

# MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS

LIFE. GOD. TRUTH. FOR COPTIC YOUTH.

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An artist's impression of the face of Jesus based on the Shroud of Turin and corrected to match Dr. Stephen Marquardt's mask.  
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Who Needs a Savior?  
*Do You?*

JESUS, *The* Messiah?

**JESUS HUMAN OR DIVINE?**

*A Historical Jesus?*

**DECISION TIME**



A PUBLICATION OF THE COPTIC  
ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE  
SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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### Mission Statement

We, the magazine staff, have a mission regarding you, the reader: to encourage you on your Christian walk and to strengthen you through articles, answers and more about God's very special plan for you.

### Material Submission

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Who is the Lord Jesus Christ to you and what meaning does He have in your life? We are plainly told in the Holy Book of I Timothy 2:5:

***"There is One God and One Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."***

Origen (c. 225) expounds upon this Holy Scripture by writing: *"We seek a being that is intermediate between all created things and God—a Mediator. This is whom the apostle Paul calls the 'First Born of every creature.'"*

To understand who the Lord Jesus Christ is, knowing how He was "The Messiah", and truly accepting the existence of the Lord Jesus Christ demands an unwavering aspiration to be a Christian, to be on a constant quest for knowledge and understanding, and requiring constant daily Holy Bible study. The consequences of being passive and of being a second rate Holy Bible student are extremely detrimental for your earthly and eternal life. One must accept that the understanding and the knowledge of the Holy Scripture is not a "some day" dream one may occasionally think about, but a definitive task to be accomplished. For the Lord Jesus Christ to have meaning in your life, you must have an understanding of who He is, what He taught, and the salvation He brought to us all.

Don't idly sit around and expect to obtain all of the Biblical learning you will need from the Church. It is equally your responsibility to study and learn to reinforce the teachings of the Holy Church. Certainly you will obtain much in your church life, but "more is better" for your personal journey through life. The Church edifies what you read at home.

The Church encourages you to search, read, and study the Holy Scriptures daily. You do not sit aimlessly around and gain scholarly knowledge for an occupation, for school study, or for a game you would like to win, but rather you apply yourself and take a direct course of action. The same should be the case "and more" for your personal Holy Bible study.

You must be active and not passive.

***"Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger."***

***(Proverbs 19:15)***

Just as one's aspirations and quests determine his desire in this earthly world so they do in the Heavenly eternal life. Remember the one talent man, the two talent man, and the five talent man (Matthew 25: 14-30)? When the Lord Jesus Christ needed not to walk on His journey, He sent the disciples for a donkey, He did not wait for one to pass His way (Matthew 21:3). Zaccheus was a short statured man; he could not see the Lord Jesus Christ so he climbed up a tree to see Him pass by (Luke 9:1-4).

***"Seek that you may excel" (I Corinthians 14:12)***

We must seek first things first when we wake up in the morning and before we sleep at night. Prayer and Holy Bible reading/study must be these first things. It is the fire that fuels the soul during the wakening hours. It is what builds conduct and character. It is what assists us to excel. Without the fire of Holy Scripture alive within us we grow weak.

***If this dies, then we are dead, though, we keep on breathing (Revelation 3:1)***

God willing, we will begin a study of the divinely inspired authors of the Holy Books and the background of which the Holy Books were written, The Holy Book of Genesis through Revelation. This will be found on the diocese website ([www.suscopts.org](http://www.suscopts.org)). A look into the life of the times, the life lead by those who wrote the books handed down through history, translated into multiple languages and that have stood the test of time. Please go to the website and begin to take the journey with me through the lives of those who lived and wrote the Holy Books of the very HOLY Bible.

It is my prayer that we all remember the ant, consider her ways and be wise with the study of the Holy Bible.

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



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Dear Mighty Arrows Staff,  
I wanted to thank God for using each and everyone of you in this effort to make the magazine for the youth. From cover to cover, the topics are well written and well presented, I have read them all. May God bless you and bless the ways He has used your gifts and talents.  
God bless,  
Newby

**Editor's note:** Thank you for your prayers. Please do continue to pray for us. As you know the enemy will fight us in the process, but we know as Jesus said, "Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail." We got Jesus on our side, who dares be against us!



**MA Staff,**  
I have an idea for the magazine, a new article perhaps. I've always enjoyed collecting good quotes (not necessarily religious) and reading them over and over, gaining wisdom through the process. Could we, the youth send in quotes to be published?  
**J. M. Stephanous**

**Editor's note:** Thank you so much for this wonderful suggestion. We encourage the youth to send us articles and photos and now "Quotes." Dear readers, please send us any quotes of wisdom that you would like us to publish. If you know the author of the quote please do mention him or her. You could do this in several ways, by email, or by mail. Looking forward to some good quotes.

## LET US KNOW

Let us know what you think about articles from our previous issues

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Writers of Mighty Arrows,  
I wanted to thank you for the topic selection you have made. I always have the hardest time discussing the issue of God and His existence with colleagues, students, and friends.

I have enjoyed reading the question and answer part of 'The Evolution Controversy' especially since I get asked these same questions myself. I'm wondering if there could be an issue discussing Bible and its authenticity.

Thank you,  
St. Mary Houston servant

**Editor's note:** You are right on the mark, dear servant. We need to discuss these tough issues that our youth question and are questioned about. We hope they are "always ready to give a defense to everyone who asks [them] a reason for the hope that is in [them.]"

Thank you for bringing the Biblical controversy up, it's our next issue, so hang tight. Please let us know of any topics you would like us to write about, and encourage your youth to subscribe and write us also. God bless.





# Writers Wanted

# MIGHTY ARROWS

## MAGAZINE



Did you ever want to write something that  
would be published?

Guys, do you want advice only a guy can give?

Have you heard of a saint's story that really touched your heart?

Girls, do you have a question only a girl can understand?

Did you ever want to share a personal experience?

Do you want to tell the magazine staff a suggestion?

Did you ever read a Bible passage that really moved you?

Have you ever written a prayer that you can share with us?

Do you want to share what is happening at your local church?

Did you ever read a book that changed your life?

Here is your chance,

We Want to hear From you!

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# WHO NEEDS A SAVIOR? Do you?

By Mimi Ignatius

*"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16)* was the profound answer uttered by the apostle Peter, for this was revealed to him by God the Father. This declaration was in response to the question our Lord posed to His disciples,

*"Who do you say that I am?"*  
(Matthew 16:15)

Take a moment and ask yourself who is this Jesus? For more than two thousand years, people have attempted to answer that same question. Most responses usually begin by affirming one's religious beliefs, which is appropriate. However, we can think deeper to the core of our soul, and consider who Jesus really is on a personal level. Can this personal bond be easily detected? Accounts of the Holy Gospel describe various situations in which our Lord Jesus Christ established a personal relationship with an individual. By doing so, Christ reveals that He is a personal Savior. He has a personal touch with every individual. At every occasion, He addressed a specific need or a void and replaced the emptiness with an enriched repentant heart.

Simon the Pharisee invited our Lord to a banquet at his house. He was one of the two individuals personally addressed

at the gathering; the anguished woman distressed over her sinful life and Simon, a man of prominence secretly judging her. Both had emptiness in their lives. She tried and failed to fill the void in her life with lust and he attempted to fill his emptiness by judging the weaknesses of others. Christ gently addressed them both according to their needs. The real difference between Simon and the woman was that the woman was aware of her needs, and so our Lord acknowledged her first, forgave her, and sent her away in peace (*Luke 7:36-50*). Despite this occasion for Simon to open the heavy door of his own heart and welcome his Savior, no account is given that he seized that opportunity. By his choice, it remained shut. Therefore, neither peace nor forgiveness for him was recorded.

Samaria provided the perfect environment for salvation for one individual and an entire population (*John*

4). It was there in Samaria, that our Lord met the infamous woman named Photini. By a well, she met her Savior, and the Savior, Himself, traveled that route purposely to meet her. Almighty God sat by the well and conversed with a simple careless woman living a very questionable life. She seemed to not really care, since this was the sixth disgraceful attempt to live with yet another man (*John 4:17,18*). Her life is a reminder that our spiritual lives are sometimes like hills and valleys

*"If I ascend into heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there" (Psalm 139:8)*

For it was in this low hellish life that she finally saw Him there. Actually, He had traveled there with her, and it was there that she finally recognized Him. He transformed her into a disciple carrying His message of salvation. The same people who once could not bear to see her,

“ She needed to be there for she was forever indebted to Him for compassionately rescuing her from the torments she endured for so long ”



were willing to hear her.

*"Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world'" (John 4:42)*

At the end of her life on earth, St. Photini was thrown in a well as part of the plan to destroy her. She is recognized by many Orthodox churches as a saint and martyr (see reference below).

A peculiar setting of death row existed two thousand years ago. It was during this dreadful time that a hopeless career criminal was finally sentenced to death. It was not strange for him to be accompanied by other criminals such as himself. What seemed bizarre in his mind was having Jesus innocently hang on the cross beside him and all the while forgiving those who treated Him cruelly. With both arms outstretched and with brutal pain and humiliation inflicted upon Him, Jesus reached out to both His death penalty convicts. Both villains were given the same love and kindness and hope for salvation. Both saw and heard the same message from the Savior they both so desperately needed, but they made different decisions which resulted in very different outcomes.

*"Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42)*

Demas was his name, a.k.a., the Thief on the Right. "

*And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (23:43).*

How precious is that!

By the tomb of Christ was Mary Magdalene. Unsuspecting to her, was her beloved Lord asking her

*"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" (John 20:15)*

Why was she so compelled to be there? For generations to come, this obscure woman, once possessed with seven demons, would always be associated with the holy resurrection. Ingrained in our minds is the icon image of her using her hair to wipe the blood of her Lord on the wood of the cross. There is no biblical support of that depiction, but the image of her outpour of love for the Lord has been illustrated with this passion and sorrow. She needed to be there for she was forever indebted to Him for compassionately rescuing her from the torments she endured for so long. She may not have understood the broad comprehensive plan of salvation, but she knew that her life

had changed. She knew that it was this Jesus, (whom she referred to as "Rabboni" Teacher) who had saved her. Because He knew that in her sorrow she needed to be there, He, in turn, desiring to ease her pain and complete her understanding of salvation, allowed her to be the first representative of humanity to proclaim His resurrection.

Journey through the Holy Scriptures and discover the promised Savior, Jesus Christ. He is God, the Word, the Only Begotten Son, and the Savior of the world. It is He who fulfilled every prophecy leading to salvation. A devoted elder of the Jewish faith named Simon waited for years for the moment to declare the onset of salvation. Revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, in his arms he beheld the Savior of the whole world, for Jew and Gentile alike.

