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of booklets
9*

*Some Questions about
The Nativity*

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His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
Pope and Patriarch of the See of Alexandria and of all the
Predication of the Evangelist St. Mark

(COVER PAGE)

***In the Name of
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
the One God,
Amen.***

In this booklet we present to you some answers which are related to certain questions about the Nativity, of which there are:

The sequence of the genealogy, and the mention of some sinful women in it; and the difference between the two gospels of Matthew and Luke as regards the names, and as regards the ascending order and the descending order in that sequence.

The number of genealogies, is it 41 or 42?

Elizabeth your relative.

The son of David the son of Abraham.

The difference in the celebration of the day of the Nativity.

The wise men (the Magi) and the nature of the star of the wise men.

The difference between the (Magi) wise men and the shepherds.

Pope Shenouda III

PREFACE

Some people ask many questions about the subject of The Nativity of Christ, and they need answers. I undertook to answer from the sayings of the Saint Fathers, which I had translated, or which I had taken from some manuscripts.

I relied in that, on many books, the most important of which are:

1. Saint John Chrysostom's interpretation of Matthews' gospel (manuscript, and translation).

2. The Homelies of saint Severus of Antioch, which were published in "Patrologia Orientalis: Homilae Cathedrales"

3. The sermons of saint John Chrysostom.

There are other questions about the virginal nativity and the virginity of the Holy Virgin, to which I answered in our book "The Comparative Theology", to which it can be referred.

But now, I congratulate you for the Nativity of the Lord Christ.

Many happy returns.

1

The sinful women in the genealogy sequence

QUESTION

Why did the evangelist neglect the names of some saint women like Sara, Rebecca, and others, in the sequence of genealogies, while he mentioned adulterous women like Tamar, Rahab, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and Ruth who is a woman of a foreign race?

ANSWER

He wanted to annihilate the haughtiness of the Jews who boast about their grandfathers. He showed to them how their grandfathers had sinned. Judah committed adultery with Tamar, his son's widow, and engendered Perez and Zerah from her. David fell into adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Boaz, the great grandfather of David, was engendered by Salmon from the adulteress Rahab.

Even if their grandfathers were virtuous men, the virtue of their grandfathers would not have been profitable to them; because the deeds of a person, not the deeds of his sons, are those which determine his destiny at the last day.

Saint John Chrysostom said about that: "

"The Lord Christ did not come to run away from our disgraceful actions, but to obliterate them. He is not ashamed of any of our defects. And just as those grandfathers had taken adulterous women, in the same way our Lord and God has betrothed for Himself our nature that had committed adultery.

The Church is like Tamar:

She was at once delivered from her wicked actions, and then she followed Him.

The condition of Ruth resembles our conditions:

Her tribe was a foreigner to Israel; and it went down to exceeding poverty. Nevertheless, when Boaz saw her, he did not despise her poverty, neither did he reject the vileness of her race. In the same way, the Lord Christ did not reject His Church that was an alien, and poor as regards good deeds. And just as Ruth, if she had not left her people and her house, she would not have tasted that glory, in the same way, the Church about which the prophet said: "Forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty" (Psalm 45: 10-11).....

Our Lord mortified them with these matters, and made them realize how not to be haughty.

When the evangelist registered the genealogy of Christ, he mentioned those sinful women; because it is impossible for any of us to be virtuous by the virtue of his grandfathers, or to be wicked by the vice of his grandfathers. I rather say that the person whose grandfathers were not virtuous and became virtuous himself, then the honor of that person's virtue would have been great.

Let no one boast about his grandfathers, and be puffed because of them, when he thinks about the grandfathers of our Lord; and let him look at his own deeds, and even let him not boast about his virtues; because it is through such boasting that the Pharisee became less the the Publican. (Luke 18).

Do not then falsify your pains by vain talk. Do not loose all your effort after having covered a long distance; because your Lord knows the virtues which you have attained, better than you, because if you give a glass of cold water, God will not neglect that, and will not forget it. (Matt. 10:43).

