last, I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.

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And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:17-18).

- † In the second coming of Jesus, He “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

In the second coming of Jesus, He will come in “His Father’s glory” with His angels. At this time God will give each of us (His people) a glorious body and take us with Him “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

- † Therefore on the example of the ascension of Jesus, we will be ascended to heaven with a glorious body. But we must first go to paradise after we leave this world. Then in the last day we will ascend to the kingdom of God in a glorious body.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Let us pray that God prepare us for this very important hour of His second coming. He urges us to be like the wise virgins who carried oil in their lanterns and lighted it to receive the bridegroom.
- (2) When we suffer for the sake of our spiritual growth, we will also enjoy our ascension to heaven with a glorious body. So, in everything else in life, we work hard to get results.

June

First Sunday

SONGS 🎵

GOSPEL RESPONSE FOR THE FEAST OF ASCENSION

Alleluia. (4) Pekrestos
aftonf evol khen ni-ethmo-
ut: owoh afshenaf e-
epshoy e-enifiowi:

Vay ere pi-o-u...

Alleluia. (4) Christ has risen
from the dead, and
ascended into the
heavens

This is He...

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THE ASCENSION

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Last Thursday the Church celebrated the feast of the Holy Ascension, as Christ ascended to Heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father.

The Lord ascended in glory, defying all the law of gravity. **He also gave us hope of being lifted up like Him**, defying the law of gravity and joining Him, by saying, *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."* (Jn 12:32)

He was lifted up on a cloud and disappeared from their sight. But He will come again on the clouds of Heaven, with His Angels and Saints, to lift us up on the clouds with Him, and be with God all the time.

And as He sat down at the right hand of the Father, we will sit down with Him in His glory.

The One they crucified at Golgotha and was counted as a sinner, enduring many reproaches and insults, has risen from the dead in glory, ascended to Heaven in glory and sat down at the right hand of the Father in glory.

Golgotha was not a sad ending of His life. It was the beginning of His glory.

Therefore, whoever suffers with Him will surely be glorified with Him...

The Ascension was the last picture of the Lord seen by His Disciples. It lifted up their eyes to where Christ is sitting down. It is what the Apostle meant when he said, "Received up in glory." (1 Tim. 3:16)

And so Christian suffering became inseparable from its glory.

Christ who suffered for our sake, appeared to St Stephen during the suffering of his martyrdom *"He gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He then cried out with a loud voice, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

The one who descended has also ascended...

We, too, would not be able to ascend, if we do not first descend...

We, also, must humble ourselves, endure suffering and be lifted up on the cross, before the ascension to the right hand of the Father...

As Christ has been lifted up, we always lift up our eyes to where Christ sits on the right hand of the Father, till he comes back once more on the clouds, to take us to Him.

Then, we will be lifted up with no descent ... Amen.

[illegible]

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School Program
the teacher should
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Second Sunday



JUNE SECOND SUNDAY

FREEDOM FROM A CHRISTIAN VIEW POINT

Please read 1 Corinthians 10:23-27 and also Galatians 5:13-14, the attached material entitled “Christianity, Religion of Strength”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To know the meaning of freedom in Christianity. Not everything is truthful in this life. We must be free to choose what is good for us without infringing on others' freedom.

MEMORY VERSE

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths “Colossians 2:16-17

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

Sometimes you say “I wish my parents would leave me alone to do whatever I want”, or “I wish I had more freedom.” But what is freedom from a Christian point of view?

† **Freedom from the World's Point of View:**
In the world there are many kinds of freedom:

- 1) **Political freedom** which allows the individual to choose the party he would like to have represent his or her interests.
- 2) **Religious freedom** that allows the person not to be forced to adopt a

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particular religion or faith, because, after all, faith has to be freely accepted.

- 3) **Social freedom** that opposes slavery and advocates equality among people and gender.

Regarding all these kinds of freedom, the Orthodox Church has stood, all through its history, in full support. "... let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths" (Colossians 2:16-17).

However, there is a different kind of freedom that is most important, namely, Christian freedom or "the freedom of the glory of the sons of God". This freedom is our main concern in today's lesson.

† **Freedom from a Christian Point of View:**

Christian Freedom:

Christian freedom is a natural result of our being accepted by God as His sons and daughters. The freedom of a son in his father's house is different from the freedom of a servant or slave. What is Christian freedom then? It is freedom from all bondages; the bondage of sin, the bondage of fear, the bondage of external worldly forces and the bondage of the Law.

† **Factors that Constrain our Freedom in Christ:**

- Bondage of Sin:

St. Paul said "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. **For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body

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Second Sunday

is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8:1-10).

This shows us that the law of sin and death is the one that reigns over man who lives according to the flesh. But the spiritual man is reigned over by righteousness and has the freedom of the glorified sons of God. All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God and they are free from all slavery from all bondages.

“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered, **and having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness**” (Romans 6:17-18).

- **Bondage of Fear:**

Related to the bondage of sin there is another bondage which is the bondage of the fear of death. “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the evil, and release those who through **fear** of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrew 2:14-15).

Fear of death is a definite evidence of the lack of faith because faith removes all fear. The martyrs who were free from the bondage of the fear of death, gave up their bodies even to the lions. Their bravery is a strong evidence of their faith which defeated death and the fear of it. St. Paul said “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15).

- **Bondage of External Worldly Forces:**

The free souls are not controlled by any external forces from the world or people. Free souls defy all the external forces and overcome them: the martyrs overcame the pains of persecution by their love, and the monks overcame the desires for luxurious life by their freely chosen poverty. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith” (1 John 5:4).

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court” (1 Corinthians 4:3).

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- **The Bondage of Literality and Formalities:**

St. Paul said “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7: 4-6).

† **Do not Use Liberty as an Opportunity for the Flesh:**

St. Paul said, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) Sit alone with God and examine all the constraints that restrict your freedom. Pray that God free you from all these constraints. Repent for every sin, fear your worldly passion, and you can exercise your freedom in Christ.
- 2) Christianity is a religion of strength for the believers. This strength would release them from all bondages: sins, fear, worldly faces, formalities ... etc. In Christ, I can be free, I can be a son or a daughter not a slave and I can enjoy a peaceful life.

June

Second Sunday

SONGS 🎵

REJOICE O MY SOUL AND SING

Rejoice O my soul and sing
Who has given you all freedom
Rejoice O my soul and sing
You have gained eternal life

Rejoice O my soul and sing
Watch and struggle always
Rise and call with a loud voice
Show them Christ is your Redeemer

Rejoice O my soul and sing
Display your salt and light
Dedicate your whole life
Let your faith remain in

Rejoice O my soul and sing
For the name of the Good Lord
Sing to him glory and praise
Rejoice O my soul and sing

Rejoice O my soul and sing
Where the Lord of glory sits
His second coming approaches
Rejoice O my soul and sing

to your groom the beloved
on the cross has shed His Blood
the name of Christ glorify
remember His wounded side

glorify the name of God
let prayer be your rod
calling sinners to repent
Savior and enlightenment

and wipe away every tear
saying salvation is here
to the service of the Lord
the salvation of your soul

a song of joy implement
who made a new covenant
sounding the hymns of the humble
carry in your heart His Gospel

and look towards the heavens
your senses to Him summon
He has said it before
Christ is knocking at your door



CHRISTIANITY, RELIGION OF STRENGTH

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

The gentleness and humility, that Christianity calls for, are no indication whatsoever that it is a religion of weakness, but it is a religion of strength. The Bible describes the faithful as, "*sharp arrows of the warrior.*" (Ps 120:4). And about the Church, the Bible says that it is, "*Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners.*" (Song 6:10).

This power is what the Holy Spirit gives to the faithful.

Therefore, God said to them, "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me.*" (Act 1:8)

The Bible also says, "*And with great power the Apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all,*" (Act 4:23) as if "*...the Kingdom of God present with power.*" (Mk 9:1)

The summit of power, in Christianity is shown in the Apostle's saying, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" (Phil 4:13)

He also says about the strength in serving "*...I also labour, striving according to his working in me mightily.*" (Col. 1:29) It is power, in spite of obstacles, as the Lord said to Paul, "*Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you and no one will attack you to hurt you.*" (Act 18:9,10).

It is power with authority over all devils...When the Lord Jesus sent His Disciples, He "*...gave them power and authority over all demons.*" (Lk 9:11). We also thank Him in our prayers as He has, "*...given us the authority to trample on serpents, scorpions and over all the power of the enemy.*" (Lk 10:19).

The Christians are strong because they are an image of God and God is powerful...

The Lord Jesus, despite His gentleness and humility, was powerful. It was said about Him, "*Gird your sword upon your thigh, O Mighty One.*" (Ps 45:3). He was powerful, "*...for power went out from Him.*" (Lk 6:9).

"The Lord is clothed, He has girded himself with strength." (Ps 93:1). "*He has hewn strength with his arm.*" (Lk 1:51). He showed His power through signs and wonders, "*God's arm has made strength.*"

Power in Christianity has a spiritual nature... It is the power to overcome sin, the world and the devils; the power of endurance, the power of working and serving; the power of personality and how it affects and leads others; the power to defend faith. This power is far from faults, violence, attacking or defeating others.

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Second Sunday



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June

Third Sunday



**JUNE
THIRD SUNDAY**

PENTECOST: THE HOLY SPIRIT THE HELPER

Please read Acts 2:1-4, the attached materials entitled “Pentecost”, “Between Ascension and Pentecost”, John 14:16-17, John 15:26-27, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To study the work of the Holy Spirit inside us as a Helper or Comforter. The Holy Spirit can guide us, form our personalities, and form the service in the church by providing different talents.

MEMORY VERSE

***“He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever “John
14:16***

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† Introduction

Theologians divided the work of God with man through history into three eras:

- 1) The Era of the Work of God the Father**, which is from the creation of man until the coming of the Messiah, Saviour.
- 2) The Era of the Work of God the Son**, which started by the Incarnation of God the Son or the Birth of Christ until His Ascension.
- 3) The Era of the Work of God the Holy Spirit**, which started on Pentecost and is continuing until the end of time or the Last Judgment.

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Please discuss the fruits of the Holy Spirit one by one.

† The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believers:

1) Sonship to God:

It is the faith of the believer and the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism that beget Him as son of God. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Read also John 3:5-6.

2) Guidance to the Truth:

When the Holy Spirit enters man, He guides him to the truth. “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1Cor. 12:3).

3) Renewal and Purification:

The Holy Spirit renews the sinner and purifies him by changing his character and inclination. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

4) Helping in Prayers:

The Holy Spirit strengthens the weaknesses of the believers and offers their prayers to the throne of God. “Likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning’s which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

5) Inspiring Men of God in their Writings:

“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.



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Third Sunday

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- 1) Let us pray with the church the prayer of the third hour and say:
“Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, which you sent forth upon Your Holy Disciples and the honorable Apostles at the third hour, take not this from us, O God, but renew Him within us”.
- 2) Our true strength comes from the action of the Holy Spirit inside us. We light a candle under the pictures of the saints to signify that everything that was good in them was a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in them. Remember that the candle is made up of frozen oil, oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit and the candle will continue to light as long as there is oil.

NOTES

[illegible]

June

Third Sunday

SONGS 🎵

LET US ALL PRAISE THE LORD

Let us all praise the
Lord for He is in glory
Glorified

Maren hos e-epchoise: Je
Khen ou –o –oo ghar afetchi o-oo

REFRAIN

He ascended into heaven
And send us the Paraclete
The Spirit of truth, the
Comforter Amen. Alleluia

Afshenaf e-epshoi enifio –wee
wee af oo- orpe nan empi
parakliton piepnevma ente
timethemi: Amen . Alleluia

He made the two into one
Which is Heaven and Earth

pentaf er piesnav en owai
ete fai pe etfe nem epkahi

O come all ye nations, let
Us worship Jesus Christ

Amoini nilaos tiro: entenoo-
osht en Isos piekhrastos

This is God our Saviour
And Lord of every one

Fai pe efnooti pensotir : owoh
epchoise ensarex niven

Three in one and one in
Three; the Father the
Son and the Holy Spirit
The spirit of truth the
Comforter. Amen Alleluia

Oo-etrias esjik evol: esoi
enshomt esoi enowai: ete fai
pe efiot nem epshiri nem pi
epnevma ethoo-wab; piepnevma
ente timethmiL amin Alleluia

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Coptic Orthodox Church



PENTECOST

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the Old Testament the Pentecost was the feast which occurred fifty days after Passover. As the Passover feast is a celebration of the exodus of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, so Pentecost is a celebration of God's gift of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. In the New Testament as well, the Pentecostal feast is fulfilled and made new by the coming of the new law, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples of Christ.

The Apostles received "the power from high" and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and the Lord. This moment has traditionally been called the Birthday of the Church.

