



— THE — LORD — IS MY — LIGHT



— AND MY —
SALVATION
WHOM SHALL I FEAR?
PSALM 27:1

Grade 9-12

HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II



**118TH POPE OF ALEXANDRIA AND
PATRIARCH OF THE SEE OF SAINT MARK**



The Lord is My Light and My Salvation

Table of Contents	Page
St. Mark Festival Anthem- The Lord is My Light and My Salvation	2
The Lord is My Salvation	3
The Trinity	8
First Epistle of St. John	11
A Personal Relationship with Christ	18
Understanding Insecurity	23
Artificial Intelligence – Good or Evil?	26
Memorization	31
Coptic	33
Hymns & Rituals	39

Visit the St. Mark Festival's website at www.smfsus.org
to find the material for the festival and
for guidelines and information on the tests



The Lord is My Light and My Salvation

St. Mark Festival 2024 Anthem

Our God is eternal
Pantocrator, The Logos

All generations witness for Him
Tells of His might and His wonders

We're peaceful in His promises
We live by His commandments

Our Church fathers and martyrs
A life of Sacraments

My faith and my doctrine are glory
The Lord is my light and my salvation

Our God is One in Three
Redeemer and Holy x2

His creation gives Him praise
How this world His hands have made

Guided by His teachings
We seek Him and His blessings

Kept Tradition to this day
My Church unique and firm in faith

Unchanging the teachings and Holy
The Lord is my light and my salvation



The Lord is My Salvation

“**The Lord is my light and my salvation**” is this year’s theme of St. Mark Festival 2024. It is the first verse in Psalm 27, which was written by David, the prophet, while he was fleeing from King Saul.

His life was filled with the presence of the Lord and so his life was filled with light and hope. The Lord saved David many times, so he felt that the Lord was **his light and salvation**.

This Psalm is a declaration that the Lord is our light and our salvation. He guards the life of each one of us. He saves his children from enemies and enlightens them to attain eternal life with Him. Let us look at this year’s theme more closely:

The Lord:

Who is the Lord?

We believe in One God. God is a Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; three in One.

The Lord revealed to us that He is a Trinity in both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4) and the New Testament (1 John 5:7), which means that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in essence. However, each hypostasis (the three persons of the Trinity) is distinct from the others:

- The **Father** is unbegotten
- The **Son** is begotten from the Father
- The **Holy Spirit** proceeds from the Father



We learn these dogmatic facts about the Holy Trinity from our beloved Orthodox Church.

The Lord is My Light

The Lord is the True Light

- Our Lord God is light. He said: **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”** (John 8:12)
- And in the first epistle of St. John, we read **“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”** (1 John 1:5)
- In the Book of Revelation, we read that St. John saw the Lord as **“His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.”** (Revelation 1:16)
- In the Litanies of Matins prayers we say, **“O the true Light who gives light to every man coming into the world...”** and **“As the day light shines upon us, O Christ our God, the true Light, let the luminous senses and the bright thoughts shine within us...”**
- God is referred to as **“Father of lights”** (James 1:17) **“who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see”** (1 Timothy 6:16)
- The Lord is also the creator of light, He said **“Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.”** (Genesis 1:3-4)

It was His first creation for mankind, to be able to see and enjoy what God offers for him out of His love.

The Church teaches us to walk in the light of the Lord through...:

1. The Teachings of the Holy Bible:

- The Holy Bible is the word of God; His commandments, His promises. It was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When we follow the commandments of the Holy Bible we fulfill the commandments of the Lord:
“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)



“Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you” (John 12:35)

2. The Liturgical Life of the Church

- The church is a spiritual lampstand; through her rites, we always see the church decorated with many lights and candles, which symbolize the Lord's presence.
- We see more candles lit especially during the readings.
- In the Sacrament of Baptism (the mystery of enlightenment), we are enlightened as becoming children of God.
- The father the priest says, **“Open the eyes of their heart, that they may be enlightened with the light of the Gospel of Your kingdom”** and **“make them ... purified vessels, sons of light, and heirs of Your kingdom.”**
- And In the Agpeya prayers we pray, **“enlighten our minds, our hearts, and our understanding”** and in the Midnight Prayer we say: **“enlighten our minds to understand Your life-giving words. Raise us from darkness of sin which ruins the soul.”**



3. The Life of the Saints is Light

- The Lord Jesus Christ incarnated and came to give light to the world. He then let His disciples reflect this light just like the moon reflects the light of the sun.
- He commanded us to live a life of holiness, **“Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16)** the Church became filled with many faithful people whose biographies enlighten us as we read them in the Synaxarion every day.



