

# Mahragan Alkeraza 2014



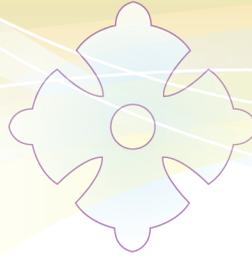
# BEMY Witness

English Edition

Gr 9-12 & English Adults



Be My Witness... Be My Witness..



**H.H. Pope Tawadros II**  
Pope of Alexandria &  
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark



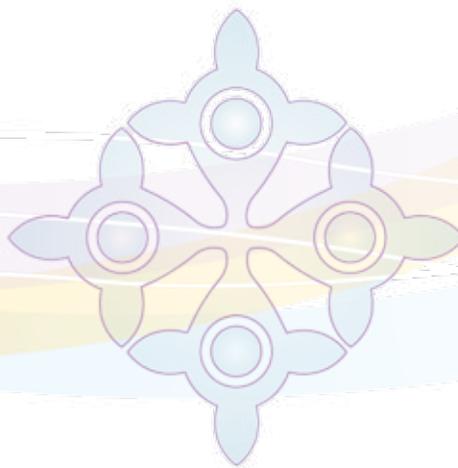
**H.G. Bishop David**  
Bishop of Diocese of New York  
and New England

Be My Witness...



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Be My Witness... Be My Witness...



## INTRODUCTION

### Mahragan Alkeraza 2014

As we celebrated the conclusion of last year's Mahragan with the distribution of the trophies for the first, second and third place winners, we were grateful for God's blessings for a successful 2013 Mahragan. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II said during the Awards Ceremony in Egypt, "I am happy to see the activities of the Youth Bishopric, I am glad that our beautiful Church that is 2000 years old is full of young youth and I am proud to see the creative work and achievements of the youth."

We were also blessed to see that the Churches in Upper Egypt participated despite the sad and cruel events their Churches were subjected to last year. Last year, in addition to the usual participation from Egypt and Sudan, we had a great worldwide participation from 192 Churches representing more than 20 countries and 8 languages.

The theme for Mahragan 2014 is "**You shall be witnesses to Me**" (Acts 1:8). This year, God is asking each one of us to be His witness.

We hope that all of you will participate in the Mahragan activities this year, and encourage everyone you know to join us in one of the greatest annual events, presented by our mother, the Coptic Orthodox Church.

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May God bless Mahragan Alkeraza this year and the efforts of all the participants and coordinators, through the prayers of our beloved father Pope Tawadros II.

✠ My best wishes for a happy  
Festival

✠ Bishop Mousa



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# BE MY WITNESSES (ACTS 1:8)

There are two types of witnesses described in the Bible:

## 1. Eyewitnesses

An “eyewitness” is someone who saw an event happen and can give a firsthand description of it.

For example, in 1 John 1:3, it says: “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 His Son, Jesus Christ.”

This verse acknowledges that the disciples were witnesses for our Lord Jesus, as they lived with Him when He served and ministered to the Jews, and they saw Him suffer, watched His crucifixion and saw Him after He resurrected. He also appeared to them several times after His resurrection, and they witnessed His ascension into heaven.

The disciples also witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit, which descended upon them, just as Jesus promised. Many were threatened by the disciples’ evangelism, and the disciples faced many hardships; they were regarded as “These who have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). However, by sharing everything they had witnessed, despite the disapproval and persecution they faced, they spread the message of salvation that Christ had given us all over the world.

## 2. Witnessing by faith

Christians believe what the fathers of the Church, the Apostles, witnessed and preached in their ministry. The authenticity of the Apostles’ mission and the spread of Christianity is supported by the sayings of the Church fathers and findings of contemporary scholars.



The Jews had been waiting for a saviour to save them from the corruption of sin and its consequence, death, and give them eternal life. This is mentioned in Isaiah 64:1: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down!"

## **Witnessing for Christ**

A person can be a witness for Christ through his behaviour; a faithful heart that lets God govern his life demonstrates the love of Christ through his thoughts and actions.

St. Paul commanded us to do this saying, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17).

This message is also given in Colossians 1:27: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ dwelling in us gives us hope because He has granted us salvation and the promise of eternal life.

"Salvation = deliverance from sin, and what sin did to mankind.

The "ancestral sin" = the natural sin people are born with, which was inherited from Adam.

The "personal sin" = the sins that people commit every day.

### **1. The ancestral sin**

Mankind is delivered from the ancestral sin through baptism; as Christ died and resurrected, believers die with their ancestral sin and are born again, purified.

Romans 6:3-4 teaches about baptism: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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."



## The important facts to remember from this passage are:

- a. The importance of baptism: To renew our life from the ancestral sin.
- b. The ritual of baptism: Where one must be fully immersed in water, just as a body is fully immersed in burial.
- c. The water in baptism is cleansing, just as renewal through baptism is cleansing and gives new life. Immersion into dust happens after death; followed by resurrection in the second coming which will be eternal.
- d. After baptism, one is born again through the work of the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The Personal Sin

Renewal through baptism does not prevent someone from committing sin afterwards, otherwise this would take away man's free will.

"Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:9-10).

The nature of man is renewed through baptism. A man's body is renewed as he dies and resurrects with Christ.

"The inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

The life of a man is renewed through continuous repentance.

With repentance comes confession before a priest, as John 20:22-23 teaches: "He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be

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bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

In order for one to be freed from sin, one ought to repent in their heart and verbally to a priest, to receive absolution. When repentance is true, the Holy Spirit bears fruit in one’s life: “Love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruits of the Spirit are essential to the life of a believer; they should be apparent in their behaviour as they demonstrate true Christianity to the world.

## **There are different ways to bear witness for Christ:**

### **1. Witnessing for Christ on a personal level**

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

“That your progress may be evident to all” (1Timothy 4:15).

When someone works on their personal relationship with Christ, they are become a witness for Him. The first step is to fight against temptation and avoid sinful lusts. It is also important to fast and pray. When one fasts, he denies his body from enjoying certain foods, and focuses on watching and praying without ceasing. This is a time to admit one’s sins and return to the Father’s house.

Living this kind of life brings people closer to the way the martyrs lived.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1Corinthians 6:20).

“The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13). A person who keeps in mind what St. Paul said lives in true repentance, and is continuously seeking God’s grace. He makes himself a temple for the Holy Spirit, by which his body will be sanctified and his senses will be blessed. This can be achieved through



honesty, perseverance and discernment, to avoid the temptations of the body and be a witness to the life of a Christian.

## **2. Witnessing for Christ in our families**

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

The true Christian shares their Christian values with their household; they behave with love and service and set a good Christian example in everything they do. Christian families first share loving, strong relationships with each other. A good Christian household is built on a strong, lasting Christian marriage. Every member of the house should bear witness for Christ through their love, faith, selflessness and unity.

## **3. Witnessing for Christ in the community**

An ambassador is a representative of his country and his job is to develop good communication with the host country. His behaviour however stands out, as he represents the one who sent him.

People do not always agree with Christian values. It is important for a Christian to be careful not to mix his values with those of this world's, especially those that stem from materialism, lack of discipline and atheism. A Christian who compromises his values could end up losing them.

"Therefore do not be partakers with them... Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5: 7-8). A witness for Christ does not conform to the perverse things that dominate the world, which bear no fruit. A Christian does not steal with those who steal, or be negligent with those who are negligent. They should instead resist and warn their brethren against sin, with love without pride, and with a message of hope. There are so many ways to bear witness for Christ, especially to those who do not know Christ. It is important to be ready to bear witness at all costs. This can be done by demonstrating the life of a true Christian, which should be full of kindness, love and constant service.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"(Matthew 5:16).



# Joseph

Imagine what Joseph would be like as a high school student in 2014:

- How would he act at school?
- How would he act at home with his brothers?
- How would he act around his friends?
- How would Joseph use the Internet and social media?
- How would he behave on church trips, and conventions?

