

MIGHTY MAGAZINE MARROWS

JOY

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth

Winter 2012 Volume 11 No.1



"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth"

Psalms 127:4



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SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, amen.

My Beloved Youth

"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
Ps 16:11

There is no other religious book that denotes JOY more than the Holy Bible. Amongst the various slight linguistic distinctions in the different versions of the Holy Bible, it is believed that the word "joy" is mentioned on average over 200 times, in addition to the derivatives such as joyful, rejoice, and other similar connotations. Hardships are for but a season and Christians realistically acknowledge that there will be times of severe persecutions, tearful moments, and painful trials. When put affliction into the temporary context of man's existence, it hardly compares to the comfort and joy of the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout one's life—the One who leads him/her to the eternal life.

"Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!" Ps 32:11

Baffling is the joyful nature of Christ's children throughout the world. This kind of joy does not result from an abundance of riches, not in prestige, not in fame, and not in any worldly ambitions or expectations. It is an inexplicable contentment in any and every condition. It is expressed in genuine smiles and warm hospitality. When filled with the Holy Spirit, there is no room for bitterness or a spirit of defeat. The aim is clear—it is to be closer to Christ. A contrite heart is the way to Christ's heart. A heart of contrition is not only transposed to a joyful heart for the penitent, but it also brings great joy to God and all the heavenly hosts.

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." Lk 15:7

Joy is one distinguished aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). Thus, Christians are empowered with this unique feature embodied in God, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. This edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine reflects on the various meanings of this fundamental characteristic of our Christian existence, resilience, and vivacity. We need to know how to feel it, how to experience it, how to live it, how to apply it, and how to share it. Each writer of this edition presents a unique lens in this astounding kaleidoscope full of the breathtaking colors of joy. As a new day dawns each morning, filter out the negatives throughout your day so you can clearly see God's beauty and purpose in your life for He desires your prosperity within the boundaries of uprightness, love, and mercy.

May the Lord fill your hearts with abundant and over-flowing joy that you may draw closer to Him and serve Him wholeheartedly.

"He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him, He shall see His face with joy, For He restores to man His righteousness." Job 33:26

God bless you,

Bishop Youssef

BISHOP OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

Glory be to the Holy Trinity, forever, Amen.

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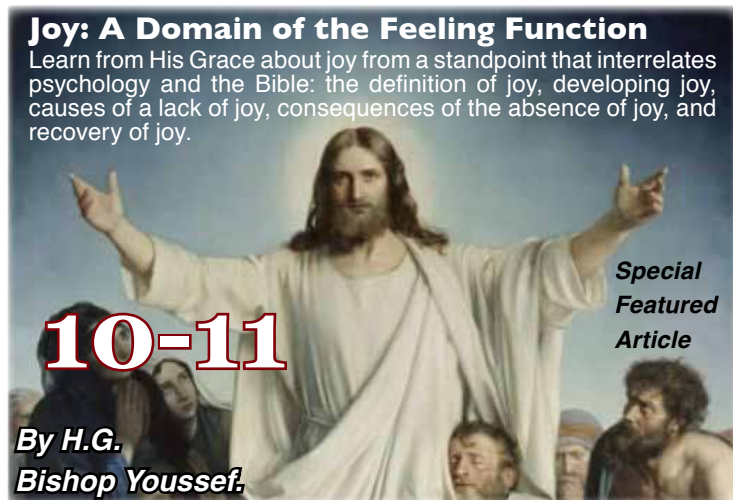
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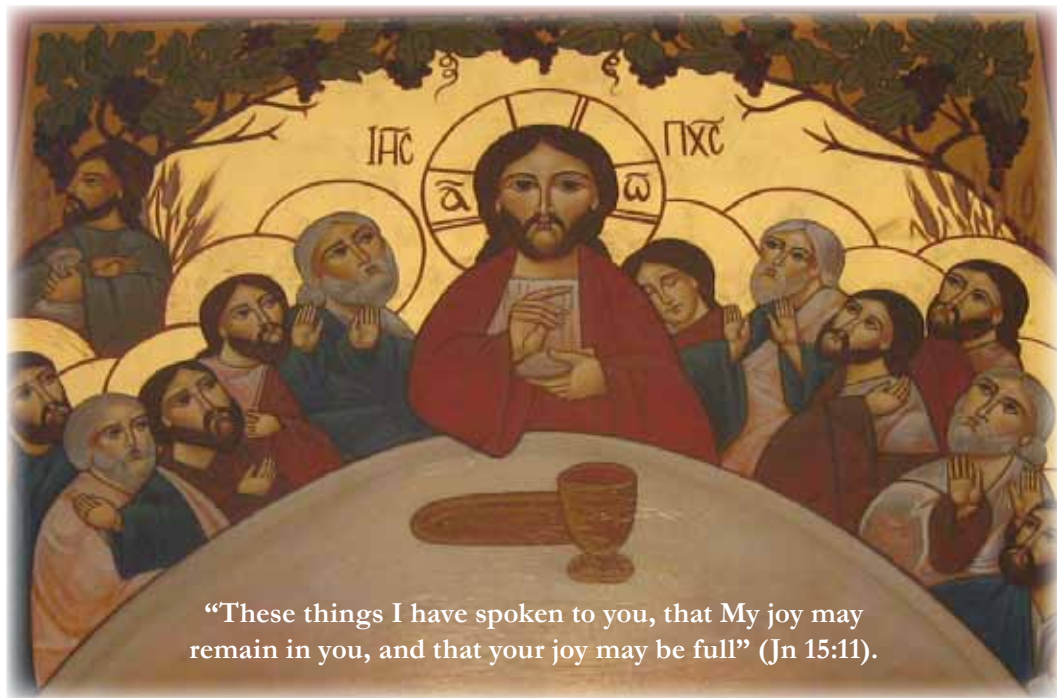
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HOW SHALL WE DEFINE JOY? Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, the finest quality of life, the ideal state of mind, refreshment for the soul, rejuvenation for the weary heart, the healer of the injured life, the sea upon which our spiritual vessel sails until it reaches its desired haven. It is all these and even more; and these blessings are secured to us by a promise, as our Lord said, “*These things I have spoken to you... that your joy may be full.*” Yes, joy is not limited to a lucky group that has managed to avoid trouble while winning the stuff we all think confer a happy existence. Joy is available to all, without exception. How sad that we could neglect so great a gift by ignorantly measuring all things by the false scale of worldly opinion!



Joy, particularly fullness of joy, is found solely in Christ. Joy is more important, more permanent, than anything we may encounter in our daily lives. It is only through abiding in Him, and He in us that His joy may remain in us.

The Joy of Our Lord

Christ clearly intends each one of us to subsist on joy. We have biological drives that point to our subsistence on material things: food, air, sleep, and so forth. But our Lord never refers to these in the Gospels; He rather counts them as secondary baggage in life’s journey, sometimes even as obstacles to our spiritual enrichment. Just as the body needs oxygen to breathe, so does the soul take its breath from joy; the life that is cut off from this valuable reserve—though it succeed in storing up every material necessity the world values—finds itself confronted by a burdensome and meaningless existence.

Our Lord’s life proves that, in a pure and elevated soul, true joy cannot be defeated by the hardest of events, or banished by the severest circumstances. The words at the top of the page were uttered by Christ during what is called the Last Discourse, which took place

immediately following the Last Supper (Jn 14—17). He spoke a number of things to His disciples that plunged them into a deep sorrow. He announced that one of them would betray Him (Jn 13:21); that He would be with them for only a short while longer (Jn 13:33); that they could not follow Him where He was going (Jn 13:33); that the world would reject them (Jn 14:18-21); and that they would all be scattered at a certain hour (Jn 16:32). All these things were the forebodings of still deeper sufferings that He Himself was about to undergo; after just a few hours, Gethsemane, the betrayal, the arrest, the trials, the scourging, and the Cross all awaited Him.

And yet how serene, how gracious, even how joyful are Christ’s words in those bleak final hours! Never does a seed of bitterness take root in His heart; never does a complaint interpose itself in His words.