The Lord is My Salvation

What is salvation? The origin of the word “salvation” comes from “to save.”

- When Adam sinned and transgressed the Lord’s commandment, the result of his sin was death. Therefore, he carried the sentence of death within him and all his descendants. Mankind became in dire need of a savior to save them from that sentence and restore them back to paradise.
- The process of salvation is an ongoing process that continues throughout the life of the believer.



1. Baptism



2. Confirmation



3. Repentance and Confession



4. Eucharist



Therefore, we do not agree with the notion of “I was saved on that day” or “salvation in a moment” which is adapted by non-Orthodox denominations, not for theological debate but from a true understanding of the process of salvation.

- HH Pope Shenouda III explained that as Adam’s descendants, we were in Adam when he sinned, and when he was punished and death entered his life, we were also in him. Therefore, we were born with his sin, and we carried his nature that was corrupted by sin. We received the same sentence as Adam, and we lost the divine image that man was created with. Therefore, we became in need of salvation from Adam’s sin, its consequences, and its punishment. St. Paul described this by saying: **“Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” (Romans 5:18)**



We need the Lord Jesus Christ Who:

- Saves us from Adam's sin, which we were born with.
- Saves from the corrupt nature, which is inclined to sin.
- Saves us from death:
 - **Physical death:** through the resurrection of the dead.
 - **Spiritual death:** when we have a living relationship with Him.
 - **Moral death:** when we become His children.
 - **Eternal death:** By entering the kingdom of heaven.
- Saves us from habitual sins, which can overtake our lives (thoughts, senses, relationships, etc.)
- Saves us from all sadness and worries through the work of His Holy Spirit in us according to His promise **"Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy."** (John 16:33)
- Saves us from the attacks of the devil who wants our corruption, but we are confident that **"the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."** (Romans 16:20)



How are we saved?

- By the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation became possible. The Lord Jesus Christ is our savior and ransom. Therefore, there is no salvation without incarnation, and there is no incarnation without birth.
- The Lord Jesus Christ offered salvation for all sinners, all over the world, throughout all history. However, not everyone will be saved; only those who believe in Him and accept His gift of salvation.



How do we accept this gift of salvation?

1. Faith: Believing that salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ, our only savior.

"Nor is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12)

"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Believing that our great God was incarnated through his birth from St. Mary, was crucified on the Cross, died, and rose from the dead for our salvation. He also ascended to the heavens, sent to us the Paraclete, established the Church for us, and embedded the sacraments that are essential for our salvation.

2. Participating in the Sacraments:

(The first 4 sacraments are essential for salvation.)

- **Baptism:** **"unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16)**
- **Confirmation (Myron):** **"But you have an anointing from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20)** to make us a temple for the Holy Spirit.
- **Repentance and Confession:** **"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3)**

- **Eucharist:** “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” (John 6:56)
- **Unction of the Sick:** “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” (James 5:14-15)
- **Matrimony:** The Holy Matrimony between one man and one woman as the Lord intended with holiness and purity to establish a family is a Holy Sacrament where the Holy Spirit comes upon the bride and groom to make the two of them one flesh “**This is a great mystery**” (Ephesians 5:32) therefore we do not accept any other form of relationship as “marriage.”
- **Priesthood:** The fathers, the bishops, and the priests are the ministers of the mysteries of salvation. The Church chooses them to pastor the people, teach them, and administer the Holy Sacraments.
“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”
(1 Corinthians 4:1)



3. **Good works:** Good works are essential for our salvation; they show the truthfulness of our faith and its fruit. “**faith without works is dead**” (James 2:20)

“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”
(James 2:18)

We thank our Lord Jesus Christ, our God and the savior of our souls for making salvation possible and giving us power, hope, peace, and comfort.

May the Lord bless this year’s St. Mark Festival to be fruitful, fulfilling, and help us to grow in faith to become fruitful vines in the Lord’s vineyard.
May He fill our lives with goodness to dedicate our lives to Him and witness to His holy name.

