



**Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria**

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

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## **What Is the Purpose of The Nativity Fast (Advent Fast)?**

**By Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty**

St Shenouda Monastery Pimonakhos Articles

Why is the Coptic Church concerned with the Nativity Fast, in which her members fast for more than forty days? Undoubtedly, the Incarnation of the Word of God was the intention of God preceding the fall of Adam and Eve in sin. Upon their fall, the Divine Covenant was proclaimed when God spoke to the serpent, saying: “He shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3: 15). Adam and his sons awaited the coming of the Messiah and the Deliverer for centuries.

It was difficult for the heavenly and earthly creatures to comprehend the Incarnation of the Word of God, His bearing the cross, and availing the faith of the new covenant to all humanity of all nations. The disciple states: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16). “Even the mystery which has been hid from ages and generations, now is made manifest to His saints.” (Col 1: 26). He adds, “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3: 9-11).

Our Lord talked with parables and symbols to reveal the Messiah, His work of salvation, in order for us to believe in Him, and rejoice in His deliverance. St. John the Baptist prepared the way by preaching and saying: “Behold; The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:



29). And when he was jailed, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus Christ asking: “Are You the Coming One, or do we wait for another?” (Lk 7:19), to confirm the arrival of the awaited Messiah. For thousands of years and in various ways God prepared mankind to partake in Him, as Jesus Christ dwelt among them (John 1: 14), to lift them to His heavens, and share in His Divine Nature (2 Pt 1: 4). What is our role in welcoming Him, abiding in Him, and He in us (Jn 15: 5), and rejoicing in His coming?

### MAY OUR SOULS REJOICE IN HIS COMING!

The main goal of the fast is for our souls to delight in His coming to our world, and His dwelling in our hearts. For when we abide in Him, we entreat Him for ourselves, our families, all the believers and the entire world to taste the sweetness of companionship with Him who became Man to allow us all who believe in Him to become the children of God. The disciple said, “He (Jesus) made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross” (Philip 2: 7-8).

The following words of the Lord Himself to the Father were fulfilled: “And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified by the truth... that they all may be one” (Jn 17: 19, 21).

### DON'T COME BEFORE GOD EMPTY HANDED!

The Divine Law commands the believer not to appear before God empty handed (Sir 35: 6; Exod 23: 15). Jesus Christ granted us the power to fulfill the commandment, for when we pray in our private dwellings, we ask on behalf of all mankind saying: “Our Father who art in heaven... forgive us our trespasses, and do not lead us into temptation” (Mt 6:9-13). As if the believer’ secret prayer lifting up all the people on his hands, and presents them asking the Father of what is for their spiritual and holy nourishment.

There is not a better offering and more delightful to the Lord than a believer’s heart that is deep enough to contain all people including those who resist him, and presents them to God lifted up by his spiritual hands.

### THE HOLY FAST AND THE NATIVITY FEAST

No one can deny what the Gospels proclaimed of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, which was witnessed by two men of the Old Testament: Moses and Elijah (Mt 17: 1-7, Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36). The two prophets shared with Jesus Christ fasting for forty days, and forty nights, and as a result, they enjoyed what no other man in the Old Testament did. For they appeared during the transfiguration, and entered into a dialogue with Christ likely around the upcoming events: His trial, passions, crucifixion, death, and burial, rising from the dead, and ascension into the heaven.

The fast in its essence is a practical proclamation of our desire for the Deliverer to transfigure within our hearts, and cleave to Him to enter into a joyous conversation about mankind’s deliverance. Those who have fasted for years, refraining from certain food, and practicing rituals without allowing God to influence their minds, hearts, feelings and emotions, may have turned the fast into a rather painful punishment. They may desire now to prepare themselves to enjoy the eternal peace, and advance their knowledge of the Divine Secrets in this fast.

## THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

The world is occupied with glittering Christmas decorations, and many compete in presenting the most magnificent decors using lights and so on in churches, public places, and homes. What pleases the Lord more is the believer who stands before Him as if in his private room, even among large congregation, lifting up in love those who are sick, sad, needy, fallen, and cast away before the King of kings, asking the Deliverer of the world to exalt them as shining stars illuminating the world among a crooked generation. (Phil 2: 7).

St. Jacob of Serugh said that the wise men carried presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh. While travelling from Babylon in the East to Jerusalem, led by the bright star, then to Bethlehem, they evangelized for Jesus Christ in the towns and villages they passed on their way to worship Him, and back when taking a different route. Many wondered about their great procession, but it had a wonderful purpose. They also preached to Herod the king, his priests, Pharisees and scribes who searched the Books for the “King of the Jews” (Mt 2: 7).

Let this Fast be an inspiration for many to welcome Jesus Christ.