His tone remains forever sure, forever steadfast, forever hopeful and bright amidst the gathering storm! His death was to be consummated in less than twenty-four hours, and yet the only topics that occupy His mind are things that would cement the disciples together as a future apostolic band: the Comforter, their love for one another, and their faith amidst trials. In the great paradox of spiritual things, Christ chooses that very night to teach them about the “fullness of joy.” But what exactly was Christ indicating would bring them full joy?


“*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*” (Jn 15:5).

As St. Peter once said, these are truly the words of eternal life. A joyful life consists of preserving an intimate, lively, fruitful, and ceaseless relationship with the risen Christ. “As a fish cannot swim out of water,” said St.

Gregory the Theologian, “and a bird cannot fly without air, so a Christian cannot advance a single step without Christ.”¹ So it follows that a Christian cannot be joyful a single day without Christ. What is the use of waking up, performing our daily chores, then turning in for sleep, when Christ’s joy was not found in each stage? How can any hour or any moment have any real worth if it is not “redeemed” by abiding in Christ (Eph 5:16)? To be attached to Christ as a branch is attached to the vine; to be nourished by Christ as the vine nourishes the branch; to live in daily dependence upon the Lord Jesus as the branch is daily dependent upon its vine—is to live joyfully.

An Article by James Helmy

¹ Schaff, Philip, ed. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. VII: St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory of Nazianzen*. Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997, 379.



Meeting people
whose life is filled
with God's joy
reminds us how
we should live.

A Joyful Experience

During my second mission trip to Mexico, I came to know a wonderful dedicated mother of two beautiful children and a hard working husband. She found Christ first and was filled by His love. Then, little by little she was able to bring Christ to the rest of the family. She is a very simple lady, having nothing fancy that would catch the eye except a beautiful smile that radiates peace and causes curiosity as to what is behind it. We worked together greeting visitors as they came to church for the activities that were held, cooked in the kitchen, and shared lots of laughs. It was a huge blessing to return back the following year and meet her again. I missed the simplicity of her smile that brought me peace. As we talked and got caught up on each other's news, we learned that her little boy was extremely sick with a severe case for which the doctors were helpless to find the cure. I must admit, I lost the peace within me and felt extremely disturbed. The little boy was just an angel and the mother was a very dedicated servant, why would God allow this to happen? The next day after the Liturgy we had an aghapy meal together--then the mother led the worship songs playing her guitar and singing in harmony. At that moment I realized that

as a mother, she must be in torment because of what her child is going through; yet I had not seen her once without a smile on her face. The way she was singing with such passion and joy would not ever portray the agony and fear that, as a mother, she must have felt. She is a living example of Saint Paul's teachings: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"* (Phil 4:4).

There are many people out there just like her who have been truly filled with God's love. They experienced and understood that no matter how many times life would bring them to their knees, no one can rob them of the joy with which God had filled their hearts. We all heard the stories in Sunday school about how in the past, people used to be able to tell Christians apart from others just by looking at them. Our early fathers' lives depended on Christ by prayer for everything from filling their hearts with joy to protection overnight. They experienced and tasted what it means to have our life revolving around God, how relying on Him is not a weakness but a source of strength and joy, as Nehemiah the prophets confirms: *"The joy of the Lord is our strength"* (Neh 8:10).

Living in such a fast-paced world full of so many temptations and idols, it is easy to be distracted from fellowship with God. Thus, one starts to feel tangled in all sorts of emotions and tasks and loses focus on the prize--that is Christ. Amma Syncletica comforts us saying: "All must endure great travail and conflict when they are first converted to the Lord but later they have unspeakable joy. They are like people trying to light a fire, the smoke gets in their eyes, their eyes begin to water, but they succeed in what they want. It is written, *'Our God is a consuming fire'* (Heb. 12:29), and so we must kindle divine fire with tears and trouble."¹

David the prophet and king lived a luxurious life, being able to lead the chosen people of God, prophesy, and write psalms. Yet, he understood that despite all his riches, wisdom,

and leadership, he cannot buy joy nor acquire it without God. Therefore, he sought the One that can give it, praying, *"Rejoice the soul of your servant,"* (Ps 86:4) a humble yet deep prayer to our Father who is always willing to fill our lives with everlasting joy, just as He promised: *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you"* (Mt 7:7). Therefore, let us ask with David the prophet for God to grant us joy in every step of our lives so that we can indeed become the light of the world.

An Article by Maria Mansour

¹ Ward, Benedicta, trans. *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, 15. http://www.thenazarenway.com/paradise_of_the_desert_fathers.htm

The Joy of Monasticism

St. Eksani, A Beautiful Example

OFTEN, PEOPLE MIX UP THE MEANINGS OF **HAPPINESS** AND **JOY**. They are frequently used synonymously, and not many realize that there is an underlying difference between the two. When one examines their definitions more closely, one realizes that they are wholly unlike. Happiness is a temporary feeling. Watching or doing an activity one enjoys can be labelled happiness; it is not joy! Joy, in its essence, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is granted by God and is eternal. Peace and comfort is derived from joy that is given to us by Christ. Many saints experienced joy in their lives because they had Christ set before their eyes until their departure.

Joy cannot be found in the world but can only be granted to us by God. Throughout the history of our Coptic Orthodox Church, many people decided to live the monastic life because it brought them joy in Christ. In their hearts, they received joy and peace from living a simple life for Christ alone. This is exemplified through one of the great saints of the church, St. Eksani. She was born to a noble and rich family in Rome who had the fear of Christ instilled in their hearts. They taught her about God, and accustomed her to the life of fasting and prayer. Not only did she grow spiritually, but she was also taught to put others first by helping those in need.

Even though she loved serving God's people, deep down she yearned for a life of solitude. On occasions, St. Eksani visited the convents in Rome and spent

time with the nuns in worship and praise. She chose to live in simplicity and always read about the lives of the church saints, asking God for the ability to live a life like theirs one day. St. Eksani was always joyful whenever she was in the convent with the nuns and sharing their lifestyle. However, a minister of Rome came to her father asking for her hand in marriage. Her father was very happy and believed that he was suitable to be his daughter's husband. Through his happiness, her father bought her precious gems and garments to prepare her for the wedding. St. Eksani remained silent and did not argue nor did she agree to proceed with the wedding; all she asked from her mother was to visit the convent one last time to bid farewell to her beloved nuns.

After gaining her mother's permission, she took two of her maidservants and went out to the seashore to look for the first ship away from Rome. She found a ship headed towards Cyprus, and decided to get on-board and depart. When St. Eksani arrived, she went to St. Epiphanius and explained to him her situation. St. Epiphanius advised her to go to Alexandria where she would meet with Abba Theophilus, the 23rd Pope of Alexandria. In Alexandria, she informed him of her desire to live the monastic life. He agreed and cut her hair as well as clothing her in the monastic garb.

St. Eksani then sold all her worldly possessions and used the money to build a church in the name of St. Stephen the

Archdeacon the protomartyr. She lived with a group of virgins and nuns that Pope Theophilus had placed with her.

St. Eksani began to practice the monastic life through vigil, prayer, and asceticism. With struggle and prayer, she lived on only bread and some vegetables, as well as sleeping on the ground. Even though this may seem to be a difficult life, St. Eksani received complete joy and peace from her deeds in the name of Christ. She struggled in that manner for over twenty years.

When the beloved mother St. Eksani departed on Toba 29, God wanted to manifest a sign in heaven to reveal her blessed life. At midday, "a cross of light, whose light exceeded that of the sun, appeared in heaven while around it, a circle of stars that shone like crowns." The cross did not lose its illumination until her body was buried with the other saintly virgins. People who saw the cross believed that it appeared to illustrate her virtuous life on earth.

Even though St. Eksani lived in a noble house with all worldly possessions that she could ever have wanted, she decided to give it all up and live for Christ. The monastic life brought her inner joy and nothing in this world could have satisfied her as much as living the life of obedience, celibacy, and most of all, poverty. Through her vigil, God kept an eye on her and protected her always. She lived a life of joy. This is unlike happiness, where one temporarily feels high emotion, but rather it is an eternal

flame in the heart that motivates, encourages, and comforts in spiritual struggles. May we learn from St. Eksani's way of life, so that we may be able to find joy in Christ.

