



Summer Festival | 2023 / 2024



REJOICE

Gr 7-9 | English Edition

“ ... the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice” (Deut 16:15)



His Holiness Pope Tawadros II



118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of Saint Mark

Appreciation

The summer festival central committee of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and its affiliated regions would like to give thanks and appreciation to the **Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States** (www.smfsus.org) for their blessed and tireless work in the translation, revision and art-work of St. Mark's Festival (Mahragan Al Keraza) books from the original Arabic version under the guidance and prayers of **H.G Bishop Youssef**.

May The Lord bless all their fruitful services and for many years to come.

In Christ,

SF Melbourne Central Committee

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You Shall Surely Rejoice

“**You shall surely rejoice**” is this year’s St. Mark Festival’s theme. This year we celebrate 20 years since St. Mark Festival was founded by HH Pope Shenouda III with his continuing prayers and blessing of our father HH Pope Tawadrous II.



The Holy Bible always encourages us to live a life of joy as we read in Deuteronomy 16:15 “**you shall surely rejoice**”. However, how can we experience the true life of joy when we are happy one day, and sad on other days?! Some days we are not satisfied with our lives even if we accomplish much! We may wonder, how can we rejoice if the world is in turmoil; much trials, pains, sicknesses, wars, and inflation. We do not know where the world is heading.

The Wisdom of Sirach answers this question for us in 2:11 “**My sons, consider the nations of men, and know that not one of them hoped in the Lord and was confounded**” which is why we “**shall surely rejoice**”. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit Who works in us.

There are 2 Types of Gladness:

1. Worldly Happiness:

Showy, exasperated, and temporary. Worldly happiness passes away once the reason passes. It affects our thoughts and our emotions but does not affect our spirits.

2. True Christian Joy:

It is what is given by our Lord Jesus; “**For He Himself is our peace**” (Ephesians 2:14) and the source of our joy “**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**” (Philippians 4:4)

Sources of Joy:

The Joy of Repentance:

What can strip the person from his/her joy other than sin?! Sin gives us a sense of guilt which leads to loss of joy. The Holy Spirit inside us, rebukes us and encourages us to repent and restore our joy.

In the Orthodox understanding, repentance is:

- Regretting our wrongdoings
- Feeling the need for repentance
- Going to our father the priest, confessing and receiving an absolution



The Joy of Fellowship, Service, and Giving

The Joy of Enduring Hardships: just as our Lord endured for our sake, we too rejoice in enduring for His name, “**So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**” (Acts 5:41)

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With What Shall We Rejoice?

Rejoice in the Lord Jesus My Savior and Redeemer:

- **“Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous” (Psalm 97:12)** Our Lord Jesus is Great! He offered the greatest love ever! He created us in His image and likeness to enjoy His unlimited love and to live with Him in paradise. But we have sinned and fallen with our own will.
- He was incarnate, born in a manger from a poor virgin, and lived poor. Not only poor but suffered and rejected by many. He died on the cross for our sake, He was buried, and He rose on the third day to raise us with Him. He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father to take us with Him to His throne. **“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Isaiah 35:10)**

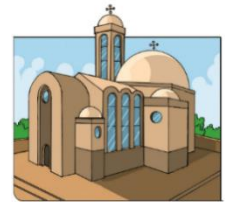


Rejoice in the Holy Bible:

- **“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11)**
- The Holy Bible is your personal divine message; in it we find love, rebuke, commandments, promises, teaching, and details about the way to eternal life ... Can we reach God without His guidance and life-giving words?!
- Therefore, every Christian ought to study the Bible regularly fulfilling the Lord’s commandment **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” (John 5:39)**
- The Lord described His words as **“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)**
- Jeremiah the prophet said, **“Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16)**

Rejoice in the Church - The House of Joy:

Our Coptic Orthodox Church is unique; the Lord redeemed her with His blood. She received the sound faith from our fathers the apostles. Therefore, she is an apostolic Church, straight in her teachings, faithful to the Lord regardless of the circumstances (tribulation, persecution, heresies, etc.). She is the house of joy, and she gives us joy.



Rejoice in Being a Member of the Body of Christ:

We receive this membership through the Holy Sacraments, and we keep this membership through our spiritual struggle. We serve inside the Church then we witness to the Lord outside in our society. Each member of the Body of Christ has a calling and a message for the society. This brings joy to our life, knowing our identity and our calling. I am a Christian, Orthodox, Coptic, and Australian.

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We receive our membership in the Body of Christ through Baptism, and we are consecrated through Myron. We abide in Christ through the Eucharist, and whenever we sin, we have the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. When we are sick, we call the priest to come and pray for us and anoint us with the unction of the sick oil. In Holy Matrimony, the bride and groom are joined together through the Crowning Prayer, one man and one woman, with purity and holiness become one body and one spirit in the Body of Christ **“so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.” (Mark 10:8)**

We keep this membership by spiritual strife. This membership has been given to us as a gift from God, who loved us to the end and redeemed us with His precious blood. When we sin, we must repent, struggle against the sin, and be filled with the Lord, in prayers, Bible readings, sacraments, spiritual reading, spiritual meetings, etc.

We express this membership by serving in the Church. First by joining a Preservant program, in order to be able to serve in the Church according to our talents. Each member has a role.