### **Fasting and the imitation of Christ**

Fr. Matthew the Poor

*(Continued)*

We should notice that all the commandments of Christ regarding works—whether they be voluntary poverty, asceticism, renunciation of kindred, divestment, or bearing the cross—revolve around the person of Christ and end up in Him: “for My sake;” “come, follow Me!” “For My name’s sake;” “be My disciple;” “come after Me;” “watch with Me.” Every work of Christ’s, which He loved to do, He shares with us, or rather we share with Him on account of our love, our sacrifice, and our asceticism. It is from Him that all our works are derived: our asceticism from His asceticism, our fasting from His fasting, our love from His love. Ultimately, communion here is a realistic one which we develop daily by further imitating Him in mind and action and by deepening our awareness of Him in our life, making Him active within us while keeping us free, spontaneous, and quick in response—as a bride is to a bridegroom. All the works we perform in the name of Christ, for His sake, and in imitation of Him—whether they be fasting, vigil, patience, endurance of suffering or persecution, service, sacrificial love, or crucifixion—are but a voluntary translation of the desire to imitate and unite with Christ (“Follow me”). They express communion in spirit, heart, and intention. Here such works may be a way to express the overt offering of the entire soul to Christ in self-surrendering love and absolute discipleship, as it was for John, James his brother, and the rest of the disciples. They offered their lives and surrendered their souls to Christ the moment they saw and heard Him. They forsook their homes and jobs and became followers: “Lo, we have left our homes and followed You” (Lk. 18:28), becoming true partners of Christ’s works, career, and suffering: “You are those who have continued with Me in My trials” (Lk. 22:28). It is possible that such works as fasting, vigil, prayer, service, or sacrifice may express a hidden love that is added to life’s daily tasks, such as earning one’s living or bringing up children. This is seen in the many who followed Christ without official publicity, like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and others whose high level of love for Christ was by no means inferior to that of the Apostles themselves. Yet, those who actually forsook

everything and followed Christ are those who, by spiritual works, most sublimely expressed a deep evaluation of Christ's person: "We have left everything and followed you." The word "followed" here denotes a shift from worldly work to spiritual work; Christ is great enough to fill our entire life and meet all our needs, becoming our sole work, our sole hope, and our sole interest. This is itself the same orthodox doctrine that the Church received from the Apostles and addresses the zeal, fervor, and agony of works, the main measure of every person's evaluation of Christ. The degree of concern and sincerity in spiritual action is that which reveals the light emanating from Christ. This consequently bears witness to the Father: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). The Apostles inherited the entire life of Christ, and were eyewitnesses and partakers of His works and acts. They inherited the lengthy fasts they saw Christ Himself perform, as Christ told them: "This kind cannot be driven out by any thing but prayer and fasting" (Mk. 9:29). They inherited night-long prayers ("Watch and pray"). They inherited agony in prayer, with frequent prostrations and sweat like drops of blood: "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground . . . And He said to His disciples, 'Why do you sleep? Rise and pray'" (Lk. 22:44-46). They inherited endurance and patience amid the insults of the hierarchy and the betrayal of comrades: "If they persecuted me they will persecute you" (Jn. 15:20). They inherited ministry in markets among the sick, the sinners, and the poor. They inherited agony, suffering, and crucifixion, the most precious and exquisite gift they inherited from Christ: "The cup that I drink you will drink" (Mk. 10:39); "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus'" (Ac. 21:13). All these works they inherited not as acts apart from Christ, but as part and parcel of Him. Christ dwelt in their hearts through faith when they received the Holy Spirit, and The Deep Meaning of Fasting Gethsemane and the Problem of Suffering - 5 - they thus performed all the works of Christ according to His promises, even miracles and death. The Church has inherited this living apostolic experience; it has inherited Christ working in the Apostles. So, the importance, or rather the inevitability, of works in the Orthodox Church means that the Church focuses on Christ Himself working in us just as He did in the Apostles, doing the same deeds He did for our salvation. The Church believes in exactly what St. Paul meant when he said: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work" (Ph. 2:13). It is equally confident that this also leads to St. Paul's words, "Do all to the glory of God" (1 Co. 10:31). It is through Christ and in His presence that works should be done; it is only the work of Christ that leads to the glory of God: "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Ph. 2:11). It is now clear that the Orthodox Church's belief in works is nothing but faith in the perfect life in Christ. To this perfection belongs Christ's whole action and, better yet, even His entire mission and compassion for all humanity. Works, then, are not limited acts done by the human will to relieve the ego. The importance of works in Church thought is based on the fact that all works must spring from the will of Christ and be perfected by His power: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Ph. 4:13). Works must end up in the glory of God the Father. In other words, they must reveal Him and testify to Him: "That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Henceforth, the concept of "faith and works" in the Orthodox Church is inseparable from the living person of Christ, who is the source of faith and works alike in human life. The ultimate end of both faith and works is the glorification of God the Father—an essential work that belongs exclusively to Christ: "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of



God the Father” (Ph. 2:11). The law that correctly ensures that works are done through Christ and for the glory of the Father is the perfect imitation of Christ in every word, deed, and behavior. We should invoke the Spirit of Christ in everything by prayer, so works may be cleared of all impurities of self-will and human thought, and that they may be pure of flattery, hypocrisy, falsification, prejudice, and self-love, all of which cause works to be ineffectual, fruitless, and dead.