An Article by Mareya Naguib



*Joy, an eternal state granted to us by the Lord,
can be attained through living a simple life for
Christ.*



The concept is very simple, yet seems far from common. Does our theology merge with our reality? In other words, we, as Christians, do a lot of talking but isn't it about time our walk matched our talk? How many of us can name people of whom we can honestly say "I see God in their lives, they are living the promises in the Bible." Most likely, it's only a handful. My list is just as short, but the sad part is that my life isn't one of them. When I see them, I want what they have. I pray to God that I would be able to live my life as they do theirs. The world can tell the difference, and that is why our churches are empty. We are living in mediocrity. God says we are conquerors, gifted, powerful, and so much more. Are you that?

In this series, we are going to talk about authenticity. I honestly cannot even tell you how many parts are to this series because God is working on my heart as I type these words. He will guide us both to an authentic belief. You know, God said that we could move mountains! We could tell this mountain to move—and it would! For the Coptic believers, this promise should hit home far more than others. You remember the story of a king who mocked the Bible and challenged the Christians of Egypt to move a mountain. And what happened, class? After fasting and praying, it moved, didn't it? Are you living in that faith? If you were challenged today, would you know that this God will move this mountain just because you asked him to? No, why? Simply because we believe in God, not believe God.

Christ said, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you... By this My father is glorified, that you bear much fruit... These things I have

To believe God, Not Only

spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (Jn 15: 5-11). And as I type this verse, I say to myself, "That was true then, true of them, the disciples." But these words are not just for the first century Christians. These words are for you and me as well, for us to know and embody. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me and My words." Those are His words.

We will learn to have possession over these words, His promises, His commands, and His truths. This is how He speaks to us. Verses will jump off the pages of the Bible to mean something to each of us. Read His word, keep a close set of notecards, and write the verses on them as He tugs on your heart to remember them. If we don't know what He says, we won't know what to believe. Faith is not built on the words, the articles, the books, or the sermons given by others. It is built on the Word of God as He speaks into your heart and mind. In the time of crisis, it will be these words which will come to our rescue on our tongues.

The second part of these promises is God showering us with blessings. "Ask what you desire... and it shall be done," (Jn 15: 7). When you abide in His words, your desires will change to line up with His. You will be praying for His will on earth. God wants to bless us, to show us the joy of Jesus even with opposition and hardships. These blessings are not material things or possessions. They are reassurance and a healed heart, a clean and a pure soul, shameless living; blessings that dollars and cents can't buy. They are peace at 3 AM when you can't sleep. These are the things that God wants to give us; these are the

ones that matter. He wants to pour out His spirit with these blessing, but He does that only to those who believe Him and abide in Him.

Often, we watch others receive these blessings and we just sit and wish for them too. Well, now God is telling me to stop watching and wishing, to stop whining and start wanting, to start believing and receiving. I hope He is saying the same to you as you read these words. It's about time this becomes personal. These blessings and promises are for us all. Nothing is being withheld from you and from me while we remain, abide, and dwell in His love. Now here's the caveat: His love. This is where my typing speed dwindles from seventy something words per minute to hardly any.

To those who LOVE God... what does that really mean? Before we jump to that, I think it's a comfort to know how much He loves us. He loved us first, long before you and I were made. Even in the Old Testament it was stated, watch this, "And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them (that's us); and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power... to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day" (Deut. 4:37-38). God's actions are out of love. You and I, the new generation of Christians of Egypt, have been led out of Egypt to a safer place. We could apply this to us temporarily. He brought me out of Egypt to give me this land and this safe life as an inheritance; that my children and grandchildren could grow freely in the faith and abide in Him. This verse suddenly became a lot more personal to me. His words



need to become personal promises to you. His love and intention for you and me are not by chance or by accident.

Listen to this, Moses says, "The Lord did not set His love or affection on you nor chose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all people; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers. The Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage... Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations (we are still within a 1000 generations of them) with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deut 7:7-9). And yet again, I remember a time of bondage

to Believe in God

Part One

could see much more.

My last point here is that we have to participate and go after the blessing. This is going to be a conquest and an adventure for us. There is so much more than what we see, and what we think it would be like to live and abide in Him. We have not begun to believe God; we have not even begun to hold Him at His words. This is the time. This is our time with God. This is about to get personal. Just hold fast and get ready for amazing things to happen. It is as Joshua told his people, *“Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, God will do wonders among you”* (Josh 3:5). Here are some meanings to the word “wonders” (Pala in the Greek): to separate, distinguish, to be wonderful, do wonderful things, miracles. If used in respect to God, it means things that are *beyond the bounds of human powers or expectations*. God wants to do that in your life and mine, and wondrous things await us. I want a lifestyle of believing God. Like Joshua said in the beginning of this verse, *“Sanctify yourself.”*

To conclude, we need a new sense and urgency of faith as well as a purposeful preparation for God to work in our lives. Our next challenge is believing that God is who He says He is. “Because faith is always an exercise of the will, not the emotions” (B. Moore). Stay tuned!

“Lord, please transform our noun of belief to a verb of belief. We want to believe Your word, so help us discern. Teach us to believe You. Help our unbelief Lord. Renew our sense of faith. I’m afraid that a mustard seed of belief seems to us like a mountain right now. Forgive us for our harden hearts and our rebellious moments. Show us your love to us personally. Please Lord, open our eyes to the amazing and wondrous things you want to do in our lives and may we be a blessing to all. Amen.”

An Article by Christine Massoud

True belief of God will save us from our sins, and help us lead more fulfilling lives.



and remember His mercy on my poor soul, and how he rescued me. Therefore, I can say for me, and I hope you can too, that I know that my redeemer lives. He is still keeping his covenant and promise to love us to this day.

Now, to the point of blessing: *“For the Lord your God is bringing you (notice the verb tense: in the present act of bringing) into a good land”* (Deut 8:7-9). Now God may define “good” differently from you and me, but what is important to remember is that it is good for us, for those around us who believe, and those who don’t. He knows what He’s doing, trust me. Trust Him. Now remember, *“This is to My father’s glory, that you bear much fruit”* (Jn 15:8). Not just “some fruit” but

“much fruit.” That is where He is glorified, that’s the Promised Land, and that’s when our theology and our reality become one. This is where He will meet us on this earth.

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you. The riches of his glorious inheritance for His people and His incomparable great power for us who believe” (Eph 1:18-19). Notice here that He uses the word hope. God is not about to force us into believing Him. He never has and never will; we want to fulfill that calling. We want that inheritance. Yes, there is an inheritance here on earth (the Spiritual gifts) and later on (in Heaven). So what are we to do today? What now?

“Today, if you will hear His voice, (I believe He is reaching out to you right here) Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion (Have you been rebellious? Have you chosen to ignore? Well, today, do not harden your heart, listen to His voice)... Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; (this is it. That’s what this is all about: unbelief)... For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... (Now he recalls the Old Testament rebellion: the ones led by Moses)... So we see that they could not enter in [their promised land] because of unbelief” (Heb 3:7-18). We are paralyzed by unbelief and that starts with you and me. I heard it once said “I believe we see so little because we believe so little.” Well, in that case, let us start to believe so much so we

JOY: A DOMAIN OF THE FEELING FUNCTION

Introduction

Joy is an integral part of a harmonious life lived out for the glory of God and our personal fulfillment and satisfaction. Nowadays, one of the most common problems is the lack of joy, especially among young people who are constantly bombarded with pressure from the surrounding; and the stresses that their concerns about life incur. If those serving in the Kingdom of God have their feeling function of joy undeveloped; it will be difficult for them to relay that joy to those whom they serve. To say we experience joy is to be able to live joyfully even during the most difficult situations; not only so, but to be able to communicate it biblically, psychologically, traditionally, and ritually to those whom we serve.

Who Are We?

As extroverts, introverts or both, depending on circumstances, maturity level, and exposure, we have been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). There is a difference between God's image and His likeness. The former is what we have been created in; the latter is what we have the potential to develop into. The term "likeness" denotes the fulfillment and realization, which we aspire for through spiritual and psychological growth and maturity. Actualizing and fulfilling this image is what St. Paul described as "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), thus we reach the likeness of God, which is our ultimate goal.

