

SAINT JOHN

VOL 27 No. 290 January & February 2016
A COPTIC CHRISTIAN BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE
COVINA, CA



“THEY HAVE NO WINE”
(JOHN 2: 3)



**A CHRISTIAN COPTIC ORTHODOX
BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE
PUBLISHED BY**



(ISSN # 1530-5600)

21329 Cienega Ave. Covina, California 91724,

a parish of the Christian Coptic Orthodox

Patriarchate of Egypt under the Papacy of

H.H. POPE TWADROS II

The 118 Patriarch of Alexandria and the Dio-
cese of Southern California and Hawaii under

H.G. BISHOP SERAPION

St. John reflects the Biblical, doctrinal, and
spiritual views of the early Church in English
and Arabic.

Editor in Chief:

Fr. Augustinos Hanna

Customer Service:

(909) 592-8847

Annual Subscription

\$50:00 in U.S.A

\$75:00 in foreign countries

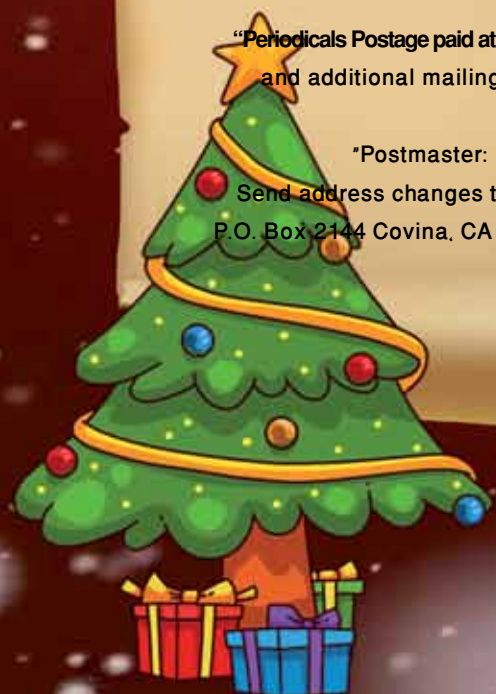
(as a suggested donation).

"Periodicals Postage paid at Covina, Ca.
and additional mailing offices

*Postmaster:

Send address changes to St. John

P.O. Box 2144 Covina, CA 91722-8144



*Verse
of the Month*



**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to
preach the gospel and the acceptable
year of the Lord"**

(Lk. 4:18, 19)

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Schedule & News..... | 3 |
| The Mystery | By St. John Chrysostom 4 |
| What do you mean sleeper? (Jonah) | By Pope Shenouda 5 |
| Blessings of Annunciation / Why was Jesus baptized?.... | By St. Ephraem 6 |
| When NOT to Rejoice? & Drummer Boy | By Fr. Augustinos Hanna 7 |
| How to Raise your Children..... | By Fr. Gawargious Kolta 8 |
| The Husband and Father Role / The Angels...By | Chris Charalambous 10 |
| Why Literacy?..... | By Jonathan & Rosey 12 |
| War is on the Horizon, is it too late to stop it?..... | By Paul Craig Roberts 13 |
| Heretic (Why Islam needs reformation now?)... | By Ayaan Hirsi Ali 14 |
| Barzilai who went home to wait for God..... | By Fr. Augustinos 15 |
| Psalms 32 (Contemplation)..... | Edited by Fr. Augustinos 16 - 18 |
| "I am the Way" was Jesus exclusive? | By Dr. Emil Goubran 19 |
| The Wedding of Cana of Galilee | By Fr. Augustinos Hanna 20 |

**SCHEDULE of MEETINGS and EVENTS
for the MONTH of September & October 2015**

| SUNDAY | WEDNESDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|---|---|---|---|
| + English Liturgy 8:00 - 11:00 a.m. *** | + Liturgy 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m... | + Liturgy 8:00 - 10:00 a.m. | + Liturgy from 8-10 am + Vespers; Bible Study 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. |
| + Arabic Liturgy 8:00 - 11:15 a.m. | + <u>Thursday Morning</u> + Senior Citizen Club 11:00 - 4:00 a.m. | | + Beginners' Deacons- Meeting 5: 00-6:00 p.m. + Elementary Meeting 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. |
| Servants' Meeting 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. 2 nd & 4 th Sunday. | + THURSDAY Family Meeting 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. | + Arabic Youth Meeting 8:00 - 10:00 p.m. | + College Youth Meeting 7:00- 8:00 p.m. + Catechumens' meeting by Fr. Daniel 7- 8 p.m. |
| TUESDAY English- Bible Study 7:30 pm | | | High School & J. High Meetings 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. |

Email your articles/comments/requests to Frhanna @mystjohn.org

Or visit us online @ www.mystjohn.org

Fax : (909) 592-5088 / Tel: (909) 592 - 0475 / Church Tel: (909) 592-8847

Church Book Store: (562) 900 -2694 & (909) 730 - 9976

1. Merry Christmas

On Thursday, January 7, 2016, the Church celebrates the Nativity Feast. The Liturgy of the Feast at St. John church, starts Wednesday 6, 7:00 p.m. until midnight. The service will be followed by the Feast's agape meal in the church hall for all.



2. Feast of St. John the Beloved disciple:

On Wednesday, January 13, St. John Church celebrates the Feast of the departure of her Intercessor, St. John the Beloved and Evangelist. Vespers on Tuesday 12, and the Liturgy on Wednesday from 8:00 a.m.



3. Feast of Circumcision:

On Friday, January 15. The church celebrates this Lord's Minor Feast. The liturgy is from 8:00 a.m. Circumcision was a symbol of the Christian baptism (Col. 2:11 and compare with Gen. 17).



4. Feast of Epiphany:

On Wednesday, January 20, 2016, the Church celebrates the Feast of Epiphany, the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Feast's Liturgy will be on Tuesday 19, from 7:00 p.m. starting with vespers then the "Lakkan" followed with the Liturgy and an Agape meal.



5. Feast of Cana of Galilee's wedding:

On Friday, January 22, the church celebrates this Lord's Feast (concurrent with the Feast of St. Demiana). The Liturgy is from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.



6. Jonah's fast (February 22 –24):

The three-day-fast of Nineveh starts from Monday, February 22, to Wednesday 24. There will be daily Liturgies from 12 noon until 3:00 p.m. The Feast of Jonah, Thursday, Feb. 25 and its Liturgy will be from 8-10 a.m.



7. H.H. Pope Tawadros II:

On November 26, 2015 Pope Tawadros travelled to Jerusalem to attend the funeral of H.E. Metropolitan Abraham, according to his will to be buried there.

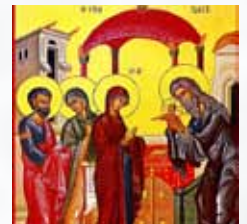


8. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

Bishop Serapion accompanied the Papal delegation to attend the funeral of Metropolitan Abraham in Jerusalem.

9. Feast of the Lord's Entry into the Temple:

On Tuesday, Feb. 16, the church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation, Christ's Entry into the Temple at age 40 days (Lk. 2:21-39).



10. Feast of St. Anthony (Saturday, January 31)

St. John church celebrates the feast of St. Antony, the founder of Monasticism, by a trip to his monastery on Saturday, January 31, 2016. Reserve your place in the bus from the church book-store.



11. The Holy Lent: (March 7)

On Monday, March 7, 2016, the church starts the Holy Lent, until Easter on Sunday, May 1, 2016.

12. Martyrdom of the Apostle St. James:

On Feb. 18, the church celebrates the feast of St. James' martyrdom, the author of the Letter which bears his name. His letter is known as the Letter of Works composed of 5 chapters. (Try to memorize by heart the last verse of each chapter; they are golden verses to live with).



13. A New Book (The Major Prophets):

By God's will and grace, it is expected that volume 4 of the "Bible Study through Questions" by Fr. Augustinos Hanna will be out of press during January 2016. It contains the five books of the prophets (Isaiah-Jeremiah-Lamentation-Ezekiel- Daniel).

14. Remember to renew your St. John Magazine' subscription for the New Year 2016; and to give a generous donation to help completing the St. John church icons and paying its debts.

St. John Chrysostom

THE MYSTERY



“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men.’ (Luke 2:13- 14)

I BEHOLD A NEW AND WONDROUS MYSTERY.

My ears echo to the shepherds’ song chanting no soft melody, but a heavenly hymn. The angels sing. The archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below, and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised up.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolding within itself, the Sun of Righteousness. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed, He had the power, He descended, He redeemed; all things move in obedience to God. This day He who is, is born; and He who is becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor by any loss of divinity did He become man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh; His nature remaining unchanged.

