

## News of January-February

### 1. Christmas Liturgy:

On Monday, January 6, 2014, St. John Church in Covina, California celebrates the Nativity Feast by the Liturgy from 7:00 p.m. until midnight. The service will be followed by the Feast's agape meal in the church hall for all.

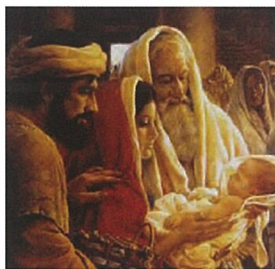


### 2. The Feast of St. John the Beloved disciple:

St. John Church celebrates the Feast of her Intercessor, St. John the Evangelist on Sunday, January 12, 2014, for three days from Thursday 9 (The Family Meeting), and Friday, 10 (The Youth Meeting), and Saturday 11 (The Vespers), then in Sunday 12, in the morning Liturgy. This is the feast of his departure; may his blessings be with us.

### 3. The Feast of Circumcision:

The church celebrates this Lord's Minor Feast on Tuesday, January 14. It comes concurrent with "Elijah's Ascension" and the departure of St. Basil the Great". The liturgy is from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.



### 4. The Feast of Epiphany:

On Sunday, 19, 2014, the Church celebrates the Feast of Epiphany, the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Feast's Liturgy will be on Saturday 18, from 7:00 p.m. starting with vespers then the "Lakkan" followed with the Liturgy and an Agape meal in the hall.



### 5. The Feast of Cana of Galilee's wedding:

The church celebrates this Minor Lord's Feast on Tuesday, January 21, concurrent with the Feast of St. Demiana. The Liturgy from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.



### 6. H.H. Pope Tawadros II:

His Holiness Pope Tawadros travelled to Switzerland, Vienna and Germany for a pastoral visit, establishing new churches and dedicating monasteries.



### 7. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

On December 7, 2013, His Grace Bishop Serapion travelled to New York and attended the Enthronement of H.G. Bishop David as the first Bishop on New York and New England Dioceses, and delivered a speech.



### 8. St. John's Retreat for the Engaged:

On Saturday, December 7, 2013, the church held her one-day-retreat for the engaged couples from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Fr. Gawargious Kolta, of St. John led all the items of the event.

### 9. St. John Seniors' Cruise to Mexico:

St. John Church Senior Citizens' Fellowship holds its first cruise in the year 2014 to Mexico, passing by Catalina Island, and Ensenada. The cruise starts May 12 to May 16, 2014. The price is \$590.00; for early reservation, call Maher Saleh Tel: (626) 2226558- or Hoda Ghazar Tel: (626) 9054705-.

### 10. Feast of St. Anthony (Thursday 30):

St. John church celebrates the feast by a trip to his monastery on Saturday, February 1, 2014. Reserve your place in the bus from the church book-store.



### 11. Jonah's fast (February 10 – 12):

The three-day-fast of Nineveh starts from Monday, February 10, to Wednesday 12. There will be daily Liturgies from 12 noon until 3:00 p.m. The feast of Jonah, Thursday, Feb. 13 and its Liturgy will be from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. May the Lord accept our fasting and prayers, especially for our persecuted church and Copts in Egypt.

12. Remember to renew your St. John Magazine subscription for the New Year; and to give a generous donation to help in the completion of the church and paying its debts (\$ 3.5 millions).

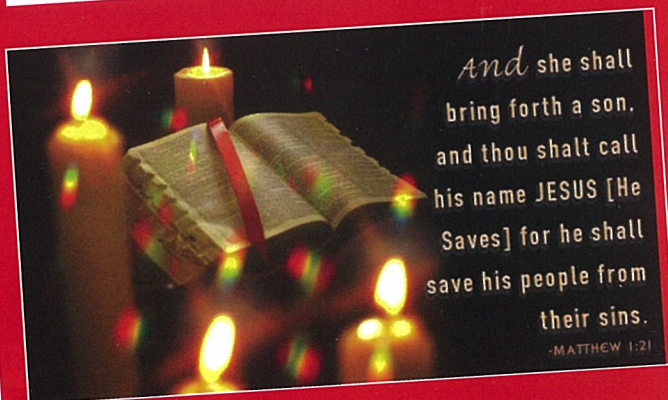
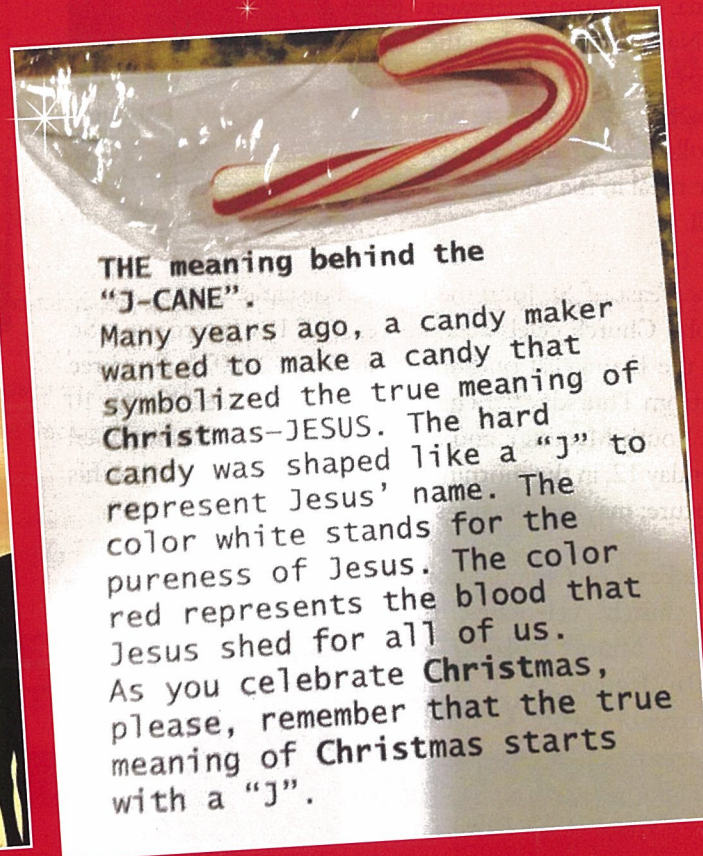
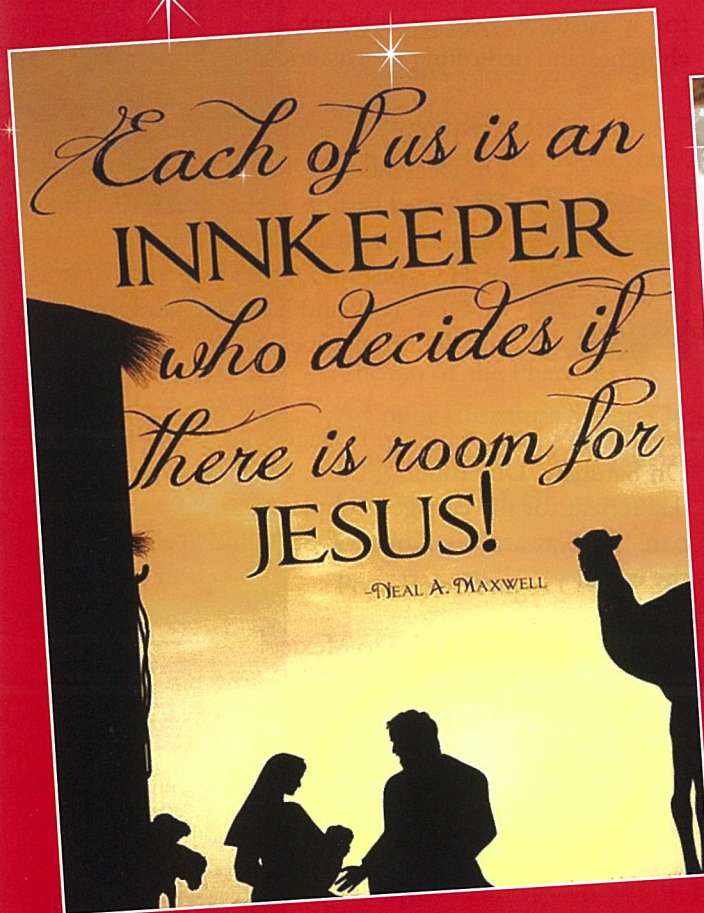
Happy New Year