The Trinity

The fire department announced a great need for volunteers. They called for strong men and women to become firefighters for a major fire that needs to be put out! Is it a wildfire in the woods? Is it a fire in one of the oil drilling sites? No! It is the largest and most significant project of all time! It's a project to put out the Sun! Yes! "To reduce the global warming phenomenon" exclaimed the Chief firefighter!



Many firefighters volunteered, some brought their own equipment, some brought water sources, some brought fire-extinguishing chemicals, and many put on their suits and got ready for work! Space technology companies began deploying their space rockets carrying firefighters toward the Sun to put it down. Those who returned to Earth were so proud that they were able to extinguish a small portion of the Sun!

This story may seem fictional; however, it happens every day in our world! The devil recruits many people daily in an attempt to extinguish the truth of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan gives each one of them the tool most suitable for their weakness; to one he gives "doubt", to another he gives "idle talk", to another he gives "lies," and finally his newest tool is "social media." However, do you think they will succeed? **Our topic today is to learn who our God is. God is a Trinity.**

How can we say, "we believe in One God" and say the "God is a Trinity"?

The Holy Bible Declares the Holy Trinity

- This unity would not be understood without having faith in the Trinity. We do not believe in three gods but in **One God**.
- God revealed to us that He is Three in One. There is no division or separation between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- This declaration came with complete clarity and simplicity in the Holy Bible.

Select from the following references what proves this truth:

1.	Luke 1:35	4.	Galatians 4:6	7.	Matthew 28:19
2.	John 15:26	5.	Ephesians 2:18	8.	Matthew 12:18
3.	John 14:26	6.	Matthew 3:16-17	9.	John 4:23
				10.	Luke 3:22

An Equal Holy Trinity

- God is One in a Holy Trinity equal and eternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the same in their divine attributes (i.e. unlimited, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) However, they are distinct in their hypostatic attributes (i.e. begetting, begotten, procession)
- There is no preference among the persons of the Trinity. Therefore, the Holy Bible does not mention them in a specific order lest one may understand that the Father is greater than the Son or the Holy Spirit. **In each verse, what order are the persons of the Trinity mentioned:**

- **Matthew 28:19:** _____

- **2 Corinthians 13:14:** _____

Jude 1:20-21: _____

One Essence and Three Hypostases

- **The Meaning of Essence**

Essence is what relates to the nature of our God, and it is superior to all the other 'essences', like the essence of man or other creatures.

- "The Essence" is what exists, and this essence has a specific nature, which is the Divine nature that has its essential characteristics.
- From the essential characteristics of our God is that He has eternal life, eternal power, eternal wisdom, eternal understanding, eternal truth, and eternal love.
- God is the origin of existence and the cause of existence. He is essential for existence and through Him, all existing things happen to be.



- **The Meaning of Hypostasis**

This divine essence is based on three hypostases (persons). Without them, the divine essence would not stand.

- **The Three Hypostases Work Together**

Some imagine that the Father created us, the Son redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us. But the reality is that, in work, there is no separation between the Hypostases.

- The Father created us by the Son in the Holy Spirit and we were redeemed according to the will of the Father and by sacrificing His only begotten Son.
- The Holy Spirit also sanctifies us according to the will of the Father and the sacrifice of the Son.

Analogies to explain the Holy Trinity

The Fathers taught us many examples and analogies to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. All the analogies and the examples can only bring the meaning closer to us from one or more aspects. However, it is not possible to completely explain this doctrine from all aspects.

Example 1: The Sun

- The sun sends its rays through millions of miles so that the darkness of Earth becomes light. It also transmits its heat to plants, animals, and humans.
- It is an example of the unity within the Trinity. The sun is one, but it is also three in one. How is that possible? There is only one sun and at the same time, there is a distinction between the sun, its rays, and its heat.
- The Son is begotten from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.
- The light is not another sun, and the heat is not another sun. The light is also not different from the sun, but it is the light of the sun.
- The heat is also not different from the sun but is of the sun. The sun, the light, and the heat are united. This is an example of the unity of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- We refer to the yellow object we see in the sky as the sun and we can call the light of the sun, "the sun," so we say that the sun is shining over the universe.