It must be noted that the feast of Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago; it is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today. We all have died and risen with the Messiah-King, and we all received His Holy Spirit. We are the "Temple of the Holy Spirit". God's Spirit dwells in us. We, through our own membership in the Church, have received "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in the sacrament of Chrismation. We enjoyed "Pentecost" in the sacraments of baptism and Chrismation.

Blessed art thou, O Christ our God, who has revealed the fishermen as most wise by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit; through them Thou didst draw the world into the net. O Lover of man, glory to Thee, When the most High came down and confused the tongues, he divided the nations. But when he distributed the tongues of fire, he called all to unity. Therefore, with one voice we glorify the all-Holy Spirit.

June

Third Sunday

BETWEEN ASCENSION AND PENTECOST*

When on the Mount of Olive Jesus ascended to Heaven after blessing the Disciples for the last time, the Disciples trembled. He had returned from the dead, only to vanish again, so quietly and with so little warning; they were bewildered by the strangeness of the event. The curtains of the Temple had been torn, the graves had given up their dead, a rock had been rolled away, Thomas had placed his fingers in a wound, and in Emmaus He had spoken to them and shared their bread and wine and announced Himself the Risen Lord; and so He was, and it was beyond all understanding that He should go from them. He who had wrapped His mantle over the earth ascended to Heaven, taking His mantle with Him, and there was no divinity left on earth. He left no relics, no doctrine, no words taken down by secretaries, no letters. There was no child to assume His royal place. There was no tomb, no coffin, no funeral dirge to die in stillness on the midnight air. He left the world unencumbered by His presence, and nothing He ever possessed except the words He gravely uttered were handed down to the Disciples: neither His winnowing fan, nor His carpenter's tools, nor the cloak he had worn. He left only His remembered image, and a shuddering silence; and there were some who thought He would return instantly in a consuming flame.

It was a time of legends, a time of tribulations. No one could fathom the immensity of the event. His last words were an assurance that the Holy Ghost would descend upon them, and afterward they must teach the gospel to all nations. At Pentecost came the gift of tongues, the holy flames. And still there was that sense of desperate destinies, of the whole of creation reeling toward the abyss, the end of the world so near that Peter cried out in the words of the prophet Joel that the last days were at hand. The sun would soon turn into darkness and the moon into blood, and only those who called upon the name of the Lord would be saved. A hundred and twenty people listened to Peter announcing the Second Coming, and all were afraid. They asked what they should do. They were told there was salvation only in repentance and in baptism. It was the beginning of the doctrine; and from that day until the present repentance, baptism and the calling of the holy name have remained at the heart of the mystery.

We shall not understand the beginning of Christianity unless we remember the shuddering silence which followed the Ascension, and how Peter immersed in visions clung to the three anchors of his faith.

Watch for your life's sake; let your lamp not go out and your loins not be loose, but be ready; for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh. But ye shall come together often and seek the things that befit your souls; for the whole time of your faith thus far will not profit you, if ye be not made perfect in the last time.

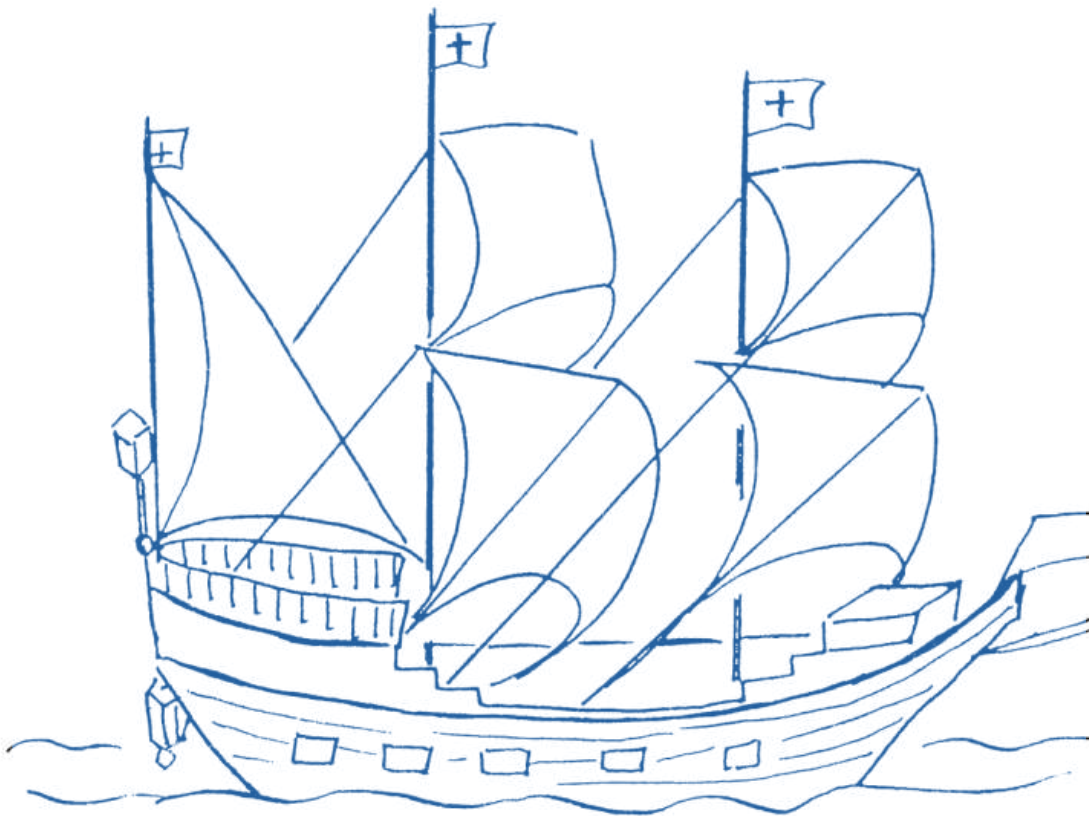
* This quotation is taken from the "Didache" which is the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles", a second century document canonized by the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). The title of the quotation is ours.

NOTES

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June

Third Sunday



St. George and St. Rueiss

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**JUNE
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF ST. PAUL
LESSON (I): INTRODUCTION**

Please read the attached material entitled “The Apostles fast”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is a five-lesson series about the missionary journeys of St. Paul. In this lesson we will just introduce the subject by an overview of the book of Acts. In this lesson we would like to emphasize that missionary work is done by God through us, if we worked alone, our missionary work will be useless.

MEMORY VERSE

***“For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as light to the Gentiles” Acts
13:47***

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† General Introduction about the Book of Acts:

- The book of Acts is written by St. Luke and it is a follow up to his Gospel. St. Luke started his Gospel by saying “Inasmuch as many things which are most surely believed among us, ... it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophillus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed” (Luke 1:1-4). At the start of the book of Acts, St. Luke said “The former account (referring to his Gospel) I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach (Acts 1:1).

June

Fourth Sunday

- The book of Acts is a description of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. This is why it is sometimes called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”.
- St. Luke wrote the Gospel in the year 63 and the book of Acts in the year 64.

† **General Idea about the Life of the Early Christian Community as Presented in the Book of Acts:**

- The book of Acts presents Christianity as a fulfillment of the Jewish religion. This means that Jesus is the Messiah for whom the Jewish people have been waiting.
- At that time, the center of authority of the Jewish people was the “Sanhedrim council” located in Jerusalem.
- At the same time, Christianity in its early life after the ascension of Jesus, had a higher council referred to in the book of Acts Chapter 15:2 “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the Apostles and elders, about this question”. References to this Christian council is also found in Acts 11:30 and Acts 16:4.

† **General Structure of the Book of Acts:**

- **The First Church in Jerusalem:**

Chapter 1:1 up to Chapter 5:42

The Disciples in the upper room, Pentecost, St. Peter’s Sermon, Ananias and Sapphira.

- **The Spread of Christianity in Palestine:**

Chapter 6:1 up to Chapter 12:24

- † The martyrdom of St. Stephen
- † The preaching of St. Peter and St. John in Samaria
- † The conversion of St. Paul: Chapter 9:1-16
- † St. Peter was saved from prison: Chapter 12

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- **The First Missionary Journey of St. Paul:**

Acts 13:1 up to Acts 15:35

- **The Second Missionary Journey of St. Paul:**

Acts 15:36 up to Acts 18:22

- **The Third Missionary Journey of St. Paul:**

Acts 18:23 up to Acts 21:17

† **The Main Characteristics of the Book of Acts:**

- 1) Our Lord Jesus said to His Disciples before His ascension “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witness to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Indeed the book of Acts deals with the story of the spread of Christianity through the preaching of the Apostles starting with Jerusalem, then to Judea, Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and it ends with Rome the capital of the world at that time.
- 2) Our Lord Jesus promised His Disciples “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these he will do” (John 14:12). Indeed, the book of Acts registers how the Apostles spoke in tongues, healed the sick and arose the dead from death.
- 3) Our Lord Jesus told His Disciples “But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. And you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles ... (Matthew 10:17-23). Indeed the book of Acts registers some of the sufferings, the insults and the persecution that the Disciples went through.
- 4) It is the only book in the whole Bible, which is incomplete. The story ends suddenly with St. Paul in Rome and it does not end with the usual ending “Amen”. Hence, the reader finds himself in front of a book which is incomplete. But how can the book end or become complete while it is the book of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church? This book started in Pentecost and it is still open as long as the world and the church exist.

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Fourth Sunday

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. In order to have a fruitful life, the Holy Spirit has to have the leadership in our life. As the Holy Spirit led the Apostles and they were successful in their lives and in their preaching, so it is with us too.
2. Train yourself to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in you. We have a duty in this society that we live in. We have to show the world our good deeds so that they glorify our Father in heaven. Then we have to pursue according to God's guidance to talk of our faith.

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SONGS 🎵

WHEN THE SPIRIT

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will love as Jesus loves

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will pray as David Prayed

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will preach as Peter preached

When the Spirit of the Lord moves in my heart
I will serve as St. Paul served

June

Fourth Sunday

THE APOSTLES' FAST

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Nobody should think little of the Fast of the Apostles', as it is the most ancient fast the Christian Church has known through generations. The Lord referred to it by saying, *"But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and they will fast. "* (Mt. 9:15)

Our Fathers, the Apostles, started their service by fasting. The Lord Himself started His service by fasting forty days on the mountain.

The Apostles' Fast, then, is special to the service and the Church.

It is said about our teacher, St Peter, the Apostle, that he fasted, *"...then became very hungry and wanted to eat. "* (Act 10:10) During his hunger, he saw heaven open and saw a vision about the acceptance of the Gentiles.

As their fasting was accompanied by vision and divine guidance, it was also associated with the work and coming of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, *"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said "Now separate for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down Seleucia... "(Act 13:2-4)*

There are certain aspects that mark out the fast of our Fathers, the Apostles, such as: fasting, praying, serving and the work of the Holy Spirit.

It pleases us that the Holy Spirit works during fasting...

The divine call also comes during fasting....

Ordination of ministers is done during fasting and ministers start by fasting before they begin their service.

There are fastings related to repentance, such as Jonah's fast and the fast related to humility as mentioned in the book of Joel.

Other fastings are for specific requests, such as Esthere's fasting.

Fasting for casting out evil spirits, as the Lord said, *"However this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. "* (Mt. 17:21)



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There are fastings before we receive any of the Lord's Graces, in the sacraments such as Baptism, Confirmation (Marion), Holy Communion and Priesthood.

As for the Apostles' Fast, it is for service and the Church, at least to teach us the necessity and benefit of fasting for the service.

We fast that God may interfere in the service and support it. We also fast to serve while we are in a good spiritual condition being aware of our weakness...

How we longed for this fast to come while we were during the Holy "*Khamasein*".