## Who Was Joseph

- He was born in Paddan Aram
- His name means "God will increase"
- He was bought as a slave when he was 17 years old
- He spent 13 years as a slave in Potiphar's (captain of Pharaoh's guards) house
- He was imprisoned as a result of a false accusation of assault by Potiphar's wife
- He became the first minister and the second man in Egypt at the age of 30 years
- He saved Egypt and a few countries north of it from a great famine
- He put new financial, administrative and tax laws that remained for many centuries
- He lived until the age of 110 and then was mummified, as was the custom in Egypt
- When the children of Israel went out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they took his bones, as he requested in Genesis 50:25, and buried him with his grandfathers
- He married Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On
- He had two sons before the years of famine came; his firstborn was named Manasseh and the younger son was named Ephraim

## Applying Joseph's Characteristics to Modern Day Life:

Regardless of the events happening around us, we must live by faith and honesty. Joseph lived a life that made him worthy of the title "child of God," and we should do the same by maintaining Christian values, witnessing for God and following His commandments. Joseph was a man who kept the commandments of the New Testament about love and forgiveness before they were given. The secret of Joseph's success was his trust in God during difficult situations.

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## Characteristics of Joseph

### 1- Loving nature

Joseph had many loving characteristics, many of which mankind had not even been introduced to until the New Testament. For example, the concept of “love your enemies” was not introduced until Jesus mentioned it in Matthew 5:43-44, but Joseph was always doing this. He also forgave others easily, as Jesus taught His disciples with the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Joseph adopted the characteristics of love to every aspect of his life, towards family, friends, strangers and even enemies. Love is the nature of God Himself, it was the reason He was incarnated, and it is the greatest commandment in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament. Love is the first fruit of the Holy Spirit.

How was Joseph so loving? Joseph shared a great bond with his earthly father, Jacob. Jacob was close to God, and would teach Joseph all about the Heavenly Father, “the God of his fathers, and his grandfathers,” and about His love for His people and promises to them. These lessons planted the roots of love in Joseph and had a great influence on his life. This was especially obvious that when he met his brothers, years after they had cruelly sold him into slavery, he cried and hugged each one of them.

### 2- Honesty and Faithfulness

Despite all his difficult circumstances, Joseph remained faithful his entire life. When he lived in his father’s house, he was always obedient to his father. Even though he was the most beloved and spoiled by his father, he still had great love for his brothers and sought their safety, as his father requested. When he arrived at Shechem and did not find them, he was diligent and did not return to his father until he found them– he even got lost himself in the process. When he heard that they were in Dothan, he was faithful and went after them, despite their jealousy and hate towards him. “I am seeking my brothers” (Genesis 37:16).

Joseph was also faithful when he was in prison; he remained pure and peaceful, and even made an effort to help others who were in prison with him.



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How could Joseph endure being thrown into prison, by false accusation, and losing reputation? The Bible says, "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy" (Genesis 39:21). It didn't matter where Joseph was, God was with him all the time.

### **3- Forgiveness**

Joseph's brothers, whom he loved, betrayed him. When they wanted to avoid killing him, they sold him as a slave with no freedom and no hope (Genesis 37:23-24). This should have hurt Joseph deeply, but their jealousy and hatred did not affect him, he instead forgave them. When he met them many years later in Egypt, his brothers thought he would seek revenge, but instead he cried and hugged them. He not only forgave them, but he also took care of them and their families (Genesis 45:1-15).

Many people would seek revenge when they get a chance, but not Joseph; he treated his brothers with love before and after he had revealed his identity to them

### **4- His purity**

Imagine a young man, 17 years old, who was taken from his loving father's house to be sold as a slave. He endured the suffering of slavery before his master, Potiphar, promoted him to a higher position, and made him overseer of his house. He maintained integrity and never took advantage of his position. When his master's wife asked him to sin with her, he said his famous words, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). This was a great example of Joseph's purity. He showed how much he loves God. Joseph escaped Potiphar's wife, refused her offers, endured false accusations and put himself in danger of death. This was a tough situation, but he maintained his purity at all costs.

### **5- Piety**

Joseph was never affected by the behaviour of those who worshipped pagans. He must have experienced culture shock when he was moved to Egypt. He went from living a simple shepherd life and was moved to live in an advanced country, with different education and a different language. Instead of conforming and leaving behind his values, he was able to discern the skills, education and wisdom he learned that would be beneficial to him from the ones which were not right for God's people. God helped him fulfil His plan using the skills he learned, as he kept his piety no matter what situation he was faced with.



Joseph's piety was shown in the following situations:

1. His reply to his master's wife when she tried to tempt him: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).
2. His plan to make his family live away from the pagan worship in Egypt. He asked his brothers to request from Pharaoh to live in isolated part of "the land of Goshen," since the way the Egyptians tended their sheep was considered "unclean" to the people of God. (Genesis 46:33-34).
3. When Joseph said to the Israelites, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (Genesis 50:25), he demonstrated his faith through a promise to his people.

"By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones" (Hebrews 11:22).

### **6- Patience and Faith in Difficult Situations**

When Joseph was 17 years old, God revealed to him the plan He had for his life and His purpose through two consecutive dreams. His brothers then sold him as a slave out of jealousy. Joseph endured many difficult situations before his dreams were fulfilled. After spending 11 years as a slave and two years in jail, he became the minister at the age of 30. He was patient and peaceful throughout his difficult situations; he did not even defend himself when Potiphar's wife ruined his reputation, or make any complaint against his master, who he served faithfully for many years. He never lost hope while he was in prison, and did everything that was asked from him. This showed his faith and patience in God's promise.

The people that Joseph helped forgot about him and did not make effort to help him; however, he did not lose hope or trust that God would stand by him. When his brothers did the evil deed of selling him into slavery, he had faith that this was part of God's plan for him.

### **7- His growth in knowing God**

When he was young, his knowledge about God came from his father, Jacob. But when he grew older, he developed a personal relationship with God, and appreciated love, grace, mercy, comfort, peace, hope and wisdom. This relationship with God had a significant impact on his personality; he became a loving, forgiving, wise and helpful person who comforts others.



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### **8- He made amends for any mistakes he made in his life**

As a youth his pride caused conflicts with his brothers in different situations:

- a. He did not realize that it was not wise to reveal everything he knew unless it was necessary
- b. Revealing his two dreams to his brothers showed pride and immaturity. However when God changed his life and put him in a position of power, his pride was gone, and he did not reveal himself to his brothers until it was the right time (Genesis 42:8-9).
- c. While he was in prison, he told the cupbearer his story to ask for his help, but he did not expose the mistakes of his brothers or Potiphar's wife (Genesis 40:15).
- d. When he interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer, the baker and Pharaoh, he gave all of the glory to God (Genesis 40:8, 41:16).

### **9- He glorified God's name and made Him known among the nations**

He used every situation he was in to glorify God, and gave Him credit for all of his abilities—especially while he was interpreting dreams. When he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams he said: "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:37-44)

### **10- The Fulfilment of God's Plan in His Life**

Through God's plan, Joseph was able to save the lives of his family and all of Egypt from the famine. By saving his family, he saved the nation from which Jesus Christ, the source of truth and salvation, would come.

"Trust in God, give Him your life, walk the difficult path and enter through the narrow gate. He who was with Joseph and saved him from the sinful woman and made of him a witness for purity; He who was with Daniel in the lion's den and with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire furnace; He who was with St. Peter and freed him from prison; He who was with St. Paul and saved him from the council of the Jews; He who stands by His people through every tribulation and gave them salvation and showed His might with them will be with you and save you." –St. Isaac the Syrian.

Comparison between our Lord Jesus and Joseph. Fill in the blanks:

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Our Lord Jesus	Joseph
Born in the land of Canaan	Born in the land of Canaan
He and St. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt, as the angel Gabriel instructed Joseph, to escape Herod	
	Sold by Judas, one of his brethren
Egypt was a refuge for baby Jesus while Herod sought to kill Him	
	Sold with 20 pieces of silver
Started His ministry when He was 30 years old	
	He was stripped from his coloured coat
He was unjustly crucified	
	He dealt with lawbreakers (cupbearer and the baker). Pharaoh forgave the cupbearer and killed the baker
	His brother took his coat and dipped it in blood
Met with His disciples after the resurrection and forgave them	
He conquered and saved the world	
	He was embalmed (mummified) by Egyptian physicians
He was called Jesus, meaning "saviour"	

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# Science vs Faith

There are some elements of faith that are not observable through scientific research. The scientific method requires significant evidence before something is considered a fact. A believer is someone who believes the Lord's teachings regardless of how much evidence they can find.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

The believers accept the teachings about creation, but a scientist does not. A scientist may also not believe in the miracle of feeding the 5000 people from 5 loaves and 2 fish, and having 12 baskets leftover.

