

## Early Types of Worship in Ancient Ethiopia

No doubt the element of all kinds of forms of worship were practiced in the country especially the sun god which was widely known in Axum, one of Ethiopia's earliest Kingdoms. Sun god worship became widely practiced in Arabia in the town of Yemen. These Arabians a Cushite semetic people, migrated across the Red Sea to the South of Axum taking with them their sun god and moon worship and other cultures. Sun worship became widely practiced up to the point when the Queen of Sheba rose up during the era of King Solomon where she "admitted that she was a sun worshipper, though others adores stones, trees and grave images." Sun god worship was also current in Egypt.

It was also believed that during this early stage, - "the worship of the serpent was popular and Ethiopians offered sacrifices to it. This is confirmed to some extent by archaeological evidence found at Axum. On a stelae at Axum an engraving of serpent is still visible today, though the worship of the serpent was spread through almost all the nations of the Middle East. We have reason to believe that this cult was introduced directly to Ethiopia; from Persia. The description in Avesta, the Sacred Book of Persia concerning this matter, is identical with the tradition found in Ethiopia".

Nevertheless, Ethiopia is the first African nation to appreciate and worship the One True God of Old Testament and adopted the Judaic element (1,000 B.C.). It was even said that the idea of worship of one God has been in existence earlier. This was confined to a limited number of families. Later this disappeared when a segment of the population strayed to all forms of worship.

The worship of the true God was officially announced and established by Queen Makeda on her return from her historic visit to King Solomon at Jerusalem. This powerful Queen had managed to reign over parts of southern Arabia in Sabaea (Sheba), and because of this was titled, Queen of Axum and Sheba. Her long and strenuous journey to Palestine in Search of righteousness, was a symbol of great faith, and so our Lord Jesus Christ, over a thousand years later, spoke of her to the continuing generations, that she "shall rise up in the judgement with this generation and shall condemn it: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). The Queen was then converted to the worship of the true God. Her conversion was the light she found in King Solomon's wisdom - the light who is God and therefore, greater than Solomon.

Makeda stayed in Jerusalem for six months during which time her union with Solomon produced King Minelik I, who was born while she journeyed back to Ethiopia. She condemned other types of worship and introduced to her people the true light. About Makeda and her work, a wealth of information is to be found in the book of Kebra Negest (The Glory of Kings) from which most of this section is cited.

The Kebra Negest, States that when Menelik grew up he visited his father in Jerusalem; and came back home accompanied by Azarias, the son of Zadok the high priest and many other Israelites carrying with them the Ark of the Covenant, and placed it in the St. Mary of Zion Church in Axum, which is the birthplace of the Ethiopian civilization. The Ethiopian Falasha in northern Ethiopia who practice after the Judaism formula to this day, are to be descendants of those who accompanied Menelik. From this point of view Judaism and paganism were in effect in Ethiopia. The later was short-lived while the former became a channel for direction and introduction towards Christianity.

## **The Teachings of the Ethiopian Church**

As is with all Oriental Orthodox Churches the teachings of the Church is founded on the Apostles experience of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Creator and Saviour of the World.

The first three ecumenical councils Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, and Ephesus 431 which confessed the Son of God as being of substance with the Father and condemned Arius' formula are accepted by the Ethiopian orthodox Church, but the Church refuses to accept the Council of Chalcedon 451 presided by Pope Leo I which teaches the formula of the "two natures" against that of "one nature" the teaching of St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. The Ethiopian Church holds that there were, two natures before incarnation, but only one after the union. The human nature was not dissolved in the Divine as Eutyches taught. But rather, the Divine made the human nature immediately its own. The word and the human constitute one nature, and union is established without confusion and without division. The Church rejects the idea of Eutyches, the monophysite who taught a confusion against the union of the human by the Divine, which was regarded by (Dyophysite) theologians to be the same with teaching of the Ethiopian Church and its sister Churches, which was done without investigation and hence ignorance because Eutyches' condemnation by St. Dioscorus is an evidence to the point. One can see that the words, "dysophysite" and "monophysite" as fitting to play a great role not between the oriental Churches which have nothing to do with such phrases but between the Chalcedonian and Eutyches himself.

The Church emphasises that all concerning Christ should be applied to His entire person as one Lord. Not to single out the "Human nature" as subjected to suffering hunger, passion etc., Properties peculiar to the human are referred to His Divine powers as God suffered, God was crucified, God shed blood, God died, and God was risen up for the salvation of all men.

The seven sacraments (mysteries) Baptism, Confirmation, penance, Holy Communion, Unction of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders are important in the teaching of the E.O.C. The administration of these sacraments is somehow similar to that of other Eastern Orthodox Churches in many ways. But with more native elements especially in hymary (chanting) and the custom of rites. Sacraments are holy ordinance through which the believer receives an invisible grace under the form of an outward sign. In the performance of each sacrament the Divine Majesty Himself is present. THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

Also the Church teaches other five pillars of Mysteries. They are the Mystery of the Trinity, Incarnation, Baptism, Eucharist and the Mystery of the Resurrection of the dead. These Mysteries are regarded by the Church as basic knowledge for all faithful and every Christian must know this. Fasting is strictly observed by all baptized members above the age of seven years. During lent; meat, and products of meat are prohibited.

