



Summer Festival | 2024 / 2025

The Lord is My Light and



Gr 7-9 | English Edition

My Salvation (Psalm 27:1)



COPTIC ORTHODOX
DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II



118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of Saint Mark

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Topic 1 “The Lord is my Light and my Salvation”

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

This is the theme of the Summer Festival for the year (2024), God willing. It is the first verse of Psalm 27 by our teacher David the Prophet, at a time when he was in distress, being pursued by King Saul. The Lord brought light into David's life. He did not despair in the darkness, as his life was filled with the presence of the Lord, and thus his life was filled with light and hope.

- For whoever has the Lord as their light will see God's power and salvation from the fear, sorrows, and worries of this world, as well as from sin.

- This Psalm is a declaration about God because He is our light, our salvation, and the fortress of our lives personally. It saves the believer from their spiritual enemies, enlightening their inner vision to behold heavenly glories. Thus, it is a Psalm of trust and victory, where the Lord is our light and our salvation.

--- These are the main points of this year's theme ---

1- The Lord.

2- The Lord is my light.

3- The Lord is my salvation.

Firstly: Who is the Lord?

We believe in one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This means that: the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Not three gods, but one God. This is our faith in the Holy Trinity.

(1 John 5:7, Deuteronomy 6:4). God has revealed to us that He is one God in three persons in the Bible in both Testaments. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal in essence, but the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. Each person has a characteristic that distinguishes them from the other persons, meaning they are different in personal attributes.

The Father = is the source or fountainhead.

The Son = is begotten of the Father.

The Holy Spirit = proceeds from the Father.

These faith truths are the teachings of our Coptic Orthodox Church about the Holy Trinity and can grant us the grace to be ready to answer everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us.

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). The Scripture says, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). While some believe in God who is in heaven, which is good and true, others reject the existence of God or deny Him altogether due to the darkness and weakness of their poor hearts!

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Our faith is that the Incarnation is the solution to all of humanity's problems. Through the Incarnation, the mighty and loving God, the wise teacher, came down to enlighten the path for humanity and save it. He washes us from the mire of sin and lifts us up to heavenly immortality. So, let us understand who God is.

1- God is Eternal:

God has no beginning and no end; He is eternal. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2).

God alone is eternal, having no beginning and no end. No other being is eternal, as all creatures have a beginning and an end. Their beginning is the day they were created, found, or born. Before that, none of these creatures existed. This entire universe, with all it contains, is created; it has a beginning and an end. Nothing in it possesses eternity. But God is different: "I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth" (Proverbs 8:23-25). God had no beginning in time and will have no end. God forbid! He is eternal: "But You are the same, and Your years will have no end" (Psalm 102:27).

2- God the Creator:

He alone has created everything. The term "created" means that He brought things into existence from nothing. God is the one who created the entire universe with His word: "Be," and it was. God did not only create matter and all that is material but also created the spirit and the mind. He created the angels, who are spirits. God created life. As the Creator, He alone can also withdraw the spirit that He granted to life. He holds the power of life and death.

He is also the one who created nature, for "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He can also bring it to an end.

- Here, the discussion is about the beginning of creation: the creation of the earth, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the stars, the plants, the animals, and humanity. All of this happened in time when God created the heavens and the earth and everything upon them. Whoever denies the existence of God is blind and cannot see.

3- God's existence is inevitable

One of God's attributes is that His existence is inevitable, meaning that His existence is essential. The existence of all things necessitates a higher being of omnipotence, as He is the one who brought them into existence and is the original cause of all beings. No being other than God can be described as inevitable in existence. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:26)

4- God is Unlimited and His Power is Unlimited:

God is Unlimited in regard to both space and time: He exists everywhere and at all times, in heaven, on earth, and in between. No place is devoid of His presence, no place can contain Him, and He is not confined by any space. He is always present in all places, "who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Throughout all ages and beyond, He is unlimited in every aspect and omnipotent. His power is unlimited, and no one shares this attribute, neither humans nor angels. "Then Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty'" (Genesis 48:3).

5- God is Omniscient:

He alone knows everything about everything, at all times and in any place. He also knows things before they happen, meaning He knows the future and the unseen, and all the hidden matters. He knows the past, the present, and the future, and all of these are before Him simultaneously. He knows the hidden and the visible. His knowledge is complete and comprehensive, certain and constant. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

6- God is the Pantocrator:

Nothing can happen in the universe, whether big or small, without God's permission and allowance. Everything that occurs in the universe is under divine management. "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30).

7- God is Unchanging:

God's standards are constant and unchanging. "With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). He does not change at all. He cannot increase because there is no increase for Him to attain as He is infinite and perfect in everything. He cannot decrease in any way because decrease does not align with His divinity. He does not change because there is no better state for Him to change into.

8- God is All-Holy:

The holiness of God is His "infallibility," meaning the impossibility of error. It is an absolute and unlimited holiness. The word "infallibility" in English explains itself: "In-" meaning "not," and "-fallibility" meaning "the possibility of falling." Thus, infallibility means "the complete impossibility of falling," indicating perfect, absolute, and unlimited holiness. This attribute exists only in God alone, as "There is none holy like the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:2). It is one of the most important evidences that Jesus Christ is the Logos, God "the Word" manifested in the

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flesh, because "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He challenged the Jews by saying, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46).

9- God Incarnate for Our Redemption:

Some might think that the Incarnation is unacceptable to attribute to God, but the truth is that the Incarnation:

1. Does not conflict with God's holiness.
2. Does not conflict with God's power.
3. Does not conflict with God's wisdom.
4. Does not conflict with God's dignity.

Rather, the Incarnation is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation, which the patriarchs prophesied about in the Old Testament, and which God promised us with the coming of the Redeemer: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Since a Redeemer was necessary, and this Redeemer had to possess the following attributes:

1. He must be a human to represent fallen humanity.
2. He must die because the penalty of sin is death.
3. He must be infinite because Adam's sin is infinite, as it is directed against the infinite God. The Redeemer must be infinite to atone for the sins of all humanity throughout all ages.
4. He must be sinless because one who lacks something cannot give it.
5. He must be the Creator to be able to renew the creation of man.

The only one who can meet all these specifications is God, who can incarnate in the form of a human capable of dying. He is the infinite, holy, sinless Creator who can renew humanity and restore it to its original state.

10 - God, the Living One Who Does Not Die:

He is life itself. Can life die? Can the giver of life die? Certainly not! He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). After His death on our behalf in the flesh and His redemption for us on the cross, He raised Himself by His own power. He did not die, nor will He ever die. He is God, "the living one who lives forever and ever" (Revelation 1:18).

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11- God Dwelling in Us:

Emmanuel means "God with us." Christianity means "God in us."

This tremendous shift is from the high God, dwelling in the heights of His heaven, who condescended to us in the form of "Emmanuel." He became the humble God, who is with us, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7). Then came another transformation: Emmanuel Himself became indwelling in us! This is the essence of Christianity! The Spirit of God now dwells in us, making us holy temples in which the Holy Spirit resides. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Secondly: The Lord is My Light

1- God is the True Light and Its Source:

"God is light... dwelling in the light... praised by the angels of light... the light shone from Mary..." (the ninth part of the Theotokia of Monday). God is the light, the creator, and the source of light:

a. God is Light:

He is the one who said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12).

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

In the book of Revelation, it is said about the Lord Jesus when He appeared to the beloved John: "His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (Revelation 1:16).

In the First Hour prayer, we say: "O True Light, who gives light to every man coming into the world... When the daylight shined upon us, O Christ our God, the True Light, let Your light shine upon us...".

Indeed, God is the Father of lights and the source thereof (James 1:17), "dwelling in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16).

b. God is the Source of Light: He created it when He said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3). This is the first act of God for humanity, through which He can divide between light and darkness (Genesis 1:4). Through this divine love, humanity sees, perceives, and enjoys what God offers him... And the Church teaches us to walk in this divine light through...

2- Teaching the Holy Scriptures:

Our Holy Scripture, with its covenant, is the Word of God, His commandments, and promises, and it was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is the constitution of our lives. We have received it through tradition. Therefore, we preserve it and live by its commandments, for:

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"The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." (Psalms 19:8)

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

"For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light." (Proverbs 6:23)

Thus, we can distinguish between the chaff and the wheat. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ instructed us:

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

"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." (John 12:35)

3- The Church and Its Liturgies:

A- The Church is a spiritual ritual lighthouse: resembling the heavens in its stars and angels, it is always illuminated by many lights, like the sky on earth, indicating the presence of God dwelling in the light. It symbolizes the glory and radiance of the Church. Wasn't the lighthouse always lit in the tent of the meeting? Therefore, the Church is illuminated, especially during the reading of the divine scriptures. For we cannot imagine heaven as dark. It is "the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people." (Revelation 21:3)

This is evident in the liturgical prayers:

B- In the prayers of baptism (the Sacrament of Enlightenment), as we are baptized, we are enlightened, and as we are enlightened, we become children. And as we become children, we are complete children.

- The priest prays for the baptized, saying: "Call Your servants into Your pure light" - "Open the eyes of their hearts, so that they may receive the light of Your Gospel's Kingdom" - "Make them... vessels of light, children of light."

C- In the prayers of fraction in the Divine Liturgy, we pray: "O God, Father of light, and source of life... who lifted us from the depths to the light... who made the darkness of error within us light up before the coming of Your only begotten Son in the flesh."

"You are the compassionate God who has illuminated us, the sinners."

"O You who opened the eyes of the blind, open the eyes of our hearts."

D- In the responses prayers: during the analysis of the Morning Prayer, we ask: "Illuminate our minds, hearts, and understanding, O Lord of all... Let the light of Your face shine upon us, and let the light of Your divine knowledge illuminate us. Make us, O our Master, to be sons of light and sons of the day, so that we may pass this day with righteousness, purity, and good planning."

And in the analysis of the Midnight Prayer, we ask: "Illuminate our minds to understand Your life-giving words, and lift us from the darkness of deadly sin."

E- The glorious history of the Church: throughout the ages, it has also been a light for us on the way, through the heritage of the fathers, consisting of laws, decisions, and outcomes set

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by the Ecumenical Councils, which cannot be changed or ignored... Also, the lives and teachings of the great fathers of the Church and their interpretations of the Holy Scriptures are lights on the way and the path to reaching eternity. Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox Church strives to preserve the deposit of the true faith, sound teaching, and our firm belief, as handed down to us by these great fathers such as St. Athanasius the Apostolic, St. Cyril the Great, St. Dioscorus, and others... etc.

4- Illuminated the life of Saints:

- Christ came to illuminate the world, and He made His disciples reflect His light like the moon reflects the light of the sun... He instructed us to live a holy life: "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16), so the Church became filled with saints who became a light for us. We listen to their lives through the Synaxarium daily.

During Holy Week, after reading any chapter of the sayings of one of the Fathers, we say: "Let us conclude the discourse of our holy father (name), who illuminated our minds with his beneficial teachings." Therefore, we follow in their footsteps, as instructed: "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7)

5- The righteous life is a light:

At the beginning of the Thanksgiving Prayer, we say: "Arise, O sons of light, let us praise the Lord of hosts." Because "you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). This symbolizes the radiance emanating from the believer in their words, dwellings, actions, behaviors, and all their activities, shining forth the light of Christ dwelling within them, dispelling the darkness and guiding the steps of those around them.

6- The light of eternal life:

Just as the beginning of the Holy Scriptures speaks of the creation of light, which God created on the first day, so too does the end of the Holy Scriptures speak of the heavenly Jerusalem, the shining city, where it says: "And the Lamb is its light" (Revelation 21:23). In the resurrection, the righteous will rise with bodies: luminous, spiritual, heavenly, sanctified to eternal life with the Lord Jesus and the saints. Let us be the radiant light in the world, which necessarily involves:

- a- Radiating and reflecting the light of Christ upon us: just as the moon reflects the sunlight.
- b- Dwelling and settling the light of God within us, which is why the Lord Jesus likened His bride to the pure sun (Revelation 10:6).

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Let us thank the Lord, who made us a light to the world, as He dwells within us, shining through us in His divine image. He is able to illuminate our lives from within and without, guiding our path to the kingdom.

Thirdly: The Lord is my salvation.

1- What does "salvation" mean?

Salvation, in our Coptic Orthodox understanding, is rooted in the Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers. It comes from the word "Save" in English.

Humanity erred and transgressed the commandment, and the punishment for sin was death. Thus, humanity was sentenced to death, and its nature corrupted as a result of sin. Humanity became in desperate need of a Savior to deliver them from all of this and to return once again to paradise to dwell with God.

This process of salvation lasts a lifetime and begins in the Church through: participating in the sacraments necessary for salvation: baptism, chrismation, and the Eucharist. It is completed through repentance and confession and culminates in the transformation of the body into a heavenly spiritual body. Therefore, we reject the phrase "I am saved" and the idea of "instant salvation," not out of a love for doctrinal debate, but out of an understanding of the dimensions of the "process" of salvation.