The believer accepts the existence of an all mighty creator and accepts the unseen, as 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).

## 1) What is faith?

Faith does not only entail a set of beliefs, ideas or values about good, but also a personal relationship with Him. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Thomas would not believe that Jesus had resurrected until he saw Him, and felt the marks on his hands and side for himself. True faith is the ability to believe without asking for proof.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, a Christian is given powerful abilities and can move mountains "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17).

Faith is not simply a belief, but also a way of life. It goes beyond our senses and the abilities of our mind to understand the works of God. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).



“Then Jesus said, to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’” (John 11: 40).

Believers are confident in their faith, and this gives them a sense of security and trust no matter what is going on in their lives. “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

## 2) Types of faith:

### a. **Theoretical faith:**

A believer does not simply accept the existence of God, but also keeps His commandments and applies His teachings to his life through his works. St. James talks about the dead theoretical faith; “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19).

The Book of Job demonstrates the concept of theoretical faith. “So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’” (Job 1:9-11). These words show that Satan believes in God’s existence and that He is the source of Job’s blessings and protections.

However, the words of Satan in this passage are blasphemy. Satan is constantly fighting against God’s kingdom and His children. Satan’s beliefs are also dead because although he believes in God’s existence and power, he is a source of evil fights against all of His teachings and commandments.

It is easy to simply believe in the existence of God; it must go hand in hand with practical faith.

### b. **Practical Faith:**

A believer leads a life of faith and lives for Christ.

### c. **Continuous Faith:**

We should not only communicate and bond with God in Church and during special feasts, but in our hearts and minds in every moment of our lives.



**d. Faith Through Trust and Experience:**

We should experience faith throughout our life as David said, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

Examples of Strong Faith:

- According to Mark 9:23, all things can be achieved through faith.
- Faith can overcome all tribulations, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!" (Zechariah 4:7).
- It was through faith that Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea with Moses, (Exodus 14:22) and the Jordan River with Joshua (Joshua 3).
- The Israelites wandered through the desert with no food or water, and had faith that God would provide for them (Exodus 16:15-22).
- It was through faith that the mountain of AlMokatam was moved at the hand of Simon El-Kharaz, during the Papacy of Pope Abraam Eben Zaraa.

There are several examples of strong faith throughout the Bible and church's history.

**e. Unshaken Faith:**

An unshaken faith is not shaken by any challenge, tribulation, doubt or any other factor. Whether it is a time of joy and power, like the Transfiguration on the mountain, or a time of tribulation and sorrow, like on the Mount of Golgotha.

Unshaken faith is sure that God can do things that are impossible for mankind. When Sarah was old and without hope of having a child, God gave her Isaac. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son after this miracle, Abraham's faith was not shaken and he sought to obey the Lord, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

Abraham did not doubt God's love and trusted that He was able to fulfil His promise to make his descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the sand of the shores.



f. **Faith of the Holy Spirit:**

Through faith, the Holy Spirit provides Christians with many gifts.

St. Paul said, "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 all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:4-9).

Faith is also one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Faith cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit because it is a gift and fruit of the Spirit.

g. **True Faith:**

Many people have strong social, political, intellectual and personal beliefs that they can use to influence other people. Christians should not let the influences of others shake our faith or cause us to deviate from the Truth.

## How to Strengthen Our Faith

### 1- Trust in the Awesomeness of God

- a. A Christian should keep God in his heart and mind at all times. St. Paul said, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Everything that God does is for a good purpose. Even when Joseph was sold as a slave and unjustly put in prison, it was for the purpose of a plan that God had, a plan to use these situations for something good.

Joseph knew this as he told his brothers, "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Genesis 45:8).

"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).



- b. Trust that God is an almighty, loving father who knows what each person needs before they even ask for it. As it is written in Isaiah “See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me” (Isaiah 49:16).
- c. Accept and trust in God’s wisdom in order to live a life of peace and thanksgiving. Relying on limited human wisdom alone will lead to a life of worry and trouble. In every situation, one should trust in God’s wisdom, even if it is not easy to understand at the time, one should trust that one day they will understand (just as Joseph did).

## **2- Trust in God’s promises**

- Although Sarah was barren, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham of giving him many descendants, as many as the stars in heaven
- He fulfilled His promise of taking care of Elijah during the famine (1 Kings 17:1-4).
- He promised Eve that one of her descendants would bruise the head of the serpent; this promise was fulfilled by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Genesis 3:15).
- He promised that He will “pour His Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28), and fulfilled this promise on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit is still with us and in our Churches today.

### **He keeps all of His promises throughout all ages:**

“I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” (Matthew 28:20).

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Regarding the Church, Jesus promised: “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

## **3- Focus on the Lord, and not on the situation at hand**

Before the crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites felt hopeless, but Moses told his people to look to God saying: “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord... The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13-14).

When David faced Goliath, if he had focused on what seemed to be an impossible task of defeating him, he would have lost hope like the rest of the Israelites. However, he had faith that God would deliver him, and He did (1 Samuel 17).



Before Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand using just five loaves and two fish, the disciples were very worried about how they would feed the hungry. Jesus, however, looked up to God, gave thanks and there ended up being more than enough food, leaving 12 baskets of leftovers.

After Lazarus had died and Jesus went to visit Mary and Martha, Martha looked towards Lazarus' tomb and said: "By this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days;" but, Jesus told her: "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:39-40).

Focusing on heaven, and not on the difficulties and sins of the world, strengthens one's faith. One should not focus on sin "for she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men" (Proverbs 7:26). One should instead focus on the Lord, "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

#### **4- See God in Everything**

It would be too difficult to live in a world separated from God; however, He is with us at all times and within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This should be the focus of a Christian, as a reminder that nothing can happen without the permission of the Lord, and that He is always looking after His people.

#### **5- Have a Personal Relationship with God**

A person who has a strong relationship with God should fear nothing. He is not just our Lord and Master, but also a loving friend, who should be trusted with everything.

"No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends" (John 15:15). He is knocking at your door asking you to open and He will enter to be with you (Revelation 3:20).

Accepting Him into one's heart and continuously nourishing a relationship will develop strong faith. His people should rejoice in His company and trust that all things will be revealed in due time, just as he promised Abraham (Genesis 18:17).

#### **There are four elements to strengthen one's trust in God:**

1. Mind: Stop worrying and thinking too much about the future, or how a situation will turn out, and believe that everything is in the Pantocrator's hands and that He is always taking care of His people.



2. Eyes: Stop looking towards anything that will bring worry, but look to heaven and see the Lord Jesus in everything. When St. Peter fixed his eyes on Jesus, he was able to walk on the water, but when he doubted and looked at the water, he got scared and was about to drown.
3. Heart: Stop feeling anxious about the timing of things. God is in control, and His timing is perfect.
4. Tongue: Train the tongue to praise the Lord in every situation.

Faith changes how we deal with situations. Complete the following tables:

Doubt	Negative result	Faith	Positive result
How do you feel when you have doubts about something (exam results for example)		How do you feel when you are confident about something?	
Sometimes, we doubt God when something terrible happens and wonder how He allowed it. How do you feel when you doubt God's love for you?		How do you feel when you have faith that God is with you and does what is good for you?	
How do you feel when you wonder why a particular tribulation is happening to you?		How do you feel when you thank God in every situation, just as Job did.	



Reference verse		Faith statement
John 20:31	I believe that	Jesus is the Son of God
Psalm 100:5		
Philippians 4:19		
Psalm 48:14		
Mark 11:24		
James 1: 6-7		
James 5:15		
1 John 5:14		
Mark 5:34		
Matthew 21:21		
Matthew 15:28		
Numbers 20:12		



# THE CHURCH READINGS

If you met a very hungry person, do you think they would be satisfied if you gave them a picture of bread? They would need real bread to satisfy their hunger.