Furthermore all faithful must keep the Ten Commandments and the six parables in Matt. 25:35-36, in order to inherit eternal life. In the second coming of Christ the dead will be raised and sinners will receive punishment according to their deed. So man is responsible for his own committed sins.

### **he Introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia (The Ethiopian Eunuch)**

The country embraced Christianity and maintained the doctrine of Christ from the era of the Apostles to the present day, as it is narrated in (Acts 8:26-39). The history of St. Phillip the Apostle baptizing the Eunuch who was very much interested in religion, is of great interest for the Ethiopian Church history. This Eunuch was a man of high rank, the finance minister of Candace Queen of Ethiopia.

Eusebius speaks of him as the first fruits of the faithful in the whole world. Irenius writes that preached the Gospel of the Ethiopians. Other evidence is that during the time that the Eunuch preached Christianity, Ethiopian women wore crosses upon their heads signifying the recognition of the Crucifixion of Christ. Besides St. John Chnysostom witnessed that among

those who were present at Pentecost (the birth of the Universal Church) were Ethiopians.

In the history of the Church, it is further recorded that St. Matthew the Apostle preached the Gospel to the Ethiopians and won a few converts to the new doctrine and left the country.

### **Fruementius - First Bishop of Ethiopia**

The book of St. Tekle Haymanot tells us that in the beginning of the fourth century after Christ, there came to Ethiopia Meropius, a philosopher (pilgrim) from Tyre, accompanied by two young men, Fruementius and Aedesius (Sidrakos). They were received graciously by Anbaram the high Priest. In that very night Meropius was ill with fever and after a few days he died. But the two young men were introduced to the King Ella-Amida; they grew up in the house of Anbaram, learning the customs and life-style of Ethiopia. Later Fruementius was chosen and was sent to Alexandria, then Patriarch Athanasius consecrated him bishop and sent him back. Upon arrival in Axum, he was called Abba Selama (Father of Peace).

As the first Archbishop he preached the gospel throughout the country. The book of St. Tekle Haymanot tells nothing about whatever occurred in relation to Aedesius, but according to the information given by Rufinus, a contemporary writer, he was made a priest in Tyre.

### **Emperor Ezana (Edna) and Christianity**

According to the western historians and writers the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia was in the fourth century during the reign of Ezana (320-356 A.D.) and Ezana became the first African King to have been a Christian and to have made Christianity the official religion of his empire. Nevertheless, Christianity was certainly known in the country before the time of Fruementius. Of course, Candace whose conversion had been due to the Eunuch becomes the first Christian Queen of the country.

The official declaration of the doctrine of Christ by Ezana was done not as a new introduction to the people, he did it to prove himself as the true Christian leader of the nation.

### **Problems Confronted by the Church**

For hundreds of years the Christian Ethiopians had to fight for the maintenance of the Christian faith against internal and external foes. Such as the constant hostility of the Muslims against the Christian during their

occupation of the Red Sea coasts including Yemen and Aden. The fiery onslaught of Ahmed Gran (the left handed ) a Muslim (1528-1540).

With the aid of Turkish troops, attacked the country from one end to the other, "and was able to oppose the Christians successfully. Over a decade the invaders pillaged the land affecting untold damage. Innumerable Monasteries and Churches were sacked and burned to the ground, ancient manuscripts and other works of art were stolen. The ancient Church of Axum was rased to the ground and the famous Monastery of Debre Libanos was entirely demolished".

Another persecution of the Christian people occurred by Yodit (Judith) terrible in Tegray and in Amhara East (fire); when the Solomonian Dynasty was removed from Axum (A.D. 928-968) to the Zagwe Dynasty in Wolo province. According to the Ethiopian traditional sources she was of the Jewish faith. As it was her desire to exterminate the philosophy of Christianity, she was able to run out the Christian dynasty and cast down most of the historical places and Churches. Both Yodit and Ahmed Gran were native Ethiopians.

The third and great problem was the desire of the Roman Catholic Church to bring the Ethiopian Christians under the jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome (1520-1632). Several missionary workers and bishops (Jesuits) were sent to Ethiopia for the purpose of conversion. Pedro Pais (Paes), Joao Burmudez, Andre de Oviedo, Francisco Alvares and D. Alfonso Mendez were the notable leaders among the missionaries. Their mission was the result of contact with King Manuel and King Joam of Portugal made by Empress Eleni and her son Lebna Dengel (Prester John) of Ethiopia, whose desire was to fortify their country against the Turkish menace then pending, by alliance with a Christian neighboring power, and to protect the holy land in which the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ is. They were very sad of the fact that all the Churches which were in the land of Egypt, Nubia and Syria were destroyed by the Moors. Among the notable missionaries Pedro Pais who reached Ethiopia in 1603. He lost no time in advertising the Church of Rome. He had brought Emperor Susneyos of Ethiopia; to the Catholic faith.

Pedro Pais ordered the people to kneel to him as representative of the Pope. Priests of the Ethiopian Church should be re-ordained by him and the whole population of the country was regarded as heathen if not rebaptized under the Catholic faith. Churches had to be reconstructed and altars were rebuilt in the Portuguese fashion.

