

# Knox Inter-Faith Network

THE COPTIC ORTHODOX FAITH  
Presented by Maher Megallaa  
At the  
3rd December 2007 Meeting  
Knox Civic Centre



St. Mark the Apostle and Evangelist

The presentation covers the following 5 topics: -

1. Why were Adam and Eve removed from God's presence and why did they receive death for the sake of a piece of fruit?
2. Why did God, the creator of the Heavens and the Earth, crucify Himself on behalf of mankind? Why He didn't sacrifice someone else instead?
3. What is the Holy Trinity as revealed in the Old and New Testaments?
4. Why was the Coptic Church the first Church to split from Western Churches regarding the nature of Christ?
5. What are the Seven Sacraments of the Coptic Church?

**FIRST TOPIC: Why were Adam and Eve removed from God's presence and received death for the sake of a piece of fruit?**

- Satan deceived Eve and she committed aggression against God.
- Adam disobeyed God by not listening to His warning [As God told Adam "you must not eat from the tree, and you must not touch it, or **ELSE YOU WILL DIE**" ([Genesis 3:3](#))]
- The sin against God is eternal and unlimited.
- They both deserved **condemnation and death** and a sacrifice would need to be offered to save them from their eternal punishment.

God created the heavens and the Earth before creating mankind. One of the heavenly archangels named Satanas [Gk] or Satanouel [Hebrew] who is now Satan wanted to make himself like the Most High ([Isaiah 14:14-15](#)) and as a result a war broke out in heaven between Archangel Michael and his angels who fought against Satan and his follower angels AND defeated them ([Revelation 12:7](#)). Unfortunately, Satan and his followers were thrown down to the Earth. This evil angel is powerful and is envious of God's creation of the human race. He managed to deceive Eve which led to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the presence of the Lord and they received death as punishment for their transgression.

**As God is eternal and unlimited, accordingly Adam's sin against Him is equally eternal and unlimited.**

**Adam's descendants lived with Satan and his evil followers. The Old Testament tells us that the first causality of this association was Abel, who was killed by his brother Cain (Genesis 4:8). God in His mercy sent Profits through the ages to the Israelites, including Moses, and provided them with the Ten Commandments and sat the Law for their guidance.**

## **SECOND TOPIC: Why God, the creator of the Heavens and the Earth, crucify Himself on behalf of the mankind? Why didn't He sacrifice someone else instead?**

For Adam and his descendants to be saved from the eternal punishment, a true sacrifice had to be offered to the Lord.

This Saviour/Deliverer of Mankind (Messiah) must be:

1. A descendant of Adam, but without Adam's inherited sin.
2. Has no sins in him and makes no sins.
3. Prepared and is willing to offer Himself as a sacrifice for mankind.
4. Is capable to concur death which was brought to the world by Eve's transgression and Adam's disobedience. That is, as death came to the world by one man, salvation and reunion with God in an eternal life has to come from the resurrection of the New Adam and by His lifting of us with Him to the heavens.
5. Capable to release the souls of righteous people who died before the conciliation and were waiting in Sheol (Pit/Hades) and be able to take them to Paradise before moving to the Kingdom of Heaven after judgment.

In conclusion the Saviour:

- Can't be an angel for obvious reasons (angles have nothing to do with Adam's sin and are of different nature).
  - Can't be a descendant of Adam because we are all born with Adam's sin.
  - Animal sacrifice is limited to clean the sin of the offering person (as was case in the Old Testament) but not for the entire human race. An animal sacrifice does not meet the above mentioned 5 requirements.
- **FOR US TO BE REUNITED WITH GOD, SALVATION MUST COME FROM HIM.**
  - **THIS ONLY HAPPENS IF AND ONLY IF HE IS ETERNALLY MEEK AND HUMBLE.**

This leads us to look into the nature of the Holy Trinity.

## **THIRD TOPIC: What Is the Holy Trinity?**

- ✓ The Holy Trinity "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" are the "CHARACTER/ENTITY of the ONE GOD" and "are not three Gods in One" as explicitly explained in the Bible.
- ✓ If we observe a candle, it has flame and light. The heat and shine are of two different characters but are inseparable. And for the candle to have a life, it should have a sprit in it.
- ✓ Similarly, when we say the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit they are the entity of ONE GOD.
- ✓ As with other Christians, the Copts believe: The Holy Spirit is the "Life," of the "Father" who is inseparable from his "Son" and the three entities are not separate, nor has one existed before the others. They are like the fire which has light and heat at the same time.
- ✓ We simply believe in One God who is "the rational Being: one essence and eternally MEEK and HUMBLE".