The Liturgy readings that are read throughout the year are meant to satisfy the hunger of our hearts and ears.

The Coptic calendar has 13 months, 12 of them have 30 days. The month of Nasie, the last month of the Coptic year, is only 5 or 6 days long. Since Hatour is the month of wheat harvest and other winter crops, the parable of the sewer is read at the first and second Sunday of the month.

Through great wisdom, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church fathers put together the readings of each day of the year. Their purpose is to teach us how to walk in the Lord's way, and to highlight the importance of salvation.

**“Let the Church readings show you your sins and encourage you to leave them” Pope Shenouda III.**

**The Church readings are divided in two:**

1. Sundays: A reading about the work of the Holy Trinity in the Church is read every Sunday, to teach the reader about the theologically supported importance of unity throughout the Church
2. All other days of the week: Special daily readings are read according to the feast, saint or martyr that is commemorated on that day. The readings should reveal the different gifts that the Church and its members have been given, and how they have strengthened it.

**The Katamarus is the name of the book that has all of these readings.**

1. Part 1- describes the continuous work of God in the Church and in mankind. He is the lover of mankind; He works for the good of mankind and shares its troubles. He is elevating mankind, inviting them to share in His eternal glory, and this is the perfect love of God to



mankind.

2. Part 2- describes the unity between the struggling and victorious Church, between the earthly and the heavenly, between the people of the Old Testament and the New Testament, between men and women and between the clergy and the congregation. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Light that unites all members of His Church, just as different solar bodies gather around the sun, the source of their light.

These are not just stories to be read, they are part of the rituals of the Church, and prayed using the Church tune for that occasion (annual, Kiahk, sad or joyful).

Through these readings, the Church provides a full picture of the love of God and His work for our salvation. They also show the importance of perseverance and repentance in order to be worthy of this salvation. They teach us about heavenly meditation, accepting both suffering and joy, partaking in Church sacraments and enjoying the word of God. Most importantly, they guide us on having a personal relationship with God and preparing for the Kingdom of Heaven, which God has been preparing for us since the beginning.

The part of the liturgy in which the Church readings are read is known as the Liturgy of the catechumens. The Katamarus contains the readings read during Vespers, Matins and the Liturgy.

Some may find the readings repetitive; however, they are different every day and require focus and enlightened hearts to benefit from the treasures within them.

**The readings of the Church are included in 4 books:**

1. The Annual Katamarus, which is read year round on any day
2. The Katamarus of the Great Lent
3. The Katamarus of the Holy Week
4. The Katamarus of the Holy Fifty days, which is read from Easter until the Pentecost

These books have been put together with accuracy inspired by God to honour the greatest events that have happened throughout mankind.

**Note:** There are special readings for Sundays



**The Coptic year has 52 weeks:**

12 months X 4 Sundays = 48+1 (Nasie) = 49

Some months have a 5th Sunday = 3

Total: 52 weeks (52 Sundays)

**1- Annual Sundays Readings**

The general goal of these readings is to reveal the work of the Trinity in the Church, by discussing the continuous work of God for the Church and humanity. They describe the love of God for humanity and desire to lift everyone up and give him or her eternal life. They also emphasize the importance of the role of the Church in guiding and helping believers. The believers are blessed by: "The love of God the Father, the grace of His only begotten Son and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all".

**The readings of each month have a theme:**

**Tout:** The love of God the Father.

**Baba:** The authority of the Saviour on the souls of humanity

**Hatour:** The Gospel of the Saviour to His people

**Kiahk:** The Saviour was incarnated and became one of His people

**Toba:** Jesus Christ granting salvation to the Gentiles

**Amshir:** The Saviour satisfies the believers

**Baramhat, Baramoda** and the first half of **Bashans** come during the Great Lent, the Holy Week and the Holy 50 days, these events have their special readings

Second half of **Bashans:** the Lordship of the Saviour.

**Baona:** The gifts of the Holy Spirit and Holy Communion, since the feast of the Pentecost usually falls on this month.

**Abib:** The Saviour's aid to His disciples and the feast of Apostles

**Mesra:** The Saviour takes care of His Church.

**The Nasie**-> if there is Sunday in this month, we read about the Second Coming in Matthew 24

**The Sundays of the Holy 50 days:**

**1st Sunday:** Thomas Sunday "My God and My Lord" (John 20:19-31).

**2nd Sunday:** The living bread coming from heaven (John 6:35-45).

**3rd Sunday:** The living water, the gospel reading about the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42).



**4th Sunday:** Christ is the light of the world (John 12:35-50).

**5th Sunday:** I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:1-11).

**6th Sunday:** Jesus Christ has overcome the World (John 16:23-33).

**7th Sunday:** The feast of the Pentecost (John 16:23-33).

### **The 5th Sunday of the month:**

If the month starts with a Saturday or a Sunday, it will have 5 Sundays. On the 5th Sunday of the month, the Church reads the passage from the gospel about feeding the multitude with the five loaves and two fishes. This emphasises the satisfaction of the believers by the word of God when they hear and read it carefully with open heart. If the 5th Sunday comes on the 29th of the month the readings of the 29th of Baramhat are read instead.

## **2- The Annual Readings on Regular Days**

The Church arranged the readings of the Liturgy each day of the week, except Sundays, according to the Synaxarium of each day. This is done to show the unity between different members of the Church (earthly and heavenly).

If the Synaxarium has more than one saint, the Church chooses readings about the one who is more known. In remembrance of these saints, the Church has special readings for the feasts of martyrdom or departure; these are called "Special days". There are only 55 special days.

There are some readings that are repeated for members of the Church who play similar roles to each other. For example, on the feast of the departure of any Patriarch, the Gospel of the Good Shepherd is read. On the feast of any of the apostles, the Gospel about the apostles ministry is read.

On the 8th day of Tout we celebrate the departure of Moses the prophet; these readings describe the prophets and their faith and their work. As an example, here are the readings of that day:

### **Raising of Incense for Vespers**

Psalm: "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:14-15).

The Gospel: "The blood of the prophets shall be required of this generation" (Luke 11:37-51).



**Raising of Incense for the Prime**

Psalm: "He sent Moses His servant, And Aaron whom He had chosen" (Psalm 105: 26-27,45).

The Gospel: "And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him" (Matthew 17:1-9).

**The Pauline:**

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:17-27).

**The Catholic Epistles:**

"But holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-2:8).

**The Praxis:**

"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city" (Acts 15:21-29).

**Psalm of the Liturgy:**

"Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called upon His name" (Psalm 99:6-7).

**The Gospel of the Liturgy:**

"I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify" (Matthew 23:13-36).

The Church will read the readings for the departure of certain prophets on the following days:

Tout 4 (Joshua son of Nun)

Kiahk 20 (Haggai)

Baramhat 23 (Daniel)

Baona 25 (Elisha)

There is a story in the book of the paradise of Monks that explains the influence of the Church readings on repentance and the sanctification of souls.



St. Paul The Simple came to the Church, and noticed that everyone entering into the Church had a joyful angel following him. He then saw one man surrounded by many devils, who were dragging him, and his angel was following him from afar and was very sad. When the saint saw this, he cried, beat upon his chest and went out of the Church weeping. The people asked him to go back and attend the mass, but he refused and sat at the door of the Church weeping. When the Liturgy was over, he looked at the people coming out and saw that the person who had entered surrounded by devils came out with a shining face, with his angel close by and rejoicing and no devils surrounding him. St. Paul clapped happily and asked this person what happened that changed him. The man confessed in front of everyone and said: "for a long time I lived a sinful life, and when I saw the father crying, I listened carefully to the Church readings. When I heard the reading from Isaiah saying: 'Come now, and let us reason together.' The Lord says, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' I repented and confessed." When the people heard this, they glorified God.



# Reading The Church Icons

The purpose of a profile picture on Facebook is to provide identity for the owner of the account. It also provides some clues about the characteristics of that person.

The icons of the Church provide it with an identity, and their elements provide clues about teachings of the Holy Bible.