Meanwhile Susneyos issued a decree; death to be the penalty for those who refused to agree with the Chalcedonian formula which the Ethiopians refused to accept, in 451 A.D., the heart of the people was untouched, revolt after revolt broke out as civil wars went on without any prospect of ending, and thousands of man and women were killed. Such was the act of the Jesuits in Ethiopia. Susneyos died September 1632. His death was the end for the Jesuits. He was succeeded by his son Fasilades, during whose reign the Jesuits left the country by order.

Another attempt of conversion was made during the invasion by Mussolini (1935-1945) who had proclaimed a great colonial power in Africa. Mussolini declared that "for facism; Empire-building was manifestation of vitality and proclaimed in metaphysical vain, that the Empire in facist doctrine was not only a territorial military, but also a spiritual and moral expression".

The mission of the Portuguese Jesuits had brought several formulas concerning Christology. Two of which were Qebat (Anointing) and Tsegga (Son of Grace). There appeared a great controversy and division in the Church especially during the reign of Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868). Qebat states that Jesus became a perfect man and a perfect God by the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the Jordan River and not upon the incarnation. Tsegga states three births; eternal birth, of the Son from the Father; genetic birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary, and birth from the Holy Spirit during baptism. Such doctrinal formulas died out by decree of Emperor Tewodros.

## Mystery of the Holy Trinity

In this section the mystery of Unity and Trinity of the Triune God is described. The Holy Trinity is three in name, in person (Akal), in deed and one in essence, in divinity, in existence, in will.

**Three in name:** - Father, Son, Holy Spirit

**Three in deed:-**

- a) the Father is the begetter
- b) the Son is begotten
- c) the Holy Spirit is the one who proceeds

**Three in person:-**

- a) the Father has a perfect person
- b) the Son has a perfect person
- c) the Holy Spirit has a perfect person

The Father is the heart, the Son is the word, the Holy Spirit is the life (breath)

The Father is the heart for himself, and He is the heart for the Son and for the Holy Spirit.

The Son is the word for Himself, and He is the word for the Father, and for the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit is the life (breath) for Himself, and He is the life (breath) for the Father and the Son.

**Even though we say the Trinity are three in name in deed and in person: the three are one in essence, in divinity, in existence and in will; we do not mean three Gods but one God.** While the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit exist in their own perfect person, they are one in existence. (Abulidis, Faith of the Fathers, Ch. 40 Verse 4:6)

As Ignatius has said in the Book of the Faith of the Fathers (Haimanot Abew) the name of the Father is not changed to be the name of the Son or the Holy Spirit. The name of the Son is not changed to be the name of the Father or the Holy Spirit, the name of the Holy Spirit is not changed to be the name of the Father or the Son. The Father is called the Father but not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son is called the Son but not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Holy Spirit but not the Father or the Son. The Father is the Father, the Son is the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. The three exist eternally in their own name and person. (Faith of the Fathers Ch. 11 part 1 verse 7, 8)

**In their name of unity, the three are called Lord, God. Lord the Father, Lord the Son, Lord the Holy Spirit, One Lord. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, One God.** The three hundred eighteen fathers in the Book of the Faith (Haimanot Abew) said, “we believe in Lord the Father, in Lord the Son, in Lord the Holy Spirit. (Faith of Fathers, Ch. 19, part 1 verse 30)

The Apostolic St. Athanasius Archbishop of Alexandria said, “**The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. They are called one God but not three Gods.**” (Apostolic Athanasius Faith of the Fathers, Ch. 24, part 4, verse 4)

It is stated in many places in the Old and the New Testament Books about the Oneness and Trinity of the Holy Trinity.

In the Old Testament: Gen. 1:26; 2:18; 3:22; 11:7; 18:1-8; Ps. 33:6; 146:5; Isa 6:3,8

In the New Testament: Mt. 3:16-17; 28:19; Jn. 14:26; 2Cor.14:13; 1Pet. 1:2; 1Jn. 5:7-8

## Mystery of Incarnation

**"Mystery of Incarnation** means the mystery of the descending of God the Son who is one of the Trinity from heaven and taking up flesh and rational soul from the Holy Virgin Mary. This is the mystery of God becoming man and man becoming God. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

### **The Reason for the Incarnation of the Son of God**

God created Adam and Eve without sin and death. "God did not make death." But, man, through his transgression brought on himself misery and suffering as well as sin and evil, and was condemned to death – death of body and soul, grave and hell (Gen. 3:19-24). "For God did not make death, He takes no pleasure in destroying the living. Do not court death by the errors of your ways, nor invite destruction thought the work of your hands. To exist for this he created all things the creatures of the world have health in them, in them is no fatal poison, and Hades has no power over the world. But the godless call for death with deed and word, counting him friend, they were themselves out for him; with him they make a pact, working as they are to belong to him." (Wisdom 1:12-16; Rom 6:23). "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thes. 5:9) Adam and Eve disgraced and impoverished themselves. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden. They brought suffering and misery and were subject to the dominion of the devil. Death reigned from Adam to Christ, even to them that had not sinned. (Rom 5:12-14) They knew that, all that happened due to their transgression and violation of the commandment of God. They regretted and repented. They along with his judgment, hearing their cry, observing their tears and accepting their repentance, was pleased to redeem them, and gave them promise (Isa 63:8; Heb 2:12-16).

