



ANDY LEARNS
THE
IMPORTANCE OF THE
CHURCH



Prepared by
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I WANT TO SEE HEAVEN!

Every believer is eager to see heaven. Therefore, I wrote my book, “**Church, House of God,**” for the Church is an icon of heaven.

Mariam and Martha Zaki rewrote this book to our kids in an attractive shape, so that our kids can enjoy heaven itself when they are in the church.

I hope that many of our blessed youth be involved in writing to our kids in a attractive way to help them have the experience of heavenly life.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

June 2000

The Feast of the Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt

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SOUTH BRUNSWICK, NJ 08831

Printed by: American Pack
Cairo - Egypt +202 22801119
US Branch +1 973 323 2666.

Deposit No.: 2012/15947





1-CHURCH, HOUSE OF GOD

Can't I just pray here In the house? "Andy, Andy!" said Dad.

"Wake up, we are going to be late for church!"

"Just five more minutes," replied Andy.

"No, come on Andy. Let's go."

"Okay but why do I have to go? I'm tired. **Can't I just pray here in the house?**"

"Of course we can pray at home, but it is important that we go to the church as well," said Dad. "After all, the Church is the House of God. Tell you what, after the Liturgy¹, we can sit with Abouna² and he can explain the importance of the Church."



So Andy quickly got out of bed and jumped into the shower. He brushed his teeth and combed his hair, and then put on his suit.

The family was already in the car waiting for Andy. They drove off and

arrived at the church.

Andy sat next to his Dad, and his sister Sally sat with her Mom. Everyone attended the Liturgy and took communion.

Afterwards, Andy's Dad went up to Abouna and kissed his hand.

"Good morning, Abouna!" greeted his Dad.

"Hello my son. How are you? How is the family?" asked Abouna.

"We are all well, but we have a question that we hope you can answer," said Dad.

"Come let us go sit in the church hall," said Abouna.

Andy and his Dad went and got his Mom and Sally, and they all went and sat with Abouna.

1. The original Greek word was used to express a public work of any kind. Now the word is used for all church worship, especially the Eucharist (the Mass) as a public worship.

2. Father (Priest).

THE BUILDING



"Abouna, can you please explain why the Church is so important?" asked Dad.

"We all know that the church is called the House of God, the House of Prayer, and the House of Angels.

There are seven steps through history that have led to the "House of God."

These seven steps are:

1. The Garden of Eden.
2. The Altar.
3. Bethel.
4. The Tabernacle.
5. The Temple.
6. Church of the New Testament.
7. The Heaven.



1. In the first step, Adam lived in the Garden of Eden as a priest in the house of God. Each inch in this garden showed God's love and care for him. He would feel God's presence around him all the time, hear the sound of the Lord walking in the garden (Genesis 3:8) and talk to Him. Truly, the Garden of Eden with all its space was the holy "House of God," in which God planned to meet man



without the need of a sanctuary³, altar⁴, offering, or incense. But of course, as we all know, Adam's and Eve's disobedience led them to be out of the Garden of Eden and destroyed their relation with God."

3. The section at the commencement of the church.

4. A cubical table placed in the midSt. of the sanctuary on which the Holy Sacrifice is offered (the Lord's Body and Blood).



“Abouna, can you tell me what the altar is?” Sally asked.

“Well, Sally, the second step is the Altar, which is a Hebrew word, and in Arabic

“mazbeh,” it means the place where sacrifices are offered. The story of Genesis (22:9) where Isaac was laid on the altar to be sacrificed and burned is an example of how this meeting with God was made possible through an offering a sacrifice.



Elijah the Prophet built an altar of twelve stones (1 Kings 18:30), copying the Sinai tradition when Moses did the same thing (Exodus 24:4).

Each stone represents a tribe, as if God’s altar comes from the combined effort of the whole people through the sacrifice of reconciliation.”

“**What do you mean by the sacrifice of reconciliation?**” asked Andy.

“God wants us all to be very close to Him as well as with each other,” answered Abouna.

“So it’s kind of like how we pray at home by ourselves and how we pray at the church all together!” exclaimed Andy.

“Yes, that is a very good example Andy!” Abouna continued, “**Bethel, the third step, comes from the story of Jacob. Do you know Jacob’s story?**”



“Yes, I know Abouna.”

“Okay. Tell us Andy.”

“Jacob ran away from his brother Esau. On his way, lonely, worried and with nothing to look forward to, he rested his head on a stone and dreamed.

There was a ladder, set up on earth and the top of it reached heaven. The angels of God were going

up and down on it. The Lord stood above it and said, ‘I am with you’ (Genesis 28:12-15). Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “**Surely the Lord is in this place! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven!**” Early in the morning, Jacob rose and took the stone that he had put under his head setting it up for a pillar (column). He poured oil on the top of it and called the place **Bethel** or the ‘**House of God**.’”



“Very good, Andy,” said Abouna proudly. “So who remembers the steps we have gone through so far?”

“I can tell you, Abouna. First is the Garden of Eden, second is the Altar, and third is Bethel,” answered Sally.

“Good job, Sally. Now that leads us to **the fourth step, which is the Tabernacle.**

Did you know that it was God Himself that designed and named the Tabernacle?”

“Excuse me, Abouna, **what is the Tabernacle?**” asked Andy.

“The Tabernacle is the ‘House of God’ built by Moses with God’s instructions as His people were on their way to the Promised Land. It was **the first church**; it was in **the form of a tent**. Since they were traveling a lot, the tent was pitched wherever they camped. The tent was designed exactly as God had said. Its name, shape, design, contents, and rites were all chosen by God. Moses was told, ‘**See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mountain**’ (Hebrew 8:5; Exodus 25:9),” answered Abouna.



“Abouna, **what does rites mean?**” asked Sally.

“Well Sally, the word ‘rite’ means a “church order” of church services. Rituals should be practiced in spirituality.

Just as Moses was instructed by God on how to build the tabernacle, the king Solomon was instructed by God to build the Temple. So the **fifth step is...** “**The Temple!**” shouted Andy and Sally.





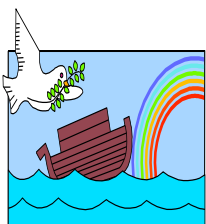
“Right. The Temple was a larger tabernacle. The word “**Temple**,” in Hebrew as well as in Arabic “Hekal”, is taken from the “Ekalu⁵” language, which means the ‘**great house**.’ This was another word for a palace, and of course God would be the King of this palace,” explained Abouna.



The sixth step is the Church of the New Testament, which is the church that you know now. The Church is not only a building, but is ‘Christ’s body’ (1 Corinthians 12:27). This new temple allows us to be a member of His Body. As St. Paul says, ‘Whereas the man who unites himself to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?’ (1 Corinthians 6: 17-19). It is through the church that we all become one body in Christ with Him as the Head.



“So now you know the history of the Church building here in this world, which began as a search for meeting with God to become close to Him. These steps attract us to attain the last step, i.e., **the eternal Church, which is heaven**. So let us review the steps together,” said Abouna.



“First is the Garden of Eden, second is the Altar, third is Bethel, fourth is the Tabernacle, fifth is the Temple, sixth is the Church of the New Testament, and at last we will attain the Church of heaven!” exclaimed Andy and Sally.

5. The ‘Ekalu is a Semitic language that was used to large from approximately the 28th Century before Christ until the first century.



2- ANDY LEARNS ABOUT THE HEAVENLY CHURCH



“Hi Tasoni!” cried out Sally as she put her hands around her and gave her a hug.

“Hello Sally. Hi Andy,” exclaimed Tasoni, “What are you all doing here?”

“Abouna is explaining to us the importance of the church,” said Andy.

“Yes, and now that we know the importance of the church building, we can go on to discuss the church life,” said Abouna. “Would you like to tell us about the church life, Tasoni?” asked Abouna.

“No thank you, Abouna. Please continue, I would like to listen and learn with everyone,” replied Tasoni.

“Very well. Let me first start by reminding everyone that in the Church, the House of God, **we all come together to be with Him**. The church building is like a heavenly place on earth, where **we can all be close to God together**.



“All of us together make up a community. The church community can be called the church building, and the church building can be called the church community. The church building and the people come together to complete this heavenly church.”

6. Coptic | word means “My sister.”



“What makes the church heavenly?” asked Andy.

“You see Andy, the Holy Spirit turns the church building from just an average building into a heavenly building, and the church is what brings the heavenly to the earthly. The church is the one place that people can go and feel as if they are in heaven with God.



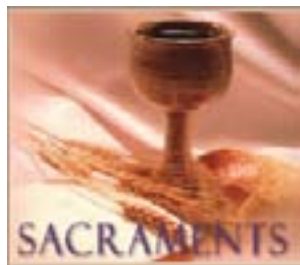
“The church is a place that sinners can go to for help. There they can find peace, comfort, and forgiveness. Through the Holy Spirit, sinners are guided to correct their mistakes and return to God.”



“The Holy Spirit is very important. While the church is being built, the Holy Spirit guides and fills the hearts of the builders as well, because they are not just putting stones together, but they are participating in something holy.”

“The Holy Spirit does a lot of work!” exclaimed Andy.

“Yes, it does,” Abouna continued, “Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit during the Liturgy (Mass), the Church offers her love to God through her unity with Jesus Christ.



“Did you know that there are several types of Liturgies: Liturgy of the Eucharist, Liturgy of Baptism, Liturgy of Marriage, and Liturgy of Blessing water.”

“The church building is designed so that liturgical services can be done with no difficulty, so that people feel that this is truly a house of worship.”



3- ANDY ASKS: WHEN DID THE CHURCH BUILDINGS START?

“Abouna, I have a question,” said Andy.

“What is your question, Andy?” asked Abouna.

“Why don’t we still pray in the Temple?” asked Andy.



“After Christ had risen, the disciples continued to pray in the Temple, following all the laws of the synagogues, just like the Lord Jesus Himself did,” answered Abouna.

“What’s a synagogue?” asked Sally

“It is a congregation of Jews for worship or religious study. The word

synagogue comes from the Greek *sunagoge* which means a leading or bringing together. It refers to any assembly or gathering of people for secular or religious purposes,” answered Abouna.

“The disciples started to practice the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. **They would pray in the upper-room of a house** that was the largest and was not used very much. Meetings took place to study the word of God, practice sacramental worships, and talk about spiritual issues.”





“In many cases, wealthy Christians left their upper-rooms for the use of the Christian community only, and often they felt that **once a building was used for such sacred purposes, it should**



no longer return to worldly uses. Many houses were entirely given to the church, where its main room was used as a church and the rest of it as a living place for the Bishop or priests.

“Wow, that was very nice of those people,” said Sally.

“They were very generous,” added Andy.

“As time went on, places were built especially for worship and prayer. And as the number of Christians grew so did the size of the buildings.



4- ANDY ASKS: ***What IS THE FIRST CHURCH BUILDING IN ALEXANDRIA?***

“Egypt was very important in the history of the church. Alexandria, which was once the capital of Egypt, was one of the most famous cities of the Roman Empire. It had a Theological School, which attracted many people,” stated Abouna.



