



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests**

January 2020

“Therefore the Lord Himself Will Give You a Sign”

(Isaiah 7:14)

Thousands of years ago, about whom was Isaiah prophesying when he prophetically uttered these words,

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Who did Isaiah refer to when saying,

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, my Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.” (Isaiah 42:1-4)

He is the same person about Whom he said,

“I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” (Isaiah 42:6-7).

He is the same person about Whom Isaiah wrote,

“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. 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. 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” (Isaiah 53:10-12).

Who is This Wonderful Man?

“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak” (Isaiah 59:16-17).

It is very clear that He is the ONE and same person Whom Isaiah wrote about throughout his entire book.

“Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign”

This is God's promise to humanity to give Himself a sign. In this respect, St. Irenaeus wrote, “How could man go to God before God

coming to man? How could mankind be liberated from the first birth leading to death if they were not first newly born through that miraculous birth given by God as an emblem of salvation, I mean the birth from the immaculate virgin? How would they have received adoption to God while remaining still in their first birth according to men in this world?... For that reason, the Logos became man, the Son of God became Son of man so that man by entering into communion with the Logos, and thus receiving divine sonship might receive adoption and become son of God.”

Isaiah reiterates God's promise to give Himself “*a sign*”,

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The Essence of That Child

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and His name will be called Wonderful” (Isaiah 9:6)

From these words we understand that this Child

- was born for all humanity
- He is the Son of man

“And the government will be upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6)

- He is born to be a ruler
- His name is above all names

This is in fact what the angel had prophetically said to Manoah, Samson's father; *“And the Angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?’”* (Judges 13:18).

Concerning the stone rejected by the builders, David, wrote symbolically, *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes”* (Psalm 118:22-23).

Referring to Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ used that same verse addressing the scribes and Pharisees, *“Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”* (Matthew 21:42-43).

The Traits of This Child

• Counselor

In reference to the fact that this Child will also come from the Jews, Isaiah wrote *“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”* (Isaiah 11:1-2).

• Almighty God

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.” (Genesis 17:1).

“Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:8).

- **Eternal**

“Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? 'I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He.’” (Isaiah 41:4).

“Trust in the Lord forever, for in Yah, the Lord, is everlasting strength. The way of the just is uprightness; O Most Upright, You weigh the path of the just” (Isaiah 26:4,7).

“I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior” (Isaiah 43:11).

- **Redeemer**

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

“‘You are My witnesses,’ says the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.’” (Isaiah 43:10-11).

- **Author of Eternal Salvation**

“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek,’” (Hebrew 5:9-10).

- **Prince of Peace**

Who can be called "prince of peace" except the ONE Who have promised,

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace” (Ephesians 2:14-15).

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill[a] toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

- **King of Kings**

“Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,...” (Isaiah 9:7).

- **Carrier of Eternal Judgment and Justice**

“..... to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever... ” (Isaiah 9:7).

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

- **God the Zealous**

“.... The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7).

It is God's zealous love for humanity that made Him come down from heaven, emptied Himself from His glory, become man in order to save man from perdition.

“For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24).

“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore, His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak” (Isaiah 59:16-17).

“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (Psalm 69:9).

These were the words the apostles remembered when they saw the Lord's anger in the temple.

“And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!' Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.'” (John 2:16-17).

“Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?” (Isaiah 50:2).

God might be surprised at the inability of mankind to benefit from the Lord's redemptive power. Is it because the Lord's hand is shortened, that it cannot save; or His ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Or is it because of lack of humility and submission on our side? We ought to be seeking Him from the depth of our hearts resting

assured of His response and His rescue replacing our nature with His.

Since the beginning of creation, God had planned to save humanity giving Himself as a sign; for He is the ONE Who with wisdom weaved a controlled plan that grants and guarantees ability to abide in Him and He in us.

St. Gregory, the Theologian says. “And when he fell through the deception of the enemy and the disobedience of Your holy commandment, You desired to renew him and to restore him to his first estate. Neither an angel nor an archangel, neither a patriarch nor a prophet, have You entrusted with our salvation, but You, without change, were incarnate and became man, and resembled us in everything, except for sin alone, and became for us a mediator with the Father, and the middle wall You have broken down and the old enmity You have abolished. You have reconciled the earthly with the heavenly and made the two into one, and fulfilled the economy in the flesh.”

St. Athanasius the Apostolic says, “To the mere creatures created by Him, He became a father according to the work of grace being implemented when this grace is accepted ; as St. Paul had described it, ‘And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ’ (Galatians 4:6-7). ‘But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God’” (John 1:12-13). Thus, it was impossible through any other means, they would become sons of God, while

by nature they are just mere creatures; unless they accept the Spirit of the true Son Who is by nature Son. Therefore, for that to happen, the Logos became man to make man capable of accepting the Divinity...This proves that we are not sons of God by nature; but that He is the Father of the Logos in us. Similarly, God the Father is not our father by nature; but He is the father of the Logos Who is in us through Whom we cry 'Abba father'. Therefore, it is His special Son Who shows the Father in them; and so, He calls those His sons. 'Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear' (Isaiah 59:1).