**When the appointed time had come forth, God sent His only Begotten Son, according to the promise.** God the Son, descended from heaven and was born from the Holy Virgin Mary. He was born so that all who believe in Him would be saved. When it is said, that He became man, it is said to mean that He united to himself the body and soul of man. Then all the words of the prophets were fulfilled (Isa 7:14, 9:6; Mich 5:2; Gal 4:4)

**Without separation of His Divinity from His humanity and His humanity from His Divinity, He became one person, one nature without change, without confusion, without separation and without division.** "He is one Son and one Christ before and after His Incarnation." (Cyril Faith of the Fathers, Ch. 78 Part 48 Verse 9-18). St. George of Nazianzum said, "He is the only God the Son who became man, and the only man who became God in unity." (Faith of Fathers Ch. 61 part 4 verse 23). John Chrysostom has written that the human body was honored by the union of the Divine Word. The poverty in the nature of the flesh was abolished by the Unity of the Word of God with the flesh, and the flesh retained the glory of the Word of God to itself by the unity. (John Chrysostom, Faith of the Fathers Ch. 66 part 9 verse 18-19)

After birth He grew like men, doing all human works except sin. He taught 3 years and 3 months in the world. For us men He died on the Cross, destroyed death by his death and saved the world. He was laid in the tomb for three days and three nights; rose from the dead on the third day; appeared to His disciples, stayed on earth for forty days, gathering His disciples and teaching them the Book of the Covenant. On the fortieth day, while the disciples beheld, He ascended unto heaven to the Father in glory praised by angels, sat at the right hand of His Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead, when everyone will be



recompensed according to his work. (Jn 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:22; Mt. 25:31; Eph 4:8-10; Acts 2:30; 2 Cor 5:14)

Therefore, the teaching highlighted in the **Mystery of Incarnation** is to believe that Christ is the Word of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, thus the Virgin Mary is the true Mother of God; the Mother of the Word. (Faith of Fathers, Cyril) "

## Mystery of Baptism

**"Baptism** is the sacrament given to all who believe in the Mystery of the Trinity and the Mystery of Incarnation for the remission of sin, to obtain adoption from the Triune God, to inherit the kingdom of God. It is called mystery, because, when the priest recites the prayer of baptism over the water and blesses it, it will be changed and become the water that flowed from the right side of our Lord Jesus Christ and one can receive the invisible grace of the adopted sonhood of God (Jn 19:34-35). Whosoever believes and is baptized, shall get remission of sin. "We believe in one baptism for the remission of sin." (Creed) Every person is born from God through baptism, and will be free from damnation. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:28)

To be born of the Trinity is for inheriting the kingdom of God. **Our Lord has taught us that we cannot enter the kingdom of God except through baptism. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."** (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:4-7)

There were prophecies and symbols foretold by the laws and the prophets about Baptism.

a) Prophecy: - "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." (Ezek 36:25; Mich 7:19)

b) Symbols

1. Circumcision:-

Circumcision in the Old Testament was practiced as a sign of baptism. It was given to Abraham as a token of the Covenant.

Everyone that was not circumcised on the eighth day after birth was to be cut off from his people, shared not from the promise and/or shall have no portion from the Promised Land. The uncircumcised were not considered as the nation of God (Gen 17:7-14).

In the New Testament, circumcision was replaced by Baptism. Every one that is not baptized was not born of God, and cannot inherit the heavenly kingdom (Col 2:11)

John the Baptist, at the end of the Old Testament and at the beginning of the New Testament was baptizing with water (Mark 1:4-8).

2. The Ark of Noah and the crossing of Israelites across the Red Sea were symbols of baptism (1 Pet 3:19; 1 Cor 10:2)

To fulfill the prophesy and to make the archetype real, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was baptized in the water of the river Jordan by the hand of John the Baptist (Matt 3:16; Mk 1:9; Lk 3:21; Jn 1:31). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church baptizes children, males on the fortieth day and females on the eightieth day. This signifies that the first persons obtained adoption from God (Book of Jubilees 4:2-15). "

## Mystery of the Holy Communion

**"Mystery of the Holy Communion** is a supreme act of life through which **we can hold intimate communion with God and that which makes us one with God**, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." "Who so eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life. My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, for it is real food. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (Jn 6:53-57)

**There are prophecies and symbols given about the Holy Communion.**

a) Prophecy

- "Thou has put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine has increased." (Ps 4:7)
- "Wisdom has builded her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars. She has killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table; she hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth up on the highest place of the city." (Prov 9:1-3)
- "The prime needs of human beings for living are water, wheat...and juice of grape." (Sirach 39:26)

These prophecies were foretold about Jesus Christ, the Lamb of Passover, who was crucified on the cross as to give His flesh and blood in the form of bread and wine.

b) Symbol

When the children of Israel were liberated from the bondage and went out of Egypt, they were told to kill a lamb, eat the flesh, take the blood and sprinkle it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, in order to get security from the plague of the firstborn. This was applied as a symbol of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was crucified and gave his flesh and blood as a ransom to the children of men. "This is the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn 1:29) Melchizedek, who is the archetype of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offered a sacrifice in the form of bread and wine (Gen 14:18).

