

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (Ps 103:12)

✠ Lecture III: On Facing the East in Our Prayers ✠

We build our Churches facing the east and in our personal prayers we face the east as well. This is because the east has certain spiritual symbols and meanings:

1. God has planted the Garden of Eden “eastward” (**Gen 2:8**). – Thus by facing the east in our prayers we remember the place that God had intended for us to be.
2. Our Lord Jesus Christ was born in the east, His star appeared in the east (**Mt 2:2**), and His mother was called the eastern gate (**Ezek 44:1,2**). – Thus salvation came to the world from the east for Lord Jesus Christ was also crucified in the east.
3. The sun that rises from the east is a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ – “The Sun of Righteousness” (**Mal 4:2**). – Therefore, as we face the east in our worship we remember our Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Most theologians say that the Second Coming of our Lord will be from the east according to the prophecy of Zechariah the Prophet, “In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east” (**Zech 14:4**). – Also, our Lord said, “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (**Mt 24:27**).
5. In the east, the first church was established, the first martyrs shed their blood and from the east the Holy Gospel spread.

Q: Isn't God present everywhere? Why then face the east?

A: Indeed God is Omnipresent but in our prayer we can only look in one direction and the east was chosen for the above reasons. Moreover, we read for instance about Daniel the Prophet praying and facing Jerusalem (**Dan 6:10**) because facing the holy city brings to his mind holy memories. Likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ who is one with the Father many times “lifted **up** His eyes to heaven” (**Jn 11:41; 17:1**) and spoke with the Father who is everywhere because lifting up the eyes has a certain spiritual effect.

*This lecture is adapted from ‘*Comparative Theology*’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.