We also express this membership by witnessing to the Lord in society as the Lord said, **“You are the salt of the earth; ... You are the light of the world.”** and **“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (Galatians 5:9)** and also **“we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20)** We witness to Christ in our schools, work, meetings, celebrations, etc.

Joy in Spiritual Fulfillment:

“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.” (Psalm 63:5)

The true Orthodox believer, as a member of the Body of Christ, has a life of joy and fulfillment through:

- Praying the Psalms daily
- The Arrow Prayers (Jesus Prayer): *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*
- Daily lectionary readings
- Reading the Synaxarion daily
- The Midnight Praises
- Church Fasts
- Church Seasons
- Church Feasts
- The Eucharist
- The Church Fathers sayings



Joy in Asceticism:

- There is a major difference between our moderate Coptic asceticism and other forms of asceticism that are puffed up at times, and could lead to sadness, and not joy.
- The asceticism which we adopt is that of St. Anthony and St. Paul. St. Anthony lived in his cave for 20 years and came out joyful. He was not overweight or raw-boned. This is moderate and spiritual asceticism. The body is a talent from the Lord, and we ought to keep it healthy.

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- The sound asceticism is under the direction of the father of confession offering my asceticism to the Lord.
- In our church, we are joyful when we fast. We rejoice in our spiritual asceticism.

Joy in Martyrdom:

“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5:41)

Rejoice in the Eternal Life to Come:

Being confined within time and busy with our lives on earth threatens the health of our spiritual life; As humans, we are spiritual beings, created with the breath of God, He allowed us to live on earth for a short period of time. After that, we go back to our original heavenly and spiritual condition where all the glory and holiness resides, in the heavenly Jerusalem. We can recognize the following glories in our joyful eternity with the Lord:

▪ Joy in the glory of holiness:

- As St. John the Beloved saw a great crowd, dressed in white, with palm branches in their hands **“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7: 14)**
- The robes which have been made white in the blood of the Lamb and palm branches in their hands are a sign of victory as **“The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26)**
- The illuminated body that we will live with in heaven is unable to fall or sin, no illness and no death, no temptation, and no sadness.

• Eternal Joy:

- **“Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Matthew 25:21)** ... this is the call that the honest and believing soul will hear when it reaches paradise, that is why it is referred to as the “paradise of joy.”
- The joy of meeting with the Lord, with the saints and all who went there before us, “the place which grief and sorrow have fled away in the light of the saints.”

• Joy of the Communion with the Lord:

In heaven we will live in continuous communion with God and with the **“members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19)** ... with the angels and the saints. Let us imagine our meeting with the Lord ... How joyful How longed for ... How fulfilling! What about our dialogue with the angels, with St. Mary, with the Church fathers, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints!



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There is no doubt, we will be entering into a never-ending joy in the presence of the Lord, and an indescribable happiness **“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man. The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”** (1 Corinthians 2:9)

- **Joy in the Glory of Eternal Life:**

The Lord promised us saying, **“Because I live, you will live also.”** (John 14:19) ... and as long as the Lord lives forever, so are those who believe in Him will live with Him forever.

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3) That is why St. Paul said **“For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain... Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you.”** (Philippians 1:21-24).

Therefore, let us rejoice:

- **in the Lord Jesus my Savior and Redeemer**
- **in the Holy Bible**
- **in the Church - The House of Joy**
- **in the Eternal Life to Come**

A Joyful Fruit

1 Samuel 1-15

Introduction:

- The 2 books of Samuel were originally one combined book, they only became split into 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel because they are lengthy.
- The name Samuel means God hears, for God heard and answered his mother’s prayers.
- Samuel the prophet wrote until his death then the rest was completed by Gad and Nathan the prophets.
- The book is the link between the era of Judges and that of the kings of Israel.
- The book consists of 3 main sections:
 1. **Samuel the prophet and judge** - Chapters 1-7
 2. **King Saul** - Chapters 7-15
 3. **King David** - Chapters 16-31

This topic will focus on the first 2 sections.

Chapter 1: 1 Samuel 1:1-28 ~ The Birth of Samuel:

- Samuel was granted by God to Hannah, a virtuous and barren woman, as a fruit of her prayers and faith. Her husband Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.
- Elkanah used to take his family to Shiloh, the center of worship at the time, to worship and sacrifice. He loved Hannah very much and used to give her double portions of the offering to compensate for the fact that she had no children.
- Peninnah would flaunt the fact that she had children, but Hannah did not, which made Hannah feel even worse. Hannah cried and vowed that if the Lord would grant her a male child, she would give him to the Lord. After praying so faithfully, she was no longer sad and experienced God’s peace. At that time, it was shame for women not to have children because every woman wanted Christ to be born from her.
- The Lord answered Hannah’s prayers and granted her a son, Samuel. As she promised, once Samuel was weaned, she gave him to the Lord.



Hannah found the answer to her problem in the temple. Likewise, we too go to the bosom of our church when we go through hardship and pray to God with tears like Hannah, and the Lord is faithful to answer our prayers just like He answered Hannah’s.

