



**Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria**

**ST. MARY AND ST. MOSES COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH**

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*Under the auspices and guidance of H.G. Bishop Mina bishop of Mississauga, Vancouver and west of Canada*

## **JONAH'S FAST- FAST OF NENIVEH**

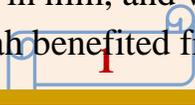
**HE Metropolitan Youssef**  
**Diocese of Southern United States**

Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your hand hold me (Psalm 139: 7 – 10)

Jonah, according to Hebrew tradition, was the son of the widow, whom Elijah, the prophet, raised from the dead at Zarephath of Sidon (II kings 17: 10 – 24). He was prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel around 825 – 784 BC. Therefore, Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, the king of Samaria (II kings 14:25)

The Holy Book of Jonah in the Old Testament tells the familiar story of Jonah, the fleeing prophet. Forty-eight verses comprise the entire story. This is a story of a legendary character with a nature similar to our own. Jonah, a contemporary of the prophet Amos, had faults, shortcomings, and weaknesses.

The Lord chose Jonah the Prophet despite his faults and used his weaknesses to make him stronger. The Lord worked through him, in him, and with him to give him guidance and to teach him. Mentally and spiritually, Jonah benefited from many lessons within his Old



Testament Book. Let us more closely examine why perhaps the Lord loved Jonah.

"Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.' Upon hearing this, Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:1-2).

As you know, Jonah attempted to flee from the presence of the Lord. On route to Tarshish a mighty and powerful wind came upon the sea. So strong was this wind that the ship was threatening to break into pieces and sink. Jonah and his troubles were discovered to be the cause of the tribulations upon the mariners of the ship. After much contemplation, prayer, and the casting of lots, Jonah was finally thrown overboard into the raging sea.

Here God's care for Jonah becomes very evident. Events do not happen without Divine Providence. God sent the great winds and strong gales to show His displeasure with Jonah's disobedience. Even so, the Lord also sent Jonah a place of safekeeping in his oppression. Jonah could have met death as he was tossed over the ship. But the Lord in His Goodness chose to protect Jonah. Why did God love Jonah?

Perhaps the answer lies within the belly of the great fish that swallowed Jonah. God sent a fish beside the boat to swallow Jonah. Jonah inside this fish's belly was most probably in darkness with the exception of when the fish surfaced for oxygen. He was most probably tossed about constantly with the diving and swimming motions of the fish. Further, one can imagine the salty water ever present and immersing most of his human body. As Jonah underwent all of these perils within the fish, we are not told of anything negative he said against the Lord.

I am quite sure Jonah realized the God of the sea received him and protected him. The fish was Jonah's shelter and not a punishment. It would take a very wise man to rationalize this message under these dire circumstances. He was given a place of safekeeping not death. For three days and three nights he remained in the belly of the whale. Perhaps God loved Jonah for his inspiring faith while captive in the fish... Inside the whale, Jonah the Prophet blessed the Lord. He called upon the Lord in his affliction. Jonah did not demonstrate fear nor are we told he appeared troubled. There is no documentation that he grieved his circumstances. Jonah in his wisdom knew the Lord created this great fish that consumed him. He knew the great fish's life and direction were both guided by the Lord. Perhaps God loved Jonah for his trust in the Unseen.

Within the belly of the whale, Jonah returned to his senses. He knelt down and prayed to God. He beheld the Lord "his" God and rejoiced in His presence. He returned once again to his prophetic rites. He returned to an obedient God-loving man, believing in His Holy promises. Jonah offered thanksgiving. Perhaps this nature of Jonah during hardship was what made God love him so.

Previously Jonah called the Lord, "God of Heaven," but in oppression, "The Lord HIS God." Jonah realized the Lord was the Savior of the oppressed and the sufferers. Just as Jonah came upon this realization we should too. Jonah is a symbol of our weaknesses, which can also help to make us stronger.