The Father begot in the Spirit, and the Virgin brought forth without defilement. The Father begot without the limitations of flesh; so neither did the Virgin in her child bearing, since she brought forth miraculously.

Hence, since this heavenly birth cannot be described, then neither does His coming amongst us permit too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a virgin this day gave birth and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of the birth I have learned to venerate in silence, and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech. For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of His works.

It is indeed the way of nature that a married woman brings forth new life; when an unwed virgin, after she has born a child is still a virgin then nature here is surpassed. Of that which happens according to nature we inquire. What transcends nature we honor in silence; not as something to be avoided, passed over, but as that which we venerate in silence, as something sublime, beyond all telling.

What shall I say to you? What shall I tell you? I behold a mother who has brought forth new life. I see a newborn child. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend. Nature here is overcome, the boundaries of the established order set aside, where God so wills. Nature here has rested, while the will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The only begotten One, who is before all ages, who cannot be touched or perceived, who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, which is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us He may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that we mortals cannot see.

For since we believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, we doubt what we cannot see, and so He has shown Himself in bodily presence that He may remove all doubt.

And He was born of a virgin who knew not His purpose; neither had she labored with Him to bring it to pass, or contributed to that which He had done, but was the simple instrument of His hidden power. All she knew was what she

had learned by her question to Gabriel: ***“How shall this be done, since I know not a man?”*** In what manner was the Almighty with her, who came forth from her? He was as the craftsman who coming on some suitable material, fashions to Himself a beautiful vessel; so Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple.

What shall I say? And how shall I describe this birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. ***The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon the sublime and heavenly throne now lies in a manger. And He who cannot be touched, who is incorporeal, now lies subject to human hands. He who has broken the bonds of sinners is now bound by an infant’s swaddling clothes.*** For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit. And so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of life. He takes my flesh to sanctify me; He gives me His spirit that He may save me.

Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken. For this day paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of goodwill diffused and spread all around – a heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and we now hold speech with angels. Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He has come on earth, while being fully in heaven; and while complete in heaven, He is without diminishing on earth. Though He was God, he became man, not denying Himself to be God. Though being the unchanging Word, He became flesh that He might dwell among us.

What shall I utter? “Behold an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” Mary is present who is both virgin and mother. Joseph is present, who is called father. His is called husband, she is called wife. The names indeed are lawful but there is no other bond.

To Him, then, who out of confusion has formed a clear path; to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.



What Do You Mean Sleeper?!



BY POPE SHENOUDA III

God called Jonah the Prophet to go to Nineveh and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Him. It was a call from God to a holy ministry aiming the salvation of every soul in Nineveh. But Jonah, instead, fled from the presence of the Lord! Didn't Jonah know that when he flees to Tarshish, God is there too, and God the Lord of the sea too!

The Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. The mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, but Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep! What a shameful thing that God's prophet was the only man who could sleep and did not call on his God! It was strange that the one who awoke him was the pagan captain, who said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God”. The ship is about to drown... because of your sin and disobedience.

God's work is very strange, He can “out of the eater produce something to eat, and out of the strong produces something sweet!” He could win Nineveh by Jonah's obedience, and could win the pagan mariners by Jonah's disobedience!

And what about Jonah, did God reject his ministry because he tried to escape? No, because Jonah repented and prayed from the fish's belly and learned obedience and said, “I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me.” In his prayer we see his faith, and see how God accepts repentance and gives a second chance. Isn't strange that God is still insisting to use Jonah for the same mission, to save Nineveh! Can't you find someone else, O Lord? Of course God has many to use and is “able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones”, but God's way as the Divine Potter, is to remake the marred clay again into another vessel and to make out of that rough stone a cornerstone. At this time all the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Jonah's message was completed by the repentance of the city of Nineveh. Therefore, no matter who you are and what have you done; God is ready to do everything for your own salvation and the salvation of everyone else through you. Let us learn to subject our will to God's wise and perfect will, for God's glory and the edification of his church.



The Annunciation of Archangel Gabriel to St. Mary included 12 Blessings

By St. Ephraem the Syrian

1. Peace greeting, “Peace to you” (in Today’s English version (Luke 1:28). “Hail to you” in King James & RSV versions.

2. Joy: In other translations, “Rejoice” & Congratulations.

3. Grace: “Full of grace” (in Coptic & Jesuit- Lk. 1:28) & Highly favored: “Greatly favored one”; and “Most favored one” in other versions.

4. Fellowship: “The Lord is with you” (Lk.1:28).

5. Blessing: “Blessed are you among women” (Lk.1:28)

6. Encouragement: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Lk. 1:30). “God loves you dearly” and “you won God’s favor” in Jerusalem Bible. “God has been gracious to you”.

7. Good news: “Behold, you will conceive in you womb and bring forth a Son” (Luke 1:31).

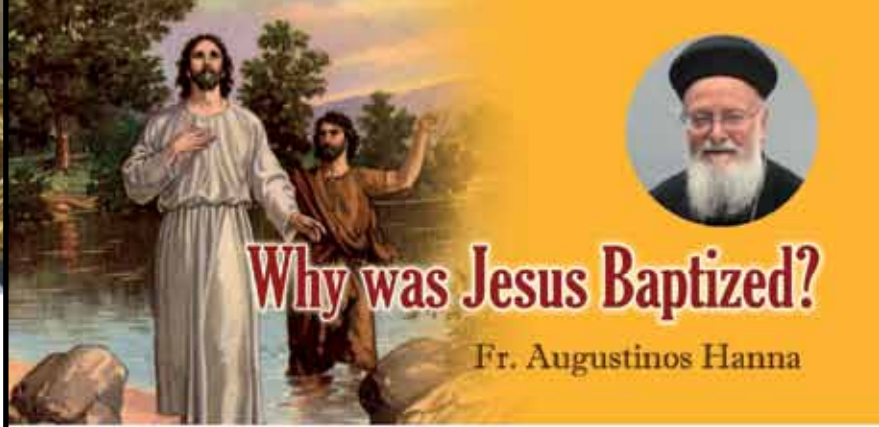
8. Call His name Jesus; a Savior”: “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21 & Luke 1:31).

9. The Son of God, and the Son of the Most High: “He will be called the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32); “The Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

10. The greatest King: “He will be great...and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David. And will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:32, 33).

11. An Eternal King: “And of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33; see also Daniel 7:13, 14).

12. Declaration of the Holy Trinity: “*The Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and *the power of the Highest* will overshadow you; therefore, also *that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35).



Why was Jesus Baptized?

Fr. Augustinos Hanna

Some people ask: since the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and He is Holy, perfect and without sin, so why He was baptized?

The answer shows us many reasons:

1. To open heaven: “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that **Jesus also was baptized and while He prayed, the heaven was opened**” (Luke 3:21). Heaven was shut since the fall of man, and this was the first time after the fall to read that heaven was opened. Baptism is from heaven and it opens heaven.

2. Jesus was baptized to show us the triune God; the Holy Trinity for the first time in history:

Jesus, the Son of God was in the water in Jordan River, and the voice of the Holy Father was heard from heaven declaring, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him” (Matt. 3:16, 17). That is why the church called this baptism, **the Feast of Epiphany**, which means the manifestation of the Three Persons of the Trinity.

3. In Jesus’ baptism, He proved His Divinity and the equality of the three Persons of the Godhead, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. He also taught His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). “For there are three who bear witness in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are ONE” (1 John 5:7).

4. Jesus was baptized, NOT as a sinner, but as a “Sin-bearer”: Listen to St. John the Baptist who baptized Him explaining, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!.... I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and He remained upon Him” (John 1:29-32).

5. Jesus showed us the importance of repentance as the first and right step in the way of God.

6. Jesus also confirmed the necessity of Baptism: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16 & John 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5).

7. In His Baptism, Jesus gave us lessons in humility and moralities (see Matthew 3:14, 15).

When **NOT** to Rejoice!