### NATURE OF GOD AS REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

I am citing 3 parts from the Old Testament which will lead to the understanding of the nature of God.

a) After Adam and Eve eat from the tree in the Garden of Eden

Genesis 3:8-27

**"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, AND THEY HID FROM THE LORD GOD AMONG THE TREES OF THE GARDEN. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "WHERE ARE YOU?" The man replied, "I heard you moving about in the garden, and I was afraid because I WAS NAKED"**

When God was moving around in the Garden [the SON!!!], Adam heard him and was shamed from God to see they were naked.

(3<sup>rd</sup> topic cont.)

b) When God started the conciliation process with the Israelites, He appeared to Moses in the bushes at the top of Mt Sinai:

Exodus 3: 2-6

“The angel of the Lord appeared to him (‘Moses’) in a FLAME OF FIRE FROM WITHIN A BUSH. He looked -- and the bush was ablaze with fire, but it was not being consumed! So Moses thought, “I will turn aside to see this amazing sight. Why does the bush not burn up?” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, GOD CALLED TO HIM FROM WITHIN THE BUSH AND SAID, “MOSES, MOSES!” AND MOSES SAID, “HERE I AM.”, GOD SAID, “DO NOT APPROACH ANY CLOSER! TAKE YOUR SANDALS OFF YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND.” HE ADDED, “I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHER, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB.” THEN MOSES HID HIS FACE, BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID TO LOOK AT GOD.” [the SON!!!]

c) When Moses was eager to see the Lord at the top of Mt Sinai

Exodus 33: 19-23

MOSES SAID, “SHOW ME YOUR GLORY.” AND THE LORD SAID, “I WILL MAKE ALL MY GOODNESS PASS BEFORE YOUR FACE, -----.” BUT HE ADDED, “YOU CANNOT SEE MY FACE, FOR NO ONE CAN SEE ME AND LIVE.” ----- I WILL PUT YOU IN A CLEFT IN THE ROCK AND WILL COVER YOU WITH MY HAND WHILE I PASS BY. THEN I WILL TAKE AWAY MY HAND, AND YOU WILL SEE MY BACK, BUT MY FACE MUST NOT BE SEEN.” [the FATHER!!!]

From this we can conclude:

- The **UNLIMITED AND ETERNAL LORD** placed Himself in the bush in the ground, **SO HE IS HUMBLE**
- The Lord appeared as a light or flame in the bush [**LIGHT OF THE WORLD**]
- The Lord spoke with Adam and Moses [**WORD OF GOD**]
- If the Lord placed Himself in the bush in the ground, why not **incarnate in the womb of St Mary**.

There is only one God with different entities:

- God the Father who **with the Son** created and controlled the galaxies with their stars, suns and planets. **The Father must have a horrendously fiery nature (personal opinion) and for this reason the angels cover their faces with their wings to avoid seeing His glory.**
- God the Son of Man = **the Light of the World** = **the Son of God** = **Emmanuel (God with us)** = **the Messiah (the saviour)** = **the Logos (wisdom of God)** = **the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- He is the Son **whom Adam used to see in the Garden of Eden**, the flame of the fire **whom Moses saw in the bush**, the same as **the Lord Jesus Christ** who incarnated in the womb of St Mary.
- **The three entities never separated at the top of Mt Sinai, or in the womb of St Mary or in the Garden of Eden.**

(3<sup>rd</sup> topic cont.)

THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT APPEARED TOGETHER [BAPTISM]

Matthew 3:16-17

“After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the HEAVENS OPENED and he saw the SPIRIT OF GOD descending LIKE A DOVE and coming on him.” And a voice from heaven said, “This is my ONE DEAR SON; in him I take great delight”

THE FATHER & THE SON APPEARED TOGETHER [TRANSFIGURATION]

Mark 9:2-7

“Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John and led them alone up a high mountain privately. And he WAS TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM, AND HIS CLOTHES BECAME RADIANTLY WHITE, more so than any launderer in the world could bleach them.” Then Elijah appeared before them along with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. So Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (For they were afraid, and he did not know what to say). THEN A CLOUD OVERSHADOWED THEM, AND A VOICE CAME FROM THE CLOUD, “THIS IS MY ONE DEAR SON. LISTEN TO HIM!”

WAS CONCILIATION COMPLETED?

YES

WHY?

**1<sup>st</sup> REQUIREMENT**

A DESCENDANT OF ADAM BUT WITHOUT ADAM’S INHERITED SIN

Isaiah’s (7:1)

Prophecy of Isaiah 700 years before Christ:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: **BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL** (God-With-Us)”.

