



The Praises and Sundays of Kiahk Encountering the Baby of the Manger



The Spirituality of the Kiahk Midnight Praises "Seven and Four"

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The Midnight Praises "Seven and Four" (The Kiahk Praises)



The month of Kiahk is a holy month that is important for the Coptic Orthodox Church, as it is a month of praise that prepares us for the glorious celebration of the Feast of the Nativity (29 Kiahk). It has a special praise that the church enjoys with its special Kiahk melody, so that the believers may feel as though they are in heaven singing praises with the angels.

These praises are called "seven and four", and they are spiritually beautiful and melodic, as they fill the hearts of believers with joy and happiness. It is given this name from the fact that the Kiahk Sunday praises includes within them the seven Theotokias (Glorifications of the Mother of God) for the seven days of the week and the four daily Canticles (Hos) with their Kiahk melodies. All of them are said on one night. They were originally distributed across days of the week as it was in the old days and in the monasteries and some churches today.

The Seven: The title refers to the seven 'Theotokias' (plural of the word 'Theotokia') which is a word derived from the word 'Theotokos', the title of the Virgin Mary meaning 'The Mother of God' to affirm that the one born of her is the incarnate Word of God. They are also preceded by seven Psalis (Hymns for our Lord Jesus Christ), with their praises and expositions.

The Four: The four Canticles, 'Hos', which is a Coptic word meaning 'praise'. The Psali is chanted before the Hos and is followed by the exposition or interpretation. It is notable that the tune of the Psali Adam in the month of Kiahk follows the tune of the praise of Abba Anthony "In the Church of the Firstborn", while the tune of the Psali Watos follows the tune of the "The Burning Bush seen by Moses."

The Psalis of the first, second and fourth Canticles are sung in the Adam tune, while The Psali of the third Canticle is sung in the Watos tune.

Arise O you children of light:

The praise begins with a hymn that we pray daily “Ten Theeno” which means: “Arise O you children of light let us praise the Lord of hosts.”

Here we find the Church urging us to watch, which is an expression of standing in the light of Christ, to praise the Lord of hosts, because in His light we see light. The saying of St. Paul the Apostle applies here: “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8)

The Four Canticles:

The First Canticle: It is the praise of Moses and the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15). This praise resembles the praise of those redeemed in heaven, as God saved them and Crossed them from the world to heaven. The Church placed it in her

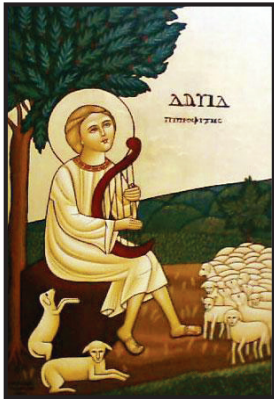


daily praise as the 'first Canticle', to emphasize to her children the need to praise God and give constant thanksgiving for His salvific work for us, as He gives us daily victory over Satan and his soldiers, not relying on our strength but through the work of His grace within us. It is noted that Moses and the people did not utter praise until after they were baptized by crossing the Red Sea and seeing the wondrous salvation of God. Thus, through baptism, when we are buried with our crucified Christ and rise with Him in the newness of life, our lips are opened with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

It is a sweet praise that a believer sings every day when he sees sin falling by the Cross under his feet, and as St. Athanasius the apostolic says: [we shall, with Moses, sing that great song of praise. Thus, singing praises, and seeing that the sin which is in us has been cast into the sea, we pass over to the wilderness.]¹

¹ *Festal Letters: 3*

The Second Canticle: it is Psalm 135 in the Septuagint (Number 136 in the Hebrew Version). 'Thank the Lord,' which is the praise of thanksgiving that the Church gives to God for His love, which saved us and strengthened us. The early church used to pray



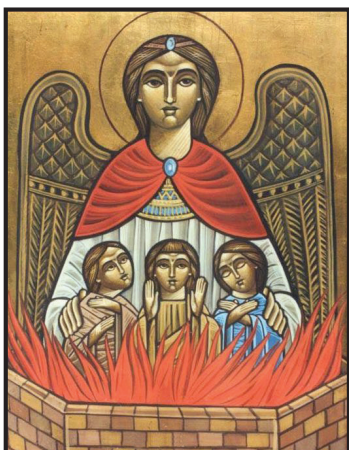
this psalm and the church still uses it today in her daily praise. It is mentioned in the biography of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic that when the people spent an evening in prayer and praise under the leadership of the Pope, the soldiers surrounded the church and attacked it, but the people continued repeating this psalm with a voice like thunder, reciting "His mercy endures forever" 26 times. The Pope remained on his seat until the soldiers left, and the Pope disappeared in the dark, and sought refuge with his friends without any harm.

The Talmud scholars see that repeating the phrase 'His mercy endures forever' 26 times in this psalm corresponds to the 26 generations from creation to receiving the Law in Sinai.²

God's mercy is demonstrated in the following:

- a. He is the unique and wondrous God [1-3].
- b. The Creator of all things for the sake of man [4-9].
- c. Caring for his faithful with a strong hand [10-24]. Grants victory over the forces of darkness: He is in heaven caring for us while we are still on earth.
- d. His care embraces the earth and the heavens [25-26], as He loves all His creation, especially us.