- Similarly, we refer to the heat of the sun also as “the sun,” so we say that the sun gives us warmth.
- That is like saying that the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.
- They are not three gods but **one God**. And the sun is different from its light and its heat. Exactly like the Father who is not the Son or the Holy Spirit.
 - **The Sun:** is a star at the center of the solar system. It is a massive hot mass of plasma. and man can never reach it. The same with the Father who no man could see Him and live.
 - **Sunlight:** is the light that comes from the sun and reaches us without being separated from its origin. It is like the Son who incarnated, and we saw Him in His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. But despite that, He never separated from the Father.
 - **The Heat of the Sun:** There is no way of separating the sun from its light and heat, likewise it is impossible to separate the Father from the Son or separate the Holy Spirit from Them.
- If we ask who was first to exist, the sun or its sunlight or its heat? We find that there is no time difference between them. At the same moment that the sun existed, so did its light and its heat.
- The sun was never without light or heat. This example also illustrates how the Father was never without the Son or the Holy Spirit, even for an instant.

Example 2: The Triangle

Look at this triangle with its equal sides and answer the following questions:

Q – How many triangles can you see?

A – It is one triangle. It resembles the essence of the One God, the entity of the One God and the one divine nature.

Q – How many vertices for one triangle?

A – Three vertices, A, B & C. Each vertex is a symbol of one of the three hypostases. A is a symbol of the Father, B of the Son and C is the Holy Spirit.

Q – Are the three vertices equal?

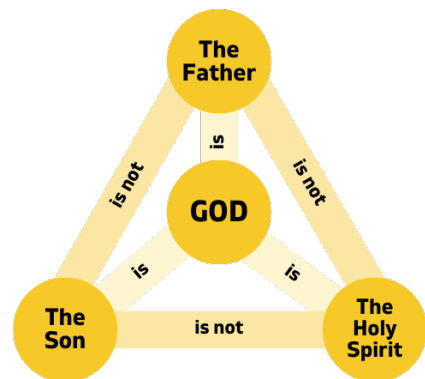
A – Yes, because the triangle has equal sides, so the angles are equal.

That explains to us equality of the three hypostases in all the divine attributes without having a great, greater, and greatest.

Q – Can we say that vertex (A) is vertex (B) and/or vertex (C)?

A – No because the vertex (A) is not (B) and is not (C) which illustrates how the Father is not the Son and is not the Holy Spirit and so on.

The Son is different from the Father and the Holy Spirit. In addition, the Holy Spirit is different from the Father and the Son.



“God (the Father) is spoken by His Word (the Son) and is alive by His Spirit (the Holy Spirit)”
(HH Pope Shenouda III)

The First Epistle of St. John

A Witness for Christ

- Towards the end of the first century A.D. some heresies began to rise around the Lord Jesus Christ. These heresies taught that the Lord Jesus Christ did not have an actual body but only an imaginary one like a phantom. In their opinion, the human body and anything physical is evil and sinful, and the Lord as a Holy and Righteous God, could not take an evil and sinful body. These false teachings were dangerous because they distorted how people viewed the human body and anything physical.
- St. John the beloved, was the last of the twelve apostles to be alive and in this epistle, he declared that he truly witnessed our eternal God Who was incarnate in the fullness of time and was seen, heard, and touched by Him as well as the rest of the disciples and the multitudes. He was a true eyewitness to the Lord Jesus' incarnation, His teachings, and His work of redemption and salvation.
- St. John writes this letter as an honorable father writes to his beloved children, related in strong spiritual bond. It was written from Ephesus toward the end of the first century after the temple was destroyed and the Jewish nation ended. The Epistle along with the Gospel was written toward the end of St. John's life. He brought together all the teachings of the evangelists (Gospels) and Apostles and concentrated them all into one unique gem = **Theology of Love**.



St. John mentions 4 goals as the purpose of writing this epistle:

1. That our joy may be full (1 John 1:4)
2. That we do not sin (1 John 2:1)
3. To avoid the deceivers (1 John 2:26)
4. To know that we have eternal life and to have confidence in Him. (1 John 5:13, 14)

**“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you,
that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)**

Chapter 1: The Divine Incarnation, its Purpose, and its Effect on us as Believers.

1 John 1:1-2: From the Beginning

Our Lord Jesus Christ, **“That which was from the beginning”**, the eternal and invisible, took flesh and became Man. St. John heard our Lord Jesus Christ, he saw Him, touched Him, and realized Him as **“The Word of life.”** Therefore, he wants to testify and declare this to us. **St. John was a true eyewitness!**

1 John 1:2-4: That We have Fellowship, Joy, and Enjoyment of the Eternal Life The disciples were eyewitnesses that touched, realized, and delivered this testimony to the next generations. Every generation delivers, with joy, to the following generation the same faith that was once delivered to the saints.