*"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your Salvation, Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32)*

This is He, Jesus Christ, who would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis. 3:15). It is He who would offer the ultimate sacrifice with His own flesh and blood. It is He who was the flame of fire in the inconsumable burning bush (Exodus 3). It is He who delighted to walk among the three youth in the furnace, whose faith in Him and resilience to all atrocities for Him was being tested (Daniel 3:25). It is He whom Isaiah the Prophet foretold of His bitter suffering (Isaiah 53). It is He whom David the Prophet and King foresaw His might and glory (Psalm 110). To be a guiding principle for all people throughout all time, it is He who gave us commandments of law (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5), and it is He who added the commandment of love (John 13:34,) for the Father and the Son are One.

Thorough analysis of one's own life will clearly identify Christ Jesus in every hill and in every valley, in every angle and in every bend, and at every occasion. From weddings (John 2:1-11) to funeral processions (Luke 7:11-17), He has traveled every step with every soul. In His meekness He awaits the fog of the clutter and pollution in each individual's life to settle so that He may finally be noticed. He is always there. All emptiness and any void experienced in life are the result of

the lack of a personal relationship with the Lord. No money, fame, power, prestige, friends, family, temporary indulgence, or any kind of earthly thought of security will fill that void. There is an evident yearning for a connection with God in order to experience real fulfillment in life. It is about true religious beliefs in conjunction with a vibrant personal relationship with the Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of hopelessness, loneliness, laziness, sinfulness, hatefulness, drunkenness, resentfulness, carelessness, selfishness, and emptiness.

The path of salvation is opened with the keys of a holy baptism, nourished by the church sacraments, and sustained by the most important bond one can ever attain. At every occasion of an individual's life, the Lord Jesus Christ is ever present, but most unmistakably in prayer and in each of the seven sacraments. He gave us, the believers, these holy mysteries so that in them faith is manifested and unity with Him is possible.

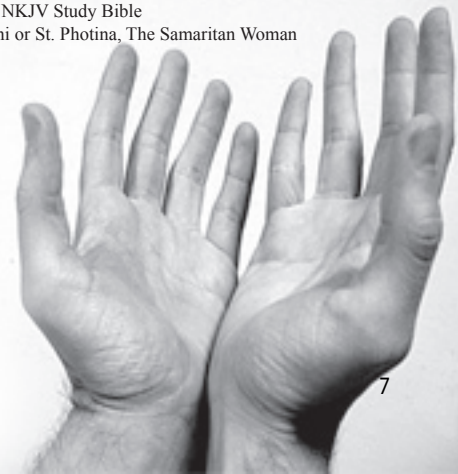
*"If only I may touch His clothes, I shall*

“ With both arms  
outstretched and with  
brutal pain and humiliation  
inflicted upon Him, Jesus  
reached out to both His death  
penalty convicts ”

*be made well" (Mark 5:28)*

Each experience adds to a real and unique relationship of love and hope, repentance and forgiveness, joy and service. It is a relationship that endures, grows, and matures. It is a relationship that in itself is wholesome and complete, lacking nothing, and desiring nothing. We have an innate need for a Savior. He is there!

References:  
Nelson's NKJV Study Bible  
St. Photini or St. Photina, The Samaritan Woman







## TRIP TO THE SCHOOL OF LOVE & THE MIRACLE OF THE HOLY OIL

BY MARIA  
MANSOUR

On May 12<sup>th</sup> we received an email from our beloved friend Christian in Mexico. He told us that oil had been dripping off the icons in our church there since Good Friday. During our regular online evangelism meeting, we marveled at the comforting message that God had sent to this new church. Although we did not know the amazing story behind it, we felt that God was inviting us to this place. As time passed, our dream of visiting the church was becoming a reality. . Eventually, 11 Copts joined the mission trip. Every Christian who has been on a missionary trip will say that they have seen the book of Acts unfold before them, but in this trip we testify that we lived the book of Acts. So get ready to start with us our adventures in the blessed Land of Mexico.

We each arrived at the airport in Mexico not knowing one another. At the airport, three of the beloved members of Saint Mary & St Mark Coptic Church of Mexico greeted us and took us to the place they call home "the church". Being in a foreign country is scary, not knowing the people made it even scarier. So, in order for us not to feel worried, the beloved members made a special welcome card for each of us. The cards were simple but the content made each one of us feel welcomed as they wrote "Welcome to your Church, welcome to your family, we are one in Christ".

During the drive from the airport to the church, about a 2 ½ hour trip, Luke (the first member of the church) told us the story of how the church started. He said that he moved to Mexico about 20 years ago and that there was no Orthodox church to pray in.

He began thinking of opening a small church and he and his Mexican wife searched for land but could not find any. Afterwards, his wife suggested building the church on the small property they owned, and so they did. He was telling us that he had no tools to build just like Moses in the wilderness, but finally he did build a small chapel for his family and friends to pray in.

He took some pictures of the church, sent them to Abouna Mikhail Edward in Ohio, him for a priest to come and pray the Divine Liturgy for them. For his annual convention, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III went to Boston. Abouna Mikhail showed him the pictures and the request of his children

and asked

in Mexico. His Holiness smiled as he was thinking of the same thing. He asked Abouna if he trusted Luke and Abouna said yes. His Holiness requested that Abouna tell Luke to buy land that they can build a bigger church on, and that His Holiness will send the money for it.

As happy as they were, the worries of finding a piece of land took over. They knew from past experience that it was very hard and expensive to buy land in Mexico. Days passed and Luke was in his shop waiting for an answer to an ad for land that he had posted in the newspaper. Finally a lady came and spoke to him regarding some land she was wanting to sell. He jumped for joy asking her about the location of the property. The land happened to be a few streets away from the chapel and his house! They sat to talk and negotiate about the money; the lady requested \$40,000. Luke thanked the Lord for there is no land in this area that could have such a cheap price. He then told the lady that on this land they would build a church. The lady cried tears of joy, as it was her heart's wish for this land to be given to God.

After the blessing of His Holiness, the money was sent right away and the Church was named after the Blessed Virgin Mary and the evangelist St. Mark. The construction period was difficult and obtaining the required authorizations took a long time. Eventually, Luke and his friend went to the Department of Religion. They met with the lady responsible for issuing such authorizations and gave her a gift from his Holiness, a picture of Archangel Michael on papyrus paper. The lady's eyes teared up in joy and granted them the authorizations they sought.

At the end of December 2005, God chose Abouna Zachariah el Baramousy to serve in the church in Mexico. On February 28<sup>th</sup> 2006, His Holiness came to consecrate the church. The blessed visit of His Holiness was a national festival in the land of Mexico, it was even reported in the news "they don't do so believing in the separation between the church and the government".

At the end of January, there was a baptism for a convert. Everyone was so happy about the girl born again in Christ. Abouna took pictures with his digital camera and viewed the pictures several time, however, this time he felt the urge to check them again as a comforting message awaiting him. Abouna started looking at the pictures again, doubting to find anything new. Around the girl's head, he saw a crown of light reflecting on his face and her mother's face. Many came and saw the picture, including one photographer who testified that it was a true picture and had not been tampered with.

One day after this miracle, a lady and her children came to the church seeking prayers from Abouna for her ten year old child. He had cancer in his blood that had affected his digestive track and taken over his body. Chemotherapy had become useless and he was in his last days on earth. Abouna, with his strong faith, asked the lady to bring her son to be baptized and told her that he would be cured right away. The lady had such a strong faith, even though she was not a Christian yet, agreed and on the day she had a doctor's appointment for her son, she instead took him to be baptized. She later took the boy to see the doctor. The





doctor examined the child for hours and finally asked the mother where she had taken her son. The mother replied that he was the only doctor they had been to. Finally the doctor asked the mother to tell him in detail about what had happened since the boy's last doctor visit. When he learned of the baptism story, he marveled and said truly this is a miracle, your son is cured and he is as a healthy as any boy in his age.

Of course Satan's wars toward the church grew more and more because of those miracles. "Nevertheless, He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." (Acts 14:17)

On Good Friday, as Abouna was chanting the hymns of the last hour, he saw something strange on an icon, but he had to focus on the hymn. Thereafter, they all went to eat aghapy, except Adriana, the wife of an Egyptian deacon. She wanted to take a blessing from the icon of Saint Mary because she had fallen on her hands and was in pain. When she was trying to touch the icon, she saw oil dropping from the picture of the Virgin Mary. She ran and told Abouna and the other church members. When they returned to the church, they found not only the icon of the Virgin but rather all the icons in the church dripping with oil. This was truly a big comfort for the church and Abouna. In Mexico, the Government fears the power of the church, especially the Catholic Church, to take over. Therefore, they do not publicize any church's news. In this case, reports came and interviewed Abouna and the church congregation and broadcasted the story. It was also written in their newspaper. The message reached many people who then came to the church, where taught the Orthodox dogma, and then were baptized.

So during our 2 ½ hour bus ride from the airport, we took such a big blessing before we started our work. When we arrived, Abouna welcomed us with roses and his huge smile. That is what I mean about the language of love, the unconditional love that gives from the hearts even if you don't know the person.

We started our first activity on Saturday morning. After praying the Divine Liturgy, we had a session on how to approach people and how to show them the Coptic Church. Then we went to the Mega Market and distributed pamphlets inviting the people to come to the church that evening for food, songs, children's activities, and the "Jesus" movie. It took us sometime around the market to give out those pamphlets and talk with the people. It was truly amazing that we all did so much work and we felt we had accomplished a lot. We returned to the church and started our first bible study on the Book of Acts.

Later in the evening God sent us a message: only the church congregation came and not many new. As we were all sad, we

understood that God wanted to teach us that it is by His grace, not our efforts that the people will come. We continued our program with the adults, followed by the raising of incense, but of course God did not leave us upset for the rest of the day, but just right after, the oil started pouring again from the icons, so we can truly say that we also have witnessed it by our own eyes. However, the mother church has still to investigate before pronouncing the verdict on the oil dripping from the icons.

Later, we gathered for dinner, where the congregation had prepared Mexican fasting food for us, seasoned with their unconditional love that they were taught through their love of Christ. We prayed the midnight praise thanking God for everything He had done for us. We woke up the second day for the Divine Liturgy, to find 2 surprises waiting for us. There were two baptisms, one of a new born child and the other for a child of the age of 7 coming especially from New York with his Mexican orthodox grandmother to be baptized.

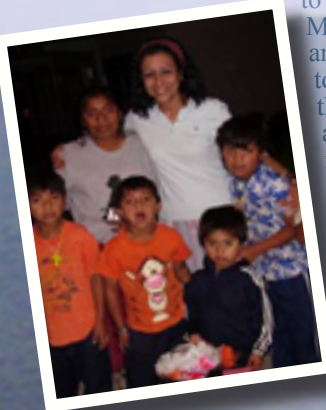
After the blessed Divine Liturgy, an adult hymn class was conducted by one of the Egyptian deacons, while the children had their Sunday school class. The children made a huge card for Abouna, demonstrating that even the children learned the language of Christ's love.