The waves did not suffocate Jonah. The whale caught him up and he did not perish. After three days and three nights, the Lord commanded the fish to "vomit Jonah onto dry land" (Jonah 2:10). His salvation came from the Lord.

As the billows and waves of life also encompass us, let us follow Jonah's example and trust in the Lord. Remember Jonah's whale and be assured of our God's long suffering. Be careful in your complaints. Jonah's example of blessing your circumstances and having faith preserved his life.

The great fish can come in many disguises in the contemporary world of today. As Christians we need to take on this spirit of wondrous faith and assurance of the Unseen. Jonah was given another chance. I believe our God is long-suffering. He does not hastily abandon or become angry with those servants who fall by the wayside.

Let us pray that we will all learn many lessons from Jonah's example inside the belly of the whale. Let us draw closer to the Lord "his" God realizing through his Biblical example that this also makes Him the Lord "our" God. Bishop Youssef Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

## **The Spirituality of Fasting**

*From book by H. H. Pope Shenouda III*

Lent comprises three fasts: the sacred forty days which Christ fasted, is preceded by a week considered either as an introductory week for the sacred forty days or as compensation for the Saturdays when abstention from food is not allowed. These are followed by Passion Week which constituted a separate fast independent of Lent at the to mark the beginning of the Apostolic era. Lent is the holiest of all the annual fasts and its days are the holiest of all the

days of the year. It correlates to Christ's fast and therefore very significant. The Church also considers it as a fast of the first degree. It is a period of spiritual reserve up for the whole year. He who does not benefit spiritually from it, will hardly benefit from the other less spiritual days. He who spends the days of Lent indifferently will find it hard to be particular about the rest of the year. Try to benefit from this fast, its hymns, readings, rites, spirituality and the afternoon Masses Our Fathers used Lent as an opportunity for preaching. During this time people were more spiritual and were ready to accept it. Indeed, preaching is set for the whole year but the sermons of Lent have a more profound effect. That is why many of Saint John Chrysostom's books were sermons that he delivered during Lent. In the same way the books of Saint Augustine. Even the Church made these days of Lent a period for the preparation of those accepting the Faith. 72 It prepared them through preaching to accept the grace of baptism. Classes for those new to the faith were held during the fast and sermons were delivered to teach and confirm them in the principles of Faith. They were then baptized on Christening Sunday, to join the faithful for the following week's Palm Sunday, in the Passion Week prayers, and in the Easter celebrations. Saint Kyrollos of Jerusalem for example, held sermons to prepare those attending to accept the Faith and explain to them the creed and the principle of faith on the days of Lent. The Church considers Lent of such importance that it has laid for it special rites. It has its own special tunes, longer period of abstention, special readings and responses, a special rite of burning the morning incense, and special prostration in the Mass before absolving the deacons. During Lent, a special Katamarus of biblical readings is used and contains readings from the Old Testament to create a special spiritual atmosphere all of its own. In order that faithful are prepared for the sacred forty days of Lent, the Church set the preparatory week so that people may not start the sacred period unprepared. It is also a way to make up for the Saturday when an abstinence period is allowed. Furthermore, the Church established the fast of Jonah also in preparation for Lent. The fast of Jonah or Nineveh occurs two weeks before Lent and has the same rite and tunes. It heralds the coming of Lent and 73 prepares the congregation to repentance which is the essence of the fast of Nineveh. In the same way that the Church has taken pains to prepare the its offspring for Lent. We should do our part by receiving it with the same concern. If Jesus Christ observed this fast for us, though He did not need to, we should therefore fast it for ourselves since we are in great need of fasting to fulfil all righteousness, in the same way as Christ did. The Church allocates so much importance to this fast that It calls it Lent which means the "Great" fast. It is "Great" because of its duration and sanctity. It is the longest of all fasts as it extends for fifty-five days, and it is the greatest in its sanctity as it is Christ's fast and commemorates His sacred suffering. That is why a sin committed during Lent is most offensive. It is true that a sin is a sin, but it is more horrible during Lent than during normal days because he who sins during any fast in general, and during Lent in particular, is actually committing a double sin. The offence of the sin itself and in addition the contempt shown for