2014





# Quotes & Verses



Season's Greetings





# Joyful Tidings

by H. H. Pope Shenouda III



IN THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR, I would like to tell you a word of hope and encouragement. I want the New Year to shine upon us with great light and joy from heaven. For by the birth of our LORD Jesus Christ, Joy, peace and hope were born. The birth of the LORD was good news to all people. In the day of His birth, the angel said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10, 11). This statement contains the entire Christian message. Christianity came to spread this good news. The Apostles' preaching was passing the good news to all people telling them: Salvation has come. John the Baptist was preaching, "The Kingdom of God is at hand. (Matt. 3:2). We as religious people, have no other work except preaching to people of this great joy. It is your message to carry the gospel of joy to everyone. Christ came up with a religion of joy to all people that carry salvation, redemption, to break the gates of hell and open the doors of Paradise (Lk. 23:43). When Zacchaeus received Christ with joy, the Lord said, "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Lk. 19:9).

## The Reasons of Joy:

"Rejoice in the LORD always and again I say rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Rejoice for the reconciliation had happened between heaven and earth. Rejoice for you sins have been removed and God will not remember them (Jer.31:34). Rejoice because the LORD shall wash you, and you will "become whiter than snow". Truly it is the good news of salvation. The LORD

said about it, "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD and they shall be My people and I shall be their GOD, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart...I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jer. 24:7 & 31:33).

**A Hopeful Look:** We want this year to have the hopeful and optimistic look that can always see joy in everything. There are some people who complicate things and spread the spirit of hopelessness and despair around them. They close the opened doors of hope. These people do not have the voice of God, because God's voice says that He came "To heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Lk. 4:18, 19). God also said, "How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaim salvation" (Isa. 52:7). This is what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take away from you" (Jn. 16:22).

## Make Others Happy:

Draw a smile on every lip and implant hope always. God does not want you to live in depression. Someone may ask, "How can I rejoice when there are many things causing pain, grief and depression; the doors are shut, the problems are complicated and many sins are drag me away from God?" My answer is: Hope solves all these. Say to the people, every problem has a solution and every closed door has a key, every sin has repentance and forgiveness. Every dispute with God can be reconciled by the grace. Therefore, live always in hope, train yourself to "rejoice in hope" (Rom. 12:12). Be a song in people's hearts, say to every weak person there is a divine power to hold you up. "Strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:12). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

I am greatly surprised by those who are depressed even in the religious surroundings! Even grief and weeping in Christianity are mingled with joy, peace and hope. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "you will weep and lament...but your sorrow will be turned into joy...you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one can take away from you" (Jn. 16:20-22; see also 2 Cor. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1). "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matt. 10:30).

**The Song of the Barren:** It is a wonderful passage in the Bible that calls to this wonderful hope and joy in the Lord, no matter how the outer circumstances are pressing. But listen to what the Bible says to the barren, "Sing, O barren, you who have not borne, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of a married woman, says the Lord" (Isa. 54:1).



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# What is this I hear about you?!

Let us read Luke Chapter 16: 1- 12,

“He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’

Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’

**So he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’**

And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are shrewder in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Hear the Lord’s question. “What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship”. This is the question the Lord is always asking you while you are alive here on earth. The servant was forced to sit with himself and consider what can he do to retain his spot by retaining at least some of it and not losing it all



and also have some friends outside when he gets kicked out. He makes friends by giving them a discount on what they really owe. That way he can improve his reputation.

## **Stewardship: what is it?**

Structurally, the story in Chapter 16 comes straight after the story of the prodigal son.

Here the servant knew he had a responsibility and that one day, he will have to give an account of his stewardship. This goes for all humans without exception. We have a lot of responsibilities in life. As students, as parents as children, as servants. Think about our earthly responsibilities for which we will have to give account. As parents, if we neglect our responsibilities, we will be held accountable. You know that if some authorities believe that parents cannot raise their children, they take the children away for their own safety because there has been a failure in the parental responsibility. So in this there is stewardship and responsibility. In church, a deacon or a priest or a bishop is responsible for their service and it’s a personal responsibility. God gives each person the power to deal with that responsibility. So in our life of works and responsibility to God, He will, and continue, to ask us the same question: “What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship”.

So how do we do that? Here are some practical tips.... Start by taking responsibility for your time. You have 24 hours in a day. How do you use that time? Time is one of the things that once it passes, you can never get back.