2

Ascent & descent in the genealogical sequence

QUESTION

There are three differences in the sequence of genealogy, between what the evangelist Matthew registered, and what the evangelist Luke registered. They are:

1. *There is a difference between the names in the two gospels.*
 2. *Saint Matthew begins the biography of the Lord Christ with the genealogical sequence. As for saint Luke, he does not speak of it before telling the story of the baptism.*
 3. *Saint Matthew mentions the genealogy descending from the first fathers to the sons, while saint Luke mentions the genealogy ascending from the Lord Christ to Adam to God.*
- Is there an interpretation for all these differences?*

ANSWER

I. The difference in names.

As a matter of fact, saint Matthew mentions the natural genealogy of the Lord Christ, while saint Luke mentions the legal or official genealogy. To explain this, we say:

The law of Moses specifies that if a man dies without posterity, the brother of the dead man must take the widow of his brother, and marry her, and engender a posterity for his brother from her. (Deut. 25: 5-6), or that the son whom he engenders becomes from the legal point of view, an official son to his brother, although he is considered a natural son to that brother who has engendered him.

Hence such a son would have two fathers: a natural father who has engendered him, and a legal father who is his uncle who died without posterity.

If this dead man without posterity has no brother, the nearest relative to him will take his wife and engender a posterity to him;

because the son who is born is counted a son to this dead man, according to the law. If the nearest relative does not want to take the wife of the dead man according to what he has been charged of, the next relative must necessarily accept this marriage, because the law is eager to raise a posterity to that dead man who has not engendered a son.

That kind of marriage is called "redemption". A clear example of this is mentioned in the story of Ruth with Boaz.

In his interpretation of this, saint Severus of Antioch said:

In this manner, Joseph the betrothed to the Holy Virgin is related, as a matter of fact, to two fathers :

Because since Heli took a wife and died without posterity, Jacob, who was the nearest relative to him, married his wife in order to engender a posterity to him from her according to the commandment of the law. When he engendered Joseph, that Joseph became a legal son to the dead Heli, and at the same time a natural son to Jacob. Therefore saint Matthew, from his part, said that Joseph is the son of Jacob, and saint

Luke, from the other part, said that he is the son of Heli. One mentioned the natural genealogy, and the other mentioned the legal genealogy.

From his part, saint Matthew mentioned the natural fathers of Joseph, while saint Luke, from the other part, mentioned the legal fathers.

Saint Luke went on with the genealogical legal sequence until Nathan son of David. Saint Matthew went on until Solomon son of David. The two met in David..... Then the course was sometimes similar, and some other times, it was variously divided, then it was united again, and then separated.

Hence the genealogy of Christ is confirmed, from the natural and from the legal point of view,.....that He is the son of David, the son of Abraham, the son of Adam.

2. The difference in ascending and in descending, and the relation between this and the baptism.

Saint Matthew began his gospel by saying: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham....." Then he explained the genealogy saying: "Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob". And after having mentioned those who were engendered through faulty relations, he came at last to the census of the generations. Then he said directly: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows....."

Thus after having explained the corruption and the death through which all these generations had passed, he arrived at the pure birth of the Lord Christ from the Holy Spirit and from the Virgin saint Mary.

As for saint Luke, he narrated the Annunciation, the birth of the Baptist, the Nativity of Christ, and gradually reached the baptism of Christ at the age of thirty; and then he mentioned the legal genealogy.

Saint Severus of Antioch explains this matter saying:

"Luke explained the legal genealogy, that reminds us of Him who died without posterity, then his name was raised after his death, by a son who is attributed to him, in a way that has some similarity to the adoption and to the resurrection.

He mentioned this genealogy after having narrated the story of the Nativity; because baptism gives the true heavenly adoption, in manifesting us as sons of God. Therefore he mentioned the legal genealogy which gives the adoption; in order to show that this representation has been truly confirmed, and that the sickly condition of the people has been returned to health by means of grace.

It is for this reason that he ascended with the genealogy from down upwards, till it arrived to God, in order to show that grace which comes

from baptism raises us up and elevates us to the divine relationship, making us sons to God.

Exactly just as the union of marriage which happened after the disobedience of the commandment by Adam and Eve, and the engendering of sons, which resulted from that, made us descend downwards. And to complete this image he descended with the natural genealogy downwards

Saint Augustine says:

Matthew goes down with the genealogy, pointing to our Lord Jesus Christ who descended to bear our sins. Because in the posterity of Abraham "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Thus he did not begin with Adam.

3

The number of generations

QUESTION

Saint Matthew says: "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations" (Matt. 1:17). But when we count them, we find them to be 41 only. What then is the secret?

ANSWER

The reason is that Jeconiah was counted twice, because he is like the angle stone, an intermediate between two generations, and so he was counted with each of the two.

From David who had sinned, they went down to the captivity to the age of Jeconiah,

And from Jecohiah, they went up to the generation of Christ who has emancipated them.