Truly and with confidence, He proclaimed Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit and His birth from a virgin by the Holy Spirit. He took a body not different from ours, becoming an intercessor and mediator between us and the Father; and so we became fit for unity with Him, through our unity with Him in one human nature and through uniting with Him and abiding in Him. By our free will to follow Him, denying ourselves and carrying the cross we escape the death under which we had been sentenced. We were rescued from the rottenness that was working in our old nature; we took off the old man and put on the new man that is renewed day by day. For, through His birth, Jesus Christ has laid the foundation of the new beginning in the second Adam for a new life attributed to the living God Who does not die. Through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we became anointed in Him worthy to become the temple of the Holy Spirit. By His death on the cross, the writing of our sin was torn up, and we were liberated from the slavery of sin. He instituted for us the sacrifice of His body and blood to eat and

drink to be confirmed in Him whenever we eat and drink them during our sojourn until we reign with Him in everlasting life, with His resurrection, He resurrected us confirming victory over death. With His ascension, and sitting at the right hand of the father, He prepared for us a new way, holy, for us to sit with Him and inherit with Him in His divine throne."

St. Cyril the Great says, "Therefore, how is it possible for man who is engulfed in death on earth to return to incorruption? I reply: It is necessary for this dead body to partner with the life-giving power coming from God; God's life-giving power i.e. the Word (Logos), His only Son Whom the father has sent as a redeemer and savior. For, the Word has become incarnate without change of His previous status and without losing His essence as the Word of God. He was born of a woman obtaining for Himself that body from her in order to plant himself in us in an inseparable unity that would raise us above the authority of death and corruption. St. Paul testifies saying 'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Therefore, by unifying with that body that was previously subjected to death, the Logos Himself, being God and life, has liberated the human body from corruption. Moreover, He has made His body a life-giving body. Therefore, when we eat the body of our Savior and drink his blood, we obtain life within us becoming, somehow one with Him, living in Him and thus we procure Him within us."

Articles on the Christian History

The Sixth Century

St. Severus and the Preservation of the Orthodox Faith

After a number of years of worship in monasteries and deserts, St. Severus decided to come out of seclusion to defend the Orthodox faith against the divisions and heresies in the Apostolic church. So, he sent out very strong convincing letters of opposition in an attempt to preserve the validity of the Orthodox doctrine. Having received many of those letters, the Emperor saw in St. Severus the only person who would stand against the false teacher. So, St. Severus was invited to Constantinople to debate with Macedonius, the perpetrator of the heresy that the Jesus Christ who was crucified, was Jesus Christ the man and not the incarnated Word of God.

St. Severus' opponents among whom Macedonius, knowing the strength of his arguments, refused to attend the meeting to avoid encounter with him. As a result, Macedonius was excommunicated and sent into exile.

Ordination of St. Severus

Soon after his return from Constantinople to his cell in the desert, St. Severus was elected by the Council of Antioch to replace the fallen heretic patriarch. The response of St. Severus was "I am not worthy of this great responsibility. How can I sit on the same see of St. Ignatius the great?"

However, after a lot of pressure, he was ordained over the See of Antioch around the year 512 AD. During the first year of his papacy he convened a council during which he convicted the Council of Chalcedon and Leo's message and established relations with the apostolic church of Alexandria.

Emperor Justin

Seven years after his reign, Emperor Justin passed away and was succeeded by one of the rulers of the empire guard. Being a Chalcedonian, he launched a series of persecutions and issued a decree endorsing the Council of Chalcedon, and threatened to exile any bishop that would disobey his decree. Consequently thirty-two bishops were driven out of their sees and many monks sent out of their monasteries. St. Severus having suffered a lot of afflictions was advised to escape to Egypt to preserve his life and faith. He did so reluctantly and lived in Egypt for twenty years during which he continued to support the faith of his church in Antioch through fiery messages.

However, during that time, the Emperor ordered that a council be called for to force the churches of Antioch and Alexandria to adopt the Chalcedonian faith. Encouraged in a vision by an angel, St. Severus accepted the invitation to go and defend the Orthodox faith. In Constantinople, St. Severus met with the pope and rebuked him for having abandoned the faith of the fathers. On the other hand, the Emperor tried hard to coax and coerce the pope to adopt the Chalcedonian faith. It so happened and during his visit to the big church in Constantinople in the company of Bishop John, the Emperor was met with unexpected rioting from the Chalcedonian congregation against those who did not adopt their faith and who were considered infidel. They also demanded trial of Pope Severus. As a result, ignited with fury, the Emperor summoned Pope Severus from Antioch to Constantinople for trial and subsequent death sentence. God interfered miraculously through the empress, Theodora, who secretly met with St. Severus in jail convincing him to flee to Egypt. In 536 AD, he did escape to a town named Sakha, in Egypt. The evil people attempted to capture him again, but God blinded them to where St. Severus was although he was very close to where they were searching for him.

In Sakha, St. Severus stayed at the house of a pious man called Doretheos till he reposed in the Lord on the 14th day of Meshir as is recorded in the Synaxarion.