The other thing is how you handle responsibility of your health and the choices you make in that respect. You also have responsibility for your senses. What you see, what you hear and what you think about. Do you fill your mind and nurture it with the right things: knowledge, intellect and purity.

We are also responsible for the way we handle and think about money. Money seems to control every aspect of our life now. We are responsible for not letting it control our life and developing self-discipline in this respect.





We are also responsible for our environment that God has created for us, to look after it. Consider how much greenhouse gases we release as humans and how much we have destroyed the environment.

These are all responsibilities which we have – we require the discipline and the inclination to care about them and to be able to give a proper account to God with respect to our life of stewardship, in service and love worthy

of the kingdom of heaven. Because without being faithful to these little things, it will be hard for us to be faithful in the bigger things.

The Unjust Steward: a Cheater, a Forger and a Prodigal:

Here we have a servant who conspired with his master's debtors and forged documents and gave discounts – a shrewd cheater and forger.

So we get to the crunch: why did God praise him and commend him? Because he was forward thinking, he

thought about what would happen when

he got penalized and dumped by his master.

He managed and thought of it well even though he had not been faithful in his stewardship. God reminds us that this is the attitude of the world around us, where people avoid responsibility.

## Lessons:

So what do we take out of this? No matter

how big or small your responsibility is, be a good steward and give a good, faithful account of this mission. And then you will hear the joyous words of our Savior: "Good and faithful servant, you have been faithful in a little, I will give your responsibilities over many things. Come and share your Master's happiness". This is an invitation from God Himself.

As for the person who neglects his

Accountability or lives in negligence and selfishness.

Consider the story of Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife– consider his honesty and purity when he said, "How could I do such a wicked thing against my God" (Gen. 39:9).

## The Coptic Epiphany Icon



In Coptic Art, the icon of the Epiphany has five distinct features, and they are:

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ immersed in the water: "Then Jesus, when he had been baptized, came up from the water" (Matt. 3:16). St. Paul explained that saying, "We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead...even so we also should walk in newness of life"(Rom. 6:4).

2. The Holy Spirit hovering over Christ, in the form of a dove: "And He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him" (Matthew 3:16).

3. Saint John the Baptist:

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him" (Matt. 3:13).

4. Angels bearing red and white robes:

The red color symbolizes the blood of our LORD, which was shed for our salvation on the cross (Rom. 3:24, 25), while the white symbolizes the purity which we attain through baptism (Acts 22:16 & Rom. 6:3, 4).

5. A serpent, as a symbol of Satan and sin, being crushed under the feet of our LORD, showing that He fulfilled the words of God to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman...and her seed...shall bruise your head" (Genesis 3:15 & Hebrews 2:14).



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# FROM GLORY TO POVERTY: WHY DID YOU COME LORD?

By Mark Hanna



Commercials, sales, gifts, Christmas trees, season's greetings, holiday parties, fancy foods and decorated homes... all overshadow the reality of a poor boy born in a manger to a virgin mother whose name was Jesus. Nearly 2000 years ago when the Lord Jesus was born, no one realized that Jacob's ladder had finally touched down on earth and the Son of God Himself came down to our world. It amazes me how the world expected the coming of the Messiah for generations, and when He finally did come their searching eyes completely missed Him. "He was in the world and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. (John 1:10-11) Have we become a similar breed, not acknowledging Him either? These thoughts led me to wonder how many of us today truly understand why God actually left all the heavenly glory and became man? The Son of God became man in order that the sons of men become sons of God. Since Adam's fall, God's promise was finally fulfilled that a Savior would be born from the woman's seed (Eve's) who would finally crush the head of the serpent (Satan). Christ's nativity was the first step in the fulfillment of that promise. That was a great day for all humanity. Yet earth did not celebrate. Instead, the hosts of heaven rejoiced for and on our behalf. St. John the Apostle introduced Christ in his gospel saying, "No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son, who is in the bo-

som of the Father, He has declared Him" (Jn.1:18). What a great act of God's love and mercy! Although we did nothing to deserve it (quite the contrary), yet He desired to restore us once again to our original state (St. Gregory the Great). Mankind in God's image and likeness was His delight amongst all His creation. On the sixth day of creation God spoke in the Trinity saying, "Let Us make man in Our image." (Gen. 1:26). We were created as a mirror of God's nature, holy and divine, yet disobeying His commandment, we defiled this immortal nature and were sentenced to death as earthly beings. It was always God's desire to recreate us once again, restoring us to His intended glory prepared for us from the beginning. Since no other way was possible except through His own life-giving touch, He sent His Son to us so that we may become a new creation through Him. As St. Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29) In the fullness of time, God was born from the blessed Virgin Mary and appeared on earth as one of us in human flesh and blood. As our salvation was His only goal, He died on the cross offering Himself on our behalf as a sacrifice so that His immortal life-giving flesh and precious blood would once again ignite His divinity in us. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself made that eternal promise saying, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Partaking of His body and blood is partaking of God in His fullness, His immortality. Let us never forget that in so partaking of Him, we become like Him. Therefore God became like us to once again make us in His image. The Church fathers wisely summed up this great love story saying, "He took what belonged to us and gave us what belonged to Him."

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## What Child is This?!

+ Some say He was just a good teacher, but good teachers don't claim to be God.

+Some say He was merely a good example, but good examples don't mingle with prostitutes and sinners.

+ Some say He was a madman, but madmen don't speak that great wisdom He spoke.

+Some say He was a crazed fanatic, but crazed fanatics don't draw children to themselves or attract men of intellect like Paul or Luke to be His followers.

+ Some say He was a religious phony, but phonies don't rise from the dead.

+ Some say He was only a phantom, but phantoms can't give their flesh and blood to be crucified.

+Some say He was only a myth, but myths don't set the calendar of history.

+The Apostle Thomas expressed it perfectly when he saw Jesus after His resurrection, and exclaimed, "My Lord and My God" (Jn.20:28).

## Readers' Corner

### Microwave or slow cooked?

Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; LORD!"

(Psa. 27:13).

In our society and culture today, we like to have it "our way", and we like to have it "now". I often think of the T.V. commercials for cash settlements, in which everyone is shouting "I want my money now". Whether we mean to or not, we often take this mentality when it comes to our faith. We look for God to answer immediately and on the spot. We want to know today in which way to go, and not wait until tomorrow.

