MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE

LIFE.GOD.TRUTH.FOR COPTIC YOUTH



"GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE."

MK 16:15

Summer 2010 Volume 8 No. 9

MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth" Psalm 127:4

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In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

My Beloved Youth,

Evangelism is one of the greatest miracles, not only in a historical context, but it is an evident on-going miracle. Seventy-three books of the Old Testament (including the Second Canonical Books) paved the way of our hearts to await the Messiah. Before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Archangel Gabriel joyfully announced the anticipated birth of the Forerunner, John the Baptist, to his father, the priest. The Archangel then had the honor of the Annunciation of the Savior to the Blessed Virgin Mother. Angels proclaimed the great news of the birth of Christ to the shepherds in the fields. Magi from the East arrived to witness the Child King and spread the word of His birth. All these events, prophecies, and encounters directly and indirectly evangelized the world about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Christ our Lord and the Holy Family's flight into Egypt began the Christian mission of Evangelism which would spread throughout the world. As He entered this pagan infested land of philosophy and science, the prophecies of old were fulfilled. There in Egypt, the Holy Family inadvertently prepared the Egyptian people for a faith that would never be exterminated from its sands. This would become a faith that would prove to be a light to the world throughout the ages. Christ personally prepared Egypt for evangelism. Egypt is where His servant the apostle, evangelist and martyr, St. Mark, later traveled to establish Christ's holy church in this great land which had in former times harbored many prophets and was to be the land of birth for many righteous men and women, the birthplace of monasticism, the perseverance of confessors, and the bloodshed of martyrs.

The New Testament reveals the beginning of the apostolic missions which continue even until today. Amongst them is one of the greatest converts, the Apostle Paul, who wrote more than one half of the New Testament and eventually received the crown of martyrdom. Yet, there are many who evangelized without apostolic titles, but under the auspices of the apostles. These were simple folks whom Christ personally healed, forgave their sins, and/or raised from the dead. They naturally became indebted to Him for renewing their lives and proclaimed His deity in the streets. St. Longines speared Christ while He hung upon the cross after He had died. While witnessing the pouring of His holy blood and water from His wounded side, this centurion accepted the faith and was eventually martyred. Two unbecoming women amongst the many also evangelized: the Samaritan Woman, shamed by her own people because of her sins, boldly changed a nation when Christ revealed Himself to her and allowed her to evangelize in His name; St. Mary Magdalen, once possessed by seven evil spirits, was sent by the Lord Himself to proclaim His holy resurrection to His disciples.

Every believer is called to evangelize. There is no way for anyone to contain and withhold the glory and beauty of God Incarnate to him or herself. It becomes the soul's desire to share this wondrous revelation. The means of declaring our faith may vary. For some, a quiet demeanor of a faith-filled life is sufficient. For others, boldness and declarations are necessary. While yet for others, their lives are marred with bloodshed as they joyfully receive the crowns of martyrdom. My question to you, my beloved youth, is how can we remain silent and refuse to carry Christ's message of salvation to the world? Therefore, have faith; share your faith; and live your faith!

Glory be to God forever. Amen!
God bless you,

Bishop Youssef
Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



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Peace & Grace

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Thank you for your prayers and support of this ministry for the glory of His Holy Name.

Servants in Christ,
Mighty Arrows Magazine Staff

MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE
Summer 2010

Heroes of Faith: Simon & Saul, Witnesses for Christ?

By Maria Mansour

As the Apostles' feast approaches, I cannot help but recognize two amazing heroes in the history of Christianity that are great witnesses to Christ: St. Paul and St. Peter. They are heroes indeed, not only because they were both martyred for the sake of Christ, but also because throughout their lives they taught us valuable lessons from which we as youth ought to learn. St. Augustine writes, *"Both apostles share the same feast day, for these two were one; and even though they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first and Paul followed. And so we celebrate this day made holy for us by the apostles' blood. Let us embrace what they believed, their life, their labors, their sufferings, their preaching, and their confession of faith." (Kiefer, James. Peter and Paul: Apostles and Martyrs. May 28, 2000).*

Although St. Paul and St. Peter are two great pillars in our Church for preserving the faith and preaching the word of God to the world, they each had a unique background and a different encounter with Christ. Even in their deaths, they both had been imprisoned in the famous Mamertine Prison of Rome and had foreseen their approaching martyrdom *(Cf. 2 Tim 4:6; 2 Pt 1:14)*. Saint Peter was crucified upside down, not worthy to be like his Master, whereas Saint Paul who was a Roman citizen was slain by the sword *(Cf. Coptic Synexarium - Epip 5)*.

St. Peter was born at Bethsaida, near the Sea of Galilee *(Cf. Jn 1:44)*. He was a married man and a fisherman by trade*(Cf. Lk 4:38; 5:3-5)*, yet he gladly accepted Christ's invitation to leave everything and join Him (*Cf. Mt 4:18*). Our Lord Jesus Christ prepared Saint Peter in such a unique way, one that relates to our lives as youth. Saint Peter witnessed the first miracle during the wedding of Cana of Galilee *(Cf. Jn 2:2)*. He was present during the transfiguration *(Cf. Mt 17:1)*. He was also always among the three disciples that Christ chose to witness certain miracles such as the raising of the daughter of Jairus *(Cf. Lk 8:51)*. Nonetheless, we see St. Peter struggling many times: he lost faith when Christ asked him to walk on water *(Cf. Mt 14: 28-31)*; out of anger he cut the ear of one of the guards *(Cf. Jn 18:10)*; finally, he denied Christ three times *(Cf. Mk 14:72)*. Yet, Christ saw in him a man with zeal to do His will. He saw great desire in St. Peter to be a disciple of His and to preach the Word. Many of us are just like St. Peter; our hearts are ready but we stumble and fall many times. Therefore, let us be strong and persevere just like St. Peter did. He found himself too weak to do anything, until Christ restored him again and gave him and the rest of the disciples the Holy Spirit that guided and strengthen them into their journey. Let us always listen to the Spirit of God in us to lead us to do His will.