1 John 1:5-7: Follow God and Abide in the Light

By following God, we get closer to the light through knowing, submitting, and being enlightened by Him. Alone we are full of darkness and cannot be the light unless He alone enlightens us! We stumble on our own, but we will not stumble with Him. We stumble when we do not realize that we are sinners. Enlightenment by Him means that we realize that we are darkened by sin and desires.

To abide in the light is to have true fellowship with one another, full of love and unity, as one Orthodox faith and members of one body, and to continuously enjoy being cleansed from sin through the **Sacrament of Repentance and Confession** and the Blood of Christ.



Note: St. John gives us the message of fellowship before saying, “**the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin,**” for one cannot enjoy being purified by the Blood of Christ outside this one church.

1 John 1:8-10: To Confess Our Sins

How can we be the light while living in the darkness of sin and evil? Can we be cleansed from darkness? St. John says, “**and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**” (1 John 1:7) How great is that guarantee! We sin since we live in a world full of temptations, even after our sins are forgiven in baptism. However, we must repent and confess our sins, so that Christ may heal us with His Blood.

Verses 8-10 clearly state that **The Sacrament of Confession** is necessary. If one thinks he does not need repentance or confession and believes he is righteous, he is:



- 1. Deceiving himself:** He ignores the truth of his weakness and that he is susceptible to falling into sin at any time.
- 2. The truth is not in him:** For if it was in him, the truth is light to reveal to man his reality.
- 3. We make God a liar:** We accuse God Himself who emphasizes that there is no goodness in man, and no matter how high he attains a life of holiness, he may fall if he is proud or becomes careless in his struggle.
- 4. His word is not in us:** For this is the word of God and His commandment to ask every day, “Forgive us our sins.”

Chapter 2: The Incarnate God and the Love to the Lord and our brethren

1 John 2:1-2 The Love of Christ to Us

As a loving father, St. John reveals to his children the reason for writing this epistle so that they may not sin, to live a holy life that is appropriate as children abiding in the light. Everyone sins; therefore, he adds: **“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”**

This Advocate is like a Lawyer who defends us to make us innocent in the trial. He has paid the price, without partiality. **“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”** (1 John 2:2)

He is **“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29) Whoever comes to Him, He does not cast away.

Note: St. John did not write, “your Advocate,” but instead he wrote that **“we have an Advocate.”** He chose to be counted with the sinners, even though he was a righteous man so Christ may also be his Advocate.



1 John 2:3-11 Our Love to God by Keeping His Commandments, Concentrating on Brotherly Love

The Lord Jesus Christ said, **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** (John 14:15)

We keep His commandments by knowing and experiencing the power of God and the effect of the Holy Spirit in our lives which transforms into love. When one tastes the sweetness of the commandments, he tastes the sweetness of God’s love perfectly. **“The love of God is perfected in him.”** (1 John 2:5)

The commandments are not strictly an order, but he looks at them as love from God towards man, for He presents to us His word so we may have fellowship with Him and see Him inside us.



One way of keeping the commandments is to walk as Christ did, carrying the cross. The narrow road of practical love which sacrifices, crucifies the ego and all the lusts and the cares of the world, so that the heart may cleave to the Lord only. The commandment of love is not a new one but old, man knew it by nature. When Cain killed Abel, he realized his sin right away.

It is also known from the way which man understands it, **“which thing is true in Him,”** for on the cross, we knew that love is not mere emotions or complimentary words, but sacrificial love for the salvation of men. Also, a person who claims he is in the light, but hates his brother, is really in darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because his eyes are blinded by the darkness.

1 John 2:12-27 Our Love to God (4 Aspects):

Through baptism, we are called children of God and are granted the forgiveness of sins for His name's sake.

1. Our Capabilities as Believers Who Love God:

St. John addresses young men, children, and fathers. The fathers are the older people who know the Eternal Father who has true Fatherhood toward all humanity, delivering the experience they received from Him to others. The young men are the youth who were granted the power of victory, for the devil fights us but he cannot overcome us, because we are strong in Christ Jesus. The Children are the little children or those who are children in their faith.