Personality Components

Sensing, intuiting, thinking, and feeling in various degrees are the four functions that constitute a human personality. God has the four functions fully developed in Him. When we develop those four functions in us, we become Christ-like, in the likeness of God. Each of the four gospels is said to demonstrate a function of

SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLE

By H.G. Bishop Youssef



the personality of Jesus Christ:

- The Gospel of St. Mathew reflects the Thinking Function
- The Gospel of St. Mark demonstrates the Sensing Function
- The Gospel of St. Luke reflects the Feeling Function
- The Gospel of St. John reflects the Intuition Function

What is Joy?

Inward joy, one of the characteristics of the Christian, is a domain of a well-developed feeling function. It is the second of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. Being joyful is not dependent on circumstances; because no matter what happens, a true Christian should be relaxed and radiant capable of illuminating and not depressing his surrounding. This is because a true Christian who keeps heaven in view will remain serene and cheerful on the darkest day drawing support from the deep river of joy that the Holy Spirit has set course for within us.

Characteristics of a Well Developed Feeling Function

• *Loyalty and Fidelity:*

The quality of being faithful is an aspect of God's perfect feeling function, and a constant attribute of His. Just as God is love, so is He faithful. Our unfaithfulness does not cancel nor alter God's: "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not" (Romans 3:3,4). In order for us to develop

into the likeness of Christ, we have to practice faithfulness and loyalty without which the Feeling Function in us is ultimately destroyed. "Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness" (Psalm 37:3). A sign of a developed feeling function is that our faithfulness to God and to others will remain constant even when they are not.

• *Doing Gods will:*

The joy of Christ consisted in doing His Father's will and work. He told us "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). This was so important in His life, even more satisfying than necessary food. Joy came out of serving and pleasing the heavenly Father. It was a common recurring theme of His life and ministry.

Means of Nourishing and Developing the Feeling Function

• *Remembering:*

Remembering and sharing good news with others is a sure source of happiness. David the Psalmist expressed this truth in Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." The act of remembering happy occasions, moments, and incidents brings about joy in the heart and nurtures the feeling function. That is the aim behind celebrating feasts, anniversaries, and recalling happy events. Positive memories energize feelings, heal wounds, and deepen commitments to the covenants that bind us. In the

same way, commemorating major events like the Nativity, Resurrection and celebrating feasts of the saints, renew our commitments to God and open us up for hope, healing, and life renewal. This joygenerating concept of celebrating and sharing the good news is found in many of Christ's parables such as the lost son, the lost coin, and the lost sheep to mention a few. These parables give us an insight into the heart of God that is willing to celebrate and experience His pure joy especially that of reaching the lost.

• *Repeating:*

In the Holy Book of Deuteronomy 4:9-10, God commands Moses, his children, and his children's children to remember how He, the Almighty had rescued the Israelites from the land of Egypt delivering them with a mighty hand. This positively confirms the importance of Tradition in our spiritual and social practices. Tradition, is telling the old story over and over again. In doing so, we nourish our present and protect our future. The outcome of these commemorating experiences is a form of energy called gratitude. The term is derived from the root word "grace." So, gratitude is an energy-charged joyful reaction to the graces obtained. This is also manifest in the Arabic language where the word for "feast" "عيد" means repeatedly remember the joyful events. Whoever forgets the graces of God will never be grateful and consequently will never experience Joy. There is an inevitable link between the three elements: prayer, joy, and thanksgiving. They are commands issued from God directly for us to obey and implement. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16,17). The links in the chain are interrelated and interdependent; so much so that a breakdown in one will lead to a breakdown in the cycle; since each one feeds the other. David has fulfilled this command ex-

pressively in Psalm 103:1-5, praying, rejoicing, and giving thanks while remembering the good deeds that God has done to him; "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things" with the outcome being "So that your youth is renewed like the eagles."

In the same psalm, David is prophetically being reminded by the Holy Spirit of the real source of all these benefits that he is surrounded with. It is the Redemptive act of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Without this redemption, we would still be in Satan's bondage reaping the fruit of pain, death, and destruction. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:11-14).

Causes of Lack of Joy

• Sin:

The seat of feeling is the heart. Many evidences from the Holy Bible proves sin to be the main cause of hardness of heart (Psalm 106, Isaiah 1:4). Thus, a hardened heart, because of sin, cannot experience the gift of joy. Counter to the productive positive cycle that exists in a joyful heart; a negative one emerges in a hardened heart. This is because sin leads to hardness of heart; and hardness of heart leads to lack of joy. Unless the source is eliminated; this cycle will not be replaced with the one which has praise, gratitude, and joy as its components. Hardness of heart is considered a spiritual amnesia, a spiritual psychological condition in which we experience forgetfulness of God's graces and goodness and dwell in our negative thoughts and self-

centeredness. God warns against this perilous state of mind and heart in Deuteronomy 8:11 "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today."

• *Decay and Paralysis of Commemoration:*

When people stop commemorating significant spiritual incidents, they cut themselves off of the value of Tradition turning it into a burden and an obsolete historical bunch of practices.

• *Loss of Focus:*

When we focus on the wrong things, the wrong input and the wrong attitudes we have lost sight of what is important in maintaining joy and living the joyful life; thus missing what joy is all about.

Consequences of the Absence of Joy

• *Loss of Power:*

"For the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10) so, according to this biblical truth, lack of joy equals lack of strength. A sad heart cannot have a strong positive outlook to life nor to all that is in it. Besides, a wounded and hardened heart distorts God's feeling image. This condition will reflect on the persons spiritual life and how he perceives church rituals and practices. For example, an unhappy heart will not enjoy the treasures existing in the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy is essentially a remembrance of the redemptive act of Christ. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). A sad, hardened heart will not be able to perceive the rich joy that exists in attending the Divine Liturgy. Having missed the mark, he will experience frustration and impatience; and his worship will consequently turn into a traditional, lifeless one. God described this psychological, emotional state, also experienced by the Israelites, saying "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Matthew 15:8). Contrary to such an apathetic state of mind and at-

titude is the priests joyful one. In concluding the Liturgy rituals the serving priest concludes by saying "our mouth is filled with joy and our tongue with gladness."

• *Loss of Faithfulness:*

A sad heart becomes unfaithful to God and alien to the sources of his life and talents. St. Paul in his first epistles to the Corinthians, speaks extensively of this state of denial of the source of all things and the subsequent pretentious thinking otherwise. "And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). As a result of this mental and emotional apathy, happiness gets replaced with sadness, depression, loss of spiritual vision, and lack of incentive to exploit and gain with the talents we have been entrusted with.

Recovery of Joy

• *Holy Contrition:*

Sadness and grief can be made use of in a beneficial way. They can be altered in nature and turned into a holy one leading to repentance and change. Such grief will then gain a new name and be described as holy; leading to full joy: "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted" (2 Corinthians 7:10). A very prominent character who experienced this double fold process is the prodigal son who, all of a sudden, awoke from his spiritual amnesia; and because of God's mercy, grace, love, and acceptance, gained spiritual awareness, and real contrition that led to repentance. This spontaneity of grief and joy, sorrow and compassion, comes from one place and one place only and that is the redemptive act of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Those who have not freely entered the experience of God's free merciful act on the Cross cannot be disposed to accept compassion from others nor show it to them. We need God's redemptive mercy to be activated and actualized in our lives before we can manifest and bestow it on the others.

Here comes the role of the Holy Spirit as an intercessor, teacher, and comforter. The Holy Spirit-inspired Litany for the Sick, requesting psychological and physical healing; prays for seven needs: mercy, rest, refreshment, grace, help, salvation, and forgiveness. When we call upon God, the help for the helpless, hope for the hopeless, and comfort for the faint-hearted; we will find the answer in the exclusive tenderness of Jesus Christ Who can heal from all kinds of injuries including physical, psychological, and emotional injuries.