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Chapter 2: 1 Samuel 2:1-36 ~ Hannah’s Prayer, Eli’s wicked sons, Samuel’s Childhood Ministry:

- This chapter begins with Hannah’s prayer in which she rejoices in the Lord for having been given a son. **Read Hannah’s prayer and compare it to the Virgin Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55.**
- Hannah then leaves Samuel with Eli the priest, as she promised to give the child to God. Samuel was a very small child at the time.
- Eli’s sons were also priests, but they were found to be very corrupt. They dishonored God by taking their portion and more of the sacrifice before giving it up to God first. They were also rude and disrespectful to the worshipers and did not listen when they were told of their wrongdoings. **“Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:17).**
- Even as a child, Samuel would minister to the Lord, and Hannah was blessed with three more sons and two daughters for her faithful prayers.



What other barren women in the Holy Bible had their prayers answered and bore children?

- Eli knew his sons Hophni and Phinehas were corrupt, and he warned them of divine judgment. However, he never truly rebuked them. In a way, he was favoring his sons above God by not enforcing God’s commandments upon them. For this reason, a prophet came to tell Eli that his priestly family would be destroyed.

God would:

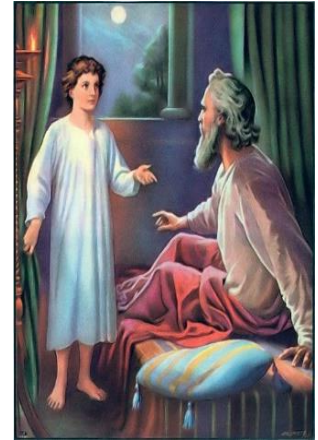
1. Remove the priesthood from his house
2. Remove the strength from his house; all his descendants would die in the flower of their age
3. Allow them to see the Ark of God captured by the Philistines
4. Make his descendants wish to die, but their wish would be denied
5. Have both of his sons die on the same day

Parents have a duty and are commanded by God to discipline their children. Knowing this, will your response to your parents’ discipline be any different?

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Chapter 3: 1 Samuel 3:1-21 ~ Samuel’s First Prophecy:

- When Samuel was still a boy, he ministered to the Lord in front of Eli.
- God called Samuel at a time when there were few faithful people. Even the priests were not faithful.
- God called Samuel 3 times. Each time, Samuel responded, **“Here I am.”**
- He went to Eli thinking that he had called him. By the third time, Eli knew that it was the Lord who was calling and told him to respond saying, **“Speak Lord, for your servant hears.”**
- When the Lord spoke to Samuel, he revealed to him that he would judge the house of Eli because he did not restrain his sons from their evil ways.
- Samuel revealed this to Eli when asked. From that time on, all of Israel would know that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.



“The path of obedience is the shortest of paths, yet it is the most difficult.” —St. John Climacus
“Whoever listens to his spiritual fathers is listening to the Lord.” —St. Anthony the Great

How would you respond if you heard the Lord call your name?

Chapter 4: 1 Samuel 4:1-22 ~ The Ark of God Captured; Death of Eli:

- Israel went out to battle against the Philistines without sanctifying themselves or asking God’s counsel. As a result, the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines. They asked why the Lord allowed them to be defeated and could not find a reason.
- Instead of repenting and returning to God, they carried the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to the battle with the two corrupt priests, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli the priest.
- They were simply leaning on the formalities of worship but lacked true faith. The Holy Bible tells us that when the Ark of the Covenant came into camp, all the people of Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. Although they were very loud, their hearts were still without repentance.

How different is their response from Hannah’s silent, faithful prayers?

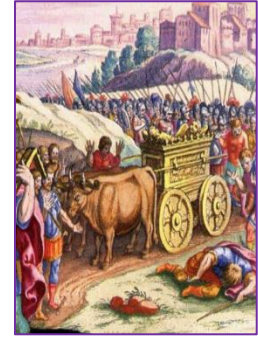
Do you take anything with you that represents the presence of God during stressful times, like in an exam? What can you do to make sure that you are truly relying on God and not the object?

- The Ark was captured from them by the Philistines, symbolizing God’s presence departing from them, a great tragedy for Israel.
- Hophni and Phinehas were killed. Thirty thousand soldiers were killed. The neck of Eli was broken, and he also died on that day.
- Samuel’s first prophecy is fulfilled, and the first step of God’s judgment of the house of Eli comes to fruition.

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Chapter 5: 1 Samuel 5:1-12 ~ The Philistines and the Ark:

- God allowed the Philistines to capture the Ark of the Covenant as a mean of chastising His people and to make them realize that through their corruption, they lost the dwelling of God in their midst.
- At the same time, God proclaimed His glory and might when Dagon, the god of the Philistines, fell down before the Ark of the Covenant. Also, wherever the Ark was taken, the people would be plagued with tumors and destructive rats.
- After realizing these calamities were not coincidences, the Philistines decided to send the Ark of the Covenant back to the Israelites to avoid further casualties.
- The decision was a testimony to God’s holiness and might. As the prophet Isaiah writes, **“I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 42:8).**



Chapter 6: 1 Samuel 6:1-21 ~ The Ark Returned to Israel:

- The Ark remained with the pagan Philistines for seven months to confirm that what was happening to them was not a coincidence, but a sign of God’s wrath on them.
- Also, this period of time encouraged the believers to offer an honest repentance and truly yearn to enjoy the presence of the Ark of the Covenant in their midst again.

Chapter 7:

1 Samuel 7:1-17 ~ Samuel Judges Israel:

- For 20 years, Samuel had prepared the people of Israel for repentance. **“If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 7:3).** The people repented, and Samuel interceded on their behalf.
- Through prayer, fasting, and sacrifice offering to God, they overcame the Philistines, **“And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel” (1 Samuel 7:13).**
- Samuel went on to judge Israel all the days of his life.