To fulfill these prophecies and realize the symbols, examples, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Thursday evening at the Passover, took the bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to His disciples and said, this bread which I give you is my flesh. In the same manner He took the cup, blessed it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "this is my blood which will be shed for you and for many people, for the new covenant, for the remission of sin (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19). This mystery is always performed in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

When the priest puts bread on a paten and the wine in a chalice and blesses them with the liturgical prayer, the bread and the wine are changed into the real flesh and blood of the Son of God. This was made clear by the scholar St. Athanasius – when he said, "We believe, that the bread and the wine are bread and wine before they are blessed by the priest, but after they are blessed by the priest the bread and wine are changed to the real flesh and blood of the Son of God." (Ath. Faith of the Fathers; Ch 28 Part 14 Verse 22)

**Therefore, the Holy Communion which the disciples received on Thursday evening, that which was crucified on the cross on Friday, and that which is being practiced at every corner to the end of the world is one and the same.** The Ethiopian Orthodox Church believes and teaches that the flesh and blood is not simply a memorial or symbolic but real flesh and blood of the Son of God. The pure sacrifice that the clergy offers is the same sacrifice that was given up on the cross on Calvary (John Chrysostom Liturgy 85)."

## **Mystery of Resurrection of the Dead**

... "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

## **The Seven Sacraments of our church**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church serves the faithful through the seven sacraments. These sacraments are called mysteries because the invisible grace of the Holy Spirit is granted through them. The seven sacraments are:

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church, taking the example of pillars as has been said in the Proverbs of Solomon as a starting point, teaches that there are seven sacraments (Proverbs 9:1). Of the seven, a bishop and a priest can perform the six sacraments. A bishop confers ordination only.

### **Baptism**

Of the seven sacraments, Baptism is the first. Baptism is the sacrament through which we are reborn and enter the Kingdom of God. (Jn. 3:5). Baptism has a Biblical basis (Mt. 28:19-20).

In our church we baptise children. In the Old Testament children were considered as people of the covenant after they were circumcised. In the New Testament children are baptized in their infancy and become members of the family of Christ. God has never isolated children from His grace. For example Jeremiah was blessed while he was in the womb of his mother. (Jer. 1:5). John the Baptist was likewise filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb of his mother (Lk. 1:15). Our Lord and Savior during the period of His teaching has blessed children. This shows that the age of children does not prevent them from being brought to God (Mr. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17; Acts 16:33; 1Cor. 1:16). In the practice of our Church a boy is baptized on the fortieth day after birth and a girl on the eightieth day after birth.

### **Confirmation (Mayron)**

It is the holy ointment, which one is anointed after Baptism. Confirmation like Baptism is performed once and cannot be repeated. Through the sacrament of confirmation, the believer is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Apostolic times the baptized person was granted the Holy Spirit by the laying of the hands. (Acts 20:14-17). When the church expanded, however, the bishops who continued the works of the Apostles permitted the replacement of the laying of hands by the anointing of the Holy Oil.

The gift of the Holy Spirit with mayron, confirmation, has Biblical foundation. The believer is anointed with the Holy Oil immediately after Baptism. When the Apostles baptized children and grown ups, the baptized person was granted the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8: 14-17; 19:5-6).

Children should be anointed with Myron as soon as they are baptized so that they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible confirms that let alone after birth, there were children who were granted the Holy Spirit while they were still in the wombs of their mothers. (Lk. 1:15; Jer. 1:1-8).

The right to anoint was originally confined to the Apostles but later passed on to bishops, and then priests were also authorized to administer the sacrament.

### **Holy Communion**

Holy Communion is the culmination of all sacraments of the Church. Holy Communion means offering of sacrifice. This is not an offering of man to God but the offering of God for man. The sheep and goats were offered as sacrifices in the altars during the Old Testament times. However, these were preceding examples of the offering of the flesh and blood of Christ during the New Testament. The offering of bread and cup of grace that Melchizedek offered to Abraham (Gen. 14:18) and the sacrifices, which the Israelites offered during the day of their liberation, exemplify Christ our pascal lamb. Holy Communion has Biblical foundation (Mt. 26:26; 1Cor. 11:23-25). When the priest puts the bread on the paten and the wine in the chalice and conducts liturgical prayer, the bread is changed into the body of the Son of God and the wine into the blood of the Son of God. What is thus given in our Church is the body and blood of the Son of God.

When the priest administers the body, the deacon administers the blood with a cross-spoon. Those who, due to sickness, are not able to come to the Church receive the Holy Communion in their homes during liturgical service. The Holy Communion has to be administered on the same day; it cannot be spared for another time. Holy Communion should be taken after abstinence from food for at least fifteen hours. According to the doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church the Holy Communion is real body and blood of Christ. (Jn. 6:51, 52, 53, 55).

Like the other sacraments, bishops who succeeded the Apostles originally performed the Holy Communion, but as the church expanded they authorized the priests to perform the sacrament. The deacons assist the bishops and the priests. The believers who have examined and cleansed themselves through penance can receive the Holy Communion. But those who have not cleansed themselves through penance even if they receive the Holy Communion being unworthy will bring damnation upon them. (Cor. 11:28-29; Liturgy of John Chrysostom).