“**What is a Theological School?**” asked Sally.

“Do you know what a Theological School is, Andy?” wondered Abouna.

“Yes, I do. It is a place where people study religion,” replied Andy.

“Very good! Egypt was also the place where the monastic movement began. With all its types and forms it spread in no time to both the East and the West. **The angelic life of the simple Egyptian monks attracted many philosophers and royal members.**”

“Unfortunately, Church buildings in Egypt were demolished, destroyed and burned, sometimes by pagans and at other times by rulers such as the Romans, Melickens⁷, Mamelukes, and Turks. Not a single church in all of Alexandria could be connected to the first three centuries. Even the ancient churches of Old Cairo, and other monuments of Upper and Lower Egypt are known to be built sometime after the third century. However, architects show

7. After the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the emperors or the kings (Melouk) of Constantinople appointed bishops to rule the Church of Alexandria, and the Copts refused them. Those who followed them were called Melickens, i.e. the followers of the kings.



that Egypt must have had a good collection of large and valuable churches.”



“Does anyone know who Ananius is?” asked Abouna.

“Isn’t he the man that St. Mark, the apostle and evangelist converted to Christianity?” asked Sally.

“Yes, he was fixing St. Mark’s sandal in Alexandria, when he pricked his finger and said, “Oh, One God”. St. Mark asked Ananius if he knew about the God that he was calling for. So, St. Mark began to tell him about God and then he believed and became a Christian,” explained Andy.

“Ananius was the very first person to be converted to Christianity. His little house in Alexandria became the first house-church in Egypt, where meetings of the Christians were held.”



5- SALLY SAYS:

We pray toward the east

“Why does everything in the church have to be so neat, so orderly?” asked Andy.

“Andy, God likes everything to be organized; He does not like to see chaos or disorder. God likes discipline and hates disorder. That is why when we worship Him, whether at the church or at home, we are expected to observe order and discipline.

“Sally, do you know which way we pray?” Abouna asked.

“We pray toward the east,” answered Sally.



“Did you know that in the Old Testament everyone would pray towards the Temple of Jerusalem as the place of the ‘Presence of God’? Now we pray towards the east. God has always instructed that we pray in one direction. That is an example of the organization that God likes.”

“The church is always built pointing east. Crosses are placed towards the east to let people know that that is the direction in which they should pray. Do you know the story of St. John, the son of Zebedee?” asked Abouna.

“No,” answered the children.



“St. John the son of Zebedee took a cross of wood and placed it towards the east and knelt to pray. He converted a multitude of people with just a prayer towards the east. The people turned their backs to the west and fell down on their faces before the cross to the east. They were weeping and saying: We worship



You, Son of God, who was suspended on the Tree.”“During the Liturgy of Baptism, the person being baptized must. first look west, then turn east, symbolizing leaving evil and confess his or her belief in the Holy Trinity.”



“We not only pray towards the east at church, but should also face east when we pray at home by ourselves,” explained Abouna.

“Abouna,” asked Andy, “**Why do we pray towards the east?**”



“There are many reasons for facing east. One reason is that we call Christ ‘the East’ (Zechariah 6:12), and **the Sun of Righteousness** and Justice who shines continuously upon us to destroy darkness (Malachi 4:2). When we face east we face the Lord and give our backs to the darkness of sin.



“Another reason is that **the Garden of Eden is planted in the east** (Genesis 2:8). The Garden of Eden is our ancient homeland, the place that we seek. The Garden of Eden is our country,” explained Abouna.



“Just like the Temple in Jerusalem was the holy country,” exclaimed Andy.

“Exactly. A third reason that we face east is that **Jesus ascended from the east and will come again from the east** (Acts 1:11).

“Not only do we face east when we pray, but traditionally **the church has people buried facing east**, looking out for our Savior to come on the Day of Judgment.

“When St. Mary was dying, it is said that she turned to the east and prayed and then lay down, still facing eastward.”



6- The First Cruise in the world

“Yesterday I was walking by the church with my friend Sam and we were talking about how beautiful the church building is. Then my friend said that our church looks like a ship. While we were thinking about why it looked like a ship, we saw a bride and groom entering the church with Abouna. Sam said, ‘**Look Andy, the couple looks like they are getting married on a cruise ship**,’ Andy said.



“Do you know who was the couple who enjoyed the first cruise in the whole world?” asked Abouna. He added, **“It was a unique couple, Noah and his family as a bride and the Lord as the Heavenly Groom.**

The Lord accompanied them in the Ark as a unique and very delightful cruise to enjoy an aquatic trip around the world. He passed with them to a new world.” (Genesis 6-9)

“You and your friend are right to think that the church looks like a ship because it was built in the shape of a ship,” answered Abouna.

“Does anyone know how many different shapes the church can be built with?” asked Abouna.

“Two,” answered Sally.

“You’re close,” said Abouna. “Would you like to take a guess Andy?”

“Three?” guessed Andy.

“Yes, there are three designs for the shape of the church building. Does anyone know what they are?” questioned Abouna.

“No,” answered the children.



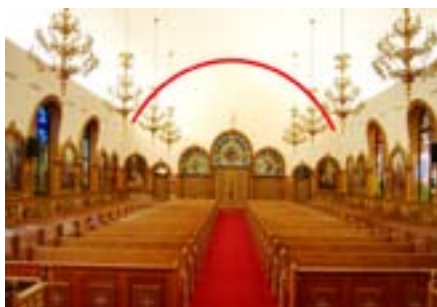
“The three different designs for the shape of the church are the cruciform, the circle and the ship.



The first design, **the cruciform**, represents the Crucified Body of Christ. It was very common in the Byzantine style and was never brought to the ancient Coptic Churches.

Coptic builders were never interested in it and perhaps they never knew about it at all. Today the Copts have few churches with the cruciform design.

The second design, **the circle**, refers to the eternal nature of the church, as being an endless line (without beginning and without end). She bears the nature of God. This form is also very rare in Coptic architecture.



The third design, **the ship**, is the most common in the Coptic churches. This comes from the famous story about the Ark of Noah in the Old Testament,” said Abouna.

Just like the Ark saved Noah and his family and all the animals and birds that came to live inside it, the Church also saves all the people who come to live in it.

The Ark saved Noah, his family, the birds and the animals from dying in the flood. The Church also saves her people from dying because of their sins.

“Through the Ark, Noah and his family attained the renewed world and through the Church, we will attain the new world, heaven itself,” explained Abouna.



7- Andy discovers

THE SANCTUARY AND THE ALTER

“Last Sunday before the holy liturgy started, my Mom asked me to give a piece of paper with the name of someone who was sick to the deacon. The deacon serving in the sanctuary took it. He did not just go from the front of the sanctuary but he went around it through the side. He put it on the altar, and asked Abouna to pray for him.



I asked my Mom, **‘Why is there a special order that the deacons must follow when entering the sanctuary?’** She answered ‘Ask Abouna.’” Andy related

At the end of the liturgy, Andy asked the same question to Abouna.

Abouna answered, “Remember that every detail about the church has an explanation behind it, just like we talked about before. The two main parts of the inside of the church are **the sanctuary and the altar.**”

“What is the importance of the sanctuary and the altar?” asked Sally.

“Well, **the Sanctuary represents heaven itself or God’s throne among His heavenly creatures and saints.**

The Sanctuary can sometimes be called “altar.” The sanctuary represents heaven **and the altar represents the Cross.** Without the Cross, it would not be possible to know heaven so we need both the altar (**the Cross**) and the Sanctuary (**heaven**).

Behind the altar is the **‘tribune’** on which the bishop sits and occupies his **‘throne’** (**cathedra**), and around him the priests



practice their worship and preaching. For this reason the Sanctuary is also referred to by some as “*presbyterum*,” the place reserved for presbyters (clergy).

On the top of the tribune lies the *niche*, which **represents God’s bosom**, which embraces the whole world through the altar and the priestly ministry.

We will discuss the tribune, throne, and niche later.

Because the sanctuary is so holy, there are several rules that must be followed. Can anyone tell me one of them?” asked Abouna.

“**We have to take off our shoes before we go in,**” answered Sally.



“**Not everyone can enter the sanctuary, only the bishop, priests, and deacons who celebrate the liturgy,**” Andy also responded.

“**And they cannot talk while they are in the sanctuary!**” exclaimed Sally.

“Very good children. Since Christ is the ultimate sacrifice, why do we still need an altar?” asked Abouna.

The children shrugged.

“Isaiah the prophet foretold us about an altar that would be built in Egypt (Isa. 19:19). It cannot be a Jewish altar, but a Christian one. The Lord Himself spoke about the altar in the New Testament when He stated, ‘If you offer your oblations on the altar..’ (Matt. 5: 24),” said Abouna.

“Abouna, what is the altar made of?” questioned Sally.

“Well, at first the altars were generally **made of wood**. This is because Christ Himself celebrated the Last Super on a wooden



table. Also, the Cross, on which the Body of Christ was hung, was made of timber, and so is the Tree of Life that brings forth heavenly fruit. Wooden altars could easily be moved from one place to another during periods of persecution.

Altars were also **made of stone**. The first stone altars were made of stone slabs, which covered the relics of Martyrs and formed part of their tombs.

When Christianity was declared as the official religion of the Roman Empire, it became natural that more expensive materials were used for making altars, **so they made metallic altars,** explained Abouna.

“What is our altar in this church made of?” asked Andy.

“Well Andy, the altar of this church is **made of marble**. Most Coptic altars are made of stones, marble, or bricks. There are some exceptions. For example, in the new Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo, **a bronze altar** is in use, which was presented to our church by the Russian church,” answered Abouna.



“**Coptic altars are in the shape of a cube**, which resembles the Tomb of the Lord. They are never attached to a wall and stand clear in the middle of the sanctuary. They must also be hollow so that relics of saints can be kept inside or beneath it.

Nowadays, we tend to keep these relics in a container next to the icon of the saints to allow the people to kiss it and receive their blessings. On the eastern side next to the altar there is a small opening showing an interior opening or hollow space, which was



used during persecution to hide the Holy Gifts when necessary,” added Abouna.

“Wow, everything does have a purpose and reason behind it,” exclaimed Sally.

“Yes, the Coptic Church is very well thought-out. Another planned design is the set-up of the church. The choir is usually raised three steps above the rest of the nave, while the sanctuary is often raised one step above the choir. Yet the altar is never raised above the sanctuary, but is fitted directly on its ground, as directed by the divine commandment (Exodus 20:26). Exceptions to this were found in the desert churches, where the altar is constructed on a step or a platform above the floor of the Sanctuary. The thinking behind this rule seems to be that **the gates of heaven are opened before the presbyter upon his entry to the sanctuary**. That’s why there is no need to climb on a platform to offer the Sacrifice for fear that he should fall into self-pride, counting himself above his spiritual brothers and children.