On Monday we were blessed by a visit from Abouna Timotheus from Miami, Florida. After many prayers, we felt that God wanted us to direct our work towards the children, so every evening we had Sunday school and crafts for them. Others stayed with the parents and spoke about the Coptic Church and others spent time praying that the word of God will reach their hearts.

The experience of this trip were very beneficial to all of us as a group as well as individually. God has taught us that no matter what we do and how hard we work, it is only by His grace that we will accomplish anything in life. Don't say you are not a good enough person to become a servant or that you are unworthy, for we all are, but say to God that you are just a tool ready to be used by Him for the glorification of His Holy Name. Most importantly, if the love of God fills your heart, then you can move mountains. This story is just the continuation of the book of Acts. Please keep the church in your prayers.

To read more stories: take a look at the presentation of the missionary trip to Mexico, please visit:

<http://www.suscpts.org/evangelism/mclass.html>



News and happenings at your local church?

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Subject: Happenings





Icons by Dr. Isaac Fanous  
at St. Mary COC of Colleyville, TX



JESUS - WAS (IS) THE MESSIAH?  
BY GEORGE BASSILIOS



Christ asked the most crucial question in the history of mankind: *“Who do you say that I am?”* (Matt 16:15). This is truly the question, and it is personally directed to us. Our eternity is hinged upon how we answer this pivotal question, provided that our life reflects our belief.

Was He really the Messiah? Was He a mere good moral teacher? Was He just a Prophet? Let’s examine together the evidence before us.

But, before we delve into the core of the argument, let’s define what we mean by “Messiah.” The Greek and Coptic translation of this word is “*Khristos*.” This is Jesus’ title; many have made this title into Jesus’ surname. Jesus Christ means Jesus the Christ (Messiah). When we say we are Christians, we are saying that we are followers of the Messiah. Messiah is a Hebrew word signifying “one who has been anointed.” The kings of Israel were anointed with oil in the name of God. Because it was customary to anoint kings, the phrase “The LORD’s anointed” became a synonym for “king.”

The term “Messiah” was later used to designate a “future king,” an expected royal leader from the line of David who would restore the kingdom to Israel. That the Messiah is supposed to be a king is a well-known fact by anyone who has studied the Bible in depth. Consider these verses:

*“Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross,”* (Mark 15:32).

*“We have found the Messiah...you are the king of Israel,”* (John 1:41, 49).

So now we come to the crucial question: What is the historical evidence for the messiahship of Jesus? It is one thing to claim to be the Messiah and quite another to have the credentials to support that claim. However, Christ did both. He offered three unique and miraculous facts as evidence of His claim: (1) the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, (2) a uniquely sinless life, and (3) His resurrection from the dead. All of these are historically provable and unique to the person of Jesus.

## The Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecies

There were numerous prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. To name a few, the following prophecies claimed that Jesus would be:

- Born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt. 1:21)
- Of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3 and 22:18; Matt. 1:1 and Gal. 3:16).
- Of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Luke 3:23, 33 and Heb. 7:14).
- A descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12; Matt. 1:1).
- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4–7).
- Anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2; Matt. 3:16–17).
- Heralded by a messenger (Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1; Matt. 3:1–2).
- A worker of miracles (Isa. 35:5–6; Matt. 9:35)
- Cleansing the temple (Mal. 3:1; Matt. 21:12).
- Rejected by Jews (Ps. 118:22; 1 Peter 2:7).
- Dying a humiliating death (Ps. 22 and Isa. 53; Matt. 27:31).
- Standing silence before his accusers (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 27:12–19).
- Mocked by those who crucified Him (Ps. 22:7–8; Matt. 27:31).
- Having His hands and feet pierced (Ps. 22:16; Luke 23:33).
- Crucified with thieves (Isa. 53:12; Mark 15:27–28).
- Praying for his persecutors (Isa. 53:12; Luke 23:34).
- Pierced in his side (Zech. 12:10; John 19:34).
- Buried in a rich man’s tomb (Isa. 53:9; Matt. 27:57–60).
- Mocked by the casting of lots for his garments (Ps. 22:18; John 19:23–24).
- Raised from the dead (Ps. 2:7 and 16:10; Acts 2:31 and Mark 16:6).
- Ascending into heaven (Ps. 68:18; Acts 1:9).
- Sitting at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:3).

These Old Testament prophecies about Christ were made hundred of years in advance. What is truly amazing about these Old Testament prophecies is that

there is no way they could be made by “intelligent guesses” or by reading the “trend of the times.”

Some skeptics argue that there is a natural explanation for what only seemed to be supernatural prophecies here. One explanation is that the prophecies were accidentally fulfilled by Jesus. He happened to be in the right place at the right time. But what are we to say about the prophecies involving miracles? He just happened to make the blind man see? He just happened to resurrect from the dead? These hardly seem to be chance events. If a God is in control of the universe, then chance is ruled out. Further, it is unlikely that these events would have converged in the life of one man.

Dr. Peter S. Ruckman, a mathematician, claims the odds of fulfilling only 60 of the prophecies, by the only person who claimed to be the Son of God, and who died on a “tree” in Calvary, and who rose from the dead on the third day, are astronomical! The odds are not just one in one trillion but one out of ten to 895<sup>th</sup> power. That is a one over a one followed by 895 zeroes! The evidence clearly points to Jesus as the divinely appointed fulfillment of the messianic prophecies.

## Jesus’ Sinless Life as Evidence for His Messiahship

The very course of Christ’s life demonstrates His claim as the Messiah. Some of Jesus’ enemies brought false accusations against Him, but the verdict of Pilate at His trial has been the verdict of history: *“I find no fault in this Man”* (Luke 23:4). A soldier at the cross agreed, saying, *“Certainly this Man was a righteous Man”* (Luke 23:47), and the thief on the cross next to Jesus said, *“This Man has done nothing wrong”* (Luke 23:41).

But the real test is what those who were closest to Jesus said of His character. His disciples had lived and worked with Him for several years. Peter called Christ *“a lamb without blemish and without spot,”* (1 Peter 1:19) and added, *“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth,”* (1 Peter 2:22). St. John the Beloved called Him, *“Jesus Christ the righteous,”* (1 John 2:1). St. Paul expressed unanimous belief of the early church that Christ *“knew no sin,”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He later said that He was tempted as we are *“yet without sin,”* (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus Himself once challenged His accusers, *“Which of you convicts Me of sin?”* (John 8:46), but no one was able to find Him guilty of anything.

This being the case, the impeccable character of Christ gives a double testimony to the truth of His claim. It provides supporting evidence as He suggested, but it also assures us that He was not lying when He said that He was God.

## Jesus' Resurrection as Evidence for His Messiahship

There is a third miracle of God confirming Christ's claim as the Messiah: it is His resurrection from the dead. This is truly the greatest of all miracles. The fact that both the Old Testament and Jesus predicted that He would rise from the dead makes the miracle that much stronger. First, there are passages, such as Psalms 2 and 16, that are cited by the New Testament as applying to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:27 and Heb 1:5). St. Paul used these passages, without doubt, in the Jewish synagogues as he *"went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ,'"* (Acts 17:2,3). Second, the resurrection of Christ is taught by logical deduction from two Old Testament teachings: (1) the Messiah will come and *die* (Isa 53; Ps 22) and (2) the Messiah will have an enduring *reign* from Jerusalem (Isa 9:6; Dan 2:44; Zech 13:1). The only way the Messiah can fulfill these two prophecies is by a resurrection from the dead. On the top of these Old Testament prophecies of Christ's resurrection are those He made on several occasions Himself. According to our teacher St. John, Jesus prophesied about His resurrection from His earliest ministry, saying, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,"* (John 2:19). In Matthew 12:40, He said, *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* After Peter's confession, Jesus *"began to teach His disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things... and be killed, and after three days rise,"* (Mark 8:31). Jesus repeated this same prophecy again on the way to Jerusalem and the cross (Mark 14:59; Matt 27:63). Further, Jesus said He would raise Himself from the dead when He said, *"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again,"* (John 10:18).

Now in view of the prophecies of the resurrection, the event is given special confirming significance. Philosopher of science Karl Popper argued that, whenever a "risky prediction" is fulfilled, it counts as confirmation of the theory that predicted it. If so, then the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of His own resurrection is confirmation of His claim to be God. For what could be riskier than predicting your own resurrection? If a person will not accept these lines of evidence as support to Christ's truth claim, then he or she will not accept anything as evidence.

## Liar, Lunatic, Or Lord

Thus, we are left with the now famous "tri-lemma" proposed by the English apologist, C. S. Lewis, who concluded his own research into the messiahship of Jesus.

The argument in simplest form states:

1. Jesus was either God or a bad man.
2. But Jesus was not a bad man.
3. Therefore Jesus was (is) God.

Few would challenge the second premise, but if the first is added, the conclusion necessarily follows. Someone who claims to be God, and is not, is not a good man but a bad man. Merely a "good man" is one thing Jesus could not possibly be. By claiming to be God, He eliminated that possibility. For a liar is not a good man, and one who lies about his essential identity is a liar, and a mere man who claims to be God lies about his essential identity. C.S. Lewis cogently says:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

It is attractive and comfortable to say that Jesus was neither a bad man nor

God, but a good man. To say he was a bad man offends Christians, and to say he was God offends non-Christians. To say neither offends no one. Therefore non-Christians want to say neither. *But that position offends logic.*

Either Jesus believed His own claim to be God or He did not. If He did, He was a lunatic. If He did not, He was a liar. Unless, of course, He was (is) God. Why could He not be either a liar or a lunatic? Because of His character. There are two things everyone admits about Jesus' character: He was wise and He was good. A lunatic is the opposite of wise, and a liar is the opposite of good.

## Why, then, are many not compelled?

Not for rational reasons. No reason has ever been brought forth against Christianity that has not been refuted. The reluctance is usually moral. To admit that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, is to admit His absolute authority over my life. Can a drug addict think clearly and objectively about moral truth when it comes to drugs? We are all addicts to something — to sin, that is. That is the very disease that Jesus came to cure. Of course the cancer is going to fear the surgeon. That is exactly what you would expect. That is not a reason to disbelieve the surgeon's claim to be the healer. In fact it is just the opposite. The sad truth that haunts many is *"that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God"* (John 3:19-21). It is not the *absence* of evidence that bewilders the skeptics and non-believers; rather, it is their *suppression* of the evidence.

May the Lord of lords reign on our needy hearts and in them may He become our King, our sovereign Ruler, and most of all, *our Messiah*.

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# JESUS *Human or Divine?*

BY MOUNIR WASSIF

Our Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself, the Incarnate Logos, who took to Himself a **complete** manhood. His Divine Nature is united with His Human Nature in a **complete hypostatic (personal) union without mingling, confusion, alteration or separation**. Furthermore, the unity between the two Natures occurred **without transmutation**. Thus the Divine Nature did not transmute to the Human Nature, nor did the Human Nature transmute to the Divine Nature. The Two Natures did not mingle, as in the case of wheat and barely or salt and sugar, and were not confused, as in the case of wine and water or tea and milk. The Two Natures were not altered, as opposed to the case of the chemical union of carbon and oxygen to form carbon dioxide, each loses some of its properties that distinguished it before this unity. In contrast, no change occurred to the Divine or Human Nature as a result of their unity. The Two Natures were not separated for His Divinity parted not from His

Humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye.