Jeconiah was in that matter, a symbol of Christ, who was described as "the stone which was rejected by the builders, which has become the chief cornerstone".

4

The son of David, the son of Abraham

QUESTION

Why did the apostle Matthew say in the genealogy sequence: "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1); and mentioned David firstly, although Abraham precedes David as regards time?

ANSWER

Saint John Chrysostom said about that:

"He mentioned David firstly, because he was prominent in the mouths of all the people at that time, in view of his dignity, and his majesty, and also because he was more recent in time.

Thus they said: "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" (John 7:42).

Nobody called Him the son of Abraham, but they called Him the son of David..... because of his kingdom, and because they honoured the kings who reigned after him.

And God said to Solomon: "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (1 Kings 11:12)."

We note also what the angel said in his annunciation to the Holy Virgin of the birth of Christ:

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1: 32:33).

5

*Elizabeth your relative***QUESTION**

The angel of the Annunciation said to the Holy Virgin : "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived in her old age" (Luke 1:36). How can this be, since the Holy Virgin St. Mary is from the tribe of Judah from the posterity of David, while Elizabeth is from the daughters of Aaron from the tribe of Levi; and the mixing among tribes was forbidden, in order to safeguard the inheritance, lest it would be transferred from one tribe to another?!

ANSWER

It is true that it was said in the book of Numbers:

"So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance" (Num. 36: 7-9).

Nevertheless there are some who interpret the word "your relative" in a general meaning, or that she is like one from the daughters of Israel, according to the word of the apostle saint Paul:

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants....." (Rom. 9: 3-4).

But saint Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, presents another interpretation. He says:

[As a matter of fact, the book of the Exode was written before the commandment that forbids taking a wife from another tribe. Aaron, the first chief priest according to the law, took a wife from the daughters of Judah, "Aaron took to himself Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, as wife" (Ex. 6:23), and Amminadab is from the posterity of the tribe of Judah.....

Consider the very wise management of the Holy Spirit, who ordained that the wife of Zacharias, the mother of the Baptist and the relative of St. Mary the mother of God, was called Elizabeth. We recollect the past until Elizabeth whom Aaron married, and the union of the two tribes which happened through her medium. The Holy Spirit obviously declares to us that it is through the medium of Elizabeth, that the relationship with the Holy Virgin was established.]

6

Why the registration by genealogy from Joseph?

QUESTION

This question was asked by saint John Chrysostom, and he answered it:

"How is it declared that Christ is from the posterity of David? since he was not born of a man but from a woman only; and the posterity of the Virgin was not counted?..... and what is the objective in that the evangelist mentioned Joseph who was not a cause for the Nativity of Christ?"

ANSWER

It was mentioned in the gospel that "the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1: 26-27). According to the law, it was not permitted that one could marry from a tribe which is not his own tribe (Num. 36: 7-9).

Since Joseph is from the house of David and from his relatives, it was not possible for him to take Mary as a wife from another tribe than his tribe, and from another ethnic group than his.

If you say: "What is it if he had disobeyed the law in that matter? I reply to you that the gospel testified to him that he was "a just man" (Matt. 1:19).

If you say: Why is it according to the genealogy from Joseph and not from the Virgin?

We say: "It was not a custom among the Jews, to count the genealogy from women. Therefore he was silent about the mention of her grandfathers, and he counted the genealogy of Joseph. If he had counted the genealogy from a virgin, he would have invented an innovation. And

if he had been silent about the genealogy of Joseph, we would not have known the grandfathers of the Holy Virgin.....

Also it was because he did not want to manifest before the time, to the Jews, that Christ was born of a Virgin.....since in that, there is a deliverance of the Virgin from a malignant accusation..... lest the Jews would have lapidated the Virgin with stones.

Since after numerous miracles, they called Him the son of Joseph (Matt. 13:55), how would they have believed before His miracles, that He is the son of a virgin?!

7

THE "WISE MEN" (THE MAGI)

QUESTION

Who are the wise men? Why did the star appear to them? How did they overcome the Jews? Was the star a natural star? Or was it a heavenly power in the form of a star? What are the symbols which the story of the wise men bear, and what are their relationships with the Gentiles and the Jews?

ANSWER

The wise men came from the East, probably from the countries of Persia. They were from the rank of princes, or scientists, or priests. They worshipped the ancient eastern gods, probably the fire; and they may have been among the followers of Zaradesht. They were experts in astronomy and in the stars. Perhaps they had heard from the Jews in the dispersion about a Saviour who will come to deliver them and to become the king of the Jews.