Luke 1:27-35

“the angel GABRIEL was SENT BY GOD to a VIRGIN ENGAGED to a man whose name was JOSEPH, a descendant of David, and the virgin’s NAME WAS MARY.” The angel came to her and said, “Greetings, favoured one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled by his words and began to wonder about the meaning of this greeting. So the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God! LISTEN: YOU WILL BECOME PREGNANT AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND YOU WILL NAME HIM JESUS. He will be great, and will BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, AND HIS KINGDOM WILL NEVER END.” MARY SAID TO THE ANGEL, “HOW WILL THIS BE, SINCE I HAVE NOT HAD SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A MAN?” THE ANGEL REPLIED, “THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU, AND THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL OVERSHADOW YOU. THEREFORE THE CHILD TO BE BORN WILL BE HOLY; HE WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD.”

(من مدائح شهر كيهك المبارك)

THE FIERY BUSH. أعليقة التي رآها.

\*\*\* REFRAIN. \*\*\*

+THE FIERY BUSH THAT MOSES;HAD SEEN IN THE DESERT BURNED WITH FIRE;AND THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED.

2-Likewise the Mother of Light;Carried the Divine Embers.  
Nine months in her womb;with a perpetual virginity.

3-I open my lips and speak;About the hidden mysteries.  
To honour Mary, Mother of Light; Blessed Ye best of humanity.

(3<sup>rd</sup> topic cont.)

## **2<sup>ND</sup> REQUIREMENT**

### THE SON HAS NO SIN IN HIM

John [8:46]

“Who among you **CAN PROVE ME GUILTY OF ANY SIN?** If I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me?”

## **3<sup>RD</sup> & 4<sup>TH</sup> REQUIREMENTS**

### THE SON IS WILLING TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF & CAPABLE TO CONCUR DEATH

John [10:17-18]

“**For This Reason The Father Loves Me**, BECAUSE I LAY DOWN MY LIFE THAT I MAY TAKE IT UP AGAIN. NO ONE TAKES IT FROM ME, BUT I LAY IT DOWN OF MY OWN ACCORD. I HAVE AUTHORITY TO LAY IT DOWN, AND I HAVE AUTHORITY TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN. **This Charge I Have Received** FROM MY FATHER.”

## **5<sup>TH</sup> REQUIREMENT**

### CAPABLE TO RELEASE THE SOUL OF THE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE WHO DIED BEFORE THE CONCILIATION AND WERE WAITING IN SHEOL (PIT/HADES)

David's prophesy 800 years before Christ:

Psalms 7:10

“You will not abandon me to **Sheol**; you will not allow **your faithful follower** to see **the Pit**”.

Psalms 107:20

“He sent them an assuring **Word** and healed them; **he rescued them from the pits where they were trapped**”.

Act 2:27

“because you will not **leave my soul in Hades**, nor **permit your Holy One to experience corruption**”.

(3<sup>rd</sup> topic cont.)

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE SON AS REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

i) THE SON AND THE FATHER ARE ONE.”

John 12:44-50

And Jesus Cried Out And Said, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME, BELIEVES NOT IN ME BUT IN THE FATHER WHO SENT ME. AND WHOEVER SEES ME SEES HIM WHO SENT ME. I HAVE COME INTO THE WORLD AS LIGHT, so that whoever believes in me MAY NOT REMAIN IN DARKNESS.”

John 14:11

‘BELIEVE ME THAT I AM IN THE FATHER, AND THE FATHER IS IN ME, But If You Do Not Believe Me, Believe Because of the Miraculous Deeds themselves’.

John 8:16

‘But if I judge, my evaluation is accurate, because I AM NOT ALONE WHEN I JUDGE, BUT I AND THE FATHER WHO SENT ME DO SO TOGETHER’

ii) THE SON IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with GOD, and the WORD was fully GOD. The WORD was with GOD in the beginning. All things were created by Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. In Him was LIFE, and the LIFE was the LIGHT OF MANKIND. And the LIGHT shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

iii) THE SON OF MAN HAS THE POWER OF CREATION

John 9:1-7

“Now as Jesus was passing by, he SAW A MAN WHO HAD BEEN BLIND FROM BIRTH -----HE SPAT ON THE GROUND AND MADE SOME MUD WITH THE SALIVA. HE SMEARED THE MUD ON THE BLIND MAN’S EYES” and said to him, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam” ---SO THE BLIND MAN went away and washed, AND CAME BACK SEEING”

iv) THE SON OF MAN HAS THE POWER AND AUTHORITY TO RAISE THE DEAD [LAZARUS]

Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-10

“But some of them said, “This is the man who caused the blind man to see! Couldn’t he have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?”