• *Shift in Focus:*

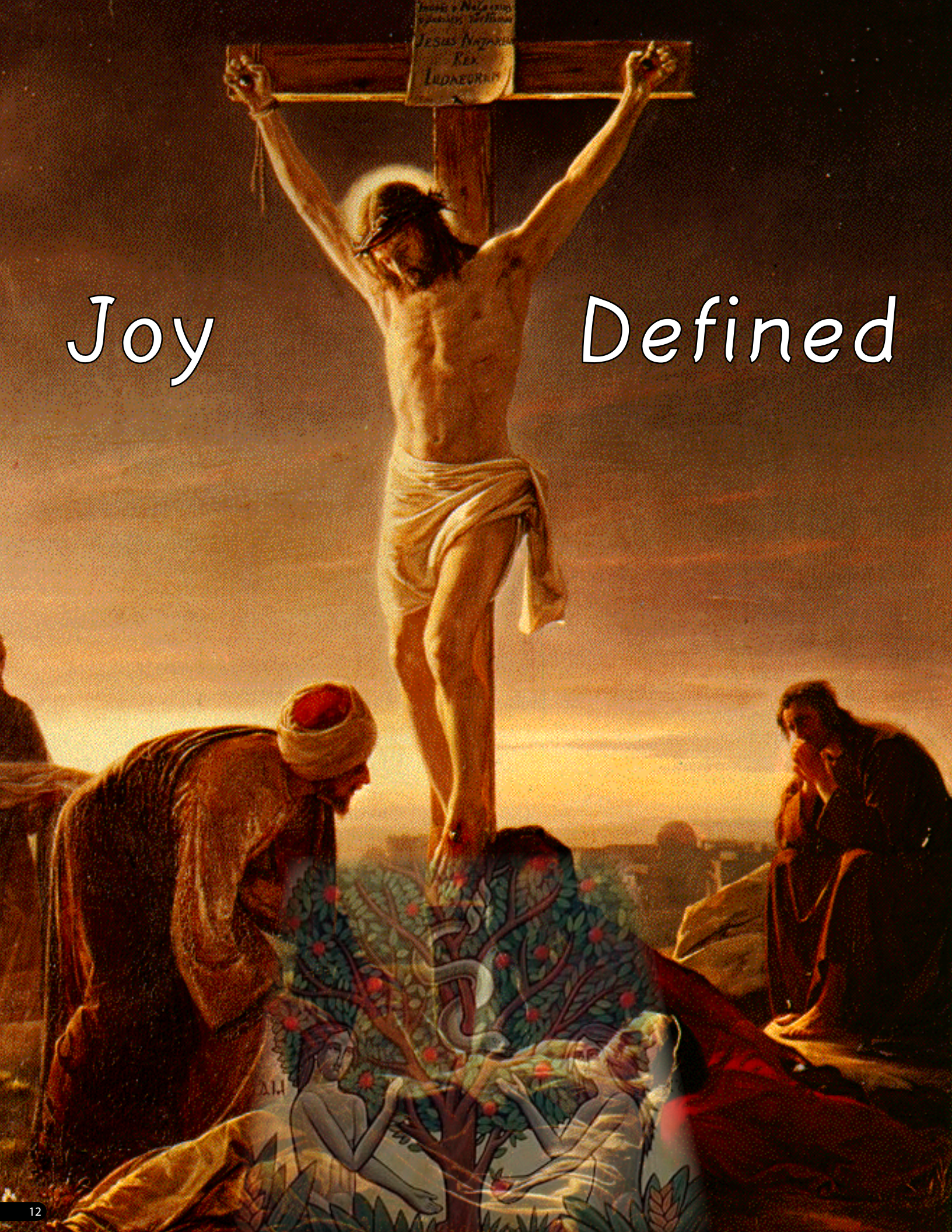
When we start to focus on the right thing, which is mainly our relationship with God, Then we will be able to relax and rejoice; confessing with St. Paul, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:35). This is a learning process which even St. Paul had to go through before he could say "I have learned" (Philippians 4:11) the secret of being joyful and content in any and every situation. David the psalmist had his focus and priorities rightfully established; that led him to experience the everlasting joy. "I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).

Conclusion

The joy of the Lord is the answer to living a meaningful life; and the one very important element in completing the character of a Christian. Joy gives us a taste of what heaven must be like. So much so, that even when life strips us of all the circumstances that would normally bring a sense of happiness, we will be able to boldly profess with the Old Testament prophet that "though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:17,18).

Joy

Defined



Joy is received in full upon the acceptance of the truth that Jesus Christ has come to save, heal, forgive, and restore us back to Himself, and that in doing so, He fills us with His joy, hope, and peace of His salvation.

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT ALL THOSE THINGS YOU STRUGGLE WITH—ALL THE FEAR AND PAIN AND WORRY—CAN BE WIPE AWAY IF YOU ACCEPT ONE TRUTH? JUST ONE. I worry that when I tell you what this is that you will roll your eyes, or even worse, nod your head in superficial agreement.

What is this truth? Jesus Christ is God, and He has come to “*save that which was lost*” (Mt 18:11). To make it more personal, mentally replace “*that which was lost*” with your own name. Yes, Jesus Christ has come to save Mary, Mina, Mark, Sally, Suzy, Bob, even Mohammed—and you, “*the apple of His eye*” (Zech 2:8). He calls each of us individually “*His jewels*” (Mal 3:17). What lovely endearments.

Do we really understand what this means, or do we find ourselves simply nodding our heads at these Claims? Do you really believe that He is your Savior? Do you believe you are His beloved (Son), that He cares for you (1 Pt 5:7), that He knows you (Ps 139:1), and that He loves you?

And how has He loved us? Revisit the verse we have memorized since elementary school: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish*

but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). Why is it that we memorize this verse so early on in our spiritual lives? Simply, because it sums it all up.

No amount of paper and ink would ever be sufficient to describe the depth of His love. Once we first disobeyed Him in the Garden of Eden, we sinned and thus put on death, “*for the wages of sin is death*” (Rom 6:23). Because of His deep love for us, however, He had a plan for our salvation—a plan that was designed to make up for our own mistakes. It is important to understand that it was “*not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*” (Tit 3:5-7). We sinned. He saved. We rejected. He restored. We abandoned. He remained.

So what does this have to do with all your fear, pain, and worry? Everything. King David desired Bathsheba, sinned with her, and killed her husband, and after being chastened by God through the Prophet Nathan, he felt remorseful and repentant. As a result, Psalm 50 was produced. In it King David pleaded

with God and begged, “*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.*”

Joy—defined is “the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying.” To King David, God’s salvation was exceptionally good and satisfying, thus he asked for the restoration of His salvation in order to restore his joy.

If we focus on our pain and our mistakes and our shortcomings, we will be overcome with false feelings of guilt and shame, which are not from God. God promises Joy. God promises forgiveness. God promises healing. God promises salvation.

ARE YOU LOST? ARE YOU BROKEN HEARTED? ARE YOU HELD CAPTIVE BY YOUR FEAR, SHAME, OR WORRY? ARE YOU BOUND BY THE PAST OR THE FUTURE? Then get to know your Savior and His Mission: “*He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ... To comfort all who mourn ... To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning*” (Is 61:1-3).

These gifts are free to all those who ask and to all those who believe. “*Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full*” (Jn 16:24). You want your

burdens lifted? You want to experience the joy of His salvation? You want to be free? Ask. Perhaps even in the asking, you will find joy through prayer, and you can then say with King David, “*In your presence is fullness of joy*” (Ps 16:11).

The joy found in His presence and in His salvation is not temporary. It is eternal, present as long as we immerse ourselves in His truths—such as those found in John 16:22: “*Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.*”

Do not let Satan’s lies condemn you. Believe in God’s truth. “*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 15:13).

Joy. Receive it. Now does that not sound refreshing?

An Article by Sarah Mathoslah

Dr. Rageb Moftah



“Who?” This was my first reaction when someone suggested writing this article about Dr. Rageb Moftah. But after “googling” him, it soon became clear to me that this was a gifted man well worth writing about, well worth knowing. So let me share with you what I found out about him.

First of all, he was born in 1898 and died in 2001.² When he was of age, his wealthy parents sent him to Germany to study agriculture. Dr. Moftah completed his studies in agriculture but also did something

I suspect his parents had not anticipated: he followed his passion for music. He obtained degrees in music from the University of Bonn and from the University of Munich.

Then, he did something few people dare to do; he had a life goal, a dream which seemed impossible and he went for it! So what was his dream, you ask? Well, let's put it this way – he decided that he wanted to preserve all the original hymns of the Church and the vocal musical notations as faithfully as he could.³ Apparently, some people wanted to introduce changes into the hymns and Dr. Moftah refused to stand by and let the original hymns slowly disappear.