Saint John Chrysostom says:

"[My brothers, we urgently need long watching and many prayers in order to be able to answer these questions, and to know who are those wise men? and where did they come from?

Because Satan suggested to the enemies of the truth to say: "When Christ was born, His star appeared: Is this not a sign which proves that astrology is a true industry? If He was born in this manner, why did He eradicate astrology, fortune-telling, and magic, and did he render the devils to silence?!

Let us then examine what was that star: was it one of the numerous stars? Or was it an alien to them, from another nature than their nature?

Or was it that only the person who looked at it, that thought it was a star? If we know the answer to these questions, we shall know the other matters with greater facility.

That star was not one of the numerous stars; and it is more convenient to say, according to what I think, that it was not a star. But it was one of the invisible powers, and was transformed to that aspect.

The evidence is clear:

Firstly: from the way of its movement: Because there is no star which can possibly move in that manner. If you consider the other stars, you will find that their movement is from West to East. But this star went in its course from the North to the South, because that is the direction from the countries of Persia to Palestine.

Secondly: as regards the time of its appearance: because it did not appear by night, but rather in the daytime when the sun has risen. And this appearance is neither due to the strength of a star, nor to the strength of the moon, nor was it due to all these astral bodies which hide and set down when the sun rays appear. But this star had overcome the sun rays by the abundance of its brilliancy, and was more visible and more glittering than all of them.

Thirdly: this truth becomes obvious from that the star appeared for some time and then disappeared for some other time.

Because it appeared in order to show them the way to Palestine. When they came to Jerusalem, it hid itself. And when they left Herod after he had questioned them, and intended to walk to Bethlehem, the star reappeared to them again. This appearance and disappearance does not happen in the movement of an ordinary star, but it is due to a power which is, above measure, different from others. Because it did not march in a special way. But when it was necessary that they would march, it marched. And when they needed to stop, it stopped, thus controlling all the conditions of their march according to what was convenient for them. It was like the column of clouds in its conduct of the Jewish people.

When they entered Jerusalem, the star was hidden from them, so that having lost their guide, they were compelled to ask the Jews, in order that the matter would become notorious and well-known to everybody..... Thus the appearance and the disappearance brought a determined providence that had a special wisdom.

Fourthly: by its descending downwards:

The meditator must in an obvious manner, necessarily find out another characteristic from the guidance of the wise men by the star. Because it was not possible to show them the way while it was high over them, but it achieved that action by coming downwards. Because while it was high over them, it could not determine precisely a narrow place like a hut where a small baby is lying down. We can know this from the

example of the moon, which appears greater than many stars, and how it appears to all the inhabitants of the world in all its vastness, and everyone thinks that the moon is near to him.

Tell me how would the star have shown them a small place like a hut and a manger, if it had not left this high place, and gone downwards till it stopped over the head of the child.

That is what the evangelist indicated saying: "and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was." (Matt. 2:9).

When the star recognized the Child, it stopped, and its stopping there, while it was descending downwards, is a great testimony.

It had a great influence upon the wise men and guided them to the worship of the Child. They did not worship Him as an ordinary human being. That is obvious from the gifts which they presented to Him, and which are not convenient for a small child in its swaddling clothes.....

Did you see with what arguments, it has been shown that this star was not one of the ordinary stars?.....]

Why did the star appear?

If you ask why did the star appear?

I shall answer you saying that its appearance symbolizes the end of the choice of the Jews; destroying all their arguments of self-sufficiency, and calling all the world to His worship.

Thus He opened the door to the Gentiles from the principle of the coming of the Lord, willing to educate His people through the foreigners. Because if He had sent to them many prophets who explained to them His coming, and nevertheless they did not listen to them, therefore He let the foreigners (the Persians) come from a distant land asking for the vision of the way. Let the Jews learn from the words of the inhabitants of Persia, what they refused to learn from their prophets. If they persist and discuss after that also, they will lose every excuse and every argument.

What have they to say, they who have refused to accept the Christ in spite of His having sent to them the prophets, while the wise men accepted the Lord and worshipped Him, merely because they had seen a single star?

Just as He convicted them with His acceptance by the wise men, He also convicted them with the faith of the pagan inhabitants of Nineveh. Therefore He said to them that "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here"

(Matt. 12:41). Likewise He convicted them with the Samaritan woman, and the woman of Canaan, and the queen of the South; because all these have at least believed; but the others, not even at most, did not believe.