Jesus, intensely moved again, came to the tomb. ---- Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, replied, “Lord, by this time THE BODY WILL HAVE A BAD SMELL, BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN BURIED FOUR DAYS.” Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believe, you would see the GLORY OF GOD?” So they took away the stone. JESUS LOOKED UPWARD AND SAID, “FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE LISTENED TO ME. I knew that you always listen to me, but I said this for the sake of the crowd standing around here, THAT THEY MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME.” WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS, HE SHOUTED IN A LOUD VOICE, “LAZARUS, COME OUT!” THE ONE WHO HAD DIED CAME OUT, his feet and hands tied up with strips of cloth, and a cloth wrapped around his face. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

**FOURTH TOPIC: Why was the Coptic Church the first Church to split from Western Churches regarding the nature of Christ?**

- The Copts refused to follow the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), which defined the person of Jesus Christ as being "ONE IN TWO NATURES."
- The doctrine of "TWO NATURES" appeared to us to imply the existence of TWO CHRISTS, DIVINE AND HUMAN, and was therefore tainted with Nestorianism.
- We upheld the terminology of St. Cyril, who had spoken of "ONE INCARNATE NATURE OF GOD THE WORD". The Egyptian Coptic Christians' rejection of the Council of Chalcedona – accepted both in Constantinople and in Rome.
- Because some minority in Egypt was supported by Byzantine imperial authorities, the Copts developed national and cultural animosity against the Byzantine Empire. This hostility facilitated the conquest of Egypt by the Arab Muslims in the 7th century.

## **FIFTH TOPIC: What are the Seven Sacraments of the Coptic Church?**

A sacrament is an invisible grace given under a material sign and administered by a canonical priest. We believe in **Seven Sacraments**. We call them the “**Means of Salvation**” or the “**Means of Grace**”. They are actions through which the believer is made part of, and to grow on, the Lord. We obtain salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Salvation is a road that must be walked by the believer to the end. To us, salvation is only reached after a life long strife and struggle. Faith, Repentance and Baptism are the gates to Salvation.

In the **Sacrament of Baptism** (**Romans 6:34**), we wash away the original sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are buried and raised with Him, receive a new life and become “children of God” (I John 3:2).

Coming out of the holy baptismal water, we receive the Holy Spirit through the **Sacrament of Confirmation or Chrismation** and become “**temples of the Holy Spirit**” (**I Corinthians 6:19**). This sacrament was originally officiated by the laying of the Bishops hands (**Acts 19:2-7, Hebrews 6:2**). But now, our Church uses the holy oil. This holy oil, called the **Meyroun**, was first made by the Apostles of the spices and ointments that were prepared by the women for the Holy Body of the Lord after His burial (**Luke 23:56, 24:1**). Since then, new spices and ointments, with the same proportions, are added to the original Meyroun before it is depleted. This is done by the Pope and many Bishops in a great ceremony with special prayers, and distributed to all the priests of the Coptic churches in Egypt and elsewhere.

Yet, the “New Life” as children of God requires constant nourishment and continuous growth. It is not easy. We are to “**enter by the narrow gate**” (**Matthew 7:13-14**). We are to guard against the old self and its natural vulnerability to sin (**Romans 6:19**). A Christian is susceptible to committing mistakes; **so there must be a way available to him/her to be continuously cleansed and restored to full communion with Christ**. Like Peter, in the day of the Last Supper, a Christian has to offer his dirty feet to the Church, which it washes and dries. If we refrain from doing this we lose our position with the Lord; just like Jesus told Peter in that same day, “**If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me**” (**John 13:8**). But, “**if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**” (**I John 1:9**). The **Sacrament of Penance and Confession** is diligently practiced by the Coptic people “**with fear and trembling**” (**Philip 2:12**).

Coupled with penance and confession, the **Sacrament of the Eucharist or Communion** is reverently and continuously practiced by us for the “remission of sins” (**Matthew 26:26-28**). “**He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him**” (**John 6:56**). The Church allows children to partake of the Holy Communion since baptism. As members of the Body of Christ, children must continue to be nourished on the heavenly bread and can not be spiritually starved.

The **Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick** (**James 5:14-15**) has a clear place in the life of our Coptic Church. Whenever a believer is sick, he may ask to be anointed. The Unction of the sick is not reserved only for those who are at the point of death.

Unlike the five sacraments explained above, the last two may not necessarily be practiced by all Christians, but are life-long covenants. Those who are blessed with the **Sacrament of Priesthood** (**Matthew 28:18-20**) **never retire from it**. The **Sacrament of Marriage** (**Ephesians 5:31-32**) is not a contractual agreement but rather a union in Christ “**What God has joined together let not man separate**” (**Matthew 19:6**)”.