Coptic altars have no form of engravings, even shapes of the cross, following the divine commandment that the use of tools in the formation of the altar will pollute it (Exodus 20:25). All important ornaments are in the Canopy that surrounds the altar,” explained Abouna.

“How come we can have more than one altar?” asked Andy.



“In the beginning of Christianity there was one altar for every church, since every city had one Christian community led by

one bishop, and helped by a number of priests and deacons. Only



the bishop could celebrate liturgies, and since a bishop could not conduct two liturgies in a single day only one altar was needed.

Because of the huge growth in the number of Christians, priests were given the authority to celebrate the Eucharist, so multiple altars began to appear. Although we have multiple altars in our church, we believe in one altar, the One Tomb that contains the One Body of Christ. Just like our belief in the One Church, even though there are many church buildings, and the One Sacrifice that is offered at more than one place at the same time,” answered Abouna.



“Oh, now I understand,” said Andy. “But how does it become an altar?”

The consecration of the altar by prayers, readings from the Holy Bible and Chrism is normally done as a part of dedicating the whole

Church. It involves a long service, which begins at sunset and ends by the Liturgy of the Eucharist on the following morning. A bishop conducts the service.

At present, in the Coptic Church, the Liturgy of the Eucharist can be temporarily held on an unconsecrated altar as long as a **consecrated altar-board is placed upon it**.

Another important detail about the altar is **the altar covering**. It represents the linen cloth of the Lord’s burial. The covering is useful in case the chalice is spilled; the Holy Blood is absorbed by the cloth instead of falling on the floor. **An altar must not be left without coverings**, which often consist of three layers:

The first cloth covers the altar completely from all sides, and is decorated with four crosses, one at each corner, or just a big cross in the center.



A **white linen cover** is placed on top, which hangs only about 15 cm. from the altar surface.



The third layer is used only during the celebration of the Liturgy of Eucharist to cover the Holy Gifts, and is called '**Prospharine**' which comes from the Greek word '**prosphora**', which means 'oblation.' It represents the stone that the angel rolled away from the tomb of Christ. After the **Prayer of Reconciliation**, the priest and the deacon lift it up from its place and shake it so that the little ringlets attached to its edges produce audible sounds. It resembles the earthquake that took place during the resurrection of Christ," explained Abouna.

"Why is the cloth always white?" asked Sally.



"Well the white linen represents purity, but red cotton velvet is sometimes used for the first covering," said Abouna.

"The altar has been kept holy ever since the Early Church. **Nothing is placed on it, except the Holy Elements, the sacred vessels and the Gospel. Even the relics of saints and martyrs are not placed on it.**

In our Coptic churches, the Cross is not placed on the altar, for the altar itself is the Lord's Golgotha or the Lord's Cross.

Flowers are not allowed to be put on the altar, because the Lord Himself makes it beautiful.

Sometimes one candlestick is placed on the right side of the altar, and another on the opposite side. They represent the two angels guarding the Lord's tomb. At present, placing candlesticks on the



altar is not at all uncommon, but people like to return to the early practices by keeping nothing on the altar.

Another old tradition is placing the Holy Gospel on the altar till the reading time," said Abouna.

"So can someone tell me what is allowed on the altar?" asked Abouna.

"Only the Holy Elements, the sacred vessels and the Gospel are allowed," answered Andy.

"Very good," said Abouna. "On the surface of the Coptic altar, a consecrated **altar-board** is loosely set in if the altar is not consecrated. **The Board is usually made of wood, and sometimes, not often, of marble. On the Board three things are painted: a Cross or a number of crosses, the first and last Greek letters of the alphabet 'A W,'** sometimes a few selected psalms such as: 'His foundation is in the holy mountains.' 'The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.' 'Glorious things are spoken of you, O City of God' (Ps. 86: 1, 2). '... even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God' (Ps. 83: 3).

The altar-board probably dates back to the times of persecution, to make it easier to celebrate the Liturgy of Eucharist whenever it was possible. On the other hand, others believe that it came in replacement of portable altars, since they are more convenient. So in urgent cases an altar-board can be used with an ordinary table to form a temporary altar, since a Eucharistic celebration cannot take place in the absence of an altar-board," explained Abouna.

"Abouna, what's that wooden thing around the altar?" asked Sally

"That is called **the Ciborium or Canopy**. It can be made of wood or stone and rests upon four pillars of stone or marble. The



word Ciborium has three liturgical meanings:

- 1) The structure that I just mentioned.
- 2) The covering suspended over the bishop's throne.
- 3) The dome shaped vessel that is used to contain the Holy Communion for the sick.

The Canopy serves a double purpose.

Firstly, it has curtains hung between the pillars, it served **to cover the altar at certain points in the service**, it is said, at the *Epiclesis* (descent of the Holy Spirit) and the *Confession*. This practice is gone from both the Eastern and Western Churches.

Secondly, canopies have always **added honor or holiness to the things or persons involved**. They have been used over the rulers' seats as a sign of honor, and on the altar for it is the throne of the sovereign, of the King of kings.



The Coptic ciborium is well known by its dome-shape compared with the Western styles that are usually in a cone or pyramid shape. Although the Coptic altar is bare, having no ornaments or paintings, **the**

Coptic ciborium has many paintings on both the interior and exterior surfaces.

The icon of the Lord, surrounded by the Cherubim and the Seraphim is usually in the center of the dome, **because it represents the heaven of heavens in which the Lord and His heavenly creatures live.**



Icons of the four Evangelists are painted on the four pillars, as if the four corners of the universe are blessed by the word of the Gospel.

On the top, a large Cross is mounted in the center of the ciborium and sometimes another four crosses are mounted on the sides, so that they all refer to the five wounds of the Lord," described Abouna.

"So now we have discussed the many aspects of the altar," said Abouna.

"Abouna, you forgot to tell us about **the tribune, throne, and niche**," interrupted Andy.

"Oh, yes. Thank you for reminding me," said Abouna. "Behind the altar and around the eastern wall of the Sanctuary lies the '**Tribune**.' It is often made of marble or stone and consists of seven semi-circular steps. There is a semi-circular tribune, made of marble, at the apse⁸ of the Church, while mosaics decorate the wall around it.

On the Tribune, **presbyter seats** are fitted, and at the center of the top step, stands **the seat of the Patriarch or the Bishop**. From this seat the bishop delivers his sermons, facing the congregation, while the altar lies before him, and the priests occupy their seats around him according to their ranks. It is a wise location showing that the clergy have no superiority over the congregation, except as servants of the altar.



The bishop's seat is usually known as '**Synthronos**' in Eastern Churches, and '**Cathedra**' in Western Churches. It is defined as 'a thing that is sat upon with particular reverence due to one's position. A church that is provided with such a seat is known

8. A semicircular or polygonal, usually domed, projection of a building, especially an altar or east end of a church.



as a 'Cathedral Church.' Because of the increase in size of church buildings, a bishop's seat became movable and could be shifted to the nave so that the congregation could hear well. Not a single seat is left in the tribune of Coptic Churches.



The Niche is the apse that represents the eastern wall of the Sanctuary, which surrounds the tribune. It is often occupied with the icon of **the Pantocrator**, that is the Lord Jesus Christ coming on the cloud, carried by the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the four Living creatures, with the twenty-four heavenly Presbyters offering incense. The Lord appears holding the planet earth with one hand, for He is the Almighty one, and the pastoral rod

with the other hand, for He is the Shepherd and Redeemer who liberates men from the captivity of sin. The niche represents the bosom of God, for the Lord longs for His church, and she waits for His coming. In front of this icon, a sanctuary lamp that is permanently lit is fitted. It is known as '**the perpetual lamp**' and represents the star, which appeared to the Wise men and guided them to where the Lord was born. Directly above this icon, in most cases, there is a small window (*aperture*), from which the sunbeams enter at sunrise," explained Abouna.



7- Andy & Sally study THE ICONOSTASIS

"Come with me Andy and Sally," said Abouna as he began to stand, "I want to show you something."



So the children stood up and followed Abouna towards the front of the church. They stopped at the iconostasis.

"Does anyone know what this structure is called?" asked Abouna.

"An icon," hesitated Andy.

"Close, the picture itself is an icon, but the structure is an iconostasis. The Iconostasis represents one of the most important architectural features of Orthodox Churches. It is a solid screen of wood or marble, made up of icons of the Lord, His angels and His saints. It is between the Sanctuary, where the Lord is always present, and the nave of the church where worshippers come together seeking the divine life."

"What is the iconostasis used for?" asked Sally.

"The Iconostasis was created as a sign of worship towards the mystery of the altar, or the mystery of Christ, but surely that was not the main reason for it. Possibly, the most probable reason for the introduction of the Iconostasis came as a defense against the **Iconoclastic Movement**⁹. It showed the Church's wish to maintain our relation with the heavenly creatures and the saints, in Jesus Christ," answered Abouna.

⁹- A movement of some people who struggled against using icons in the church or at home.



“Icons of the Lord, His mother, heavenly creatures, prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints fitted upon the Iconostasis provide a heavenly feeling for worshippers. The different icons hanging on the Iconostasis show the union between the two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly. It declares that all previous separation has been overcome through the Cross! The human beings are counted with the heavenly ones. They participate in their life and share in their worship.

The Iconostasis also supports the church doctrine that our fathers and brothers who departed in the Lord are not far away from us. The death of their bodies never separated them from the Church nor did it destroy the bond of love they had revealed towards the salvation of mankind. So, we can say that the Iconostasis is a symbol of reserving the first portion of the nave to the saints,” added Abouna.



“The churches of Old Cairo, in particular the churches of Abu-Serga and St. Mary, have Iconostases that are remarkably beautiful, carved, inlaid with ebony, ivory and cedar wood, and carry a large number of Icons and Symbols. The Coptic Iconostasis, which was apparently influenced by the Byzantine version, contains **three doors: the Royal door as the entrance to the principal sanctuary, and two other doors for the side sanctuaries.** It is almost certain that Royal doors existed since the early generations of sanctuary screens. They were called “Royal or Holy doors,” because at them, oblations were offered, where the priest selected the “Lamb,” the bread that was sanctified and changed into the Body of the Lord, the King of kings, and the Holy One!



Its opening during the Liturgy symbolizes heaven itself so that we may catch a glimpse of its brilliance.

As the Iconostasis declares the bringing together of God and man, the unity between heaven and earth, **the three doors represents the Holy Trinity.**

Only the clergy who celebrates the Liturgy is allowed to enter through the sanctuary doors and only at restricted times of the service. This practice symbolizes the entrance of the whole church to the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ, the High Priest. The priest must face the altar and step through the right hand side of the door using his right leg and bowing his head, as if stepping into the kingdom of heaven, for he is a child of God who stands at God’s right hand (Matt. 25). A similar way is observed upon stepping out of the sanctuary. This time he leaves by the left side of the door, in reverence, keeping his eyes fixed on the altar, as if confirming that his inner eyes are focused on God’s altar or the throne of God!

The keys of these doors are kept with the archdeacon. The doors are usually decorated with icons and carvings, in addition to verses from the Holy Scriptures.