June

Fourth Sunday



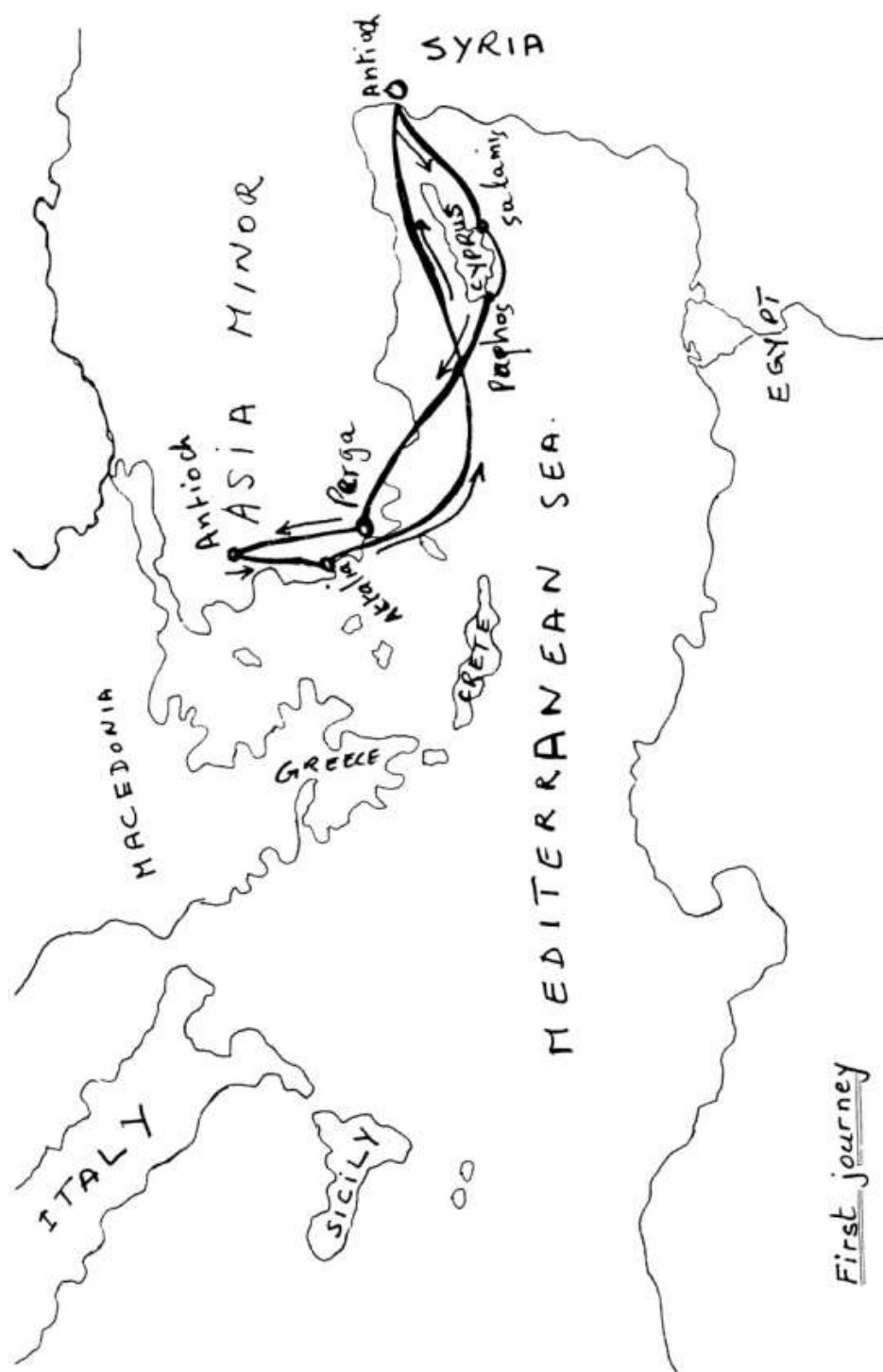
For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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First journey

July

First Sunday



**JULY
FIRST SUNDAY**

**THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF ST. PAUL
LESSON (II):
THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF ST. PAUL**

Please see the attached map and distribute copies of it to the students to be able to follow the journey, the attached material entitled “Working with God”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

This is lesson two in a five-lesson series about the missionary journeys of St. Paul. We have to learn how to work with God in missionary work as well as our own daily lives.

MEMORY VERSE

“Stand up straight on your feet “Acts 14:10

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

† **The First Missionary Journey of St. Paul:** (Acts 13:1-Acts 15:35)

The journey was in two locations: **Cyprus** and **Asia Minor**.

- In Cyprus:

† There were 3 people in the group: Paul, Barnabas and Barnabas’ nephew John Mark.

† Landing in Salamis in Cyprus, they began preaching in the synagogues (Acts 13:5). From Salamis they moved overland to the capital Paphos.

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† In Paphos a miraculous incident resulted in the conversion of Sergius Paulus. Please read Acts 13:6-12 in the class.

† It is at this point that the Acts shifts its usage from Saul to Paul (Acts 13:9).

- In Asia Minor:

† From Paphos the small group sailed to the coast of Asia Minor landing at Perga in Pamphylia.

† In Perga, John Mark returned to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas continued.

† From Perga they Went to Antioch the Capital of Galatia:

They preached in the synagogue for two Saturdays in a row because the people there asked them saying “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it” (Acts 13:15). After the Jews went out from the synagogue, the Gentiles asked the Apostles to speak to them again the next Saturday. When the Jews saw the multitude they became too angry and they started to resist Paul.

† Then Came the Starting Point to Preach the Gentiles: (Acts 13:46-47)

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ (Acts 13:46)

† In Lystra:

They met Timothy and he became a believer. They healed the man crippled from his birth (Acts 14:8-11).

The multitude thought that the Apostles are gods and they called Barnabas “Zeus” and Paul “Hermes”. Paul taught them about our Lord and Master Jesus Christ and after exerting some efforts they stopped offering sacrifices to them.

† St. Paul Stoned:

The Jews and some of the Gentiles became angry at St. Paul, stoned him and dragged him outside the city thinking that he was dead. As the Disciples gathered around him, he rose up, entered the city and on the next day left with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:19-20).

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First Sunday

† **Back to Derbe:**

Many believers were added in Derbe and St. Paul was not persecuted.

† **Back to Jerusalem through the Cities in which they Preached:**

They went back for consultation with the Apostles and the elders in Jerusalem over the subject of circumcision. Please read Acts 15:1-35.

On their way back to Jerusalem they went through all the cities in which they preached and ordained priests in each of them. “And when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

† **Summary of the Sufferings of St. Paul in the First Journey:**

- 1) He made lots of efforts as he was travelling to many cities.
- 2) He was driven out from Antioch in Pisidia.
- 3) He escaped from Iconium.
- 4) He was stoned in Lystra.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

“... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, ...” (Romans 8:28). If we let God guide our steps, even if we find some doors closed, we would not worry because we know that God is directing us to take another route. This is what happened with St. Paul. He started his preaching in Antioch in Pisidia talking to the Jews from the Old Testament (Acts 13:15-52). When they refused, he directed his words to the Gentiles and won them instantly (Acts 13:46-49).

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SONGS 🎵

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep." (Jn 10:14)

REFRAIN

The Lord is my shepherd
Come to Him all who labour

I shall not want.
and He will give you rest.

Whenever I am weary
Whenever I am anxious

You wipe away me tears.
You calm all my fears.

Whenever I am restless
On the cross You died

You listen and care.
and my sins You did bare.

Whenever I am homeless
In a strange country

You open Your door.
no one can care more.

Whenever I am hungry
Whenever I am thirsty

You give me Your food.
You give me Your blood.

Whenever I am scorned at
Whenever I am happy

You stretch out Your hand.
by my side You stand.

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First Sunday

WORKING WITH GOD

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

The Lord Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working. " (Jn 5:17) Let us concentrate on the last phrase...

St. Paul said about himself and his companion Apollo's, "For we are God's fellow workers. " (1 Cor 3:9)

God can do everything on his own, but he wants you to work with Him, not only to work, but to toil and strive, "And each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour. " (I Cor 3:8)

The fact that God works does not mean that Man becomes slack...

God, in Revelation, blessed the Angel of the church in Ephesus for labouring and toiling, saying, "I know, your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil, and you have persevered and have patience and have laboured for my name's sake and have not become weary. " (Rev 2:2-3)

Work for the spiritual person, is an association with God and the Holy Spirit It is a partnership with the Divine Nature in work... It is the readiness of one's will, not only to associate with God but to become actually a partner...

Therefore we say to God in the Liturgy of the travelers, "Share in the work of your servants. "Depending on God does not mean idleness or carelessness but it is an association with God; relying on God's strength.

Through work, God tests the extent of our love and obedience to Him. And as St. John the Apostle said, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. " (1 Jn 3:18) In spite of David's faith that, "the war is for God" and his confidence that God is going to work with him, he took his sling and stones and progressed to the front to face Goliath...

Therefore you must work and ask God to be with you in what you are doing. But beware of idleness, as God does not like the sluggard...

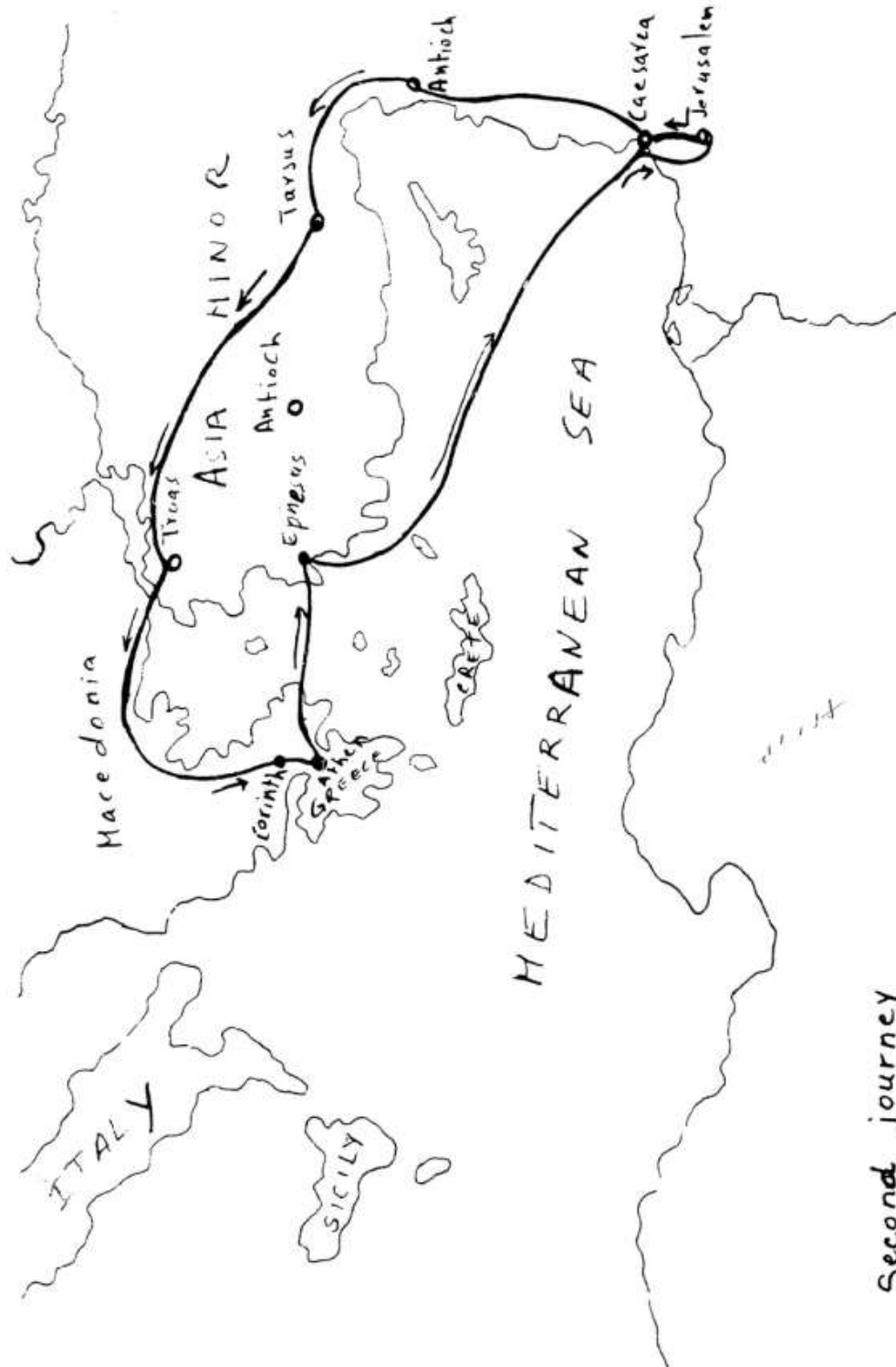
You have to plant and water then God will make the plant grow...

Truly, you could humbly say, "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God gave the increase. " (1 Cor 3:7)



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Second journey

July

Second Sunday



JULY SECOND AND THIRD SUNDAYS

THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF ST. PAUL LESSONS (III) & (IV): THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF ST. PAUL

Please see the attached maps and distribute copies of it to your students to follow the lesson, the attached material entitled “The glory of suffering”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

These are third and fourth lessons in a five-lesson series about the missionary journeys of St. Paul. In these two lessons we study the second missionary journey of St. Paul and learn that when God is given the leadership all efforts would be successful according to His plan. But we must also accept and ensure sufferings without complaining or losing our peace.

MEMORY VERSE

*“Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘this is the way, walk in it’,
whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left”
Isaiah 30:21*

PLEASE EMPHASIZE

- † Please review very briefly the first missionary journey.
- † **The second missionary journey of St. Paul is in Acts 15:36 to 18:23, This journey was to Europe.**
- † Paul had been working at his home church in Antioch of Syria for about a year

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and all was doing well. But Paul was remembering and praying for those who had believed in Jesus on his first trip to Asia Minor. There was a dispute between Paul and his old friend Barnabas over John Mark. Barnabas wanted John to go on the trip with them. Paul would not have him.