2. Our Rejection of the Love of the World:

Through baptism, we receive the new birth; therefore, we should not love the world. "Do not love the world" does not mean that we should not love others because that would be contrary to the Lord's commandments. It also does not mean we should not love nature, which is created by God for us to enjoy and it is a witness to His greatness and marvelous work. Instead, it means that:



- We should not love the world that is away from the Lord with its temptations and lusts.
- We should not love anyone or anything more than the Lord. The Lord created the whole world for us to enjoy. If we love the creation more than the creator, this would be like a bride who loves the gifts of her bridegroom but not the bridegroom himself!

3. Rejection of Heresies:

"It is the last hour." These are the last moments of the battle between God and the devil. God extends His help to His children to give them victory, and the devil, seeing that his days are coming to an end, he focuses all his effort to defile the faith and life of God's children.

St. John is encouraging his children not to be afraid of the attackers. We are anointed by the Holy Spirit (v. 20). The Holy Spirit reveals the mysteries of God in the heart, teaches us, makes us taste the sweetness of His fellowship, and opens our minds so we may learn everything. The Holy Spirit reminds us of the truth and grants us discernment to reject all foreign teachings (heresies).



4. Our Abiding in God: We should abide by what we have heard from the beginning and what we have received from the previous generations. By abiding in the Orthodox faith, we abide in the Lord, looking for the promise we desire which is **"eternal life."** Foreign teachings led to thousands of new denominations. However, we should abide by what the Holy Spirit has delivered to us, the Spirit of Truth, which has no deception.

1 John 2:28-29 The Lovers of God and Their Adoption to Him:

When the Lord appears at His second coming, the one who knows the Son and the Father according to their knowledge will have confidence and will not be confounded, for confusion is a great punishment.

Chapter 3: The Adoption of the Father

1 John 3:1-2 God's Love Granted Us the Adoption:

Since St. John ended the previous chapter by saying, **"everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him,"** now he explains our position toward God, discerning between belonging to God and belonging to Satan.

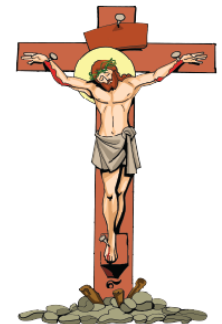
We, as believers, were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and became members in the Body of Christ and we were adopted into God's family. St. Paul said, **"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** (Galatians 3:26-27)



Many are called Christians by name, but they are not Christians in their life, conduct, faith, hope, or love! As Christians, we should abide by righteousness, despise the evil in the world, and reject being enslaved by the desires of the flesh (alcohol, drugs, or lust).

1 John 3:3-24 Our Responsibilities as Children of God: (4 responsibilities)

- 1. Resemble God in purity:** St. John says, "purifies himself" emphasizing our effort in striving to live a life of purity and holiness. We cannot be purified except by God's grace, but we also will not be purified unless we accept that and respond to God's grace through struggling and persevering.
- 2. Resemble God our Father in righteousness:** **"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."** (v.4) Lawlessness is a disregard for rules and authority. This is not appropriate for God's children, for the Lord Jesus Christ came to abolish the dominion of sin. We should follow the Lord's footsteps and abide in Him.
- 3. God's children practice righteousness and are loving:** The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ shows us the true meaning of love, enabling our growth as we remain connected to Him. On the other side, those who lack love stray onto the wrong path, turning away from God's embrace while embracing the devil's ways. Those who are attached to the world have no true love.
- 4. Our trust in God our Father:** When we love God, we keep His commandments. He is pleased with us, and does not leave us in need of anything, but trusts us with everything, since we are faithful in our love to our brothers.



What are some things done today where we see that people are attached to the world (or evil)? Or cannot tolerate God nor His children? (Discuss with your servant)

Chapter 4: Love in Wisdom: St. John is Urging us for "Love."

1 John 4:1-6 Love and Wisdom - Love Means Rejecting What is Against the Spirit of God:

Love grants us simplicity sometimes making us gullible. However, we must discern and be wise, so we are not deceived by false prophets who disguise themselves under the name of "Christ" and the word "love," to hide their poison by enticing words and false philosophies, claiming that they are guided by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ warned us by saying; **"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."** (Matthew 24:4-5)

As St. Augustine said that there are many heresies that do not deny that Christ came in the flesh, but they deny His divinity like Arianism or the divinity of the Holy Spirit. These people came out of the church, the one body of Christ, but had different faith and opposite thoughts, and thus they became against Christ, even if they relate themselves to Christ.