Interestingly, Dr. Moftah found that the hymns were correctly passed down to the cantors with very little variations, with two or three exceptions. In these cases, when there were



The
Preserver
of
Hymns¹

**1898
- 2001**

two ways in which a hymn could be sung, Dr. Moftah travelled Egypt in search of the original way.

In 1928, he approached the Royal Academy of Music in London and asked them to recommend a recording expert. They recommended Professor Ernest NewlandSmith. You guessed it! Recorded hymns equalled pre-

served hymns. Dr. Moftah and Prof. NewlandSmith worked for twenty years recording the ecclesiastical Coptic music.⁴

In 1970, he cooperated with Dr. Margit Toth and musically transcribed St. Basil's Liturgy. It took them thirty years to complete this project! In 1992, Dr. Moftah offered his life's work to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.⁵ If you are curious, you can listen to some of it at http://www.thealpha.org/index.php?option=com_jdownloads&view=viewcategory&catid=135&Itemid=64.

What makes Dr. Moftah amazing is that, although he clearly could have used his God-given gift for his own benefit, he did not. Instead, he chose to use it for all our benefit, leaving us with his beautiful legacy of preserved spiritual hymns.

An Article by Myriam Fahim

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragheb_Moftah

² Ibid.

³ <http://www.coptic.org/music/watson.html>

⁴ http://www.copticheritage.org/interviews/ragheb_moftah

⁵ <http://www.coptic.org/music/watson.html>



Joy of being a super hero



voted consecration of the heart. It totally defies the laws of nature as we know it, for someone to change the entire direction of their life and turn to the Lord Jesus. It takes a divine touch for someone to realize that they need a Savior, that they don't have it all together, that they are not 'okay', and that they will lay their own will aside and obediently pursue the will of God.

The problem with our "super powers" is that we just don't use them. How silly would it be seeing Superman on a bus? Or Spiderman on an elevator? That's me and you sometimes! We act like we haven't been bitten by a (spiritually) radioactive spider or that our real home isn't another planet. Okay, maybe I'm going a bit far with the comics, but you get the picture! St. Paul and the early church fathers had this fact crystal clear in their minds. *"We are more than conquerors (superheroes) through Him who loved us!"* (Rom 8:37). *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom 8:31). *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (Rom 8:35).

We believe that our Jesus is invincible! And, our Jesus walks with us so we can live an invincible, victorious, miraculous life!

That's a life where Jesus casually does amazing things, and we look on, with our jaws dropped and say, "Whoa, there goes another miracle that Jesus did!" That's a life of joy right there. I love that, to Jesus miracles are pretty easy, and I'd bet the reason that heaven rejoices over the repentance kind of miracles is because they're His favorite.

I'm sure if someone told you that they work miracles, you'd probably figure that person is either delusional or pompous or some combination of the two. In the Coptic circle, our hyper-vigilance against pride sometimes keeps us from letting God be who He is in our lives. Yes, we are sinful. Yes, we are unworthy. But as we say in the Divine Liturgy, "The holies are for the holy," and "The sanctification is by the Holy Spirit." It's our Father's good pleasure to make us holy, to use us for His glory.

You've come across a wonder-worker or two, you might just not know it yet. By conventional definition, a miracle is something impossible by human abilities and that defies the laws of the natural world we live in. There is a type of miracle that

which heaven itself takes notice. This kind propels heaven into a celebration! This isn't the oil-dripping or the apparitions, but the Bible speaks about one of these words that we throw around, making of it some massive deal. You guessed it: "Repentance." If you are Coptic, you've probably heard this word about 27 million times in the past year. Perhaps so much so that it's lost its meaning to you. Yet, here is the Bible making an outrageous claim (as usual) that 'repentance' makes angels rejoice.

God's sweetness is on display again in that He won't let us get jealous of angels. He gives us a sneak preview of the joy-experience of seeing another human have his "mind changed." The fingerprint of the supernatural is all over these situations. The joy of the observer, or better yet, participant, is beyond words to explain, but more importantly the actual occurrence of repentance is clearly only allowed by the active Love of the Savior.

In my life, the only joy that I can compare to knowing Jesus and growing in His infinite love, has been the supreme joy of being a part of someone else getting to know Him. It's like raising the dead - but better! Raising a man from a grave, knowing he'll die again, isn't all that impressive, in a sense, but, working hand in Hand with Jesus (at least that's what He graciously makes it feel like to us in raising someone from eternal death to life everlasting)--that's a keeper! So, put on your cape and let's bring some joy to heaven with the miracles of repentance in the lives of the lost around us and by challenging each other to dig deep into Christ and live with consecrated hearts!

An Article by Mena Mirhom

Special Announcement to Copts from the President and his wife.



Michelle and I wish Coptic Orthodox Christians in the United States and around the world a blessed and joyous Christmas. On this special day, we give thanks for the extraordinary contributions that Coptic Christians have made to the United States. I want to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to work for the protection of Christian and other religious minorities around the world. As events in Egypt and elsewhere have illustrated, and as history repeatedly reminds us, freedom of religion, the protection of people of all faiths, and the ability to worship as you choose are critical to a peaceful, inclusive and thriving society. In this Christmas season, we join our Coptic brothers and sisters around the globe in prayers for peace.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/06/statement-president-celebration-coptic-christmas>




OH MY SWEET LORD, who am I to have such grace, such joyous grace in praising You? The psalmody was heavenly. I really believe something would happen to me if I pass up a hymn, if I don't sing, it truly is a gift from You, one that is deeply rooted from within me. It is true, if I were to lose one of the senses I ask that it not be hearing (so I can hear praises), or speech (so I can praise You); it truly is a divine service. It is the highest form of prayer, actually it is divine prayer because it has no wants but only glorifies You,

akin to the Cherubic praise in the Revelation, truly transferring the person to heaven. Oh my Lord, my sweet Lord, how I cherish praising You, how I long to praise You unceasingly – the Jesus Prayer, the Our Father, the psalms, Psalmody – the goal is preoccupation with You, uniting with You unceasingly: *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks."*¹ If my heart is always with You I'll always thank You and Your grace, with inexpressible joy that only comes out in praise. Oh my Lord, I know I'm shortchang-

ing You in everything – I do the bare minimum, and what I do do is often contaminated with the self. Any other owner would evict such a tenant worker, but You are my Father and Beloved and only for this reason do I remain hopeful, only because of Your unfathomable compassion and graciousness. Lord, I don't know if I will still be breathing until this vespers, or even until the end of the Liturgy. Oh, how I would that You would take me to You, Lord please change me, give me a truly penitent heart, make me Your chosen vessel,

Oh my sweet Lord



der about anything? I should put my whole life snugly into the corner of Your hand and entrust it there, rejoicing continually for having such a caring loving thoughtful Beloved. How could I give my life to any other? You know You own this life and have owned it before I took my first breath (You were there watching, in fact You are the One who breathed into my mouth the breath of life, and with this my life came into being). Oh my Lord, who am I that You should love me so? Who am I that You should choose me as Your bride? I've blemished (to put it mildly) Your sacred Name with my life, I was insolent and ungrateful, oblivious, or careless. Oh my Lord, You are perfection, so how do You tolerate my imperfection? How do You tolerate my imperfect faith and fidelity-lacking heart? How do You tolerate my sluggishness and continued laziness in not pursuing perfection? How do You tolerate my forgetting who You are and who I am – forgetting my rightful place and forgetting that without You inside my life every second, I would crumble, be sifted, crushed, and perish? How do You tolerate when I forget that You are the one holding me up and You are the one working in me for good? My sweet Lord, how do I keep from ever forgetting this? Please tell me, show me, or make me.

Your chess piece, Lord, please make this life exactly according to Your heart's desire and delight.