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Chapters 8-10: 1 Samuel 8:1-10:27 ~ Israel Demands a King and God Grants them Saul:

- When Samuel was old, he made his sons judges over Israel, but they were dishonest and corrupt. In addition, the people were preoccupied with the appearance of greatness and luxury of the kings of the surrounding Gentile nations. They wanted to have a king too.
- They took advantage of Samuel’s old age and the perversion of his two sons to demand a king.
- Samuel was offended by the demand and felt as though the people were rejecting him. However, the Lord told Samuel, **“Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them”** (1 Samuel 8:7).

Give examples of things people request from God while, at the same time, rejecting Him.

- Samuel warned the people of the harmful consequences that would come with a king, but the people continued to demand a king. God fulfilled their request and gave them Saul, a young and handsome man, to be their king. **“There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people”** (1 Samuel 9:2).
- The Lord revealed to Samuel that Saul would be the king of Israel, and Samuel would anoint him king. **“So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day”** (1 Samuel 10:9).
- When Saul was announced as the king, the people did not thank God. Also, some did not like him and did not bring him a present, as was the custom at that time. Saul remained silent and spared the people from a revolt.

“If you love the truth, you should love silence. This will make you shine in the Lord as the sun, and will save you from the deception of ignorance. Silence will unify you with God himself.”

—St. Isaac the Syrian

Chapters 11&12:

1 Samuel 11:1-12:25 ~ Saul’s First Victory and Samuel’s Address at Saul’s Coronation:

- The people of Jabesh Gilead were going to be humiliated by the Ammonites, so they implored Saul for help. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul. He rallied all the people of Israel to help, and they defeated the Ammonites.
- This was a very good start to Saul’s reign, for which he deserved the renewal of his kingdom in Gilgal where everyone rejoiced. Samuel gave a farewell address at Saul’s coronation.

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- He addressed the people of Israel and asked them to testify before the Lord and His anointed to Samuel’s faithfulness to them and to the fact that he never defrauded, oppressed, or received any bribe from the hand of any of them.
- He also reminded them of the Lord’s blessings and reproached them for demanding a king. However, he opened a door of hope for them in the Lord who loves His people.
- His intention was to teach the new king a lesson.



Chapters 13-15: 1 Samuel 13:1-15:35 ~ Saul’s Unlawful Sacrifice and Saul Rejected as King:

- Saul was in combat with the Philistines, and the people of Israel were in great fear when they saw that they were in danger.
- Although Saul was the king, he was not a priest and should never carry out any priestly duties, like offering a sacrifice. Samuel told Saul that he would meet him in seven days in Gilgal to give an offering to God. When Samuel was delayed, Saul impatiently offered a burnt offering to the Lord himself.
- As soon as he completed the burnt offering, Samuel arrived and saw what Saul had done. Samuel told him that what he did was wrong saying, **“You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:13).**
- He went on to say, **“But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14).**
- Shortly thereafter, the Lord said that he would punish Amalek for what they had done to Israel. Saul was granted victory over Amalek, and he was commanded to destroy all that Amalek had. He was not to spare any man or beast. However, Saul did not obey the commandment. Instead, he did not kill Agag, the king of Amalek, but he took him alive. He also spared many of the animals.

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- The Lord told Samuel, **“I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandment” (1 Samuel 15:10).**
- Samuel mourned for Saul but told him that the Lord had rejected him from being king for his disobedience. After this, Samuel never saw Saul again, but he continued to mourn for him.



Draw Near To Me

The Epistle of St. James

True joy is in reading and living the word of God in the Holy Bible.

- The epistle of St. James, along with 2 epistles of St. Peter, 3 of St. John, and 1 by St. Jude constitute the 7 Catholic epistles of the New Testament.
- They are called Catholic because they were not written to specific people or churches like the Pauline epistles. Instead, they were addressed to all Christians. A part of the Catholic epistles is read in the Liturgy of the Word.
- The writer of the epistle is St. James, the cousin of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the bishop of Jerusalem who headed the first council, the council of Jerusalem, in 50 AD.
- The Epistle of James offers instruction for those experiencing problems. The people that St. James is addressing were experiencing persecution, economic injustice, poverty, apostasy, and fragmentations within the Church. St. James attempts to rekindle true living faith and encourages repentance, patience, and self-control. St. James also teaches the harmony of both faith and works. St. James is telling the people that works are a natural result of faith and to align their lifestyles with what they believe.

Chapter 1:

**“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”
(James 1:2-4)**



Trials: Outward circumstances faced by all believers—conflicts, sufferings, and troubles. Trials are not pleasant and can cause a lot of sadness, but we should consider them opportunities for rejoicing. They improve and purify our faith, producing patience and endurance. Patience includes the idea of standing fast under pressure, with a staying power that turns hardships into opportunity. The trials of this world occur with the permission of God, so to become angry with the circumstances is to become angry with God. The Godly reactions to trials are joy and perseverance. It is through these trials that our true hearts are revealed. Trials are food for our faith, which must be continually fed in order to grow.