The Divine Logos was united with the Human Nature (body & spirit) that He took from the Virgin Mary by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin so that the Child to whom she gave birth would not inherit the original sin. This unity between the Two Natures (Human and Divine) took place from the first moment of the

Holy Pregnancy. As a result of this unity between both Natures inside the Virgin's womb, **One Nature** (entity) was formed **out of both: "The ONE Nature of God, the Incarnate Logos."** The Term "One Nature" **does not refer to either** of the Two Natures (Human or Divine), **but it refers to the result of the union of Both Natures** into this One Nature which is "the Nature of the Incarnate Logos". The term "Two Natures" implies division or potential separation. Human language is inadequate when it comes to describing this union but here is one example: The union between the human spirit and human body: The nature of the human spirit unites with the physical earthly nature of the body without mingling, confusion, alteration, or transmutation {Note: They will separate at death and then they will reunite}. This union of the two natures (human spirit and human body) results in ONE nature that is the human nature. The term ONE here doesn't refer to either of the two natures (spirit or body) but it refers to the result of this union of BOTH natures into this ONE human being. **Therefore, just as we say that the person is ONE nature consisting of two elements (spirit and body), we can also say about the Incarnate Logos that He is ONE entity of two natures (Divine and Human).** The union of the spirit and body is a hypostatic one. So is the union of the Divine Logos and the Human Nature in the virgin's womb. A hypostatic, real, self-essential union not a mere connection that separates as Nestorius claimed. Although a person is formed of two natures (spirit and body), nobody refers to him/her as two. All the person's acts are attributed to this ONE nature, not to the spirit alone or the physical body alone. Similarly, all the acts of Christ should be attributed to Him as a whole, not to His Divine Nature independently or to His Human Nature independently.

## In a Nutshell:

Our Lord Jesus Christ has Two Natures:

1. The Divine Nature of the LOGOS.
2. The Human Nature that He took from the Virgin Mary.

The Human Nature is composed of Two Elements: the Human Spirit and the Human Body.\* The Divine Nature of the LOGOS is united with every element of the Human Nature without mingling, confusion, alteration, transmutation, or separation. As a result of this Hypostatic Union, One Entity is formed out of Both (Divine and Human) Natures. This is the "One Nature Of God, The Incarnate Logos". When we refer to this **ONE NATURE** we are referring to this **ONE ENTITY** that resulted from the union of **BOTH** the Divine and Human Natures.

So what happened on the cross? Our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. Death means that His Human Spirit was separated from His Human Body. The Divine Logos remained united with **BOTH** the spirit and the body after their separation. Hence, His Divinity parted not from His Humanity. This explains why the body was not corrupted in the grave and it also explains how the spirit was able to return to the body when the Resurrection took place.

## Are we Monophysites?

The Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Indian) are 'Miaphysites.' There is a difference



between the ‘Monophysites’ who believe in **One Single Nature** (Divine) of our Lord Jesus Christ and the ‘Miaphysites’ who believe in **One United Nature** or **One Composite Nature** (Divine and Human) of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not believe in a Single Nature but we believe in One Incarnate Nature of the Logos.

### **Our Faith concerning the One Will and One Act:**

Naturally, since we believe that after the union of the Divine and Human Natures, One Nature resulted, namely, the Nature of the Incarnate Logos. We also believe in **One Will** and **One Act** for the Incarnate Logos. There is no contradiction or conflict between the Will and the Act of the Two Natures; what the Divine Nature chooses is undoubtedly chosen by the Human Nature. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work”* (John 4:34) This proves that His will is the same as the Father’s. Certainly, the Divine Logos has the same will as the Father since He is one with Him in the Godhead. Thus, it must be that the Nature of the Incarnate Logos has One Will that is not different from the Father. In fact, sin is nothing but a conflict between man’s will and God’s. But our Lord Jesus Christ said, *“Which of you convicts Me of sin?”* (John 8:46) proving His One will with the Father. If there were no unity between the will of the Divine Logos and His Human Nature, internal conflict would have resulted. Far be it from Him! How then could the Lord Jesus Christ be our guide and our example? The complete righteousness that marked the life of our Savior was due to the unity of His Divine and Human will. Also, the crucifixion was the choice of both the Divine and Human will. Had it not been one will, it would not have been said that He died by His own will for us. And since the will is one, the act is also one.

\*This Lecture is adapted from ‘The Nature of Christ’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

\* Human nature actually consists of three elements: The body, the spirit and the soul. As St. Paul said, “may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Only two are mentioned above for simplicity. But we need to understand that our Lord had a FULL human nature.





# Hey Mike,

I am so angry with my father because he is very sneaky and nosy. I found out that he went into my computer and went into my email account behind my back when I wasn't home. He read everything that I wrote to my priest, everything. I do not feel comfortable living in the same house with him anymore. Besides, this is not the first time my father has upset me like that. I love my dad and I know he loves me, but he has exceeded limits spying on me. I want to move out very badly, but I don't make enough money to support myself (I have a job, but I'm only 18 years old), and on top of all this, my mother, who I love very very much is stuck in between all of this. Many times before, this family was close to falling apart. I don't want this to happen, but I'm just so afraid that it might happen. I want this family to be close, but I just can't take my father anymore. I am seriously considering moving out on my own or with another family member. This will definitely cause very big problems both for me (because it will be very difficult for me to live on my own) and for my family. The only thing that's keeping me in this house is the fact that my family is supporting me financially. What should I do? I'm so mad and I don't know what to do. Please pray for me.

I understand your confusion and your struggle with what has happened. Maybe it was not the right thing to do, but I think you do know he had the good intention. Here, I want to ask you a question. Are you upset because your father has invaded your privacy or because he has read things you are ashamed of and did not want him to know about them? You do admit that your father loves you, so you know that he did this out of love for you because he is worried about you and wants to make sure you are not in trouble. Your pride is making you feel you cannot stand this house anymore. If you do really love your parents as you say, you will never think of leaving the house. To say that financial support is the one thing holding you to your family shows your lack of love towards them. You say about your father "I cannot trust him anymore" what do you think your father would say about you? Can he trust you? What do you think is the role of the father in the household? Is it just financial obligation? Did you ask yourself what made your father check your email? Do you really think he is just a nosy person or is it that he sees things that makes him worried about you. If he had asked you direct questions would you have told him the truth?

Be honest with yourself before blaming your father for what he has done. Do not think of your father as your enemy, but someone who loves you and wants what is best for you. His main and sole motive is your wellbeing. You need to have a conversation with your father. Always have an open communication with him and take him as your friend. Make him feel he can trust you and love him as he loves you.

**I am suffering from laziness and lack of energy. Can you help me?**

A student's day schedule can be overwhelmingly packed with lectures to attend, people to meet, studying, and decisions to make. If students do not learn how to manage their time properly, they can be in trouble.

Everyday, we must desire and seek the will and guidance of God. Making good decisions, living a productive life, avoiding temptation, laziness and procrastination, eating healthy food and exercising should be our goals. Exercise such as walking has been proven in clinical trials to elevate mood. Above all we must follow the path of God in each day.

I encourage you to begin every day with prayers from the Agpeya, asking God to enlighten your path and strengthen your faith. Pray also for wisdom and understanding that you may overcome procrastinating and wasting your precious time.

I am going to give you some biblical verses to help you out. "He came out and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed Him. When He reached the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial'" (Luke 22:39-40).

"Do not bring us to the time of trial" (Matthew 6:13). These verses are stating "save us from the coming trials," "do not bring us to the test." They are ways of asking God to guide us through each day; and to help us know what is the right way to follow.

At the close of the day, review the events one by one; with a thankful spirit for those things accomplished and those you fell short of fulfilling. Pray that God will guide you in your shortcomings and follow this meditation with the Lord's Prayer and the prayers of the twelfth hour.

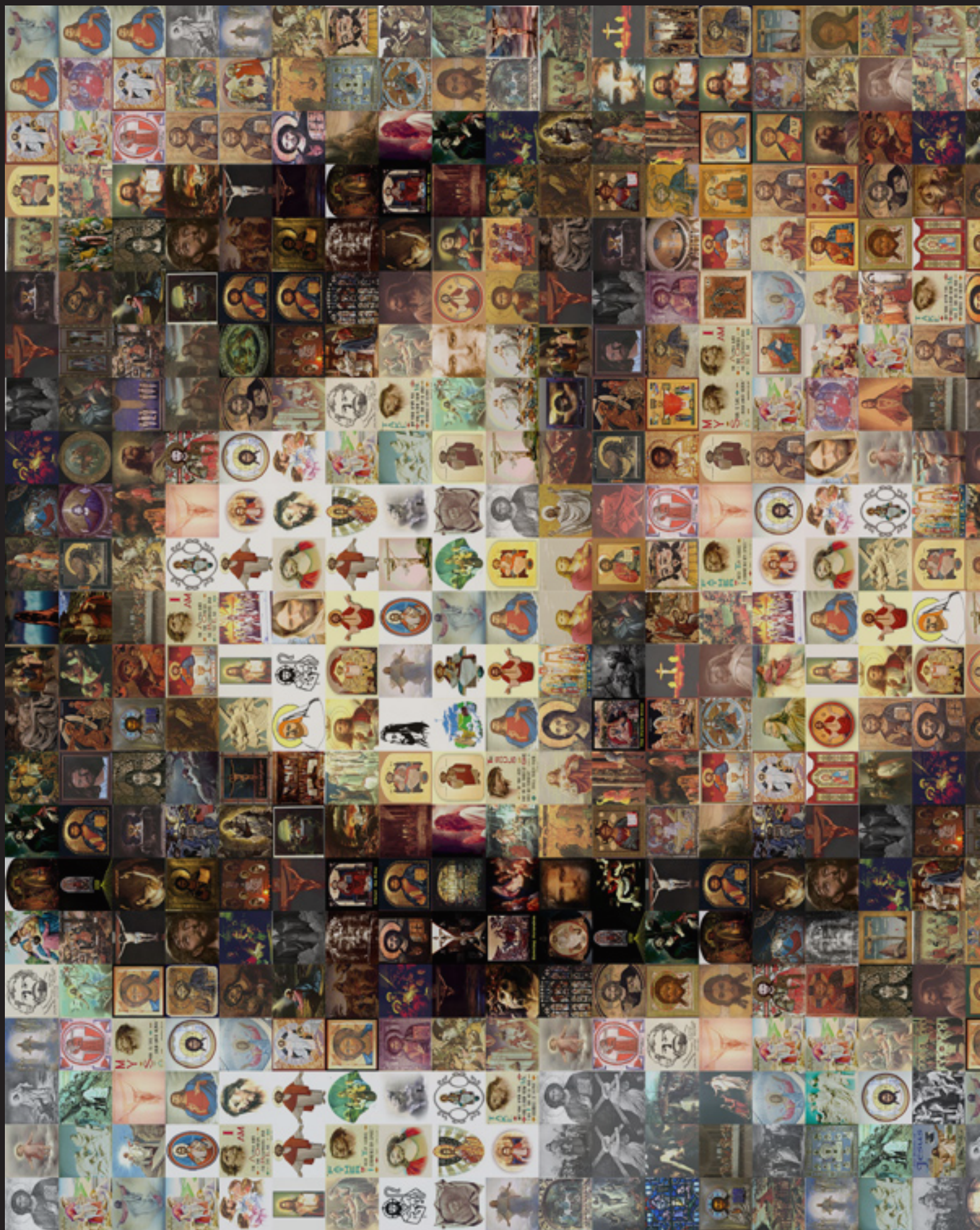
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or e-mail:  
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Subject: Hey Mike









*These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace.  
In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer,  
I have overcome the world - John 16:33*



# Dear Mary,

## Silence is golden

When should I stop talking about God? I was talking to a few friends last week about this movie that is supposed to be rated PG but should have been rated, at minimum, PG-13. There were so many sexual references that I couldn't stop telling my friends of how it was a mistake to drag along my younger sister. Suddenly one of them blurted out, "silence is golden." I was so shocked! What should I have said? Was I wrong to complain? How was I to know about the movie or my friend's reaction. Am I too much of a Christian?