## **What is an Icon?**

“Icon” is the Greek word for picture; however, our Church Icons are not just pictures, they are symbols with great significance and meaning.

When this term is used in the Church, it is usually referring to an icon of our Lord Jesus, St. Mary, one of the martyrs or the saints of the Church.

The features of an icon are guided by theology, rituals and Church traditions so that they provide accurate symbolic meanings.

An icon should have enough features that it provides a simple representation of a story, so that even a person who cannot or has not read or heard the story can understand it. The stories of icons usually explain the love and works of the saints of the Church.

## **What are the characteristics of the artist who draw an icon?**

Icons have always been an important element within the Church. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God inspired the artists who designed the tabernacle. The artist who draws an icon should have a unity with God, and should be designing the icon based on meditation on the word of God, His love and salvation.



### **An example from the Old Testament:**

“And Moses said to the children of Israel, ‘See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, To design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship. And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, in him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and of the weaver—those who do every work and those who design artistic works” (Exodus 35:30-35).

When one enters the Church with a mind that is weary, receives comfort and inner peace comes from meditation in front of the holy icons. This way, the attendee goes through the same journey as the saints who were crowned with glory (St. John of Damascus).

The Church uses icons to remind the believers about the great price of salvation.

The icon of the crucifixion reminds us of how He was crucified with thieves, although He is blameless. The thief on His right hand believed and said to Jesus, “Remember me, O Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom. Jesus granted him salvation immediately and said, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”. The thief who was on His left hand side rejected Him, and was not invited into the Kingdom of God. The same will happen in the Second Coming; those who have faith will be on Jesus’ right hand, and will be invited into the Kingdom; those who don’t will not be invited in.

The icon of St. Mary and St. John the beloved on either side of the crucifixion reminds the congregation of how they stood by Him at the foot of the Cross, recognising the great gift they were being given.

In Church, the congregation faces the east, since this is where Jesus will be coming from during His Second Coming. The congregation awaits His coming by facing the east and worshipping. We also face the icons of the saints on the iconostasis, as we ask for them to intercede on our behalf as we strive to join them.



### **Honoring the icons:**

St. Basil the Great said, "The honour we give an icon is for whom it represents." This enables us to go through an open door and be in good relationship with Him. It also influences us to imitate the life of righteousness, faith and virtues of the person in the icon. If we live a spiritual life, we live in the glory of our Lord as these saints did.

The icons are consecrated by the Holy Myron. When we take the blessings of the icon, we seek the blessings of the holy Spirit through the prayers of the saint. We do not worship the materials of the icon; we worship the Trinity and its works, which are represented within icons. "When we worship the cross, we worship the One who was crucified, not the wood; otherwise we would worship all trees." –St. John of Damascus

When we honour the Holy Bible, we are not worshipping the paper or ink; we are worshipping the words of our God. When we honour a picture of our Lord, we are honouring the Lord Himself, not the materials on which His image is displayed. When we kiss an icon, we are greeting The Lord Jesus or the saint in the icon with a holy kiss.

### **The Icon and the Church Rituals:**

An icon must be consecrated through the Prayer of Consecration and anointed with Myron Oil to be a part of God's house. The icons are carried during processions for Church feasts and celebrations, like Palm Sunday, the Feast of the Cross and Easter.

### **The Rituals of the Consecration of the Icons:**

A bishop prays the Prayer of Thanksgiving, raises incenses and then prays saying, "O Master, Lord, who gave us the Law through His servant Moses from the beginning. And ordered to make the ark of covenant with Cherubim and Seraphim, who cover the altar by their wings. Who gave wisdom to Solomon to build the house in Jerusalem. You appeared to Your saintly apostles by the incarnation of Your only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ for them to build Churches by the name of your saints and martyrs. We ask you and entreat your goodness O lover of mankind to send your Holy Spirit on this icon that is for (the name of the saint) to become for us a port of salvation and a port of steadiness. That every one who comes with faith, may your saint intercede for them before God for the remission of their sins for blessed is Your name and full of glory."

Be My Witness...





After that, the bishop anoints the icon with Myron 3 times and asks God to “sanctify this icon (name) on the Church altar in the city of (city name). In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

These rituals unite the icon with the altar and the Church (congregation). The congregation asks the saints in the icons, who are in unity with the Church, to intercede for their repentance and guidance.

Anba Yousab El Abah talked about honouring the consecrated icons, saying: “You say how do we worship paintings? How do we convince ourselves? We must consecrate the vessels for the service, the altars and the icons. This is not done by the hands of a priest, but by the hand of the archpriest who anoints them. A priest can give Communion to the congregation, but cannot carry the Myron, as he does not have the authority to give the Holy Spirit to others.”

In the Church, we are not allowed to bow down before the altar or kiss the icons unless they are consecrated with the Myron oil. The Church orders that we bring the icon over the altar during the liturgy, pray on it and anoint it with the Myron. At the end of the liturgy, the bishop says “accept the Spirit” and breathes three times over the icon.

If the Spirit did not dwell in the icon through the anointing with Myron and the breath of the bishop, then the worshipping is done in vain! The Spirit truly descends on the Church and its elements as we are worshipping.

“Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it” (Matthew 23:20-21).

You might ask yourself who do I worship in the icon the Spirit of God or the saint? The worship must be to the Spirit of God; we honour and respect the saint and ask for their prayer and intercession.

### **The Art of Drawing the Icon:**

Icons are a branch of Coptic art, and are part of our Egyptian Pharaohic inheritance. It is also a mixture of different civilisations that were present in Egypt at different points in time. The artists used chromatic elements (natural oxide) found in Egyptian mines for the golden background



of the icons and the halo around the heads of saints. The art of making icons flourished in Egypt in 17th and 18th century thanks to Egyptian, Greek and Armenian artists who lived in Egypt at that time. One of them was John the copyist who painted most of the Coptic icons in old Cairo Churches and Coptic monasteries. On each icon, the name of the artist and the year of the drawing is written.

The Copts found inspiration for aid in their journey on earth and to strengthen their spiritual life from the icons. As long as one lives in his earthly body, the senses benefit from visual aids to keep the heart attached to the spiritual things. This is the purpose of putting up icons in the Church and pictures of saints in Churches and houses.

### **Characteristics of the Coptic Icon:**

\*The largest element in the picture is the saint or figure it represents, as they should be the centre of focus of the icon; any other building, purpose or object is smaller. If the evil one who persecuted the person is in the icon, their picture is even smaller. The other elements, especially people who persecuted that saint, are smaller because they eventually lost their significance in the story, and history does not focus on them or the things of this world that the saint gave up to win Christ. The legacy of the saint is what remains from the story.

- The saints in the icons are not drawn in a closed room, because they have won eternal life, and eternity has no limit.
- The saints are painted in suitable, conservative clothes, because they lived a life of righteousness and chastity; the icon does not pay attention to the physical beauty of a saint, it focuses on their spiritual beauty.
- The saints are painted with their face showing both eyes, as a sign of spiritual enlightenment. Evil figures are drawn showing only one eye and one side of the face, as a sign of a lack of spiritual enlightenment, and their attachment to worldly things rather than heavenly things.
- The saints are painted with a circle of light around their heads, this is taken from Roman art, where a circle was drawn around the heads of emperors to distinguish them from everyone else.

On the icons of the saints, we can also see elements of important events where they witnessed for Christ, for example, being tortured and persecuted for their faith. Examples:



- St. Demiana is drawn with the 40 virgins
- St. Rewis is drawn with a camel
- St. Mina is drawn with two camels
- St. Mark is drawn with a lion

The saints are painted with wide eyes as a symbol of spiritual enlightenment, while the nose and mouth are small, as a symbol of their simple, ascetic lives. Their smile without baring their teeth is a symbol of how their joy is spiritual and not worldly.

### **How do you read the icon?**

Each icon has a special symbol and is painted using different colours that have a significant meaning.

### **The Nativity Icon:**

It shows baby Jesus in a manger, swaddled in white clothes, in a way that symbolises the shroud, as a prophecy of His burial. This icon displays how the Logos humbled Himself and came down to earth for us, and became one of us. It also displays the miraculous birth from Virgin Mary.