### **Ordination**

This is the sacrament through which the clergy are entitled to perform the various services of the Church. This sacrament has Biblical basis. (Mt. 28:19,20; Eph. 4:11; Acts 26:20).

There are three hierarchical ranks of Ordination. These are deacon, priest and bishop.

*Priest:* The order of priesthood is conferred either after marriage or after becoming a monk. He can perform all the sacraments except, conferring Ordination, consecration of the Holy Oil used for sacrament of confirmation, consecration of the altar, the Ark of the Covenant, new church and new vessels. If he becomes a priest in celibacy, he can attain the rank of bishop; but if he is married, he will be limited to the rank of priesthood. A priest is ordained by the laying of hands and the breath of bishop.

*Deacon:* Deacons are ordained into this Order before marriage. After marriage, the

deacons become priests but if they wish to be monks and be ordained priests they have to remain celibate. The duty of the deacons is to assist priests and bishops. They are ordained by bishops.

In our Church, there are three ranks under the deacon-hood, which qualify one to serve the church. These ranks are conferred through blessing and not by the laying of hands. No payment is made for receiving any of the Ordinations. (acts 8:18-26). Ordination is not attained through inheritance but through a calling of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the canons of the Church.

### **Matrimony**

Christian marriage is one of the seven sacraments, which is performed in a church by means of which the grace of the Holy Spirit is obtained. Holy Matrimony is based on the Bible. (Gen. 1:27,28, 2:18, Mt. 19:4-6). The Canon of the Church requires that before matrimony is affected the following conditions should be met.

- Both couples should be Christians to obtain the grace of God
- Both should belong to the Orthodox Tewahido Church. If any one of them is not a member, he/she should first be a member of the Church.
- No pre-martial sexual relationship is permitted.
- Both should consent to be united in marriage.
- No marriage is allowed within seven generations so as not to break the rule of kinship that forbids marriage between close family relations. (Lev. 18:6-21; Deut. 7:3-4).
- As the marriage of Christians epitomizes the unity between Christ and the Church, it shall not be broken. (Eph. 5:32),
- In our Church one to one marriage only is allowed.
- Re-marriage cannot be conducted by any one of the two partners unless divorce is affected because of adultery or one of the partners dies. (Mt. 19:6-9)
- Bishops and priests celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- Matrimony is not performed without Holy Communion. (Fetha Negest Article 24:899)
- Parents should be consulted and their consent should be secured.

### **Penance**

Penance means to feel remorse, repent and cleanse oneself from sin. Although Christians are reborn through Baptism, men are liable to commit sins. Therefore: Every Christian should have a father confessor (soul-father)

Every one should go to the father confessor and confess his/her sins. (Lev. 14:30, Mt. 8:4; Epiphanius Faith of Fathers Hai. Ab. 59:20). Those who confess their sins and return to God receive the grace of God and by receiving the Holy Communion they will enter to their former place of honor. Confessions and remissions are performed only by bishops or priests only. Penance is based on the Bible. (Mt.16: 19, 8:4). The confession of the penitent made in front of the father-confessor and the tears shed for the sins committed will enable them to be rejuvenated by the Holy Sprit. (Liturgy of Athanasius). Penance is one of the Sacraments that are repeated. The main objectives of the teachings starting from the Prophets, of John the Baptist; Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and his disciples that Apostles is to enable people to

inherit the kingdom of God through repentance, ?Repent Ye: for the Kingdom of God is at hand.? On the basis of this truth, the Church teaches the need and virtue of Penance. (Mt. 3:1-2,4:17, Zach. 1:3)

### **Unction of the Sick**

It is one of the Seven Sacraments of the Church. It is an anointment administered to the sick. It has Biblical origin and is administered by bishops and priests. (Mk. 6:13; Jas. 5:13-15).

In our Church, since Unction is proffered to cleanse sins of the flesh as well as of the soul, Unction is administered to one who afflicted by sin. Unction is performed by bishops and priests only.

Each of the Seven Sacraments has its own book of prayer and system of application. The seven Sacraments as a whole are considered as manifestations of the faith and tenets of the religion of the Church.

These Sacraments are all performed in the Church. However, it is not also forbidden if they are performed elsewhere as and when conditions are met. The main aim of all the Sacraments is to redeem mankind.



## Faith and Work

Our Church teaches and believes that when religion and work are both found in a Christian life, they bring forth salvation. However, faith comes before work. The great father of the Church St. John Chrysostom said; Faith is the basis, the rest are building and walls. Elucidating this point further, as the foundation bears the building; faith also embraces deeds, i.e. as a building cannot stand nor be seen if it without foundation, a Christian cannot become a Christian without good deed. (Homily of John Chrysostom 9).

Faith gives assertion to the things we hope for and explains the things that we cannot see. This was the testimony that was given to the fathers. (Heb. 11:1-2). Faith can attest to and explain those things that cannot be seen as concrete when it can be demonstrated in action and deed. In 1 Cor. 13:13; it is written "... now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love..."

The Apostle St. James emphasizing the fact that faith and work should go together saying "... what good is it my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead..." (Jas. 2, 14-26).