## Rites:

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RITES OF THE HOLY LITURGY IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

*HG Bishop Mattaous  
Bishop of St Mary Monastery*

#### OUR LORD JESUS AND THE RITUALS

The Lord Jesus Christ, although He is the Law Maker and the Author, respected the rites of Moses. The Lord Jesus respected the rite of circumcision, being circumcised on the 8th day, and was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb (Luke 2:21). He also obeyed the laws of purification when His parents took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, *"(As it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons'. (Luke 2:22-24).*

The Lord Jesus respected and participated in all of the feasts and assemblies, as seen in the following quotes:

*"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem...and many believed in His Name when they saw the signs which He did" (John 2:13- 23).. "Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacle was at hand...but when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were, in secret.... Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught" (John 7:10-14), "And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think - that He will not come to the feast?", meaning, shall He do something different this year? (John 11:55-56).*

Although the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders to seize Christ (John 11:57), He entered Jerusalem in a great ceremony on Palm Sunday and repeatedly went to the temple until they arrested Him. When He wanted to institute the Sacrament (the Mystery) of the Lord's Supper, He first celebrated the rites of the Jewish Passover with His disciples, and then He instituted the Eucharist (The New Passover).

After cleansing the leper the Lord Jesus instructed him to go and show himself to the priests and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them (Matt 8:4). In doing this He wanted to show the priests, the keepers of the law, that He didn't come to break the law but to complement its shortcomings and to make its rituals spiritually alive. He also asked ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priests and on the way they were cleansed (Luke 17:14).

Our beloved Lord Jesus Christ was the first to establish the rituals of the Christian Church when He prepared the Upper Room of Zion. He held the bread with His hands and mixed the water and the wine. The Lord taught His disciples many things, much of which was not revealed until after His Resurrection. These teachings were not recorded in the Holy Scriptures but were handed to the disciples by word of mouth, *"...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"* (Acts 1:3).

The Holy Church is the earthly Kingdom of Heaven, and the pillar and foundation of truth.

## **SAINT OF THE MONTH:**

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

### ***St. James The Mangled "Intercisus"***


St. James the mangled, was martyred. He was one of the soldiers of Sakrod, the son of Shapur, King of Persia. Because of his courage and his uprightness, he was promoted to the highest rank in the king's court. He found favor and access to the king, who even counselled with him in many affairs. In this way, he influenced St. James greatly to the extent that he turned his heart away from worshipping the Lord Christ. When his mother, his wife, and his sister heard that he adopted the king's belief, they wrote to



him saying, "Why have you forsaken the faith in the Lord Christ and worshipped the created objects, the fire and the sun? Know that if you persist in what you are doing, we will disown you and you will become a stranger to us." When he read their letter, he wept and said, "If by doing that, I have become a stranger to my own family and my people, how would the situation be with my Lord Jesus Christ?" Consequently, he resigned from the king's service and devoted his time to reading the holy books.

When the news reached the king, he summoned St. James. When the King saw the change that had befallen him, he ordered that James be beaten severely and if he did not change his belief, he was to be cut up with knives. They cut off his fingers, his hands, his legs and his arms. Each time they cut off a piece of his body, he praised the Lord and sang saying, "Have mercy upon me O Lord according to Your great compassion." (Psalm 50:1) Eventually, nothing was left of him except his head, his breast and his loins. When he knew that his time was near, he entreated the Lord to have mercy and compassion upon the world and the people therein. He apologized for not standing in the presence of the mighty Lord and said, "I have neither legs to stand before Thee, nor hands to lift up to Thee, behold the parts of my body have been cast around me, O Lord receive my soul." Straightaway, the Lord Christ appeared to him, comforted, and strengthened him and his soul rejoiced. Before he delivered up his soul, one of the guards made haste and cut off his head. He thus received the crown of martyrdom. Some of the believers then came forward and took his body, wrapped it and buried it.