the holiness of those days. Therefore, they are two sins, not just one. Carelessness for the sanctity of those days is indicative of the heart's cruelty, for a heart that is not affected by the spirituality of those sacred days is undoubtedly a cruel one from a spiritual point of view. He who sins during this fast is subject to the Lord Jesus Christ words who said: "If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt 6:23). 74 If these sacred and inspiring days are a period of darkness, then how much more are the normal days? Sainly monks beheld the great Lent. Their whole lives were days of fasting, but the days of Lent were of special sanctity for the first generations of monks who used to leave the monasteries during the sacred forty days and live in isolation on the mountains. An example is found in the story of Saint Zosima and his encounter with the repentant Saint Mary the Copt. The same zeal was found in the monasticism of Saint Shenouda chief of hermits, and in many of the Ethiopian monasteries. Let us also be fervent during these sacred days. If we are unable to fast the days in abstinence as did the Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him then at least let us try to be as serious and as pious as we can and to the limit of our endurance. If we cannot reproach and forcefully defeat the Devil as did the Lord, at least let us be ready to resist him. Let us remember what the Apostle Saint Paul said in criticism to the Hebrews: "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." (Heb 12:4). Man should strive "to bloodshed " in resisting sin. If the three days that Esther and her people fasted had their strong influence, how much more will the fifty-five days in supplication to God? At this point, I address all in reproach: How many Lents have passed by us with all the spirituality's of the "Great Fast"? If we have gained some spiritual benefit from 75 every fast, what is our harvest from these "Great Fasts" and from the other fasts that we kept?

The point is that, in fasting, we are in need of seriousness and spirituality and should not pursue the matter in a routine and careless manner.

## **Not losing sight of God**

*Bishop Angaelos of London-UK (continued from December's issue)*

There are times when we feel that we have nothing, and we can't do anything but then we realized that God really does fill the void in our lives, and He compensates us. He will never ever remain indebted if we have given anything, He will return a hundredfold. The stewards when they came back to Him said here are your five talents, here your two talents, well done, well done you've been faithful in this little bit. Enter into what is even greater, what is even more majestic what is even more beautiful. God has everything, God is everything, God can give us everything and

whatever we give, He'll give us more not just to reward us, but He says you know what you're really good I gave you these five talents you've invested them about five more well you know what the true God that I am who loves you and loves the rest of my children, I now know if I give you ten talents, you use them for ten more. If I give you a hundred, I give you a thousand you will continue to use them. So, do you see how a mind of God works? This isn't brownie points this is you've given me five I'll give you ten great with what a good deal come to business again. This is us working and growing, this is us giving. I've given you this much talent you've used it here's more so you can use it for more, because I now know that you get it, you understand. I said to you that if you do it for the least of these you do it for me and you did it and you get it. You understand that it's about you loving me but it's also about you loving your neighbor as I love your neighbor because that is the kind of God I am, and this is how you start to become perfect without even realizing it. But Lord I'm not working on perfection! No, you're working on being like me and I am perfection. "Lord": you still sin", and you will continue to sin, But as you continue to become like me more and more you will sin less. What's the reaction? What's the relationship Lord? Simple, because if you love me you won't want to grieve me. if you love your brethren you won't want to grieve them or grieve me by grieving them and so the more generous the more giving the more sacrificial the more loving the more, we are like him for him and for his humanity at the same time.