St. Paul's background and his journey of faith are somewhat different from St. Peter's. St. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews yet a Roman citizen. He was well educated since his youth, knew the doctrines and the law and had zeal to serve God *(Cf. Phil 3:5-6, Act 22:28)*. Unfortunately he chose the wrong path in the beginning of his life, but God never forgets those whom He has created. He always provides opportunities for people to repent and return to him. St. Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus was a personal invitation that was gladly accepted *(Cf. Act 22:6-10)*. Like many of us, sometimes we've been taught to do the right thing since our childhood, but as we grow older and the responsibilities of life take over, we tend to drift away from the main path and lose our way. But brethren, never give up hope, for God will never leave you astray, and will guide you back as He did St. Paul. He shall guide us, but are we ready to accept His invitation?



Both Apostles then began their mission of evangelism after receiving the Holy Spirit *(Cf. Act 2:4; 9:17)*. St. Peter's mission was to preach to the Jews, while St. Paul preached to the Gentiles *(Cf. Gal 2:9)*. It is amazing how both apostles submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and were led to different adventures. Their lives were filled with excitement because they considered suffering for the sake of Christ, joy that fills the heart. When St. Peter first began to speak, people thought he was drunk *(Cf. Act 2:15)*, and when St. Paul began to preach, people thought he had lost his mind *(Cf. Act 26:24)*. While the strangest things happened in their lives, like the shadow of St. Peter and the handkerchief of St. Paul healing many *(Act 5:15; 19:12)*, they always gave thanks to God and praised His name. Truly, God works in our lives in mysterious ways, for He gave courage to Peter to speak regardless of his weak faith at times. He also gave grace to Paul in the eyes of those who heard him preach.

I wondered many times how the Apostles survived the mental warfares. Many times their lives were in danger. There were conspiracies plotted against them. They were attacked. Even food at times became a scarce resource. How was there room left in their hearts for trust? St. Paul shares his experience with us saying, *"For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21)*. Our witness to Christ goes beyond words. It is rather a life lived all for the glory of God. St. Peter and St. Paul are both amazing examples for such a life, as even death for them is gain. So we too brethren, when the mental wars begin and the worries of what the future holds for us cause us grief, let us remember that our true life is in Christ and our true hope is in Christ our Lord. He is the hope of us all, the salvation of us and the resurrection of us all, as we say in the Litany of the Gospel.

Many times we think that because we are still young adults nothing much is expected from us, that preaching or evangelizing is the work of priests or missionaries. God may not be expecting us to stand boldly like these two saints and proclaim His name, but He is expecting us to be a light unto others and show them the source of hope we have. St. Peter reminds us gently saying: "*…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" (1 Pt 3:15)*.

Saint Peter and Saint Paul were indeed great heroes in the history of the church despite their different personalities and approaches to discipleship and evangelism. Saint Peter taught us that even though some of us are slow to learn and growing in our faith, God never gives up on us, but rather He is always there reaching out His hands to save us. On the other hand, St. Paul was filled with a great zeal that always made him proclaim God's name even in the most difficult situations. Therefore we can now hear God's voice to them saying: *"O you who have been steadfast with Me in My temptations, I render to you My holy covenant forever"* (Enthoten Ze - Hymn for the Apostles).

References:

St. Augustine's quote:
http://satucket.com/lectionary/Peter&Paul.htm

St. Photini, The Woman at the Well



To some, evangelism may seem like a very difficult activity to undertake in their daily lives. The concept of preaching to others about Christianity can seem very embarrassing, and perhaps abnormal in today's generation. When most people think of the word "evangelism," they probably picture a priest or a bishop preaching to a congregation of regular churchgoers, not common laypersons preaching to the random public. However, this misconception was proven incorrect by St. Photini, commonly known as "The Samaritan Woman."

St. Photini was the Samaritan woman who spoke with Christ at Jacob's Well *(Cf. Jn 4:4)*. Her name means "light," because she received the light from Jesus Christ and spread it wherever she went. She came to draw water, but after she had been given water from the true Well, she despised the material water (when one is nourished spiritually, even material needs are overlooked). What the Apostles did, this woman did also. When the apostles were called, they left their nets. She, without receiving a directive to preach, but driven by joy, left her water pot and followed the path of evangelism. She did not call merely one or two people (as did Andrew and Philip) but aroused a whole city of people, bringing them to Christ. This shows her great zeal and wisdom.

By Mareya Naguib

She left her sinful life and immediately preached the message of Christ to her family and community. After the Pentecost, she, her five sisters (Anatole, Phota, Photis, Paraskevi, & Kyriaki), and her two sons (Joses and Victor, who was later renamed "Photinos" by Christ) were baptized. They became great preachers of Christ in many different places, including Smyrna in Asia Minor, Carthage in North Africa, and finally Rome, where they endured endless tortures at the hands of Emperor Nero. These tortures included beatings, poisonings, blinding, imprisonment, temptations, and finally crucifixion. While these evangelists were enduring these tortures, they also managed to convert one of Nero's Dukes (St. Sebastian), his daughter (St. Anthousa), and his magician (St. Theoklitos), who were all consequently martyred.

St. Photini is considered a Patron Saint in the Coptic Church and many other Orthodox churches around the world. Her zeal and love for Christ gave her the wisdom and courage to evangelize His message to all whom she encountered. In the eyes of the world, she had not been recognized as an individual of significance, yet her evangelism bestowed upon her this fame. One need not be of the priestly orders to evangelize and spread the true and upright faith. All that is needed is a heart ablaze with love towards God and a desire to speak about our amazing God. Christ reminds us that *"the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Mt 9:37)*. It is time to stand up and remind everyone around us that Christ is the true Light and true God.

Topping, Eva C. *Saints and Sisterhood: The lives of Forty-Eight Holy Women.* Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1990. (134-141)

Community Life is a Successful Beginning

By H. E. Metropolitan Bishoy
Abbot of St. Demiana Monastery

Continued ....

To begin, as we know, the monastic must first succeed in community life inside the monastery. Community life inside the monastery obligates you to gain spiritual virtues. You live the life of lowliness of spirit, because the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). You also gain the virtue of humility and practice other Christian virtues. Most important of these is the virtue of love, and so, you win the love of the monastics and serve them. When the monastery feels that you have served and suffered much, laboring in renovation, agriculture, or in any other service regarding the life of the monastery, then the monastery would feel that you are not a burden. You have applied this principle: "These hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me" (Acts 20:24)

You must refuse the principle of living on the bread of charity because if this principle augments, it will continue even when you become a solitary in the wilderness. You will then want people to come take the blessing of 'this saint' and Satan could begin to create disturbances by means of supernatural gifts. People also could unsettle you, claiming that your prayers move mountains and that devils tremble from you. You could find this an easy and profitable route, as visitors flock from every place and direction carrying their vows and firstfruits.