We should never stop talking about God. Deuteronomy 6:6-8 says:  
"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 door posts of your house and on your gates."

We are called to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5) This means we will love what He loves and hate what He hates. He hates sexual immorality (Romans 1:28-30). You were right to reveal this to your friends. Whenever we speak God's truth, we need to be prepared for two possible reactions. As Proverbs 9:8 tells us you should avoid correcting a scoffer lest he hate you, but rebuke a wise man and he will love you. As you mentioned, it is painful when what we have said is not received with the intention given. When we speak truth in love and this happens, it is encouraging to remember the words of our Savior Jesus Christ:

"Blessed are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you,  
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,  
For the Son of Man's sake.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!

For indeed your reward is great in heaven,

For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets." Luke 6:22-23

Once we have revealed truth, however, it is good to allow time for the hearers to process what they have just heard and make their own decision based on what was said. No one likes to be nagged and this seldom has the desired effect. May God continue to purify your heart and consecrate your tongue.

## Contraceptives

I have heard COUNTLESS differing opinions as to whether or not contraceptives are permitted inside marriage for Orthodox Christians. Is it a kind of control we should not have, planning our future and when to have a child? I'm about to get engaged, hence the confusion. Thanks Sarah

Sarah,

The church does not forbid the use of "medical" birth control (ex. Pill, IUD) but does suggest alternative methods of family planning. One such recommendation is controlling fleshly desires during fasting periods. "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment."

(1 Corinthians 7:5-6)

Of most importance is that the family comes together to make the decision and agrees on how to go about family planning. You may also read more on this in the book "Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective" by John Meyendorff.

Editor's note:

You could also read His Grace Bishop Youssef's answer by going to this link <http://www.suscopts.org/q&a/index.php?qid=1128&catid=567>  
And for an even more thorough reply, check His Grace Bishop Serapion's at <http://www.lacopts.org/index.php?site/entry/43/>

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# Is There Historical Evidence of Jesus?

Written by Michael Gleghorn

## Evidence from Tacitus

Although there is overwhelming evidence that the New Testament is an accurate and trustworthy historical document, many people are still reluctant to believe what it says unless there is also some independent, non-biblical testimony that corroborates its statements. In the introduction to one of his books, F.F. Bruce tells about a Christian correspondent who was told by an agnostic friend that "*apart from obscure references in Josephus and the like,*" there was no historical evidence for the life of Jesus outside the Bible. {1} This, he wrote to Bruce, had caused him "*great concern and some little upset in [his] spiritual life.*" {2} He concludes his letter by asking, "*Is such collateral proof available, and if not, are there reasons for the lack of it?*" {3} The answer to this question is, "*Yes, such collateral proof is available,*" and we will be looking at some of it in this article.

Let's begin our inquiry with a passage that historian Edwin Yamauchi calls "*probably the most important reference to Jesus outside the New Testament.*" {4} Reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote:

***Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome. . . .*** {5}

What all can we learn from this ancient (and rather unsympathetic) reference to Jesus and the early Christians? Notice, first, that Tacitus reports Christians derived their name from a historical person called

Christus (from the Latin), or Christ. He is said to have "*suffered the extreme penalty,*" obviously alluding to the Roman method of execution known as crucifixion. This is said to have occurred during the reign of Tiberius and by the sentence of Pontius Pilatus. This confirms much of what the Gospels tell us about the death of Jesus.

But what are we to make of Tacitus' rather enigmatic statement that Christ's death briefly checked "*a most mischievous superstition,*" which subsequently arose not only in Judaea, but also in Rome? One historian suggests that Tacitus is here "*bearing indirect . . . testimony to the conviction of the early church that the Christ who had been crucified had risen from the grave.*" {6} While this interpretation is admittedly speculative, it does help explain the otherwise bizarre occurrence of a rapidly growing religion based on the worship of a man who had been crucified as a criminal. {7} How else might one explain that?

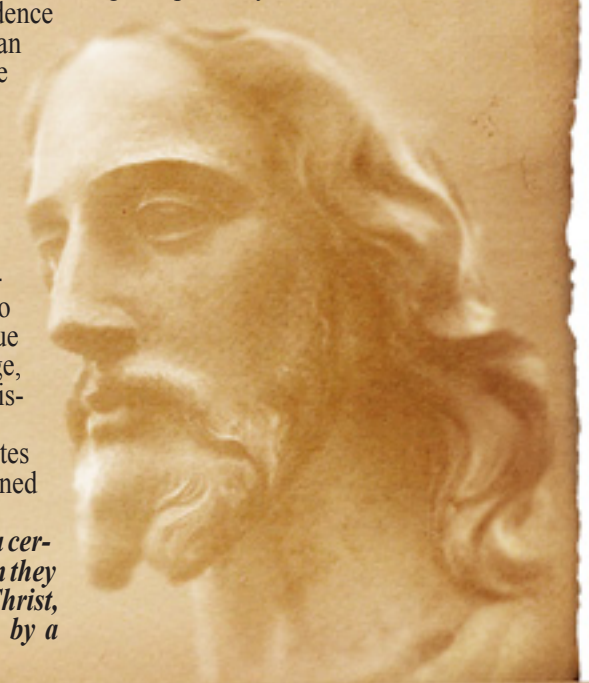
Evidence from Pliny the Younger  
Another important source of evidence about Jesus and early Christianity can be found in the letters of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan. Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan's advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians. {8} Pliny says that he needed to consult the emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity. {9}

At one point in his letter, Pliny relates some of the information he has learned about these Christians:

***They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a***

***sol-  
emn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.*** {10}

This passage provides us with a number of interesting insights into the beliefs and practices of early Christians. First, we see that Christians regularly met on a certain fixed day for worship. Second, their worship was directed to Christ, demonstrating that they firmly believed in His divinity. Furthermore, one scholar interprets Pliny's statement that hymns were sung to Christ, as to a god, as a reference to the rather distinctive fact that, "*unlike other gods who were worshipped, Christ was a person who had lived on earth.*" {11} If this interpretation is correct, Pliny understood that Christians were worshipping an actual historical person as God! Of course, this agrees perfectly with the New Testament





doctrine that Jesus was both God and man.

Not only does Pliny's letter help us understand what early Christians believed about Jesus' person, it also reveals the high esteem to which they held His teachings. For instance, Pliny notes that Christians bound themselves by a solemn oath not to violate various moral standards, which find their source in the ethical teachings of Jesus. In addition, Pliny's reference to the Christian custom of sharing a common meal likely alludes to their observance of communion and the "love feast." {12} This interpretation helps explain the Christian claim that the meal was merely food of an ordinary and innocent kind. They were attempting to counter the charge, sometimes made by non-Christians, of practicing "ritual cannibalism." {13} The Christians of that day humbly repudiated such slanderous attacks on Jesus' teachings. We must sometimes do the same today.

Evidence from Josephus

Perhaps the most remarkable reference to Jesus outside the Bible can be found in the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian. On two occasions, in his Jewish Antiquities, he mentions Jesus. The second, less revealing, reference describes the condemnation of one "James" by the Jewish Sanhedrin. This James, says Josephus, was "the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ." {14} F.F. Bruce points out how this agrees with Paul's description of James in Galatians 1:19 as "the Lord's brother." {15} And Edwin Yamauchi informs us that "few scholars have questioned" that Josephus actually penned this passage. {16}

As interesting as this brief reference is, there is an earlier one, which is truly astonishing. Called the "Testimonium Flavianum," the relevant portion declares:

*About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he . . . wrought surprising feats. . . . He was the Christ. When Pilate . . . condemned him to be crucified, those who*

*had . . . come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared . . . restored to life. . . . And the tribe of Christians . . . has . . . not disappeared.* {17}

Did Josephus really write this? Most scholars think the core of the passage originated with Josephus, but that it was later altered by a Christian editor, possibly between the third and fourth century A.D. {18} But why do they think it was altered? Josephus was not a Christian, and it is difficult to believe that anyone but a Christian would have made some of these statements. {19}

For instance, the claim that Jesus was a wise man seems authentic, but the qualifying phrase, "if indeed one ought to call him a man," is suspect. It implies that Jesus was more than human, and it is quite unlikely that Josephus would have said that! It is also difficult to believe he would have flatly asserted that Jesus was the Christ, especially when he later refers to Jesus as "the so-called" Christ. Finally, the claim that on the third day Jesus appeared to His disciples restored to life, inasmuch as it affirms Jesus' resurrection, is quite unlikely to come from a non-Christian!

But even if we disregard the questionable parts of this passage, we are still left with a good deal of corroborating information about the biblical Jesus. We read that he was a wise man who performed surprising feats. And although He was crucified under Pilate, His followers continued their discipleship and became known as Christians. When we combine these statements with Josephus' later reference to Jesus as "the so-called Christ," a rather detailed picture emerges which harmonizes quite well with the biblical record. It increasingly appears that the "biblical Jesus" and the "historical Jesus" are one and the same!

