

**Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate
Archangel Michael Church
Howell, NJ**



September, 2000

Volume1

Issue 9

Misra/Alnasy/Tut 1716/1717



THE MOTIVES OF MARTYRDOM IN CHRISTIANITY

By: Late Bishop Yoannis

Humanity did not know in all its history, martyrs like the martyrs of Christianity, in their enthusiasm, courage, meekness, patience, endurance and rejoicing with martyrdom! They embraced death and torture in joy and calmness, which amazed their persecutors who accused them with madness and foolishness. Some of the enemies of Christianity mocked the martyrs and interpreted their attitude as sort of escaping from life and kind of suicide. We cannot understand mar-

*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain. **He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life . If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will Honor."***

tyrdom in Christianity, or estimate its sanctity, unless we know its motives that led those saints to death as if it were an enjoyable journey. Early Christians believed "in some spiritual principles changed their look to life. We may mention some of them in the following:

This world is temporary compared with eternal life: There are many divine sayings encourage that feeling...*"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2Cor. 4:17, 18)...*"But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away"* (1Cor 7:29,30)...*"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"* (1Jn. 2:17).

They are strangers in the world: They were always re-

membering the inspired words of the holy apostles, *"Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear"* (1Peter 1: 17). *"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul"* (2 Pet.2:1 1). St. Paul, after speaking about the heroes of faith in the Old Testament, he said, *" These all died in faith, not having seen them atar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"* (Heb. 11: 13). *"So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord ... we are confident, yea, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"* (2Cor. 5:6,8).

This world lies under the sway of the wicked one and this life IS full of suffering, pain and tribulations: *"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"* (I Jn.5: 19). *"Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice, and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy"* (Jn. 16:20). *"Enter by the narrow gate"* (Matt.7:13). *"In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have over-come the world"* (Jn. 16: 33).

By comparison with the other life, it is said of, *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* (Rev. 21:4).

They believed that the end of the world's tribulations lead to a great glory in heaven:

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn.12:25).... "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain" (Jn.12:24).... "I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world" (Jn. 16:20-22)..."This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him we shall also live with Him if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim 11, 12). "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom.8:18 . see also (Rev. 7:9-17; 1 Cor.2:9; I Jn.3:2).

For all these reasons:

1. **They abandoned worldly and material things:** They followed the wisdom of Job as he said, *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 1:21).* It is the same meaning St. Paul confirmed in (I Tim 6:7,8 & 2 Cor. 6: 10).

2. **They desired and longed for departure and being with Christ:** This strong desire was supported with the Lord's promises, *"Where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:2,3); "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life ... if anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there My servant will be also" (Jn.12: 25,26).* Therefore, all the martyrs shared Simeon's song, *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Lk.2:29).* In the same meaning and feeling St. Paul expressed his Inner strong desire, *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better..." (Phil. 1:21-23).*

3. **They did that out of fervent love:** Saints and martyrs loved the Lord Jesus Christ and kept the first and the greatest commandment from all their hearts, minds, souls and strength. They applied His words, *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"*

St. John The Baptist



On the second day of the blessed month of Tout the great prophet St. John the Baptist, son of Zechariah the Priest, was martyred by the order of King Herod. When the prophet John rebuked Herod because he had taken Herodias the wife of his brother Phillip, to be his wife saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Mark 6:18), Herod cast him in prison, though he feared the saint. Then an opportune day came on Herod's birthday when he gave a feast for his nobles, high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you". He also swore to her,

"Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom". So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "the head of John the Baptist!" Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter". The king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought, and he went and beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother (Mark 6:20-28). There was great apprehension that day, and their joy turned into sorrow. It was even said that when the holy head of St. John was cut off, it flew up into the air, out of their hands crying out saying: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife". It is also said that the head rests now at the City of Homs in Syria. The disciples of St. John came, took his holy body and laid it in a grave until the days of Pope Athanasius, to whom the Lord wanted to reveal it.

May his blessings be with us all.
Amen.

BIBLE STUDY

The Gospel of St. John

By: Mark Michael

The Gospel according to St. John is very unique in that it is the only book in the Bible that states its purpose clearly and briefly. It was written to tell individuals how to find eternal life. It is a powerful presentation of Jesus' deity not just a life story. Every chapter presents evidence, both signs and statements, for His divine authority. Therefore, St. John makes it clear that Jesus is the Son of God and that believing in him is the beginning of eternal life.