A monk in one of the monasteries actually built several extravagant buildings and churches on visitors' donations, which he personally received, to the extent that he built an entire monastery outside the monastery. When he was asked if this was not the monastery's possession, he answered, "No, this is my responsibility! This is mine!" In this way, he abused people's simplicity and trust in the Hagiography which they read about in *The Paradise Of The Holy Fathers*, in a way that does not agree whatsoever with the life of exile, the life of lowliness, or the virtue of love. On the contrary, such a person only creates problems with the superior and authority figures in the monastery, and provokes friends and loved ones against the monastery, in order to do one's own bidding.

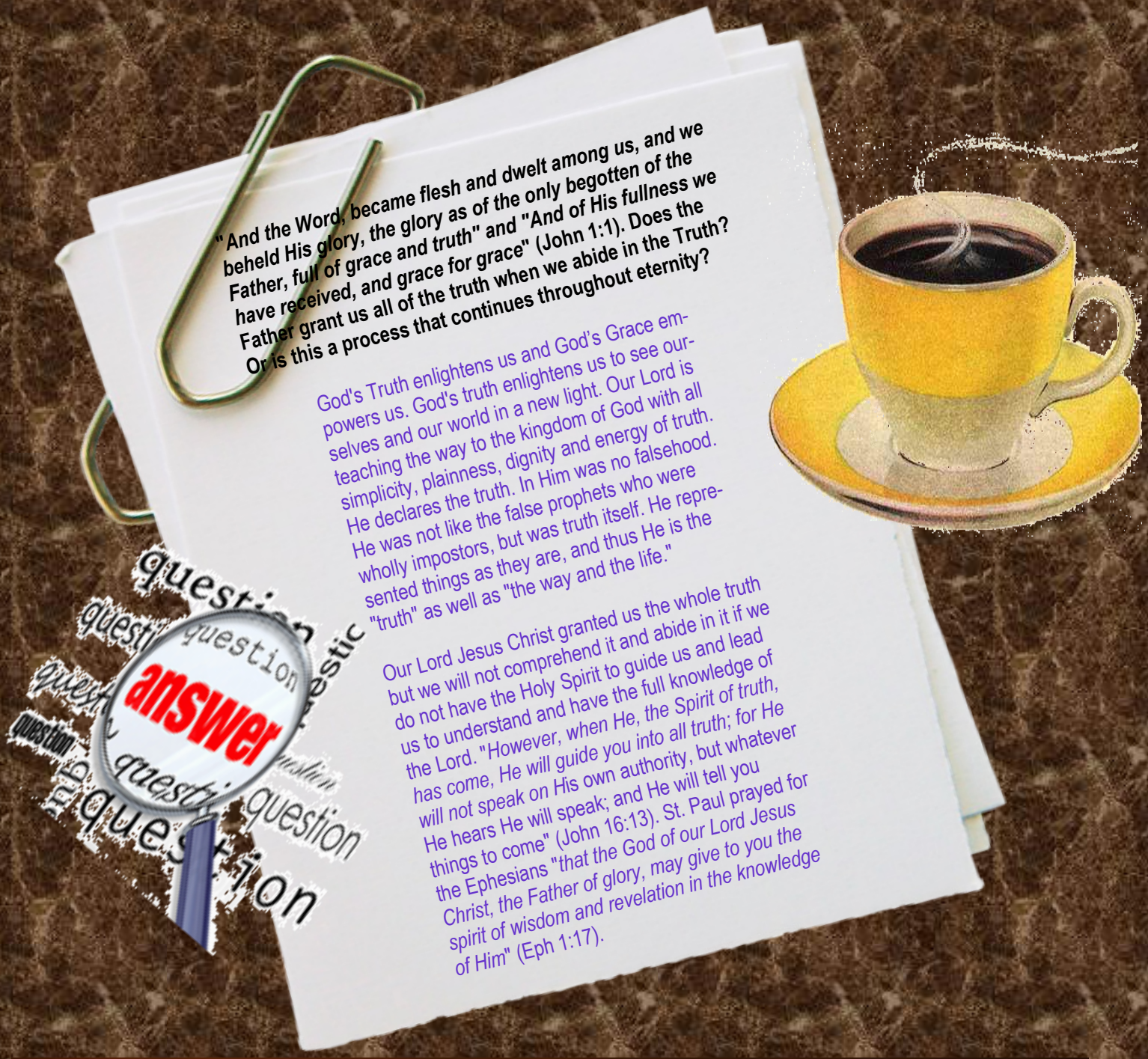
On the contrary, those in the monastery should feel that you have lived and labored in it, saying, "This monastic labored in building the bakery. This monastic labored in organizing the pharmacy. This monastic labored in building the new monastic cells." Each monastic should feel that he has a memoir in his cell from you before you venture into solitude; the walls of the monastery themselves should witness to your labor and watchfulness. Generally, you should feel that you came in order to sojourn from the world and secular people, and not to sojourn from fellow monastics; plant this within your heart from the start. You died to the world in order to live in a new world, the monastery, not to rebuff the monastic community and consider the monastics as troublemakers to be eliminated and avoided. Do not overlook that the virtue of humility could not be gained except by enduring hardships received from others.

Occasionally, Satan deceives a person, like the monk to whom Satan suggested eliminating the sin of anger and loss of inner peace by venturing into solitude. He asked the abbot's permission to go live in a cave for the sake of his salvation. There, he placed a jug of water at the entryway, and every so often the wind would blow, tipping over the jug and spilling the water (water is rare in those parts and is only obtainable with great effort). Finally, he lost his temper and smashed the jug to pieces. At this point, the monk realized that when he ventured into solitude, an angry nature and the devil of anger accompanied him. Therefore, he returned to the monastery, begged forgiveness, apologized, and said, "Here the virtues of endurance and patience could be gained."

To be continued .....