James 1:5-11 ~ Wisdom for Trials

- St. James is encouraging us to find faith in a relationship with God through prayer.
- Through true, faithful prayer, we should request knowledge, understanding, and correct judgment to deal with life’s trials.
- The wisdom of God does not necessarily get us out of the “trouble” we are experiencing, but it is insight on how to learn from the troubles and difficulties and realize the blessing.
- Firm loyalty to God and confidence in Him are essential elements of faithful prayer.
- The pursuit of worldly riches is useless.
- Those who are poor will be tempted to be envious and bitter, and the rich will be tempted to be greedy and arrogant. Both will lose their salvation.
- The rich man should always trust the Lord, not himself or his money. However, the poor who remain steadfast in their faith will have the most in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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- In addition, the poor should find glory in the fact that God has allowed them to experience difficult circumstances because it is these circumstances that will perfect their character and faith.

How can we endure difficulties in life?

1. By obtaining heavenly wisdom
2. By obtaining humility
3. By realizing that the world will pass away

James 1:12-18 ~ Temptations (Inward)

- God does not tempt us. He would never purposely lead a person to commit sin because that would go against His nature.
- We are tempted when we are drawn away from God by our desires, our own sinful passions that attract us until we sin.
- We fall into temptations because we allow ourselves to do so.
- God does not cause us to be tempted or to fall into these temptations.
- Sin grows and ultimately brings death: separation from God spiritually and physically. **“Just as the world has to pass through winter before the spring comes and the flowers bloom, so a man must go through many temptations before he can inherit the prize of eternal life”**. For as St. Paul said: **“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)**.
- Temptations come in three ways: by persuasion, by attraction, and by consent. Satan persuades, the flesh is attracted, and the mind consents.

God provides for our salvation through His grace. He brings us out of our sinful nature through baptism, by which we become children of God. We are the preeminent creatures made in the image of God and consecrated to God, as were the “first fruits” in the Old Testament.

James 1:19-27 ~ The Corrective: Hear and Do

- As children of God, we must be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
- We must also uproot the seeds of evil and plant the seeds of the Word of God.
- Finally, we must restrain our tongues, be merciful to others, and be unspotted from the world.
“Often I have talked and regretted it, but I have never regretted being silent.” - St. Arsenius
- St. James warns us against uncontrolled anger that leads us to be unfair, rude, and cruel when we deal with others.
- We should not mistake this behavior as the judgment of God.
- However, for us to be in the “righteousness of God,” we must have tolerance, kindness, and controlled passions.

Righteousness of God: To be in the “right way” of God and to adhere to His moral principles.

- **“The role of anger is to fight against the demons.”**

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- “Turbid anger is calmed by the singing of the psalms, by patience, and by almsgiving.”
- “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). “The perfect law of liberty” refers to the Jewish notion that “freedom” is found in obedience to the Law. St. James applies this principle to the Lord Jesus Christ’s law, “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**” (James 2:8). It is our Lord Jesus Christ’s love that frees us from our sins and allows us to love others.



St. James goes on to emphasize the essential relationship between faith and works and provides three examples:

1. **Mastery over speech:** What proceeds out of the mouth flows from the heart, for sooner or later our tongue will reveal the quality of our faith in God.
2. **Ministry to the needy:** Faithful Christians must be the guardians of the poor, especially of those orphans and widows who have lost their natural guardians.
3. **Moral purity in thought and deed:** A traditional indicator of a working faith. “Let us make haste to wash away through fasting the filth of our transgressions, and through acts of mercy and compassion to the needy, let us enter into the bridal chamber of the Bridegroom Christ, who grants to us great mercy” (Vespers, week before Lent).

Chapter 2: James 2:1-13 ~ The Law of Love

- St. James warns us against judging others by the earthly standards of rank, wealth, achievements, and appearance.
- In addition, a person’s dignity and worth come from God, not from fellow humans.
- Favoring the rich over the poor is an example of fainthearted faith that comes from unjustly judging and showing partiality, or favoritism. God is not partial, meaning He does not favor anyone. “**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**” (John 3:16).
- The salvation and grace of God is for all. However, the poor are more likely to repent and renounce this world for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven because they see the emptiness of earthly things. These are poor people who are rich in faith.
- On the other hand, the rich take pride in earthly possessions which give them their rank among worldly men. Let us remember that in these verses, St. James is referring to the prideful rich man, as evidenced by his jewelry and fine apparel, and not the rich man in general.
- Again, we see the “law of liberty,” referred to here as “the royal law:” “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**” (James 2:8).
- It is the second greatest commandment of Christ. Showing partiality is committing a sin and is not in keeping with “the whole law.”
- Therefore, by showing partiality, we become guilty of “the whole law.” God does not allow partial obedience.
- We cannot pick and choose which laws we want to follow. The whole Divine law must be accepted as God’s will for His people.

“ REJOICE ”

We are asked to show mercy, so we will not be judged mercilessly.
“Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

During the Holy Great Lent, we sing: **“Blessed are those who have mercy, who give to the poor and fast and pray. The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts. The Son will show them mercy on Judgment Day.”**



James 2:14-26 ~ Faith that Works

“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18).



“Is our teaching weak? If you are Christian, believe in Christ. If you believe in Him, show me your faith by your works.” - St. John Chrysostom

- Faith that saves is a “complete” faith, one that trusts and lives with God. Therefore, complete faith is both faith and works. **“You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16).**
- Let us not forget that God will reward us according to our deeds **Matthew 16:27.**
- Even demons have faith and tremble before the living God. Their faith does not lead them to love, submission, and obedience, but rather to hatred, rebellion, and disobedience.
- Living faith evolves over time through works with the eventual fulfillment of God’s promises.