Evidence from the Babylonian Talmud

There are only a few clear references to Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled between approximately A.D. 70-500. Given this time frame, it is naturally supposed that earlier references to Jesus are more likely to be historically reliable than later ones. In the case of the Talmud, the earliest period of compilation occurred between A.D. 70-200. {20} The most significant reference to Je-

sus from this period states:

*On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald . . . cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy."* {21}

Let's examine this passage. You may have noticed that it refers to someone named "Yeshu." So why do we think this is Jesus? Actually, "Yeshu" (or "Yeshua") is how Jesus' name is pronounced in Hebrew. But what does the passage mean by saying that Jesus "was hanged"? Doesn't the New Testament say he was crucified? Indeed it does. But the term "hanged" can function as a synonym for "crucified." For instance, Galatians 3:13 declares that Christ was "hanged", and Luke 23:39 applies this term to the criminals who were crucified with Jesus. {22} So the Talmud declares that Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover. But what of the cry of the herald that Jesus was to be stoned? This may simply indicate what the Jewish leaders were planning to do. {23} If so, Roman involvement changed their plans! {24}

The passage also tells us why Jesus was crucified. It claims He practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy! Since this accusation comes from a rather hostile source, we should not be too surprised if Jesus is described somewhat differently than in the New Testament. But if we make allowances for this, what might such charges imply about Jesus?

Interestingly, both accusations have close parallels in the canonical gospels. For instance, the charge of sorcery is similar to the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus cast out demons "by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." {25} But notice this: such a charge actually tends to confirm the New Testament claim that Jesus performed miraculous feats. Apparently Jesus' miracles were too well attested to deny. The only alternative was to ascribe them to sorcery! Likewise, the charge of enticing Israel to apostasy parallels Luke's account of the Jewish leaders who accused Jesus of misleading the nation with his teaching. {26} Such a charge tends to corroborate the New Testament record of Jesus' powerful teaching ministry. Thus,



if read carefully, this passage from the Talmud confirms much of our knowledge about Jesus from the New Testament.

Evidence from Lucian

Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek satirist. In one of his works, he wrote of the early Christians as follows:

*The Christians . . . worship a man to this day--the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.*{27}

Although Lucian is jesting here at the early Christians, he does make some significant comments about their founder. For instance, he says the Christians worshipped a man, "who introduced their novel rites." And though this man's followers clearly thought quite highly of Him, He so angered many of His contemporaries with His teaching that He "was crucified on that account."

Although Lucian does not mention his name, he is clearly referring to Jesus. But what did Jesus teach to arouse such wrath? According to Lucian, he taught that all men are brothers from the moment of their conversion. That's harmless enough. But what did this conversion involve? It involved denying the Greek gods, worshipping Jesus, and living according to His teachings. It's not too difficult to imagine someone being killed for teaching that. Though Lucian doesn't say so explicitly, the Christian denial of other gods combined with their worship of Jesus implies the belief that Jesus was more than human. Since they denied other gods in order to worship Him, they apparently thought Jesus a greater God than any that Greece had to offer!

Let's summarize what we've learned about Jesus from this examination of ancient non-Christian sources. First, both Josephus and Lucian indicate that Jesus was regarded as wise. Second, Pliny, the Talmud, and Lucian imply He was a powerful and revered teacher. Third, both Josephus and

the Talmud indicate He performed miraculous feats. Fourth, Tacitus, Josephus, the Talmud, and Lucian all mention that He was crucified. Tacitus and Josephus say this occurred under Pontius Pilate. And the Talmud declares it happened on the eve of Passover. Fifth, there are possible references to the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection in both Tacitus and Josephus. Sixth, Josephus records that Jesus' followers believed He was the Christ, or Messiah. And finally, both Pliny and Lucian indicate that Christians worshipped Jesus as God!

I hope you see how this small selection of ancient non-Christian sources helps corroborate our knowledge of Jesus from the gospels. Of course, there are many ancient Christian sources of information about Jesus as well. But since the historical reliability of the canonical gospels is so well established, I invite you to read those for an authoritative "life of Jesus!"

#### Notes

1. F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 13.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Edwin Yamauchi, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 82.

5. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, cited in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 82.

6. N.D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (London: Tyndale, 1969), 19, cited in Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 189-190.

7. Edwin Yamauchi, cited in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 82.

8. Pliny, *Epistles* x. 96, cited in Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 25; Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 198.

9. Ibid., 27.

10. Pliny, *Letters*, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

11. M. Harris, "References to Jesus in Early Classical Authors," in *Gospel Perspectives V*, 354-55, cited in E. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?," in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. by Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 227, note 66.

12. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

13. Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 28.

14. Josephus, *Antiquities* xx. 200,

cited in Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 36.

15. Ibid.

16. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.

17. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.63-64, cited in Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.

18. Ibid.

19. Although time would not permit me to mention it on the radio, another version of Josephus' "Testimonium Flavianum" survives in a tenth-century Arabic version (Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 41). In 1971, Professor Schlomo Pines published a study on this passage. The passage is interesting because it lacks most of the questionable elements that many scholars believe to be Christian interpolations. Indeed, "as Schlomo Pines and David Flusser...stated, it is quite plausible that none of the arguments against Josephus writing the original words even applies to the Arabic text, especially since the latter would have had less chance of being censored by the church" (Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 194). The passage reads as follows: "At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." (Quoted in James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 95, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 194).

20. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 202-03.

21. The Babylonian Talmud, transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), vol. III, Sanhedrin 43a, 281, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

22. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

23. See John 8:58-59 and 10:31-33.

24. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 204. See also John 18:31-32.

25. Matt. 12:24. I gleaned this observation from Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 56.

26. Luke 23:2, 5.

27. Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, transl. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), vol. 4., cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 206.

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# sex is not the problem (lust is)

**But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Ephesians 5:3**

One morning at Sunday School something very unexpected happened. Our Sunday school teacher announced that we will have a competition at the end of the summer about a book. In my head I thought "a book from the Bible, how easy". But later I realized that the servant was referring to a contemporary Christian book called "Not Even a Hint" by Joshua Harris. The name sounded familiar, wasn't that the guy who "kissed dating goodbye"? Since the servant was quite secretive about what the book was about, I decided to get it to find out. A couple of things attracted me to the book; it was small and had a good layout. I took my time reading through the book. Later on, I found myself going back over parts of it and rereading the section again. I even grabbed a pen and started underlining passages. It was, to say the least, a life-changer!

The book is about Lust and Harris is quick to point out that we all struggle with it. But as I read, something quite different was being reassured in my mind: God's good and awesome plan in creating us with sex drives. Harris points out that God is good and on our side, that He's not a fun-crusher or pleasure-killer, He has a great plan for you and me. The author discusses the major differences between our biological sex drives and Lust. Not only that, he assures us of what we already know; we can't fight it on our own, with our own minds or bodies, we need HIM. The book is filled with scriptures to make this case and to help us realize that we have to fight fire with fire, we have to lift up the shield and be on guard, realizing that God meant

sex for something far more and far better and far time-wise than what we know and understand from where we are now (in high school). Harris also talks about issues associated with Lust, like masturbation, which he calls "the self-centered sex". The most unexpected part of the book is the Accountability chapter. The author discusses how important it is in every aspect of our Christian walk to have a spiritual guide, like our priests. My favorite part of the book is tucked in the back. It's one of the last chapters where the writer starts breaking down a series of lies and myths with one or more biblical references. Through reading the list, I felt very empowered and decided to put to memory some of the verses – to use as that shield I told you about earlier. I highly recommend this book to everyone, both students and servants. I even bought a few copies to give as gifts to friends. A few weeks ago, the book was reprinted using a new title "Sex is not the problem (Lust is): Sexual Purity in a Lust-Saturated World. Check it out.



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**Q** “When was the salvation of Jesus Christ made: Was it on His birth? Was it on His death? What about us, how do we become the children of God? Is it on our birth? Is it after baptism? Is it after taking His Holy Blood and Body?”

Altaye Gebeyehu, Ethiopian Orthodox Christian

**A** The short and simple answer to your question is that Christ has granted us salvation on the cross through the shedding of His redeeming blood. Consider the following verses:

Without shedding of blood, there is no remission. (*Hebrews 9:22*).

In Him we have redemption through His blood. (*Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14*)

Having made peace through the blood of His cross.” (*Colossians 1:20*)

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” (*Hebrews 9:12*)

You were not redeemed with corruptible things ...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (*1 Peter 1:18-19*)

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb (*Revelation 12:11*)

However, I’d like to expound upon this answer with the following clarifying points:

The crucifixion of Christ could not have taken place without his physical existence, i.e. “Incarnation.” Also, through His crucifixion we were redeemed from the sentence of death; but the gift of life was realized in His Holy Resurrection. With that said, His Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension are all looked upon as God’s all-encompassing plan of salvation for humankind.

From our human perspective, salvation is the story of our entire life. It is dynamic and ever-growing. It is hinged upon our response to what Christ has given

us. This includes our “faith working through love” (*John 8:24, Galatians 5:6*), our rebirth from above through baptism (*John 3:5*), living a heavenly life on earth through repentance and confession (*Luke 13:3, 1 John 1:9*) and abiding in Him and his life-giving Body through partaking of the Holy Eucharist.

The initiative of Christ is not enough. Man must cooperate as well. Although with the incarnation of Christ, His crucifixion, His descent into Hades, His resurrection, His ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of man became accessible. In order for it to become the property of man it must be pursued by man himself. God respects the freedom of man and does not compel, pressure or force anyone, but rather calls.

In conclusion, salvation is likened to a journey and as long as we are in the flesh that journey has not reached its conclusion. Christ, in relation to this journey, is not just the destination but he is the one that guides us to the destination. A Church father said: He is not only my final destination but the inn at which I rest each evening.

**Q** “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’” *Matthew 22:42*

**The Unity School of Christianity says this verse indicates that Jesus was a reincarnation of David. Is reincarnation biblical?**

**A** “Son of” in Hebrew thinking meant “descendent of” (*Matthew 1:1-17*), not “reincarnation of.” This verse indicates that Jesus came from the lineage of David, not that Jesus was a reincarnation of David. Jesus’ birth in the line of David was important, for the Old Testament



Scriptures taught that the Messiah had to come from the line of David (*2 Samuel 7:12-17; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1*).

Reincarnation goes against the whole of Scripture. For example, while the doctrine of reincarnation teaches that people die over and over again until they reach perfection (Nirvana), the Bible teaches “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (*Hebrews 9:27*). Each human being lives once as a mortal on earth, dies once, and then faces judgment. Jesus taught that people decide their eternal destiny in a single lifetime (*Matthew 25:46*). This is precisely why the apostle Paul emphasized that “now is the day of salvation” (*2 Corinthians 6:2*).

Scripture indicates that at the moment of death believers go into the presence of the Lord (*2 Corinthians 5:8*) and unbelievers go to a place of suffering (*Luke 16:19-31*), not into another body.

From a practical perspective, if the purpose of karma is to rid humanity of its selfish desires, then why has there not been a noticeable improvement in human nature after all the millennia of reincarnations? And how do reincarnationists explain the immense and ever-worsening social and economic problems in India, where reincarnation has been systematically taught throughout its history, including widespread poverty, starvation, disease, and suffering?

Jesus taught that people decide their eternal destiny in a single lifetime

Salvation is the story of our entire life. It is dynamic and ever-growing. It is hinged upon our response to what Christ has given us.