By
Fr. Augustinos
Hanna



+ **“Love does not rejoice in iniquity” (1 Cor. 13:6).**

+ **“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls” (Prov. 24:17).**

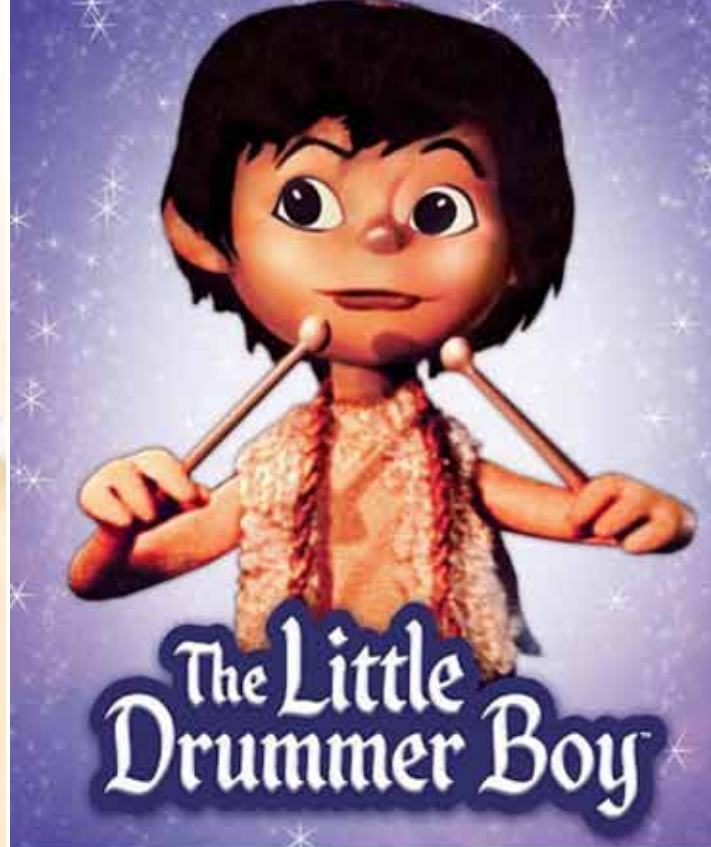
Christmas season is the most joyful time of the year. The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, *“I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord...”* And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”* (Luke 2:9-15). The Bible, as a general rule, asks the believers to “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil.4:4); but every rule has some exceptions. For instance, the two verses above ask us Not to rejoice in such cases:

1. Love does Not rejoice in iniquity:

St. Paul set the frame and characteristics of the true Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13, and said in the rest of the same verse, “But rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6). He added in other epistle an explanation saying: “Do not be partakers with them...and have NO fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph.5:7-11).

2. Do Not rejoice when your enemy falls (Prov.24:17).

Rejoicing at someone’s downfall is like participating in the cause of that downfall or even wishing more evil on the person. That was the attitude of the Ammonites who maliciously rejoiced when the temple in Jerusalem, “was desecrated and over the land of Israel when it was laid waste and over the people of Judah when they went into exile” (Ezek. 25:3). For spitefully celebrating Israel’s misfortunes, the Ammonites experienced God’s displeasure, which resulted in grim consequences. How do we react when disaster befalls our neighbor or when he gets into trouble? If he/she is a nice and friendly neighbor, then, of course we will sympathize with her and go to her aid. But what if he is an unfriendly, trouble making neighbor? Our natural tendency may be to ignore him or even secretly rejoice at his downfall. Proverbs warns us: Do NOT rejoice when your enemy falls or stumble. Instead, Jesus tells us that we show His love in action when we “love [our] enemies and pray for those who persecute us”. By so doing, we imitate the perfect love of our Lord.



“The Little Drummer Boy” is a popular Christmas song written in 1941. It was originally known as “Carol of the Drum” and is based on a traditional Czech carol. Although there isn’t any reference to a drummer boy in the Christmas story in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 2, the point of the carol goes straight to the heart of the meaning of worship.

The carol describes how a boy is summoned by the Magi to the scene of Christ’s birth. Unlike the wise men, however, the drummer has no gift- so he gives what he has. He plays his drum, saying, “I played my best for Him.” This echoes the worship Jesus described when He told of the widow and her two coins: “Truly I tell you, he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out her poverty put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:3)

All the drummer boy had was his drum and all the poor widow had were her two coins, but the God they worshiped was worthy of their all. He is worthy of our all as well, having given His all for us.

How to raise your children

by Fr. Gawargious Kolta



Children are a heritage from the Lord. They are like arrows in the hand of a warrior. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. In the homes of God-fearing parents, they will be like olive plants around their table. These facts are mentioned by the Psalmist (Ps. 127, 128). The responsibility of the parents about raising their children is great. Raising children who love and fear God, will not only please the Lord, but also will make the parents' hearts joyful. King Solomon said: **"Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul"** (Prov. 29:17). He also added that he who loves his son disciplines him promptly (Prov. 13:24).

The parents must teach their children how to gain wisdom; because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A wise son makes his father glad, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother (Prov. 10:1). King Solomon said to the children: **"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother"** (Prov. 1:8). When the parents discipline their children, they will not walk in the council of the ungodly, nor stand in the path of the sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. Their delight will be in the law of the Lord, and in His law they meditate day and night (Ps. 1:1, 2).

Different children, different needs:

The parents must know the stages that their children go through, their needs, their readiness for learning, and their interests and capabilities.

Sophie Koulomzin, a Russian professor at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, said in her book: "Our Church and Our Children" that there are seven stages that children pass through in their life: Infancy (age 0-3 years), pre-school (age 3-6), middle age (age 6-10), late childhood (10-13), adolescence (age 13-18), and maturity (age 18 and above).

1- Infancy (age 0-3): During this period, a baby grows from a small helpless being into a small human person that walks and speaks; expresses his desires, his likes and dislikes; recognizes and loves certain persons; gets afraid of others. He can be amused, frustrated, curious, happy, sad, angry, and associated with a number of things or people with pleasurable or frightening feelings; knows love, pity and jealousy.

The Orthodox Church should emphasize the religious importance of infancy. During the first few weeks of his life, the **infant receives three sacraments**; Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Communion, making him a bearer of grace and protect him from

the power of evil, before he shows any hint of awakening or understanding. We must know that all of adult life is a reaction to a development received in infancy. We can roughly summarize the mental and physical processes that go on before a child is three years old:

1- Discovery of his physical self, the development of physical senses, sight, smell, touch, movement, taste and hearing.

2- Discovery of freedom and restriction, of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, feeding habits and toilet training.

3- Discovery of security and love; like sensation of cold and discomfort is replaced when his mother approaches him by warmth and comfort. Sensation of hunger is relieved by the approach of the same person. The fear of being lost disappears when the same person appears.

4- Discovery of negative feelings: rage, fear, jealousy.

5- Discovery of the discrepancy between his own will and the imposed will of another, usually an adult person.

6- Accumulation of factual experiences and information without being ready to intellectualize about them. Sounds and smells are remembered.

7- Between the age of two and three, the child acquires the ability to express his wishes in words, to communicate with the surrounding world through primitive talking.

In this period, we can link the baby to the religious experience of adults, to their life of prayer and to their participation in the liturgical life of the church. The baby's perception of this religious and sacramental life may seem to be purely sensual, but it is fully authentic. When the disciples tried to prevent mothers from bringing their children to Jesus, He said: **"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it"** (Mk. 10:14, 15). He took the children in His arms and blessed them. He gave His love through bodily contact. He made them feel His closeness through their physical senses.

Infants can go through many experiences that prepare them for later moral concepts. The discovery of freedom and restriction, of security and love, the unhappiness of fear and jealousy, and other experiences acquired in infancy is basic to religious development. In Christian families these experiences are illuminated by the spiritual life of the parents. No one can measure or evaluate the effect of the sacraments which our church gives to

young babies, but surely the gifts of the Holy Spirit are kept open in the life of our children.

2- Pre-school children (age 3-6): During this period, the children have acquired the art of fluent speech and the art of understanding speech. They can listen to short stories lasting not more than ten minutes. The story must make a constant appeal to their physical senses, through repeating the sounds, imitating the movements, showing how big and how small are the things mentioned, looking at large and clear pictures brought to illustrate the story. There are some concepts that are foreign to their mentality, like power, faith or love. They understand that a person is nice, kind, or nasty and unkind.

A five years old, will recognize that “God wants us to be good and we must not be bad”, but what is good and what is bad is still very hazy. Also the basic idea of sin, repentance, life-after-death is completely beyond the pre-school children understanding.

Children of this age **need constant physical activity and cannot stay quiet long**. They enjoy any work which is short with immediate visible results. Five years old children are quiet ready to hear a very simply-told Bible story of creation. They can act some parts of the story; ask them to close their eyes in order to feel the darkness that was before God made light, and open their eyes to feel the light. They can act out how different animals move, how birds fly. They can touch seeds, flowers and leaves.

Stories illustrating how God cares for us can be told. The story of Noah’s Ark, emphasizing how God saved Noah, his family and the animals, and how the dove flew out and brought back a green leaf, when the flood was over. Equally it is good to tell the story of the baby Moses, and the story of the nativity of Jesus Christ.

A five years old child, growing up in an Orthodox Christian home will have accumulated a number of religious concepts and experiences. He will **have an idea of God** who made everything, who is kind and powerful. An orthodox child will learn to make the cross and to say the words “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. He will have no idea as to whether “God” and Jesus Christ are two different persons.