“Those who believe but who do not fear God are even worse than the devils. And those who believe and tremble but who do not practice what they preach are just like the devils.” -Hilary of Arles

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:26)

Faith produces works and works makes faith perfect and complete.

“ REJOICE ”

Chapter 3 James 3:1-12 ~ The Work of Faith: Controlling What We Say

- St. James does not give the warning about judgment to others before applying it to himself first.
- He tells us that teachers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged more strictly than others. A position of leadership or influence means a greater responsibility.
- Also, dead faith without works can drive one to appear in the form of a teacher who talks and rebukes others without any inner remorse.
- Likewise, in the Divine Liturgy, the priest prays for his sins before he concerns himself with the sins of others.
- What we say reveals who and what we are. If we can control what we say, we can control what we do. Only by the work of the Holy Spirit within us can the tongue be brought under control.

**“Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.
My brethren, these things ought not to be so.” (James 3:10)**

James 3:13-18 ~ Godly Counsel

- St. James warns us about counseling others. He tells us if we are truly wise and understanding, let us show this wisdom with good conduct.
- We should refrain from counseling others with our “wisdom” that can be rooted in pride and sinful passions.

**“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those
who make peace.” (James 3:18)**



“ REJOICE ”

Chapter 4: James 4:1-10 ~ Lack of Faith and Works: Quarrels in the Church

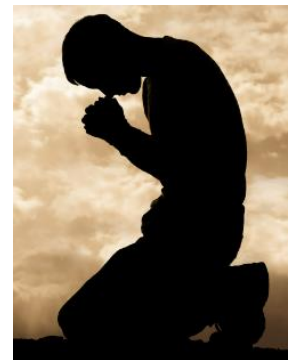
- Wars and fights in the Church are another example of the result of faith without works. These disputes come from worldly desires and passions, like pride, that cause disruption in the body of Christ.
- Similarly, when we ask for things that arise from selfish desires, our prayers will not be answered. We are told, **“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4).**
- We cannot serve, or love, two Gods. We must choose between God and the world.

What are some choices that you make on a daily basis that require you to choose between God and the world?

“Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (James 4:5-6)

How can we conquer pride and self-seeking pleasures?

1. Stop praying for self-centered pleasures.
2. Renounce the world and build a friendship with God.
3. Yield to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us through Chrismation.
4. Be humble, recognizing that God resists the proud.
5. Resist Satan and submit to God.
6. Approach God in worship, and purify our hearts and hands through repentance in preparation for worship.
7. Never laugh off God’s call to mourn for sin. No sin is funny, and we should laugh at neither our own sins nor the sins of others.



“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (James 4:10)

**What have you asked from God in prayer that He has not given to you?
Why do you think these prayers have gone unanswered?**

“‘Whatever you ask from the Father in My Name, He will grant you.’ The name of the Son is ‘Jesus,’ or Savior. Whoever asks in the name of the Savior is the one who asks for His salvation. So let us review our requests to see whether they are in the name of ‘Jesus,’ that is, matters pertaining to our salvation. Do you request a field, a garment, material gifts, or do you ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?’” - St. Gregory

James 4:11, 12 ~ Criticizing Others

- When we criticize others, it is another example of pride that becomes evident in what we say, a proud proclamation of the law in the manner of judging.
- It is a lack of faith combined with evil works that is an offense to the person and God. God’s will is to love others with humility and mercy, even if they are in the wrong.

James 4:13-17 ~ Being Overly Confident

- True faith is to completely depend upon God and to seek ways to do good works.
- We should begin all that we do and say with, “If God wills...”
- When we plan as if we know what will happen tomorrow, we exhibit arrogance.
- Let us neither boast nor be arrogant; **“God resists the proud” (James 4:6).**
- It is not wrong to plan, but it is wrong to not put God at the center of the plan.

“ REJOICE ”

- Finally, St. James also warns against the sin of omission. We typically think of a sin as something we do. However, not doing what we know is right is equally sinful.

What are common sins of omission that youth commit today?

Chapter 5: James 5:1-6 ~ Warning to Rich Oppressors

- St. James describes in great detail the fate that awaits the unjust rich and how their wealth will condemn them.
- He is referring to those who have become rich unfairly by stealing, cheating, and taking advantage of others.
- These are the rich people whose passions are worldly, and their richness led them to become greedy and covetous.

For many youth today, they may not be “rich oppressors,” but they may seek other “riches” in an oppressive, or unfair, way. What are some of these “riches?”

James 5:7-12 ~ Encouragement to the Oppressed

- We should stop grumbling at each other, and we must not demand that life be “fair.”
- We must be patient and wait on the Lord, realizing that plants do not produce fruit overnight.
- Finally, we must not swear by God as a way of proclaiming proof of truthfulness. We should always be truthful, exhibiting integrity, as an evidence of our faith.

James 5:13-18 ~ The Work of Faith: Healing

- Salvation involves the whole person, body and soul. Therefore, the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick has a double purpose, the healing of the body and forgiveness of sins.
- Praying and oil are used in combination during the healing of the sick.
- The oil symbolizes not only the primary medicine of ancient times, but also the Holy Spirit in the Church.
- Notice that Confession is a necessary component of this healing.
- It is also interesting to note that St. James writes, **“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16).**



James 5:19, 20 ~ Restoration

St. James tells us the importance of the work of faith in bringing back a fellow Christian who turns away from Christ.