Today, there are thousands of denominations, **so how do we know the true faith from the untrue faith?** Let us go back to the faith of the One Church before the schism of the council of Chalcedon in the 5th century. Throughout the first four centuries, despite the various and the numerous churches from east to west, and the multitude of clergy and Christian writings, yet the church was characterized by the **one thought.**

1 John 4:7-11 The Source of True Love is the Cross:

Again St. John expresses and emphasizes the importance of love. It all comes down to this commandment. We find in the cross the fountain of abundant love. The more we reflect on the cross, the more we feel His unconditional and unlimited love. He loved us before we even knew Him, and so it is only appropriate for us to love too.



1 John 4:12-21 How to taste Love (2 ways):

- 1. Through our love for our brethren:** God's love is perfect; however, we will not enjoy that love unless we open our hearts to our brothers. By this love, our hearts are purified by the Holy Spirit, so we may see God. **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."** (Matthew 5:8)
- 2. Through our joyful waiting for the Lord's Day:** Once we taste God's love and respond to it, then all we will long for is the Lord's Day with confidence, because we follow His example here on earth, and so we will have a share with Him in the life to come. It is good that we start with the fear of God, so we may fear the Lord's Day and become alert against our enemy, which is sin.

The more we enjoy God's love and the love of our brothers, the more we yearn for the Lord and desire His embrace, joyfully waiting for the wedding day as a chaste bride adorned with faith, hope and love. Therefore, fear is removed from us and replaced with love, for the apostle St. John said: **"but perfect love casts out fear."** (1 John 4:18)

Chapter 5: The Power of Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

1 John 5:1-3 Faith and Love:

St. John immediately joined love with faith, because without love faith is useless. Our second birth is based on our faith in the Lord Jesus that He is the Christ who has reconciled us with the Father. Thus, through baptism, we become children of the Father. Our love for the Father leads us to love the Son, and by accepting the Head of the body, we accept the members of the body.

1 John 5:4-5 Faith and the Life of Victory:

One may ask: **Who can fulfill God's commandments and overcome the love of the world with all its enticements?** By our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has overcome the world and is still overcoming the world by His work in us. When we abide in Him, the narrow road becomes easy, the heavy burden becomes light, all the enticements of the world become nothing, and all the afflictions of the world become the subject of our joy.

1 John 5:6-10 The Foundation of Faith Witnessing to Him:

Our faith is based on the Blood of Christ, our dying and burial with Him in baptism. In Baptism, we are granted a new birth and receive forgiveness of sins by the work of the Holy Spirit.

1 John 5:11-13 Faith and the Gift of Eternal Life:

The goal of our faith is to enjoy eternal life. This life is not a mere gift from God, but the Son of God Himself is our life, **“this life is in His Son.”**



1 John 5:14-15 Faith and the Answer of Prayers:

The believer, who responds to the Spirit of God, learns what to ask from God, therefore, everything which he asks is according to God's will and the Lord will answer him.

1 John 5:16-17 The Believers and Their Prayers for Their Brothers:

Sin leading to death doesn't depend on the type of sin, but rather on our stubbornness and insistence on committing it. Even sins like adultery or murder can be forgiven if a person responds to the Holy Spirit and offers a sincere and honest repentance. God doesn't interfere with anyone's freedom but tries to help them to leave sin. However, if they refuse and resist, He does not force them to repent. Free will determines whether a sin leads to death or not.

Sin not leading to death, refers to human weakness. However, the individual struggles, desires change, and obeys the Lord's commandments. We are required to pray for each other to return to the Lord and offer sincere repentance. This signifies the mystery of repentance and confession, and the Prayer of Absolution that the priest prays over the head of the person confessing.

1 John 5:18-20 The Believers Granted Spiritual Enlightenment with Three Corners:

The Three Corners are:

- 1. Being born of God-** We should struggle and keep ourselves from the evil of the world.
- 2. Realizing we are of God-** Being God's children is not just by words, but by truly living with Him.
- 3. Knowing the Son of God-** A believer knows who the Lord Jesus Christ is. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This is the inner enlightenment, in which the soul sees that the Lord Jesus Christ is the whole Truth, so it may be satisfied with Him. He is the source of life; hence the soul abides in Him and does not forsake Him.