On each side of the Coptic sanctuary doors there existed **a small window**, cut about one and a half meters above the floor. These were originally used during the persecution periods, where two deacons watched the church through them. In the case of an attack they notified the priest, who in turn hid the sacrifice, blew out the candles and tore away the altar clothing.

Communion was sometimes given through these windows since the Holy Elements must not be taken outside the sanctuary, and the laymen were not permitted in it.”



“There is a certain order for the icons, right Abouna?” questioned Andy.

“Yes, Andy. On the right side of the Royal door, the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ is fitted. He appears holding a sheet of the Gospel showing the verse “I am the Good Shepherd.” This icon reminds us that Jesus Christ is the unique Gate leading to the heavenly Kingdom. He is the Good Shepherd who opens the gates to heaven through His life-giving Sacrifice.

Next to this icon appears the icon of St. John the Baptist, the angel who prepared the way for the Lord’s coming.

Next, comes the icon of the “**Patron Saint**” or the “Icon of the Church,” for it portrays the Saint in whose honor the Church was built. It is usually followed by a number of selected icons of saints and martyrs or incidents from both the New and Old Testaments.

On the opposite side of the Royal Door appears the icon of St. Mary, the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). She represents the whole church and the Queen who sits on the right hand of the King, Jesus Christ.



The icons of the Annunciation, Archangel Michael, St. Mark the Evangelist and perhaps a selection of famous Apostles follow this icon.

Directly above the Royal Door the icon of the last supper is mounted. It shows Christ giving communion to His disciples, which shows Christ as the High Priest.

On both sides of the above icon we usually find **icons of the twelve disciples**. They assure us of the apostolic nature of our Church. It is established on the apostolic faith, and continues to



exist in an apostolic way, and is shepherded by the apostolic clergy.

On the top of the Iconostasis a cross is mounted and a view of the Golgotha is displayed, the Virgin Mary stands on one side and St. John the disciple stands on the other side.

Before every icon a candle is hung. They are known as “Lampadas,” and resemble the light of Christ who shines through His saints. The exception to this is the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ, for Christ Himself is the “Light” who illuminates the entire Church.”



“Abouna,” asked Sally, “Why are there **ostrich eggs** in front of the Iconostasis?”

“Well Sally, eggs, generally, held a symbolic meaning in the Early Church as representative of hope and resurrection, or the risen spiritual life in Jesus Christ. It is said that when Pontius Pilate asked St. Mary the Magdalene of how Jesus rose from the dead, she brought an egg and presented him with the question. ‘Tell me how a small chick emerges from this egg when it is born?’

Perhaps this practice matches the tradition of exchanging colored eggs, especially red eggs, between the Christians on Easter day (the Feast of the Christian Pasch). It also explains the finding of marble eggs in early tombs as those in the tomb of St. Theodora and St. Balbina and others.

Another factor that accounts for using Ostrich eggs in churches arises from an ancient belief that after laying her eggs, the Ostrich must keep staring at them in order to speed up their hatching. Taking her eyes away will produce opposite results. Likewise, when the Christian walks into the Church, he ought to concentrate all his thoughts and attention to the divine worship, leaving behind all earthly worries so his prayers will not be spoiled or lost,” explained Abouna.



9- A CHINESE CHILD VISITS OUR CHURCH IN PASADENA, CA

Fr. Antonious, the priest of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church of Pasadena, California, received a call from a primary school. The teacher asked him if the children of her class could have a look at the new building of the church.

After a week he received a letter from a Chinese child. He had written:

“Father, before I had visited your church, I was afraid of death. I could not imagine that I would lose my parents and I would not see them for good. I saw your very attractive icons, and as you said to us that **we share those who have departed in their heavenly worship. They still live and we will see them. Now I'm not afraid of death!**”



I- The Icons and The Holy Bible

As Abouna was walking together with the children out of the church, Andy stopped at an icon of St. Anthony and St. Paul.



“Abouna, why are there so many pictures all around the church?” Andy questioned.

“Well Andy they are not really pictures, but icons. They cover the Iconostasis, parts of the sidewalls, the sanctuary, the nave, and the baptistery. The icons are not for decoration but hold a message; **they teach us and set examples for us all,**” answered Abouna.

“The greatest icon is the Holy Bible. It is a special kind of icon, a divine icon. It shows us, through the Holy Spirit, God's love towards us in our own language. It shows His plans for our salvation and brings us to the eternal glories. The power of this written icon does not lie in the words, but in the Life-giving Spirit, who is capable of attracting the human souls to gain unity with God,” added Abouna.

“So through the Holy Spirit icons can speak to us?” asked Sally.

“Yes, Sally. Icons are open books, presented to all people through colors. Not only do they show events from the Old and New Testaments, but also give you an idea about our relation with heaven and the heavenly creatures. They are used to strengthen our unity with the Holy Trinity and lift the souls beyond this world! In other words, they help to explain the mysteries of the Scripture, its concepts, doctrines and spirit,” explained Abouna.

“Oh, I understand! When we look at the icons, our Holy Spirit



helps us to see beyond the colors. It helps us understand the story behind the picture, the meaning of it,” exclaimed Sally.

“In the Old Testament the Tabernacle and the Temple themselves were icons displaying heaven. God instructed His people to make a number of specific images for the Tabernacle and the Temple. They included many items, all designed by God Himself,” said Abouna.



“One of these items is **the Cherubim of the Ark**. The Lord commanded Moses to make two Cherubim with their wings spread upwards so that they overshadowed the cover of the Ark. These were not just symbols to remind the people of God’s presence, but they represented the true presence of God; who is riding upon the Cherubim (Psalm 18:10; Ezekiel 11:22).



Also, the image of the Cherub was displayed on the screen of the Tabernacle, which separated the Holy and the Holy of Holies. It appeared also in the Temple of Solomon as a repeated piece of art covering the Temple walls and the lintel of the door (1 Kings 6:27-29; 2 Chronicles 3:7), as a sign of God’s presence in His holy House.



Another item is **The Bronze Serpent**. It took the form of a bronze statue of a burning serpent mounted up on a pillar in the wilderness, and acted as a source of healing to those who beheld it (Numbers 21:8, 9). It served as a symbol for the Crucified Messiah as the Lord says, ‘As



Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life’ (John 3:14, 15). When the people began to misuse this valuable item and adored it as an idol, offering it oblations, it was smashed by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14),” described Abouna.

“Because God is invisible, the people of the Old Testament could not create an icon for God. In the New Testament, however, Christianity was basically founded on the revelation of God through His Incarnate Son, “No man has seen God at any time; the Only-Begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). Through incarnation, the icon of the Lord was revealed to us. The physical appearance of the Lord on earth has made it possible to draw His image; we could document the various events of His everyday lifestyle in the form of painted icons as well as in written stories.

II- The Icons and Church Education

Sally said to her brother, Andy, “How nice my close friend Neha is. She asked me if she could visit our church. What do you think?”

Andy said, “It is a good chance for her to discover the divine love.”



“She does not know English, she cannot follow the Liturgy, nor join us with the hymns. Perhaps our worship will be boring,” Sally said.

He answered, “We have special sermons written in a universal language.”

“What are these sermons?” asked Sally.

“Well, they are the icons,” answered



Andy. **“Icons are presented in a simple, universal language that can be interpreted by all languages. Those who cannot read can understand them as if reading a book or hearing a homily, and the educated can learn what the writings are unable to explain.** They have been the language of the universal church all over the ages,” explained Andy.

III- The Icons and Spiritual Life



“One night, as I was in the church a young man entered the church and walked towards the sanctuary. There, in the quiet atmosphere and the faint candlelight reflected upon the icons, he gazed at the icons for a while and returned with tears in his eyes. Later, I learned from him, that he had intended to commit suicide

and was on his way to buy some sleeping tablets. He jumped into a train, looking for an isolated area to end his life away from people. However, as he passed by the church and saw the faint rays of candlelight sparkling from the windows, an overwhelming desire drove him to have a last prayer before his departure. There, before the sanctuary icons and the peaceful atmosphere, he could not help his emotions: **‘How can I deprive myself from the companionship of these saints in the Lord?’** The looks on the martyrs’ faces reminded him of their eternal crowns. He assured me, ‘I shall never despair again even if my troubles multiply ten times.’



It was night that changed the course of his life spiritually and psychologically, and evens his personality. As he found peace of mind, his relations with others have greatly improved.



Needless to say, all this was not achieved by a book he read or a sermon he heard, but by the powers of the Holy Spirit through icons,” Abouna explained.

“Wow Abouna, that is really amazing! The Holy Spirit is really something very special! The icon, through the Holy Spirit, saved that man’s life,” exclaimed Andy.

“Yes Andy, the Holy Spirit is truly marvelous. He helps believers to see more than meets the eye. **The Christian sees in the holy icons help in his journey with God, at home, or on a journey, in hours of danger or in happy moments.** An Orthodox believer wishes to see icons, to gaze through these windows into the world beyond time and space, and be reassured that his earthly pilgrimage is only the beginning of another fulfilling life,” described Abouna.

IV- Veneration of Icons

“Can you believe it Andy, that all last night I was dreaming that we were in the church? I enjoyed the cheerful people who were celebrating the feast of the Resurrection. But I have a question: Why do people kiss the icons of the Risen Christ and Abouna burns incense before it? Do we worship icons?” asked Sally.



“That’s a good question Sally, let’s ask Abouna,” answered Andy.

“Abouna,” asked Sally, “Why do people kiss icons, light candles before them, and your Reverence burns incense before them? Do we worship icons?”

“We do not worship the icon as a divinity, Sally, but we adore Him Whom they represent and recall by means of the icon, the advent of His birth, His Passion or His sitting on the throne. Worshipping and veneration are different things.



To God alone worship is due, from all those who are high in heaven, on earth, and those who are under the earth. We worship God and venerate His saints because of the Holy Spirit who fills them. We do not worship the icons' materials, but God who is represented by the icons. Be certain that when we kneel before the Cross, we direct our worship to the Crucified and not to the wood, otherwise we would have to kneel before every tree on the road," explained Abouna.

"That's silly," Sally said.

"Yes it would be," answered Abouna. "When we honor the book of Law, we do not bow to its material of leather or ink, but to the words of God it contains. Likewise, **on honoring the icon of Christ, I imagine myself worshipping Christ Himself, and not the wood or paint. By kissing the icon of Christ, an Apostle or Martyr, we reach beyond the materialistic to the intimate spiritual contact with the prototype whom it represents.**" Can we venerate any icon, Abouna?" asked Andy.



"According to the Coptic rite, veneration may only be given to consecrated church icons. These receive consecration by a bishop and are anointed with the same Chrism that is used in baptism. Therefore upon accepting the Holy Spirit, they are qualified to receive incensing, be kissed, or accorded any other form of veneration. They are no longer memorial frames, but become in God's possession, and bear effective spiritual power that is capable of attracting the hearts to heaven, and positively contribute to the church's life," explained Abouna.



V- Icons of Christ



"When were the icons of Christ first introduced?" asked Andy.