Joy in My Church

The Midnight Praises

The church is the body of Christ and is the union between all the members of the church: the striving church on earth and the victorious church in heaven. My joy in the church is realized by my participation in prayers and praises with the saints and the angels.



It is said that praise is the work of angels for it has the sole purpose of glorifying God without asking for any requests. We share with the angels in their praise during the Midnight Praises.

The Importance of Praise:

1. Praising is the work of the angels and saints all the time around the throne of God in heaven: **“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1)**. Also, we (the struggling church on earth) join them (the victorious church in heaven) in this work because we are all one body in Christ.
2. Praising has a miraculous ability to change evil habits and sanctify the thoughts and the senses.
3. Praising is the way to transfer the Christian dogma throughout generations.
4. Praising is the way to fight the evil spirit and triumph over him.

The Elements of The Midnight Praises and their Order:

Now we will learn about the elements of the praises and their order, so we could do as commanded in the Holy Bible, **“I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15)**. Then we can enjoy the unity with the heavenly hosts in praising our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Introduction to the Midnight Praises (“Ten Thino”): With it we start the Midnight Praises, and it is sung using a beautiful tune that starts quietly then increases in the joyous pitch. The first verse means **“Arise, O children of the light, let us praise the Lord of hosts.”** It is an invitation extended to us from the church to leave behind laziness and sleep and arise to praise our Savior for granting us life.

The First Canticle (Hoos): Hoos is the Coptic word for canticle, meaning “praise,” and in the Midnight Praises, there are four canticles. A canticle is a praise that comes directly from the Holy Bible. The First Canticle comes from Exodus 15. It is the praise of Moses the Prophet, his sister Miriam, and the children of Israel after their salvation from the slavery of Pharaoh after crossing the Red Sea. It is the praise of triumph and defeat, and the church placed it as The First Hoos because Pharaoh and his soldiers who enslaved the Israelites represent the devil and his soldiers. As Moses saved the children of Israel and crossed the Red Sea with them, the Lord Jesus Christ saved us through His Cross, as we cross with Him from death to life in baptism which is the first sacrament and the key to heaven.



“ REJOICE ”

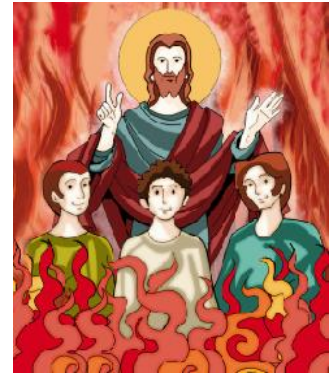
Lobsh of the First Canticle: Lobsh is a Coptic word meaning “explanation,” and there is one chanted after the first and second canticles. Every day except Sunday praises (Saturday night), we read the Gospel according to St. Luke (Luke 2:29) after the Lobsh of the First Canticle and then sing the 7th, 8th, and 9th parts of the Sunday Theotokia since they are talking about the incarnation of our Lord. The salvation of the people of Israel from Pharaoh is a symbol of the salvation of humanity from Satan through the incarnation of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Second Canticle (Hoos): The Second Canticle comes from Psalm 135. It is a praise of joy with salvation and victory. We offer praise and thanksgiving to our good Savior for His mercy and goodness. This canticle is composed of 28 verses, and the refrain of each verse is “**His mercy endures forever**” (je pefnai shop shaeneh).



Lobsh of the Second Canticle: We express our gratitude and thank our Lord who granted us salvation.

The Third Canticle (Hoos): The Third Canticle comes from the Continuation of Daniel 3, a deuterocanonical book. Even after the defeat of the devil through the Cross, the devil does not stop fighting the children of God. He wanted to burn the three young youths alive in the fiery furnace, and he also wanted to burn us in the fire of his temptations. As the Lord saved the three young youths from the fiery furnace, He will also save us from the devil’s temptations and give us victory and triumph. Our Lord appears in front of us as He did in the fiery furnace with the three young youths. Therefore, we join them in their praise and invite all the creation to praise Him.



The Psali of the Three Young Youths (Aripsalin): The Psali begins with, “**O, sing unto Him who was crucified, buried and resurrected for us.**” This glorification is arranged according to the Greek alphabet. In it we remember the work of the Lord with the three youths in the fiery furnace, and it is sung immediately after the Third Canticle.

The Glorification of the Three Young Youths (Tenoweh Ensok): This is a part of the prayer of Azariah, one of the three youths. Azariah prayed it alone in the fiery furnace as mentioned in the continuation of Daniel 3:24-45. It is chanted after the Third Canticle and before the Commemoration of the Saints.

The Commemoration of the Saints: Those who triumphed over the lusts of the world, Satan, and his temptations through the power of God became saints and role models. We ask for their intercession and prayer, as they joined the angels in the life of heaven, to help us complete our struggle and be transferred to the victorious church in heaven.



Doxologies: The word, “doxology” is a Greek word meaning “glorification”. In the doxologies, we glorify St. Mary, the angels, and the multitudes of saints so that the Lord would answer our prayers on their behalf. We give them the respect and blessing, so they may have sympathy with us and aid us with their prayers on our behalf. The doxologies are also sung during the Raising of Incense of Vespers and of Matins. The doxology for the feasts and fasts are sung before St. Mary’s doxology and then followed by the other doxologies in order.