† Paul chose Silas, a man who had already risked his life for the Lord. Off went Paul and Silas to the very cities whose leaders had tried to kill Paul. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus.

† **From Lystra to Galatia: (Acts 16:1-6)**

At Lystra a young Christian named Timothy joined Paul and Silas as an assistant. (Timothy's mother was a Jewess and had been converted to Christianity, his father was a Greek). Timothy became a good disciple of St. Paul. Timothy is mentioned five times more in the book of Acts: 17:14, 17:15, 18:5, 19:22 and in 20:4. Several times St. Paul sent Timothy to churches to help and teach them: 1 Cor. 4:17 and 16:10). The young churches grew together in faith and number each day. It was a rewarding and encouraging sign. Still Paul and Silas were not ready to go home. Ahead lay the great coastal cities of Asia. But the Holy Spirit told them not to go there, though they did not know why. Yet still in complete submission, they obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they headed north through Phrygia and Galatia.

Note: Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Paul "took and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek". Paul certainly would not have Timothy circumcised to ensure his salvation. He and Timothy went on their journey together, telling Gentile Christians everywhere the decrees of the council at Jerusalem, that circumcision and the Mosaic law were not required for salvation, in fact, not required at all of Gentile converts. No, it was evidently a matter of expediency. Timothy's father was a Greek. So "because of the Jews" and because "they all knew that his father was a Greek", Paul circumcised Timothy, evidently to make him acceptable to the Jews. After all, if Timothy were to preach Christ to the Jews, he must preach as a Jew from the Jewish Old Testament. It is inferred that the Jews would not listen well to a half-breed Jew who was not circumcised.

† **From Galatia to Troas (Acts 16:7-8)**

After several months they came to the borders of Mysia and Bithynia. At first they tried to go east into Bithynia. Again the Holy Spirit let Paul know very definitely that this was not the Lord's will. So they went west through Mysia

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Second Sunday

to Troas.

† **Paul goes to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-12)**

One night Paul had a vision. A man from Macedonia was pleading, “come over and help us”. Silas, Timothy and Luke who had just joined them, agreed with Paul that God was sending them to Europe. They boarded the ship at Troas, and sailed with a favorable wind to Samothrace, then to Neopolis, and went inland to the chief Macedonian city of Philippi.

Note: In verse 10 Luke, who is writing the book of Acts, says “immediately **WE** sought to go to Macedonia”. In verse 4 he had written, “As **THEY** went through the cities”. in verse 6, “Now when **THEY** had gone throughout Phrygia”. In verse 7, “After **THEY** had come to Mysia, **THEY** tried to go into Bithynia”. in verse 8, “And **THEY** passing by Mysia came down to Troas”. But in verse 10 the writer says, “Immediately **WE**”. So here Luke joined the party and hereafter, as we see in verses 13, 16, it is “we”. Notice also that all through the Book of Acts, Luke did not mention his name as a personal exercise in humility and self-denial.

† **By a Phillippi Riverside: (Acts 16:13-15)**

Phillippi was a Roman colony without even ten Jewish men in town to form a synagogue. The missionaries did find a group of women praying by the river, One of the women was Lydia, a Gentile woman who sold purple cloth. When she heard that Jesus is the Saviour, she believed, and so did those in her household. After Lydia was baptized, she urged the missionaries to stay in her home.

Phillippi was the home town of St. Luke.

† **In a Phillippian jail: (Acts 16:26-40)**

- Paul commanded the demon to go out of a devil-possessed girl.
- Paul and Silas in prison
- At midnight, Paul and Silas began to pray. The chains fell off. Doors were opened. The earthquake jarred the prison to its foundation.
- The jailer became a believer.

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† In Thessalonica: (Acts 17:1-9)

St. Paul spent three weeks preaching to them, and the authorities forced them to leave the city. The church grew very rapidly.

† In Berea: (Acts 17:10-15)

The service was very successful. The Jews came from Thessalonica to agitate the people against St. Paul. St. Paul escaped to Athens. He left Silas and Timothy.

† In Athens: (Acts 17:16-33)

He did not want originally to preach in Athens until Silas and Timothy came from Berea. But when he saw so many idols in the city he started to preach to the Athenians. When he spoke about the resurrection from the dead, they rejected him and only a very few believed. Please notice the method which St. Paul used. When he spoke to the Jews, he preached to them from the Old Testament. When he spoke to the Gentiles of Athens, he preached to them using one of their gods, the unknown god. Read Acts 17:22-31.

† In Corinth: (Acts 18:1-23)

He had two principles in Corinth:

- 1) After the failure in Athens, because he started preaching from a philosophical point of view, he preached to the people about the crucifixion of Jesus.
- 2) He worked to earn his living for one year and a half. Many people believed in Corinth.
 - † He cut his hair in Cenchreae.
 - † In Ephesus he preached to few Jews.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.



July

Second Sunday

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THESE TWO LESSONS?

Can we learn to withstand some suffering for the sake of Jesus? It may be that we forsake some pleasures in life for His sake, it may be that we accept some insults for His sake, it may be that we love our enemies and forgive them for His sake ..., etc. Our Lord Jesus said “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

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Coptic Orthodox Church



SONGS 🎵

WHERE HE LEADS ME I WILL FOLLOW

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mat 16:24)

I can hear my Saviour calling
take your cross and follow, follow me

Where He leads me I will follow
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way

If I am sick or if I am healthy
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way

Whether in peace or times of war
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way

I'll go with Him through the judgment
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way

He will give me grace and glory
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way

July

Second Sunday

THE GLORY OF SUFFERING

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

St Paul, the Apostle, says in his Epistle to the Romans, *"If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together "* (Rom 8:17).

And so, suffering for the Lord becomes a measure of the glory that awaits the faithful in the eternal Kingdom. **Therefore the Church places the martyrs above all the Saints.**

They are mentioned in the Church's prayers before the spirit-borne and the solitary fathers, who filled the wilderness with prayers and contemplation. They are also mentioned before our fathers the Patriarchs and Bishops, with all their services in spreading the Word. This is all because of the sufferings they endured for the sake of God.

Even in service, the measure of suffering is also obvious, as the Apostle says, *"... and each will receive his own reward according to his own labour. "* (1 Cor 3:8) Therefore, the Lord says in his letter to the Angel of the Church at Ephesus, *"I know your works, your labour, your patience... and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for my name's sake and have not become weary. "* (Rev 2:2-3), putting labour at the beginning.

It is also said in the Bible that, *"God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love..."* (Heb 6:10)

Love expresses its existence by labouring for the be loved one, as the Apostle says, *"... Let us not love in word or in tongue. "* (1 Jn 3:18)

The depth of love also shows in suffering, when the level of love is raised up to sacrifice and redemption.

Therefore, God's love was shown to us in its deepest form when the Lord was on the Cross, sacrificing him self for our redemption, the just for the unjust., **Christ was at the peak of His glory when He was in His deepest passion.**

For this reason, He said about his crucifixion, *"Now the Son of Man is glorified."* (Jn 13:13). The picture of His crucifixion is the picture of His glory...

St. Paul, the Apostle, considers suffering as a gift from God. In this, he says, *"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for his sake."* (Phil 1:29)

St. Peter, the Apostle, also talked about suffering saying, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps "* (1 Pet 2:21).

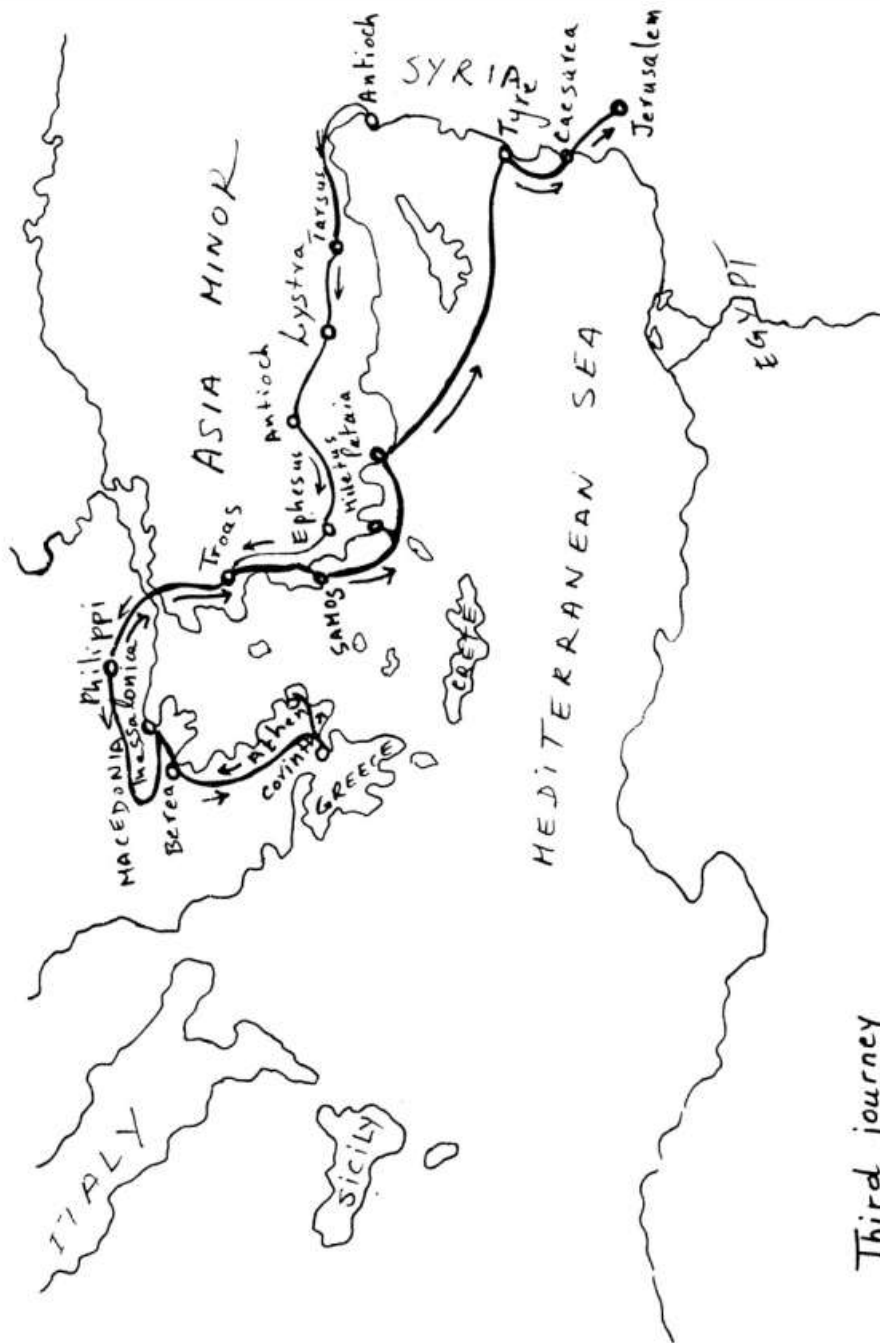


NOTES

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July

Second Sunday



Third journey

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Coptic Orthodox Church



**JULY
FOURTH SUNDAY**

**THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF ST. PAUL LESSON
(V):
THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF ST. PAUL**

Please read Acts 18:24 up to 23:11, the attached material “GROWTH”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

This is the fifth lesson in a five-lesson series about the journeys of St. Paul. In this lesson we study the third Missionary Journey of St. Paul. We focus here on the growth of the church. It required the help of God, work of the Apostles, their patience and time for growth. We need these elements for personal growth.

MEMORY VERSE:

“So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed “Act 19:20

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

† St. Paul left Priscilla in Ephesus and did not preach too much in Ephesus except to few Jews and promised them to come back after a short visit to Jerusalem. On his way back, he visited the churches in Galatia and Firigia and strengthened the disciples in them.

† **In Ephesus: (Acts 19:1-41)**

Apollos came to Ephesus before St. Paul. Priscilla and Aquila explained to Apollos the way of God more accurately, who then went to Corinth.

St. Paul was teaching the Jews who knew only the Baptism of John (the Baptist). Then he taught the Jews in the synagogue and was preaching in the school of Tyrannus. The word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily to the extent that they burnt their magic books that were worth 50,000 silver coins.

July

Fourth Sunday

The seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, tried to call the name of Jesus over those who had evil spirits to heal them. The evil spirit answered and said “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Then the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This teaches us that miracles are not playthings. Not everyone is given the gift of performing miracles or gift of healing. Please read the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

After three years in Ephesus, the people, being pushed by Demetrius who used to make a lot of money by making the idols, attacked St. Paul.

As St. Paul was in Ephesus for this period, so many troubles and sufferings came on him. He wanted to collect money from the churches of the Gentiles to send to the poor of Jerusalem. At the same time he had sad news that some of the churches in Galatia and Corinth are not in good shape. It is most likely that St. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians and to the Corinthians during that period.