St. Mary and St. Moses Abbey, Corpus Christi, TX
His Grace Bishop Youssef, Bishop and Abbot
Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



Search the Holy Scriptures

HOLY BOOK OF GENESIS

1. Give the four basic points of Isaac's blessing to Jacob.
2. What wrong doing does Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob commit?
3. Jacob responded to God's revelation and word in four ways. List them.
4. Anointing with oil is first mentioned in what chapter and what verse?
5. Chapter ? mentions tithing. Who was the first person mentioned in the Holy Bible to tithe?

ANSWER TO A BIBLE QUESTION FROM OUR SUMMER ISSUE:

Why did God let Abraham in on His plans? (4 Points)

"For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."
(Gen 18:17-19)

Committed Service Instills Fulfilling Happiness

By His Grace Bishop Youssef



The tie that binds both happiness and spiritual service is a fundamentally simple one, "*It is more blessed to **give** than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). The Lord Jesus Christ not only taught giving; but His very life demonstrated emphatically that serving others is an essential component of spiritual happiness. A person may have unprecedented gifts and talents; but if they choose not to share them with others, those gifts and talents will not bring about the expected fulfillment.

"*There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities but it is the same God Who works in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*" (I Corinthians 12:4-7).

***The first step* towards an enriched, fulfilling service to God is to recognize that gifts and talents are ultimately God's and His alone.** They should not be considered yours neither by you nor by others.

No two servants possess exactly the same identical gifts. It was only the perfect Lord Jesus Christ Who had possessed all the gifts and talents during His life on earth. God's plan is to assimilate all the infinite number of gifts and talents He has distributed to us all, and make them function together as one. It is a biblically documented mandate that everyone combine their talents and gifts laboring together in love towards one unified goal without any underlying human dissension. We should embrace this as an expected behavior from us springing from an internal conviction rather than a waited-for effort; if we truly believe our gifts and talents are from God to be utilized for the advancement of His kingdom.

***The second step* towards a happy blessed service is resolved in making a commitment to share our gifts and talents with others.** Having the desire to serve is certainly essential; but without determination desire is like a candle without a flame. Wishful thinking alone does not make service burn brightly with productivity and success. Rather, commitment extends desire into unconditional, faithful, seven day a week service. Hard working, progressively moving, validated service turns into a labor of love with committed dedicated servants.

Origen (c.248) spoke of the commitment of the church teachers at its inception:

> "At the present day, indeed there is a multitude of Christian believers. Not only rich men receive the teachers of Christianity, but also persons of rank, as well as refined and high-born ladies. Some will perhaps dare to say that it is for the sake of a little glory that certain individuals assume the office of Christian instructors. However it is impossible to reasonably entertain such a notion about Christianity in its beginnings. For back then, the danger incurred was great especially by its teachers."

Servants cannot serve two masters. They have to choose either the earthly or the heavenly; but they cannot be attached to both and claim they can serve. "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:18). Trying to maintain an attachment to both leads to procrastination in completing service works to the best of one's ability; some readily volunteering their talents and gifts, in addition to sporadic time spent in prayer and preparation for vital services such as deacons' hymns and Sunday School lessons.

***The third step* following full commitment to His service is having the right attitude in reflecting our gifts and talents.** We "choose and wear" our attitude exactly as we do our clothes each and every day. The essential question concerning attitude is, "Does my attitude, supported by my actions, spiritually encourage others to desire to share their gifts and talents, furthering and ensuring the growth of the Church?"

The Lord Jesus Christ prolifically gave a heartfelt example of how the right attitude, the true inner faith we reflect to others should be, "*I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me*" (Matthew 25:35,36). Here, the Lord not only gave an example but also identified Himself with the poor, the homeless, the suffering, and the needy.

With a spiritual attitude one comes to realize that spiritual rather than physical nourishment leads a person to never hunger or thirst again. Offering the garment of righteousness through teaching, exhorting, encouraging, seeking out the sick, visiting the debilitated, immobile elderly, is doing that unto the Lord Himself. There is physical as well as spiritual Imprisonment; and among us there are people walking seemingly free; but who are spiritually imprisoned to sin and compliance to a worldly sinful life. Such are the ones our Lord asked us to visit and liberate.

Our commitment and non-condescending attitude towards living a righteous life will eventually lead others to follow our example in desiring the Lord Jesus Christ as Master of their life away from sin and its bitterness. Further, it will demonstrate to those who are ever mindful and watching our example as servants how we are called upon to use our talents and gifts. We must be ever watchful and introspective as servants "*...for who is greater, he who sits at the table or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves*" (Luke 22:27).

The spiritual attitude of a servant should also not be overtaken by often seeking the easy, most familiar, less difficult path. St. Paul said, "*...serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me...*" (Acts 20:19). A servant should also be faithfully seeking positive ways by which to expand and share gifts and talents, persevering for the betterment of the service. The number of years in service, a servant's age or relations should not place them in higher esteem than other servants.

St. James and St. John, the sons of Zebedee unthinkingly, unsettled the other ten listening disciples by saying, "*Teacher we want You to do for us whatever we ask. And He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your Glory*" (Mark 10:35 -37). The Lord called them privately aside and quietly taught them the self-denial in discipleship, "*You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise it over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve*" (Mark 10:42-44).

***The fourth step* is finding spiritual satisfaction in service. Servants should have service as the utmost important source of their happiness.** Giving unto others what God has given unto you, becomes to your soul its breath, purpose, and joy. Salty lakes are self contained, with water pouring only internally. Fresh lakes, on the other hand, receive and give fresh water, causing their waters to be really fresh and refreshing. So is the case with service. If it is not contained; but reaching out to others then it becomes refreshing; bringing forth happiness to the giver as well as the receiver.

It is humbling to constantly keep before our eyes the fact that perfection is a quality possessed by only One earthly person, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ's earthly life and His death reflect the Perfect Servant in the Perfect Man. The perfect Man did not ask to be paid for His services. There was no royal fanfare for His miracles; nor was His service motivated by fear. No pretensions or vices overshadowed His service; a donkey was his choice to ride as a king. There were even very few who had said "thank-you." He served until he went on the cross.

The Lord Jesus Christ reached out to others with His heart, not only with His all knowing, all powerful encompassing knowledge. He motivated others not only by ***who*** He was, but also by ***how*** He was: humble, ready, patient and loving. His service was truly a labor of love, bringing spiritual happiness to all those who chose to faithfully follow His teachings and His Holy Example. His epitome of service would fill voluminous Holy Gospels known by those whose watchful observant eyes could not help but commit His examples to memory.