I often fall into this routine myself, and I call it microwave faith. If I'm hungry, and short on time (as I often am) I love to throw something into the microwave, eat, and run. When I ask God where He wants me to go and what He wants me to do, I tend to expect the same results. Pray, questions answered, and then off I go to the next task on my list for the day. The problem with this mentality is that we lose heart if we don't get our answers right away. When we lose heart, we tend to pray on it less and less; to the point where in my experience, I will make a decision from my flesh, and not in the Spirit. God sometimes responds immediately, yet often He is the God who enjoys a good slow cooking. Let's be honest...if given the choice of a microwave burrito, or a slow cooked pulled meat sandwich; which would you choose? God wants to transform our minds to see things His way, and to think as He thinks. To do this, it sometimes takes a slow cooking process.



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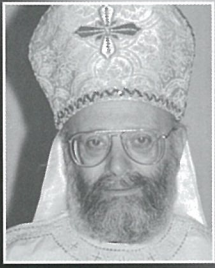
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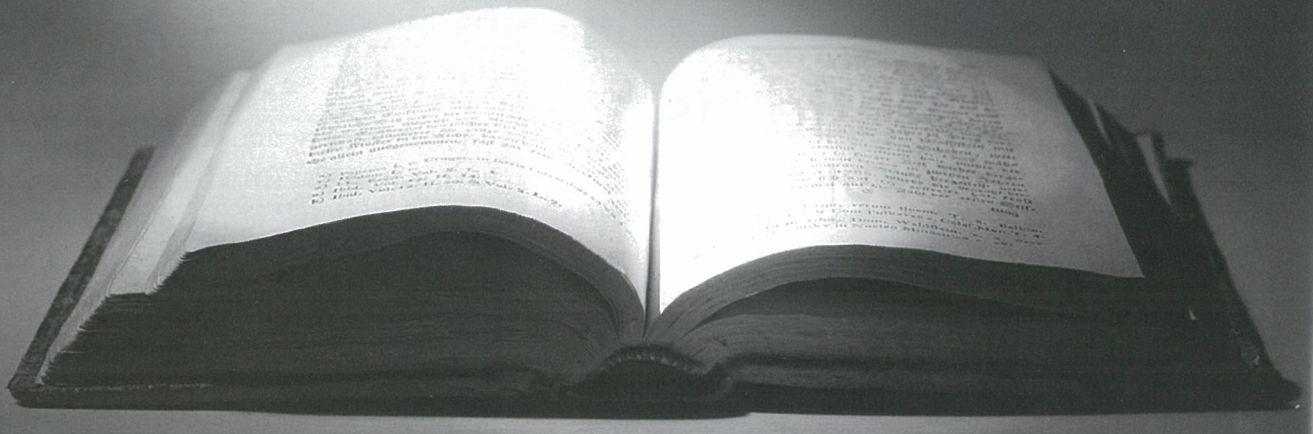
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# The Wonders of the Bible

by Fr. Augustinos R. Hanna



The Bible is more wonderful than all other books in its:

## ORIGIN AND CONSTRUCTION:

No one man or group of men planned the Bible. It was written in different lands over a period of 1600 years. The very existence of such a book is an overwhelming proof that the Bible is not of man, but that it is a production of God. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

## UNITY:

The Bible is one great book with one great theme, though it contains 66 separate volumes written by 40 authors, in three different languages (Hebrew- Greek- Aramaic), upon different topics, and under different circumstances. The close fitting together of these varied books into one great book proves someone directed the writing of each and planned the whole. Who could possibly have done it but God? One unity, No contradiction, and each book completes the other and explains it.

## CIRCULATION:

The Bible, was the first book to be printed (1450 A.D.), and is the best seller of the day. Probably 50,000,000 copies a year come out. This number of Bibles, if

stacked one on top of the other, would stand over 70 miles high! The circulation of other books is computed by thousands, the Bible by millions.

## AGE NOT AFFECTING ITS PRESENT DAY APPEAL:

The Bible is not the oldest book, but though the first part of it was written more than 3,500 years ago and the last part nearly 2,000 years ago, today it is more popular than any modern book just off the press.

## TRANSLATIONS:

Some part of the Bible has been translated into over 2,000 languages and dialects, the whole of into 1020. Shakespeare's works have been translated into only 40 languages. Although the Bible is an oriental and foreign book, it has transcended all national boundaries and is received by all peoples as their very own book

## INTEREST FOR ALL CLASSES OF PEOPLE:

Old, young, rich, poor, wise, simple, high, and low, men, women, youth and children are all gripped by the appeal of the Bible.

## INEXHAUSTIBLE MEANING:

Though anyone can easily understand its main message, the most brilliant minds cannot fully understand its deepest thoughts. The highest intellect can completely

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grasp all its meaning. Great volumes have been written on single verses.

**STIMULATION TO ART, LITERATURE, MUSIC, ETC.** Many of the world's masterpieces and movements have been motivated by the Bible. Literature- Milton's "Paradise Lost", Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress", Shakespeare quoted 60 times verses from the Bible. Art- The Last Supper, by DeVinci, Madonna, by Rafael, "The Creation" by Michael Anglo, and thousands of masterpieces by Morillo, Caravaggio, Rembrandt and others. Music- "The Messiah", by Handel; "Passion of St. Matthew" by Bach, "Parsifal" by Wagner, "Ave Maria", by Schubert, Masses by Mozart and Beethoven. Architecture- St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, St. Mark Cathedral in Venice; Notre-Dam in Paris; St. Paul in London; St. Petersburg... in Russia etc.

#### **CLAIM TO BE GOD'S WORD:**

More than 2,000 times in the Old Testament the words "Thus says the Lord" or similar terms are used. No other book matches such claims. Anyone who reads the Bible with open mind and heart is convinced that the Bible is God's word to man.

#### **PROPHECIES:**

The Bible records the most unlikely predictions concerning the future, yet at the appointed time they happen and the Bible then records the fulfillments. More than 330 prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Christ alone! Notice how Micah 5:2 about the place of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, was fulfilled 500 years later (see Matthew 2:5); Christ's birth from a Virgin (Isaiah 7:14) was fulfilled after 750 years; His miracles (Isa. 35); His Passion (Isa. 53). Christ's redemption in Psalm 22, and was fulfilled after 1,000 years, and a series of prophecies in Genesis 49:9-12 by Jacob were fulfilled after 2,000 years.

#### **SURVIVAL OF PERSECUTION:**

History shows that mighty Kings and Emperors have tried at times to destroy this book. They have died but the Bible lives on. Many were persecuted for translating the Bible, and others for just having a Bible! Thousands were killed rather than deny the Bible and the Christ it presents.