† **In Macedonia: (Acts 20:1)**
He went from Ephesus to Macedonia.

† **In Greece: (Acts 20:2)**
St. Paul arrived at the southern part of Greece. The Jews plotted against St. Paul and he had to go back to Macedonia.

† **In Troas: (Acts 20:7)**
He preached at night. St. Paul arose the young man Eutychus from the dead when he fell from the second floor.

† **Back to Jerusalem: (Acts 21:15)**
The whole group went by sea from Troas to Jerusalem passing by several cities. St. Paul was bidding the churches in these cities farewell because he knew that he will not see them again. Please read in class the final address of St. Paul to the churches (Acts 20:25-38).

† **In Jerusalem:**
St. Paul paid the money he had collected to the church. The Jews arrested him and wanted to kill him but the Lord saved him from their hands.

The Lord used Claudius Lysias to save St. Paul from a plot by the Jews. Then St. Paul was brought to trial in front of Felix the governor then in front of King Agrippa.

† **The Trip to Rome:**

The Lord said to St. Paul “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” (Acts 23:11). St. Paul

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was later martyred in Rome.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) Growth needs time. We have to be patient, work with God, ready to endure suffering and we will receive glorious rewards.
- (2) We must be very faithful to the teachings, traditions and guidance of our church fathers. St. Paul in his latest address to the churches in which he preached, said to them “Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28).

July

Fourth Sunday

SONGS 🎵

I love my beautiful church
The house of our Lord

Where I find my joy
And everything I need.

Jesus comes to stay with us
Granting us His help
Giving everyone His blessings
And the heavenly peace

We see the holy saints
And the martyrs gather around
Praying always for those here
Who are asking for their help

In front of the altar
Abouna is praying here
Together with the deacons
As it will be then in Heaven

In the Liturgy we pray
And the angels are there
The Holy Spirit also comes
Blessing us in His power

We share the feast of His body
Drink His Blood given for us
And before we leave the church
Everyone takes Orbana.

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GROWTH

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

One of the characteristics of the spiritual life is continual growth...

Man starts his relationship with God through repentance then he grows from the fear of God to His love. The growth in love continues till it reaches holiness, as it is said in the Bible,.. *".. you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy for I am holy. " (1 Pet 1:15-16)*

Would one stop after reaching holiness?

No he has to strive for perfection.

The Bible says, *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. " (Matt 5:48)*

The one who endeavours on the road to perfection never reaches its end, no matter how far he gets, perfection has no limits...

There are levels of perfection, each level is, higher than the other...

Look at St. Paul, who was a saint. He was caught up to the third heaven and he made wonders and miracles. In spite of all that, he says, *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on... I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. " (Phil 3:12-13)*

The Apostle concludes his saying about this growth, *"Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind. "*

We can see that even the righteous must always strive,"to reach forward. "

God has compared the faithful to a grain of wheat that becomes a seedling and grows. He said, *"... and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself, first the blade, then the head and after that the full grain in the head. " (Mk 4:27-28).*

Are you like the wheat that grows continually, starting as a seedling becoming an ear of corn then full grains of wheat?...

Try to grow as growth gives continual warmth. To stop growing means no warmth in the heart which leads to one's lukewarmness.

If you feel you are unable to grow, try at least to stop where you are. Bewared of going backwards.

July

Fourth Sunday



For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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July

Fifth Sunday



JULY FIFTH SUNDAY

PERSONALITIES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (I): AARON THE PRIEST

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

The Purpose is to Study the life of Aaron the priest and learn from it. We will also compare the service in the Old Testament with the service in the New Testament. In this lesson we like to focus on respecting the priest and priesthood.

MEMORY VERSE:

“So he (means Aaron) shall be your spokesman to the people, and he himself shall be as a mouth for you “Exodus 4:16)

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

- † Aaron is the brother of Moses. When the Lord asked Moses to go and get the Hebrews out of Egypt, he told him to take his brother Aaron with him. Moses transferred what God was saying to Aaron and Aaron transferred the information to the people (Exodus 3:16).
- † Aaron (and Moses) are Levites. Aaron was 83 years old when they talked to Pharaoh to get the people of God out of Egypt.
- † In the battle of the Hebrews with Amalek, Moses sent his people to fight. Moses stayed at the top of the hill with the staff of God. As long as Moses held the staff up (as a symbol of the Cross), the Hebrews were winning. When his hands got tired, Aaron took part in holding Moses' arms up because every time his hands went down, the Amalekites had an advantage (Exodus 17).
- † The Lord ordered Moses that Aaron and his son become priests and told him how to consecrate them to make the offering (Exodus 29:1-8).

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- † Aaron fell in sin when he obeyed the people to make an idol of gold for Moses was late in coming back from the mountain where he was receiving from God the two tablets of Testimony (Exodus 32). The prayers of Moses and the kindness of God saved Aaron from destruction.
- † There were three people named Korah, Dathan and Abiram who rose up against Moses and Aaron with some of the children of Israel (Numbers 16:1-33). They attacked Moses and Aaron saying “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?” (Numbers 16:3). They wanted to participate in the priesthood as well. God punished them and “the ground split apart under them” (Numbers 16:31).

This teaches us not to revolt against God’s men,

- † The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom saying, “Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. “Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die here. So Moses did just as the Lord commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son, and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days” (Numbers 20:23-29).

† **The Difference between the Priesthood of Aaron (Levite) and the Priesthood of Christ:**

- The priesthood of Levite is based on offering animal sacrifices while the priesthood of Christ is based on the sacrifice of His own blood.
- The priesthood of Levite was serving symbols of heavens, but the priesthood of Christ is serving heavenly life. Please read Hebrews 12:22-29.
- The priesthood of Levite was a symbol of the priesthood of Christ and when Christ came this symbol has stopped. “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second” (Hebrews 8:7).
- The Lord Jesus as the chief priest took His priesthood from the Father

July

Fifth Sunday

forever (i.e., the priesthood of Jesus is everlasting).

- Compare old covenant and new covenant services. “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).
- The comparison between worship in the Old Testament and worship in the New Testament is clarified in Hebrews Chapters 12 and 13. Here we find a new understanding of worship. We worship God with fear, love and obedience.
- The Holy Spirit has freed us from the blood offerings and we only have spiritual offerings (John 4:22-24).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

We have to respect the priests of the church, obey them as fathers and secure their blessings.

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SONGS 🎵

SUNDAY PSALI

I called upon You from the depth of my heart Release from me the bonds of sin	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ help me
Overshadow me with the shadow of Your Wings Make haste O my God and save me	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ help me
Every knee bows down before You All of my sins O God erase	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ help me
You know my thoughts and search my inner parts Create in me a Holy heart	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ help me
Your Holy Spirit cast not away from me Incline your ear to me and hear me speedily	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ help me
Set before me a law in the way of your righteousness Your Kingdom O my God is an everlasting Kingdom help me	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ
Have patience on me and destroy me not speedily I wake up at dawn that I may praise Your Name help me	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ
Praised and beloved Your Holy Name Disperse from me all the Devils help me	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ
Instill in me the fruit of Your righteousness Give us Your true peace and forgive our sins help me	My Lord Jesus help me My Lord Jesus Christ

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AUGUST

First Sunday



**AUGUST
FIRST SUNDAY**

**PERSONALITIES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT(II):
HANANIAH, MISHAEL, AND AZARIAH**

Please read Daniel 3:1-30, the attached article entitled “Seek Faith”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

To study the behavior of these three young men and learn something beneficial to your life. It is clear that they had strong faith. They did not yield under any pressure because they believed that God is with them.

MEMORY VERSE:

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king “O Nebuchadnezzar we have no need to answer you in this matter” Daniel 3:16

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

- † The original Hebrew names of these three young men are Hananiah (means God is kind), Mishael (means God is the one to ask) and Azariah (means God is my helper). Nebuchadnezzar, the king, changed their names to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.
- † The three young men were friends of Daniel.
- † The king made an idol of gold 30 meters long and asked all the people to worship the idol once they hear the sound of the music. The three young men (about 15 to 17 years old) refused to worship the idol. The people who envied them went to complain to the king.
- † The king brought them and burn them with fire. They answered him “we have

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no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:16-17).

- † Remember when the Devil came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness Jesus said to him “Only to the Lord our God we worship”. The same thing was said by the three young men (Daniel 3:18).
- † The fire was so strong that it burnt to death the men who pushed them inside it (Daniel 3:22).

This shows the amount of faith they had. The king was astonished to see 4 people walking in the fire. The fourth one looked like the Son of God. So, God came and walked with them in the fire and made it cold. Remember that God used to appear several times in the Old Testament as a man. For example: God came with two angels to visit Abraham.

- † Even if we walk in the fire of life and in the midst of a wicked world, God is with us to make our life pleasant.
- † When they called them out of the fire, the four came. But at the door the fourth one disappeared and only Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah came out. When the people came around them, they found even no smell of smoke in their clothes. The three knelt down and glorified God.
- † What did the king do? Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him...Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shedrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces...Then the king promoted Shedrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon” (Daniel 3:28-30).
- † Our church, before every divine liturgy, sings from the Psalmody in the morning praise of God, the Hymn of the three young men. They represent the church walking in the fire of the world, but with Jesus the head of the church, the world cannot hurt it.
- † The Son of God who was walking with the three young men has been and will continue to be walking with the church in all its sufferings and tribulations as He promised “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.



AUGUST

First Sunday

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

- (1) We need to have faith so that we can stand in front of all the adversaries of the enemy placed in our lives without fear and leave all our practices on the work of God with us.
- (2) We must insist on following the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and the traditions of our church no matter what the society does to pressure us to do something else. As much as we love God and follow His commandments, He will give us all the help we need to overcome all temptations.

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Coptic Orthodox Church



SONGS 🎵

OUR SAVIOUR HAS SUMMONED US

REFRAIN

Our Saviour has summoned us
He gave us a new covenant

He took bread and gave thanks
He broke and gave the disciples saying:

From the chalice, He gave them
My Blood is shed for mankind

It is the Heavenly manna;
The Remedy for our souls

The mercy of our God
Mercy and love

The angels and all creatures
He's the only Lord to worship

Our Lord is the true God
Now I am closer to Him

to all stay by His side
His love which does abide

He blessed and sanctified it
this is my Body, eat of it

this is the covenant
to forgive all sins

the Body of Jesus
and the Healer for us

is indeed abundant
together in this sacrament

submit to Him in fear
with love and awe indeed

He is magnified and praised
because in my heart He stays

AUGUST

First Sunday

SEEK FAITH

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

St. Paul the Apostle says, *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. "* (2 Cor. 13:5).

The faith here is not that of the mind or just the name. It is the real faith, a life-style that one lives in God and shows in all his deeds and all his feelings.

The life of faith means complete submission to God and extreme trust in His work within you and within the Church.

Faith cuts a road in the sea and lets water flow from the rock. It is enough to see that the Bible says, *"With God all things are possible. "* (Matt. 19:26). Do you have the practical faith by which you can do everything in Christ? Or is your faith weak and cannot stand tribulations?

If it is so, what should you do? The Lord says, *"According to your faith, let it be to you. "* (Matt. 9:29). The only solution is to pour yourself before God and openly say to Him: Lord I believe, but my faith has not reached the practical level yet. My faith is like the bruised reed that You, due to Your love, wouldn't break; and like the smoking flax that due to Your compassion, You would not quench. Accept me, O Lord, with my weaknesses.

Grant me this faith, a gift from You. Do not say, 'I'll give you according to your faith' and do not make faith a condition for the gift. Let faith be the gift itself.

Grant me to believe in You, submit my life to You and trust in Your dispensation. It is sufficient for me to believe that you will grant me faith. Isn't also "a gift from above" from You, and nobody can believe without Your grace?

You say, "Only believe". Even this faith I want from You so I would not think that my humanity has done anything without You...

I am still waiting for this faith by which I could do everything through Your grace.

I believe that You'll give me, and I wish, after being in Your presence, to say, I believe that You have given me'.

My faith then changes from a desire and a request to a reality and a life.



NOTES

[illegible]

AUGUST

First Sunday



For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

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**AUGUST
SECOND SUNDAY**

**IS MAN PRE-DESTINED IN HIS ACTIONS OR IS HE
FREE TO CHOOSE?**

Please read Exodus 32:1-28, John 10:1-6, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

To be able to answer the question mentioned in the title.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Whoever is on the Lord’s side come to me; Moses said. “Exodus 32:26

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

† Introduction:

The subject of man’s freedom to choose which route to take in his life or which action to make, and the extent of this freedom is one of the most difficult and important subjects which baffles many people even Christian theologians. There are three opinions regarding this:

- 1) Some believe that man is given full freedom of choice on earth including his freedom to determine and control his own destiny.
- 2) Some believe that man is born having all his life predestined for him; hence, man is only a tool to fulfill the will of He Who created him, (For the teacher’s own knowledge, the Calvinists, or Presbyterians traditionally take this stand; also the Muslims.)