A major element in the young child’s experience of church life is **frequent Holy Communion**. The reality and the validity of the sacrament cannot be identified with the child’s rational understanding of it. The best approach is to tell them **the story of the Lord’s Supper**, telling them that this was the holy food, Jesus gave His disciples for the first time. Their attention can be focused on the icon of the Last Supper which is often seen above the Royal Doors.

A child of five who is raised in a Christian home has much Christian knowledge and a lot of impressions that can grow and develop later. He is in a state of readiness for religious growth.

3- Middle childhood (age 6-10): The children in this age have thoroughly emerged from the world of the family environment. They attend school and they have friends and enemies of their own, whom their parents do not know. They adjust to the

rules and relationship of a larger world; the school, the neighborhood, the streetblock, etc. They like to purchase things at the store for themselves. They learn to know the rules, not only of their parents, but the rules established by the school, by other kids, and those established by the policeman in the street. Everything that they took for granted is gradually being tested and subjected to comparison.

The change in mentality of this age, affects their interests in stories. They will **show interest in cause and effect**, and in listening to Bible stories, showing interest in God’s plan for the world. They are ready to receive the idea of God as creator of the universe. They are ready to assimilate that God cares for us that He protects us. Bible stories like that of the three youths in the furnace cannot be used as a proof that we need not to be afraid of getting burned. The real point of the story is the answer given by the three youths to the king: **“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up”** (Dan. 3:17-18).

There are many stories in the Bible that tell about God’s care in moment of danger and of **letting people to suffer** for some time, but always remembering them and turning their suffering to their good. Then children can recognize that from the stories of Joseph, Balaam and his ass, the prophet Jonah. Though it is too early to discuss with them the problem of suffering, especially that of the innocent. We can establish in their minds the image of Jesus Christ as the one who was innocent and accepted suffering, but His suffering and death were not the end, because He rose from the dead. If the children have assimilated with their minds the story of **the Passion and the resurrection**, we have provided them with a basis for a Christian belief to the problem of suffering, dealing with it at a later age.

The children in this age may ask **“who is God”**. We can tell them about the Holy Trinity in a simple way, saying that God the Father made the world by **His Word. Jesus Christ Son of God is also called “Word of God”** (Logos) and the Holy Spirit of God hovered over the waters. They we learn that God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit made the world. They may ask “How is man in the image of God?” We may say that man is a reasonable person. He is also spiritual person; he can pray and love and think and feel. So we can say that there is a little of the Holy Trinity in every human person. We can tell them **the Story of Epiphany**, stressing how people on that day saw Jesus, the Son of God, heard the Father’s voice and saw how the Holy Spirit of God hovered above the head of Jesus. The child in this age may ask: “How come, one God and three persons?”

No abstract explication is completely adequate, but we can tell him the example of the sun, its being (figure), its heat and its light. Thus, the three are one. Also we can tell him that it is difficult to comprehend God as the little child, whom St. Augustinos saw while trying to put the water of the ocean in a little hole which he made in the sand of the beach.

(To be continued)

The Husband & Father Role

BY CHRIS CHARALAMBOUS



When we look at a husband-wife relationship, we see **the couple as complete unit. They are one-flesh** as the Bible clearly explains in Genesis 2:24 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh".

At the same time they are interdependent on each other (1 Corinthians 11:11 "Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord". They are to complete each other, not competing with each other. Couples must understand that their weaknesses and strengths are meant for them to complement each other. The woman is to be her husband's helpmate as well as playmate. Couples who do not recognize this truth and build their marriage according to God's design will experience a lot of tension and disharmony when they compete with each other like enemies.

A man who wants to establish a harmonious home will give top priority to his wife. He will love her, lead her and listen to her. What does it mean for a man to love his wife? I'm afraid the word 'love' has been badly misused. "I love my dog; I love shoes; I love Honda" and "I love my wife!"

What is the difference? Is there any difference? According to Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." This is the standard of love we are talking about. Regardless of our feelings, the command to love our wife is "Agape", the **unconditional and sacrificial love which lasts for all seasons; whether in spring when wives are blooming or in autumn when they will be withering.** Love is a commitment. Love is an act of the will, not one based on emotions. Feelings cannot withstand the difficult trials in a marriage. Only love built on commitment and sacrifice can stand the test of time.

When a wife is secure in her husband's love, she will have no problem submitting to his leadership. Lead-

ership without love is like a dictator's rule. The husband who loves best leads best. And the best way to love your child is to love his mother. Someone said, "Be careful that your marriage doesn't become a duel instead of a duet." Love your wife unconditionally and sacrificially, and then your marriage will become a beautiful duet.

Another important role of the man is **leadership.** The man must lead. Ephesians 5:23 "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church ..." **God has designated the husband as the head of the relationship.** This is the creation order. The husband is therefore responsible to lead his family, with his wife as his helpmate. Together, they are a team and not enemies. It is unfortunate that some wives would say, "My husband is the head, but I'm the neck." Given such a situation, it is likely that in that marriage there is a power struggle. In many homes, there are men who are reluctant to lead. Perhaps out of frustration, women either take control of the home or refuse to follow the husband's lead. This is a 'no win' situation.

The husband is the pilot, his wife the co-pilot. Together, they chart the course of their destination.

Along the way, if they go off course, both must help each other to get back on course. The safety and well-being of their children is in their hands. For whatever reasons, a man who does not lead as he should is ultimately answerable and responsible for the consequences of his lack of leadership.

The husband must love, lead and listen to his wife. When a husband fails to listen to his wife, this is one sure sign of a communication breakdown. One of the most common complaints a counselor hears is, "My husband doesn't listen." Husbands, hear your wives out, don't interrupt, and don't offer solutions, just listen! When you listen, you're showing your love as you consider her feelings and points of view.

So let us examine the man as a father. To be a good and effective steward of his family, a father needs to remember the following;

Time is essential. A father cannot teach and train if he does not give time and spend time with the family. I have yet to meet a man who complains he has plenty of time. Try asking your children what they think is the most important to you. Fathers, don't confuse the important with the urgent. Prioritize your time. You need to block out time to attend to the things that are important. What matters most to you? Is it your family - your wife and children? Make them your priority! Fathers, when was the last time you spend an hour with your children?

Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Where is your heart today? What is your treasure? Look at how you spend your time. Most of us would like to think that our family matters most, but how much time do we give to our wife and children?

Without time, it is impossible to teach and train. You need time to give instruction to a given subject, to give knowledge, to give lessons, to impart to another. A good teacher is a trainer.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

A father's responsibility in giving spiritual instruction is a continuous process. Fathers, do you realize that little ears are listening; that little eyes are observing you? Who are their role models in today's culture and society? Who are your children following? 1% of the child's time is spent under the influence of the Sunday School; 7% the influence of the public school and 92% under the influence of the home.

Fathers, if we do not impart to our children the positive moral and spiritual values while they are under our charge, it is unlikely we will have much influence when they leave the home later.

While they are still young and impressionable, teachable, we must spend time to teach and train them. We are their mentor, their trainer, their discipliner, their encourager, their cheerleader, their hero and best of all, their father!



By Fr. Augustinos Hanna

DO YOU KNOW YOUR HEAVENLY FRIENDS

The Angels?

SOME THINGS THE BIBLE TELLS ABOUT THEM

1. They were created by God (Gen. 2:1) before creating the universe (Job 38:6, 7).

2. There are several orders or classes. Isaiah 6:2 told about the Seraphim (Angels of praise), and Genesis 3:24; Ezekiel & Revelation told about the Cherubim (Angels of knowledge); Colossians 1:16 talked about Thrones, Dominions, Principalities and Powers.

3. They are immortal. They don't die (Luke 20:36).

4. They worship God (Philippians 2:9-11).

5. They are obedient to God (Matt. 6:10; Psalm 103:10).

6. They do not marry (Matthew 22:30).

7. They are many millions. Thomas Aquinas says 4 billion.

8. Only three are actually named in the Bible: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael (and Lucifer before the fall (Isa. 14:12-15) Then he was called Satan or the Devil, or the dragon and old serpent (Rev. 12:7).

9. Some of the angels are fallen: They left God and decided to be evil angles. Lucifer is the only one whose name we know.

10. They have personalities and free will and are not just forces or spirits or robots (Luke 1:26).

11. They can appear in visible form like a man or a flame of fire or horses of fire (Luke 1:12; Judges 13:3 & 20 & 2 Kings 6:17).

12. They help and guide people and are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14 & Acts 8:26).

13. They rejoice over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:10).

14. They protect the believers and deliver them from dangers (Psalm 34:7; 91:11).

15. They carry the souls of Christians to Paradise or the "bosom of Abraham." (Luke 16:22).

16. Each one of the believers, especially the children and the least of Jesus' brothers has a "Guardian Angel" (Matt. 18:10; Psalm 34:7; 91:11).