Pope Shenouda III says in the book *The Heresy of Instant Salvation*: "You, my brother, were on the cross in Adam when he sinned, and when he was cast out, and the sentence of death was passed on him. You inherited this entire situation, and with it, you inherited the judgment of death as part of him. Sin entered your nature, and you lost your divine image and became in need of salvation from this original inherited sin, with all its consequences and penalties, about which our teacher St. Paul the Apostle said: 'Therefore, just as through one man's sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned' (Romans 5:12)."

Therefore, we need the Lord Jesus Christ to:

1. Deliver us from original inherited sin, which we inherited from our father Adam and our mother Eve.
2. Deliver us from the corruption of our human nature, which became inclined to sinful acts after the Fall.
3. Deliver us from the four types of death:
 - **Physical death**, by His resurrection from the dead.
 - **Spiritual death**, when He grants us communion with Him and dwells within us.
 - **Eternal death**, when He becomes the savior of His children and the sharer of His divine nature.
 - He grants us **Eternal life**, by granting us entry into the kingdom of heaven.
4. Deliver us from actual sins, which dominate us due to the multitude of falls in them: sins of thought, senses, feelings, body, relationships, etc.

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5. He saves us from the sorrows and troubles of this world by His Holy Spirit working within us, as He promised: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).
 6. He saves us from the weakness of the flesh, which continues to fall until the very end, until it is transformed - by the power of the resurrection - into a glorious body of light.
 7. He saves us from the wars of demons and the deceit of the enemy of good, who desires nothing but our destruction. We trust that "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 20:1)
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2- Pillars of Salvation (How do we attain salvation?) :

Through the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior was born... indeed, the Salvation was born. For the Lord Jesus is the Redeemer, and He is the Redeemer and the Redeemed at the same time.

There is no salvation without redemption... and no redemption without incarnation... and no incarnation without birth!

The Lord Jesus Christ offered salvation sufficient for all sinners, in all parts of the world, for all ages... But not everyone is saved, rather everyone who believes in Him is saved.

Accepting salvation comes with certain conditions, namely:

1- Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sole Redeemer:

So said our teacher, the Apostle Peter: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In the Annunciation of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, it was said: "She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), and when the angels announced His birth, they proclaimed that He was born for you as "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11)... Therefore, Christ is the Savior, and there is no salvation for anyone without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, there is no salvation from our sins by merely believing in the existence of God alone, as even Akhenaten believed in the existence of God. But salvation occurs when we believe that our great God incarnated in human form, from the Holy Virgin Mary, was crucified on the cross... He died and rose again for our salvation... Then ascended with His glorified body to heaven... and sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit... and established for us the Holy Church... and instituted within it the salvific sacraments... without which there is no salvation for humanity.

It's clear that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is essential for salvation, as in the Lord's words: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He also said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16), "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5).

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2- Practicing the Holy Sacraments: Because the Holy Scriptures teach us about the importance of the sacraments for salvation:

1- The Sacrament of Baptism: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

2- The Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation): "But you have an anointing from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20), so that we may become holy temples indwelt by the Spirit of God.

3. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

4. The Sacrament of Communion: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56). The previous four sacraments are essential for salvation.

5. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:14-15).

6. The Sacrament of Marriage: The Holy Spirit unites two into one person, one will, and one entity (as God intended), manifesting love and purpose in life; the mystery of union is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who descends on the bridegroom and bride to make them one (man and woman) and unites them heart and body as one, "and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

The Holy Bible says about the Sacrament of Marriage: "This is a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32). Our church taught us holy and pure life, calling this sacrament "the sacrament of the icon" in the New Testament.

7. The Sacrament of Priesthood: The church servants are ministers of the sacrament of salvation. The church entrusts them with leading, teaching, and administering the holy sacraments.

- "He who desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1).

- "Obey those who rule over you and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account" (Hebrews 13:17).

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

3- Good Works:

- "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). "Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18).

- "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Thus, good works are essential to salvation because they demonstrate the sincerity of faith and yield abundant fruit.

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4- The Glorification of the Body:

What is meant here is that our bodies, in which we live on earth, bear the legacy of sin, causing us to fall into mistakes from one time to another. So, the Christian strives to live in a sinless body, but he weakens and stumbles. Yet, he quickly repents with blood, repentance, and the spirit of confession, saying, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise" (Micah 7:8).

As long as we are in the sinful body, the weak and mortal body, our salvation cannot be completed without freeing this earthly body. The glorified body in heaven is glorious, immune to sickness, weakness, and death.

Indeed, we will be rid of this sinful body in the resurrection, meaning we will rise in new bodies: spiritual, luminous, heavenly, and glorified, just as the Lord Jesus' body was when He rose from the dead.

This is what we refer to as the "Glorification of the Body" or the "Transfiguration" (from the word *Trans*, meaning "change," and *Figure*, meaning "shape" or "form"), meaning our bodies will transform into that luminous, spiritual form. The body we will rise in when the Lord Jesus comes in His glory at the second resurrection will resemble the glorified body of believers in a luminous, spiritual form.

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

These are the four pillars of salvation:

1. Faith in Christ... Let us live for Him, believers in His incarnation and His sacrifice for us.
2. The Holy Mysteries... Let us practice them faithfully for our sanctification.
3. Good deeds... As evidence and fruit of the sincerity of our faith.
4. The Transfiguration of the Body... This is what the Lord grants us in His Second Coming.

Thank you, our Lord Jesus, the light of our lives, the savior of our souls, the giver of strength, hope, comfort, peace, and steadfastness. Therefore:

We do not fear any tribulations, no matter how severe. Throughout history, the Church has endured numerous wars, doubts, doctrinal deviations, and yet all these have vanished, while the Church remains strong, unique, and steadfast. It shines as a light to the world, a radiant sun, and a formidable army that terrifies all demons. Indeed, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 18:16 NKJV)

We do not fear because we unite with the Lord within us: through partaking of the Holy Mysteries, we are strengthened by Him who dwells in us. Then, we have acquired the grace of God's protection, which grants us peace and assurance, defeats the forces of evil, and illuminates our path.

We do not fear because we are children of God: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:14 NKJV) He grants us victory and triumph through the power of His cross, and so we boast in it as the power of God for our salvation. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

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This was the faith of all the righteous martyrs of the Church throughout the ages, as witnessed in the scene of the martyrdom of the 21 martyrs in Libya.

We do not fear because we have hope in eternal life: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." (Revelation 21:7 NKJV) The Lord gives us a feast filled for our souls, a fountain for our spiritual lives, and fills our days with peace, to bear fruit in the vineyard of the Lord, and to live for Him, bearing witness to His holy name every day.

To our Lord be glory forever and ever, Amen.

Topic 2 "In my dwelling, there is light." (The book of Exodus 1-15)

"But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." (Exodus 10:23 NKJV)

General Introduction:

The Holy Bible is divided into two Testaments: Old and New. The Old Testament contains 46 books, while the New Testament contains 27 books.

The Book of Exodus is one of the books of the Old Testament. It is the second book after the Book of Genesis, among the five books of Moses the prophet. It is called Exodus because it includes the story of the Israelites' departure from the land of Egypt. The book contains 40 chapters.

This book symbolically announces God's free salvation for humanity, which is evident through the people's departure from the land of slavery by God's hand, into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. This represents salvation from bondage, as a symbol of God's free salvation for humanity.

It also presents persons, symbols, and sacrifices as indications of God's incarnation and His salvation for us.

The book begins with "And," as if it is a continuation of what precedes it. The writer of Genesis and Exodus is Moses the prophet.

At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, we see slavery under the harsh and tyrannical rule of Pharaoh. The Book of Exodus includes events that occurred to the people over 145 years, from the death of Joseph to the second year of the Exodus.

This book shows how God's promise to the patriarchs was fulfilled and how the people of Israel became an organized nation, with leaders and a priesthood. It also shows how God dwelled among His people (the Tabernacle), while this people in Genesis were just families and tribes. We see God's governance in leading them.

This book began with humiliation and persecution and ended with the manifestation of God's glory in the Tabernacle, passing through the blood of the Passover lamb, which justifies, redeems, and atones for sins.

The events of the people's exodus from the land of Egypt came as a symbol of God's free salvation (redemption). Egypt became a symbol of the land of slavery, and the departure from it symbolized the liberation of God's children. Thus, the Book of Exodus is not just a historical record but a story of salvation for the people and for us as well. In the same sense, Pharaoh became a symbol of Satan who enslaves God's children, and the people's desires for Egyptian food like leeks and pots of meat came to signify worldly desires.

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

The Character of Moses the Prophet

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| <p>The Character of Moses the Prophet Lineage: Moses is the son of Amram, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and his mother is Jochebed of the house of Levi (Exodus 6:20). Siblings: His siblings are Miriam and Aaron. Life Stages: His life is divided into three stages, each lasting forty years: From Birth to Forty Years Old: He was found by Pharaoh's daughter on the riverbank after his mother placed him in a basket coated with pitch and tar among the reeds. Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and gave him to a woman to nurse (who was his mother). She named him Moses, meaning "drawn out of the water." He was raised in Pharaoh's palace until the age of forty. From Forty to Eighty Years Old: He fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian and lived in the house of the priest of Midian. He married Zipporah, the priest's daughter, and had a son named Gershom. From Eighty to One Hundred and Twenty Years Old: After forty years in Midian, the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush and sent him to lead the people out of Egypt. He led the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years and did not enter the Promised Land. He passed away at the age of one hundred and twenty on Mount Nebo.</p> | <p>Moses the prophet became a representative of the entire Old Testament, being the recipient of the Law, the one who spoke with God, and who led the people to their liberation from slavery and towards the Promised Land.</p> <p>When the Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured on Mount Tabor, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him (Matthew 17:1-8).</p> <p>In the Book of Revelation, we hear about the song of Moses, which the victorious sing in heaven (Revelation 15:3).</p> <p>Moses initially had a speech impediment and a harsh nature (killing the Egyptian). He was fearful and fled after killing the Egyptian. He tried to excuse himself from the work and service in a way that provoked the Lord's anger. When Pharaoh rejected his initial request, Moses blamed God in an unacceptable manner.</p> <p>However, he later became:</p> <p>Meek, more than all people. Very great in the eyes of the Egyptians (Exodus 11:3). A successful leader and judge for the people. There was no one like Moses before or after him (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). The Church commemorates his departure on the 8th of Tout each year.</p> |
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The world humiliates, but grace exalts (Exodus 1-2).

1. Jacob and his sons and grandsons entered Egypt as one family when Israel (Jacob) came to see his son Joseph alive. Then, the Jewish nation was formed in Egypt, and later its first leader, Moses the prophet, emerged.
2. "They were fruitful": This means they multiplied greatly in their descendants, like fish, and "increased abundantly": They grew exponentially. They became greater through their true knowledge and worship of God.
3. "And Joseph died": Here, Joseph is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. The divine inspiration connects Joseph's death with the significant growth of the Israelites. This means that the Church only grows through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

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4. Then a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph, and he persecuted the people of Israel who were growing and multiplying. He subjected them to forced labor (enslavement). He also employed Egyptian midwives (midwives of the Hebrews) to kill the male infants at birth before anyone saw them, and issued an order to drown every male child. Similarly, the growth of the Church or the human soul provokes the enemy of goodness, stirring the enemies of the Church against it, causing the children of God to be preoccupied with excessive labor (the bricks used to build cities), so that they do not rise from the earth and continue in their earthly lives.

5. During their enslavement, the children of Israel built the cities of Pithom (currently Tel El-Maskhuta near Tel El-Kebir) and Raamses (a place of storage), which were fortified cities on the eastern borders.

6. Moses was born to Amram and Jochebed, his wife, both of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 6:20). His mother hid him in a basket (ark) and placed him on the edge of the river among the reeds. Pharaoh's daughter found him and adopted him, then gave him to Jochebed (his mother) as a nurse. When the child grew, Pharaoh's daughter named him "Moses."

7. Moses grew up and went out of himself to inspect his brothers, without inviting him to God (indicating service without God's call). The first attempt by Moses to save the people stemmed from human compassion, and it was premature. It was also done in the pride and arrogance of human strength (killing the Egyptian). When news of Moses' first attempt reached Pharaoh's ears, he sought to kill him. But Moses feared and fled from Pharaoh's face, indicating that service without being sent by God results in toil and failure.

8. Moses met the seven daughters of the priest of Midian at the well and helped them water their flock. Then, the priest of Midian invited him to his house and allowed him to stay there. Moses then married Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, the priest of Midian, and they had a son named Gershom, meaning "a stranger there."

9. When the king of Egypt died, the Hebrews sighed because of the bondage, and the Lord looked upon the humiliation of His people and arose to deliver them.

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." (Exodus 1:12)

- Pharaoh symbolizes the devil, who humiliates the sons and daughters of God.

- The scholar Origen sees Pharaoh's daughter as symbolizing the church of the nations that accepted Moses (the Law) from the Jews through the river (baptism), believed in him, and brought him to her palace. "She comes out of her father's house and goes to the water to wash away her sins; this is the church coming from the nations to find in the river Moses, whom her own people rejected."

- Regarding Moses' role in rescuing the people, the name "Moses," meaning "drawn out of the water," is considered a prophetic expression of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea.