AUGUST

Second Sunday

3) Some take the middle route, namely that man has, in some ways the freedom of choice, and in others, he is pre-destined.

† Now, what does the Bible say regarding this subject? Where do we, as Orthodox Christians, stand regarding this question? Invite answers and open the subject for discussion.

† You can lead the discussion in this way:

- Jesus said: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27)
- If, according to what Jesus our Lord said, man is going to be judged according to his actions, then he must be free to choose the action he takes, otherwise, God is not just.
- However, if this is the case, where does the pre-knowledge of God stand? In other words, was Adam, for instance, free to choose between obeying God or the serpent? You might say “Yes, and that is why he was punished for his action.” But God knew, beforehand — even before the creation of man — that Adam would disobey Him, and that is why the plan of salvation was in the mind of God before “the beginning” i.e. creation.. In other words, could Adam have done otherwise and obeyed God? If so, wouldn’t that have disturbed the plan of God for salvation?

Invite comments.

Answer: If Adam obeyed God rather than the serpent, the pre-knowledge of God would have been different. Let us explain:

The pre-knowledge of God, since it is not declared to man, does not interfere with his freedom of choice between good and bad. Just as an example, a teacher of a class, knowing his students quite well, can determine who would succeed and who would fail. When the result of the final exams is declared, those whom he knew that they would fail did not pass the exam. Now, would one of the failing students complain that that was just because the teacher knew, beforehand, that he would fail? The failing student cannot complain because the pre-knowledge of the teacher was not declared to the student, and therefore, did not affect his study. On the contrary, knowing of that student’s weakness and limitation, the teacher, most probably, tried to help him more than the rest, and still that student failed.

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† Let us look at some Biblical references and answer some questions:

1) What is God's desire towards man?

St. Peter says: "He (God) is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). As a good shepherd, Christ our Lord would leave the 99 and go search for the lost lamb (Matthew 18:12). St. Paul also says: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 2:3,4).

2) How could this desire of God be implemented in man? Is it by force or by persuasion?

Although the desire of God that man should not perish in eternal damnation but should inherit the Kingdom of God, God, like a good human father, would not force His son to enter His Kingdom. Read the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

It is true that God tries every means possible to persuade His son to choose the way of the Kingdom ... He knocks on the door ... He sends him one message after the other... Through the forgiveness of his sins, He gives him a chance after the other ... He even sends him the Holy Spirit to live in him and be with him ... Much more, He gives him the very Body and Blood of the Incarnated God to be mixed with his own body and blood ... All this and much more, hoping anxiously (if we can use that expression), that man would choose the way of salvation, the way of the Kingdom of God. Still He gives man the freedom of choice and wouldn't force him against his will. Read here the memory verse: "Whoever is on the Lord's side come to me."

All this could be summed up in the lamentation of our Lord over Jerusalem. He said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing!** See! Your house is left to you desolate (Matthew 23:37-38).

3) Is man's freedom of choice unlimited?

Certainly not. The time, the place and the circumstances around his birth are definitely not of his choice. The same goes for his death. Besides, the talents he is given and some of the circumstances around him during his life are also not of his choice. But, other than these and the like, the choice is completely his.

AUGUST

Second Sunday

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

God is offering each one of us every assistance to inherit eternal life:

- 1) We have the desire of the heart of God the Father to gain our salvation.
- 2) We have the Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord which forgives all our sins and trespasses.
- 3) We have the power of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us to help us in all our struggles to win the battle against the Evil one.
- 4) We have a host of saints interceding on our behalf before the throne of God so that He may give us the strength to overcome the temptations of the devil.
- 5) We have the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ to nourish us with the Bread of Life — the Body and Blood of our Lord—to stand strong in the face of all kinds of tribulations of this world.
- 6) We have the word of God, the Bible, to guide our steps through our difficult journey to our eternal home.
- 7) We have the power of prayer, the exercise of fasting, the guidance of our spiritual fathers, the priest ... etc. to strengthen our weaknesses.
- 8) At last we have the freedom of choice either to follow Christ to eternal glory or to follow Satan to eternal damnation.

A Note for the Teacher:

You are the one who knows whether your class is ready for this subject. Chances are that they are ready. Children in this age group usually wonder about this problem. But if you feel that it is above their level, choose another lesson. The choice is yours. May God guide your thoughts.

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SONGS 🎵

JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD

REFRAIN

Jesus Christ our Lord Saviour of my soul

Let my thoughts be Your thoughts that is all in all

Let my senses be Your senses that is all in all

Let my heart be Your heart that is all in all

Let my will be Your will that is all in all

Let my deeds be Your deeds that is all in all

Let my way be Your way that is all in all

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**AUGUST
THIRD SUNDAY**

**THE PROPHECIES AND SYMBOLS OF THE VIRGIN
MARY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Please read the attached material entitled “A Vesper Doxology for Saint Mary the Virgin”, and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON:

To study the prophecies concerning the Virgin Mary and the various symbols that are analogous to her. In this lesson we will learn that St. Mary is a very special Saint because she gave birth to our Lord Jesus. All these prophecies and symbols of her make her a model person in the church.

MEMORY VERSE

“We glorify thee Mother of true light “The Liturgy Book

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

† **St. Mary has a special position in our church, She is honored above and before all saints. The reasons are:**

- 1) The most important reason is that she is the Theotokos: Theo means God, Toos means mother (in Greek), hence, she is the Mother of God.

On the Saturday Theotokia we sing in our church and say “Emmanuel, whom you have born has kept you without blemish and your virginity has been sealed”.

- 2) There are so many miracles that were done by God through her intercession on our behalf. This is why so many churches in the whole world are named after her.

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3) There are specific prophecies and symbols about her in the Old Testament.

† Prophecies about St. Mary:

- “The burden against Egypt, behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt” (Isaiah 19:1). This is regarding the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt.
- “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).
- “Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut” (Ezekiel 44:1-2).

This verse indicates the continuous virginity of the Virgin Mary even after she gave birth to Jesus our Lord,

† Symbols Analogous to Virgin Mary:

- Noah’s dove (Genesis 8:11) that came back holding an olive branch as a sign of peace. St. Mary was the sign of peace between heaven and earth because through her came Jesus Christ.
- Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12-13) is a symbol of St. Mary because she conceived and bore the Lord Jesus and since that time the angels came to the world for various messages.
- The bush (Exodus 3:2) “And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush, So he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed”. This is indicative of the permanent virginity of St. Mary.
- The rod of Aaron (Numbers 17:8); the rod is similar to Virgin Mary who gave birth to Jesus in a miraculous way. Aaron’s rod brought forth branches.
- Jar of Manna (Exodus 16:33); the manna was given in the desert to God’s people to eat. St. Mary had inside her the Bread of Life.
- There are other symbols of the Virgin Mary in the Old Testament in addition to the ones mentioned above.

† St. Mary in the Coptic Liturgy:

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The hymns and songs for the Virgin Mary occupy a good portion of our Liturgy. The meanings and music of these hymns and songs were very well organized to suit the various occasions in the church.

- 1) Before every Divine Liturgy, there are praises for the Lord that are sung antiphonically from the Psalmody book. Every day has a different Theotokia for the Virgin Mary which is very rich in symbols about St. Mary extracted from the Bible. For example, in the Saturday Theotokia, St. Mary is called "The Dome which is called: the Holy of Holies, which contains the Ark overlaid, with gold from all sides".

- 2) During the censuring of the Altar in the Divine Liturgy, the deacons and the people sing the following hymn:

"This is the censer of pure gold, bearing the amber in the hands of Aaron the priest raising incense upon the altar. The censer of gold is the Virgin, its amber is our Savior. She has given birth to Him. He has saved us and remitted our sins.

- 3) In the "canonical hours" from the "Agpeya", we honor the Virgin Mary and seek her intercession. The third portion of every litany at the end of every hour of prayer is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. For example, in Terce (the prayers of the third hour) we say: "O mother of God, thou art the stock of the true vine, having borne the cluster of life. Thou art she; we ask thee, O thou who art full of grace, together with the apostles, concerning the salvation of our souls. Blessed be the Lord our God. Blessed be the Lord day by day. The God of our salvation shall make our way prosperous".

Also before the creed we pray saying: "Hail to thee! We ask thee, O saint, full of glory, the ever-virgin, the mother of God the Christ; to lift up our prayers unto thy beloved son that He may forgive us our sins. Hail to her, the saint, the Virgin, who gave birth to the true light, Christ our Lord; ask the Lord to have mercy on us and forgive us our sins. O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, the faithful intercessor of human beings, intercede for us before Christ to whom thou gave birth, that He forgive us our sins.

Hail to thee, O Virgin, the true Queen. Hail to her who is the pride of our race, who gave birth to Emmanuel. We ask thee to remember us, O faithful intercessor, before our Lord Jesus Christ, that He forgive us our

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sins.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

We must seek the intercession of the Virgin Mary to pray on our behalf so that the Lord may accept us, forgive our sins and grant us those special needs that we may implore, whether they are spiritual or otherwise.

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[SONGS](#) 🎵

A VESPER DOXOLOGY **FOR SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN**

The Adornment of Mary in the highest heavens, at the right hand of her beloved: pray to Him on our behalf.

As David said in the Psalm: the queen did stand on your right hand, O King.

Solomon called her in the Song of Songs: my sister and my spouse: my true city Jerusalem.

For He has given a sign about her in diverse high names saying: come out of your garden: you chosen aroma.

Hail to you, O Virgin: the true queen: Hail to the pride of our race: for you gave birth to Emmanuel.

We ask you, remember us: O faithful intercessor: before our Lord, Jesus Christ: that He may forgive us our sins.

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For the success
of this Sunday
School Program
the teacher should
refer to the

HOLY BIBLE

in his/her preparation
of the lessons and in
teaching the students
in the class

August

Fourth Sunday



**AUGUST
FOURTH SUNDAY**

THE HOLY TRINITY

Please read Matthew 3:16-17 and Matthew 17:1-5, the attached article entitled “The Holy Trinity” and give the lesson with emphasis on the points below.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

To let the students understand as much as possible the mystery of the Holy Trinity and through their understanding, their faith be strengthened and they would not be victims to any strange and heretical teaching.

MEMORY VERSES

Jesus said, “I and My Father are one.” John 10:30

“For there are three who bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” 1 John 5:7

PLEASE EMPHASIZE:

† Introduction:

Today we are attempting to study the nature of the Triune God, or the mystery of the Holy Trinity. How can we grasp, with our limited minds, the nature of God the Almighty? The only one who can tell us about God and explain Him to us is none but God Himself.

Therefore, we humbly pray that the One True God would manifest Himself to us as He did to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, to John the Baptist at Jesus’ Baptism, to the three Disciples Peter, John and James on the Mount of Transfiguration and to the rest of the Disciples later when they were ready to accept the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

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† How can we, with our Limited Minds, Understand the Mystery of the Holy Trinity?

- 1) It is hard to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity, otherwise, the word “mystery” would not have been used. However, in His loving kindness, God did not leave us baffled, so He gave us a glimpse — just a glimpse — of the Trinity in our own beings. After all, we are created in His image, after His likeness (Genesis 1:26). This is how He gave us this glimpse:

I am actually three in one.

- a) I have a physical body, which is *me*. When my physical body is tired, it is me that is tired.
- b) I have a mind, and my mind is *me*. If my mind is sharp I say that it is me who is intelligent.
- c) I have a soul or a spirit, and my spirit is also *me*. When Saint Paul was taken up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4), was he in the body or out of the body (only in the spirit)? He himself did not know. But, even if he was in the spirit alone, it was he that was taken up to the third heaven.

So, I have a body, a mind, and a soul (spirit); these three are me.

2) The Holy Trinity could be understood as follows:

- a) There is only one God.
- b) The Word of God, or the Mind of God, or the “Logos”, is God. At the appointed time, the Word of God became Man (John 1:14) and manifested Himself to man (John 1:1) and was known as “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35), “the Son of Man” (Luke 5:24) because He is God Incarnate, and the “Logos” or the “Word” (John 1:1-14) and (I John 5:7).
- c) The Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit is God. Since the beginning, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2). In the Old Testament He spoke by the prophets, and in the New Testament He came down upon the Jordan River and upon the Apostles at Pentecost.
- d) When we say the “Son of God”, or the “Spirit of God” we mean the Son of God the Father and the Spirit of God the Father.

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So, we have here the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and these three (Persons) are one as Saint John puts it in 1 John 5:7.

† **Did the Holy Trinity Manifest Himself to the People of the Old Testament?**

The answer is “yes” but vaguely.

- 1) Why vaguely?
- 2) How did He manifest Himself?

1) Why Vaguely?