Abouna answered, "The icons of Christ go back to the lifetime of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Once the king of Edessa, called Abgar V was very sick. He sent messengers to our Lord asking Him to visit him. **Ananias, one of the messengers was a painter, tried to take a portrait of Christ but failed due to the splendor of His countenance. In sympathy of him the Lord washed His face and miraculously stamped features upon the linen cloth with which He wiped His face.**



2. **St. Veronica** used her handkerchief to wipe Jesus' face on His way to Golgotha. The Lord rewarded her by copying the portrait of His face on the cloth.

3. There are some icons of St. Mary and the Child Jesus depicted by **St. Luke the Evangelist.**

VI- Icons of Saints

Nina whispered to Sally saying, "What is this? Do you worship the pictures of angels, men, women, and children?"

"Why do you ask?" questioned Sally.

Nina said, "I see you are kissing and lighting candles before the pictures of angels and men in the church."



Sally asked her friend, “Nina, do you have a picture of your dad?”

“Sure I have one, why do you want it?” asked Nina.

“I will put it on the floor and I will stomp on it,” answered Sally.

“What?! you can’t do that!” exclaimed Nina.

“It is just paper,” answered Sally.

“No, it is a picture of my dad. He who stomps on it in fact despises my dad!” Nina said.



“Exactly, we are not respecting the icons of the angels and saints for their art, but these are all symbols of those who received the grace of God. We honor the divine grace in them!”

“Why do we have icons of saints?” asked Sally

“We have icons of the saints because as our Lord says, ‘I live... And I will glorify those who glorify Me.’ And the divine Apostle, says: ‘Therefore now he is not a servant, but a son, and if a son, an heir also through God.’ Again ‘If we suffer with Him, we also shall be glorified with him,” answered Abouna.

“We worship the icon of Christ as the Incarnate God. And we honor the icon of our Lady, the Mother of us all, as the Mother of God; and the icons of the saints as the friends of God. They have withstood sin unto blood, and followed Christ in shedding their blood for Him, who shed His blood for them!” exclaimed Abouna.

“The four Evangelists are the true witnesses and interpreters of Christ’s life and His saving deed. Does anyone know who are the four evangelists?” asked Abouna.

“I know,” said Sally. “St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John,” stated Sally.

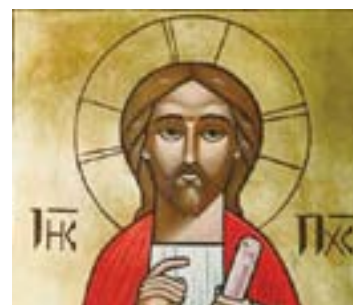


“Very good Sally. The holy Fathers found a close relationship between those Evangelists and the ‘Four Living Creatures’ (Ezekiel 1:5). St. Mark is likened to the Living Creature who has the shape of a lion, St. Matthew the human one, St. Luke the ox, and St. John the eagle. For this reason the Evangelists are depicted together with their symbols or with the Living Creatures.”

“Because the four Evangelists are the true witnesses of Christ, the Evangelists’ icons and symbols were introduced in early Christian places of worship. Often they are shown around the throned Christ in the eastern niche of the church, sometimes in the four corners of the principal dome of the nave or in the corners of the sanctuary dome; as they represent the four majestic pillars upon which the Lord’s kingdom is established,” added Abouna.

“What about the disciples?” asked Andy.

“The earliest representations of the twelve disciples appeared as symbols in the ancient churches of Rome. They were pictured as twelve sheep, with Christ in the middle, as the Good Shepherd holding a lamb in His arms. More frequently, Christ was depicted as “the Lamb of God,” raised and crowned with a cruciform nimbus, and the disciples arranged on each side as sheep,” described Abouna.



“A Cruciform nimbus? What is a nimbus?” asked Sally.

“The Nimbus of glory or the Halo became a characteristic feature of the icons of Christ, His saints and angels. The use of Nimbus around the heads of saints and angels reveals

their nature as the “light of the world.” Icons of Christ, on the other hand, are further distinguished by a cross inside the Nimbus



together with His monogram, or the alpha and omega letters, written on it as a sign of the Lord's Divinity," explained Abouna.

VII- Icons of Heavenly Creatures



"Our church is also a church for the angels and all the heavenly creatures. They too pray and worship God. If each of us goes to church and prays we will find that each of us has his own angel beside him. So the angel that guards us also stands next to us and worships God. The icons of the church give us a heavenly image. Who can tell me some examples of icons with angels in them?" questioned Abouna.



"The icons of Christ," answered Sally.

"Good. What else?" asked Abouna.

"The icons of saints," responded Andy.

"Right. Also we can see angels in the icons of spiritual events, as well as in icons of their own. We have icons of Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael," explained Abouna.

VIII- Icons through the Ages

"Abouna, how did they start making icons in the churches?" asked Andy.

"Well, at first they used symbols, such as representing Christ as the Good Shepherd or the Fish. Icons were also used to tell stories of the Bible because not everyone spoke the same language. There were also icons of St. Mary and of the disciples. Later, there became icons of saints and martyrs," explained Abouna.



IX- Icons and Art

"Iconology is considered an art with its own rules and development. The church makes a distinction between icons of the church and normal paintings," said Abouna.

"How do they do this?" asked Sally.



"Well, first the Christian artist is a preacher and a teacher. He does not only offer art, but revelations and prophecies. In his icons, he must reflect his inner biblical feelings, which he practices. **He needs to have natural artistic abilities. He also has to have knowledge of the Bible, the church tradition, and teachings, and also to practice the Christian life.**

He also needs to have **divine grace to guide him during his work**, so that he may produce blessed and holy icons, which will have the power to attract the soul to fellowship with God.

The real Christian Iconographer fasts and prays while doing his work.

The spiritual icon-maker uses things from this world to show what is beyond our senses," explained Abouna.

X- Coptic Icons

"Most Coptic art was destroyed over the years, especially after the Arab conquest of Egypt. But some can be found in the churches and monasteries. Coptic art is unique and is not a mixture of the different cultures that entered into Egypt.

Also, the monasteries added to the growth of Coptic art.

Later on some Coptic art mixed with Byzantine art, but it never



lost its Egyptian touch. Egyptian art tends to paint sunsets in red, which is a Pharaohs' tradition. Also, **the heads in Coptic art are usually very large** in proportion to the bodies. **The wide eyes of saints in Coptic art** followed the ancient Egyptians' form. You see them looking straight unto the eyes of their beholders as if they desire to call them to follow them unto their heavenly home.

The icons represent an important part of our church tradition, which has developed through the ages. Some icon makers started copying the European pictures, so other icon makers wanted to study the characteristics of true original Coptic art that we may go back to the spirit and attitude found in them. Coptic icons show our church's attitudes, ideas, dogmas and spirituality.



All icons of the church are joyous events, the victorious Cross, where the Lord is hung as the King of kings.

There are **no pictures of Hell**, only of heaven, heavenly creatures and heavenly crowns. This is that the church gives hope to her children, and not to frighten them by the terrible tortures of Hell.

As long as the church seeks to create a spirit of confidence in her children, there will be **no paintings of demons**. In necessity they appear in small sizes, trodden under the feet of the Lord; archangels or martyrs, in weakness.

Coptic Iconography expresses **feelings of love and kindness**.

In Coptic icons you often see the heads of figures enlarged. The eyes are wide, and the bodies are ill proportioned, for the Coptic iconographers do not represent the bodily features, but rather



meet the inner strength of the spirit. **The heads are enlarged as a symbol of God who is our heavenly Head, and the eyes are wide as a sign of the inner sight.**

Even the worshippers themselves concentrate on the strength of the spirit which icons represent. On their entry into the church they stand near the icons, bow their heads and touch just the frame of the icon with their fingers, asking for the prayers of the saints or for the blessings of God, giving little or no attention to the details of the representation.

The Coptic Iconographer finds it necessary to depict the Lord hanging on the Cross, with **opened eyes as a sign of His immortality and continual providence**. According to **St. Eulogius of Alexandria**, "The Lord slept on the Cross for a brief time, as shown by His body; but his divine eyes remained opened, for He is God."

Saints and heavenly creatures are depicted with **two eyes as a sign of their inner sight**, while wicked persons like Judas are depicted from his side with one eye as a sign of his looking towards earthly things while the other eye, that is the inner sight, is totally darkened.

The Coptic Church as a "Church of Martyrs" is familiar with her icons of **military saints** such as, SS. George, Mena, Theodore, Victor, Markarius (Two-sworded man) and so on.



It is said, **"The Origin of the icon of St. George and the Dragon, is to be found in the Egyptian representations of the fight between Horus and Set."** (Ancient Egyptian gods).

The Coptic artist dares not picture the Father, for He is unseen. On rare occasions He is depicted in a symbol as a Hand going through the clouds, but He is never depicted as an aged man, for He does not incarnate.



10- Andy and Sally discover: *THE Church Building, A Heavenly Life*

Andy and Sally walked with Abouna around the church. They looked at all the icons.

“Abouna, Why are there so many little crosses on the Iconostasis (icon-stand)?” asked Sally.



“You see Sally, the church likes to decorate everything in the building with symbols that have meaning to us.” Abouna said, **“The church building, as a whole, is a symbol of the heavenly**

life, it is no wonder that every part of it, especially the Iconostasis is decorated by Christian symbols such as crosses, fish, lambs, vines, doves and so on. In fact, symbolism plays an important role in our daily life and it is used in the Holy Scriptures and in church life.”

“What’s a symbol?” asked Sally

“It’s something that stands for something else, like a straight sign or like a picture of a heart meaning love,” answered Andy.



“There is a lot of symbolism in the Old Testament,” said Abouna. “Symbols of language, colors, numbers, events and actions are used in the Old Testament.”

“Abouna, can you give us an example of colors,” requested Sally.

“Sure, the color white, for example, is accepted in the Old Testament as a symbol of innocence of soul, purity of thought

and holiness of life. The same idea is transferred to the New Testament and church rituals. At the Lord’s transfiguration, ‘His garment was white as the light.’ (Mark 9:2, 3) The angel of Christ’s tomb was clothed investment, white as snow. The newly baptized wear white garments and the clothes of liturgical services are also white,” Abouna explained.

“What does that mean, Abouna?” asked Sally

“Well my child, St. Cyprian says that the church was white with the purity of her children, now she has found a robe of purple in their blood,” Abouna explained.

“So white is for purity and purple is for blood,” Andy said.

“Very good Andy” Abouna continued, “The scarlet which Rahab set on her house was a symbol of the redeeming blood; and **the blue used in the tabernacle was a symbol of the heavenly life.”**

“Abouna, what about numbers, like seven or five,” asked Andy.



“Ok Andy. **Number seven is used in the Old Testament as a symbol of perfection.** Balaam, as a test of the will of God, built seven altars and prepared seven oxen and seven rams for sacrifice. Job, referring to the protection of the divine providence says, ‘In seven troubles there shall no evil touch you.’ And Jacob, as a sign of his complete submission bowed himself seven times before his brother Esau. Naaman was commanded to bathe seven times in the Jordan as a prelude to his complete restoration to health,” said Abouna.