Let us all be thankful to God for bestowing upon us precious gifts and talents and may He make us worthy to commit them to His Service. May we increase in service and righteous endeavors, fulfilling spiritual happiness and become more upright in good deeds.

Have mercy on us, O God.

FROM FEAR TO WORSHIP: HABAKKUK, THE PROPHET -PART FOUR

By Christine Massoud

If you've been reading through this series on Habakkuk, you know that most of the first chapter was not really hopeful. We had a lot of doom and gloom and calamity and Chaldeans coming in to take over the earth. Habakkuk, the prophet, was questioning God's plan and once he got quiet enough to hear, God answered him. God is at work all along and wants us to ask him for his great and mighty plan. He wants us to trust in His goodness and faithfulness like in the past; he will continue to provide and protect us in the future. We read how Habakkuk responded by trusting God and His purpose; now we continue to the last installment of our series. If you don't know what I'm talking about, please read the previous articles online at www.suscopts.org/mightyarrows, may they be a great blessing to us all.

As we come to the end of Habakkuk, he is praying to the Lord. He's responding to the things he has seen, the things he has witnessed, the things God has given him—of **God's character, God's holiness, God's glory, God's plan, and God's purposes.** He sees that there is judgment coming. The Babylonians are going to be God's instrument to chasten the Jewish people for their backsliding ways. But, God is going to judge the Babylonians. They will reap what they have sown, and it is as if the whole vision is just too much for Habakkuk to handle. In light of what he has seen, he says in verse 16, *"When I heard, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself."* Habakkuk trembles at the revelation of the glory of God—the revelation of the power of God, at the wrath of God. He trembles at the impending judgment and the coming persecution. He trembles at the judgment that even the righteous will experience because they live in a corrupt nation.

I think of the fact that it's not only Habakkuk who trembles at that thought, but throughout the history of God's people, many of God's people have been persecuted, even many of the righteous. Those who walk by faith have been persecuted for their faith or they've had to suffer along with the unrighteous. Think of the apostle Paul—when he was converted, God said, *"I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Act 9:16).* He knew that his life of serving Christ would not be an easy one, and that it would involve suffering. St. Paul said, *"The Holy Spirit testifies in every city saying that chains and tribulations await me" (Act 20:23)*. Can you imagine being in ministry, and that's the only thing you knew would happen for sure? He didn't say, *"I know in every city that people are going to believe or people are going to be saved or new churches will be started,"* but rather said, *"The one thing I know for sure, because the Holy Spirit has told me, is that in every city imprisonment and afflictions will await me."*

God's people are often taken to the brinks of death and put in places where they're put in peril of their lives. As we serve and obey the Lord, we know that there will be affliction. There will be trials. There will be struggles. The life of faith, which is what we're talking about in this book, ***"The just shall live by his faith,"* is a life that also includes affliction** *(Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17)*. Trouble is coming, but we know that beyond the trouble, salvation is coming. God is always out for the salvation of His people. We're still dwelling in exile. We're not home yet. The promises of God are not yet all fulfilled. They will be. The way we survive here is by exercising faith in what God has promised. *"The righteous shall live by his faith,"* even when he knows that afflictions are coming.

As an expression of faith, Habakkuk says, **I will quietly wait**, in spite of what I know is going to happen. The Babylonians are coming, God's people are going to be chastened, God is going to pour out His wrath on this earth. *"Yet, I will quietly wait. The thought makes me tremble."* It's not like he's just burying his head in the sand and pretending like it's not going to happen, or thinking that somehow he's going to escape all this. When you pray, *"Lord, sanctify me. Purge the evil and the wickedness out of my own heart,"* it makes you tremble to think of what that might mean, what that might entail. Yet, by faith you can say, *"I will endure it quietly. I will wait quietly. I will wait for the day when God will turn His wrath on all my oppressors, and God will save and redeem and rescue His people."* When you can wait on the Lord and not live in this perturbed mindset, you're exercising faith: **knowing that God will right all wrongs.** He will fulfill His promises. Wait on the Lord. We ourselves who have the Spirit within us, we groan; we writhe, but we wait eagerly for God to finish the story. We wait for God to come and vindicate righteousness. We wait for God to exercise His judgment and His salvation on the earth. We wait for God to deliver us from these weak and needy and feeble and frail bodies. We wait eagerly for that.

Paul goes on to say in Romans eight, *"For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope,"* (v. 24). If you could see it, if you could experience it all now, it wouldn't take faith. *"For why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance"* (v. 24-25). Paul says we wait eagerly, and we wait patiently. How do we do that? By faith. How do the righteous live? By faith. We wait eagerly. We wait with patience. God is in the process of making all things new. So what do you do? You wait on the Lord. Now, I don't know about you, but I find it really hard sometimes to wait. Do you ever find that as you're waiting for God to move or you're waiting for God to act, that your faith kind of gets weak and feeble and you lapse into unbelief? Sometimes you even find yourself saying, "God, it's hard to wait!"

I think that waiting is hard for all of us. It takes faith, and it's not natural to wait. That's why we have to keep our eyes on the Lord and keep our eyes on the finish line. I struggle to wait to see how God's going to resolve issues, and I want God to hurry. I want Him to wrap things up more quickly. I want to see the end of the story more quickly. But God says, *"No. Learn to wait."* Wait on the Lord. Is there some impatience in your heart for God to move, for God to act? You've been impatient with Him, saying, *"Lord, do it now! Fix it now!"* You're pushing and demanding. Are you accusing God of not caring? God says, *"I have treasure I want to give you. I want you to know Me, but you're going to have to wait."* If your heart has been impatient or angry towards God because He's not moving fast enough in a situation or in the way that you think He should—even just this moment, confess that to the Lord.