Why

By Jonathan & Rosey

Literacy



Since we first visited India, the question has been on our minds...what direction is our service going to take?

Of course, our lives here involve a lot of things that can't be defined. Our friendships, participation in community rhythms, solicited and unsolicited advice and all sorts of help in times of need are part of what we do here. But we also wanted a defined role.

For me (Jonathan), I thought that would involve education. This is a massive need in our communities which feeds into many other needs. I saw child laborers forced to quit school early to support their families, and thus never being able to learn anything more than the trade they started in childhood. Girls who never got the chance to go to school. Poor families who stopped sending their kids to school when they couldn't afford it. A lack of schooling meaning that many adults couldn't read, couldn't understand medical instructions, and had their employment opportunities limited.

And more than anything else, I felt that the lack of education in our community had limited the potential for community members to see something different for themselves in life. This isn't always true for people without formal education, but in our slum, there was no significant "informal education" to broaden people's horizons. Many of our neighbors were limited in view to what their families had told them, and so no aspect of their lives – work, education, spirituality, health care, child-rearing, even recreation – could expand beyond the limits set by their parents, who might have been kept within tight limits themselves.

In April of last year, we got introduced to a brand-new literacy program that had just been developed. We and our friends agreed to pilot the program ourselves, to show the creators whether the program worked or not. It did, and in part as a result of our pilot testing and helpful changes, thousands of people in many slums and villages have become literate, including 15 of our own neighbors so far.

For us, literacy is important for several reasons:

- * A stepping-stone to formal education.
- * The beginning of self-directed learning, and being able to pick up new things on one's own.
- * The self-esteem and pride it brings to those who think of themselves as "lesser" than others.
- * Literacy lessons give some additional structure and organization to mental processes.
- * There are so many factors – culture, religion, caste, family – that tell people, "This is who we are, so this is who you are, and this is all you can be." We desperately want to break into that assumption and help people understand that they have a choice. Being able to read when they always assumed they'd be illiterate, being able to understand doctor's instructions themselves, being able to read religious texts on their own – these are all parts of being able to make new choices.

* There are wealth of studies that show that people's health improves, their ability to earn a living improves, their ability to engage in family planning improves, their ability to seek their own rights improves, etc., once they learn to read.

While I (Jonathan) have been the main one teaching literacy, Rosey has taught a number of people as well. She has also started therapeutic art experiences and "lessons" that sometimes run simultaneous with my literacy classes.

Since I began working with the NGO that developed the literacy program, my work has expanded beyond the slum. That's included giving presentations on the program, continuing to improve and develop the program, and helping monitor projects in other slums and villages.

We don't know how long we will continue in this initiative. It is only the first endeavor in expanding educational opportunities in our slum. But we'll keep going as long as it appears helpful to our neighbors.

War Is On The Horizon: Is It Too Late To Stop It?

Paul Craig Roberts

December 7, 2015

One lesson from military history is that once mobilization for war begins, it takes on a momentum of its own and is uncontrollable. This might be what is occurring unrecognized before our eyes.

In his September 28 speech at the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Russia can no longer tolerate the state of affairs in the world. Two days later at the invitation of the Syrian government Russia began war against ISIS.

Russia was quickly successful in destroying ISIS arms depots and helping the Syrian army to roll back ISIS gains. Russia also destroyed thousands of oil tankers, the contents of which were financing ISIS by transporting stolen Syrian oil to Turkey where it is sold to the family of the current gangster who rules Turkey.

Washington was caught off guard by Russia's decisive-ness. Fearful that the quick success of such decisive action by Russia would discourage Washington's NATO vassals from continuing to support Washington's war against Assad and Washington's use of its puppet government in Kiev to pressure Russia, Washington arranged for Turkey to shoot down a Russian fighter-bomber despite the agreement between Russia and NATO that there would be no air-to-air encounters in Russia's area of air operation in Syria.

Although denying all responsibility, Washington used Russia's low key response to the attack, for which Turkey did not apologize, to reassure Europe that Russia is a paper tiger. The Western press trumpeted: "Russia A Paper Tiger." The Russian government's low key response to the provocation was used by Washington to reassure Europe that there is no risk in continuing to pressure Russia in the Middle East, Ukraine, Georgia, Montenegro, and elsewhere. Washington's attack on Assad's military is being used to reinforce the belief that is being inculcated in European governments that Russia's responsible behavior to avoid war is a sign of fear and weakness. The basis of US foreign policy is the commitment to prevent the rise of powers capable of constraining Washington's unilateral action. The ability of Russia and China to do this makes them both a target.

Washington is not opposed to terrorism. Washington has been purposely creating terrorism for many years. Terrorism is a weapon that Washington intends to use to destabilize Russia and China by exporting it to the Muslim populations in Russia and China.

Washington is using Syria, as it used Ukraine, to demonstrate Russia's impotence to Europe—and to China, as an impotent Rus-



sia is less attractive to China as an ally. For Russia, responsible response to provocation has become a liability, because it encourages more provocation. In other words, Washington and the gullibility of its European vassals have put humanity in a very dangerous situation, as the only choices left to Russia and China are to accept American vassalage or to prepare for war.

Putin must be respected for putting more value on human life than do Washington and its European vassals and avoiding military responses to provocations. However, Russia must do something to make the NATO countries aware that there are serious costs of their accommodation of Washington's aggression against Russia. For example, the Russian government could decide that it makes no sense to sell energy to European countries that are in a de facto state of war against Russia. With winter upon us, the Russian government could announce that Russia does not sell energy to NATO member countries. Russia would lose the money, but that is cheaper than losing one's sovereignty or a war.

The Russian government has relied on responsible, non-provocative responses. Russia has taken the diplomatic approach, relying on European governments coming to their senses, realizing that their national interests diverge from Washington's, and ceasing to enable Washington's hegemonic policy. Russia's policy has failed. To repeat, Russia's low key, responsible responses have been used by Washington to paint Russia as a paper tiger that no one needs to fear.

We are left with the paradox that Russia's determination to avoid war is leading directly to war. Whether or not the Russian media, Russian people, and the entirety of the Russian government understand this, it must be obvious to the Russian military. All that Russian military leaders need to do is to look at the composition of the forces sent by NATO to "combat ISIS." As George Abert notes, the American, French, and British aircraft that have been deployed are jet fighters whose purpose is air-to-air combat, not ground attack. The jet fighters are not deployed to attack ISIS on the ground, but to threaten the Russian fighter-bombers that are attacking ISIS ground targets.

There is no doubt that Washington is driving the world toward Armageddon, and Europe is the enabler. Washington's bought-and-paid-for-puppets in Germany, France, and UK are stupid, unconcerned, or powerless to escape from Washington's grip. Unless Russia can wake up Europe, war is inevitable.

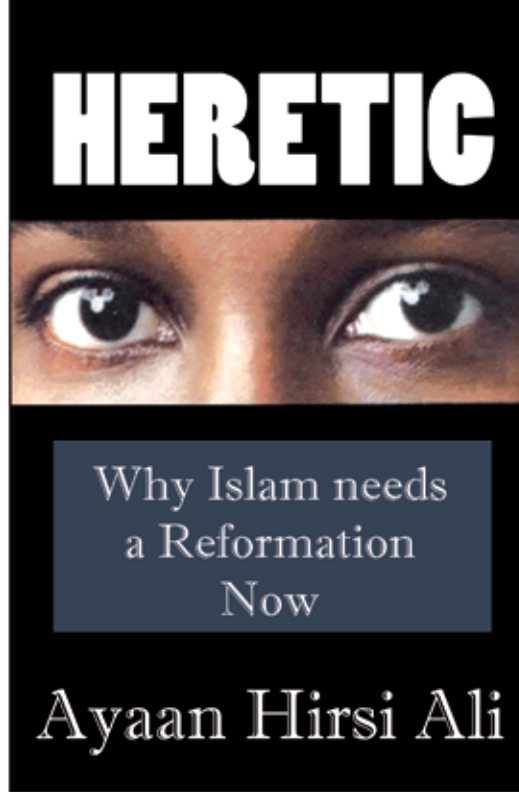
Almost daily we read about atrocities carried out in the name of Islam, which raises the question: Is Islam a religion of peace and brotherhood or a system of oppression and violence that endorses beheadings, honor killings, stoning and suicide bombings?

In her urgent new book, *Heretic*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali argues persuasively that extremists have seized control of Islam by citing passages in Islam's holy books that sanction violence. Hirsi Ali grew up in Somalia as a practicing Muslim who witnessed the application of strict Shariah law. "In the public squares, every Friday, after the ritual prayers, men were beheaded or flogged, women were stoned, and thieves had their hands cut off."