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# Digging Deeper

*“For You Lord are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.”  
Psalm 86:5*

*rivers of water...” (Psalm 1:3)*

The Holy Bible uses many illustrations to teach us that the good in a person must be allowed to grow, must be nurtured, must gain strength, become a stronghold and must be protected. Certainly, the best in life may not be that which comes easily. The flowering rose bud is protected by its sharp thorns. The sweetness of honey is defended by the sting of a bee.

It is important as we continue on in our addressing of the fruits of the spirit, to remember what is implied by the word “fruit.” It is a seed, an initial beginning that is given to us; and it is up to us to plant it, nurture it, allow it to grow and reproduce. A fruit is first a trial then a triumph if one makes the most out of their life.

This is different than a God-given gift in which lies a talent or particular desirable human characteristic that requires only being tapped into for its use.

The fruit of “goodness” is a fruit with many far-reaching sprouts...

*“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all...”  
(Galatians 6:10)*

We are instructed to do good to all people. This does not mean “to pay back” a wrong done to you with another wrong. If someone decides they are not going to speak to you, should you not speak to them either? If someone steals your money, do you steal it back? If someone tells a lie against you, do you tell something bad, even if it is the truth, against them? Did this manner of behavior ever instill goodness in a person?

What makes a person good? What helps a person “stay on the good side” of goodness? We are told the truly good persevering person is...

Goodness at all times conquers all. Goodness is God-like so we can be assured of its fortitude in our lives. Can you ever remember a time in your life when goodness did not ultimately win out? The old adage “if you are rejected for your goodness you will eventually be accepted for it” is certainly true. If you are shunned because of your goodness, because you hold steadfast to your beliefs, your Coptic Church, and your faithfulness to put God first in your life, you will ultimately be respected for those beliefs if you act according to them rather than just allude to them.

If you are put to trial and take on the fruit of goodness, you will triumph. It is, as they say, “first the (rugged ways of the) cross then the crown”.

Tertullian (c. 211) wrote, “*In short, what patriarch, what prophet, what Levite, what priest, or what leader—or at a later period, what apostle, preacher of the Gospel, or bishop—do you ever find wearing a crown? I do not think that even the temple of God itself was crowned. Neither was the Ark of the Covenant, not the Tabernacle of Witness.*”

*“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”  
(Romans 12:21)*

St. Paul resonated the effects of goodness in his life...

*“I have fought the good fight...” (2 Timothy 4:7)*

## A Reflection of God

By H.G. Bishop Youssef



What did St. Paul's reference to goodness and a good fight mean in this Holy Scripture? A good fight meant the harder St. Paul fought for that which he believed in, the stronger his trust and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ became. A good fight increases courage by letting us face the things within us we fear most.

*"...I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)*

A good fight helps us conquer what we fear the most within us. St. Matthew (5: 44) instructs...

*"Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use*

*you and persecute you."*

It has often been said through the ages that "good men are not as good

*Goodness is God-like so we can be assured of its fortitude in our lives.*

as often thought and few men are as bad as their enemies imagine". This is certainly something to contemplate on when evaluating the actions of and labeling others.

Rather the focus should be on us, standing for something good, standing in the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and desiring the eternal goodness of Heaven.

It is my prayer that as St. Paul taught the churches in Galatia that we all strive to live a fruitful life of goodness

and that we ...

*"not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:9-10)*





# VOICES OF

## THE SAINTS



ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΠΙΣΤΡΑΤΙΔΑΤΗΣ

PRINCE THEODORE  
SHOTBY

BY SAMUEL YOUSSEF

A few years ago, I started a habit of reading about a saint each day from the Coptic Orthodox Book of Saints. When I got to the story of Prince Theodore, for some reason it just touched my heart and I had to read it a second time, and again a third time. There were several things that happened in his life that really caught my attention, for example, his strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at a young age, the visitations from angels who both assisted him in battle and also healed his wounds, and the visitations by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who spoke to him and told him that he would be receiving the crown of martyrdom. For the Lord to appear to someone and to speak these words to him must tell you something about this saint. Wow!! Just thinking about this gives me goose bumps. This prince loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all of his heart and Jesus loved him. The Lord performed many miracles for Prince Theodore and I realized later that there were more that

I had not read about. I recently found a book called The Life and Miracles of the Great Saint and Martyr Prince Theodore Shotby, written by Emil G. Bashay. I learned so much from this biography of the saint and I loved him even more after reading it.

Prince Theodore was born in 281 AD on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Kiahk. He was the son of St. John Shotby and Princess Ossania. St. John was a Christian and grew up in the church, but Princess Ossania, along with the entire royal Roman family, worshiped idols. John kept his son very close to him and raised him in the Christian faith. He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ from a very young age and his faith was so strong that, even though he lived in an idol-worshipping atmosphere, he could not be convinced to worship idols. Ossania threatened to kick John out of the palace if he and Theodore didn't worship her idol. While John was praying that night, God appeared to him as a bright light and told him to leave the palace and not to worry about Theodore because he was a chosen vessel for God. So, John left in the middle of the night without telling anyone.

Ossania tried convincing Theodore to worship her idol by lying to him and telling him that the idol would destroy him like it did his father, if he didn't worship. Theodore did not believe her and he mocked her idols and even kicked one of them to the ground, out of his holy zeal for the Lord, and it shattered. When he turned 16 years old, he went to Fr. Oliganus who baptized him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Shortly after this, Theodore joined the Roman army during Emperor Diocletian's time. Because of Theodore's strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he was blessed with getting to see the Lord and with the ability to perform miracles. One day the Lord appeared to him and told him that his father lives in Egypt and that he should go and visit him. He got to spend five days with his father before he did. When he returned back to Antioch, the war was just about to start against the Persian army. The Lord stood by him and sent Archangel Michael to fight with them to victory. The icon of Prince Theodore is very similar to that of St. George. It shows him on a horse fighting a dragon which was one of the gods of the governor of Otichos. They offered human sacrifices to the dragon and most of the time they were Christians. When a widow told

Theodore that her two Christian sons were being sacrificed to the dragon-god, he rode his horse to the place where the dragon was, he prayed to the Lord to give him strength, and he was able to kill the dragon. Licinius, the new emperor, was furious and threatened to torture Theodore if he didn't deny Jesus and worship his gods. Lincinius tried convincing him with money and promotions but nothing could convince him. Theodore suffered and endured many different tortures. Through each one, he prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ and he was visited and healed by Archangel Michael, Archangel Raphael, and by the Lord Himself. These miracles helped him to endure even more tortures until he was finally beheaded and received the crown of martyrdom.

The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to St. Theodore just before his martyrdom and told him that his name would be known all over the world and that miracles would be performed in his name. Anyone who calls upon the Lord Jesus Christ in St. Theodore's name will be granted all that he desires. Anyone who does an act of mercy in St. Theodore's name will never be in need. A son named after St. Theodore will be protected from all evil. Whoever builds a church in St. Theodore's name will receive grace in heaven. A barren woman who calls upon the Lord in St. Theodore's name will be granted her wish. A sick person who calls upon the Lord in St. Theodore's name will soon be healed.

I got sick a few years ago and one of the members of my church came to visit me at my house just recently. He asked me if I had a saint as an intercessor and I told him that I don't. He told me that it is very important to have one who can intercede on our behalf and who can also perform miracles. I never really thought about having my own intercessor and I usually just said, "through the intercessions of..." And I named a couple of saints right before I started the Lord's Prayer. I then decided that I was going to have my own intercessor and I knew exactly who it was going to be.

I am honored to have this opportunity to write about this wonderful saint and to share his life with all of you. I would like to encourage you to pick a saint to be your intercessor if you don't already have one. I would also like to ask for your prayers that through the intercession of the great saint and martyr Prince Theodore Shotby, and by the powerful hand of the Almighty God, I may soon be healed.



# PRAYER WARRIOR

It is a fact for all Christians that there is no doubt that Christ is the true Messiah. Most of us take this for granted without research or meditation, but as Christians we all need to be positively supportive and knowledgeable of this fact. Are you? Read the prophecy of Isaiah and meditate on its fulfillment. Christ is the Messiah and there is no other. No need to wait, we have been saved! Be ready to defend this truth for the end is near.

## Isaiah 53

1 Who has believed our report?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,  
And as a root out of dry ground.  
He has no form or comeliness;  
And when we see Him,  
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.  
3 He is despised and rejected by men,  
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;  
He was despised and we did not esteem Him.  
4 Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.  
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.  
7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.  
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For He was cut off from the land of the living;  
For the transgressions of My people  
He was stricken.  
9 And they made His grave with the wicked  
But with the rich at His death,  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;  
He has put Him to grief.  
When You make His soul an offering for sin,  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,  
And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.  
11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.  
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,  
For He shall bear their iniquities.  
12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,  
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
Because He poured out His soul unto death,  
And He was numbered with the transgressors,  
And He bore the sin of many,  
And made intercession for the transgressors.

How lucky are we to have lived to see this prophecy fulfilled, to enjoy the benefits of being saved by the Messiah. Think! You are saved! Do you really understand the price that has been paid?! Read the prophecy again, stop at each verse, breath, take it in with joy and understanding for the price was high (Isaiah 53:5). Also beware, there will come another after Him claiming to be the Messiah and many nations will accept him as king. Be prepared to stand strong behind the True One, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Keep this verse in front of you lest you be deceived: "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4)







# DECISION TIME

BY REID FANOUS

Where am I coming from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Why do I do what I do? What's the meaning of it all? We face these questions, and more, at some point in time early on in our lives. We may decide to investigate and seek guidance to reach some understanding of these fundamental issues. Or we feel daunted by these seemingly insurmountable questions, get discouraged and work as hard as we can to avoid them, shut them out, and ignore them. One popular way out is to get busy with activities, and raise the level of noise surrounding us to such level that we do not have a clear moment left to face any of these questions.

We may temporarily succeed in running away, but sooner or later we have to come to terms with these issues. Therefore, sooner or later the same destination is reached: Investigate and Study; the only difference is "when" do we reach this station? Facing these questions early on in life and reaching some concrete conclusions, carries the potential of a

lifetime of learning and growth, without the burden of running away and avoiding the issues. Late resolution of these issues runs the risk of getting to see the light and regret all the wasted time spent stumbling in the dark, or worse yet ending our physical lives without getting to see at all.