As Habakkuk is waiting for God's purposes and God's promises to be fulfilled, while he still cannot see the end of the story, he expresses faith that God is going to fulfill His promises, and as an expression of that faith, he waits. Now, he does something in addition to waiting that I find absolutely astounding. It's mind-boggling, and it's in this last paragraph of Habakkuk that we want to explore what it says: *"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls--yet . . ."* (v. 17-18). Now, in the previous verse, he said, *"I tremble, yet I will quietly wait."* Now, here he talks about the coming devastation. He pictures what it's going to be like, what it may be like. In verse 18 he says again, *"yet." "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."*

He describes here a situation in verse 17, *"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines";* it's not just one thing that goes wrong. I mean, all of us have been through some kind of disaster or catastrophe. We could name what those are, but here is a season of life that Habakkuk is anticipating where it's not just one thing that goes wrong, but everything goes wrong—everything! He says, *"Though the fig tree should not blossom,"* that's one thing, *"nor fruit be on the vines, and the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, and the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls."* I mean, this is one calamity after another. Even if you don't provide me with the basic necessities of life—that's the situation he's anticipating. I mean, this was no empty threat. He believed God. When God said judgment was coming, chastening was coming, Habakkuk knew that was true. So he begins to imagine what could it be like having all these things taken away.

Now, maybe you can't imagine a situation—it's hard for most of us to imagine a situation in which really you would have no basic necessities of life, but think about other areas of your life, maybe not in the area of food because it's hard for us to imagine not having at least minimal food to eat. Think about in your marriage when you get minimal affection that you feel you need: Think about in friendships or in the workplace or in various other aspects of life where emotionally you feel just wrung out, drained, lonely, empty, like you have no one who cares. Maybe you've just moved to a new area, and you don't know anybody. You don't think anybody knows you or cares, or you can't find a welcoming church or community. You feel emotionally and relationally stripped of things that matter to you, things that are meaningful—relationships. You have no one to talk to. I think Habakkuk is covering all those situations with this paragraph. Though everything that matters to me and is meaningful to me and gives me warmth and love and help and care and encouragement—though it's all stripped away, regardless of the circumstances, **I will not question God's goodness, but I will have joy. I will choose joy.** That's why we need to know God's promises and then not only know them but trust them—that what God says is true—and **take Him at His word.** We are so good at having head knowledge and so poor at getting that knowledge **into the laboratory of life where we really live.**

Really, those times of whining and complaining are evidence of a failure to live by faith. *"The just shall live by faith."* The just, the righteous ones, live in light of who God is, rather than in light of our finite, flawed, limited perspective. So Habakkuk says, *"Though I'm stripped of all these things that matter, all these things that we think are important, these things we think we can't live without, yet,"* verse 18, ***"I will rejoice in the LORD; I will joy in the God of my salvation."*** Now I want to tell you, what I'm about to write here is so convicting to me because I'll confess to you so often I don't live this way. It's easy for me to live this way when I'm sitting in my room or when I'm writing this article. When I get into the reality of life and what's going to happen later today or tomorrow or the next day or what happened yesterday or the day before, I just fall back into this unbelief, acting and responding as if there is no God. But there is a God! I've been called to live and to walk by faith, and God uses circumstances to help me see when I'm not walking by faith.

This isn't like, *"Okay, I'll just grin and bear it."* This is, *"I will actively rejoice in God."* So Habakkuk is not just resigned to things over which he has no control. He is joyful in the midst of them, and that's because his relationship with God is the one thing he knows that can never be taken away from him. ***"There is no lapse in God's goodness,"*** a friend of mine said to me once. God is still good, so Habakkuk, who started out this book with intense questioning, maybe even doubts about God—he has now grappled deeply with the tough issues and the tough questions, and in the process, he has encountered God in a whole new way. Now, having encountered God, seen God for who He is, as a result of grappling with these issues, Habakkuk the wrestler becomes Habakkuk the embracer—**from fear to faith, from wrestling to embracing God, clinging to him.** Now that whole, excruciating process of faith takes a turn and in this final paragraph erupts into springs of joy. The wrestling process, the grappling process, the struggling to understand, the having to lay your doubts down and take up the shield of faith has caused him not just to survive, but it's like there's this underground reservoir of springs of living water that have sprung up and erupted in hilarity, in joy, in things that the world cannot understand—joy in the Lord.

RESPONSIBILITY

The Bridge Builder

A Legendary Poem
by Will Allen Dromgroole, 1934

An old man, going a lone highway,
Came at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,
Through which was a flowing sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near,
"You are wasting strength with building here.
Your journey will end with the ending day:
You never again must pass this way:
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide --
Why build you a bridge at eventide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, Too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building a bridge for him."

Have you ever pressed through your problems and your doubts to get through to that kind of joy? Let me tell you an observation that this friend made while we were discussing the article and other events in my life that caused this study. She said she found throughout her life that our **capacity to experience joy is in direct proportion to our willingness to experience and embrace sorrow and pain**—the breaking process, the losing process, the doubting process. To the extent that we're willing to experience and embrace the pain, to that extent, we will have a capacity to rejoice.

The problem today is we don't want to experience pain. We have in our culture and in our society so many ways of eliminating the pain, so we don't talk about brokenness. We don't talk about repentance. We don't talk about God's judgment, and then we eliminate the lows of life by running from them, medicating them, escaping them, avoiding them, doing anything we can not to have to feel pain. Well, it's clear in this passage. It's a result of his life being centered in God. Verses 18 and 19 you see this evidence of this God-centered life. *"I will rejoice in the LORD; I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength."* It's a God-centered life. You see that **God uses suffering** to cause our hearts to become detached from things that are less than God, from things and people, goods, pleasures, things that can only satisfy us to a limited extent, and then God uses that suffering as we're stripped and detached from those earthly things to attach our hearts to the One who can satisfy us deeply and eternally, to make us God-centered.