The divine commission (Exodus 4:3)

1- The appearance of God to Moses in the burning bush, amidst the fiery blaze, on Mount Horeb in the wilderness. The wilderness represents the depths of practical experience with God, and Mount Horeb signifies companionship with God. The burning bush symbolizes the people of God (the Church), and the thorn bush represents slavery (persecution).

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2- The bush was not consumed despite being engulfed in flames. "So Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see.'" (Exodus 3:3) Moses longed to know more about the sight, so God called him from within the burning bush and spoke to him to send him to his people in Egypt.

3- "Take off your sandals" (Exodus 3:5): The sandals symbolize the world and sin, and the Lord sanctified this place by His presence in it.

4- "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh" (Exodus 3:11): This phrase was uttered by Moses, who took forty years to learn it. He spent forty years in the house of Midian. There was a significant difference in Moses' nature between his first exit to inspect his brothers, relying on his own strength, and his commission from God at this time.

5- God declares His name for the first time as "I AM WHO I AM," meaning "I am the existing one," and "Yahweh," meaning "He who is."

6- They plunder the Egyptians, meaning they take what is rightfully theirs, which the Egyptians had taken from them through oppression. Similarly, when we emerge from the bondage of Satan, we reclaim all that is ours: our thoughts, our spirits, and our time.

7- Moses hesitated and refused to go to Egypt (Exodus 4:10-13) because of his humility, not because he couldn't see that it was God who sent him and would work through him!

8- "So the people believed... bowed their heads and worshiped" (Exodus 31:4). The people now believed in Moses because it was a true commission from God. Bowing down signifies genuine spiritual worship.

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."
(Exodus 4:12)

- The bush symbolizes the Incarnation, as well as symbolizing the Holy Virgin Mary, who carried the fire of divinity in her womb and did not burn.

- Moses became a symbol of the Lord Christ the Savior, who will bring the people out of the bondage of Pharaoh (Satan).

-Belief: The circumcision of Zipporah's son symbolizes baptism with the implications of Christ's blood.

- "I have surely seen the oppression of My people" (Exodus 3:7) symbolizes the Incarnation, "And I have come down to deliver them" (Exodus 3:8) signifies the Resurrection.

- The three-day journey symbolizes the Resurrection, and the sacrifice to the Lord in the wilderness (Exodus 18:3) symbolizes the slaughtered lamb, Christ, the Word of God, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1).

- Liturgical Point: We remove our shoes when partaking of communion and when entering the church, a sign of forsaking the love of the world and entering into communion with God in the sacred place.

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“A Weary Beginning” (Exodus 5, 6, 7:1-13)

1- “To Celebrate” (1:5): Worship to God is both joy and celebration. It is a three-day journey, followed by the act of “sacrifice” (3:5). This becomes a celebration, signifying the resurrection that occurred three days after the presentation of the sacrifice of the cross. It is a time of freedom and rejoicing.

2. Pharaoh Intensified His Orders to Humiliate the People, Pharaoh tightened his grip, refusing to release them. Instead, he accused them of laziness. This serves as a reminder that Satan’s battles commence when the soul prepares to embark on its journey toward knowing God and worshiping Him.

3. “Those Who Enslave the People”: These are the Egyptians. “And Those Who Organize Them”: These are the Jews, acting as foremen. Their responsibility is to oversee Jewish men who deliver a specific daily quota to the taskmasters.

4. The People Complain to Pharaoh

The people went to complain to Pharaoh, but he paid no heed to their pleas. They left Pharaoh’s presence, and Moses waited, eager to learn the outcome of this encounter. Their frustration grew, and this marked the first murmuring of the people against God and against Moses. This trait would accompany them throughout their journey in the wilderness.

5. Moses Rebukes God:

How beautiful it is when a servant engages in dialogue with the Almighty, acknowledging their own shortcomings while presenting their work for scrutiny.

6. God Begins by Saying: “I Am the Lord” (Exodus 2:6), and He Concludes by Saying to Moses: “I Am the Lord” (Exodus 8:6). This signifies, “I am the Lord who fulfills what I have promised.” How beautiful are the Lord’s assurances! He promised the fathers, and He will carry it out. He is the same Lord who was with their ancestors, remains with them today, and will be with them forever.

7- “Uncircumcised Lips”: That is, imperfect in my speech. How beautiful it is for a person to feel their spiritual weakness and sins.

8- Our teacher, Paul the Apostle, mentioned the names of the two magicians in (2 Timothy 3:8): “Jannes and Jambres.” It is Jewish tradition that has preserved the names. They resisted Moses not with terror and threats, but with a dangerous war, which is the war of deception. The most dangerous war against the Church is the one that comes from those who wear the clothes of servants, distort the doctrine, and divide the Body of Christ!

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

“Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’” (Exodus 6:6, NKJV)

“And I will rescue you with an outstretched arm” (Exodus 6:6, NKJV): The arm refers to the incarnate Lord Christ.

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

The first eight plagues (Exodus 7, 8, 9, 10)

Introduction to the Ten Plagues and Their Purpose:

To Prove the Validity of Moses and Aaron's Mission.

To Give Pharaoh and His People an Opportunity to Repent.

God's Defense of His Oppressed People, and to Pressure Pharaoh and His People to Release Them.

To Show that Salvation Comes Only Through the Blood of Christ:

The plagues began with blood (the Nile turned to blood) and ended with blood (the death of the firstborn).

To Serve as Warnings to Pharaoh, Leading to the Major Destructive Event of His Army Drowning in the Sea.

To Demonstrate the Weakness of the Egyptian Pagan Gods and the Greatness of God:

So the Egyptians would understand the futility of their gods and recognize that the God of the Israelites is the LORD, and so the Jews would understand the power of the God they worship (a school of faith).

The Initial Plagues Were Simple, Followed by Increasingly Severe Plagues, Culminating in the Painful Death of the Firstborn.

When Pharaoh failed to understand despite all this, his army perished in the sea.

The Plagues Were Acts of God, and the Israelites Did Nothing; God Was Defending His People.

They Were Preceded by Warnings, and There Were Instructions from God on How to Avoid the Plagues, Such as During the Plague of Hail.

Pharaoh is always negotiating; sometimes he refuses, other times he uses the magicians to prove the power of his gods, and sometimes he agrees to let only the men travel. However, Moses was completely against negotiating. For the children of God never negotiate with sin.

In most of the plagues, Moses stretched out his hand to the heavens because God is the source of the plagues. This proved the truth of Moses' and Aaron's mission.

The First Plague:

The plagues began with turning the river water into blood (Exodus 7:14-25). It started with blood to show that the punishment for sin is death, and it ended with blood (the Passover lamb) to show that by the blood, the people were saved and redeemed. Redemption means blood in place of blood. The plague was directed at the gods of the Egyptians; turning the water into defiled blood confused the Egyptians, as they saw their god (the river) become defiled.

The Second Plague:

The frogs (Exodus 8:1-14) were directed against the gods of the Egyptians. Frogs were consecrated to the god Osiris and were symbols of fertility and prosperity. They died and stank.

The frogs, with their annoying croaking, symbolize those who speak vain things and those who lack positive action. Pharaoh, with his stubbornness, brought upon himself more plagues.

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The Third Plague:

The lice (Exodus 8:16-19): The Egyptians were renowned as the most hygienic nation. The priests bathed evening and morning, wore pure linen, and touched nothing unclean, taking care to avoid defilement by lice. God struck them with lice. In this plague and those that followed, the magicians could not replicate it and were compelled to admit, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19).

The Fourth Plague:

The flies (Exodus 8:20-32): The Egyptians worshipped gods believed to drive away flies, yet here, God exposed their gods' impotence. This is the first time in divine revelation that God distinguishes between the land of Egypt and the land of Goshen (the land of God's people), hence the flies did not afflict them. Following this plague, Pharaoh allowed them to sacrifice (worship) in the land of Egypt. Thus, Satan procrastinates so that he does not release the sinner from his grip, desiring them to be his servant for life. Moses refused to negotiate with Pharaoh and presented a compelling argument, saying, "How shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God? Shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes?" (Exodus 8:26).

- "Do not go very far away" (Exodus 8:28): Pharaoh procrastinates until he can bring them back to bondage once more.

The Fifth Plague: Livestock Death (Exodus 9:1-7):

In the Egyptians' belief, they regarded the calf as sacred, believing it housed the spirit of their deity Osiris. However, with this plague, they come to realize the fallacy of their beliefs. Here, Pharaoh seeks confirmation that Israel's livestock remains unharmed.

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

Moses took ashes from a furnace (where clay bricks were baked), and he scattered it toward the sky, and it spread by the wind. It fell on the priests, the people, and the animals, afflicting the Egyptians with boils and blains. Even the magicians were ashamed to stand before Moses because of the boils on them.

The Seventh Plague: Thunder, Hail, and Fire (Exodus 9:13-35)

Hail is ice balls that fall to the ground. This plague was severe on the Egyptians, as they were not accustomed to severe cold. The thunder signifies God's warning, and the hail killed the plants. The fire came from lightning striking houses and trees, burning them, or from the friction of the hailstones (ice balls) producing tongues of fire. It was a heavy and severe plague directed at the stubborn heart of Pharaoh. "That I may show you My power" (Exodus 9:16) so that he might believe in God's power and repent.

Therefore, God's plagues are warnings and calls for faith and repentance (verse 19). It was out of God's mercy that He guided Pharaoh to protect his livestock to minimize losses.

Verses (20, 21): Everyone who heeds God's warnings will live.

Exodus 9:29: "That you may know that the earth is the Lord's," contrary to the pagan view that each land has its own protecting god.

Verses (31, 32): The timing of the plague destroyed the flax and barley but spared the wheat and legumes.

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The Eighth Plague: Locusts (Exodus 10:1-20)

Locusts are destructive to crops, as they consume every green plant. Here, the gods of the Egyptians were powerless to sustain them even physically. When locusts come, they arrive in overwhelming swarms so numerous that they can darken the sun, then they cover the ground. The remnant that remained and survived the hail—namely, the wheat and legumes—was devoured by the locusts. Here, Pharaoh resorts to a new form of procrastination, as he refuses to let them go (these are the actions of Satan) (verse 10).

- "The Lord be with you": This is a sarcastic expression, meaning: Do you want me to release everything and deprive the land of the slaves who work on it for free?
- "Beware, for evil is ahead of you": This means he is trying to scare them by saying that if they go into the wilderness, they will face enemies and will be without food or water.
- "For that is what you desired": This implies that they requested worship, which is the work of men, so only the men should go. However, this contradicts what Moses requested, which was for everyone to go. Naturally, if only the men went, they would have to return for their wives and children (this is Satan's procrastination to prevent the release of God's people).

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"And I will set apart in that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there" (Exodus 8:22 NKJV).

God instructed Moses to take the rod with him, as the rod symbolizes the cross. There is no possibility of victory except through the cross.

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

Without prior warning to Pharaoh, the ninth plague was darkness. The Egyptians worshipped Ra, the sun god. This plague was directed against their greatest deity. Their god was extinguished, which was terrifying for them. Thus, great fear prevailed, and they could not move from their places.

"The darkness which may even be felt" indicates that it was so intense and dense that it was not like the usual night darkness but something extraordinary. Pharaoh continued to procrastinate, but he granted more concessions because he did not want to release everyone.

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:23 NKJV).

- The continuation of darkness for "three days" signifies the wrath of nature, as occurred during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ when the earth was darkened for three hours from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. Thus, this darkness was a protest against Pharaoh's defiance and disobedience.
- There was darkness in the world before the first coming of Jesus Christ and His redemption of humanity. Then He shone with the light of His resurrection upon all who believe in Him. Similarly, there will be darkness in the world until Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shines at His second coming and rewards each according to their deeds.
- After the darkness came the light and salvation from the destroying angel. Those who walk in darkness will be destroyed (the plague of the firstborn).

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The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn (Exodus 11 and 12)

1. This was the final plague in which Satan, working through Pharaoh and his magicians, was defeated by Moses and Aaron.

2. Through this plague, the Egyptians paid for their actions in killing the Hebrew children, as the Lord punished them in the same way. Similarly, on the cross, Satan paid the price for the destruction of God's children. This symbolizes how God destroys evil, and in this plague, the firstborn of the sacred animals worshipped by the Egyptians also died, those they had deified.

3. It was customary for masters to give slaves and strangers provisions for their journey. The people left carrying great wealth and treasures. Likewise, we do not leave our battles with Satan empty-handed; instead, we emerge filled with spiritual experiences, strong faith, and virtue.

4. *****"Moses was very great in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 11:3)**:** This is not contrary to Moses' humility but explains why the Egyptians gave many possessions to the people upon their departure. The Egyptians considered Pharaoh a god, but when Moses confronted and defeated him, Moses became very great in the eyes of the Egyptians.

5. *****"But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue" (Exodus 11:7)**:** This indicates God's protection of His people, ensuring that not even dogs would bark at them during their departure. This means that the Egyptian army would not dare attack them during the exodus.

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"that you may know that the Lord does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." (Exodus 11:7)

Prophecies and Symbols:

1. The Death of the Firstborn:

- Its meaning is the crushing of Satan's power.
- It signifies the cutting off of all roots of evil, and this was accomplished by the cross.
- Since the firstborn signifies strength (Genesis 49:3), God struck Satan and his strength, binding him by the cross to free us from his bondage.