The author of the Gospel is never mentioned but we are able to deduce that it is St. John by some of the clues that he gives us. For instance, the author calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20) on five different occasions. We also know that the author had to be one of the twelve apostles because he is described as leaning on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper, an event to which only the apostles were invited. This

narrows it down to Peter, James, or John. The author says that Peter looked back and saw the one Jesus loved and James was martyred before the book was even written (Acts 12:1,2). Subsequently, it is safe to say that St. John was the author of the Gospel. This understanding is also supported by early Christians such as St. Polycarp, who was a follower of John.

Many scholars believed that the Gospel was written around 170 AD up until the nineteenth century when in 1935 C. H. Roberts discovered the Rylands Papyrus (which includes Jn. 18:31-33, 37, 38). This was written around 125 AD so therefore, it must have been written before this date to allow time for it to be copied and carried to Egypt. More conservative scholars date it around 90 AD, which seems to be the most common belief held today.

KNOW YOUR CHURCH

History of the Nayrouz

The word “Nayrouz” is thought to be of Persian origin on the assumption of its traditional use in Iran. The word is originally derived from an ancient Egyptian equivalent adopted by the Persians during their occupation of Egypt.

It denotes the Coptic New Year's Day, commemorated in the Coptic Church liturgy but also celebrated as one of the great popular feasts by the whole Egyptian nation.

It falls on Tout 1 (11 September), which is the first month of the Coptic year and takes its name from the Egyptian god Thoth.

In ancient Egypt, it was a day of celebration, ceremonies, and processions in which the golden statue of Harbor, the goddess of plenty, was taken out of its temple at Dandarah at the break of dawn amid music and chanting to inaugurate the New Year.

This same day is still a day of tremendous celebrations among all the people of Egypt.

The 14th century Arab historian

AlMeqrizi devoted space in his work to a description of the popular festivities associated with that day in medieval times. Dressed in their best attire, people exchanged visits and Fruits of the season, notably dates.

The festivities continued throughout the night and the populace took to drinking and debauchery until the Mamluk state decided to suppress the Nayrouz as an approved public holiday in the year 1378-1379. In the church, however, its celebration continued.

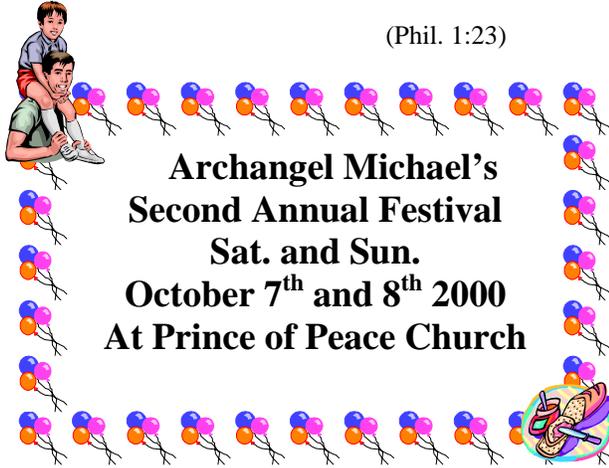
The Coptic New Year still figures in the Synaxarium as a day of healing by water.

(See Coptic Encyclopedia P. 1784).



"Having a desire to depart and be
with Christ, which is far better".

(Phil. 1:23)



**Archangel Michael's
Second Annual Festival
Sat. and Sun.
October 7th and 8th 2000
At Prince of Peace Church**

Church Activities

* The church would like to encourage spiritual reading in order for us to develop spiritually and intellectually. The church bookstore has been opened and will still be expanding. It is open every Friday & Saturday.

* Due to the lack of an Egyptian grocery store in our area, the servants have come up with an idea to serve our community as well as raise funds for the church. There will be a variety of items for sale and orders can be taken for other items.



*Please do not forget to pray to the Lord that He
may heal the sick
and
repose the souls of those who have passed away
among us in the paradise of joy ”*

This Newsletter is a free publication of the church, under the supervision of Fr. Antonious Tanius.

The committee welcomes your participation in the form of articles, reviews, news, or comments.

Please mail your articles, comments, ...etc. to the church at:

PO Box 256
Howell, NJ 07731

If you would like this newsletter mailed to a friend or wish your name to be deleted from our mailing list please fax your request to 732-821-1512.

Church Services

September, 2000

Fridays, September 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29

-7:30pm-8:30pm— Hymns Lesson

-8:30pm-8:45pm— Prayer Meeting

-8:45pm-9:30pm— Bible Study

Saturday, September 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30

-8:30am-11:30am— Divine Liturgy

-11:30am-1:00pm— Sunday School & Youth group meeting

COPTIC FEASTS

- September 10 Departure of St. Barsum the naked.
- September 11 El Nayrouz (Coptic New Year) 1717.
- September 12 Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist.
- September 27 The Cross Feast.