If you're not finding joy in the Lord right now, in the midst of whatever circumstances you're living in; if you're looking to things or people to make you happy; if your joy is not sourced, rooted, flowing out of your relationship with the Lord; if it's other things you're seeking to bring you your joy, then when you lose those other things, you will have a hard time finding true joy. Don't wait till the fig tree fails to blossom and there are no fruits on the vines and say, *"Where's my joy?"* If you're not finding joy now in the Lord, you'll have a hard time finding it then. You say, *"I'm not living in this place of destitution right now."* That's okay. That day may come in one way or another, but find your joy now in the Lord. If you enjoy Him and enjoy through Him and because of Him and for Him the good things that He brings into your life, then when you're stripped of those things, you'll find, as Henry says, that you can sit upon a melancholy heap of the ruins, and even then, **you can sing to the praise and glory of God.**

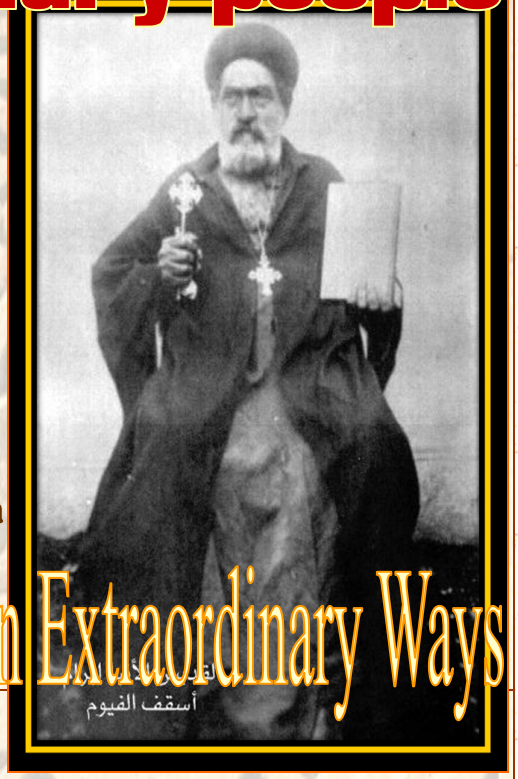
Father, thank You for Your incredible promises; for the certainty we have that the day will come when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. We know, as we've learned from this book, that the righteous will live by their faith. If we didn't have to wait for the outcome, we wouldn't develop faith, and faith is what pleases You. Lord, teach us to wait—to wait on You, and to wait in confidence; to wait eagerly; to wait with patience, knowing that You do all things well, and that You are fulfilling all Your purposes. Help us to keep our eyes on the end of the story, and in the meantime, to wait quietly for You.

Thank You, Father, for the example of this servant of Yours who knew what it was to squarely face loss and destitution and deprivation in the face and to say, *"No matter what, I will trust You. And as an expression of trust, I'm not just going to survive, I'm going to thrive by actively choosing joy in the Lord."* Thank You, Lord, that You give joy as the fruit of Your Spirit, that Your kingdom is one of joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, and there are wells of joy, wells of living water that You want to cause to spring up within us even in a place of great loss. Cause us to find our joy in You now so that when we lose these things and people that are precious to us, we'll be able to face that loss in the face and say, ***"Regardless, I will take joy in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."*** Amen.

ordinary people

PILLARS OF OUR TIME

Beloved Saint & Friend to the Poor Anba Abraam Bishop of Fayoum

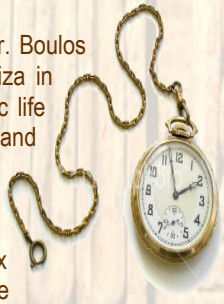


By Marilyn Ekladios

Serving in Extraordinary Ways

One might quickly look at this gentle man and think his kindness and righteousness is because he was a monk who became a bishop. Therefore, it should be expected that his behavior would enforce an exemplary life. However, Bishop Abraam could be any of you, the readers, who is committed to living a life of true faith, humility, and values which honor Christianity. His kindness and charity towards the poor did not come about just because of his priesthood.

In the year 1829, Egypt was blessed by being the birthplace of one of the most beloved saints who would be the epitome of the symbol of the cheerful and charitable giver. Bishop Abraam was born Boulos (Paul) Gabriel in a town in upper Egypt. In 1848, this nineteen year old entered the monastic life at the famous St. Mary, El-Muharraq Monastery of Assiut (a location distinguished as one of the places of residence of the Holy Family during their flight in Egypt). After a brief period, he was chosen to be the abbot of the monastery. Soon after, he became known as "the father of the poor" because of his extreme generosity towards those in need who sought charity from the monastery during difficult economic times. Unfortunately, not everyone appreciated his generosity. Thus, he eventually relocated to St. Mary, El-Baramous Monastery in the Natroun Valley (another location of residence of the Holy Family).



By the blessed hands of Pope Cyril V, Fr. Boulos was ordained Bishop Abraam of Fayoum and Giza in 1881. He never neglected his prayerful and ascetic life nor his responsibilities towards the poor. Diligent and humble he remained throughout his precious life. Anba Abraam taught us how to love and how to give. With a simple life, he taught us many lessons. Nearly every church has a special donation box bearing his loving name for the sake of the poor. He reposed in Christ on June 10, 1914, less than one hundred years ago, and is memorialized in the Synaxarium (ref.). The Holy Synod declared the canonization of St. Anba Abraam, the Bishop of Fayoum in 1964. Since then, his name has been placed amongst the Diptych (commemoration of the saints) during the Divine Liturgies. (*Cf. Coptic Synexarium, Paona 3)*

May his prayers be with us all, Amen.

In Defense of Infant Baptism

By Michael Rizkalla

Baptism of infants is a controversial topic among Christians. Many believe that in order to be baptized, one must be old enough to consent. Many who espouse this point of view feel that by baptizing their child as an infant, the parents are not allowing the child to choose Christ as a personal savior and are forcing the infant into Christianity. This cannot be further from the truth. In the Orthodox Church we believe that baptism in necessary for salvation, and that, by not baptizing children from infancy, we are depriving them of their saving grace. Furthermore, the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the early church fathers support this point of view.

The Orthodox Church baptizes infants because baptism is necessary to obtain salvation. As 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" (Jn 3:5*). Also, in the great commission, Jesus says to the disciples, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16).* If we decide to wait until a child is older, and able to consent to the baptism, then we are depriving any child who dies prior to the age of consent of the Kingdom of God.

Biblically and historically, the church has baptized all new believers regardless of age. In the book of Acts, we hear of Lydia the seller of purple in the city of Thyatira. St. Luke says of her, *"The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay'" (Acts 16:14-15).* However, this is not the only case. Later in the same chapter we hear of an incident with St. Paul, St. Silas, and the prison guard. After the two saints were miraculously released from the prison (after an earthquake occurred while they were singing midnight praises) the prison guard asked them what he must do to be saved. The two apostles preached to him and his household. Once again St. Luke states*, "And immediately he and his family were baptized" (Act 16:25-33)*. St. Luke the physician was known to be very detail oriented in his writings; he would have found it important to specify if some members were not baptized due to their age.