Gospel of St. Luke chapter 22 verse 27 asks a question "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves." So, you walk into a scene where there is a table and there are people serving who's greater who's more important? of course the people sitting down the people in the prime seats, that's okay that's fine great let's go with that one. where are you now? we're sitting down. where am I? you're serving us. so, where is the greater what is the greater what's the understanding of the greater. in this world the understanding of the greater is the one who has more power more influence or more authority and who sits and is sat. Who's really the greater? the one who is like his or her master the one who serves faithfully. The one who gives of him

or herself in that very selfless way. Now of course that makes us vulnerable, of course it does have that privilege or have been abused absolutely of course it has. It's happened with me several times and I've done it several times. You know you get people to help you, you abuse the privilege. You come to help people you're abused in that privilege it happens because of our humanity. Does it make us stop? Of course not, what it will do is make me realize I shouldn't abuse the love and the generosity of people, but if my love and generosity are abused, I need to forgive. Sometimes I need to deal with it differently, sometimes I need to give it a different way sometimes I might need to even readjust this relationship, but to cut out completely giving just because I've been hurt?

I'm no avid athlete as you might imagine, so I can imagine that if I try to run really fast from here to relatively very close, I could develop a stitch and if you've had a stitch, if you develop a stitch what happens? When you breathe it hurts. Question is, do you stop breathing? Well since we're all here the answer is probably no you don't stop breathing. It hurts but you work with it, you take a little bit of time, you breathe it a little bit slower you breathe differently, you put up with the pain a bit until it goes away, but you continue to breathe. If we are doing the will of God, it's going to hurt sometimes. Don't leave it behind, don't stop it. It is as essential as breathing, to be God-like, to be Christ-like is as essential as breathing, because it brings us closest to where we are supposed to be and who we are supposed to be. And to give as, we see Him giving us. And so, the fact that we're not alone anymore as humanity, that He's created us for each other, provides all of these wonderful opportunities for us to serve each other but also and the system does work, to be served by each other. Do you think I do stuff for X Y or Z all the time and they never do anything for me. Ok they may not be X, Y or Z, but A, B or C will have done something for you, it's a net result.

When I do something for one person, I shouldn't expect anything from that person, but I know that God will give me from another source, from another direction. The fact that I give is unrelated to me receiving. I know that God is faithful, loving, generous and I know that He is a God of promises. So, he will give me and that's my reassurance. Is it going to hurt sometimes? Yeah,

so when you have your last 20 pounds in your pocket and you want to do something with it, hurts a bit more when you pull it out right? When you have the last a little bit of energy you have in your body the last bit of attention you have in your mind the last bit of patience you have it hurts more to pull it out, but you do, and you give it and then you receive the wonderful rewards.

So, our creation is about God making us like himself, because unless we are like him, we will not enter his kingdom. why would we? Why we want to and how would we survive? The kingdom of God is about God, so unless we are like God, we're not going to want to enter the kingdom because I need to be like him to survive in it. And to be like Him is to be giving and loving. But sometimes we hurt, sometimes to be crucified, but it is in that giving that we receive, and it is sometimes in that pain, in that crucifixion that we come back invigorated and risen.

Glory be to God forever

## **SAINT OF THE MONTH:**

*“Whose faiths follow, considering the outcome of their conversation?” Heb 13:7*

### **St. Severus, Patriarch of Antioch**

St. Severus, Patriarch of Antioch was from Asia Minor. His grandfather, whose name was also Severus, saw in a vision someone telling him, "The child who is for your son will strengthen Orthodoxy, and his name will be after your name." When his son had this saint, he called him Severus. He was taught the Greek wisdom and church subjects. Once, the saint was strolling outside the city, a shut-in saint came out of his cave crying, "Welcome to you Severus, teacher of Orthodoxy, and Patriarch of Antioch." Severus marveled at how



he called him by his name, for he did not know him before, and how he foretold what would become of him. Severus grew in virtue and became a monk in the monastery of St. Romanus. The fame of his righteousness and his ascetic life spread out. When the Patriarch of Antioch departed, the bishops had a consensus to ordain him the Patriarch of the city in the year 512 A.D. The church was illuminated by his teachings which spread to all the universe, and he was one of the fathers who attended the Universal Council at Ephesus.