The Third Canticle: it is the praise of the three saintly youths. The king ordered the three youths to be thrown into the furnace of fire. Although the fire was not extinguished, it did not harm them. This praise is mentioned in the Additions to Daniel (in the Septuagint). The Church sings the praises of the three saintly youths in the Kiahk Midnight Praises, during the vigil of Bright Saturday, and every day.



God will always be gracious to everyone of us, despite his presence in the furnace of trouble. He praises his Savior and his Lord, who appears to him and loosens his bonds as he did with these youths. And instead of their perdition, they are glorified (Cf. Daniel 3).

²Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feueur, *Tehillim, Psalms - A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Mesorrah Publications Ltd., 1985, p.1607.*

This praise reveals to us superior spiritual meanings:

* Inner peace does not mean the absence of trials and sufferings. But it means the presence of God with us in the midst of the furnace of the world. The concept of trials in Christianity is that they are not resolved by their end, but by the fact that the Lord is present with us in these experiences and by Him carrying the Cross with us.

Stephen the martyr was stoned, his bones were crumbling, and the flesh of his body was worn out by stones. But he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God as he looked to heaven and thus was indifferent to the stones or his persecutors.

* The furnace of the world is needed to test the church (the Church as a group and we are the members of this community), but God, the compassionate and loving, stands in the midst of this furnace (i.e. harsh trials), transforming the fire into cool dew.

This praise combines in one scene the church's existence in the painful temporal present (the furnace), and its presence in the happy eternity (the Son of God who is in the furnace). "For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them" (Revelation 7:17). She is in the furnace of the world and at the same time in the eternal joy of the presence of God.

The Fourth Cantic: It consists of three psalms (148, 149, 150) and all of them are about praise. Praise is the work of the angels and the daily work of the Church in heaven, the saints, animals, plants and all creation. God is glorified in an unrivaled



form in His saints so we say: 'Praise God in all His saints.'

Mankind is interested in organizing choruses or choirs, whether in the world or in a religious setting. However, we have not heard

of a choir called to praise like the one mentioned in Psalm 148. This choir includes all mankind that fears God as well as the rest of His creation. It also includes all the ranks on high. Everyone feels a debt to the Creator who cared for them, and everyone professes their admiration and love for this wonderful Creator.

This psalm reveals to us everyone's commitment to glorifying God, each being according to his capabilities, abilities and talents. The heavenly creation and the heavenly hosts bear witness to Him of their exultant and holy heavenly life. The sun bears witness to God in the splendor of its rays, as with its heat for the service of plants,

animals, people...etc. And the moon with its splendid light serves us at night, and the planets with their beauty bear witness to the work of God, the greatest artist.

This is from the outside, but what is hidden is greater. As the chanter tastes the sweetness of praise, he calls all the heavenly and earthly creatures to praise:

- a. Heavens [1-6], he begins with angels, then the heavenly hos, then clouds.
- b. The earth [7-10], whether in the depths of the seas and oceans, high mountains, winds and fruitful trees.
- c. Mankind: Humans were created in the image of God - men and women - so they must praise God more than all!

As we enjoy salvation, we perceive more of God's supreme love for us, so we praise him more.

In Psalm 149, when the psalmist sees the Word of God coming to salvation, he invites the Church of the New Testament to sing a new song, where the mind is in harmony with the heart, and the community that fears the Lord becomes a cheerful and a praising community, playing musical instruments, not physical instruments but the person himself turns into a spiritual stringed instrument for the Holy Spirit to play on.

- a. Praise him in the house of the Lord [1-4]. Praise pleases the Lord and adds beauty to his people [Psalm 147: 1].
- b. We must praise him at home [5]. Even when we are asleep, while waking, and even during illness.
- c. Praise him in the arena of the spiritual warfare [6-9]. The word of God is our sword (Eph. 6: 17; Heb. 4-12). Praise is a powerful weapon for victory over the enemy.

Psalm 150 is a call to praise the Lord. The word 'praise' is used 13 times here.

- a. Where do we praise God? On the local and ecumenical level, in the temple and in the heavens [1], wherever we are.
- b. Why do you praise Him? For His deeds with us, and for His person's sake. The more we get to know him, the more we praise him.
- c. How do you praise Him? By our voices as well as musical instruments that refer to our organs, and indeed to our entire physical and spiritual being.
- d. Who are those praising the Lord? Everything that has breath [6], all creatures (148: 7-9). Thus, we humans must glorify Him. Our breath is from Him (Acts 17:25), so we must use it to praise His name.

Breath is our weakest thing, but we can dedicate it to the greatest work we do, which is to praise God!

Saint Clement of Alexandria comments on Psalm 150 that the Church praises during communion of the Holy Mysteries in a beautiful symbolic way, in which it presented the resurrected Church with her Groom from the dead, as a living musical instrument, played by the Holy Spirit to produce a sweet praise of love, saying:

[The Spirit, distinguishing from such revelry the divine service, sings, Praise Him with the sound of trumpet; for with sound of trumpet He shall raise the dead. Praise Him on the psaltery; for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. And praise Him on the lyre. By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit, as it were by a plectrum. Praise with the timbrel and the dance, refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin. Praise Him on the chords and organ. Our body He calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit, it gives forth human voices. Praise Him on the clashing cymbals. He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips. Therefore, He cried to humanity, let every breath praise the Lord, because He cares for every breathing thing which He has made. For man is truly a peaceful instrument]³

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³ *Paedagogus* 2:4