St. Mary is painted in blue clothes, as she is the “second heaven.” She is the second Eve. By giving birth to the incarnated God, she became the mother of all mankind. Joseph the carpenter is shown meditating behind them, as he is not the father of the Child Jesus.

The Magi, who were guided by a star to the place of Jesus’ birth, are shown offering gifts to Him; gold, as a symbol royalty, since He is the King of Kings; incense, as a symbol of His priesthood and myrrh as a symbol of the pain and suffering He will endure

The Magi worshipping Christ symbolises the submission of the pagan gentiles to the Christian faith; they became the first among these nations to know the Word of God and His prophecies.

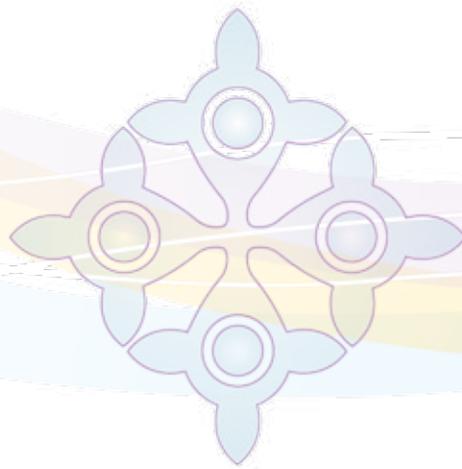
St. Clement of Alexandria said, “God gave the Law to some, and the prophecies to others.” The ox in the icon symbolises the Jewish nation, because they used to cover the eyes of the ox as



they made them turn in the mills, so that they don't understand what is happening to them. This symbolises how the Jews follow the Law without having a real understanding of it. The donkey symbolises the gentiles carrying the burden of paganism without knowing how to be freed from it. Therefore, the ox and the donkey in the icons represent all creation.

The sheep symbolise the souls who were waiting in hades for the true shepherd, the Messiah, to save them. He came to save them also, and take them to His Kingdom; that is why all the sheep in the icon are very close to the Child in the manger as He is the Good Shepherd.

Studying the Coptic icons provides a special chance to contemplate the work of God in the life of those who love Him, and how His beauty shines even in this corrupt world. It also teaches about the life of the saints who were full of love for God and the heavenly light. These beautiful icons remind people of powerful ways by which the Word of God can be applied.





# The Gospel of St. Mark

## WHO I AM?

- He was an eyewitness, born in Cyrene, Libya, from Jewish parents, His father's name was Aristopolos and his mother's name was Mary, from the tribe of Levi, and she served the Lord.
- He had two names: John (meaning God is merciful) and Mark (meaning Hammer).
- He knew 3 languages: Greek, Latin and Hebrew.
- He lived in Palestine.
- In his house, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. This is also where Jesus washed His disciples' feet.
- In his house the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples; thus, his house became the first Church in the world.
- He is the beholder of God, St. Mark the Evangelist.

## His Service

He was one of the 70 Apostles chosen by the Lord (Luke 9:1). The lion is the symbol of his gospel because it emphasised the Lord's power. Also, the lion is a symbol the Lord Jesus Christ, who came from the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He wrote his gospel between 65-68 AD to the Romans; this is why Jewish traditions are explained.

St. Mark established the Church of Alexandria in Egypt and became its first pope. He went to Egypt in the year 61 AD and ordained Ananias, the first believer in Alexandria, as a bishop. He also ordained 3 priests and 7 deacons with him.

Most of the Pagans in Alexandria then believed and became Christians. Their leaders became angry; so, on the eve of the Feast of the Resurrection, they took St. Mark dragged him through the streets over rocks and stones. He received the crown of martyrdom on the 30th of Barmouda (8 May 68 AD). He is the patron saint of the Egyptian Copts, as well the Catholic Church in the city of Venice in Italy (some of his relics lay there).



Be My Witness...

### **Application:**

St. Paul said, regarding St. Mark, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry." (2 Timothy 4:11).

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

It is also the responsibility of a Christian to follow His example and live a life full of good deeds, sharing His Word and witnessing for His love and gift of salvation.

In the Liturgy we pray: "Amen. Amen. Amen. Your death, O Lord, we proclaim. Your holy resurrection and ascension, we confess."

This mission is important for our spiritual growth.

### **The four parts of the gospel according to St. Mark, where he witnessed for our Lord Jesus:**

1. The start of our Lord Jesus' mission (he witnessed for His righteousness and ascetic life)
2. The miracles of our Lord Jesus (he witnessed for the power of His divinity)
3. The parables of our Lord Jesus (he witnessed for the power and the influence of His teachings)
4. The last days in the life of our Lord Jesus on earth (he witnessed for the power of His Cross and the glory of His resurrection)

## **The Beginnings of Our Lord Jesus' Ministry**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only person that many prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about thousand years before His coming.

Two friends went back in time to observe the prophecies that were spoken about at the beginning of the gospel of St. Mark. They headed to Judea; and saw a man wearing simple clothes teaching a large crowd of people about repentance. He did not speak like the scribes and the Pharisees or the teachers of the Law.



“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’ (Isaiah 40:3).

The two friends then wandered to the Jordan River, where they saw St. John the Baptist. He was calling people to repent and be baptised with water.

“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me” (Malachi 3:1). This verse was referring to St. John the Baptist.

Jesus came to John; He was quiet and meek, and seemed humble. John witnessed for Him saying “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29). He was our Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Jesus went to be baptized by John, by being submerged in the water 3 times.

A voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

The two friends then saw a dove descending upon Him. They didn’t understand what was happening, so they went to St. Mark and asked for an explanation. He said, “This is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity, the voice from heaven is the Father, the Son, coming up from the water, is Jesus and the Holy Spirit has come down in the form of the dove.”

St. John the Baptist was a witness, as the gospel says, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light” (John 1-6-8).

John the Baptist was “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’ (John 1:23). The people who were against him thought that killing him would put an end to this “voice,” but it lived on, rebuking the sinners saying, “It is not lawful for you to have her” (Matthew 14:4).

When John saw our Lord Jesus, he witnessed for Him saying: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:24). He was humble and announced that he was not



Be My Witness...

even worthy to untie His sandals. He gave all glory to God and humbled himself.

When John's disciples told him that our Lord baptized in the Jordan, He replied: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This is a lesson in humility for all generations

The Lord said, "among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28).

### **Fasting and Prayer**

The Lord fasted for 40 days in the wilderness before starting His ministry; He wanted to demonstrate the importance of fasting and prayers before any important work. Our Church leaders fasted before starting their ministry. Also, before any Church feast or special occasion, there must be special preparation through fasting and prayer.

"The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days'" (Mark 2:18-20).

## **The Miracles of our Lord Jesus**

### **His authority over the evil spirits**

- ◇ The synagogue is a place for prayers and teaching of the Torah (The Book of Law); however, sacrifices were offered in the temple in Jerusalem. In the synagogue, there was a man, who had an evil spirit inside him. When he heard the voice of our Lord, he cried, "What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:23). So the evil spirit witnessed that the Lord Jesus is God; the people were astonished that even the evil spirits obeyed Him. It is by authority He ordered the evil spirit out of the man, and the spirit obeyed.
- ◇ There was a man with a legion of evil spirits (about 2000) who lived in the tombs; no one could restrain him, not even with chains. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees saying, "I implore You by God that You do not torment me." When Jesus cast