Why did He attract the wise men in this manner?

Perhaps someone would ask: "Why did He attract the wise men by means of a star? We answer that it was not possible for such people to listen to a prophet if He had sent to them one of the prophets. And it was not convenient for them that He would have talked to them from above or by sending an angel. Therefore He called them by the means to which they were used, condescending to their great weakness; and He showed them a great and strange star, in order to amaze them by its beautiful aspect, and to lead them by its way of marching.

The apostle saint Paul followed this method, when he mentioned a testimony from the poets (Acts 17:28). He argued with everyone with the style to which he was used (1 Cor. 9: 19-22). With the Jews, God firstly utilized the statutes of sacrifices and purification and the rest of the ordinances and prescriptions by which He began, in view of the dullness of their minds. Then He replaced them, attracting them little by little, until reaching the high philosophy.

He did this with the wise men. He permitted to call them with a star which they saw, in order to render them more discerning and more perceptive than they were. When He led them to the manger, and when they saw the new-born, and became in their spiritualities, better than they were, then He did not let them go back to their countries by means of a star, but He "divinely warned" them "in a dream" (Matt. 2:12).

Why did He manifest Himself to those wise men, and not to others?

Perhaps someone would ask: "How did they reach such a great zeal? Who had incited them to such a long journey from their country?" According to my opinion, what they did was not merely to be guided by a star, but it was God who had awakened their souls; just as He had done with the king Cyrus, when He incited him to build the house of God. (Ezra 1:2).

Perhaps it would be said: "Why did He not unveil this manifestation to all the wise men?"

We answer: Because He was not expecting that all of them would believe Him. But He unveiled the matter to those who were more ready to accept Him. Many nations had perished, but the prophet Jonah was not sent but to the people of Nineveh alone. There were two thieves hanging on crosses, but only one of them was saved.

It is astonishing that these wise men come from distant countries to see the Christ! What good things did they expect?.....Did they come to a king?

Nevertheless they did not see a king, but a child in swaddling clothes. Did they treat Him as a king, considering what would be happening? No, because afterwards He did not surround Himself with any kingly appearance, He did not possess neither horses nor slaves, and He was accompanied only by twelve unknown poor men.

They did not expect him to be a king over them, but a king over an opposing country, which was very distant from their country. ***Undoubtedly they realized the dangers which surrounded them in meeting Him.***

They had seen how king Herod trembled, and how the whole congregation was troubled, when they heard the words of the wise men. So they were heading for a king over a country over which there reigned another king What kinds of deaths were then awaiting for them?! And what did they expect from that king to whom they were directed?

What good thing did they hope to take, when they saw before them a hut, and a manger, and a child in his swaddling clothes, and a poor mother. What then was their aim in worshipping Him and in giving Him presents?

Did they expect good things from Him, when he would become a king in the future? And how could they know that this child would, when he would be grown up, remember what they did, so long as he was in His swaddling clothes?!

How marvelous is the virtue of those who had thrown themselves into many dangers, leaving their country and their people, without any apparent aim but that they obeyed what the Lord had placed in their hearts; then they believed, came, worshipped, and gave presents.

We see the virtue of these wise men, not only in their mere coming, but also in their publicly saying: "we have seen His star in the East, and have come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2). They did not fear neither the anger nor the exasperation of the king.

Hence, I believe that these wise men became the teachers of their countrymen in their lands.....especially that they had known from the Jews, that this one whose star they had seen, is the one whom the prophets had announced long ages ago.

The shepherds and the wise men are symbols of the Jews and the Gentiles:

Saint Augustin explains this point saying:

The wise men from the Gentiles, were the first to believe in the Lord Christ. It is evident that the first fruit of the belief in Christ, was the belief

of the shepherds. The shepherds came to Him from a near place, and they saw Him on the same day, because the news had come to them by means of angels. But the wise men came to Him from a distant place, and by means of a star. Nevertheless both of them met at the corner stone, "who has made both one" those "who were afar off and ...those who were near" (Eph. 2: 14-17). It was said to the shepherds: "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14), and the expression: "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1), was realized with the wise men.

The shepherds came from a near place to see, and the wise men came from a distant place to worship.

Grace reached the shepherds before the wise men, but these last were more humble. This is the humility that rendered the wild olive tree deserving to be grafted into a cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:17). The Holy Bible glorifies this humility more in the Gentiles, than in the Jews. Examples of this are what has been said about the centurion (Matt. 8: 5-10), and about the woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:28).