2. The Last Plague's Connection with the Passover Lamb:

- It clearly symbolizes the cross.
- Therefore, the story of the Passover lamb, its rite, and its law come amidst the events of the tenth plague (Exodus 12:1-28).
- Its connection with the exodus of the people on the same night signifies that Christ, by His cross, crushed the power of Satan to free us from his bondage so that we might go forth and proceed to Canaan.

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The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12: 1-28, 43-51)

1. "The Passover":

- This is a Hebrew word that corresponds to "Pascha" in Coptic, meaning "passage or passing over."
 - It refers to the passing of the destroying angel over the houses of the Hebrews, without killing anyone inside, due to the distinguishing mark of the blood.
 - It also signifies the passing of the people of Israel from the land of bondage to enter the Promised Land, to remind them of what God did for them, so that their exodus is not merely a story from the past but a continuous and present act in the life of His people.
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2. The Rite of the Passover:

- The rite of the Passover is linked with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which the people eat unleavened bread for a whole week without leaven.
 - Leaven symbolizes evil, and this feast signifies the children of God who must live their entire lives (the week of their lives) in struggle against sin, having been redeemed by Christ's blood, passing from evil deeds to a life of virtue (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).
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3. The Exodus:

- The exodus occurred in the month of Abib, which is the seventh month in the Hebrew calendar, so God made it the first month.
 - Just as the Jews had a new beginning with the Passover, so do we with redemption have a new beginning. In every liturgy, we live in a state of continual renewal of the heart in Christ Jesus, the Sacrificial Lamb.
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4. The Passover Sacrifice:

- The Passover sacrifice is a communal sacrifice for the entire congregation of Israel. For the first time, the term "congregation of Israel" is mentioned, as they became a community based on the shared Passover sacrifice.
 - The Passover sacrifice is a lamb, a year-old male, without the weakness of old age, remaining perpetually new in our lives, although He is the Ancient of Days, eternal.
 - Inviting the nearby neighbor symbolizes the invitation to the Gentiles to faith. Everyone is called to this sacrifice.
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5. Kept on the Tenth Day and Offered on the Fourteenth Day:

- This period allowed them to ensure the lamb was free from defects and diseases. The entire congregation of Israel would slaughter it in the evening, symbolizing Christ offering Himself as the Passover for the world in the fullness of time.
 - The lamb was sacrificed in the evening, and Christ surrendered His spirit around the ninth hour (3 PM by current timing), with His body remaining on the cross until the eleventh hour (5 PM by current timing).
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6. Sprinkling the Blood on the Upper Doorpost and the Side Posts:

- The blood is not sprinkled on the lower threshold to avoid being trampled underfoot (Hebrews 10:29).

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- Sprinkling the blood on the upper doorpost and the side posts signifies that the blood surrounds from all sides: "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13).

- "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

7. "Then they shall eat the flesh on that night, roasted with fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8):

- The bitterness of the herbs signifies the bitterness of the people's bondage in Egypt and the bitterness of sin in our lives, from which we have been freed by Christ, our Passover.

- The Lord Jesus used leavened bread in the Sacrament of the Eucharist because He bore our sins in His body on the cross.

And just as the bread enters the fire in the oven, causing the yeast to die, so by the cross of Christ, sin has died.

- It should not be eaten raw or boiled in water. Roasting signifies haste, as there is no time for cooking with pots or water.

8. They would eat unleavened bread from the evening of the 14th day, which is the night of the fifteenth, until the evening of the 21st day, which is the night of the twenty-second. They would burn every trace of leavened bread in the house. This signifies that you should maintain your purity because I have liberated you. This command was given to the people who left Egypt, and it is also given to us, the redeemed by the blood.

9. "Do not let any of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire" (Exodus 12:10):

- The people offered the sacrifice and departed from Egypt at night. Allowing any part of it to remain until morning risked spoilage, which would detract from the significance of the act. Therefore, whatever was left had to be burned. Christ did not see decay.

- The bodies that were hanged were not to remain until morning (Deuteronomy 21:23), so it was necessary for Christ's body to be taken down before morning. Salvation was accomplished in the evening, and the thief went to paradise with Christ.

- They ate it "with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand": The head signifies Christ's thoughts, the feet signify His actions, and the entrails (inner parts) signify His love and affections. They ate it while prepared to depart; the Jews observed this literally as a memorial of their departure from Egypt on that night.

10. The use of hyssop: Hyssop is a plant suitable for sprinkling blood, symbolizing the healing of our diseases and the purification of our souls. It is a fragile plant, symbolizing the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ and our participation in His sufferings on the cross. As those inside the house were saved, it signifies those who are within the Church.

11. "An everlasting ordinance": Equals "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). The Passover remained a steadfast law for the Jews until the appointed time came for the Lord Jesus Christ to fulfill its symbolism and institute the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Church forever. Just as it was stipulated that only the circumcised could partake of it, so too, only the baptized can partake of it. "In one house it shall be eaten": This means that they are one in faith, and all may eat from it, both adults and children. The slaves who eat from it are the circumcised; this indicates that the nations are accepted on the condition that they first be baptized

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Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

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

The Passover lamb symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ who was sacrificed for us, leading us to eternal life, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Therefore, we celebrate the Feast of Resurrection every year, and indeed in every divine liturgy, to experience the power of resurrection in our lives continually.

- Christ is the Lamb of God, who was sacrificed for us, silent like a lamb taken from the flock, and led to the slaughter. The spotless lamb signifies that Christ was without blemish and without sin, and being a male lamb signifies that He is the Bridegroom of the Church.

- "They shall take it from the sheep": This signifies the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of Man, who was made like us in all things except sin alone.

- The keeping on the tenth day and the offering on the fourteenth day: This was a sign of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Sunday and His surrender on Thursday by the hand of Judas. The tenth day signifies that Christ offered Himself for us when we broke the covenant (the Ten Commandments). On the fourteenth day, the moon is full. If Christ's Passover is the sun of righteousness, then the church is the moon, and it has already completed its light during Christ's Passover

- The covering of the blood over everyone in the house gives an idea of atonement, for the blood of Christ covers us, meaning it atones for us so that we may be saved and not perish. There is no salvation except through this blood and faith in His atoning work.

- Eating: It signifies union with Christ. Roasting with fire: It signifies that Christ passed through the divine justice for us. Bitter herbs: They signify the bitterness of sin that Christ bore for us. Unleavened bread: It signifies that every believer in Christ should live a holy, simple life every day of their lives.

- They burn what remains of it after the ceremony ends. Therefore, in the ritual of our Coptic Orthodox Church, we ensure not to keep the sacraments for the next day.

- "Do not break any of its bones" (Exodus 12:46): This refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom when they came to break His legs while He was on the cross, they found Him already dead (John 19:33), so they did not break His legs. This signifies the perfection of the Passover sacrifice and the perfection of His work in salvation. If the Church is made from His flesh and bones, the Church of Christ will not be divided, and He will preserve His body. Just as the Passover lamb's bones were not broken, so too the righteous united with the Lord Jesus Christ do not have their bones broken (Psalm 34:20). The bone represents the living faith that cannot be broken.

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Departure and the passage (Exodus 12:29 - 42, 13)

1- The Angel of Destruction passed through the land of Egypt around midnight, symbolizing the Day of Judgment for Satan in the Last Day, which will be a day of darkness.

2- Pharaoh alone did not relent to the Hebrews, but the entire Egyptian people gave them what they asked for, hastening their departure without hindrance. They feared new plagues might come upon them. Let us consider the end of pride! What did Pharaoh, his men, and his people ultimately come to?

3- The beginning of the journey is leaving the land of sin. Egypt was a stronghold of pagan worship, and silence meant death. The believer lives here in exile. They entered Egypt 70 souls, not counting their wives, slaves, and maids. They departed around 600,000, approximately, as found in Numbers 32:2, the actual number being 603,550, excluding the Levites.

4- The Mixed Multitude: They may have been Egyptians or other slaves from different nations. Perhaps these individuals were intrigued by the God of Israel or found an opportunity to escape.

5- To commemorate this night, the Lord asked three things from them: Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the sanctification of the firstborn. "Sanctify" means to set apart and dedicate. Without sanctification, the crossing would merely be a transition from one slavery to another. The firstborn is the most precious to the family, and this is what God asks us to offer Him as our most valuable possession. Notice that this commandment is the first commandment Moses presented to the people immediately after their exodus. It is not merely a commandment but also a promise and a gift. By leaving the circle of slavery and heading towards the heavenly Jerusalem, believers enter into God's kingdom and become living members in this divine realm.

6- The Clean Animals were offered as sacrifices, which symbolize Christ. As for the Unclean Animals, they symbolize humans in their natural state, where if not redeemed by a lamb, their necks are broken. If Christ had not redeemed us, we would have perished.

7- God did not guide the people on the route to the Promised Land (Canaan) through the easy route from Egypt, which passes along the northern coast. Instead, He directed them on a different path. The official route would have exposed them to war, as it passed through many Egyptian garrisons. God wanted to spare them from the sight of war, fearing they might regret leaving Egypt and return. God intended for them a period of purification in the wilderness, a time of refinement and spiritual tests.

How then could they enter Canaan (the land of God) with their idolatry and the spirit of slavery still in them?

8- "Prepared Ones": Meaning those who walked in an organized manner contrary to what one might imagine of fugitives. They were not confused or disorderly. They carried Joseph's bones with them according to his command.

9- "Etham": This is the third station (the first being Rameses and the second being Succoth). "Etham" means a limit or border. The first time we hear about the cloud was after mentioning Etham. The cloud symbolizes the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, given to the Church

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after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day. We also hear about the cloud after the third station (with a similar meaning to the three-day journey).

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people." (Exodus 13: 22)

The bones of Joseph with the people during the journey symbolized the Church, which carries the memory of the saints who preceded and rested (the Synaxis and the Council)."

"The crossing for the people, and the destruction for Pharaoh's army" (Exodus 14)

1. God places them in a severe trial so that they may know that the path is not easy, but it is a path of continuous struggle. The sea represents the trials of the world before us, and Pharaoh behind us represents the enemy of good with his soldiers behind us. God allowed this distress to glorify Himself before His people.

2. Pharaoh went out after the people with an army of 600 chariots. That is, Pharaoh went out with all his human power (600 × 100), but they did not have the heavenly characteristic like the people of God. Therefore, they failed and perished.

3. With the first distress, the people's lack of faith and spirit of complaint appeared, as they longed for the life of slavery in Egypt again instead of the life of struggle.

4. Although the Scripture does not mention that Moses cried out, he was instilling in the people a spirit of hope in salvation, despite the cry that was in his heart, and God heard his cry. God did not tell Moses to stop crying out but to continue his prayer and to move the people. No matter how much the enemies of the Church intensify against it, God will ultimately be glorified.

5. Moses struck the sea with his rod, and the people walked by faith on dry land, as they saw the sea before them had opened up a path and they were saved. Pharaoh saw the sea split and rushed after the people without fear or trembling.

6. The illumination was by the pillar of cloud, which symbolizes the Holy Spirit who leads the journey. The Tabernacle of Meeting symbolized Christ in the midst of His people. The cloud symbolizes the Holy Spirit who gives water for fruitfulness, and the fire symbolizes the Holy Spirit as He came upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire.

7. The morning watch: Also called the morning guard, this term came from changing the guards four times during the night. The night began at 6 PM and lasted until 6 AM for a total of 12 hours, divided into parts each of 3 hours. There was a guard shift for each three-hour part. The shift was called a watch or guard duty (watch shift), and the last watch among them was called the morning watch or the morning guard.

8. The Egyptians panicked and headed towards the sea behind the people, and at that time the sea returned to its original place. They were moving towards the advancing waters of the sea and drowned. They were fleeing from the previous plagues and terror. Thus, they fled from terror only to meet their death.

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." (Exodus 14:14, NKJV)

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- The crossing of the sea was a symbol of baptism, in which we are buried with the suffering Christ and rise to enjoy His resurrection.
- Moses struck the sea with his rod to return the water to its original state, symbolizing Christ striking down Satan with His cross to destroy him.
- We also, having enjoyed the work of the cross in baptism, traverse the wilderness of this world with our leader, Christ, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem.
- Just as God sent Moses to deliver the people from slavery, so the Father sent His Son to deliver us from the slavery of Satan.

Chapter 15: The Song of Victory and Salvation

1- Before crossing, all we heard from the people was crying, sighs, and complaints. But as soon as they emerged into freedom, they immediately praised. They praised joyfully for their deliverance from slavery. A soul still enslaved to sin absolutely cannot praise, but one liberated from sin cannot stop praising.

2- This is the first song in the Bible, written by Moses, and it symbolizes the praise of the redeemed in heaven, whom God saved and led out of the world to heaven. (Revelation 3:15)

3- Moses felt that the Lord was his deliverance and salvation, so he worshipped and praised Him as his God and the God of his fathers, and His greatness was revealed in His deeds. Those who praise are the redeemed people who were baptized in the sea.