When his mother, his sister, and his wife heard that he was martyred, they rejoiced for his soul and came to where the body was and kissed it, weeping. They shrouded it in expensive cloth and poured sweet scents and perfumed oil over it. A church and a monastery were built in his name during the reign of the righteous Emperors Arcadius and Honorius. When the king of Persia heard the news of the miracles and wonders which appeared through the body of St. James and of the other honored martyrs, he ordered all the bodies of the martyrs in all parts of his kingdom, to be burnt. Some of the believers came and took the body of St. James and brought it to Jerusalem and entrusted it to St. Peter El-Rahway, Bishop of Gaza. The body remained there until the reign of Marcianus, who persecuted the Orthodox Christians everywhere. St. Peter, the Bishop, took the body to Egypt. There he went to the city of Behnasa, where he stayed in a monastery occupied by devoted monks. It happened that at the sixth hour, while they were praying in the place where the holy body laid, St. James appeared to them with many other martyrs of Persia. They joined them in singing, blessed them and disappeared. Before leaving, however, St. James told them that his body should stay there as the Lord commanded. Despite this, when Anba Peter the Bishop, decided to return to his country, he took the body with him. When he arrived at the seashore, the body was taken from their hands and returned to the place where it had originally been.

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

## Question and Answer:

Question

**DOES CHRISTIANITY BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF ENVY?**

Question

**By H. H. Pope Shenouda:**

Envy, as a feeling, exists. We know, for example, that Cain envied his brother Abel, that Joseph the Righteous was envied by his brothers, and that the Lord Jesus Christ was handed over to death by the Jewish priests owing to their envy of Him.

At the end of the prayer of thanksgiving we say: "Preserve us from all envy and every trial and act of Satan".

Envy exists, but an 'envious eye' is not something we believe in! Some people believe that there are individuals who are envious by nature, such that if they should cast their envious eye someone, some accident will befall that person, so they are fearful of envy and of those who might be envious; whom they believe have the power to do evil. Sometimes they conceal the blessings which God bestows so generously on them for fear of envy, and they make up stories of this kind of envy that amount to little more than superstitious nonsense.

This kind of envy, we don't believe in, and we regard it as a kind of intimidation and unhealthy suspicion.

Envy does not harm the person who is envied, but rather the person who envies.

It doesn't harm the one who is envied, otherwise all those who have ever excelled or held foremost positions would have been exposed to envy and suffered loss, and likewise all who have ever obtained notable rank or state awards of distinction would have become the targets of envy and have been smitten by disaster or misfortune.

What we see however, is the opposite, which is that the one who envies lives a wretched and unhappy life as a result of his envy and inner misery, as the poet said: "Bear patiently the deceitfulness of the envious, for your endurance will kill it; just as fire surely consumes itself if it finds nothing to feed on."

Why do we pray, then, to be preserved from envy, since it does no harm? We do not pray out of fear of the so-called 'envious eye', but we pray that God will frustrate any harmful plots or deceitful tricks which the envious person might carry out against us because of their evil hearts.

*When Joseph's brothers envied him, they threw him into a well, then sold him as a slave and were about to kill him. Cain killed his brother Abel out of envy and when the chief priests of the Jews were jealous of Christ; they conspired against Him and handed Him over to be crucified.*

## **VERSE OF THE MONTH:**

**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

**John 10:11**



## **Sayings of the Fathers:**

- ❖ True fasting is a prison of vices, that is, controlling the tongue, restraining anger, and conquering desires.....**Saint Basil**
- ❖ When a man begins to fast, he straightway yearns in his mind to enter into converse with God..... **St. Isaac the Syrian**
- ❖ Fasting of the tongue is better than fasting of the mouth, and fasting of the heart is better of the two.....**Saint Isaac the Syrian**

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

- ❖ Commemoration of the mother of God (21 Hatour) .....1 December
- ❖ Martyrdom of saints Cosmas, Damian, Their brothers and their mother (22 Hatour) .....2 December
- ❖ Commemoration of Twenty-Four incorporeal priest (24 Hatour) .....4 December
- ❖ Martyrdom of St. Mercurius Known as the saint with two swords (25 Hatour) .....5 December
- ❖ Martyrdom of St. Peter the seal of the martyrs (29 Hatour) .....9 December
- ❖ First day of Kiahk and the start of Kiahk praises (1 Kiahk) .....11 December
- ❖ Entrance of St. Mary into the temple in Jerusalem (3 Kiahk) .....13 December
- ❖ Consecration of St. Abaskhyron church (7 Kiahk) ..... 17 December
- ❖ Departure of St. Abba Pijimi (11 Kiahk).....21 December
- ❖ Commemoration of the honorable Archangel Michael (12 Kiahk) .....22 December
- ❖ Departure of St. Christodoulos (14 Kiahk) .....24 December
- ❖ Departure of St. John, Bishop of El- Borollos who gathered the biographies of the saints (19 Kiahk) ..... 29 December
- ❖ Commemoration of the mother of God (21 Kiahk) .....31 December

## **CHURCH SERVICES SCHEDULE:**

PLEASE, CHECK CHURCH WEBSITE IN THE FIRST PAGE.

## **YOUTUBE SERVICE STREAMING ADDRESS:**

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