When we start facing these issues, we find that the only players are: The Creator of the universe and man (myself, yourself, all of us individually). The Bible represents our main reference. The Church is the body of believers we surround ourselves with throughout our journey of learning and growth. Fellowship tends to be more than just companionship as it extends into observing, studying, learning, exchanging, practicing, touching and being touched. Since we make up the church, churches tend to have their own weaknesses that come only from our own human weaknesses. However, this weakness does not take away from our relationship with Him, because in Him our weakness becomes

strength. As Paul says: And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you: for 'My strength is made perfect in weakness'." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Therefore the issue being faced today is: What course of action have we assumed, knowingly or unknowingly, when faced with the questions we started with here? Have we reached the decision time, yet? **Baggage & Shackles**

When faced with a decision point we tend to search for excuses to postpone considering it. "Let me first do this, and then I'll consider it"; or "Let me attend to that first, then I'll have more time to consider this issue". The unstated objective is to push it further into the future, possibly with the intention of not doing it at all. "Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow you; but let me first go bid them farewell, who are at my house.' But Je-



sus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:59-62)

These ephemeral cares are the heavy baggage we subconsciously shackle to our wrists. We want to leap forward, but are brought to a screeching halt when dragging these weights along. It may make sense to first break loose from the baggage in order to freely face the decision time. Or is it?

Job – Project – Being

So, how are we to live? Since we are usually more comfortable drawing on past experiences when faced with new issues, we may be tempted to look at life as a "job." After all, most of us are familiar with what "jobs" are: One, or more, activity to be performed regularly. Pursuing life as a repetitive chain of activities, aiming at perfecting each of these activities in order to perfect the chain itself may sound like a worthwhile endeavor. A closer look reveals that this approach, in and by itself, takes away our inheritance as true children of God the Father, and reduces us to human robots. If all what we care about, and live for, is to perform these "jobs," or "rituals," we become "These people draw near to Me with their mouth. And honor me with their lips. But their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship Me. Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15: 8-9) Therefore, our life cannot be a mere "job."

If not a "job", it may then be a "project," which we may define as: A group of related activities, that have a defined beginning and end, designed to reach a particular result. On the surface it may be tempting to look at life as a "project" since our earthly life has a defined beginning and end. As such, the "project" will also have a defined end or goal. However, whatever the project, it can still be had for far less than the price already paid on our behalf by the Son. Therefore, life is certainly much more valuable than a "project." If not a "job" or a "project," what is it?

Do you recall the last time you heard a piece of music that went well beyond your ears and reached your soul; or looked at a painting that kept on drawing you into it while revealing more of itself to you; or been to a spot by the sea where the serenity engulfed you; or came across a book, poem, even a single phrase that deeply touched you? When we come across any of these situations, our reaction is typically to spend more time listening, looking,

**Whatever the project, it can still be had for far less than the price already paid on our behalf by the Son.**

are awed indefinitely. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power." (Ephesians 1:17-19) When we capture

this, we forsake every thing else in order to spend more time here. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matthew 13:44)

Therefore life is "Being" what we truly are: Christians – Members of God's Family. We call Him: "Our Father in heavens, ..." (Matthew 6:9) and His Son said "No longer do I call you

experiencing, reading and repeating. The more the beauty or value experienced, the longer the time we would like to spend with it. What if the beauty is endless? What if the value is infinite? What if the greatness is boundless? We

servants; for a servant does not know what his master is doing: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

Going through life as such we find that "jobs" and "projects", appropriately known as "rituals" and "exercises" become more like means and tools to enhance our "Being" Christians. We also find that in our unity in Him we do not "earn" a living but are rather alive from His grace. Moreover, death ceases to carry its dreadful stigma; "O Death, Where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55; Isaiah 25:8)" and become a transition allowing us to cross over to what "...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9) Yet the fruits of this decision of just "being" can be subjects of endless articles and books that are well beyond the containment of this world.

**The issue being faced today is: What course of action have we assumed, knowingly or unknowingly, when faced with the questions we started with here?**







*quiet walk*

Not from fear of death did terror enter Your heart. Your heartbeat was reviving the heavens, raising the earth, establishing the principle of life for every living thing.

Glory to Him who stood a stone's throw from His chosen disciples;

Glory to Him who stood rejected till death with a deep inward sadness, yet living still;

Glory to Him who, though a beloved Son, knelt on the ground before the Father to whom all prayers are lifted;

Glory to Him who was struck to the ground with his face marred yet who owns the heavenly face before which all heavenly hosts are awed;

Glory to Him who, in agony of soul and bitter suffering, sweated great drops of blood from His forehead, because of the weariness and grief that had ravaged his flesh during his hour of trial. He lives and is the giver of life.

## CARRYING THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD'S SINS: THE DEPTH OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

BY FATHER MATTA EL MASKEEN  
(MATTHEW THE POOR)  
Midnight, May 8, 1999

Not from fear of death did terror enter Your heart. Your heartbeat was reviving the heavens, raising the earth, establishing the principle of life for every living thing. Nor did terror enter Your heart out of fear of the pain and suffering to come, for You are the Comforter of those who suffer, the one who wipes away every tear, and strengthens the heart of the distressed. You bear the pain of every soul that takes refuge in Your bosom.

No alarm arose in You at the approach of an enemy who had the power of death in his hands, for it was You who terrorized him and overcame his power. With Your cross You bound and threw him into the eternal fire that devours all enemies of truth, all liars, and the father of lies. You are the One and Only present Eternal Truth who judges and brings to final annihilation the evil that has degraded

and humiliated mankind.

I discovered Your mystery. The source of Your grief was revealed to me, by which You attained the degree of death without dying. I realized the extent of your spiritual suffering and torture. Indeed, I realized the mystery of Your face that was marred by the earth's dust and by the



endless flowing of tears and the gushing sweat, like blood.

I learned from You the reason for the fear that took complete hold of You and entered deep into Your heart.

I also learned the mystery of the fear of the pain that gripped Your soul, not Your flesh, and the mystery of the suffering that tormented Your spirit, and the torture You suffered from being cut off from Your Father's love. You suffered alone, for it was the Father's will to bruise You with grief. (Isaiah 53:10) Why should You therefore not grieve the grief of those dying without a savior?

I got to know the measure of the pain You experienced; the tears, the broken heart, and the fear of what was about to happen. You were forsaken by the Father. It was His will to abandon You, a beloved Son of the Father.

Indeed, I got to know. I was convinced, and the mystery was revealed to me.

Your Father made You bear the full weight of all the sins of mankind, though You were innocent of them all. From the very beginning, in the eternal council chamber of the Father, You accepted the responsibility of bearing them. Because of this, You submitted to the incarnation and bore it according to Your will and Your Father's will.

Yet when I saw the significance of the Father's inevitable hostility to that sin, I was horrified. For how could the Father be so unyielding when You were one with Him, present in His fatherly bosom, and came from Him? If the sin of blasphemy is the mother of sins, how could You bear it in Your flesh and how could You stand with it before Your Father? How could You be as one who denies Him? What terror and what fear must have overtaken You! Was it possible? Did the Father allow this?

Yes! When He allowed mankind's sins to be placed on You in order to redeem them, He did allow it! What rending of Your soul! How could You stand before Him in Your holy purity, bearing the sin of fornication as if you were an adulterer, indeed the chief of all the world's adulterers?

Now, I know Your heartbreak and the reason Your face was covered in dust so as not to be seen by the Father, and the mystery of those tears and sweat flowing like blood! The load must have been unbearable as the Father's hand was laid on You. Why didn't You throw Yourself to the ground and let courage escape You, deceived by the familiarity linking You to Your Father, though it remained in You?

Do You bear man's lies and assume his sins, his deceptions, his denial of truth, and his rejection of what is right whilst being at the same the embodiment of Righteousness and Truth? How could You stand before the Father as a liar and as the representative of all liars? Did You bear every crime that the devil inspired in man? Do You take on the nature of a murderer in order to bear the murders he committed, then do You stand before the Father as if You were the murderer when You are Yourself actually their Father and Giver of Life? How can this be?

You stood, dear Master, as a burglar or thief before Your Father, assuming the identity of the ungodly. It was because of this that You were able to release the thief crucified with You - the first sinner to gain acquittal. I know now the reason for which the Apostle Paul said, "But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Why? Because, he believed in the Cross and the works of Him who was crucified.

I know now why You stayed kneeling, crying out with tears to the Almighty to save You and take away the cup, although He did not. Your meek and gentle soul was broken by the terror of mankind's sins! But it was for this very hour that You came. For the sake of Man's sins, You became flesh, drank the defiled cup, bore his burden of defilement and were judged as a sinner!

Now I know the reason for the loud cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

Had it not been for the rejection that wounded Your heart, that You bore alone as a sinner and as the father all sinners, under the Father's sentence, You would not have been able to die and descend into the grave for man's sins and remain buried for three days, fulfilling the punishment for the sin of mankind. Mankind would not have been absolved from sin and released from its sentence and its curse, which is death. This is the power of the cross and the power of Him who was crucified.

You were the Almighty, the Master and the Omnipotent One. In You the attributes of God are fully revealed. You are the One who was known throughout the Old Testament as "the Almighty." This is God's omnipotence that was revealed to its fullest extent on the cross.

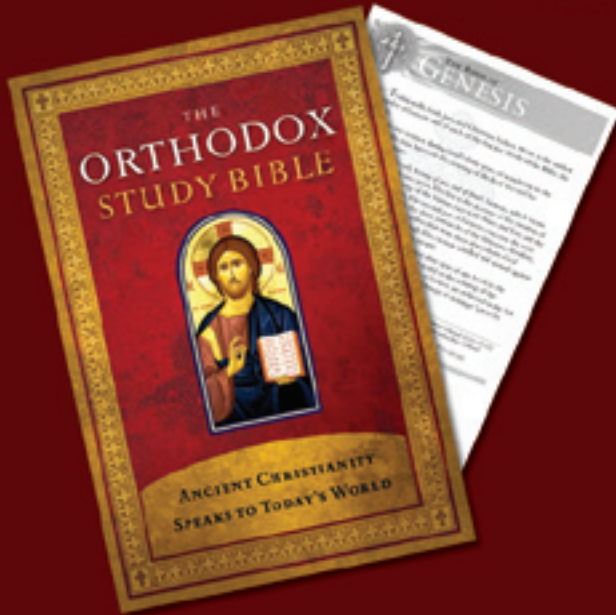
This, then, is the new man's value!

Master, you rose on the third day and exposed Annas, Caiphas, and the devil, discarding the sin You bore in Your flesh at the cross. You cleansed man from his uncleanness, burying it with the old, sin-laden body that You took from him. Sin pierced Your hands and feet and side on the cross, with nails and spear, causing Your Divine Blood to flow out like a river. A man's body is therefore baptized and sanctified with blood, and acquires the eternal life that is in Him. It descends into the tomb, where death has been trampled under Your feet, and is resurrected pure and sanctified in Your resurrection. Thereafter, death has no power over it; it is a new creation through the Spirit, and shares the glory that is Yours, the glory which You laid down through the incarnation, the cross and the tomb, but which returned as You returned to the Father. In this You bore new man in Your body and offered it, sinless, to Your Father. You reconciled God and man through Your blood that was shed, created an eternal redemption with Your Father, and gave man eternal life in You.

Thus, in the resurrected body of Christ, man is recreated and raised to sit on the Father's right hand in the highest heavens, just as Christ sat in the glory of eternal life.



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