4- The Lord is victorious in the wars stirred up by the enemies of His people, and He is powerful in that. This points to the incarnate God who fought and triumphed through the cross.

5- With His power, His love, and His nature... He is incomprehensible and invisible. Who is like You? There is no one else, unchanging and completely holy. All creatures praise His holiness; all creation worships Him in awe.

6- We only know of this praise from Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses; no other deed is mentioned for her in the Scriptures. From the prophecy of Micah (Micah 4:6), we understand that Miriam was among the leaders. It is a great deed to lead God's people and teach them praise. "With timbrels and dancing": where dancing was used in praise, and David danced before the Ark of the Lord. But this stopped because dancing was used in a way that was profane/secular.

7- As soon as the people crossed and rejoiced, trials and pains began when they felt thirsty. They complained against Moses when they found bitter water they couldn't drink. The Lord guided Moses to a tree that he cast into the water, making it sweet. This was the first lesson in the school of faith, but the people failed to understand the lesson that God can do anything.

8- Moses' first plague was turning water into blood, and the first miracle in the wilderness was turning bitter water into sweet water. The first miracle of Christ the Lord was turning water into wine (symbolizing joy). This is the mystery of the cross. Whoever accepts to carry the cross behind Christ, their life transforms into sweetness because they will ultimately share in the joy of the resurrection.

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9- Elim: In it are many comforts, palm trees, and abundant water. Thus, during our struggle in life, we move from periods of pain to periods of comfort, and faith grows gradually in each stage. Periods of comfort are a pledge of heavenly joys, just as Elim was a pledge for Canaan towards which the people were heading. The twelve springs of water symbolize the twelve disciples, and the seventy palm trees symbolize the seventy apostles (the crossing was from the old covenant to the new covenant), also indicating the twelve tribes and the seventy elders, meaning that God is committed and cares for each one in His people, providing for them, satisfying them, and comforting them.

Verse for Memorization and contemplation:

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

Therefore, the hymn of Moses the prophet is a hymn of thanksgiving that the Church has placed in its daily praise, being the first hymn, to affirm to its children and to continuously offer thanks for His work — the necessity of ultimate praise with us.

Our Coptic Orthodox Church is dedicated to hymns, praises, psalms, and melodies, teaching us to thank God for His great deeds with us. It is our duty to praise God when we receive any blessing, praising Him immediately as the people did when they praised God as soon as they left.

Topic 3 “The letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to Philemon”

The personal letter written by Saint Paul the Apostle to his friend Philemon, concerning Onesimus, a slave of Philemon who had run away.

The characters mentioned in the opening of the letter

Philemon

A Greek name meaning "lover," he was a resident of Colossae.

- Before his faith in Christ through the Apostle Paul (Philemon 19).
 - He made his house into a church.
 - Saint Paul referred to him as "our fellow worker" (Philemon 1).
 - He was known for his Christian zeal, generosity, and sincere affection (Philemon 7).
-

Archippus

A name meaning "master of the horse" in Greek.

- He was a Christian from Colossae, and some believe he was Philemon's son.
 - He served in the church in that city.
 - Saint Paul the Apostle sent his greetings to him in a letter (Colossians 4:17; Philemon 1).
-

Apphia

Seems to be a name of Phrygian origin meaning "to be of use" or "helpful".

- Apphia was a Christian woman serving in the church in Colossae.
 - Some believe she was the wife of Philemon (Philemon 2).
-

An overview of the letter:

1- It is one of the four household letters (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon) written by Saint Paul the Apostle from his first imprisonment in Rome around 62 or 63 AD, concerning Onesimus, the runaway slave.

2- The letter is filled with love and embodies practical application of Christian principles such as:

- Spiritual fatherhood and care: exemplified by Saint Paul the Apostle, who amidst his busy ministry and the issue of the runaway slave Onesimus with his master Philemon, shows personal empathy, overflowing with love towards both Philemon and Onesimus.
- Optional forgiveness and freedom of choice: Saint Paul the Apostle could have simply written the letter without sending the slave, but he chose to grant Philemon the opportunity for voluntary forgiveness, thereby enhancing its significance, and leaving him the freedom to decide regarding his runaway slave, Onesimus.

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- Polite request: Saint Paul the Apostle does not command Philemon with authority, but rather appeals to him with humility.

- Dismantling the principle of slavery: Saint Paul the Apostle treats the slave as a brother, considering him equal to a free man because in Christ they are equal. Saint Paul the Apostle did not abolish the institution of slavery through a revolt against existing laws, but through Christian love, acknowledging that Christ, in His glory, purchased both with His blood, making them both sons through a revolution of Christian love.

3- Saint Paul the Apostle mentions that he is a prisoner (verses 1, 10, 23), and he speaks about his hope to be released from prison, asking Philemon to prepare a lodging for him (verse 23).

4. Onesimus (the runaway slave) is the one who carried the message from Rome to Philemon in Colossae. The individuals whom Saint Paul the Apostle greeted in this letter are those mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians.

Introduction to the Epistle (Verses 1 to 3)

- "A prisoner of Jesus Christ": Saint Paul the Apostle presents himself as "a prisoner" to declare his solidarity with the slave in what he deserves as a captive, yet he does not mention he is an apostle. He uses the language of love rather than authority. If Saint Paul the Apostle lost his freedom for Christ, shouldn't Philemon lose something for Christ and forgive his slave?

- "Timothy": Saint Paul the Apostle involves Timothy with him in seeking forgiveness for Onesimus.

- "Fellow laborer": A partner in the work... Therefore, Philemon is committed to walking in the spirit of apostleship as a mature servant, seeking the salvation of every soul, hence caring for Onesimus.

- "Apphia and Archippus": Golden-mouthed says that Apphia is Philemon's wife, and Archippus is his son. Note the words of love and encouragement.

- "The church in your house": Philemon has made his house a church where believers gather.

- "Grace and peace": He reminds him of the forgiving grace of Christ, so he also forgives Onesimus, thus being filled with peace.

Love overflowing with abundance (Verses 4 -7)

Before asking anything from Philemon, Saint Paul pours out his love upon him, ensuring that his request for forgiveness towards Onesimus is not rejected. He doesn't forget Onesimus amidst his chains; rather, he prays for him, follows his news, admires his faith, and thanks God for his progress.

- "Hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints": This faith is the reason for love among all the saints.

- "That the sharing of your faith may become effective": He prays for his faith to be active, that its activities transfer to others who represent it.

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- "The acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you": This introduction by Paul to Philemon until the "Benevolence"

Onesimus

"Faithful servant"

The Greek name "Onesimus" means "useful." He was a slave of Philemon, one of the prominent Christians in Colossae.

He stole from his master and fled to Rome, where he met Saint Paul the Apostle. There, he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptized by him.

Saint Paul the Apostle sent him back to Colossae, along with a letter to Philemon, requesting him to accept Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother.

Onesimus accompanied Tychicus on his journey from Rome to Colossae (Colossians 4:9).

Tradition states that Onesimus later became the bishop of Berea and died as a martyr.

The request with Wisdom (Verses 8-12)

Indeed, in Christ, Saint Paul not only requests but commands. From the spirit of the letter, we understand that the meaning is: for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of your love which is evident (verse 7) and for the sake of love (verse 9), I command. Therefore, he commands in love or with love, the love of Christ.

- "Paul, the aged": Here "aged" signifies paternal authority, the paternal love of our teacher Paul the Apostle towards his son Philemon. He urges his son not to miss an opportunity like this, to do good, forgive, and pardon the one who has become his brother in Christ.

- "For my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains": What gladdens Philemon's heart is that Onesimus has become a Christian, been baptized, and thus became a son to our teacher Paul the Apostle. Just as Philemon was a son to Saint Paul the Apostle before. It is a testament to Onesimus's honor that Saint Paul the Apostle, even in chains during his harsh trial for the Lord, brought him to faith (through his teaching).

- "Now he is useful to you and to me": His qualities have changed; however, there is an amusing play on words here. "Onesimus" means "useful," and our teacher Paul wants to say that he has truly become worthy of the name and deserving of praise.

- "Whom I have sent back to you. He is my own heart": Onesimus felt that he had wronged Philemon, and Paul asked him to return to reconcile with his master. The word "my own heart" indicates that I love him dearly; he has become a new person from within.

Not by compulsion, but by choice. (Verses 13 - 16)

Saint Paul does not miss the opportunity to urge Philemon to forgive Onesimus. He does not compel anyone to do good deeds but gives everyone the freedom of choice. This is how Saint Paul acted with Philemon: willingly. For God gives us the possibility of righteous will and good deeds with freedom of choice. By His grace, He supports and assists us, initiates with us, walks with us, and completes it without forcing us.

All things work together for good. Onesimus' escape led him to faith, making him a son to our teacher Paul the Apostle and a brother to Philemon. However, the escape itself was not a good deed. Onesimus is bound to Philemon not just in temporal relations but in a

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brotherhood filled with love, making him forever inseparable from Philemon, even through events or death.

We notice the words of our teacher Paul the Apostle, filled with wisdom to soften the situation for Philemon. He says to him, "Perhaps" (verse 15), to consider Onesimus's feelings, not saying "flee" but "separated" (verse 15) from you.

Complete trust (Verses 17 - 21)

- "Receive him as you would me": Meaning, love him as you love me, so if you accept him, it is as if you are accepting me.

In these verses, Saint Paul the Apostle presents himself as a partner to Onesimus, the runaway slave. He tells Philemon, "We are partners," therefore, whatever debt he owes, I will repay. Even before Onesimus came to faith, I have shown you the way of life, so you owe me your own self. Saint Paul the Apostle will rejoice with Philemon when he sees the fruits of his love in forgiving his slave Onesimus. This is how Christianity operates—not through bloody revolutions to liberate slaves but through Christian love.

Conclusion Greetings (Verses 22 - 25)

"Prepare a guest room for me": Our teacher Paul the Apostle expected to be released and to have his freedom restored. Therefore, he requests that a guest room be prepared for him when he comes out, as if he does not expect any opposition in the matter of Onesimus. He trusts in Philemon's obedience and love. Then he sends greetings from the fellow laborers with him, perhaps reminding Philemon that he intercedes for them regarding Onesimus. This demonstrates the unity of the universal Church and the love of servants for one another.

- "Abufiras al-Masur is with me": Likely referring to Christ Jesus, or perhaps Abufiras accepted out of love for our teacher Paul the Apostle to be imprisoned with him.

- "Demas": He who abandoned our teacher Paul the Apostle in his second imprisonment (2 Timothy 4: 24 NKJV).

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In this Epistle, we derive several doctrinal (faith-based) concepts:

1- "Faith in Christ is the gateway to our life with Him. This faith, praised by Saint Paul the Apostle in Philemon, is the cause of love among the saints (believers) and is the root of all goodness within us. It is not theoretical faith, but faith working through love.

2- "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6 NKJV). Therefore, Saint Paul the Apostle mentioned the faith of Philemon as the gateway to all virtues that dwell in him, foremost among them being love.

3- "Who I have sent back to you, he is my own heart": Onesimus felt he wronged Philemon, so Saint Paul asked him to return to reconcile with his master. At the same time, Philemon's heart was moved with compassion towards the repentant slave. This practical example applies Christ's commandment: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). Our forgiveness of each other is a door for God's forgiveness of our sins, and thus we inherit with Him in His kingdom (the Lord, our Savior).

4- Saint Paul the Apostle dismantles the principle of slavery and turns the slave into a brother, equal to the free. Christ bought both with His blood, liberated both, and made them sons on an equal footing. Paul did not abolish the principle of slavery through a revolution against existing laws, but through Christian love. Philemon forgave Onesimus and granted him freedom. Knowing Christ truly enlightens our minds so we see everyone as brothers in the body of Christ (the Lord, our light).

"Do not place a negative perspective of anyone:

- "Who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me" (Philemon 1:11 NKJV).

- Onesimus was a thief and a runaway. He stole from his master Philemon while he was a slave in his household and fled. Later, he was imprisoned, and in his imprisonment, divine providence ordained that he would be imprisoned with Saint Paul, and his life changed.

- Often, we describe people with certain negative traits and refuse to believe they can change, although God is capable of transforming everyone.

- If you have in your mind that someone is unprofitable or cannot change, please change your mental image because God is still at work."

"Characters working with Saint Paul"

Epaphroditus

- A Greek name abbreviated as Epaphroditus, possibly meaning "handsome appearance."

- A zealous servant who worked in the churches of Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

- He brought good news to our teacher Paul the Apostle while he was in prison (Philippians 2:25, Colossians 4:12). Afterwards, he became a companion of our teacher Paul the Apostle in his imprisonment (Philemon 1:23).

- The Apostle shows his esteem for him through titles such as "our beloved fellow servant," "a faithful minister to Christ," and "a fellow servant in the Lord."

Aristarchus

- A Greek name meaning "good ruler," a Macedonian man from Thessalonica, and one of the companions of our teacher Paul the Apostle.
- He was the man seized by the mob and brought to the theater during the riot stirred up for the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:29).
- He accompanied our teacher Paul the Apostle from Greece to Macedonia and then proceeded to Troas (Acts 20:4, 2 Corinthians 8:20).
- He traveled with Saint Paul the Apostle to Rome (Acts 27:2), was imprisoned with him, as mentioned by Saint Paul the Apostle in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 1:24.