“Wow, all those things use the number seven!” Andy exclaimed.

“St. Augustine tells us that man is the perfect creature on earth. **He explains that man is made up of the soul, in the form of the Holy Trinity (three), plus the body coming forth from earth or the world which has four corners: that is, North, South, East and West (four), the total sum being seven.**





Number eight refers to the world to come, the heavenly life or the new life, for it goes beyond number seven, like the days of the week. For this reason the boy child was circumcised on the eighth day of his birth.



Number twelve is a symbol of God's kingdom on earth as the Holy Trinity (three) reigns over the four corners of the world (three multiplied by four equals twelve). For this reason there were twelve tribes of Israel, twelve Disciples of Christ and twelve doors of the heavenly Jerusalem," explained Abouna.

"What other kinds of symbolism are there in the Old Testament?" Andy asked.

"God did not order the ancient people to decorate His House with symbols only for purposes of beauty, but rather as **an important part of the ritual worship**. I will tell you some Bible verses that show the set up of these symbols.



'All round the Temple walls he carved figures of Cherubim, palm trees and rosettes, both inside and outside' (1 Kings 6:29).

'There was cedar wood round the inside of the Temple, ornamentally carved with gourds and rosettes' (1 King 6: 12).

'He also made pomegranates: two rows of them round each filigree, four hundred in all... The capitals surmounting the pillars were flower-shaped' (1 Kings 7).

"You see God told his people to use all kinds of symbols in the Temple," said Abouna.

"Abouna, what about the churches, how do they use symbols?" Andy asked.



"The early churches painted symbols on the church walls and ceilings **from the first century**; also, carved rings were seen in the early Christian homes, along with cups, plates, chairs and so on," explained Abouna.

"Why did they use symbols?" asked Sally.

Abouna continued, "The Early Church used symbols **because they are rich in spiritual meaning and they were better than using words.**"

"In the Coptic Church you see symbols used in decorating the Iconostasis, the Pillars, walls and ceilings of the church, or as a part of an Icon," explained Abouna.

"Can you give me an example of a symbol our church uses?" Abouna asked the children.

"I know Abouna, a fish!" Sally exclaimed.

"Yes Sally, the fish. It was the most frequent and favorite symbol in the early church. **The fish symbolizes God's believer. In Matthew 13:47 and in Luke 5:4-10 it is used by the Lord Himself as a symbol of His people.** In calling His disciples He also said, "Follow me, I will make you become fishers of men."



Secondly, the fish is a symbol of Christ. Christ is called the Fish, as the Greek letters of the word fish **ΙΧΘΥΣ** contains the initial letters of the words: **ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ ΥΙΟΣ ΣΩΤΗΡ**, which means **Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Savior**.

Another reason for calling Christ "the Fish" is that the fish was one of the articles of food with which the Lord fed the multitudes as a symbol of Himself, the Bread of Life," described Abouna.

"Are there any other animals or birds that are used as symbols?" asked Andy.



“Yes Andy, in the earliest days of Christian art, **birds were used as symbols of the winged souls**. It is one feature in which the Coptic art had developed from ancient Egyptian belief in the nature of the human soul, expressed by the bird,” said Abouna.

“Like the dove,” stated Andy.



“Yes, **the dove was one of the most representative symbols in Early Christian art**, for it has many symbolic meanings.

First, in its highest use, as a symbol of **the presence of the Holy Spirit**, it is found in the Icons of the Annunciation to St. Mary and of the Lord’s Baptism.

Second, it symbolizes the virtues of the believers as gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially peace, meekness, and purity. It reminds us of **the dove of Noah** which brought back an olive branch to show that waters had gone down and that God had made peace with mankind (Genesis 8). To this effect, **St. Augustine says that this dove refers to the soul returning to the true Ark, that is, the Church, entering through the opened side of Christ.**

Doves are symbols of meekness as the Lord Himself says: “Be you meek as doves,” and of purity, for according to the Mosaic Law, doves were offered for purification after the birth of a child.



“Third, **St. Paulinus states that doves are used in the early church as symbols of Apostles and Disciples**. They are also symbols of Christian people, but the dove was never used as a symbol of Christ, but the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

“Are there any other kinds of birds, Abouna?” asked Sally.



“The church also uses **the eagle**, which is used as a symbol of Jesus Christ. It is also used in pictures of St. John the Disciple as a symbol, of his gospel. It is also a symbol of one of the four Living Creatures standing around the Divine Throne of God,” explained Abouna.

“Are there any other symbols?” asked Andy.

“The Coptic Church uses many other symbols. **First, grape of vines is used as a symbol of Christ** (John 15:1, 5). It also points to His sacrificial Blood that is the Eucharistic Blood.

Second, the lamb symbolizes Christ, the Lamb of God. It also symbolizes the faithful people who are fed by the Good Shepherd (John 10).

Third, the Anchor is used as a natural symbol of hope.



Fourth, the ship stood for the Church and for the voyage of life, which ends in the harbor of peaceful death.

“Wow, Abouna there are so many symbols!” exclaimed Sally.

“And they all have such cool meanings,” added Andy.



11- THE CROSS

"Andy, how come you are not wearing your cross?" asked Sally.



"Because necklaces are for girls, and I'm not a girl," answered Andy.

"That's not true!" Sally quickly said, "Abouna wears a cross and he is not a girl."

"Well that's different," mumbled Andy, "He is a priest, and he is supposed to wear a cross."

"Ok fine, why don't we go and ask Abouna? I'm sure he'll have a good answer for us," suggested Sally.

"Ok, let's ask Abouna," said Andy.

"Abouna, can boys wear cross necklace or that is only for girls?" asked Sally.

"Of course, the cross is the symbol of Christianity, and we should all be proud of that and show the world that we are Christians," answered Abouna.



"So Abouna you think that it is ok for boys to wear them too?" Andy asked.

"Of course!" Abouna replied.

"So why is the cross so important? I mean why we use it so much?" asked Andy.

"At the beginning of Christianity, the cross was not used as it is used today. Back then, the cross was a sign of death because they used to crucify people on the cross. The early Christians tried to teach the world that it is a symbol of victory and salvation. Do you know why it is so?" said Abouna.

"Because Jesus died on the Cross to save us and He arose from

the dead and ascended to heaven," Andy answered.

"Exactly. **Now we make the sign of the cross before we do anything,**" said Abouna.

"Like before we read the bible, or sleep, or drive somewhere in the car," Sally said.

"Yes, when coming in and going out, before putting on our clothes, before bathing, when at table, before sleeping at night, when sitting down and reading, in all the ordinary things of our daily lives, we cross ourselves.

Also the churches of the second century in Syria used to hang or inscribe a Cross on the wall facing the worshippers to point out the direction of the east. We still do this today," explained Abouna.

"I have a cross on my wall in my room and I pray facing it every morning and every night!" said Sally.



"The Church in its reality is the Lord's Cross, where His Body, that is His people, is glorified in Him. Therefore, **the Cross is lifted upon the canopy of the altar, the iconostasis and the church tower.** It is used as an essential symbol in the decoration of every corner of the church building. **A deacon holds a cross in front of every church procession.** In other

words, the cross is connected with the whole life of the Church," explained Abouna.

In the altar service, I mean during the liturgical celebration, the priest uses **a hand cross as a tool of the holy vessels.** He uses it in all his priestly ministering, for example, in crossing the oblations and the incense, in consecrating the baptismal water, blessing a couple getting married, giving peace to God's people and in asking





for the absolution of sins. He holds it while reading the Gospel and giving the sermon,” explained Abouna.

“Why do priests always carry the cross in their hands?” Andy asked.

“The Cross is used so that everyone remembers that it is **the Lord who works through the priests**, it is not the priests who act themselves by themselves.” Abouna continued, “Also, making use of the hand cross during the altar service **assures us that all our worship and offerings are presented through Christ’s sacrifice and in His Name**. We are unworthy to worship God, but in Christ and through His Cross we become God’s children, and therefore our worship is accepted.

We use the hand cross in the altar service because it **represents the presence of Christ among His people**, as the Living and Life-giving One,” explained Abouna.

“Abouna, why are there so many crosses on the iconostasis?” asked Sally.

“There is a close relationship between the Cross and the iconostasis, and that is why the Cross is on top the iconostasis and represents one of the more familiar symbols used in its decoration.”



Abouna continued, “The Cross finds its own place not only inside the church building, but also from outside above the church tower.”

“So the church has crosses everywhere, inside and outside. But Abouna, how come there are so many different crosses?” Andy asked.

“It is no surprise that there are **more than four hundred various types of crosses in existence** because the cross was known from the prehistoric times among the pagans (those who believed in idols as gods) as a sacred symbol and a source of life. The Jews also

knew certain types of the cross, as a foreshadowing (something still to come) of the Lord’s Cross.

To the Christians, the Cross represents a very important theological truth, as the redeeming power of the Crucified Christ, **a sign of redemption and as an object of the Lord’s Parousi** (His last advent).”

“The cross goes way back doesn’t it,” said Andy.



“Yes Andy. During times of persecution not so many people were able to publicly display the cross. They used other symbols such as a fish, a symbol that their persecutors did not understand, to express their faith.

You should be glad that today you can wear your cross proudly. **It is not jewelry, but a symbol of your faith. Be proud of it.**”

“Ok Abouna I promise to wear my cross proudly from now on,” Andy said.





12- Andy discovers the: SACRED VESSELS

Andy was serving in the altar with his father during the Sunday liturgy. He watched Abouna carefully clean the vessels, and hand them over to his father to dry. Andy noticed how carefully Abouna and his father were handling the sacred vessels.



After Abouna said the prayer of benediction, Andy asked him about the sacred vessels. “Abouna, why do you handle the sacred vessels with such great care? And why are they well sacred?” asked Andy.

“You see Andy, God, as the loving Heavenly Father, who created the whole world on our behalf, asked Moses to offer some items to be used in His House. Being aware that they really belonged to God, He ordered Moses to anoint not only the Tabernacle but also the ark of testimony, the table and its utensils, the lamp-stand and its utensils, the altar of incense and so on, all with sacred ointment, saying to him, ‘You shall consecrate them that they may be most holy, whatever touches them will become holy.’ (Exodus 30:29).

The Church of the New Testament, as Christ’s Bride, offers several special vessels to be used in God’s House, being aware they are God’s own. They are **consecrated by prayers, the word of God, and by crossing them by the anointment of Chrism (Mayroon)**. When consecrated, they are only to be used for God’s service.

1. The Chalice: “Is the communion cup considered a sacred vessel?” Andy asked.

“Yes, the communion cup is called the Chalice. The wine is consecrated into the Blood of the Lord through the Liturgy of

Eucharist. The Lord Himself used the chalice (Matt. 26:26- 27), and the Apostles imitated Him. St. Paul the Apostle calls it ‘the Cup of Blessing,’ and ‘the Cup of the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 10:16, 21).