To answer this question, we turn to Saint Gregory Nazianzen, one of the well-known Church Fathers of the fourth century who was granted, after his death, the title “Theologian” by the Church. He wrote:

“The Old Testament reveals the Father clearly, but the Son obscurely. The New Testament reveals the Son and implies the divinity of the Spirit. Now (at the present time) the Spirit lives in our midst, making Himself more evidently known. While the divinity of the Father was not yet recognized, it would have been dangerous openly to preach the Son, and until the divinity of the Son was admitted, dangerous to impose the added burden, if I may so speak, of the Holy Spirit. Just as it is with those whose stomachs are overloaded, or those who, with eyes still weak, try to look upon the sun, so it would have been with the faithful; by trying too much, they would have lost even that which they were able to bear ... It was necessary that, by partial addition and, as David says, by ascension from glory to glory, the full radiance of the Trinity should progressively appear.”

Here, according to St. Gregory, the manifestation of the Holy Trinity all at once to the people of the Old Testament would have been dangerous ... Why? ... They would have believed in many gods. That is why the Holy Trinity manifested Himself in the Old Testament vaguely.

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2) How did the Holy Trinity Manifest Himself in the Old Testament?

In Genesis 1:26 we read: “And God said, Let us make man in **our** image ,...” And also in Genesis 3:22, God said “the man has become as **one of us** ...” The same phrase is also repeated in Isaiah 6:8, “Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying; Whom shall I send, and who will **go for us**?”

Here, these questions come to mind ... Why does God call Himself “us”? What does this mean? It means that “in the beginning” and even before “the beginning” God was a Triune God. This we can see clearly from what Christ Himself declared in His prayer to the Father: “You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24), meaning, before “the beginning”. Also, in the same prayer He asks the Father to glorify Him “with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” (John 17:5). Therefore, there is something which reaches back into eternity far before the phrase “in the beginning”. That something or someone is God the Father and God the Son.

Add to this what we read in Genesis 1:1-2 that before creation, the earth “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.” Read also Psalms 139:7 and Isaiah 11:1-2 and Isaiah 61:1.

Then, what was since eternity, before “the beginning”? There was the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Triune God was clearly manifested in the New Testament. Saint John writes in the beginning of his Gospel: “In the beginning (already) was the Word, and the Word (already) was with God and the Word (already) was God ... All things were made by Him ...” (John 1:1-3). And in his first Epistle he wrote, “For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” (1 John 5:7).

Notice that the fact that the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are one goes in complete harmony with the Hebrew faith in which the basic dogma is this, “Hear, O Israel; the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4). This verse, for thousands of years, has been recited twice each day in the Jewish Liturgy. It was quoted by Christ Himself (Matthew 12:29). It is also echoed in the letters of Saint Paul (Ephesians 4:6 and I Timothy 2:5). Amidst that Jewish world with this fundamental and deeply rooted dogma of the One God, Christ commissioned His Disciples to baptize “in the name (not names) of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19).

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† What are the Manifestations of the Holy Trinity in the New Testament?

- 1) As mentioned above, the Holy Trinity was manifested in a most striking way to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, to John the Baptist at Jesus' Baptism, to the three Disciples at the Transfiguration ... **etc.**
- 2) The Divinity of God the Father was very clear and was never questioned all through the Old Testament and the Dogma was carried through in the New Testament.
- 3) The Divinity of God the Son was declared by Christ Himself in many places in the New Testament such as:
 - a) "... He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9).
 - b) "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? ... Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me." (John 14:10-11).
 - c) "And the Word was God." (John 1:1).
- 4) The Divinity of the Holy Spirit was also declared in the New Testament.
 - a) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you ..." (John 14:26).
 - b) The Holy Spirit is God Who works in the New Testament. "... the Holy Spirit (God) said, Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit (God) " (Acts 13:2-3). Also we read, "... they (Paul, Silas and Timothy) were forbidden by the Holy Spirit (God) to preach the word in Asia." (Acts 16:6). Read also Acts **15:28** and Acts 20:28.
 - c) Read also 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Hebrew 3:7-11.

Note:

Please ask the children to summarize what was talked about and give prizes.

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

There is one God in three Persons. God Himself revealed this mystery to us. Therefore, this faith in the Triune God we declare in the Creed, at Baptism, when we Cross ourselves, when we pray, when we sing ... etc. We worship Him with the angels saying "Holy, holy, holy ... " (Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8). Holy is God our Father, holy is God our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and holy is God the Holy Spirit our Helper and Comforter. We ask Him to bless us, to have mercy upon us and to guide us to the way of His Kingdom.

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SONGS 🎵

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE

Love, love, love, love
Love your neighbor as yourself

The Gospel in a word is love
Love, love, love

Pantocrator
You created heaven and earth

You are my Creator
I adore You.

Jesus Christ
You are our Sacrifice

You are our Redeemer
I love You

Holy Spirit
You sanctify our souls

You are our Comforter
I need You

Coptic Church
Through Your Sacraments we are saved

You are our blessing and pride.
I serve you

Agios O Theo-os
Agios Athanatos

Agios Ees- shiros
Eleison ymas Eleison ymas



THE HOLY TRINITY

When we say “The Holy Trinity” we mean “God”. We use the words “Holy Trinity” when we have in mind His mysterious Being, for we know that there is One God, but He is in three Persons, namely God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. To a number of Christians this is a stumbling block. They are under the impression that most other Christians believe in God’s being One in Three Persons merely because the church tells them to do so. The fact is that the first Disciples of Jesus Christ were not “told by the church” to believe in the Holy Trinity, for the simple reason that they themselves were the church. They believed in this mystery because God revealed it to them.

How did this revelation unfold itself? And how can we share in the experience of the early church? We shall try to answer these questions.

The Holy Trinity is a supernatural mystery and without divine revelation we would never have known it. Even after the revelation of this truth we cannot understand it fully. Yet we can hope to find out that the Holy Trinity is a mystery and we can be satisfied with knowing the mystery, even without penetrating it. This is, remotely speaking, like knowing a secret without knowing its details. The mystery is such, that as soon as we understand that it should be a mystery, its being a mystery becomes perfectly acceptable and our normal desire to know is not frustrated.

To believe in the Holy Trinity is to believe in the truth that:

- a) There is one God.
- b) The Son of God is God. At the appointed time He became man and took the name Jesus.
- c) The Spirit of God is God. He spoke through the prophets, came down upon the Jordan River when Jesus was being baptized, came upon the Apostles at Pentecost.
- d) When we say the Son of God and the Spirit of God we mean the Son of God the Father and the Spirit of God the Father. Indeed the Father, the Son and the Spirit are three distinct Persons.

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have insight and humility. This belief requires insight because, as far as it can be experienced, it is the most profound of all the human experiences. A Christian has the experience of the Holy Trinity, albeit inadequate, when he lives for God only, offering himself to Him as to his Maker who is also the Maker of the world; but he must do so with our Lord Jesus Christ Who, Himself God, offered Himself to His Father in heaven. The true Christian must further be aware that it is from God the Holy Spirit that he receives the courage and power to offer himself to God. This experience will lead to the knowledge that God is One and that He is three Persons, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, we know, as members of the Church, that there is One God Who exists in Three Persons, or that there are three Persons in the One God.

Now as we try to think of this belief, we see that it is not against reason, but above reason. Since God is infinite, and since there is only one universe, there cannot be more than one God; again, there must be diversity of Persons in the One God for He is the living God and life implies diversity.

We know the Holy Trinity, as members of the church. Indeed, anybody may know that there is God, but only the true members of the true church know Him more intimately because through the eyes and ears of the Apostles who actually lived with the Lord, true Christians talk and listen to Him Who is God. The true members of the true church are taught by those who, in turn, were taught by the Apostles.

Besides insight, belief in the Holy Trinity requires humility. This humility consists in one's willingness to place oneself within the church. This placing of self within the church will be difficult and meaningless if the church is looked at as a group of "other people". It would then be legitimate to ask: why should I believe what "other people" tell me to believe? But as a matter of fact the church is not merely "other people". It is the community of those who have the experience of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of them. The church is the community of the Apostles, enlarged to an extent where it now embraces millions of believers. Humility appears in willingness to make oneself apart of this community in spite of the imperfections that it exhibits on earth. The church assumes, putting her trust in God, that anyone who sees the light will come into the fold. She does not, in other words, demand from people to give up their freedom. To believe is, in the final analysis, to make a choice and without freedom no choice can be made. The church, true to herself, acts on this principle.

Now the church is not a society of anarchists, There are certain convictions that she holds as eternal truths because God showed them as such. The church is

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possessed by these truths more than she possesses them. These truths, inasmuch as they are taught, are called dogmas.

There is nothing frightening about a dogma. It is not a device, as some people have mistakenly come to believe, which destroys one's freedom. On the contrary, a dogma is a theological conclusion to which the church has arrived on the basis of her experience and knowledge and which she must share with all the faithful.

To go back to our subject: we must be careful to observe that when we say "Three Persons in One God" we do not use the word Person in the sense in which we use it in ordinary conversation. When we say, for instance, Tom is a person, Dick is a person and Harry is a person, we cannot conclude that Tom, Dick and Harry are one person or one man. They are together three persons or three men.

In the dogma of the Trinity, One Person (the Father) and another Person (the Son) and another Person (the Holy Spirit) are also three Persons, but here the word Person has a much higher meaning. The difference is that whereas three ordinary persons are together, a group of three people, the Persons of the Holy Trinity are one God. Further, they are not parts of God; but Each is God Himself. All three Persons have the same, identical, one essence or substance. To convey this in a neater way, we use a technical word: we say, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial.

God has been the Holy Trinity from all eternity. It would be very wrong to say that in the beginning there was God the Father and that He grew later into the Holy Trinity. None of the Persons of the Holy Trinity were ever alone. In fact, without either the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, there would be no God. Each Person is "in" the other Persons of the Holy Trinity in a special sense. For this indwelling there is a special word: we refer to the three Persons being "in" Each Other by the term circumincession.

We believe in God the Father, infinite, eternal and perfect. We believe in God the Son, infinite, eternal and perfect. We believe in God the Holy Spirit, infinite, eternal and perfect. The mystery is in God the Father's, God the Son's and God the Holy Spirit's being not three but One God.

Mystery in this context means neither puzzle, nor a problem difficult or impossible to solve, nor a detective story plot. These things may be "baffling". The mystery of the Holy Trinity is not baffling. It is profound and beyond our capacity to put in words. It is nonetheless, a revealed mystery. "Revealed" means, as we know, "shown by God". A true Christian will therefore "see the mystery" and beyond this he need not and cannot go while his life and

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understanding are subject to the limitations of this world.

“Three real persons in an essence which is numerically one” is the heart of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Saint Gregory Nazianzun, a universally recognized father of the church, describes as follows the revelation to men of this mystery:

“The Old Testament reveals the Father clearly, but the Son obscurely. The New Testament reveals the Son and implies the divinity of the Spirit. Now (i.e. at the present time) the Spirit lives in our midst, making Himself more evidently known. While the divinity of the Father was not yet recognized, it would have been dangerous openly to preach the Son, and until the divinity of the Son was admitted, dangerous to impose the added burden, if I may so speak, of the Holy Spirit. Just as it is with those whose stomachs are overloaded, or those who, with eyes still weak, try to look upon the sun, so it would have been with the faithful; by trying to carry too much, they would have lost even that which they were able to bear ... It was necessary that, by partial addition and, as David says, by ascension from glory to glory, the full radiance of the Trinity should progressively appear.”

Saint Gregory thinks, then, that it would have been “dangerous” to teach about the Holy Trinity all at once to ancient peoples. What was the danger? It was, obviously, polytheism, namely belief in many gods. The Divine wisdom arranged that people should be given one aspect of the truth about God, at a time. To the Jews was revealed, throughout the Old Testament, the existence of One God. Our Lord Himself abstained from elaborating on the true depth of this belief at first. He did not declare His divinity lest He disturb the otherwise correct belief of His own Disciples as to the oneness of God, Yet He made His own divinity manifest through His acts. Nature (things visible) and the spirits (things invisible) obeyed Him. He spoke and acted with authority to the point of surpassing the Law and overcoming death.

As the end approached, Jesus’ revelations about Himself became clearer and more definite, until the high priest’s question: “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us if thou be the Christ, the Son of God”, He answered: “Thou hast said it ... hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” He further declares that “all power is given to me in heaven and on earth”. And most important of all, He asserts in John 10:30 His oneness with the Father: “I and the Father are one.”

In this and in other passages our Lord taught what the church later put in more systematic terminology. It was necessary for the church to do so since she had to address herself to people who could be helped in their faith mainly through

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systematic argument.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is a distinct Divine Person, One of the Holy Trinity, is equally clear in the New Testament. In the Old Testament there are abundant indications of this effect. Says Isaiah: “And a flower shall rise up of (Jesse’s) root, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.” Other passages which have approximately this meaning indicate that the Spirit was expected along with the Messiah.