Demas

- A Greek name possibly abbreviated from "Demetrius," associated with the Greek god Demeter, goddess of agriculture.
- He accompanied Saint Paul the Apostle in his ministry and was sent by our teacher Paul the Apostle with greetings along with others from Rome (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24).
- He left his service and parted ways with Saint Paul the Apostle during his final imprisonment in Rome, and he went to Thessalonica, "because he loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10 NKJV).

St Luke

Saint Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke as well as the Acts of the Apostles. He was a physician by profession and is the only non-Jewish writer among the authors of the New Testament.

St Mark

Saint Mark, known to the Church as "The Beloved Disciple of God," was one of the Seventy Apostles chosen by the Lord Jesus for ministry. He wrote the Gospel of Mark, the oldest of the Gospels, and was the first to preach Christianity in Egypt.

Topic 4 “Light of Light”

In the Creed, we declare our faith, saying: "Truly we believe in One God... Light of Light." What are the truths of the Christian faith?

Truths of the Christian Faith

In our Coptic Orthodox Church, we believe that God exists and:

1. God is One.
2. The Trinity of Persons.
3. We believe in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.
4. We believe in the divine incarnation.
5. We believe in the unique redemption.
6. We believe in the One Church.
7. We believe in the inerrancy of the Holy Bible and the impossibility of its distortion.

These seven essential truths distinguish the Christian faith, and this living faith is incomplete without them.

1. The truth of the One God

So we believe in one God... This is how we declare every day in the Creed, saying: "Truly we believe in one God"... In the Christian baptismal formula, we say: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God", and we do not say: in the names... but in the name... and we conclude the formula with the phrase: "the one God". The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are filled with verses that affirm our belief in the unity of God.

2. We believe in the Holy Trinity

Our one God, triune in persons... just as we say that within a single human there are: soul, mind, and spirit... these three in one person. Similarly, when we observe in the single sun: fire, light, and heat, these three distinct and different elements, inseparable from one another, ultimately constitute one sun.

3. We believe in the divinity of Christ

For the Lord Jesus demonstrated this during His time on earth. For example, He was born of a virgin, lived in absolute holiness, free from sin. He exercised absolute authority over inanimate objects, plants, animals, nature, demons, sins, and thoughts. He healed the most severe diseases, raised the dead, created eyes from clay, resurrected Himself, rose with a glorified body of light, and rose and will never die forever.

4. We believe in the divine incarnation

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

This is how our teacher, the Apostle Paul, declared it. The divine incarnation was necessary for our salvation and redemption, so that Christ might die for us, lifting the sentence of death

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from us. This was achieved through His united divine and human nature. He renewed our fallen nature through the action of His united divinity and humanity. Thus, Christ saved us from two grave matters: the sentence of death and the corruption of nature that followed the fall.

5. We believe in the glorious redemption

Therefore, "without shedding of blood there is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22) So Christ died for us, lifting the sentence of death from us, and He died shedding His blood to cleanse us with His precious and forgiving blood of our sins. He died crucified to cleanse man and earth from the curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who... hangs on a tree." (Galatians 3:13)

Thus, the divine and holy blood of Christ has mighty efficacy in our lives, forgiving our sins, cleansing us, sanctifying us, establishing us in Christ, and granting us eternal life.

6. We believe in the One Church

Therefore, the Lord Jesus founded the Church when He redeemed us and sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He made us "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30). Thus, we say, "For we, though many, are one bread and one body" (1 Corinthians 10:17). The head of the body is the Lord Christ, and its members are the saints in heaven and the believers on earth.

7. The truth of the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures

"It is the divine proclamation in both the Old and New Testaments: 'For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21), and 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV). Therefore, it is incumbent upon believers to study the word of God, that they may be enlightened by its light and commandments. There are abundant proofs of the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures."

Questions about the Mystery of the Divine Incarnation

The essence of Christian faith is the Mystery of the Incarnation!! This means the manifestation of God in human form, to achieve supremely important goals, is the true axis of Christianity. Here, some questions arise, including:

1. Is it possible for God to incarnate?
2. Is there a conflict between the Divine Incarnation and the dignity and holiness of God?
3. Is there a necessity for the Divine Incarnation?
4. How was this glorious Incarnation accomplished?

1- Is it possible for God to incarnate?

A- Certainly, God can incarnate in any form, simply because God is capable of all things. If there is a necessity for the invisible Spirit of God to manifest in a visible form, then surely God can accomplish that.

B- Incarnation means that God became human without ceasing to be God. The invisible we have seen, the intangible we have touched. What had no body became a body in reality.

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C- The Old Testament is filled with numerous sensory manifestations of our great God, in various forms, all preparing for the Divine Incarnation.

Here are some examples:

- He appeared to Adam and Eve in many dialogues, walking in the garden.
- He appeared to Abraham in the form of a man, accompanied by two angels in the form of men as well, to inform him about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and to promise him the birth of Isaac.
- He appeared to Jacob in the form of a man who wrestled with him until the break of dawn, blessed him, and renamed him "Israel," meaning one who struggles with God, signifying his effort in dialogue with God and seeking the blessing.
- He appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush.
- He appeared to Joshua son of Nun in the form of a commander of the army.
- He appeared to the parents of Samson, Manoah and his wife, in the form of a man.
- He appeared to Gideon in the form of the Angel of the Lord.
- He appeared to Daniel in the form of the Ancient of Days.

2- Does the Incarnation contradict the dignity and holiness of God?

A- Certainly not... because humans are among God's creations, crowned and priests of this creation, created in the image and likeness of God... So what's wrong with God taking on the form of a human, especially since humans are the noblest of God's creations!!

B- The Incarnation does not contradict the holiness of God, just as the sun can cleanse a heap of rubbish without becoming polluted... In the same way, when God incarnated, He purified our fallen nature without diminishing His holiness, which is infinite and absolute.

C- Some imagine that we say Jesus Christ was a human who became God... but we do not say that.

D- Others insist that God condescends and becomes human. We speak of the Incarnation of God and not the human to become a God, because the human to become a God is impossible and not possible, but the Incarnation of God is possible because God is capable of everything.

A man to become a God is like saying an office boy sat on a Ministry's seat, but the incarnation of God is like saying the Minister walked in the guise of a beggar.

The simple story is that our Lord Jesus humbled Himself, descended, and took the form of a servant... What's the problem?

The problem is that there are people who diminish the value of humans, and consequently do not believe that God would descend to the level of humans at all. However, humans are the masters of creation, and they are created in the image and likeness of God. God respects, loves, and values humans. Therefore, it is not surprising that God descends, incarnates, and unites with us, even if humans are considered insignificant by some. The Incarnation elevates the value of humans and makes us partners in the divine nature.

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3- But ... Why the incarnation?

A- God's judgment on humanity for sin was: "You shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17)... "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). It is separation from God and the distortion of His image in humanity. Through the Fall, we inherited serious sin and corruption of human nature.

B- God's love for humanity, His desire for their salvation and goodness, made it so that God would not accept humanity's destruction and annihilation into nothingness.

C- Because God, as a wise teacher, saw that it was necessary to come down to us to teach us the way of eternal life, this was certainly possible, but for us to ascend to Him, that was impossible!!

D- He reshapes the image of humanity and renews our nature corrupted by the Fall and sin, so that we may once again be in the image and likeness of God. This we attain in the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

E- He dies instead of humanity, thus lifting the sentence of death from them.

F- Because He desired to redeem us, He took on our nature, like us but without sin, to fulfill the sentence of death that was issued against us because of our sins...

G- so that He may dwell within us, God has to be united with us, in the humility and condescension of the lover towards the beloved, to protect us from the enemy

4- How was the Incarnation accomplished?

Here we pose the following questions:

- Is God's appearance to Abraham in the Old Testament considered an Incarnation? Certainly not.

- Did Christ come down with a body from heaven, passing through the Virgin Mary like a tube or a jewel box? Again, no.

- Did God enter the womb of the Virgin and find in it a fetus named Jesus, unite with him, and come out of her womb as a human united with God? No.

So what happened then?

The Incarnation took place at the moment of the Annunciation, where the Divinity that dwelled in the Virgin took from her blood, but without sin, and thus became human like us in human spirit, human body, and human soul, but without sin.

The Word of God entered into the womb of the Virgin Mary, who was a virgin and had no fetus because she had not been married. By His divine power, He sanctified her and took from her blood and flesh to form for Himself a fetus. Therefore, the one born of the Virgin is God Incarnate, and not another.

God took on our nature and united it to Himself. He became the Son of Man, bearing our human nature and likeness in all things except sin. This is like a young doctor entering military academy and graduating as an officer without losing his identity as a doctor. The doctor became an officer without division in his person, without changing his characteristics, and without mixing within himself the qualities of the doctor and the attributes of the officer.

Topic 5 “Illuminated by the Light of our God”

We chant on the night of Abu Ghalamsis, after reading the Book of Revelation, and we say:

Heavenly Jerusalem... built with precious stones...

Heavenly Jerusalem... illuminated by the light of our God...

Heavenly Jerusalem... protected by the Lamb's protection...

And our Saviour in its midst places crowns on the heads of those who love Him.

The meaning of the word "Abu Ghalamsis"

Abu Ghalamsis is an angelic vigil, during which the soul ascends to the Heavenly Jerusalem, where the Lord of Glory, risen from the dead, is present, along with the angels and saints. For this reason, the entire Book of Revelation is read during this vigil. The first word in the Book of Revelation is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." The word "Revelation" in Greek is "Apokalypsis," and from this, it came to be commonly known as Abu Ghalamsis.

The Night of Abu Ghalamsis is also called the Night of Holy Saturday, and the Night of Joyful Saturday.

Holy Saturday

It is called Holy Saturday because on this day, the Lord Jesus Christ brought light to those who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. He illuminated Hades with His divinity when He descended through the cross and brought out all those who had died in the hope of salvation, opening for them the gates of Paradise.

Joyful Saturday

It is called Joyful Saturday because, on this day, the saints rejoiced as the Lord Jesus Christ transferred them from Hades to the bliss of Paradise.

For this reason, the Church offers hymns of joy and thanksgiving on this night, praising the Saviour for His great redemption and salvation.

What happened on this night?

He descended: The Lord, with the power of His divinity, descended into Hades.

He liberated: The righteous souls who had died, awaiting the salvation of the Lord.

He opened: The gates of Paradise.

The creation rejoiced: In victory and salvation.

The Lord Jesus Christ illuminated: Those sitting in darkness and enlightened Hades with His divinity.

Three Themes of Hymns and Readings

On this night, the Church focuses on three themes of hymns and readings:

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1. The Lord: "God, the living one who does not die – even if He died in the flesh on the cross and was buried in the tomb – He is alive by His divinity, which did not leave His soul for a moment or the blink of an eye, and His resurrection was on the third day."
2. My Light: Life in the light and the great joy that encompassed the righteous, who were in the darkness of Hades, waiting for the great Redeemer to illuminate them with the light of eternal life.
3. My Salvation: The completion by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for all humanity, and the great joy that encompassed the righteous who were in Hades waiting for the Redeemer. We rejoiced in salvation.

After leaving the church on Great Friday, we return to our homes to eat and rest until 11 p.m. (according to the schedule and circumstances of each church). We then return to the church to observe the vigil of Abu Ghalamsis, where we keep vigil by the tomb of the Saviour in a joyful service divided into three parts:

Firstly: Hymns of Salvation

Readings from both the Old and New Testaments, proclaiming that the Lord has completed the salvation when He said on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and descended into Hades, freeing the captives and bringing them into Paradise.

The victory and joy in the hymns of the prophets illustrate how their followers transitioned from: death to life, distress to victory, and darkness to light. This symbolizes what the Lord has done for us through His redemption on the cross. Here are some of the hymns:

1. Psalm 151: The Church begins its prayers with Psalm 151 in its beautiful melody. It is recited only on this night and is one of the parts removed by the Protestants; it is known as the "Small Psalm." It recounts the story of David's victory over Goliath after Goliath had humiliated the people of Israel, with no one daring to fight him. David could not bear Goliath's defiance against the people of God, so he resisted and defeated him. Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ could not bear the devil's defiance against His children, so He rose to save His people, defeating Satan on the cross and giving us the ability to triumph over him.
2. The Prophet and the People After Crossing the Red Sea: This hymn recounts how the Lord brought His people through the Red Sea, rescuing them from destruction and delivering them from Pharaoh. It symbolizes the Lord's salvation for humanity from the devil.
3. The Prayer of Hannah, the Mother of Samuel: She was barren and felt humiliation and shame, but God granted her the great prophet Samuel.
4. The Prayer of Jonah the Prophet: Jonah is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. This hymn carries the meaning of crossing from death to life. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, the Lord Jesus Christ was in the tomb for three days and three nights. Jonah's being cast into the sea saved the ship, and the Lord Jesus Christ's descent into the tomb saved humanity. Jonah entered the belly of the fish, which no one else had entered, and the Lord was buried in a tomb where no one else had been buried. As Jonah faced the sentence of death when cast into the sea but remained alive, so the Lord Jesus Christ took the sentence of death upon Himself, was placed in the tomb, and rose alive.
5. The Prayer of King Manasseh: He was one of the kings of Judah who did evil and worshiped idols, causing the Lord to become angry and allowing his defeat and captivity. While in prison, he humbled himself, repented, and prayed to the Lord, who restored his kingdom. Similarly, humanity, when it sinned, faced the punishment of being captured by the devil and imprisoned in Hades. All people who lived in

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repentance and died with hope for salvation had their darkness illuminated by the Lord's divinity, and the Lord transferred them from captivity to freedom.