In addition, the Old Testament precursor to (or symbol of) baptism was circumcision. This can be seen in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. St. Paul teaches us, *"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" (Col 2:11-12).*Therefore, circumcision is the Old Testament equivalent of baptism. All males were circumcised on the eighth day of life – certainly too young to consent. Also, nowhere in the Bible do we see a notation that a person had to await being old enough to be baptized. Then, why should we deprive these little ones from unity into the body of Christ? In fact, if we keep them from Him, we would be violating His teaching which says, *"Let the children come to Me and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:14).* Therefore, how can we forbid them from coming near to Him by our rationalization that they are too young to understand the meaning of the sacrament or too young to consent?

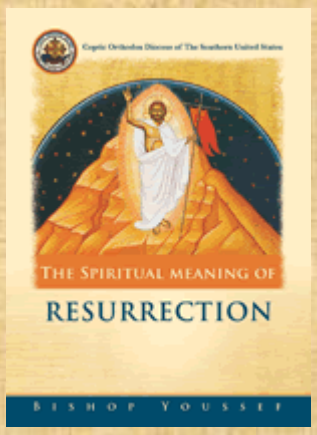
In fact, the controversy over infant baptism is a fairly new phenomenon. Most of the church fathers supported the practice of infant baptism. It was not until after the Protestant reformation that major objections were posed about infant baptism. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin supported the practice of infant baptism. In Luther's *Sermon on Infant Baptism* he states: "*Therefore we here conclude and declare that in baptism the children themselves believe and have their own faith, which God effects in them through the sponsors, when in the faith of the Christian church they intercede for them and bring them to baptism*."[2] He believed that baptism of little children was just as valid as that of consenting adults. This view is supported by the early church fathers. St. Gregory of Nazianzus says on this topic: "*Do you have an infant child? Allow sin no opportunity; rather, let the infant be sanctified from childhood. From his most tender age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Do you fear the seal [of baptism] because of the weakness of nature? Oh, what a pusillanimous mother and of how little faith!"*[3] Therefore, St. Gregory taught that it is our weak faith that leads us to doubt the effectiveness of baptism on infants. He also believed that it was crucial to baptize infants as to not allow sin to take a foothold in their lives. We see this same sentiment in the writings of St. John Chrysostom. He taught us saying, "*You see how many are the benefits of baptism, and some think its heavenly grace consists only in the remission of sins, but we have enumerated ten honors [it bestows]! For this reason we baptize even infants, though they are not defiled by [personal] sins, so that there may be given to them holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, and that they may be His [Christ's] members."*[4] These are only a few examples of the writings of the early church fathers supporting the practice of baptizing infants. Their writings are replete with support for this practice.

Therefore, the practice of baptizing infants is one that has strong support in both the Bible and the practices and teachings of the Church for nearly one and a half centuries. It was not until recently that objections began to be raised against infant baptisms. It is ill-advised to deprive infants from the blessings of the sacrament of baptism. It is for all these aforementioned reasons that the Orthodox Church continues this great practice.

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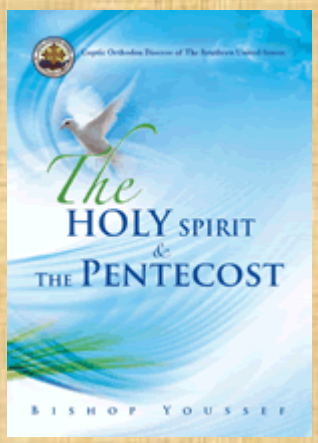
[1]NKJV Bible
[2]Martin Luther, Luther's Sermon on Infant Baptism
[3]St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration on Holy Baptism* 40:7, A.D. 388
[4]St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Catecheses in Augustine, Against Julian* 1:6:21, A.D. 388.
[5]H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy, Simplifying the Faith Lecture Series# 4 The Sacrament of Baptism

The Spiritual Meaning of Resurrection



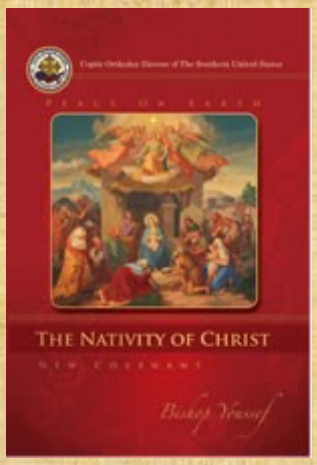
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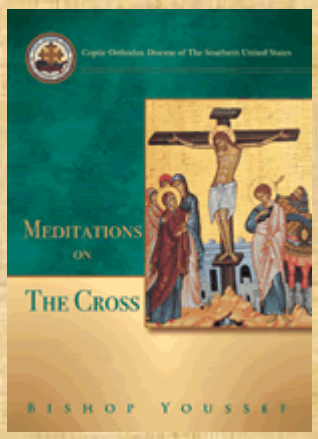
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Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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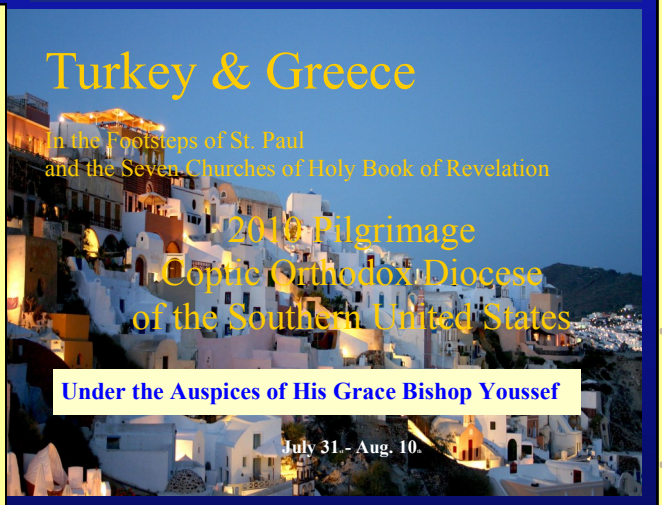
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HS Girls: Jul 26-29, 2010

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