“ REJOICE ”

The Fourth Canticle (Hoos): The Fourth Canticle comes from Psalms 148, 149, and 150. In Psalm 148, we invite nature, including all the creation, to praise its Great Creator. In Psalms 149 and 150, we invite all humanity to glorify and praise the Lord. That way, the entire universe, both the creation that has a mind, such as the angels and humans, and the creation that does not have a mind, such as the planets and the stars, participates in praising and glorifying our Holy God.

Psali: The word, “psali” is a Greek word meaning “hymn” or “glorification” to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalis are praises of “My Lord Jesus Christ.” In it we say the name of the Lord who is a great refuge against all the temptations of the enemy.

Every time you say the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
it is like carrying a sword to attack the enemy.

There are 2 kinds of Psalis—Adam and Watos:

Adam: used on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday and has a faster tune

Watos: used on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday; and has a slower tune

There are Psalis for each day of the week and Psalis for different occasions.



Theotokia: The word, “theotokia” comes from the Greek word, Theotokos. The Theotokias are glorifications for St. Mary the mother of God. They come directly after the Psali to glorify St. Mary and the mystery of incarnation that came through her. We remember the prophecies that talked about incarnation and the symbols of St. Mary the mother of God. There are seven Theotokias in the Psalmody book, and they are sung using the Watos or Adam tune, depending on the day.

Antiphony (Defnar): The story of the saint of the day sung in a hymnal tune.

The Conclusion of the Theotokias: The Adam conclusion fosters in us feelings of repentance, confession and trust in the mercy of God, while the Watos conclusion encourages the waiting for the second coming of the Lord and eagerness for eternal life and the end of life on earth.

Conclusion of the Midnight Psalmody: Then we say the conclusion of the praises “**O God have mercy on us**” (Ephnoti Nai Nan) seeking the mercies of God and we say the prayer of “**Lord have mercy**”

(Kyrie Eleison) 41 times.

Then in the Divine Liturgy, we are united with our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and rejoice for allowing us to partake of Him.

Praising is like a journey from earth to heaven in which we go up one step at a time until we reach our goal. It gives us a taste of eternity which is the joy we feel with our Lord Jesus Christ. When you fix your eyes on the glories of heaven, you will not look back at earthly glories.

“I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD” (Psalm 104:33-34)

Drawing with Words

The Art of Communication

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” (James 1:19)

What is communication?

Communication is sending and receiving information, feelings, and ideas from one person to the other for the benefit of both from each other's experiences. Communication is effective when both ends send and receive the message clearly.

What is the purpose of communication?

- Providing information
- Sharing feelings
- Persuasion
- Motivating others
- Entertainment

Elements of Communication:

- **Sender/Speaker:** the person giving the information
- **Receiver/Listener:** the person who receives the message
- **Message:** the information transferred
- **Feedback:** the reaction of the receiver

Read the story of our Lord Jesus Christ meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1-42 and find the elements of good communication in this meeting.



Types of Communication:

Internal: Internal communication is within oneself.

The Prodigal Son exemplifies internal communication.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him,

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” (Luke 15:17-19)

External: External communication is communication with the people around us in our daily life.

The conversations between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, and many more demonstrate external communication.

What is another example of external communication from the Holy Bible?

“ REJOICE ”

General Requirements of Effective Communication:

The Speaker: Show interest in the listener.

- Use language that would be understood and appreciated by the listener.
- Take into account the feelings of the listener.
- Choose the right time and place to speak.
- Understand the nature of the listener.

The Listener: Must show interest in what they hear.

- Must summarize what they heard.
- Must assure the speaker that they are understood.
- Must not be quick to give an opinion until they listen and the speaker finishes what they want to say.
- Must not be distracted (e.g. being on a cell phone).
- Must not interrupt.

Obstacles of Communication:

- Lack of interest in the other person.
- Body language is not consistent with spoken words.
- Previous judgment on others (e.g. having a negative impression about the person you are talking to, resulting in assumptions and bias, and hindering good communication).
- Different goals between the speaker and listener.
- Using language that is not understandable to the listener.
- Personal differences, such as way of thinking or culture.
- Lack of trust, meaning that the listener does not trust the speaker.
- Disinterest of either party.



Memorization

From The 9th Hour - Agpia

PSALM 100 (99)

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations. **Alleluia.**

From The 9th Hour - Agpia

THE GOSPEL

(Luke 9:10-17)

A chapter from the Holy Gospel

according to St. Luke

may his blessings be with us all. Amen.

And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done.

And He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.

When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.” But He said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men.

“ REJOICE ”

And He said to His disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of fifty.”

And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

R

Anthem 2023/2024

E

(By the grace of God we grow
And give fruits a hundredfold
And His Spirit dwells within us
Gives us joy as the Bible told) **x 2**

J

(Rejoice in your faith and church
Handed down to us by God
Be firm in prayers and doctrine
And build your life on His word) **x 2**

O

(Our Lord wants us faithful
Glorified and joyful) **x2**
Always joyful

I

For He has redeemed us on the cross
And gave us eternal life
When you're a temple for His dwelling
Sadness will not be a choice

C

Praise and thank God every day and you...
And you will surely rejoice!

E

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