6. The Hymn of the Three Youths: The three youths who refused to bow to the king's statue were saved by the Lord from the fiery furnace, where they walked inside, praising the Lord.
7. The Story of Susanna the Righteous: Susanna's salvation from death due to the envy of the two elders symbolizes the great salvation the Lord brought to humanity, freeing us from the death that entered the world through the devil's envy. Daniel, whom the Lord sent to save Susanna, is a symbol of the Lord Jesus who became incarnate for the salvation of humanity. Just as the two elders were caught and delivered to destruction, so, by the death of the Son of God for us, Satan was captured in Hades.

Secondly: The Reading of the Entire Book of Revelation

The story continues with the opening of heaven, the return of Paradise, and the hope of eternal immortality after this temporal world ends. The Book of Revelation narrates the story of the confrontation of God's children with Satan, their struggle against him, and their ultimate victory, enjoying their presence with Christ in His kingdom where "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Before reading the Book of Revelation, the curtain of the sanctuary is opened, and seven lamps are placed in the center, lit with oil as a symbol of the seven churches. The seven candles represent the seven stars, the overseers of these churches, and the cross in the center symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the reading of the Book of Revelation, the church is illuminated with candles. The priests and deacons descend with lit candles and crosses, processing around the church while chanting hymns in a grand procession that reminds us of the Heavenly Jerusalem, expressing their joy in the marvelous salvation accomplished by the Lord. The entire church chants: "Heavenly Jerusalem... the foundations (the first foundation... and so on)."

The Book of Revelation (chapter 21) presents some aspects of the splendor of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the qualities of its people, the children of God. It uses the imagery of precious stones to describe the beauty and grandeur of the Heavenly Jerusalem, where the children of God are the adornment of the city. "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Revelation 21:23).

Thirdly: The Holy Liturgy of Joyful Saturday

On this night, we rejoice in Christ who will surely rise on the dawn of Sunday, after completing the glorious redemptive mission that led Him to promise the penitent thief: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). This paradisiacal night concludes with the Divine Liturgy, preparing us for the feast's liturgy.

The rites and hymns of this night are special to the Lord. Therefore, half of them are sorrowful (reflecting Christ in the tomb and what He endured for us), and half are joyful (celebrating our salvation), as the Night of Abu Ghalamsis falls between Great Friday, with its peak of sorrow, and the glorious Feast of the Resurrection, with its peak of joy. The vestments are changed from black to white, symbolizing victory, salvation, and joy in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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All the readings in the church speak of victory and salvation after distress, commemorating the triumph the Lord has given us through His redemption. Thus, the church is joyful, and more processions are held this night with candles lit.

The church prepares the faithful through the hymns of this night to receive the joy of the Lord's resurrection.

On the Night of Abu Ghalamsis, oil is blessed and used in the sacrament of holy matrimony. It symbolizes the grace of the Holy Spirit, giving strength and stability to the couple.

The hymns and prayers of this night include several processions. It is wonderful to conclude with the hymn "How Beautiful is Paradise," which narrates the story of salvation and is sung on Joyful Saturday. Here are some of its verses:

Eternal in the name of God, exalted in His heavens... bestowing His gifts upon us, oh how sweet is Paradise. Life has darkened, there is no escape for me... wandering without guidance, oh loss of Paradise. Angels and saints, and people united... all wearing crowns, always in Paradise.

Topic 6 “He Lit Up the Darkness”

Our Coptic Church... a strong Church... with a bright, ancient history... written by generations with letters of light despite going through many events and hardships over the centuries: persecutions, heresies, and challenges. Yet, the faithful saints stood up to these with faith and loyalty, enduring much suffering. Here, we will review the fourth century, its most significant features, some of its events, and its key figures:

Famous Patriarchs

- Pope Peter (17th), Pope Achillas (18th)
- Pope Alexander (19th), Pope Athanasius (20th)
- Pope Timothy (22nd), Pope Theophilus (23rd)

Fourth Century

“An era filled with persecution and heresies”

Key Events and Developments in the Spread of Christianity and the Role of the Coptic Orthodox Church:

- The establishment of a church in Ethiopia through the efforts of Egyptians.
- The spread of monasticism worldwide, initiated by the Patriarch of Alexandria.
- Many people began coming to Egypt to study the monastic system.
- The spread of Christianity among Sudanese and Bedouins by Coptic churchmen.
- My Coptic Orthodox Church has always been a leader in education and a beacon to the world.

Among the Significant Heresies that Appeared in This Century:

1. A dispute over the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, with some claiming that she had other children after the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The schism of Meletius, one of the bishops at that time, who offered sacrifices to idols and took advantage of the Patriarch's absence to seize the Patriarchal throne and began managing the Church's affairs.
3. Macedonius: An enemy of the Holy Spirit who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit and promoted the teachings of the Arians, being one of them. He was appointed Patriarch of the See of Constantinople.

Another significant heresy that also appeared in this century was Arianism.

What is Arianism, what are its ideas, and how did it emerge?

The Arian heresy began during the time of Pope Peter, the 17th Patriarch. It had an impact on leading some people astray. The Church had always taught that God is one, a Trinity of Persons, and had never spoken of any differences between the Persons until Sabellius emerged. Sabellius denied the distinction between the Persons, claiming that there were three names for one God. The Church condemned him, clarifying that there is a distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, meaning that there are three distinct Persons in the Divinity. Arius then came to expand on Sabellius's teachings, and he fell into heresy when he stated:

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The Son is different from the Father in essence.

The Son is the first creation of the Father, made from nothing.

The Son is the intermediary through whom the universe was created.

According to Arius's belief, the Son is lesser than the Father in nature and rank, and that the Father is older than the Son. Arius taught many people this doctrine, attempting to spread his heresy.

Pope Alexander (the 19th Patriarch) taught in front of Arius that the Son is equal to the Father in essence, having the same nature and being as the Father, and he openly opposed Arius's heresy, which claimed that the Son is not equal to the Father in essence and that He is not eternal.

Arius initially spread his heresy in secret and then began to teach it openly, similar to how someone today might teach and say, for example, that we are born without sin, or that we do not inherit sin, or even that someone might advocate for the deification of humans! Instead of returning to the recognized Church Fathers to correct his error, he struggles to spread his erroneous views, causing confusion among the people!

Due to the Coptic Orthodox Church's commitment to preserving the integrity of doctrine throughout the ages, from the beginning of Christianity to this very day, many heresies and strange ideas contrary to Christian teaching and the faith handed down from the saints and the Apostles have emerged.

This is where the role of our Church Fathers comes into play in safeguarding this faith. Ecumenical councils were convened (which are gatherings of the shepherds and teachers of the Church from all over the world) to discuss the heresy or strange teaching, make decisions regarding it, and then communicate these decisions to all the churches. These decisions were also recorded for future generations so that they might know the great history of their Church.

In the Fourth Century - Famous Councils:

The Council of Nicaea

The First Ecumenical Council – 325 AD

This council addressed the heresy of Arius and the division and turmoil it caused within the Church. If it were not for the steadfastness of our Fathers and ancestors, and the crucial role played by Deacon Athanasius in preserving the true faith, the Church might have suffered even greater disruption.

The Council of Constantinople

The Second Ecumenical Council – 381 AD

This council was convened due to the heresy of Macedonius, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Here, Pope Timothy played a significant role, and the phrase "Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit..." was added to the Nicene Creed.

Birth Certificate of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

Overview of His Birth:

Parents: Pagan father and mother

Place of Birth: Alexandria

Year of Birth: 296 AD

Consecration as Patriarch: 328 AD

Residence as Patriarch: St. Mark's Church, Alexandria

Contemporary Kings: Constantine the Great, Julian the Apostate, Jovian, Valens

Influential Figure: Pope Alexander the 19th

Year of Departure: 373 AD

"So, who is Pope Athanasius?"

First: A Glimpse of His Birth

- He was born to wealthy parents.
- It so happened that some of the Christian children invited him to witness a Christian ceremony (baptism). He asked to join them, but they refused because he was not a Christian at the time. So he said to them, "Now I am a Christian." This coincided with the passing of Pope Alexander, who saw in him a young man with great potential.
- After the death of his father, his mother went to Pope Alexander, and he taught them both all the Christian teachings. They were baptized along with their household, and they distributed their wealth among the poor.
- Athanasius learned all the church teachings and was ordained as a deacon and secretary to Pope Alexander. He was preoccupied with administrative work alongside studying theological, literary, and philosophical sciences.
- He became a disciple of Saint Antony, and a strong bond developed between them, which increased his love for monasticism, asceticism, and contemplation.
- Pope Alexander later ordained him as a priest to be the voice of truth in the presence of the bishops during the assembly (synod) held at that time.

Second: Deacon Athanasius in the Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea was convened in the year 325 AD, at the invitation of all bishops of the ecumenical church, and 318 bishops attended to discuss the heresy of Arius. Pope Alexander, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, was present at the council and brought along his disciple and personal secretary, the young Saint Athanasius, who was 25 years old at the time and was one of the prominent participants in the council. He was tasked with defending the faith against Arius's doctrine, which claimed that the Son was not equal to the Father, and that the Father brought the Son into existence from nothingness. The purpose of the council was to clarify that the essence of the Father is inseparable from the Son. Athanasius responded to the heresies of Arius, defending the faith and proclaiming the true teachings.

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| The Heresy of Arius | Athanasius Reply |
|--|--|
| <p>1. The Father said: "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Therefore, the Son is lesser than the Father and is not equal to Him in essence.</p> | <p>1. The intention here is that He is greater in His divinity than in His humanity, but they share the same essence, as indicated by the words: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me" (John 14:10), and "All that the Father has is Mine" (John 16:15).</p> |
| <p>2. Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18), meaning that He received authority from His Father.</p> | <p>2. The Son, by His eternal birth from the Father, has inherited all authority from the Father. He stated this because He is of the same essence, and He equated Himself with the Father when He said to His disciples: "Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).</p> |
| <p>3. The Lord Jesus said: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).</p> | <p>3. The Lord Jesus spoke in several instances in His human capacity, such as when He said on the cross, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Luke 22:42), and also when He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46), aligning His human experience with divine authority, as shown when He said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).</p> |
| <p>4. The Lord Jesus said: He does not know the hour of judgment, as He said: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32).</p> | <p>4. The Lord Jesus told His disciples this to prevent them from questioning a mystery they were not permitted to understand.</p> |

- Many of Arius's claims revolved around the concept that the Son is lesser than the Father and that they do not share the same essence. Due to the extensive debates and the numerous discussions diverging from Orthodox faith in this matter, Athanasius proposed adding the word "equal to the Father in essence" or "of one essence with the Father." The supporters of Arius also proposed the addition of the term "similar to the Father in essence," but this proposal did not receive much support. Eventually, Saint Athanasius's phrase was approved, and it was agreed to include it in the Nicene Creed: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father."

- After this decision, Arius was excommunicated and anathematized, and the verdict was signed by all members of the council except for five individuals. Following this decision, all Arius's writings were burned, and an order was issued that any church refusing to accept this decree would be banned from communion and anathematized. Thus, the council effectively refuted Arius's heresy and affirmed the Orthodox faith.

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The excommunication decision was made by the members of the council because our Church is conciliar, not papal like that of Rome.

- Several years after the council, Pope Alexander of Alexandria passed away in 328 AD. He was the 19th patriarch on the See of Mark, and he had recommended that Athanasius succeed him. At this time, Athanasius was in the mountains, feeling reluctant to become a patriarch, but the people went searching for him, and they insisted until he finally accepted. He was ordained as patriarch in 328 AD, and later ordained Frumentius as the first bishop of Ethiopia.

- Emperor Constantine, influenced by the followers of Arius, ordered Pope Athanasius to accept Arius into communion. However, Athanasius refused, writing a declaration of his faith against Arianism around 330 AD.

- Saint Athanasius was exiled from his throne five times due to false accusations from the Arians. However, he faced all these charges with resilience. During the reign of Emperor Julian, Athanasius returned to his throne but faced continued opposition from the Arians, who were repeatedly attempting to remove him from the See of Alexandria. He found solace in prayer and facing challenges with faith. Eventually, he returned to his throne once again, and the persecutions ended, with his final return occurring around 366 AD.

Significant Marks in the Life of Pope Athanasius

- He was a profound thinker from a young age, due to his studies in theology and literature.

- He stood against the forces of darkness, heresies, and innovations that threatened the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

- His deep study of the Holy Bible and accurate interpretation left us with many sayings and ideas of sound thought.