#### **CENTRAL CHARACTER:**

The main character of the Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the greatest wonder of the Bible, the Savior of the world. No other religion offers a living SAVIOR.

Let us then wait upon our Lord, and wait with patience and endurance..."His" that is, and not our own. Let us continue to seek His presence and call upon Him to help us with all of life's decisions. Let us not rush our Lord, but let Him guide us on His time...for His ways are perfect and righteous, as He is perfect and righteous. Let us not lose heart, yet lean on Him more and more each and every day.

Lord, help me to not look for the instant and the now, but to wait upon you, abiding in you, soaking in your Spirit as you transform and guide me in this life. Let me humbly serve you Lord and not myself. Let my thoughts, my actions, and my words glorify you God; as others may see you and not me.

*Mona Singh*

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## Readers' Corner (2)

Frhanna,

The persecution of Christians is a global epidemic. Pastor Saeed's life – a U.S. citizen's life – is on the line because of this persecution – suffering in a deadly Iranian prison because of his faith. Do we just stand by and watch?

The Obama Administration has abandoned Pastor Saeed, but we never will. At the ACLJ, we are redoubling our efforts.

Next week, I am leading a legal delegation to Berlin, where we will meet with key international leaders and ask them to help us Save Saeed.

At home, we are working with Members of Congress to increase sanctions on Iran. But we need your support to fund our global efforts for Pastor Saeed and for other persecuted Christians.

Jay Sekulow  
ACLJ Chief Counsel



Happy New Year

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# HE MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION, TAKING THE FORM OF A BONDSERVANT

(PHIL. 2:7)

God the Logos (the second Person of the Holy Trinity) who is the brightness of the glory of God, the image of His Person, upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), and the only begotten Son before all ages (Ps. 2:7) took the shape of a bondservant and became Man (but without sin). He, who in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth and all the angels of God worship Him, made Himself of no reputation taking the form of a bondservant. He, who is Holy and glorified by the praises of the heavenly hosts, was incarnated and became Man. He, who the heavens are not pure in His sight (Job 15:15), and He who charges His angels with error (Job 4:18) emptied Himself from all glory and honor, and came to live with us, the sinful people.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to serve us, we the dust, as He says in humbleness: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mat. 20:28). He took the form of a servant in order to serve us. He rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel, girded Himself, and washed the feet of His disciples (Jn. 13:4, 5).

He, who nourishes and provides for all His creation, lived on our earth a life of poverty. He did not have any place to sleep, as He said: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Mat. 8:20). He did not have money to pay the temple tax. He asked St. Peter to go to the sea, cast his hook, take the fish that comes up, open its mouth; and take the piece of money which he would find and pay for the Lord and for himself (Mat. 17:27). He suffered many difficulties and was treated with contempt (Mk. 9:12). He did not please Himself, but He was humiliated and reproached by people. St. Paul said about Him: "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me" (Rom. 15:3).

Through His incarnation, He showed His love to mankind. For the sake of our redemption, He endured joyfully all the reproaches and sufferings. St. Paul said: "... Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).



By Fr. Gawargious Kolta

Our Lord Jesus Christ made Himself of no reputation in order to accomplish great jobs and exalted purposes for the benefit of mankind, mainly:

1- Redemption of mankind: He was poured on the cross as an offering and the divine justice accepted his suffering and His life to fulfill our debts. Isaiah prophesied saying: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief, when You make His soul an offering for sin". (Isa. 53:10). Thus our Lord said to Nicodemus: "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" (Jn. 3:16). Through His redemption, We are saved from eternal death.


2- Renewal of our corrupted nature: We get a new nature when we believe and are buried with Him in baptism (Col. 2:12). We put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him (Col. 3:10). We were by nature children of wrath and dead in trespasses, but God who is rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:3-5). We get the power to walk in the Spirit and become worthy of the calling with which we were called, and qualified to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light (Col. 1:12).

3- Coated by the grace of the Holy Spirit: We the believers, receive the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Chrismation, and He gives us the power to overcome sin, and would not come into judgment, but pass from death to life (Jn. 5:24). The Holy Spirit will also grant life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). The Holy Spirit helps our weakness, and makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). St. Paul said: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Tit. 3:5, 6). As we are justified by His grace, we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:7). His grace helps us to fight the good fight in this world by disciplining our bodies, and offering Him our organs a living sacrifice, as we had put on the new man which was created according to God.

4- Declaring the Father to us: Man in the Old Testament got a wrong picture about God. He saw Him as a fearful







God, in the flood of Noah, or a flaming fire in Sodom and Gomorrah. After the incarnation, we see God as the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2), as Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him (Jn. 1:18). We see Him full of mercy and love to sinners. Now, we know God the Father, and feel His love, through His begotten Son, the Son of Man (Jn. 8:19). The Lord said to the Father in His intercessory prayer: "I have manifested Your name to the men ..." (Jn. 17:6).

#### 5- Teaching mankind new concepts:

By His incarnation and living on earth, the Lord taught us how to live in righteousness and holiness. No man ever spoke like Him, (Jn.7:46), and His teachings astonished the multitudes, as He taught as one having authority (Mat. 7:28-29). Jesus Christ Himself practiced His teachings, giving us a good living example. He taught us voluntary poverty, loving our enemies, when He asked forgiveness to those who crucified Him. He taught us the life of obedience when He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). He did hide His divinity and became without reputation (emptied Himself) in order to accomplish man's redemption. He taught us to be kind to the needy, to share the sufferings with the agonized, the sick, and those who are mourning. He bore our grief and carried our sorrows (Isa. 53:4). Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

#### How we can practice the virtue of emptying ourselves?

We feel that this virtue is difficult to be practiced for our nature leans to be glorified, cling to be dignified, lean to high reputation and seek pride. Many get offended and angry when somebody despises them, and some lose their temper when anybody declines their dignity. The society motivates us to refuse emptying ourselves. This virtue needs continuous practice every day to refuse the glory of this world. It needs to follow our Lord who said: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mat. 11:29).

There are some pieces of advice that can help us to gain the virtue of emptying ourselves:

1- Let us put the Lord's cross in front of us and discover His great love to mankind and His humbleness, when He emptied Himself from all glory and honor, became like a bondservant, and endured the shame of the cross for our sake. We, the sinful are not better than Him. We must not follow the desire of the flesh. We must discipline our bodies, our desires and bring them into submission.