OH MY SWEET GENTLE LORD, my life is laid out before You, You see the past, the present, and the future; You know why I do certain things and why I don't do certain things. I might forget the causes or the reasons, but not You, You remember. You planned my life before I was born and fashioned it exactly to fit; with such love, how could I worry or even won-

der about anything? I should put my whole life snugly into the corner of Your hand and entrust it there, rejoicing continually for having such a caring loving thoughtful Beloved. How could I give my life to any other? You know You own this life and have owned it before I took my first breath (You were there watching, in fact You are the One who breathed into my mouth the breath of life, and with this my life came into being). Oh my Lord, who am I that You should love me so? Who am I that You should choose me as Your bride? I've blemished (to put it mildly) Your sacred Name with my life, I was insolent and ungrateful, oblivious, or careless. Oh my Lord, You are perfection, so how do You tolerate my imperfection? How do You tolerate my imperfect faith and fidelity-lacking heart? How do You tolerate my sluggishness and continued laziness in not pursuing perfection? How do You tolerate my forgetting who You are and who I am – forgetting my rightful place and forgetting that without You inside my life every second, I would crumble, be sifted, crushed, and perish? How do You tolerate when I forget that You are the one holding me up and You are the one working in me for good? My sweet Lord, how do I keep from ever forgetting this? Please tell me, show me, or make me.

OH MY SWEET TENDER LOVE, I know my life is in Your hand and You won't allow anything bad to happen to me, I know nothing can happen to me outside Your will, I know You hold me close to Your heart and Your eye is on me. No matter what the evil one plots, he cannot prevail against You. I just need to not fear and trust in You – and be free.

Oh, You who water and plant a paradise in the middle of nowhere just for the plants and animals: "*Who gives food to all flesh*,"² how tenderhearted You are my sweet gentle Love, what would I ever do without You? I've tasted being a tool in Your hand and relying completely on You, and I can't live any other way. Please Lord, please keep me a vessel in Your hand.

Has anything, anything in my life occurred without You? The pains as well as the joys, the bliss and the scorn, You were always present, You always witnessed, You always consented, because You knew I needed it: "*He bruises, but He binds up*."³ When I needed to learn, You allowed the sorrow, yet You accompanied it with grace so that I am able to endure. Oh my Love, what would I do without You! I know You hold me in the palm of Your hand, please forgive me and correct me for my weak times. Re-strengthen my

faith Lord, return me to handing my whole life over to You completely, and trusting You to care for it and provide for it and protect it and love it, to the utmost – more than I can. Oh You who see every millisecond in the past, present, and future simultaneously; oh You who are limited by nothing; oh You who are overcome or overpowered by nothing; oh my Love; oh my security; oh my God. Do not panic, do not worry, He will take care of things; He will do what is best for you. He is a capable owner and driver. He sees your life and knows what you need, and He will provide.

MY SWEET LORD, I don't know what to say, I just want to sit with You and call on Your name, and hear Your voice. I came to You and have nothing. I want to empty my brain and my whole being and put You there as the ruler, author, and owner. I just want to sit with You in silence (not speaking, not thinking, not praying, not even praising) but listening. The disciple's role is to listen and observe much more than to speak. What can I learn when I'm giving out? I need to be fed by You. Thank You for this state of serenity.

Anonymous

We probably do not think twice about seeing and hearing the word joy, but things used to be different. Two thousand years ago, non-Christians hardly ever used the word joy with the meaning of Acts 8:8. Joy was one word for which secular writers had little use. Travelers might have used it to describe returning to their homeland. For example, when we come back home from a long trip, we are delighted to see our familiar rooms and sleep in our own comfortable beds; it feels so good to return home. Two thousand years ago, people who had this experience described it as a joyous event. Likewise, the word *joy* was occasionally applied to someone who spread false reports and gossip. A third use of this term was the flooding of the Nile River. A good flood meant a good harvest, so during good floods, people had joy. For the most part, before Christianity came along, there was a very limited understanding of joy. Christianity changed the world in that it really introduced the concept of joy. According to Acts 8, when lost people were found and obeyed the truth, they experienced joy. Basically, Christ equals everlasting Joy. It's a simple equation!

Therefore, we are going to take the three letter word in Acts 8:8 and learn about it. Let us examine several references: the first comes from Matthew 13, which presents some parables. The Lord's first parable is about a farmer who planted a crop. Jesus said sowing seed in the ground is like the word of God being taught to the unsaved. In Matthew 13:20, Jesus said some who are taught, receive the word with *joy*. This is the effect of the gospel. Joy (a thrill almost beyond words) fills the heart after finding and obeying the truth. An illustration of the depth and wealth of this joy is found a little

later in the same chapter: "*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*" (Mt 13:44). Christ's joy is so profound that people are willing to give everything they have for it.

God's word says Christian joy is not limited to this life. A little later in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we see this same word occurring again. Matthew 25 describes the future judgment. The saved will be told to enter into the joy of their Lord (verse 23). Thus, Christ's joy exists in the here and now, and in the hereafter. We have established that joy should be in the heart of those who hear and obey the truth. We also know that joy will be associated with going to heaven. Another aspect of joy is found in Luke 15:7: "*I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.*" The Lord described a wayward child of God who returns to faith. The Holy Bible states that when a person comes back to God, there is *joy* in heaven. The heavenly court is absolutely thrilled when an unfaithful Christian repents. Sometimes estranged Christians believe they need to "get their act right" before returning. Jesus said the key to righting our relationship with God is "repentance." If we are willing to repent, we are back in God's good standing and heaven rejoices with joy.

The world can also rejoice. Our word from Acts 8:8 is again used in John 16:20. Just prior to these words, Jesus told His disciples that He had to go away. It was necessary for Him to die, and this would make them very sad. While the disciples were grieving, the Lord's enemies would *rejoice*: "*Most assuredly, I say*

Christian

"And there was great joy in that

to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy" (Jn 16:20). We see many examples of John 16:20 in our days. There are events and decisions that still make God's people grieve while the world rejoices. For example, Plan B is also known as the "morning after pill." Ladies who do not want to become pregnant can take a pill to terminate a pregnancy. At the present time, this pill requires a prescription, but it appears that a forthcoming decision would make this product an "over the counter" item. Obviously, most Christians oppose making this pill easy to get for several reasons. Those on the other side of the aisle find easy access to this pill a cause for celebration. Quite often, the world finds joy in what is saddening and upsetting to Christians. This is a good reminder that the world's joy is usually far different than our joy. We should always be thankful that we do not need to get our joy from the world. Note that for Christians, this joy cannot be taken away. When Jesus spoke about joy in John 16:22, He made a subtle but strong point. He said, it cannot be taken away. His exact words in John 16:22 read, "*Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.*"

Many confuse happiness with joy. Happiness is nice, but it fades. Happiness can be stripped away from us at any moment, but Biblical joy is independent of circumstances.

Whether we are in good health or ill health, we can and should have joy. If we are young or old, joy stays in our heart. New Christians and old Christians should all have joy, the SAME joy, God's eternal joy! To this, someone might say, "What about during difficult times? What about the periods when things are hard? What happens to joy during affliction?" St. Paul answered these questions by saying, "*I am exceedingly joyful*" (2 Cor 7:4). Why? Were times especially good when he wrote the book of Second Corinthians? Circumstances were difficult seeing that he ends this verse with "*in all our tribulation.*" Pressing problems were upon this apostle, but he was still exceedingly joyful.

This very term is found in 2 Corinthians 8:2 in conjunction with poverty. There were, in the first century, and currently, many Christians who were and still are extremely poor. Yes, they lacked material wealth, but they abounded in joy. The poorest people in the world quite often overflow in joy. Joy is thus a result of the triumph of faith over adverse and trying circumstances, which, instead of hindering, actually enhance it (Act 5:41). Even for our Lord Himself, dying by crucifixion is about the worst death ever devised by man. How did the Lord manage to endure this form of execution? What motivated Him to go through with it? How could He willingly submit to the cruelty? He did it by concentrating on the joy set before Him:

Joy

city" (ACTS 8:8)

"Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2).

Lastly but definitely not least, in 3 John 1:4, St. John wrote to the faithful members of the church, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* Parents receive great joy when they see their children doing what is right. God, who is also a parent and our maker, has a similar joy. We saw an example of this earlier in Luke 15. When someone returns to the right way there is joy both on earth and in Heaven. As Christians, one source of our joy is to see other people living as the Holy Bible describes or as God intends.