The Jews manifested to the Gentiles the Christ whom they did not themselves want to worship.

We note as regards the wise men, that in not returning through the same way, they symbolize the change in life; since those who arrive at Christ, do not return again to their first way.

Saint John Chrysostom says again:

"Let the Jews be ashamed, because they had seen wise men and ignorant people preceding them, while they did not come to Him, not even after these. ***That which had happened at that time was a token of what happened later: that the Gentiles preceded the Jews*** Thus those who were from the land of Persia preceded those who were from Jerusalem. The apostle saint Paul mentioned this meaning when he said to them: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

The Jews should have worshipped with the wise men, and should have glorified their God, but they trembled and were troubled.

"Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared", desiring to kill the new-born.

Between Herod and the wise men:

Herod did not care for all that had happened. He was not persuaded, neither by the prophecies of the prophets which he had heard, nor by the story of the extraordinary star, nor by the coming of the wise men from distant countries to worship the new-born.

It is clear that he was in a strange position. Whether he had believed the prophecy which had been said, it is evident that he acted contrarily. And whether he had denied it and had not expected that what was said in it would be realized, why then was he afraid and terrified?

Among the matters which demonstrate his lack of understanding, is his delusion that the wise men would prefer him to the new-born whose star they had seen, and for whom they suffered the pains of that long journey!

The astonishing thing is that "he had secretly called the wise men", and said to them: "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also" (Matt. 2:8).

And we ask him: "If you truthfully say that, why then do you ask the people secretly? And if you want to kill Him, do you think that the wise men had no doubts about you, because of your trouble and your calling them secretly? But when the malignity of a person traps him, he becomes less intelligent than everybody....."

Beware of becoming like Herod who said: "that I may come and worship Him also", while his heart was not sincere to Him, but he wanted to kill Him. Because those who worthlessly take part in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, resemble Herod.

The wise men, before their sight of the Child, were hammered by tribulations and fears from every part. But after their worship, He filled them with peace, and they became His priests through their worship, because they presented gifts and offerings to Him.....

But perhaps you would ask: "Why did the wise men run away from Herod's face? And why did the Child Jesus run away too?"

We answer that it was not convenient to show His miracles in that early age, lest people would not have felt that He was a human being.....

There is another meaning, which is that we must expect difficulties and pains since the beginning of the way.

Here is Jesus who, while He was still in His swaddling clothes, was chased by Herod, and ran away. And His mother who had not committed any evil, who had not gone away from her house for a long distance at any time, she was alienated and suffered the pains of a long journey.....and Joseph likewise, and also those Persians who secretly departed running away.

That happened so that, when you hear these events, and you become prepared to serve a spiritual service, and then you meet calamities and hardships, you do not tremble a little and do not say: "I should have been crowned because I have accomplished the service of my Lord."

When the wise men had been divinely warned not to return to Herod, they "departed for their own country another way" They did not doubt, but they promptly obeyed, *and they did not think in themselves: "If this Child is greatly powerful, and possesses such wonders, what need have we to run away and to depart secretly!"*

Likewise the just Joseph did not argue with the angel, while doubting.....

And he did not say to him: "You said before, that He will save His people, and behold, He did not save Himself, but we are in need of journeying and running away. What happened to us is the contrary of what He had promised us....."

He did not pronounce any of these expressions, because he was believing. And he did not ask about the time of his return from there, although the angel did not specify it, not even by saying "until I bring you word"

THE DIFFERENCE IN THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

QUESTION

Why do we celebrate the feast of the Nativity on the 7th of January, while some other churches celebrate it on the 25th of December. What is the reason for this difference?

ANSWER

It is not a doctrinal or a theological difference, but it is a scientific difference.

It is known that the year is 365 days and a quarter of a day. Therefore a day is added once every four years; and the year is called a leap year.

But in the gregorian western calendar, it has been said that the year is 365 days and a quarter of a day and approximately 11 minutes. This calendar was established about fifteen centuries AD.

If this difference of eleven minutes every year, is multiplied during those centuries since the birth of Christ until now, it will result into a difference of approximately thirteen days which is the difference between the 25th of December and the 7th of January.

We have confidence in our Coptic calendar, because of the great excellence of the Pharaohs in the science of astronomy, and we celebrate

the Nativity on the 29th of Kiahk which corresponds to the 7th of January. There are some other churches who share with us this date.

But the question is not a question of faith and doctrine, nevertheless it can be exploited to impress the simple, when the date is changed.