As a teenager, Hirsi Ali embraced jihad, or holy war, but eventually began to question a system that marginalized and persecuted women. When her father tried to force her into an arranged marriage, she fled to the Netherlands and later moved to the United States, where she is a fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She left Islam and now considers herself an atheist.

Hirsi Ali continues to fear for her life, knowing that many Muslims believe she should die because she has defamed Islam. She advocates five reforms, abandon Muhammad's semi-divine and infallible status; focus on life on earth instead of life after death; overhaul Shariah laws, which are derived from the Koran; review the practice of allowing individuals to enforce Islamic law; and challenge the imperative to wage jihad.

The author sharply criticizes Western liberals who contend that atrocities like the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have nothing to do with



Islam. Westerners wear blinders, she says fearing that any criticism of Islam would be denounced as Islamophobia.

In a brief history of Islam, Hirsi Ali notes that Mohammad initially advocated peaceful co-existence with non-Muslims, but when he moved from Mecca to Medina, his message changed radically. Hirsi Ali says that many passages in the Quran, which Muslims regard as the final word of God, endorse violence. When Mohammad defeated unbelievers in battle, they were given the choice of conversion or death.

Seventeen Muslim-majority nations declare Islam the official state religion and require that the head of state be a practicing Muslim. Many Muslims reject my notion of separation of mosque and state.

The Quran stresses the importance of the afterlife. Children are taught that they will go directly to heaven if they die as martyrs in suicide attacks. Parents express pride in children who end their lives on suicide missions. Hirsi Ali describes a Palestinian woman who encouraged three of her sons to become suicide bombers against Israel. "Mothers of suicide bombers

talk as if their sons had gone off to get married.

The author cites passages in Shariah law that authorized beheading, crucifixions, amputations, stoning and lashings. At least 15 Muslim nations allow or require death by stoning for adultery or other sex related prohibitions. After Friday prayers in Saudi Arabia, men flock to nearby squares to watch the implementation of Islamic justice by cutting off hands, stoning and beheadings.

Hirsi Ali expresses outrage that Muslim women are treated as second-class citizens. Men may take up to four wives, while women are limited to one husband. "The inequality of the sexes, in short, is central to Shariah."

At least 5,000 women are put to death in so-called honor killings each year. The author cites the case of a 25 year old Pakistani woman who married against her father's wishes and was then stoned to death outside a courthouse.

Hirsi Ali previously wrote *Infidel*, a best-selling memoir of her early years. Next, in *Nomad*, she described her efforts to build a new life. Now, in *Heretic*, she says an Islamic reformation is possible, and although the evidence she cites belies her optimism.

The author is on solid ground when she writes that the West has spent trillions of dollars waging war against terrorism without much success. She argues that Western nations need to fight ideas with better ideas, not with bombs. "Islam is at crossroads", Hirsi Ali argues. "Muslims...by the hundreds of millions, need to make a conscious decision to confront, debate and ultimately reject the violent elements within their religion....Muslims are actively recruiting suicide bombers in the United States and Europe"

BARZILLAI...who went home to wait for God

(2 SAMUEL 19: 33-37)



Dear Barzillai,

You are one of the not-so-well-known characters of the ancient writings, for your story is hidden in history - but we have found you out! You didn't like a lot of publicity, and perhaps even now you will shrink from being brought into the limelight. Accept our apologies, noble sir, and if our actions seem to offend, grant an indulgence. We like you ; we like you a lot, for in that wise old head of yours you possess much wisdom. Again and again we have read the brief record of your exploits, and it seems to us that you passed through four definite phases.

Your Personal Regard

We have been told that when David fled from the rebellion of Absalom, you with others, "Brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse. And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, the people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness" (2 Sam. 17:27-29). Nice work, Barzillai! You thought of everything in that hour of emergency. In these modern days people would have taken a collection of tinned foods, and would have forgotten the tin opener! We have often considered your liking for David; surely you thought a great deal of your master, for at the time of your allegiance the outlook was gloomy. We admire loyalty and faithfulness, and your glorious deed became an immortal example. Well done, old man. We are proud of you.

Your Persistent Refusal

How we would have loved to see David's face when you disappointed him. Oh, Barzillai! He had planned to give you the time of your life. What a present for your eightieth birthday - a royal present, too; and you refused it. How long did David try to persuade you to alter your mind? Old friend, we know many people who would have jumped at the chance to accompany David to the palace, to live in the lap of luxury. The soft lights and sweet music of the kingly household would ravish their hearts, and on no consideration would they refuse a king's offer. We can still hear David saying, "Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem (19:33) - and you shook your head.

Your Potent Realization

"I am this day 80 eighty years old: and can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my Lord the king?...Let your servant I pray, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother." You crafty old man - you were an expert diplomat. Even David could not have been offended at the refusal, for your arguments were unassailable. You could not hear - you could not taste - quite right, Barzillai, but you could see, and there was a great deal to be seen in David's presence. But you were looking elsewhere; your eyes were on eternity. "How long have I to live?" you asked, and at the same time you could have supplied an approximate answer. "A few weeks, a few months, but at most a few years. Should I waste my precious moments on the frivolities of earth, when soon I shall commence the important journey into the hereafter? No, David, I am going home to attend to the most important business in life."

Your Peaceful Readiness

Old friend, we would like to ask a question. How long had you to wait before the call came? We see you sitting peacefully at home; we appreciate the deep content filling your soul. Your lifetime of ready service was a source of constant satisfaction; your opportunities had not been lost. The unknown road ahead did not fill you with misgivings. Your people had gone that way, and their Guide would soon be coming to guide their aged son. Of course, you could not tell us about your funeral; but we believe it was a procession of quiet dignity. It wasn't a funeral, but a home-going and a reunion. You were ready for the eternal call, and God was proud to welcome you. Fortunate man! How we wish that all men would learn from your story. We struggle and scheme, we save and plan, and so often forget that a similar call could come to us at any moment. Oh, Barzillai, we are all mixed up. We say, "A bird in the hand is worth more than two in the bush," but that is not always true. A mansion in Immanuel's land would be worth a city in this land. Barzillai, we have much to learn!

Psalm 32

Title- A Psalm of David: Contemplation

Proof that David wrote this glorious evangelistic Psalm is found in the title. It is verified also by the apostle Paul, "Just as David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works" (Rom. 4:6-8).

Deep repentance over his great sin was followed by such blissful peace that he was led to pour out his spirit in the soft music of the choice song. In the order of history, it seems to follow Psalm 51. **A Contemplation** is a new title to us; it indicates an instructive or edifying Psalm. The experience of one believer affords rich instruction to others; it reveals the footsteps of the flock and comforts and directs the weak. Perhaps prefixing the word was important so that doubting saints might not think the Psalm's promise was only to David. They could appropriate it as a lesson from the Spirit of God. David promised in Psalm 51 to teach transgressors the Lord's way, and here he effectively does that also

DIVISION

- We find blessing of the pardoned, vv. 1, 2.
- David makes personal confession, vv. 3-5
- The application of the case can be applied to others, vv. 6, 7.
- The voice of God is heard by the forgiven one 8, 9
- The Psalm concludes with a portion for the two great classes of people, vv. 10, 11.

EXPOSITION

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2. Blessed is the man to whom the lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

1. Blessed. Like the Sermon on the Mount, this Psalm begins with beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12). This is the second Psalm of blessing. The first Psalm describes the result of holy blessedness; this Psalm details that cause of it. The first pictures the tree in full growth; this depicts its planting and watering. He who is the first Psalm is a reader of God's book is now a suppliant at God's throne.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. He is now and will ever be blessed. Is he poor, or sick, or sorrowful? He is still blessed indeed. Pardoning mercy is

of all things in the word most to be prized, for it is the only and sure way to happiness. To hear from God's Spirit the words, absolve is joy unspeakable. In this psalm, blessedness is not ascribed to one who has been a diligent law keeper, for then it would never come to us. It is to a lawbreaker, who by grace most rich and free has been forgiven. Self-righteous Pharisees have no portion in this blessedness. It is over the returning prodigal that the word of welcome is pronounced and the music and dancing begin. A full, instantaneous, irreversible pardon of transgression turns the poor sinner's hell into heaven and makes the heir of wrath a partaker in blessing. The word forgiven in the original is taken off or taken away as a burden is lifted or a barrier removed. What a lift! It cost our Savior a sweat of blood to bear our load (Luke 22:44); it cost him his life to bear it away. ***Samson carried the gates of Gaza (Judg. 16:3), but what was that to the weight Jesus bore on our behalf?***

Whose sin is covered, covered by God as the mercy seat covered the ark, as Noah was covered from the flood, as the depths of the sea covered the Egyptians. What a cover! It forever hides the filthiness of the flesh and the spirit from the sight of the all seeing God! He who has once seen sin in its horrible deformity will appreciate the happiness of seeing it no more. Christ's atonement is the propitiation, the covering, the making of the end of sin. Where this is seen and trusted, the soul knows that it is then accepted in the Beloved. It therefore enjoys a conscious blessing that is the foretaste of heaven. It is clear from the text that people may know they are pardoned, for who could know the blessedness of unknown forgiveness? Clearly it is a matter of knowledge, for it is the ground of comfort.

2. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity. The word "Blessed" is plural, oh the blessedness, the double joys, the bundles of happiness,



the mountains of delight! Three words denote our disobedience: transgression, sin, and iniquity. This is the three-headed dog at the gates of hell. Our glorious Lord, however, has silenced the barking against His believing ones. The Trinity of heaven overcomes the trinity of sin. Non-imputation is the essence of pardon; the believer sins, but the sin is not reckoned, not accounted.

May St. Paul's words be ours, "David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputed righteousness apart from works" (Rom. 4:6). We, who have a substitute to whose account all our debts have been placed, are blessed indeed.

And in whose spirit there is no deceit. He who is pardoned has been taught the deal honestly with his sin and God. Forgiveness is no sham. The peace it brings is not caused by paying tricks with conscience. Self-deception and hypocrisy bring no blessedness. They may drag the soul to hell with pleasant dreams, but to the heaven of true peace they cannot conduct their victim. Free from guilt, free from deceit, we are justified from faults and sanctified from falsehoods. Those who washed from sin are truthful, honest, simple, and childlike. There can be no blessedness to tricksters with their plans, tricks, shuffling, and pretending. They are too afraid of discovery to be at ease. They build their house on the brink of a volcano, and eternal destruction must be their portion.

3. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long.

4. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought.

5. I acknowledge my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. 3-5.

David now gives his experience. No instructor is so efficient as one who testifies to what he has personally know. He writes well who like the spider spins the subject from his heart.

3. When I kept silent. When through neglect I failed to confess, or through despair dared not, ***my bones***, those solid pillars of my frame, ***grew old***. They began to decay with weakness. My grief was so intense as to sap my health and destroyed my vital energy. What a killing thing is sin! It is a pestilent disease, a fire in the bones!

Through my groaning all the day long. David was silent as to confession but not to sorrow. Horror at his great guilt drove him to incessant laments, until his voice was no longer articulate. It was so full of sighing and groaning that it resembled the hoarse roaring of a wounded animal. None know the pangs of conviction except those who have endure them. The rack, the wheel, the fires are easy when compared to the hell that a guilty conscience kindles. Better to suffer all the diseases of the flesh than

to lie under the crushing wrath of almighty God.

4. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me. If God's finger can crush us, what His hand be like as it presses heavily and continuously? Under terrors of conscience, many people have little rest at night. The grim thoughts of the day dog them to their bedrooms and haunt their dreams, or else they lie awake in the cold sweat of dread. God's hand is helpful when it lifts but awful when it presses.

My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. The sap of his soul was dried, and through sympathy the body appeared to be deprived of fluids. The oil was almost gone from the lamp of life; the flame flickered as though it would soon expire. Un-confessed transgression, like fierce poison, dries the fountain of strength. It makes us like a tree blasted by lightning, like a plant withered by the scorching heat of a tropical sun. Pity the poor soul when it learns of its sin but forgets its Savior, for it goes hard for that person. It is time to change the tune. The notes are low in the scale, and with such hard playing, the strings of the harp are out of order. The next v. will surely be pitched in another key, or will play a more joyful subject.

5. I acknowledge my sin to you. After long lingering, the broken heart does what it should have done and bares its bosom before the Lord. The scalped must cut the festering ulcer before relief is obtained. The least we can do, if we would be pardoned, is acknowledge our faults. If we are too proud to do that, we deserve double punishment.

And my iniquity I have not hidden. We must confess the guilt and the sin. Concealing it is useless, for it is well-known to God. Admitting it is beneficial, for a full confession softens and humbles the heart. We must as far as possible unveil our soul's secrets. As they dug up the hidden treasure of Achan (Joshua 7:21), let us by weight and measure bring out our sins.

I said. This was David's fixed resolution. ***I will confess my transgression to the Lord.*** Even in the days of symbols, the faithful looked to God alone for deliverance from the intolerable load of sin. Now that types and shadows have vanished at the appearance of the dawn, how much more should we look to God alone?

When the soul determines to plead guilty, absolution is nearby. We read, ***"And You forgave the iniquity of my sin"***. Not only was the sin pardoned but also the iniquity. When the acknowledgment was made, the virus of guilt was immediately put away. God's pardons are deep and thorough. The knife of mercy cuts the roots of the ill weed of sin. "Pause, my soul, adore and wonder; Ask, O why such love to me.

Grace has put me in the number of the Savior's family. Thanks, eternal thanks, to You, O Lord.

6. For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to you. In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters.

7. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.

No doubt David's case has led thousands to seek the Lord with the palmist meant that **for this cause** all the godly also would seek, and we confirm his testimony. All will draw near to God when godliness rules their hearts. The mercy seat is the way to heaven. Between the time of sin and the day of punishment, mercy rules the hour and God may be found. Once the sentence has been given, however, pleading will be useless, and the condemned soul will not find the Lord. Dear readers, do not reject the acceptable time, do not waste the day of salvation (Is. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:2). The godly pray while the Lord has promised to answer. The ungodly postpone their petitions until the Master of the house has shut the door and then their knocking is too late.

You are my hiding place. Personal claims on our God are the joy of spiritual life. The same man who in the fourth v. was oppressed by God's presence now finds a shelter in Him. See what honest and full confession will do! The gospel of substitution makes Him our refuge who otherwise would have been our judge. You shall preserve me from trouble. Trouble shall do no harm when the Lord is with me. Rather, it will bring much benefit.

You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. What a golden sentence! David is surrounded with song and with dancing mercies, all proclaiming the triumphs of grace. Right and left, above and beneath, the air resounds with joy. And, all this for the man whom a few weeks earlier, had been roaring all day long. What a great change! What wonders grace has done and still can do! Love so amazing needs to be pondered. Joy so great demands quiet contemplation, for language fails to express

8. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.

9. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.

The Lord speaks and gives the psalmist an answer to his prayer. Our Savior is the instructor. The Lord Himself teaches His children to walk in the way of His Holy Spirit. We are not pardoned to live after our lusts but to be educated in holiness and trained for perfection. Heavenly training in a covenant blessing. providence sees everything. It is well to be the sheep of His pasture, following the guidance of His wisdom.

Understanding separated us from animal. Let us not act as if we were without it. Take counsel and advice, and be ready to run where wisdom points the way. We need to be cautioned against stupidity, for we are apt to fall into it. We who ought to be as the angels readily become as the beasts. We ought to be as a feather in the wind, wafted readily in the breath of the Holy Spirit. But we live like motionless logs. We would not be treated like mules if there were not so much of the donkey about us. If we are quarrelsome, we must expect to be kept in with a tight rein. Oh, for grace to obey the Lord willingly, lest like the willful servant, we are beaten with many stripes. Lest they kick against You.

10. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him

11. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked. Like stubborn and unmanageable horses, they have many cuts and bruises. Those who sow sin will reap sorrow in heavy sheaves. Sorrow of conscious, disappointment, and terror are the sinner's heritage, then forever sorrows, remorse, and despair. Let those who boast of present sinful joys remember what **shall be** of the future and take warning.

But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him. Faith is the opposite of wickedness, since it is the source of virtue. Faith in God is the great charmer of life's cares. Those who possess it dwell in an atmosphere of grace, surrounded with the bodyguard of mercies. May we who love the Lord always believe in the mercy of God, even when we cannot see traces of its working. Mercy is as surrounding as omniscience: every thought and act of God is perfumed with it. The wicked have a hive of wasps around them, many sorrows, but we have a swarm of bees storing honey for us.

11. Be glad In the Lord Happiness is not only our privilege, but also our duty. We serve a generous God. He makes it a part of our obedience to be joyful. How sinful are rebellions complaints? How natural it seems that those who are blessed with forgiveness should be glad! Someone once died from joy at the foot of the scaffold after receiving the monarch's pardon. Will we receive the free pardon of the King of kings and yet mourn in inexcusable sorrow?

And rejoice, you righteous, redouble your rejoicing, peal upon peal, God has clothed His children in the white garment of holiness; let them not restrain their joyful voices but sing and shout as those who find great treasure.

And shout for joy, all you upright in heart! Our happiness should be demonstrative. Poverty of love is chilling and represses the noble flame of joy.



**"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life;
No one comes to the Father but by Me."
(Jn. 14:6)**



By Dr. Emil Goubran

Was Jesus exclusive?