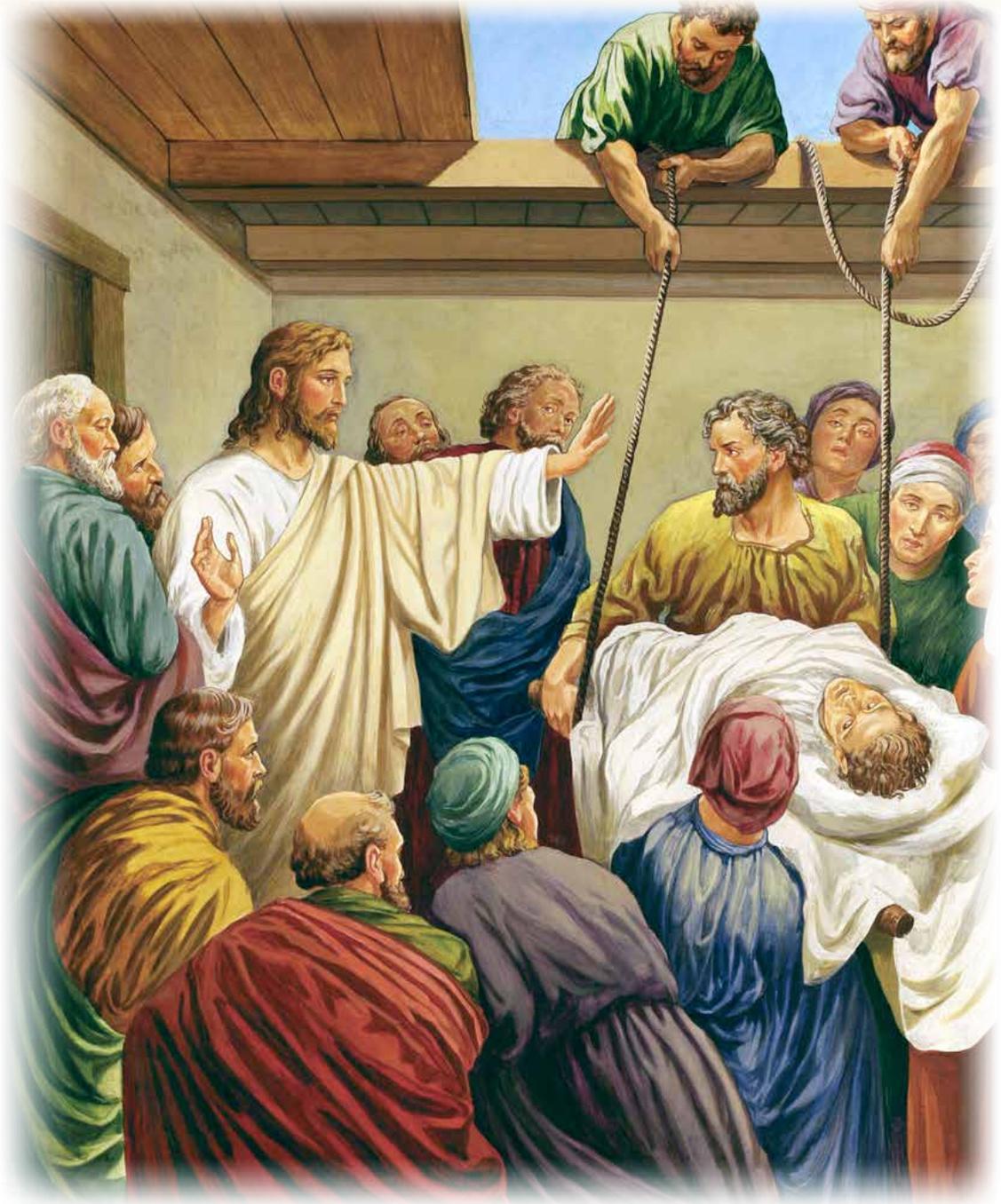
the evil spirits out, they found the man sitting, clothed and in his right mind. "And they were afraid." (Mark 5:20)

- ◇ There was a Greek woman (Syro-Phoenician: gentile not Jewish) who had a daughter who was demon possessed. She asked our Lord Jesus to heal her. He wanted to show her faith to the Jewish, so He told her "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs. Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed. (Mark 24-30)
- ◇ There was a child who was deaf and mute, because he was possessed by a demon. The evil spirit was torturing him by throwing him in the fire and water to kill him, it also threw him down. He would foam at the mouth, gnash his teeth, and becomes rigid. Jesus said to the father of the child, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" So Jesus healed him. "Many times the devil attacks us by many trials but we can defeat him by fasting and prayers" (Mark 9:17-29).

## His Authority to Heal All Sickesses

- ◇ Leprosy is a serious contagious disease; at the time of Jesus, people with leprosy were outcasts. It was also a symbol of the sin and its consequences. The lepers were isolated far from the people and nobody could come near them. A leper came to Jesus asking to be healed; Jesus had compassion on him, touched him and immediately was healed (Mark 1:40-41).
- ◇ Simon's mother in law was sick with high fever, the Lord held her hand and immediately healed her (Mark 1:30).
- ◇ The paralytic man had faithful friends who brought him to Jesus, trusting that the Lord will heal him. The house where they went to find Jesus was full of people who wanted to see Him; so, they went up to the roof, made an opening after digging through it and lowered the bed the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic man, "son, your sins are forgiven you."

Be My Witness...





- ◇ Some teachers of the law were sitting there thinking to themselves; “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming who can forgive sins but God alone.” Jesus knew what they were thinking in their hearts and he said to the paralytic man, “Get up take your bed and go home”. He got up took his bed and walked out in full view of them all. They were all amazed and they praised God saying “we have never seen anything like this” (Mark 2:1-12).
- ◇ While Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, He found a man with a paralyzed hand. He knew what the crowds were thinking so Jesus asked them, whether is it allowed to do good things on Sabbath day? They couldn’t answer, so He brought the paralytic man in the middle and healed him. The paralytic hand is a symbol of a man who cannot do any virtues, neglects his prayer and does not serve his family or friends.
- ◇ There was a woman with severe bleeding for 12 years; no doctor could heal her. She spent all her money on treatments with no result. When she saw our Lord, she did not ask Him for anything, but thought that if she only touched His garments, she would be healed. She was cured immediately and the Lord said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well” (Mark 5:34).
- ◇ A deaf and mute man was brought to Jesus. Jesus took him away from the crowd, lifted up His eyes to heaven and said; “Ephphatha” which means “be opened immediately.” The man’s ears and tongue were then cured. Why did Jesus take him away from the crowd and why did He lift up His eyes towards heaven?
  - » Our Lord Jesus Christ was not performing the miracles to draw the people’s attention, but because He had compassion on them.
  - » He lifted up His eyes towards heaven to teach us that our healing and peace comes from above (Mark 7:32-37).
- They brought a blind man to Him and begged Jesus to heal him by touching him. Jesus spit on the man’s eyes and put His hands on him. The man was healed and saw the people, but they looked like trees. Once more, Jesus put His hands on his eyes, and then his eyes were opened. His sight was restored and he saw everything clearly (Mark 8:22-26).
- In Jericho, a blind man named Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside begging. When he



heard that Jesus was there, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus looked at his faith and healed him. This blind man said the truth: that the Messiah was to come from the offspring of David the prophet and king (Mark 10:46-52). "O Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." This is the prayer that stopped Jesus. Let us pray together, "O Jesus son of David have mercy on me, that I may receive my sight."

The man with leprosy and the woman with the bleeding were both unclean, according to the law, but Jesus touched the first one and allowed the second one to touch Him. Jesus gives us the healing from the diseases of our body and our spirit.

## His Authority Over Nature

### ◇ **Calming the storm:**

When the disciples were on a boat with Jesus, a furious storm came upon them; the waves crashed over the boat; it was nearly filled with water. Meanwhile, Jesus was asleep. The disciples, being afraid, woke Him, worried that they were about to drown.

This was a test of their faith, Jesus got up rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Be still!" The winds then died down and were completely calm. The disciples feared and asked each other, "Who is this?" Even the wind and the waves obey Him" (Mark 4:37-41).

### ◇ **Walking on Water:**

Jesus asked His disciples to go into the boat ahead of Him, but the wind was against them. At about the fourth watch of the night, He went out towards them, walking on water. When they saw Him walking on the water, they thought He was a ghost and they cried out. Immediately He spoke to them and said: "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." (Mark 6:47-51).

### ◇ **The fig tree:**

When Jesus and His disciples had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. Seeing a fig tree from afar that had leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it to eat. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. Jesus cursed it saying, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."

Be My Witness... Be My Witness...





Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away" (Mark 11:11-14, 20-26).

This tree is the symbol of the hypocrite who creates an image of righteousness, when he lives a life lacking virtues (fruits).

### **His Authority Over Death:**

Jesus said about Jarius' daughter that she was sleeping and not dead. He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the girl arose and walked. He commanded them not to share what they had seen, and that something should be given her to eat (Mark 5:21-24,35-42).