Many have searched and searched for joy. Long ago, it seemed so elusive that many simply did not use the word. Joy exists and it is found only in Jesus Christ. We find it by receiving the Faith and continuing to obey it. Many want to talk about joy, but this is actually a Christian word. Therefore, without faith, we cannot walk and live with God (Heb 11:6) and we cannot continue in the faith without repentance (Lk 13:3). God's love and joy is constant and plentiful, but only available to those who seek and want to live with Him: *"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad"* (Mt 5:12).

An Article by Joseph Ghebrial





The Fruitful Tree

A young man bought a house with a small backyard. He wanted to plant fruit trees, but the yard was so small that it could take only one tree. He went to a nursery looking for the best fruit tree to fit his yard. The

nursery owner started showing him the trees that she had but they were all beyond his budget. The lady noticed how eager this person was to leave the nursery with a tree, so she showed him a small tree that did not seem

as appealing as the other trees. She told him, "This is a mystical tree. If you take good care of it, it can bear up to nine different fruits at the same time. The man was confused and did not believe the lady. He decided to

take the tree anyway because she was offering it for free. He said in his heart, "What am I going to lose? At end of the day, it is for free!"

The man took the tree and



Only the tree of the Holy Spirit can bear nine fruits.

it out if he wanted to get another tree.

One morning when he was about to pull out the tree, he noticed a small unripe apple fruit. His reaction was a mixture of confusion and optimism. It was not the season for apples, but there was an apple! The tree could indeed bear fruit! He kept telling his friends about the out-of-season apple fruit, but no one gave him any attention. The young man decided to keep the tree and take good care of it. As years went by, the tree bore different fruits as the nursery lady told him. Sometimes it bore different fruit at the same time and sometimes one at a time. Sometimes the fruits would ripen in season and sometimes out of season. However it happened, as the man grew older and older, that the tree grew bigger and bigger. It did not need as much care as before, because it had deep roots in the ground. One day, it bore nine different fruits at the same time. The man enjoyed the fruits of his tree. It was so abundant that he would share the fruits with his friends, who wanted to plant a similar tree in their own backyards, but it was too late for them to wait till their trees bore fruits.

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Lady in the nursery is the church, and the backyard is our heart. The man is our free will. The friends represent our earthly desires. We receive the Holy Spirit from the church, but we have to dig deep in our hearts for the tree to take root. We have to take good care of it even when we cannot see any fruit, because one day this tree will be strong enough to sustain us when we cannot sustain ourselves.

The well-being of this tree depends on the amount of care we offer. The tree is sitting in the middle of our secret garden. It brings more fruit when we are humble enough to accept the fact that we did not make the fruit, we just planted and harvested it. Sometimes we do not enjoy the fruits of the Spirit because we claim them to ourselves. Remember 1 Cor.3:6, "I planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase."

An Article by Miena Armanious

planted it in his backyard. He took good care of it for years, but it did not grow as big as he expected. He would go back to the nursery and ask the lady if there is anything wrong with it and her answer was usually,

"Be patient!" This man did not know what to do. Visiting his friends, he would notice the big and beautiful trees in their yards. He did not have enough room in his backyard to plant another. He would have to pull

In case you are wondering what this all means, the tree is the Holy Spirit and the nine fruits are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness,

QUESTION



ANSWER

Fall Edition GENERAL QUESTION

Answered

Q: From where has the prayer of Thanksgiving originated? How long has the church been using it?

A: The Thanksgiving Prayer was the opening prayer for the original Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark.

It was prayed by the priest secretly at the start of the Liturgy. The original text reads "We give Thee thanks, yea, more than thanks, O Lord our God, the Father of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, for all Thy goodness at all times and in all places, because Thou hast shielded, rescued, helped, and guided us all the days of our lives, and brought us unto this hour, permitting us gain to stand before Thee in Thy holy place, that we may implore forgiveness of our sins and propitiation to all Thy people. We pray and beseech Thee, merciful God, to grant in Thy goodness that we may spend this holy day⁴ and all the time of our lives without sin, in fullness of joy, health, safety, holiness, and reverence of Thee. But all envy, all fear, all temptation, all the influence of Satan, all the snares of wicked men, do Thou, O Lord, drive away from us, and from Thy Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Bestow upon us, O Lord, what is good and meet. Whatever sin we commit in thought, word, or deed, do Thou in Thy goodness and mercy be pleased to pardon. Leave us not, O Lord, while we hope in Thee; nor lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one and from his works, through the grace, mercy, and love of Thine only-begotten Son." This would date the Thanksgiving prayer to the time of the apostles in the 1st century.

The entire text of St. Mark Liturgy is published in "The Early Church Fathers: The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. VII" : http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-07/anf07-64.htm#P8474_2651209.

Fall Edition Bible Question: *Judith had great faith in God. Give proof.*

Answer: Judith 8:14-15, 19-20: ¹⁴ For ye cannot find the depth of the heart of man, neither can ye perceive the things that he thinketh: then how can ye search out God, that hath made all these things, and know his mind, or comprehend his purpose? Nay, my brethren, provoke not the Lord our God to anger. ¹⁵ For if he will not help us within these five days, he hath power to defend us when he will, even every day, or to destroy us before our enemies. ¹⁹ For the which cause our fathers were given to the sword, and for a spoil, and had a great fall before our enemies. ²⁰ But we know none other god, therefore we trust that he will not despise us, nor any of our nation.

New Winter 2012 Edition GENERAL QUESTION

And its Answer

Q: How do we know whether our happiness is born out of a strong relationship with God or out of positive circumstances? Is it reasonable to be upset with God when circumstances aren't going well; although we're told to be thankful to him under all circumstances? Should we call out for help?

A: Excerpts from Psalm 30, NKJV: "Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps 30:4,5). "Now in my prosperity I said, 'I shall never be moved.' Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face, and I troubled" (Ps 30:6,7). "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever" (Ps 30:11,12).

These two questions combine one thought: What determines my inner contentment? If it is I or my circumstances, then it is unreasonable to be upset with God when things go wrong. On the other hand, if I find joy in my relationship with God, then calamity will not dampen my hope in Him, for my relationship with God is my prosperity. In either case, God's presence in my life completes my joy and gives me hope. The mere thought of His absence in my life is disturbing. Contentment is better than "happiness". Most people are not "happy" to be poor or sick; but can still experience contentment and gratitude with however little or much they possess.

New Winter 2012 Edition

BIBLE QUESTION

FROM THE HOLY BOOK OF 1 MACCABEES
(answer to be posted in Spring Edition)

Q: What did Judah's men do as they returned from plundering the camp?

A: To be posted in the next edition!!!

Events & Activities

DIOCESE PROGRAMS

St. Verena Resource Ministry

(SVRM) Requesting assistance or registering to be a Volunteer Consultant

Family Ministry Program: fmp.suscpts.org

Theological Seminary Program

Program Registration deadline: March 15, 2012

NEW DIOCESE PROGRAM!

The **LEAD** Program
Leadership Education And Development

The Diocese is very excited to announce a new program for those interested in leadership development. God willing, The LEAD Program (Leadership Education And Development) will begin in the Fall of 2012.

DIOCESE EVENTS

Pre-Marital Retreats: FL: Feb 3-5, 2012

Coptic Professional Adults Retreat: Feb 16-19, 2012

THE MISSION EXPERIENCE: MEXICO

June 18 - June 28 - Summer Trip 2012

Experience the mission and service of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Mexico. This trip will be blessed with the presence of H.G. Bishop Youssef. Fr. Zakaria Al Bramousy will host the group at St. Mary & St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Tlayacapan, Mexico. Experience the fruit of the labors of the mission and visit beautiful and historical sites in Mexico. Registration is limited to 25 participants. For more information, kindly contact: 2012missionexperience@gmail.com

THE BEST OF RUSSIA

July 16 - July 28 - Summer Trip 2012

We will be visiting many religious, cultural, and historical sites throughout the trip and will be blessed with the presence of H.G. Bishop Youssef. If interested and would like more information, please send an email to: 2012RussiaTrip@gmail.com
Registration is limited to 40 Participants.

* Dates are subject to change. Please check www.suscpts.org

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Servants in Christ,
Mighty Arrows Magazine Staff

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