Once I was listening to a debate between a panel of atheists and Muslims. A Somali woman, who renounced Islam and adopted atheism, stated that "In all religions it is us versus them ideology". What she is saying is that believers in every religion claim to be the only way to heaven and everybody else is doomed if they don't follow their faith.

Is this statement true?

Even if this statement is true, the real question here is whether or not the claim made by any of these religions is true. If we apply the principles of logic, it is not possible that all claims by all religions (that their religion is the only way to heaven) are true. There can only be one true claim and the rest are false, (especially when there is sharp contradiction between them) or all of them are false. Let us examine the Christian claim. In order to understand why the Lord said "No one comes to the Father but by Me", and to verify the truth behind it, we need to ascertain a couple of points:

First is the credibility of the Bible:

The credibility of the Bible has been the subject to a lot of research based on two criteria, namely; integrity and reliability.

Integrity pertains to content stability over time without any change, e.g., additions, deletions or modifications.

Reliability pertains to authenticity and truthfulness of biblical accounts. Both have been proven through historical and archeological and personal experience- evidence to be true, as published in a lot of apologetic books.

Second is the divinity of Jesus Christ:

This is based on biblical accounts relating to what Jesus Christ said about Himself, e.g., "the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:38), "I and the Father are one!", (Jn. 10:30), "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

The Bible also refers to Christ as the Word of God and creator of everything that exists: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..... All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being." (John 1:1-3).

With the above two points in mind, was Jesus Christ exclusive when he said that **"No one comes to the Father but by Me"**? According to the Bible, the answer is NO, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have **all men to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim 2:3-4). If so, how do we reconcile what appears to be exclusive to the people who follow Christ and not others? To understand, we have to go to the beginning and ask the question "what was God's purpose in creating humans? What did He really want to achieve? According to

the Bible God wanted us to be one with Him as mentioned by Christ Himself when He was praying to the Father saying "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may **be one in Us**" (John 17:21).

In order for this to be achieved, God created us in His likeness, "And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." Gen 1:25. While likeness here refers to a number of qualities including intelligence, logic, freedom of will, immortality...etc., the most important part was to be of the same nature as God "Holy".

We cannot be one with God if this nature gets tainted with sin or evil, which makes us lose compatibility with God. And this is exactly what happened when Adam and Eve got contaminated with the knowledge of evil despite the commandment of God. This outcome necessitated their separation from God (spiritual death). Death was not the only consequence but also included their bondage to the devil, slavery to sin, and imprisonment in hell. In order for humans to become one with God again, their sinful nature must be restored to its original holy condition. The only one capable of achieving this outcome is the creator Jesus Christ Himself. That explains why the Lord said "No one comes to the Father but by Me", since He is the one who is going to restore our nature back to its holy condition.

In addition, all the consequences of the fall of man must be reversed in order to liberate mankind from its bondage to the devil, slavery to sin, imprisonment in hell and the power of death over humanity. This is when the love of God comes to save humanity: "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). Once man becomes free again to reconcile with God through the grace of salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the final goal to reunite with God becomes a matter of man's free will and choice to accept or reject the invitation of God to be one with Him. Therefore, the final outcome of man's eternal destiny falls on his own shoulders. Accordingly, when Jesus said "No one comes to the Father but by Me", He was not excluding anyone but rather showing us the true way to become one with Him and the Father, and to benefit of His salvation. In the end, it is man's free will that will decide his eternal destiny. God will honor man's free will in whatever direction man wants to go. It is man's free will that will decide his inclusion or exclusion from being one with God. That reminds me with a statement by C.S. Lewis in which he said "at the end of days there will be two groups of people; those who said to God Thy will be done, and those to whom God will say thy will be done."

Is Going to Church Useless?!

A Church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper & complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. 'I've gone for 30 years now,' he wrote, and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons, but for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them.

So, I think I'm wasting my time and the preachers and priests are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all.'

Much to the delight of the editor, it went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

'I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today.

Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!'

When you are DOWN to nothing, God is UP to something!

Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible!

Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment!

**IF YOU CANNOT SEE GOD IN ALL,
YOU CANNOT SEE GOD AT ALL!**

B. I. B. L. E. simply means:

Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth!

B: Basic

I: Instructions

B: Before

L: Leaving

E: Earth

Do ANGELS think or feel emotion?

It is easy to think of angels as heavenly robots, programmed to do their Maker's will. Although angels were created to serve God, they were given reason and free will. Thus, angels were capable of choosing sin - as some apparently did.

St. Augustine wrote that this choice arose "not from a difference in their natures or origin...but from a difference in their wills and desires."

As with human beings, free will gives value to service rendered to God. As author and angelologist David Connolly puts it, "In freely choosing to serve as the agents of divine purpose, angels are the living expression of the prayer, 'Thy will be done.' "

Just as the physical swiftness of angels is legendary, so are they presumed to be far superior intellectually to human beings. Mortimer Adler, in *The Angels and Us*, explains why:

"Superior to human beings who have minds conjoined with bodies, the angels - minds without bodies - know without any dependence on sense - experience or imagination and have wills with freedom of choice but without being subject to the influence of bodily passions."

Because angels do not have bodies, their emotions lack the "feelings" of human beings, but they nevertheless are endowed with love, Adler writes, "that accords with the two precepts of charity that Christ enjoined mankind to observe. Each angel loves God before self and loves fellow angels in a measure equal to self-love."

Jesus' Miracle in the Wedding of Cana of Galilee

On January 22, we celebrate the Lord's Feast of Jesus conversion the water into wine in the wedding of Cana of Galilee; therefore, it is fitting to note some important lessons about it:

1. The First Miracle:

St. John the Evangelist said, "This beginning of signs Jesus did" (Jn. 2:11). In fact he meant the first in Jesus open ministry, but not the first at all, because He performed many miracles in His childhood in Egypt, when He entered into Egypt, "The idols of Egypt tottered at His presence" (Isaiah 19:1). The Coptic tradition recorded many of His miracles during the three and half years stay in Egypt. Some scholars say, the first miracle Jesus did, was His silence for thirty years before doing this miracle, while He is the WORD of GOD!

2. Performing the first miracle at a wedding!

Weddings are time of gathering and joy and celebration of the first marriage, which God Himself performed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:24). The Lord Jesus blessed the marriage and sanctified it by His mere presence and His miracle. Christ likened His own relationship with His church and the human soul many times with the wedding (Matt. 22 & 25; Hosea 1:19, 20; Song of Solomon & Revelation 19 and 21).

3. Christ's first miracle versus Moses' first one: Moses' first miracle was turning the water into blood in all the land of Egypt (Exod. 7:19-23). That designated death, judgment and the rule of the law; while turning Christ the water into wine refers to the blessings of the New Testament which are life, joy, love and to the Holy Spirit in the time of grace (Lk. 1:15; Eph. 5:18).

4. Cana of Galilee was a small, unknown town or village; but it jumped to the top of history and fame, for Christ's visit; and likewise every person or place Jesus touches or visits, becomes famous and well known in the whole world. Jesus' touches make history and eternal blessing.

5. The Divinity of Christ as a Creator:

The Lord Jesus proved His Divinity and Godhood through this great miracle; because He created the wine by His mere will, even without a word! No one can create anything out of nothing except God alone, the only Creator. What happens in nature and take years, He did in a moment.

By Fr.
Augustinos
Hanna



6. The wine Jesus created was not toxic and did not cause drunkenness, according to the testimony of master of the feast and the bridegroom (Jn.2:10). And the Bible always defranciates between the wine and the strong drink (Lk. 1:15 & Judges 13).

7. The Intercession of St. Mary the Virgin:

St. Mary was there in the wedding before the invitation of Jesus and the disciples. She might be a relative to the bride or a close friend and proved to be the ideal servant, who noticed the problem and tried to solve it quietly, without embracing the poor bride or the groom. She intervened by her strong intercession by telling her Son Jesus in very few words, "They have no wine!" That was enough for Jesus to do His miracle upon her request and intercession, despite His hour has not come yet! That was an example to how much Jesus honored His mother and obeyed her.

8. St. Mary's only Sermon:

We never heard that St. Mary ever preached, she was almost silent, contrary to all women! Her words, which the gospels recorded were very few and rare. But here we find her great sermon, which is the summary of all sermons, "His mother said to the servant, "Whatever He says to you do it" (Jn. 2:5). She drew the attention of the servants to the obedience of Christ's commandments as the way of the blessings, miracles and success in ministry. In other words she says, if you wanted to benefit of my intercession keep Christ's commandments. This is the evidence of your love to Him and your trust in Him (Jn. 14:21, 23).

9. My hour has not come!

For everything Christ did, and that was done to Him, He had His hour, the fixed time and the fittest time. He said the same words later on about the hour of the cross.