2- We must know ourselves, we are dust, we are like the flower of the field that will pass away, and our lives are as va-

por that appears for a short time and vanishes. Without the grace of Christ and His caring, we would not have health, money, or reasoning, and we would be nothing. It is not our power or our knowledge that gives us life; so why are we proud?

3- We must not be overwhelmed by the riches and the pleasures of life and the lust of the world. If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us (1 Jn. 2:15). St. Paul said: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phi. 3:7). There is no way of comparison between the futile and worthless glory of the world, and the glory of the Kingdom of God. The Lord said that His kingdom is like a beautiful pearl of great price; we must do our best to gain it, lest another takes our crown (Rev. 3:11).

4- We must do all spiritual good deeds in secret, and our Father who sees in secret will reward us openly. We must consider that all the good we do is a duty and not a favor. The Lord said: "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say ..., 'we have done what was our duty to do'" (Lk. 17:10).

5- We must do all good deeds without murmur, even when these deeds humiliate us. We must accept all criticism without being disappointed. We do the good deeds willingly and without asking for reward. Also, when we practice emptying ourselves, we will not judge others.

6- We must not be righteous in our own eyes, or give excuses when we commit sins, or justify ourselves when we do mistakes, as Adam and Eve did (Gen. 3:12, 13). We should rebuke ourselves, when we are mistaken.

7- We must stop blaming and reproaching others. If we have to tell anybody his fault, let that be between the two of us alone (Mat. 18:15), in order to gain him for Christ. We must restore him in a spirit of gentleness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted (Gal. 6:1), for he who wins souls is wise (Prov. 11:30).

8- We should not accept praise from people; give the glory to God (2 Cor. 4:7). The Lord said: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Lk. 6:26). We must not boast for any achievement or success; it is from God and not due to our power or effort. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. It is God, who works in us and enables us to be what we are.

9- We must offer our money, health, and time willingly and joyfully to help others and accomplish God's work. We must not give the leftover; but the best we have, as all things come from God, and of His own we give Him (1 Chr. 29:14).

10- We should take pleasures in infirmities, in needs, in reproaches, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when we are weak, then we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10), as His grace works in us.





# The Sins of the Pharisees (2)

## Trusting in Rituals instead of Doing Good

By Jonathan Hakim



One reason that Jesus and the Pharisees didn't get along was because the Pharisees prioritized religious rules over doing good deeds for others. In the article about the Pharisees' hypocrisy, I wrote that the Pharisees gave more importance to tithing than they gave to justice and mercy, and focused on correct washing more than avoiding greed and self-indulgence. These were just two of the many ways in which they prioritized their religious rules over good works.

Another example is the Sabbath. At least six different times the Pharisees got angry with Jesus because he healed people on the Sabbath.

Even when Jesus did miracles and good works, the Pharisees dismissed these deeds with comments like, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath" (John 9:16). They told those looking for mercy to "come on other days to be cured, and not on the Sabbath day" (Luke 13:14).

The Pharisees misunderstood why God gave us rules and ceremonies to follow. The rituals we follow should draw us closer to God, so that we can love Him better. But if we prioritize the rituals over actions of love, then we've missed the point! Jesus praised the scribe who said that loving God and loving neighbors was more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mk. 12:33). The Lord Jesus told the Pharisees that God declares, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13, 12:7). Jesus told them that they teaching human traditions as God's doctrine (Matt. 15:3-9/Mk. 7:6-7). He challenged the

Pharisees with the question "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4).

In church there are many things we can do to assist our relationship with God. But Jesus made it clear that loving God and loving our neighbor is the center of everything God has given us, and love needs to be at the focus of our devotion to Christ (Matt. 22:37-40/Mk. 12:29-34). If we begin to think that doing religious ceremonies the right way is more important than mercy, justice, faith and love, then we have forgotten what true religion should be about.

There were other times when the Pharisees let religious rules get in the way of seeing the good in Jesus. They couldn't understand why divorce was wrong, since their rules had allowed it (Matt. 19:3-9). They wanted to kill a woman who had been caught in adultery in accordance with Moses' law, while Jesus wanted to show her mercy (John 7:52-8:11). They didn't like that Jesus failed to ceremonially wash His hands the way their Fathers had taught (Matt. 15:1-2/Mk. 7:1-5). Even after Jesus' death, Pharisees who had become Christians were still focused on circumcision rather than accepting followers of Christ who had different practices (Acts 15:5). The Lord Jesus did not eliminate religious rituals. In fact, Jesus' disciples baptized those who put their faith in Him, and Jesus Himself instituted the communion meal. But these practices are not what is most important to God - it is evil actions that defile us, not failure to follow religious rules (Matt. 15:10-20/Mark 7:14-23). Jesus said that even someone who was not following the disciples could be in God's favor if he was doing good works in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38-41/Luke 9:49-50).

The full meaning of the law and the prophets is in loving God and loving our neighbor (Mark 12:33, Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8-26), in doing to others as we would have them do to us (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31). This is the center of true religion (James 1:27). If we get so caught up in the practices that we lose sight of the meaning behind them, then we risk falling into the same sin as the Pharisees.





# THE STORY OF THE COVER PICTURE

A Coptic Stamp for Christmas Chosen this Year in England Painted by Fady Mikhail

The Egyptian artist who painted one of this year's Christmas stamps packed his picture with intriguing hidden meaning

THE COPTIC SCHOOL OF EGYPTIAN CHRISTIAN art is almost as ancient as the story of Jesus Himself, and its exquisite yet fading paintings, of Mary and Jesus and a procession of saints, have adorned the crumbling walls of centuries old churches and monasteries from Luxor to Old Cairo. But young English-Egyptian artist Fadi Mikhail has shaken the dust off this venerable genre of religious art and given it a colorful new coat and meaning for today.

Once it was lost, after the culture of Egypt's Coptic Christian community was buried by invading Muslim Arabs in the 7th Century. Now Slade graduate Fadi's campaign to revive Coptic art has received a modern boost, with a Royal Mail commission to paint a 'Madonna and child' icon for the £1.88 stamp (above) in the seven-stamp 2013 Christmas issue. Royal Mail's aim for the commission was to reflect ethnic diversity in the UK.