At the Incarnation we see the three Persons of the Holy Trinity active together. We see them again at Baptism when God the Father speaks, God the Holy Spirit appears as a dove and God the Son is baptized. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17). At the Transfiguration on Mount Thabor we witness again the presence of the Holy Trinity. This time the Holy Spirit appears as a luminous cloud. “And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, James and John his brother, and bringeth them into a high mountain apart: and He was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light ... While He was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him’ “(Mat. 17:1-5).

After His baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert. “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Mat. 4:1). He (i.e. the Spirit) is not a gift or an impersonal power. He is a Divine Person: “It is expedient to you that I go”, our Lord says to His disciples “for if I go not, the Paraclete (i.e. the Holy Spirit) will not come to you”. We can see from numerous other passages in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and God, is nevertheless neither the Father nor the Son.

It is thus abundantly clear that the Creed, which is composed mainly in order to safeguard the truth of the Holy Trinity, has its source in the Bible and in the earliest tradition of the church. As we may have easily observed, the words “Trinity” and “Person” do not occur in the Creed, but this does not prevent it from being an elaborate statement of God’s being One Essence in three Persons. We say in it at the outset that we believe in One God. Then we acknowledge that the Father is God, the very word Father indicating that He is a Person; that the Son is God and a Person; and that the Holy Spirit is God and a Person. The divinity of the Holy Spirit is indicated by His divine attributes of uncreateness and perfection. He is a Person inasmuch as He does things such as speaking in the

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Prophets, and descending upon the Jordan.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have their unity in the Father and are different only in their relation to each other. The Father begets, the Son “is begotten” and the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. But these relations do not come about in time; they are eternal. There was no time, in other words, at which the Holy Spirit was not, or at which the Son was not. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-eternal.

Saint Gregory of Narec states the mystery of the Holy Trinity in, among other passages, the thirteenth “Word” of his celebrated Book of Prayers: “Beneficent God, mighty and awful. Thou, by the grace of the mercy, art also (our) good Father. Thy very name announceth the joyful news of thy compassion and intimacy. Thou art sweet even to those who are rebellious and ever discontent. With thee is thy Son as thyself, his strong hand raised over thy creation, redoubtable in his timeless authority. And thy Holy Spirit of truth, proceeding from thee without consumption, perfect essence of that which exists, everlasting being, equal to thee in all things, sharing with authority the glory of thy Son. Triune Personality, all inscrutable, self-differential into distinct Persons while One through circumincession. One existence, one nature, one authority, without confusion and chasm, of one will, consubstantial. No Person greater than Another, and not less, not even by the twinkling of an eye.”

By maintaining that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God and different only in their relation to each other, the church fought the Arian heretics on one side, who said erroneously that the Son was a creature; she fought the Sabellian heretics on the other, who said erroneously that God “appears” now as Father, now as Son and now as Holy Spirit. These people tried vainly to reduce to the dimensions of their minds what is, by definition, beyond their minds.

A heretic is a person who trusts his own mind more than the mind of the church. He tries to push his own teachings even on what the church has considered and found wrong and detrimental to people’s salvation. Sabellius (the teacher of the Sabellian heresy) and Arius (the teacher of the Arian heresy) were, of course, heretics. Sabellius taught in the first half of the third century. Arius came less than a hundred years later. The creed is mainly a refutation of their ideas.

Speaking of the “one Lord Jesus Christ” our creed says: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate, was made man.”

We pointed out in connection with the Holy Trinity that a mystery is not against, but above reason. God does nothing contrary to reason, but He Himself is, and His doings sometimes are, above reason. We see the meaning of these doings, but we cannot explain them, that is to say we cannot put them in words, because they

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are far too wonderful to be contained within words or the limits of our reason. The Incarnation is such a mystery. As we said, a Christian mystery is not a puzzle; it is not a problem to be solved. It is simply a truth that the church knows because it has been revealed to her by God.

The Incarnation is God's becoming Man without ceasing to be God. The word comes from a Latin word (*caro, carnis*) meaning flesh. The Armenian word for "Incarnation" means literally "becoming man". This, again, is the mystery. We cannot understand with our unaided reason, that the same Person is, at the same time, God and Man. Yet our inability to explain a fact is not an indication of the impossibility of the fact. The fact, in this case, that Jesus Christ is God was grasped by the apostles and then by the church through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a truth of Revelation. The true church is based on this conviction that Jesus Christ is God.

The Second Person of the Holy Trinity became man for two specific purposes: the first and more inclusive of these purposes was to redeem mankind.

In order to understand how mankind was redeemed through the Incarnation we must go back to the story of Adam and Eve. We remember that in this story the fall of man is told in a dramatic way. Through his disobedience man separated himself from God and lost his gift of being in communion with Him. Like children who, after irreparably offending their father, have to leave their father's house, Adam and Eve were put out of Paradise, for God requires obedience. But this requirement is not that of a despot and the obedience that God requires is not a blind obedience. The relationship of command and obedience between God and man is a relationship of love. Even when man decided to turn away from God, his Maker did not abandon him. The inspired writer of the book of Genesis relates in the same breath Adam, being driven from the Garden and God's promise, that the "seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head". The "serpent" here stands for the Devil, namely for him who snatches people away from God. The Devil snatched man away from God. Man's willingness to listen to the Devil provoked God's wrath, yet He promised in His mercy that the Devil would eventually be defeated in his mighty combat with God and would have to release man from his (the Devil's) bondage. This was the promise of redemption (of man's being redeemed).

There was a work of reconciliation to be done. Man could not bring himself back to God because he had lost the very gift of being in the company of God. When a branch is grafted onto a tree it receives its life from the tree. The tree does not receive its life from the branch. If the tree were not "willing" to give its life to the branch, there would be nothing, so to speak, that the branch could do about it. In this example the tree stands for God and the branch stands for man. Man separated himself willfully from God and without His infinite mercy there was

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nothing man could do to return to Him.

The solution for man's estrangement was God's reaching out for him. This is precisely what the Second Person of the Holy Trinity did when He became man. As the Christ — the Anointed One — He sacrificed Himself and redeemed mankind. Through and in His sacrifice all people are redeemed and raised to a status even higher than that of Adam. They are now children of God and may call God: "Father" as did Jesus Himself.

It must be clear that the work of redemption is not a mechanical work. By "mechanical work" is to be understood the kind of work where the human will play no part. For instance when a father wants his little child to go from one side of the street to the other, he can grab him and carry him across. As far as the child is concerned, this is mechanical work. The child has no part in it. Or, the father can extend his hand and wait until the child, out of his own free will, gives him his little hand. Here the father has the child's consent: that is, his willingness to cross the street safely with his father. His father is not carrying him across as if he were a little statue. The redemption is not a mechanical work in this sense. Men are redeemed if, and only if, they want to be redeemed; if, that is, they choose freely to participate in the work of the Christ.

We shall have more to say about the redemption (which is the first and more inclusive purpose of the Incarnation). The second purpose of the Incarnation is the self-revelation of God. The following remarks can be added thereto:

By becoming man without ceasing to be God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity offered Himself to our sight. He revealed Himself to us. He reduced Himself, as it were, to the human condition so that we may commune with Him more directly. A very important theologian of the early church explains the Incarnation in terms of a colossal statue as big as the world. How is it possible to "see" such a statue? In order for us to see it and know what it is like, it must be reduced to a much smaller size, for only then can it fall within our visual field. This is what God did. He came down to our level so that we may reach Him. Through the prophets, as we know, mankind had caught glimpses of God. In Jesus Christ God was revealed in a final way.

Many passages can be quoted from the New Testament indicating that Christ came not merely to increase people's knowledge about God, but in order to make them His children. "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). Again, in the first epistle of John we read: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him, Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him,

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for we shall see him as he is, (1 John 3:1-2). It should be observed here that to see Christ as He is, is to be like Him, In other words, the revelation of God and man's redemption go hand in hand. We may also quote from Saint Paul: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation? (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

The One Father of the church universal who dealt with the doctrine of redemption more earnestly than anyone else is Saint Athanasius. If Christ is not God, he said, then we are not redeemed. This explains the zeal with which he opposed Arius at the council of Nicaea.

We said that the redemption is a more inclusive purpose of the Incarnation, That is because we do not seek to know God in order to satisfy an idle curiosity. Our knowledge of God is itself a means of redemption, of being delivered from bondage to sin and to the Devil, and this brings us to the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation: in this mystery God reveals Himself as the Redeemer. He makes Himself known as He who can defeat the Devil so that we may have a life of holiness in His presence.

As in the case of other mysteries of our faith, the true teaching that our Lord is both God and Man has not gone unchallenged. Not long after the church began to expand, some people tried to bring this divine mystery down to the level of their human understanding. We know that this is impossible, for that which is not against, but above human reason, can be known only as revealed by God. In order to defend her position and maintain the truth that Jesus Christ is both God and Man, the church had, at times, to mobilize all her resources against wrong teachings or heresies.

A heresy known as "docetism" was one such heresy. The followers of this fake teaching generally maintained that the physical body of Christ was a mere phantom like appearance and that, therefore, He did not really feel physical pain when He was being scourged or nailed on the Cross. Nor indeed, according to docetism, was our Lord ever tired. This teaching is due to the difficulty that people have of reconciling suffering with the perfection of God. It goes without saying, however, that without the reality of the passion the very reality of our salvation falls to the ground. That is to say, without the real suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, we could not be saved, Besides, there are a great many evidences in the Bible to show the falsity of such a doctrine. There is a clause in the creed: "truly and not in semblance", that guards us against this and other similar errors.

Another wrong teaching stands at the opposite side of docetism and maintains

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that our Lord is only a man inspired by God, albeit to an unusual degree. This doctrine called Apollinarianism (from Apollinaris, the heretic, who lived in the fourth century) was condemned in the Council of Constantinople in 381. Under different names this doctrine has always been held by many people. All those who think that Jesus is merely a good example for others to imitate are victims of this heresy, even if they do not think of themselves as “apollinarians”.

All sorts of wrong teachings between these two extremes have been held through the centuries down to the present day. Yet a simple analogy may give us a glimpse into the mystery of our Lord’s person and nature. Just as a cloud becomes drops of rain without changing its substance, likewise did God become man without ceasing to be God. And He showed forth His divinity in and through the limitations of His manhood, as the waters of a river have to follow the meanders and twists of the river bed. The all-important point to remember is that at the Incarnation God assumed the limitation of being a man voluntarily. As Cyril of Alexandria, a champion of the true faith, maintained in the fifth century, “God became Man.”

This brings us to the famed Council of the city of Chalcedon (Kal-se-don), held in 451. This council formulated Christ’s being One, yet God and Man, by saying that Jesus Christ is one Person but has two natures, divine and human. Now this council pronounced the above-mentioned Cyril of Alexandria a teacher of true doctrine. He (Cyril) had also received the support of Coelestin I, Bishop of Rome. And Cyril consistently maintained that in the concrete reality Jesus Christ has one nature in which the two natures (divine and human) are united.

The council of Chalcedon was therefore contradicting itself by pronouncing on one hand the orthodoxy of Cyril and by using, on the other hand, a formula different from that of Cyril. The council got around this difficulty by decreeing that the two natures are united “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”

There is ample reason to believe that Chalcedon would have maintained Cyril’s formula, and the Christian world would have been spared the violent feuds between the adherents and opponents of Chalcedon, were it not for the influence, in this council, of factors other than theological.

The more mystically or monastically inclined opponents of Chalcedon (including the Armenian church) adopted Cyril’s formula. Jesus Christ, they consistently maintained, is One Person and has, in the concrete reality, one nature in which the divine nature and human nature are united or made one.

The interest of this controversy is, today, largely historical. There is, one may assume, general agreement among the more enlightened faithful that the so called monophysites (those who reject the formula of Chalcedon) and the so called

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diophysites (those who adopt it) are really saying the same thing in different ways. This has been made evident particularly by Nerses the Graceful, one of the greatest Armenian doctors of the church, who died in 1173. Between these two formulas: “two natures, divine and human, united without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” and “one nature divine and human” there is not much difference indeed. Both parties maintain in the final analysis that Jesus Christ in One Person and that He is God and Man.

At least six circumstances point to and establish the divinity of our Lord: (1) the testimony of the church. It is on this belief that the church stands. Numberless martyrs have laid down their lives confessing that Christ is God. (2) The apostles teach explicitly the same doctrine. (3) Jesus Christ Himself testifies that He is the Son of God and God Himself. (4) Christ’s holiness, teachings, miracles and prophecies. (5) His glorious death and resurrection justify His claim. (6) Furthermore, the prophets foretold His coming as the Messiah.

Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to do all these sacraments in the church, Every one of them was done by the disciples and apostles through the action of the Holy Spirit. The same thing happens now through the Holy Spirit and Abouna’s prayers.

MAJOR

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THE FOLLOWING TABLES
OF CONTENTS REFLECT
THE CHANGES IN THE
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