Shortly after, Emperor Anastasias died and Justinian, who was Chalcedonian in faith, reigned after him. He called upon this holy father and gave him great honors to persuade him to change his stand and to follow the emperor's belief, but the Saint refused. The emperor became angry, but the Saint did not fear his anger, and so the Emperor ordered him to be killed. Theodora, the Emperor's wife who was Orthodox in faith, knew about what the emperor intended to do, so she told the saint to flee from his face. St. Severus escaped to the land of Egypt and traveled everywhere and visited monasteries disguised as a monk. He strengthened the faith of the believers in the Orthodox doctrine. He dwelt in the city of Sakha in the home of a holy lay leader called Doretheos. God performed through him many miracles. He departed in the city of Sakha, and his body was relocated to the monastery of El-Zugag.

***May his prayers and blessings be with us all, and Glory be to God forever. Amen.***

### **Question and Answer:**

**Question**

**Non-Copts often ask why is it that during some fasts, the church allows eating fish. Also, why has the church started this practice which did not exist before?**

**Answer**

Fasting is an integral part of spirituality. It includes a period of abstinence and a modified vegetarian diet. Fasts

of the first degree, which include the Holy Great Fast, the paramoun, and Jonah's Fast, strictly exclude fish. Although Wednesdays and Fridays are fasts of the second degree, yet, just like Jonah's fast, they are directly related to the Holy Great Fast and salvation. Therefore, these four abstaining categories or periods of fasting are observed without eating fish. The remaining fasts are of the second degree, and do include fish, as a supplemental protein source, just as fish was our Lord's preference. Our church is consistent, but not rigid. While in the early church, first- and second-degree fasts were observed more ascetically, excluding fish; overtime, the church uses wisdom and prayer in making ritual adjustments as long as they do not impede the sound faith, dogma, doctrine, or teachings of the church Fathers. Fish was introduced first to help children, elders, pregnant and nursing women, and the sick in order to help them fast. Gradually, fish was allowed to all the Christians during the second-degree fasts.

#### **VERSE OF THE MONTH:**

Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Luke 3:8

#### **Sayings of the Fathers:**

❖ Fasting makes the body humble

*Saint Longinus*

❖ Precious is pure fasting before God, and it is preserved as a treasure in heaven. Fasting is a weapon before the evil one, and a shield with which we fight the arrows of the enemy.

*Saint Ephraim the Syrian*

❖ Fasting without prayer and humility is like an eagle with broken wings

*Saint Macarius the Great*

❖ Bread and salt with silence and comfort are better than honest foods with worries and sorrows. [St. Afracim the Syrian](#)

## **THE CHURCH COMMEMORATES THIS MONTH “SYNAXARIUM”**

- ❖ *Departure of St. Peter the worshipper (25 Tobeh) .....2 February*
- ❖ *Martyrdom of the forty-nine saints of Sheheat (Scetis) (26 Tobeh) ..... 3 February*
- ❖ *Commemoration of archangel Sorial (27 Tobeh) ..... 4 February*
- ❖ *Commemoration of annunciation, nativity and resurrection (29 Tobeh) .....6 February*
- ❖ *Commemoration of the universal Ecclesiastical counsel in Constantinople (1 Amshir).....8 February*
- ❖ *Departure of great saint Anba Paul “the first Hermit” (2 Amshir) .....9 February*
- ❖ *Feast of presenting the Lord Christ to the temple (8 Amshir).....15 February*
- ❖ *Commemoration of the honorable Archangel Michael (12 Amshir) ..... 19 February*
- ❖ *Departure of St. Severus the Patriarch of Antioch (14 Amshir).....21 February*
- ❖ *Departure of St. Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist (16 Amshir) .....23 February*
- ❖ *Commemoration of the virgin Mary the mother God (21 Amshir) .....28 February*

### **CHURCH SERVICES SCHEDULE:**

PLEASE, CHECK CHURCH WEBSITE IN THE FIRST PAGE.

### **YOUTUBE SERVICE STREAMING ADDRESS:**

[www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_MI2B3NKLi1Y8P3nQR5Amw/live](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_MI2B3NKLi1Y8P3nQR5Amw/live)