He is delighted by the chance to promote the art that is an articulation of his Coptic Christian faith. 'It's a big blessing, I feel honored and privileged to work on something that's so high-status,' says the 28-year-old, born in the UK to Coptic parents and now living and working in Hertfordshire. Fadi is influenced by Egyptian artist Isaac Fanous – one of the founders of the Neo-



**Fadi Mikhail**

Coptic school that aimed to resurrect the original Coptic style in the Sixties. Fadi studied under Isaac Fanous in California, where he was painting a new cathedral, before going to the Slade. 'Professor Fanous was a lyrical poet

with a brush,' recalls Fadi. 'I would sit for hours a day, just soaking in every flick of his brush and every stretch of his arm over the paintings.' Fanous would surely have been proud of his apprentice: Fadi's icon boasts a distinctive aesthetic of contemporary clarity and simple modern lines; yet the image is

packed with an ancient code of fascinating religious symbolism that harks back to the earliest Coptic painters.

For a start, his painting is called Theotokos, Mother of God: Coptic artists portrayed Mary as 'theotokos', meaning 'God-bearer' in ancient Greek.

Gestures, looks, even the colors, need to be unlocked by the initiated. Cue Fadi: 'The Virgin isn't looking directly at Christ,' he says of the picture.

'Instead she is looking just beyond Him in a sad way, premeditating what is to happen to him because she knows that he will suffer torment in his life.

Above: Fadi Mikhail explains that Coptic iconography is full of special religious symbolism Opposite: Fadi's beautiful stamp for this year's Christmas issue



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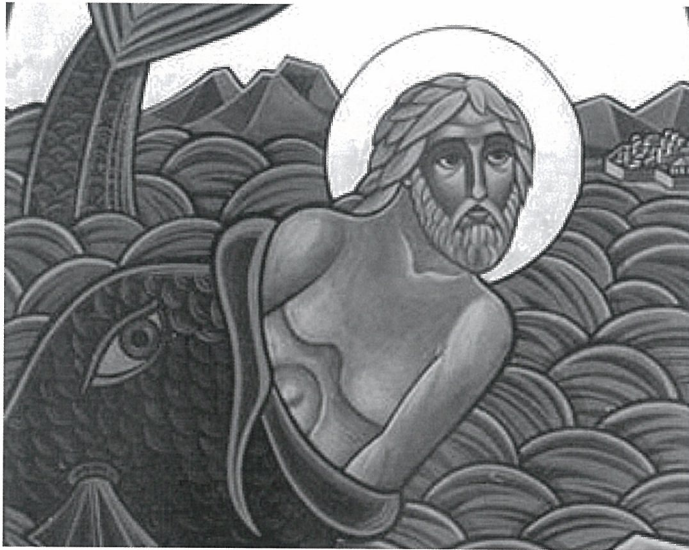
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# JONAH...WHO DID NOT APPRECIATE SUCCESS!

Edited by Fr. Augustinos R. Hanna



This is the bewildering story of an evangelist who did not want converts. Jonah was one of a type; there has never been another preacher like him. The first chapter described Jonah Perishing and we considered his bold Disobedience. The second chapter told of Jonah Praying inside the belly of the whale, and we recognized his late Decision. The third chapter revealed Jonah Preaching and we admired his Bold Declaration.

The forth chapter tells of Jonah Pouting, and we are amazed to consider his Bewildering Despair. These simple headings enable students to understand the message contained in this remarkable book. Dismayed by the kindness of God in sparing the Ninevites, Jonah reminded the Lord how he had predicted what would take place. Recognizing, from the prophecy of Nahum, the fact that the Ninevites were planning to invade Israel, and they were very wicked and cruel (Nahum 3 & Jonah 1:2), he feared for the future of his nation. Probably, this may be the only reasonable excuse for Jonah's escape according to his understanding. Fifty years later, Israel was devastated and

appalled by the excessive cruelty of the heathens. Yet even in the life time of Jonah God was endeavoring to teach that He loved everybody. It should be remembered that this message had never been proclaimed; it was totally new. Besides, Gentiles were considered to be unclean! I would like to mention here three points:

## 1. God is reminded!



Jonah said, "I told You so, and You would not listen." "And he prayed to the LORD, and said...Ah, LORD, was not this I said, when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish: for I knew that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore, now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." Jonah's conception of the overwhelming mercy of God is unequalled in Old Testament writings. He knew that a cry for forgiveness would reach the heart of the Almighty but, alas, did not trust the sincerity of the Ninevites. Even should they be converted, their descendants would become the murderers of Israel. Jonah believed that prevention was better than cure; better that the parents should die before they gave birth to a race of merciless persecutors who would destroy innocent Hebrews. Jonah seemed to say, "God, I told You so; I knew what would happen, but You would not listen to me! I am no longer any use to Your people or myself. So please let me die." THE PREPARED THINGS mentioned in the Book of Jonah suggest that God was equal to every emergency. He has not lost that ability.

## 2. God is Responsive!

"Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Jonah's sun had been eclipsed by his cloudy problems. His vision had become impaired, he was unable to see beyond his disappointment. Utterly weary, he sat on the east side of the city to see what would happen. Maybe, so he thought, God will see the folly of His ways and destroy Nineveh after all! Then God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. Then He prepared a worm, and an east wind, and together these became the communication line between the miserable prophet and the overflowing heart of the Almighty. We have not been







told much about the prophet's reactions, but it appears to be strange that a plant, a small creature, and a rushing wind should be better servants of God than an ordained preacher! Jonah was a bird with damaged wings, a well that had lost all its refreshing water. He loved his people so much that he forgot, temporarily, to trust God and His infinite knowledge and wisdom. It is so easy for man to destroy himself, but it is impossible for a man to destroy the love of God which surrounds him.

### 3. God is right!

At first glance it might appear as though Jonah were right in his assessment of the situation. The Ninevites did destroy Israel, but there were other details to be considered. When God refused to destroy the city of Nineveh, He preserved a whole generation from destruction. At the same time, He was giving forty years in which Israel had the opportunity to repent of its own sins. When Jonah's beloved nation failed to respond to the message of contemporary prophets and when the people erected idols and deliberately worshiped them, they became as guilty as the Ninevites and deserved the punishment that happened to them. The entire record teaches that God knew exactly what He was doing. We are not aware of the final reactions of the prophet, but at least we understand how Jonah would have appreciated the words of St. Paul who said, "I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites,..." (Rom.9:2, 3). Moses also expressed similar sentiments when he said: "Oh, these people have sinned a great sin, but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." (Exodus 32: 31, 32).