Hence, all good work is the fruit or result of faith. One who has a true faith does good deeds. (1Cor, 13:2).

Our Lord Jesus Christ says that every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Mt. 7:19). Again it is written that, not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of Heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in Heaven. (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 3:8). This shows that to be worthy of the kingdom of Heaven what one does should be rooted and manifested in faith. On the Day of Judgment, one will be judged on what he did in faith and not on the basis of his faith devoid of good work. (Mt. 25:41-45).

What is written is that our Lord will reward each person according to what he/she has done in the lifetime on earth. (Mt. 16:27; Jn. 5:28-29; 2Cor. 5:10; Rev. 14:13, 20:21, 22:12).

On this basis, therefore, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church believes and teaches the faith should be practiced along with deeds and that faith as such by itself would not count for much.

**"The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has its own laws and orders of fasting.**

**Accordingly, there are seven fasting periods."**

Number	Name	Amharic	Start	Finish
1	The Great Fast (Lent)	Abey Tsome	Yekatit 17 / Feb 24, 09	Meyazia 10 / April 19, 09
2	Wednesdays and Fridays	Erob ena Arb Tsome	All except during 50 days after Easter	same
3	Nineveh	Nenewe Tsome	Rotating Fast, so it varies	Rotating
4	Gehad (Eves of Christmas and Epiphany)	Gehad	One day	
5	Fast of the Prophets	Tsome Nebiyat	Hidar 15 / Nov	Tahisas 28 / Dec
6	Fast of the Apostles	Tsome Hawariat	Monday after Feast of Pentecost (Peraclitos) Sene 1 / June 8, 09	Hamle 4 / July 11, 09
7	Fast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary	Tsome Felseta le Mariam	Nehassie 1 / August 7th 2009	Nehassie 15 / August 21, 09

\*All seven fasts are for all members of the Church.

### **The Order of Fasting**

"Fasting is abstinence from all things that a body needs, and one has to fast from animal products and from any kind of food for a limited time until the period of fasting is over (Fetha Negest 15, Matt 6:16). In general, one has to abstain from any thing which the body desires.

The aim of fasting is to make the desire of the body to obey the will of the soul, to seek forgiveness of guilt and to increase the reward of the soul.

Fasting has perpetual relation with religion. Even though the way it is practiced differs from religion to religion, anyone who has religion practices fasting. Especially in the Old Testament, fasting had a prominent place in the lives of the Jewish people. Whenever the Old Testament prophets sought to communicate with God, they neither ate food nor drank water (Exd 34:28). The wrath of God that comes about as a result of sin can be averted through solemn prayer and rigorous fasting (John 3:7-10; Joel 2:15).

In the New Testament also, fasting is not a law made by man. It is our Saviour Jesus Christ himself who made it the beginning of His messianic ministry in his earthly life (Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2). Our Saviour Jesus Christ has taught that fasting has the power of driving away evil spirits (Matt 17:21; Mark 9:2).

The Apostles who were commanded to serve the church received guidance from the Holy Spirit while they were praying and fasting (Acts 13:2). Priests and deacons who served as preachers of the gospel were inspired and ordained while fasting and praying (Acts 13:3; 14:23).

It was through fasting and beseeching God that righteous people received what they needed and wished (Ezra 8:21; Neh 9:1-3; Est 4:16-17; Acts 10:30; 13:2-3).

As the theological interpretation of fast is beseeching God and asking him for the forgiveness of sin, it is, therefore, mandatory to abstain from animal products and alcoholic drinks which incite lust (Dan 10:2-3). Fasting has been taught and practiced in the teachings of the apostles and Church Fathers (The Law of Kings Article 15; Didas 29).

As it is said, "Blessed is he who fasts to feed the poor," if any fasting man gives what he has allocated from his lunch and supper to the organization of the disabled founded by the Church or to the poor, his fast will be more complete (Isa 58:6-11).

Fasting is not only abstinence from food. It will be a true fast if the eye is kept from seeing, the mouth from speaking and the ear from hearing evil things (Matt 5:21-30;

## THE GLORY OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY

The holiness, virginity, covenant and intercession given to Our Holy Lady, the Virgin Mary is quite widely taught and deeply rooted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

### **Holiness**

Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, who conceived and gave birth to Jesus Christ in virginity is free from the original sin derived from the descendants of Adam, clean from any sins of the flesh or soul; embedded in the conscience of God before the time of her birth, free and protected from human desires and frailties, and the choicest from among the chosen. Such is the Virgin Mary – Pure and Holy of Holies (Songs 4:7)

She is graced and honored by the Saint Angles as indicated in Luke 1:28-30. Here it is written that the angel said to her, "Greetings, you who are highly favored the Lord is with you."

Our Lady, who is blessed in body, spirit and flesh, was chosen by God to be the abode of His Son and the dwelling of the Spirit (Heryacos Liturgy 45; Psalm 132:13).

Purity of the flesh, purity of the soul and purity of the heart all belong and reside in Our Lady.