“What is the Chalice made of?” asked Andy curiously.

“Well Andy,” Abouna said, “The Early Christian Chalices were commonly made from wood or glass. By the third and fourth centuries, precious metals became common, and believers offered valuable chalices of gold and silver set with jewels, as a sign of their love. Many **Fathers asked their people not to exaggerate in offering these valuable vessels while there were many people in dire need.**”

“What is the shape of the chalice?” Andy asked.

“The bowl of the Coptic Chalice has a bell-shaped form; the stem is long and rests on a circular stand.

“What goes into making the blood of Christ before you pray on it? I mean what it is made of?” said Andy.

“According to the Coptic rite,” Abouna said, “wine is mixed with about one third of water. The Syrians use half water and half wine. In the Greek Church the only rule appears to be that there is to be more wine than water in the Chalice.

2. The plate: “How about the plate that holds the body of Christ; does that have a special name?” Asked Andy.

“Yes it does Andy; it is called in the Coptic **tdiskoc**, a small round tray, without a stand and having no engraving. It is usually made of silver or gold,” stated Abouna.



“What about the metal thing that goes on top of it?” Andy asked.

3. The Dome or Star: Abouna explained, “It is





the Dome or Star. It is called in Arabic قبة and in Greek asterisk, and consists of two silver arched bands, held by a screw, crossed over each other into the shape of a cross, usually surmounted by a small cross. It is said that **St. John Chrysostom** had introduced this article, which is placed upon the paten **to keep the holy bread in a prescribed order, and to support the coverings**. It represents the shape of the tomb and also reminds us of the star that appeared to the Wise men.”

4. **The spoon:** “What about **the spoon** we take communion with? Does that have a special name too?” Andy asked.

“The Spoon in Coptic is called **pikhqthr**,” Abouna said, “In it the Blood of Christ is given to the people.”

“What else is a sacred vessel?” asked Andy.



5. **The cruets:** Abouna answered, “Well, the cruets are also sacred vessels.”

“What are the cruets?”

“The Cruets are two vessels used in holding the wine and water for the Eucharist. There are three other cruets

used by the Coptic Church, they are as follows:

Firstly, one is used to hold **the Chrism** (Myroon), the sacred cruet which only the priest or bishop can hold. It is usually preserved in the Sanctuary, and sometimes on the altar.

Secondly, a cruet contains **the oil of ‘Khallilion’** or ‘Gallilon,’ used in the liturgy of Baptism.

Thirdly; a cruet contains **the oil of ‘Apoclupsis,’** that is the oil which is used in the service of the Bright Saturday (before Easter) when all the book of Revelation (Apocalypse) is read,” explained Abouna.



“Abouna, where do they keep the sacred vessels?” Andy asked.



6. **The ark:** “The **ark**, a wooden box in the middle of the Altar,” Abouna said, “the box, in Coptic, is called **pitotc**, means a ‘seat’ or a ‘throne,’ and is used as a Chalice-stand. Usually it is cubical in shape,

about thirty centimeters high and twenty-five centimeters wide. The top is closed with high flaps. The beautiful carving is inlaid with ebony and ivory and is decorated with four small icons.

It is called ‘the Throne,’ for it represents the presence of the Crucified Lord. It is also called ‘the Ark,’ as it looks like the ark of Noah, through which the creatures were saved. The Blood of the New Testament, which is in the Chalice of this ark, saves us.”

7. **The Ciborium** “Abouna, when people can’t go to church because they are sick and are in the hospital how do they get communion? I mean what if they really wanted to come to church but they were just too sick to go. What do they do?” asked Andy.

Abouna said, “People who are unable to go to church can still take communion. The Ciborium or the **Antophorion** is a small vessel of silver, circular in shape and having a cover, with measures about six centimeters in diameter and its height is about six centimeters. Its purpose is to hold the holy Body moistened with a few drops of the honored Blood to the sick or prisoners, or to any person who cannot attend the Divine Liturgy and partake in the ceremony. However, this vessel is not used to preserve the Holy Communion for any other time than the required, for the Coptic Church rules forbid this custom,” Abouna explained.

“Are there any other sacred vessels, Abouna?” asked Andy.



8. The Book of Gospels: “Yes Andy there are several others.” Abouna explained, “**The Book of Gospels** is a sacred vessel. A copy of the New Testament, covered with silver or gold and decorated by icons, has in the middle of one side the icon of the Resurrection or Crucifixion, and the other side there is the icon of the Patron Saint or St. Mary and the Child Jesus. Sometimes on the corners, there are the four Evangelists with their symbols.



9. The censor: Abouna continued, “The censor is also a sacred vessel, Andy.”

“Why do we use incense?” asked Andy.

“Well Andy,” said Abouna, “Under the Old Testament dispensation, the use of incense in divine worship was set by God.

One of the first gifts offered to Christ while He was yet an infant, was the frankincense, a costly gift of love, which should be offered to Him by his people today.

There is a lot of symbolism behind censuring.

1. Censing is a symbol of **the presence of God among His people.**

2. It symbolizes **praying** (Exodus 30:1-8) as a sacrifice of love. According to the Coptic rite, liturgies of Eucharist, Baptism, Healing, Marriage, Funerals are connected with this sacrifice of love.

3. Censing also symbolizes **the purification of people** when God said to Moses, ‘Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment, Moses said to Aaron: Take your censer and put therein from off the altar, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement

for them, for wrath has gone forth from the Lord. The plague has begun...’

4. The burning of incense before persons and things is most **horrific.**”

“There is a special way the priest burns the incense.” Abouna explained, “According to the Coptic rite, burning incense has a strict order; The priest swings the censer around the altar and in front of the Sanctuary door, the Gospel, the sacred icons and the bishop, then he kisses the hands of his fellow priests, descends with his censer amongst the worshippers, and finally returns to the Sanctuary:

“The priest begins by censuring the Altar, for through the merit of Christ’s Blood, our offerings and prayers are accepted. He then gathers the prayers and blessings of the word of God (Gospel), bishops, deacons and the entire congregation together with those of saints and returns to the Sanctuary to offer them, on behalf of each one.”

“That’s so cool, so the priest takes all our prayers,” said Andy. “But what is the thurible?”

Abouna explained, “**The thurible (censer) is a brass or silver vessel in the shape of a cup, in which incense is burned. In the usual form of the censer the container is suspended on three chains from which it can be swung during the incensation.**

In our church, the censer symbolizes St. Mary, who bore the ‘**True Coal burning with Fire,**’ that is the Incarnate Son of God. Its three chains remind us of **the Holy Trinity** who participated in the Incarnation of the Son. For the Father sent His Son, the Son obeyed, and the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin for the Incarnation of the Son,” explained Abouna.

“Are there any other sacred vessels?” asked Andy.





“Yes, there are a few more:



1. A **small box for incense**, usually of silver or carved wood.



2. The **Ewer and Basin** are used for washing the hands of the priest during the liturgical services. They are usually made of bronze, but sometimes they are made of silver; and the ewer is sometimes a pitcher of clay.



3. The **Qurban (oblation)-basket** is a small basket made from palm leaves in which the holy bread is placed, some of which the celebrant chooses as the “Lamb.” This basket is decorated with crosses and sometimes with strings of silver or gold.



4. **Musical instruments:** The Coptic hymns depend in the first place, on the natural instrument, I mean, the throat. However, we use some primitive instruments such as the triangle and the cymbals,” explained Abouna.

“Wow I never knew there were so many sacred vessels!” exclaimed Andy. “And we really do take good care of the sacred vessels,” Andy said.

“Yes we do Andy,” said Abouna.

13- THE NAVE



Andy and his American friend, Jeffery, were leaving church after Sunday Liturgy.

Jeffery said, “Your mass sounded so cool with everyone singing together.”

“Yes it’s nice when we all sing together, it sounds so good, like one voice, one body,” agreed Andy.



“How come there are some men that wear white robes, and why do they sit in front of everyone else?” Jeffery asked.

“Well, the men wearing white are the Deacons.

The Nave of the church is divided into two parts called ‘Choruses.’ There is the Chorus of Deacons, and the Chorus of Believers, or the body of the church,” answered Andy.

“How do you know all this, Andy?” asked Jeffery.

“My priest taught me,” said Andy, “Come on, let’s go to his office and he will explain everything for us.”

“Hi Abouna, this is my friend Jeffery,” Andy said.

“Welcome to our church Jeffery, it’s nice to meet you!” Abouna greeted Jeffery.

“He attended the liturgy with me, and he has some questions we were hoping your Reverence could answer,” said Andy.

“Sure Andy, What is the question?” asked Abouna.



“We were hoping you could explain the Nave to us. I explained to Jeffery that there are two parts of the Nave.” Andy said.

He continued, “We know that there is the Chorus of Deacons and the Chorus of Believers, but can you explain them a little more?”

“Sure, let us start with the **Chorus of Deacons**. It’s also called **the Chancel**.

It is situated on the east end of the nave, separated from the Sanctuary by the Iconostasis, and from the rest of nave by a screen or fence.

The Chancel is one to three steps higher than the nave. It contains seats for the deacons, **two candelabra** and **two lecterns** on which the Coptic and English books of readings (**lectionaries**) are placed,” explained Abouna.

“What is the lectern?” asked Jeffery.

Abouna answered, “**The lectern** is a moveable wooden desk, furnished with a sloping book rest. It is adorned with geometrical designs and is sometimes inlaid with ivory carvings.

The Chorus of Believers is also called the Nave. The term ‘Nave’ is derived from the Latin ‘**navies**’ meaning ‘**a ship**.’



The Sanctuary and the Nave are correlated, the former sanctifies the latter, and the latter completes the former. **The Sanctuary represents God’s presence and the nave declares people’s meeting with God.** For this reason the Sanctuary is called the Soul of the Church, while the Nave is called the Body of the Church. The Nave was normally divided into two parts by a colonnade.

The southern aisle was reserved for the nuns, virgins, widows,



women and their children. This aisle is now used without any division for all the female believers. The northern aisle of the Nave is still reserved for men.

According to this order, **children attend the liturgy with the whole congregation, with women sitting at the right hand of men, as the Queen is at the right hand of the King,**” explained Abouna.



“How come there is a **dome** in the ceiling of the church?” asked Andy.

“Some Coptic Churches have one dome, called **cupola**. It resembles Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, who is seated in the heavens. For this reason, it is usually painted with the Icon of the Lord or in a bright blue color decorated with pictures of angels and stars. Some churches have three cupolas, which represent the Holy Trinity.



Other churches have five cupolas. The principal one, which is the largest in the center, represents our Lord; and the four small ones around it, represent the four Evangelists.

“How come there are **pillars** in the church?” asked Jeffery.

“Usually, there are twelve pillars in the Church of the New Testament. St. Paul called the Disciples pillars (Galatians 2:9).

In the ancient churches columns are **decorated with various crowns**. Rarely do you find two crowns alike, for this symbolizes to us those who will be crowned by the Lord, each receiving his own crown,” explained Abouna.