To love God is to love His children. A man without love is a tinkling cymbal, "a sounding brass or a clanging Cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). It would be interesting if we could decide which was the more effective, Jonah's heart or his head!



A United States Marine was attending some college courses between assignments. He had completed missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the courses had a professor who was an avowed atheist, and a member of the ACLU.

One day the professor shocked the class when he came in. He looked to the ceiling and flatly stated, "GOD if you are real then I want you to knock me off this platform. I'll give you exactly 15 minutes." The lecture room fell silent. You could hear a pin drop. Ten minutes went by and the professor proclaimed, "Here I am GOD, I'm still waiting."

It got down to the last couple of minutes when the Marine got out of his chair, went up to the professor, and cold-cocked him, knocking him off the platform. The professor was out cold. The Marine went back to his seat and sat there, silently.

The other students were shocked and stunned, and sat there looking on in silence.

The professor eventually came to, noticeably shaken, looked at the Marine and asked, "What in the world is the matter with you?" "Why did you do that?"

The Marine calmly replied, "GOD was too busy today protecting America's soldiers who are protecting your right to say stupid stuff and act like an idiot. So, He sent me."

The classroom erupted in cheers!

Keep our flag flying  
This is our pride and freedom



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# Christmas Is:

By Fr. Augustinos R. Hanna

## These are some of the meanings of Christmas:

Christmas is Emmanuel, "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

Christmas is a time to receive God's greatest gift and to reflect by giving Him to others.

Christmas is the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and in our hearts.

Christmas is "God so loving the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

Christmas is caring for people and sharing their poverty, needs, joys and sorrows (Romans 12:13 & 15).

Christmas is Jesus born today in us when we receive His body and blood in Communion (John 6:51; 56).

Christmas is giving with pleasure, without asking anything in return.

Christmas is LOVE.

Christmas is PEACE.

Christmas is JOY to the world; the Lord is come (Luke 2:11; 14).

Christmas is thanking our heavenly Father for His "Indescribable Gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Christmas is reading the Story of Christ's birth for the

hundredth time and still finding new meanings in it.

Christmas is time to help the needy, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Christmas is having a SAVIOR (Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:11).

Christmas is to sing with the angels; and to glorify God in the highest, to spread peace and joy on earth" (Lk. 2:14).

Christmas is to worship the Divine child because He is "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father and prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Christmas is to open your treasures with the wise men of the East and offer Jesus your gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matt. 2:11).

Christmas is to follow the STAR of Bethlehem with exceedingly great joy, to lead you to the SUN of RIGHTEOUSNESS (Matt. 2:10; Malachi 4:2).

Christmas is to be ready for suffering and persecution with the children of Bethlehem from King Herod and who is behind him, "The great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns" ((Matt. 2 & Rev. 12:3).

Christmas is to honor, magnify and praise the "Mother of Christmas", the holy virgin Mary as Jesus honored her; and who was God's chosen vessel full of grace. Learn from her tens of virtues like purity, humility, wisdom, love, mercy, service, patience, and peace.....





# POPE URGES EGYPTIAN CHRISTIANS TO

## 'BE STRONG, DO NOT FEAR!'

The Holy Father and the Coptic Catholic Patriarch celebrated Mass together advocating peace and reconciliation in Egypt.

by ELISE HARRIS/CNA/  
EWTN NEWS 12/10/2013

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis concelebrated his daily Mass Monday morning with the Coptic Catholic Patriarch of Alexandria, offering prayers for peace, and renewing his call for religious freedom throughout the Middle East. “Be strong, do not fear!” Here are the consoling words that find their confirmation in fraternal solidarity,” the Pope said during his homily, adding that “I am thankful to God for this encounter that gives me a way to reinforce your hope and our hope, because they are the same.” With these words Pope Francis began the reflections of his morning Mass, which he celebrated in the Santa Marta guesthouse of the Vatican alongside Egypt’s Coptic Catholic Patriarch, Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak. Turning his thoughts to the Coptic Catholics in the Middle East, the Holy Father recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah in the day’s first reading, stating that “We feel that the encouragement for ‘the faint of heart’ is directed



to so many in your beloved land of Egypt who are experiencing insecurity and violence, sometimes because of their Christian faith.”

Moving to the Gospel reading in which a paralyzed man was lowered through the roof by his friends in order to be healed by Jesus, the Pope highlighted how the passage presents “Christ who conquers the paralysis of humanity.” However, the Pope also noted that “the paralysis of consciences is contagious.” “With the complicity of the poverties of history and of our sin,” he said, this paralysis “can expand and enter into social structures and into communities to block entire peoples.” Pope Francis added that on the contrary, “the command of Christ: ‘Arise, walk!’ can reverse the situation.” “Let real guarantees of religious liberty be given to all,” he said “together with the rights of Christians to live peacefully in the places where they were born.

Recalling the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt, Pope Francis said that they were welcomed into a “generous land,” and prayed that the Lord “watch over the Egyptians, that along the paths of the world they might seek dignity and security.”



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# Congratulations



**St. John Church congratulates**  
Tamer Kamel and Jaclyn for the  
Baptism of their baby

**John**

May the Lord Jesus Christ bless  
his life and grant him spiritual and  
physical health and growth in the  
grace of God and the knowledge  
of his word and church.

**St John Coptic Orthodox Church congratulates**

Mr. Peter and Dr. Merrell Mina on the baptism of their  
first born son,

**Paul Gregory Mina**

We pray for God's loving guidance and everlasting

care; for blessings and happiness all Paul's life through.  
Congratulations also to his grandparents

-Refaat and Mary Sami, Esam and Sanaa Mina



St. John Church in Covina, California congratulates Dr.

**Mark Takla and his bride Sandra**

on their wedding. May Christ our Lord, who blessed the  
wedding of Cana of Galilee, bless their life together, grant  
them health, love, success and happiness and a Christian  
home built on the Rock. Congratulations to their two fami-  
lies.

**Congratulations to Mina George and Hazar**For  
the baptism of their baby boy

**Roger (George)**

The church prays for his growth in health, spirituality  
and full stature in Christ and long life.

**St. John Church congratulates** Joseph Tanious and  
Mariz for the safe arrival of their first baby boy

**Alexander**

May the Lord Jesus bless him and prepare him for the  
second birth by baptism and the third nationality which  
is the heavenly one that lasts forever (Phil.3:20). Con-  
gratulations also to his grand- parents, Geddo Samir  
and Teta Mona and all the family.



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