### **The Lord's Parables**

#### ◇ **The Parable of the Sower:**

"Behold, a sower went out to sow." The sower is our Lord Jesus; the seeds are the Word of God.

"Some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

The parable explained: The seeds by the wayside represent people who hear the word of God, but then Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. The ones that fell on stony ground represent people who hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness, but have not rooted it in themselves, so it does not endure within them. When tribulation arises regarding the words they have heard, they immediately stumble. The ones who were sown among the thorns represent the ones who hear the word, but their cares for the world and desire for riches chokes the word within them, and



they become unfruitful. Then there are the seeds that are sown on good soil; they represent those who hear the word, accept it and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred (Mark 4).

◇ **Light Under the Basket**

“The light” refers to the Lord’s work that enlightens our life like a lamp. Satan cannot hide the work of God inside our heart, but we can. The Lord asks that we let His work shine through us, so people can see it and glorify our Father in heaven.

◇ **The mustard seed**

A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds, but it grows into a big, tall tree. The Lord said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. The Church started small, but grew and spread like a large tree. The tree symbolizes the Cross. Through the Cross, the Church spread and reached all parts of the world.

◇ **The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers**

The man in this parable represents God the Father; the vineyard represents the Church of Old Testament. The wicked vinedressers represent the priests, scribes and Pharisees of Old Testament. The servants represent the prophets of the Old Testament that the Lord sent to serve the vineyard, but the wicked vinedressers seized and beat them, and killed some of them.

God sent His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and they crucified Him. Jesus came and gave the vineyard (the Church of New Testament) to new vinedressers, the apostles and their successors. (Mark 12:1-12).

Instead of repenting, the high priests and the Pharisees got very angry with Jesus; they wanted to arrest Him, but they feared the crowd, which considered Him to be a great prophet.

## **It is Finished**

**Jesus declared His plan to redeem mankind on four occasions throughout the Gospel of St. Mark :**



Be My Witness...

1. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).
2. "For He taught His disciples and said to them, 'The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day'" (Mark 9:31).
3. "Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again'" (Mark 10:32-34).
4. "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." (Mark 14:28) "Then He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand'" (Mark 14:41-42).

### **The symbols of His crucifixion and His burial**

1. Passover lamb: This is a symbol of Jesus as He was being crucified, He was like a lamb to the slaughter, perfect and at peace as He suffered. The passover lamb is put over two rods, to symbolize the Cross, and eaten with unleavened bread, to symbolise purity.
2. In Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of a very expensive perfume. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head; this was in preparation of His burial (Mark 14:3-9).
3. The Lord Jesus offers His Body and His Blood for the sacrament of the Eucharist, after He ate the Passover meal with His disciples. The correct icon of last supper is one that shows the Lord sitting with His disciples on a table with one loaf of bread and one cup (Mark 14:22-26).

### **The End of the Jewish Priesthood**

The high priest asked the Lord Jesus: "Are you Christ the Son of the blessed One?" Jesus replied. "I am." The high priest then tore his garments as a symbol of ending the work of Old Testament priesthood and to be replaced by New Testament priesthood (Mark 14:61-62).



When our Lord cried out and gave up His Spirit on the Cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This was a symbol of the ending of the Old Testament worship. The Romans destroyed the temple.

There will be no more offerings of sacrifices because Jesus Christ was the ultimate sacrifice, which paid for all the sins of mankind – past, present and future.

When they wanted to mock Him, they put on Him mock symbols of royalty: a purple robe, a rod in his Hand and a crown of thorns on His head (Mark 15:17-20).

Your death, O Lord, we proclaim. Your holy resurrection and ascension, we confess.”

### **Witnesses of the Resurrection:**

1. The women who followed the Body of Jesus to the tomb, with no fear, so that they may know the place of His burial (Mark 5:47).
2. The angel witnessed: “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here” (Mark 16:6).
3. The disciples of Emmaus preached His resurrection (Mark 16:12-13).
4. Mary Magdalene followed Jesus through the journey of His suffering. She was sad, but was courageous and did not fear how the Jews might react. She was loving and faithful. Before she recognized Him, Jesus appeared to her and said, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She replied, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:13). Mary Magdalene was not afraid to answer this question, although she did not recognise who she was speaking to. She did not fear, run away or deny like the disciples. She was also the last one to leave the tomb on Good Friday. She was the first one to taste the joy of the resurrection as a great reward for her faith, and she was the first to announce the resurrection of our Lord.

The scholar Epolitos said that she was the apostles’ messenger as she preached the resurrection mainly to St. John and St. Peter.

The resurrection of our Lord make us think about heaven. We have been granted eternal life because of it; and now, after we die, we too will come out of our tombs, out of darkness, away from the weight of evil and into the arms of God.



Be My Witness...

# Memorization

## Matthew 5:1-12

**New King James Version (NKJV)**

### The Beatitudes

5 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.



## From Agpeya 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour

### **Psalm 19 (Psalm 20 in the Bible)**

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you; May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion; May He remember all your offerings, and accept your burnt sacrifice. May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose. We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions. Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy Heaven with the saving strength of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They have bowed down and fallen; But we have risen and stand upright. Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call. Alleluia.

### **Psalm 22 (Psalm 23 in the Bible)**

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever. Alleluia



## **The Bible of the Third Hour**

### **John.14: 26-15:4**

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. “You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I. “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and He has nothing in Me. “But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here. “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. “Abide in Me, and I in you.

Glory be to God Forever. Amen. We worship You O Christ together with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us.

## **The Litanies of the Third Hour**

Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, which You sent forth upon Your holy Disciples, and Your honourable Apostles at the third hour, take Him not away from us, O Good-One, but renew Him within us. Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.



**“Zoksapatri ke Eiyou-ke agi-you epnevmaty”** (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.)

O Lord, Who at the third hour, sent down Your Holy Spirit upon Your Holy Disciples and honourable Apostles, take Him not away from us, O Good-One, but renew Him within us. We beseech You, O Christ our Lord, the Word, and Son of God. Renew within us a righteous and life-giving Spirit, a Spirit of prophecy and chastity, a Spirit of sanctification, righteousness and authority. O Pantocrator; for You are the Light of our souls, O You who enlightens every one that comes into the world and have mercy on us.

**“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.”** (Both now and forever and unto the age of all ages, Amen.)

O mother of God, you are the true vine, bearing the Fruit of Life, we ask you, O full of grace, together with the apostles, to pray for the salvation of our souls. Blessed be the Lord our God. Blessed be the Lord day by day. He prepares our way, for He is the God of our salvation.

**“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.”** (Both now and forever and unto the age of all ages, Amen.)

O Heavenly King, and Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who is in every place, and fills all, You who are the Treasure of goodness, and Giver of life, graciously come and dwell in us, purge away all stain, O Good-One, and save our souls.

**“Zoksapatri ke Eiyou-ke agi-you epnevmaty”** (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.)

Be My Witness...



Just as you were with Your Disciples, O Saviour, and gave them peace, graciously come also and be with us, save us, and deliver our souls.

“Kenin ke aa-ee ke-ic-touce e-on-ace ton e-onon Amen.” (Both now and forever and unto the age of all ages, Amen.)

Whenever we stand in Your Holy sanctuary, we are considered as those standing in Heaven. O Mother of God, You who are the gate of heaven, open unto us the door of mercy.



Be My Witness... Be My Witness...



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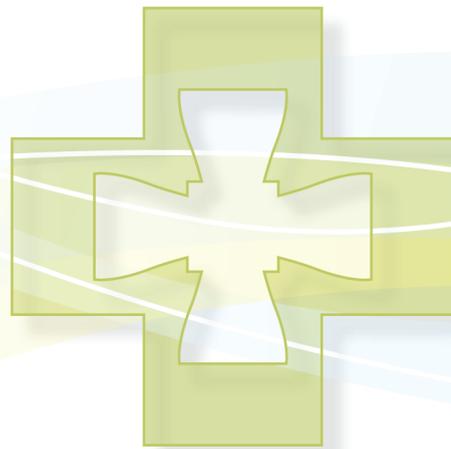
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