### **Virginity**

One of the distinctive attributes of the Virgin Mary that makes her the select among the select and the honored among the honored is the fact that she conceived and gave birth to Christ in virginity (Matthew 1:18-20). Our Lady the Virgin Mary is virgin before she conceived the Lord, during her period of conception, after conception, before delivery, during delivery and after delivery. Our Lady, apart from all women is pure and virgin in thought, word and deed (Tewodotos 53:22). The word virgin rightfully denotes her sanctity and purity. No female, either past or present, has combined virginity with motherhood; as well as motherhood with virginity as Our Lady St. Mary.

Our Lady is a virgin in perpetuity (The Liturgy of Basil 73; Ezekiel 44:3; Song 4:15) and the Evangelist Luke says, "God sent the angel Gabriel...to a virgin... The virgin's name was Mary." (Luke 1:27). Ephraim also says that Our Lady is the pride of all virgins (Ephraim 6:3).

### **Honor of the Virgin**

Our Lady, the Virgin St. Mary, is the most prominent from all angels. She is pre-eminent in honor and intercession from all saints. Other ladies are honored for

having given birth to prophets, saints and martyrs. But Our Lady is honored as the Mother of God. Hence, the honor accorded to the Virgin Mary is below the Creator but above His Creatures. She is, therefore, revered as such (John Chrysostomos, The Faith of the Fathers, Chapter 28:36-39). St. Luke in 1:30 says, "...Mary, you have found favor with God."

### **Devotion**

Several prophecies have been written about the honor and high esteem of Our Lady. Prophets have told about the virgin giving birth to Christ (Psalms 132:13; Isaiah 7:14; Ezekiel 44:3).

Church fathers, have through the centuries glorified her guided by the Holy Spirit, about her ever sanctity and purity; and have also praised her in their writings and songs. Fathers such as St. Ephraim, Abba Heriakos, St. John Chrysostoms and Abba Giorgis of Gascha have venerated her greatly. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church reveres her by speaking and writing on her sanctity and purity. The life of Our Lady is associated with God's act of redemption.

As Noah's Ark became the cause for saving the lives of his family as well as himself and thus saving the human race from extinction; Our Lady, the Virgin St. Mary, is also God's trusted repository for being the cause for God's act of redemption by giving birth to the Savior Messiah. According to the doctrine and faith of our Church, the Virgin Mary is venerated as being above God's creatures but below God.

In our hymns and liturgy, we recite Mary's praise right after reciting the Holy Trinity's.

The sacrifices that Christ paid for the human race for himself becoming man: when we think of this in conjunction with the trials He went through, i.e. the fact that He was born in the manger, that He was shrouded in a rug, that He was banished, driven away from place to place, His suffering, His crucifixion and death; we cannot separate the Holy Virgin Mary from these travails.

Who else, outside of Mary has been honored thus, "Greetings, you who are highly favored...you have found favor with God...the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." (Luke 1:28-35)

From among her relatives, St. Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit said to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!". Besides, she bore witness to the fact that Mary is the Mother God by exclaiming, "But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me!" (Luke 1:43). She thus confirmed that what was said by God about Mary would be accomplished and that she would believe in and carry out God's Will.

When St. Elizabeth heard Mary's greetings, the baby leaped in her womb (St. John) and St. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus was it confirmed that He who was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary was God, the Son of God. Our Lady has herself said that, "From now on all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48; Psalm 45:17). On this basis, all Christians who believe in Her Son regard her as the basis of their purity, as a pride of their virginity, and a cause for their salvation.

### **The Covenant of Intercession**

Our Church teaches about the covenant of intercession given to Our Lady with Biblical truth and absolute Apostolic tradition. Our Lady, the Virgin Mary has obtained the honor of motherhood and the covenant of intercession from her Son, Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ performed the first miracle through the intercession of Our Lady, by changing water into wine at a wedding at Cana of Galilee (Feast of the First Miracle, John 2:1-5).

When the Lord was on the Cross, He said, "Dear woman, here is your son," (John 19:26), when He saw Our Lady the Virgin Mary standing there; and He also said, "here is your mother," to His Disciple and thus gave her to the custody of the Church. She received an irreversible word from Jesus that all who beg for mercy and forgiveness in her name believing that she is the mother of Christ shall have their supplications answered.

Hence the Church, preserving the word of her Son, Jesus Christ, reveres St. Mary as:

- The abode for the Holy Spirit
- The Mother of God
- The Eternal Virgin
- The Holy of Holies

And since the Holy Bible attests to these honors of hers, and since Holy Angels and the sons of Adam revere her, the Church therefore honors, thanks, and implores in her name (Liturgy of Jacob of Serouh 99)

Our Lady, the Virgin St. Mary, departed on January 21 (Eth. Calen), aged 64, according to the tradition (Tewfit) that has been passed on from the Apostles. Angels carried her body to paradise and placed it under the plant of life in paradise.

Having thus been there in paradise till Nehase (August) 14 of that same year, angels carried and gave her body back to the Apostles and they laid it to rest at Gethsemani. On the third day of her burial, on the 16th of Nehase (August), she rose from the dead and her Assumption to heaven in glory took place. Thus is what the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church believes and teaches about the death, resurrection and Assumption of the Virgin St.

Mary. Nehase 16th (August) of every year is thus commemorated with great ceremony by the Church (Synaxrium, August 16<sup>th</sup>)