“What is that big **platform?**” asked Jeffery.

“It is called **an ambon**. The Greek word ‘**owobolvely**’ means to ‘ascend.’ It is a high building which the bishop or priest stands on, when preaching to the people.

Abouna continued, “It usually rests on twelve columns, which symbolizes the twelve Disciples; it is made of marble, stone, or wood, and is decorated with Icons of Saints.”

“Why do the churches have ambons?” Jeffery asked.

“Ambon symbolizes the stone of the Lord’s tomb on which the angel sat and preached to the women.

It also symbolizes **the mountain on which Moses received the Law**. Also it represents **that mountain on which our Lord Jesus spoke to the people, and the other on which Christ ‘the Word of God’ was transfigured in front of His Disciples,**” explained Abouna.

“What about the hole in the ground at the back of the church? What’s that?” asked Jeffery.

“That’s where we have the washing of feet, right Abouna?” Andy answered.

“Yes, Andy, it is called the **Mandatum Tank**. It is found in the western end of the nave. It is a shallow rectangular basin about 60 centimeters long and 30 centimeters wide and is laid in the floor, covered with boards.” Abouna explained, “This tank, which is made of marble or stone, is used in the service of ‘**Blessing the water,**’ on **the feasts of the Apostles, the Epiphany, and Maundy Thursday.**”



“Wow, Andy your church is so cool. It has so many neat stuff,” said Jeffery.

“Yeah, I didn’t even know half the names of these things.” Andy said, “I’m glad we came and asked Abouna to explain it all to us.”

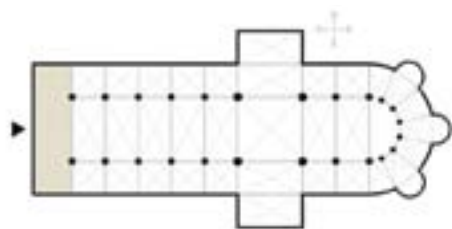
“Me too!” exclaimed Jeffery.





14- THE NARTHEX And THE BAPTISTERY

“So now we know one important section of the church is called the nave, what are some other important sections of the church called, Abouna?” asked Andy.



“Well, Andy there is the ‘Narthex,’ it is the western area near the entrance of the church, where the catechumens and repentants attend a

special part of the liturgy called “Liturgy of Catechumens” or “Liturgy of Word.”

“What does catechumens mean?” asked Andy.

Catechumens are those who are getting ready to be baptized, and the repentants are Christians who have committed certain sins and whose spiritual fathers forbid them to receive the Holy Communion for a period of time,” explained Abouna.

“Before people are baptized, they are called catechumens, right Abouna?” asked Andy.

“Very good,” encouraged Abouna.

“Abouna, what about **the baptistry**? That is also an important section of the church, can you tell us more about it please?” asked Andy.

“Of course,” replied Abouna, “I would love to tell you more about it. The baptism of Jesus Christ has allowed us to participate in the Lord’s saving deeds, His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. For

this reason Jesus Christ told His disciples, before His ascension, to baptize, saying “**Go, therefore and make disciples... baptize them**” (Matthew 28:19). As the Lord commanded from the very beginning, the church has called the entire world to be baptized and to be preached to about Jesus Christ and His salvation. So believers can live a life similar to the crucified and the resurrected life of Jesus Christ, and can therefore receive the Spirit of Jesus.”



“Hi Sally!” exclaimed Andy, “Abouna is talking to us about baptism!”

“Hello Sally,” said Abouna, “Yes, why don’t you come join us.”

“I would love to Abouna,” answered Sally, “Thank you. Did I miss a lot?”

“No, we just started. Andy why don’t you tell Sally what we just said?” asked Abouna.

“Sure. It all started when St. John the Baptist baptized Jesus. This allowed us to join Jesus in His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. That’s why Jesus Christ told His disciples to go baptize people and preach to them. So that we could all live a life similar to Jesus Christ’s life. Is that right Abouna?” asked Andy.

“Very good,” said Abouna, “Do you have any questions Sally?”

“Yes Abouna. Jesus was baptized in a river, right?” asked Sally.

“Right! Early, in the apostolic age, a lot of Jews and Gentiles were joining the Christian faith. They could not be baptized in baptisteries because they were a very large number of people, of which many were adults, and also because churches were under persecution everywhere. So **they used to baptize, in the Name of the Holy Trinity in an open environment, like in rivers, seas, and springs,**” explained Abouna.





“So when did people start being baptized inside the church?” asked Andy.

“Baptisteries were used in the early stages of Christianity. They either selected a space within the church building or wherever believers were gathered for worship. Early Christians used to assign special rooms for baptisteries, and also when necessary special houses were used for worship,” answered Abouna.



“How come the baptistery in our church is at the end of the church?” asked Sally.

“I know,” said Andy, “**It is because people who enter the church from the back, who are not Christians are**

baptized first and then continue into the church towards the altar.”

“Very good Andy! While the altar is situated towards the east **the baptistery is built at the west** so that it may act as a medium to transfer those who are in the west to the Lord, our true East,” said Abouna.

“The positioning of the baptistery will also make it unavoidable to be seen by the believer entering the church. This in turn will remind him of **where he was born**, and who his father and mother are. The sight of the baptistery will light his heart with flames of love to his spiritual mother and heavenly Father,” added Abouna.

“Now we know about where the baptisteries are supposed to be, but what about the shape? Are all baptisteries a square shape?” asked Sally.

“Good question Sally. No, not all of them are a **square shape**.

Until the fourth century, the most commonly used shape of baptisteries was the ‘**quadrilateral**,’ often with an apse at the end.

By the beginning of the fifth century, other shapes began to

appear, such as the **hexagonal**, the **octagonal**, the **circular**, and the **cruciform**. In any case, these various types symbolize the theological concept of baptism and its effect in the life of the Church.

1. THE QUADRILATERAL TYPE (**four-sided design**)

This type resembles the shape of a tomb and ‘*martyrias*’ of the early centuries. The reason behind it was that they looked at baptism as sharing death, burial, and resurrection with Christ.

2. THE HEXAGONAL TYPE (**six-sided design**)

This type refers to the sixth day of the week, which is Friday, on which Christ was crucified and buried. Once again it stresses ideas of the Holy Fathers about baptism as much as a co-death and co-burial with Christ.

3. THE OCTAGONAL TYPE (**eight-sided design**)

This type symbolizes the resurrection day of Christ, which is the eighth day of the week. The emphasis here is on the co-resurrection with Christ in baptism. Because of this idea, the church chose Easter Eve as a preferable time for baptizing catechumens.

4. THE ROUND TYPE

This type is meant to remind us of the baptismal grace, or in other words the re-birth. It also reminds us of the idea of the Church’s womb, where all believers are born by the effect of the Holy Spirit. The round type shows an interesting point, it is similar to the circle of eternity. Inside it the baptized enjoys a life beyond all bounds, in a heavenly atmosphere.





5. THE CRUCIFORM



This type directly shows the way of Christ's death, declaring the reality of baptism as a Cross.

"Do you have any more questions?" asked Abouna.

"Yes Abouna. Why is there a dome above the baptistery?" asked Sally.

"When you come out from the baptistery's water, the view of **the dome above the baptized is meant to attract his thoughts to heaven**. It shows the Church beliefs that baptism is the beginning of a heavenly life, where the newly baptized partakes in the Kingdom of God," answered Abouna.



"Wow! That is so amazing. Everything has a symbol. A lot of thought and planning has gone into building the baptistery! And the whole church too!" exclaimed Andy, "We are so lucky to have so many interesting historical facts behind our

amazing Coptic Orthodox Church."



15- THE CHURCH-TOWER (Belfry)

"I love the sound of the bells which are rung in many occasions," Sally said.



"Yes, but they are so loud!" exclaimed Andy.

"Abouna, what are those tall towers that hold the bells called?" asked Sally.

"They are called **belfries**. You see, Sally, the church represents the Lord's ship voyaging towards heaven. Similar to the ship's guard-tower, the church has

a belfry, where bells are normally hung," answered Abouna.

"What are belfries used for?" asked Andy.

"Well, the custom of using bells in the divine service goes back as early as the Old Testament. Bells were included among the ornaments of **the high priest's ephod** (garment), so they were heard at the high-priest entrance and departure from the Sanctuary." Abouna answered.

"Larger bells were also used, namely the **"Megeruphita."** The Mishana states that the sounds of the *Megeruphita* were loud to such an extent that one cannot hear a person speaking in all of Jerusalem."



"Wow, now that is loud. What did they need bells like that for?" Sally asked.

"These **"Megeruphita"** were sounded **to summon the priests to service, to summon the Levites to sing, and to invite the stationary-**



men to bring the unclean ones to the gate called “Nicanor,” answered Abouna.

In the early church of the New Testament, namely in the first three centuries, the use of bells to summon the believers for worshipping was impossible, because of the certainty of persecution,” Abouna explained.

“It is worth noting that the West bells were originally thought of as heathen, and were baptized in a special ceremony to renovate them. However, later the object was clearly that God might use the sounds of bells **to call upon the hearts of the people to worship Him,**” continued Abouna.



“They sure do call upon my heart!” Sally explained.

“And your ears,” said Andy jokingly. “How come we use them in church?” asked Andy.

“In the Church, **the bells replaced the trumpets of the Old Testament,** which were used on receiving the Divine Law (Exodus 3:27). The Scripture states, “as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder Moses spoke, and God answered him in the thunder.” Now bells are rung in the church, as being the new Sinai Mount, where the Lord meets His people and speaks to them.”



Abouna continued, “They were also **used in wars** (Judges 3:27). The church is the place of the spiritual battle, where the children of God struggle against sin with the weapon of the Holy Spirit.

“They were used for celebrating feasts. We do not cease ringing bells at every service until **the Last Advent of Christ,** in other words, celebrating the eternal feast, whence the sound of God’s

trumpet will be heard. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)” Abouna explained.

“The bells were also used for **ordaining the kings** (2 Kings 9:13).”

“When do we use them now,” asked Sally.

Abouna explained, “Church-bells are rung **during the “offertory,”** announcing that Christ the King reigns in our souls, through His Sacrifice. They are also rung **during the communion,** declaring the joy of the church with this Heavenly Feast.

A special rhythm is tolled **on feasts.**

On **the death of a member of the parish,** a special mourning rhythm is tolled as a participation of the whole church in one’s mourning.” Abouna continued, “The mourning rhythm is also tolled at the beginning of every hour on Good-Friday Service.

In the feasts, Sunday and during the 50 days from Easter (Christian Pasch) to Pentecost, no mourning rhythm is tolled, since the church is rejoicing and celebrating the events of these days,” said Abouna.



“Wow, these bells are more important than I thought they were!” exclaimed Andy, “They have so many uses.”

“That’s right,” said Abouna, “**The bells are a very important part of our church, and they will always be considered special.**”

“Well, I guess they are not as annoying as I thought, I actually like them,” said Andy.

“I told you that you would like them!” exclaimed Sally.



[illegible]This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