- His most famous work is the book "On the Incarnation of the Word," which explains and confirms the doctrine of the divine incarnation and the plan of salvation, which some Arians rejected. He also authored the book "Against the Pagans" and "Against the Arians."

- He added phrases to the Nicene Creed that affirm the Son's equality with the Father.

- It was said of him: "He lived as a martyr every day."

- Athanasius was described as: "If Athanasius were made of iron, he would have melted. But he was as solid as a rock, unmoved by the divine care that made him so."

Lessons Learned from the Life of Pope Athanasius

- The Orthodox faith is precious and valuable; it deserves our defense, and we must know our role and responsibility towards it.

- We should not listen to any strange teachings, and we must review all ideas critically.

- Rely on the teachings and sayings of the early Church Fathers.

- Ensure that our sources are trustworthy and that they support the sound doctrine, referencing these sources.

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In the Liturgy

- Saint Athanasius the Apostle is commemorated, and his life story is read in the Synaxarium on the 7th of Bashans.

- In the readings of Great Friday: at the third hour and the eleventh hour, the sermon of our father, Saint Athanasius the Apostle, is read, and at the end of the sermon, the phrase is recited: “We conclude the sermon of our father, Saint Athanasius the Apostle, who enlightened our minds and eyes with the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one God. Amen.”

- He is one of the fathers who strived greatly to preserve the Orthodox faith, described as “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and one of the fathers who enlightened our minds and were a beacon in the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

- Among the important sayings about him is what Saint Jerome said: "If it were not for Athanasius, the whole world would have become Arian."

Where is our life in relation to this saint?! His life is not a legend or a story to impress us. The saint in the Church is the living Gospel; he is Christ who lives in every era before people. The saint is a living part of the Body of Christ, that is, the Church. As much as our connection with the Head (Christ) is strong, so is our connection with its members who are a cloud of witnesses around us, continually praying for us. Do we proclaim Christ to everyone through our ethics, behaviors, actions, and our beautiful image? Or is it possible that we might sell our Christ for the slightest things?

Topic 7 “Walk in the light”

Introduction Questions:

Perform an experiment by bringing: wires, a lamp, and a small battery to light up this lamp.

- Identify who invented this invention?
- Imagine how the world looked before this invention?
- How did people spend their day?

"The light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun." (Ecclesiastes 7:11 NKJV)

It is Thomas Edison who invented the light bulb. Before the light bulb, the world relied on the primary natural source "the sun" for daylight: "The sun for brightness, the moon for night; for the comfort of human life." (Morning Prayer Analysis).

However, as human needs required longer working hours, people began to think of "fire" to obtain warmth and light. With development and civilization, we reached the electric lamp, lighting, and electrical devices.

Discussion Questions:

If you were living before the invention of lighting,

- How would you spend your day?
- What is the significance of light in your opinion?

Light has brought about a new dimension to life, allowing humans to work for longer periods, enjoy more time with our families and friends, increase our productivity, and many other benefits. Discuss these with your friends.

This is about the lamp, my friend. What about you?

Have you ever felt that your presence made a significant difference in the lives of those around you or in life in general?

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

Reflection Question:

How does your presence represent light:

- At home?
- At school?
- In the street?
- In church?

And the Bible concludes with the book of Revelation, describing the heavenly Jerusalem:

"And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever." (Revelation 22:5 NKJV) Thus, the Bible begins and ends with light.

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Darkness was the first thing God decided to erase, and light was the first thing God chose to create. Imagine with me, my friend, that when God wanted to prepare a wonderful life for humanity, He began it with creating light!

The first gift from God to you is that He lights the path before you, so you know how to walk through life and how to enjoy the beauty of His creation. Write down three beautiful things you enjoy seeing around you:

Bring a candle and a white paper and sit in a dark room...

- Bring the paper close to the candle; you will find that the illuminated area expands.
- Move it away, and you will see the illuminated spot shrink.

Question: What is the meaning of this experiment?

A passage from the first letter of John states: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5 NKJV). This true Light that enlightens every person who comes into the world...

It is the way to the light and the true light itself...

We, my friend, represent this paper. The closer we draw to the source of light, the more we become illuminated and enlightened. We shine with the word of God and His wisdom, fulfilling His command: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105 NKJV). We shine for everyone around us: "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." (Isaiah 60:1 NKJV).

Sources of Enlightenment - What can I do to be enlightened?

Firstly,

- Enlightenment in the evangelical and patristic sense means that the light of God shines in a person's mind, enabling them to possess the discernment and wisdom guided by the Holy Spirit, leading to sound decisions and choices.
- Enlightenment involves drawing near to the source of light (like the example of the paper) and maintaining that proximity. God's command to us is to walk in the light and not in darkness: "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." (John 12:35). "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12).

Our sources of enlightenment:

1- Sacramental Practice:

Baptism: Through baptism, a person is enlightened by the renewal of the Holy Spirit in their life, being born of water and the Spirit. It opens our inner vision so we see what others do not:

- We see God as a loving Savior!
- We see ourselves in truth!
- We see reality without being deceived by the falsehood of this world!
- We see the path and walk in it with confidence.

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

Here, we can say: "Once I was blind, but now I see." (John 9:25). It removes the veil from our senses, the deceit of the enemy, and the illusions of the world. Divine light pours into the heart and mind of a person, making them insightful and wise.

One of the beauties and splendors of our Coptic Orthodox Church is its practical and spiritual framework for our relationship with the Lord. When we emerge from the baptismal font, we are born anew, proclaiming to all humanity that we have joined the family of "the enlightened in the world."

We are anointed with the holy chrism "the seal," signifying our liberation from the bonds of the adversary, and we become a temple for the Holy Spirit.

Then, as we partake in the Holy Mysteries, we live by them and are strengthened in them. Likewise, the sacrament of repentance and confession is instituted so that we remain pure and blameless, our conduct remains white, and our light shines brightly in the world, radiating purity and righteousness.

2- Prayer and the Holy Scriptures:

Prayer is the audible, visible, and tangible language between us and God. He hears our prayers and listens to our requests. The words of the Gospel are the best light for our path and a lamp for our lives: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105), "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light." (Proverbs 6:23).

God sends us messages, and His appropriate response to us through His word, "the Holy Scriptures."

Therefore, a true Christian never stops reading the Word, embracing it with love in his heart, principles in his mind, and a constitution in his behavior. Through reading the Word, the mind is enlightened and the person knows where to place his feet. However, if you understand the entire Bible and do not follow the commandments precisely, you will not see the light

3- The Holy Atmosphere:

Whenever we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, live a life of continuous prayer, and establish ourselves through partaking of the sacred, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56), and safeguard ourselves with pure hearts that glorify and praise God, choosing friends who are like-minded with pure hearts, enlightened minds, disciplined souls, and filled with God, we can live in more blessings, righteousness, and peace.

What should I do to shine?

Plugging in the plug is not enough to light the lamp, as over time the bulb may get covered with dust and won't be able to shine its light to others. Therefore, it must be cleaned regularly to remove the obstructions.

What are the obstacles that might be in our lives and block the light from others?

And what if it gets dirty again?

- Likewise, our lives, in order to shine for others, we must clean ourselves constantly:

1. Apply the commandment and practice it in our personal lives and among others.

2. Repent and confess continually.

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

3. Pray for others.
4. Conduct ourselves with meekness and simplicity.
5. Act with honesty and fear of God in our behavior and speech.
6. Spread the spirit of hope, joy, peace, and love to everyone.

The commandments are like a guideboard, or traffic signs showing: when to stop, and when to proceed on the road, and what are the places of danger, and the bumps that we will encounter so that we can be cautious of them... and so on.

Let us imagine this scene: "A cheerful and optimistic person, who has hope in life, regularly partakes in the sacraments, seen by people as calm, living in peace and joy, does not shout or get angry, strong in the truth, honest, follows the truth and respects those around him, and yet, has dignity and reverence in the eyes of people."

What do you think of this man or this woman?

- What do you like about these qualities? And would you like to possess them?

- What do you do to acquire these qualities?

If we reflect more deeply, we will realize that all these qualities are present in the Lord of Glory Himself. Therefore, in order to emulate Him, we must get to know Him better.

Conduct a study on the character of the Lord of Glory, Jesus, in the four Gospels

(qualities - behaviors - strength in actions and words - friends - treatment of the close and strangers).

Is there a fake light?

What do you think of this word?

- Often, we see different forms of people who appear radiant or influential on social media, such as bloggers. The world may present someone to you who enjoys great fame due to videos or content they share on platforms like TikTok or Instagram, for example, without purpose or meaning.

- However, people know them wherever they go - they receive many gifts - they accumulate a lot of money, etc.

Do you see, my friend, is this the light you're searching for? Or the reason God created you to reach?

In truth, fame, wealth, and gifts are not inherently problematic. However, when the goal becomes acquiring these things without a higher purpose or meaningful message that benefits followers, it becomes futile!

Personally, you might use these platforms to make people glorify God or seek Him, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

We can, my friend, use any means or circumstance—our presence anywhere—with the purpose of radiating light, love, and peace. In your opinion, what are the things that could extinguish this light?

1. Friends:

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

When they are different from us in:

- Actions and behaviors (lack of fear of God, lying, lack of honesty, etc.).

You must know, my friend, that at this stage of life, you are greatly influenced by your friends. They can extinguish the light within you if you follow them and are influenced by their words that are far from wisdom and fear of God.

2. The Ego:

When we imagine ourselves as more important, superior, or richer than everyone around us, the light dims. Simply put, when you let self-importance and pride steer your life, you distance yourself from the source of wisdom and light. It is said, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

Imagine with me if someone claims to be above everyone else, knows everything, and never makes mistakes... how will people perceive them? Will they allow the Holy Spirit and the spirit of teaching to work through them? (Because they know everything and don't need anyone to understand them!)

3. Moving away from the Source of Light:

- Often, you feel discomfort or lack of peace when you are distant from sources of enlightenment.

- Life with God is light, and distancing ourselves from the source of light plunges us into darkness. Darkness represents a life of evil and sin.

4. Negative Emotions:

Such as anger, which is like fire if left unchecked and controls your life, preventing you from seeing or living in the light. "A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression" (Proverbs 29:22).

Lack of gratitude or dissatisfaction, viewing things pessimistically or negatively all the time, blocks the light from filling your life... and so on.

5. Negative Thoughts:

Negative and unhelpful thoughts deceive the mind, making it unable to see things correctly, and thus not giving you a chance to be enlightened or illuminated.

And now, my friend, do you know how we can preserve the light within us?

At the end of each day, write down three positive things you are thankful to God for every day.

Write what you did today to maintain and strengthen the light within you.

Memorization

(From the Prayers of the Third Hour - Agpia)

Psalm 23 (22)

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.

Yea, 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 Gospel of St. John (14:26-15:3)

A chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. John may his blessings be with us all. Amen.

“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.**

Litanies of the third Hour

O' Good Lord, do not take Your Holy Spirit away from us, this which You sent upon Your holy disciples and honourable apostles at the third hour. Create a pure heart in me, O' God and put a new and loyal Spirit within me, do not banish me from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. **Thok-sa-patri Ke ey-you Ke agiyou ep-nevmaty.**

O' Lord, who sent Your Holy Spirit upon the holy disciples and honourable apostles at the third hour, do not take this away from us, O righteous Lord. We ask You our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Logos, renew with in us a right and life giving spirit, a filial spirit of chastity, holiness, justice and authority. Our Almighty God, the light of our souls, illuminating every person who comes into this world, have mercy upon us. **Ke-neen Ke-a-ee Ke-is-touse E-onas ton E-onon. Amen.**

Mother of God, full of grace, you are the true vine that carries the fruit of life. We ask you and all the apostles to pray for the salvation of our souls. Blessed be the Lord our God whom we praise each day, because He prepares our path as He is the God of our salvation. **Ke-neen Ke-a-ee Ke-is-touse E-onas ton E-onon. Amen.**

O' Heavenly King, the Spirit of truth, the comforter, who is every where and fills everybody. You are the treasure of goodness and giver of life, we ask You to graciously come and dwell with in us, purify us from iniquity and save our souls. **Thok-sa-patri Ke ey-you Ke agiyou ep-nevmaty.**

Lord, abide with us as You did with the apostles, when You gave them Your peace, we ask You to grant us Your peace, our Saviour; save us and spare our souls. **Ke-neen Ke-a-ee Ke-is-touse E-onas ton E-onon. Amen.**

Whenever we stand in Your Holy Temple, we are considered as those who abide in heaven. O' Mother of God, you are the gate of heaven, open to us the door of mercy.

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Anthem 2024/2025

(Our God is eternal
Our God is One in Three
Pantocrator, The Logos
Redeemer and Holy) x 2

All generations witness for Him
His creation gives Him praise
Tells of His might and His wonders
How this world His hands have made

We're peaceful in His promises
Guided by His teachings
We live by His commandments
We seek Him and His blessings

Our Church fathers and martyrs
Kept Tradition to this day
A life of Sacraments
My Church unique and firm in faith

My faith and my doctrine are glory
Unchanging the teachings and Holy
The Lord is my light and my salvation
The Lord is my light and my salvation

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