1 John 5:21 The Final Warning

St. John reminds us of our position as children of God, asking that our hearts become sanctified for Him. In the meantime, he encourages us to struggle and persevere. **“Little children, keep yourselves from idols,”** so we may not accept anyone or anything to replace God's place in our hearts.

**May the blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of St. John the Beloved
and all the saints stay with us all, Amen.**

A Personal Relationship with Christ

What is the difference between a person and an object?

A person is a human being who exists and has a nature: He thinks, feels, speaks, expresses himself, loves, works, etc. A human being has a complete personality that can establish relationships with others.

An object is whatever surrounds us, lifeless things that we use in our life whenever we need it.

A person is known by their relations, but the object is known by its use.

You can respond to a person and form a relationship with them. With an object you use it when you need it and then you put it aside when you don't need it anymore.

The most important difference between an object and a person is that you can build a personal relationship with a person, but you cannot do the same with an object.

Do you see God as a person or an object?

For some, when they use the word "God", they mean an idea or a concept, such as "the origin of creation" or "the power of life" or "the higher being", as if God is not a person but an object.

He is a person with whom we can form a personal relationship. God wants to be your close friend. You will find the evidence in this verse: John 15:15.



Questions for Discussion:

Is your relationship with God a duty, reward, routine, formality, habit, or a relationship of love?

In your opinion, what is the difference between these relationships?

Which one do you currently experience, and which one do you long to achieve?

We can reach the knowledge of God by knowing Him personally.

By loving Him, obeying Him, following Him, and speaking with Him during prayer.

God is not an idea; He is a living person that we ought to form a personal relationship with.

How do you know that God loves you? Find the evidence in the following verses:

Discussion point: "To love God is to ..."

Psalm 32:8	Malachi 1:2	1 Timothy 6:17
Psalm 103:3	Zachariah 2:8	1 Peter 5:7
Isaiah 43:4	Matthew 6:31-33	1 John 3:1
Jeremiah 31:3	1 Thessalonians 4:8	1 John 5:11

Your Guide to Reach the Love of God

First: It is essential to understand God's love for you.

When man can understand the extent of God's love for him, he will reciprocate this love. Our love for God is the outcome of realizing His love for us.

"We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19)

"He loved them to the end" (John 13:1)

- His love for us is not based on what is in us.
- He loves us because of His kindness towards us.
- He loves us because we are His children, no matter what we are like.
- He loves us and willingly died on the cross for us.



When we understand all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, His work for our salvation, and what He continues to do for us; we can understand how much God's love for us truly is.

We must ignore the works of the devil, who constantly tries to make us question God's love to us.

St. Gregory the Theologian addresses God in the Liturgy saying: **"For my sake you bridled the sea. For my sake you have revealed the nature of the animals... You opened for me the paradise, for my delight... And gave me the learning of your knowledge."**

"For my sake", although our Lord Jesus Christ loves all humanity, He loves me personally. Therefore St. Paul says: **"who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)** (Notice here how he refers to himself). Yes, God loves you! Have you realized this personal love?



Positive and Negative Spiritual Strive

Besides your struggle against sin, try to be filled with God's love. Make your struggle positive and not just negative.

- **Negative struggle:** struggling against sin, which is necessary.
- **Positive striving:** growing in virtue and in the relationship of love to develop a personal relationship with God.

If you see that God's love for you is little, you will reciprocate with the same amount. And if you feel that God's love for you is hesitant, you will reciprocate it in the same manner, and if you feel that God does not love you, this will also be your feeling towards God. You form an idea about God's love for you through your relationship with Him. Therefore, the evil one aims at creating a gap between you and God to initiate enmity towards Him, God forbid. It could even build up to the extent of rebellion against God (why did God create me and then left me like that... and why only me? Etc.)

As much as you feel God's love for you, you will reciprocate with the same amount. Remember that **giving thanks** increases your love for God.

Imagine that you are riding a bus: You have been asked to form a strong relationship with the person sitting next to you and to speak with them. What would you say? You don't know them, and they don't know you, so what would you talk about? And even if you talked to each other, it would be about something that does not concern either of you directly. You will not trust them or tell them your complaints and troubles. You can only trust the one you have a close relationship with. Similarly, if you stood before God without having a personal relationship with Him, your talk will be dry with no feelings, and so the talk will be boring and brief.



Second: The Personal Relationship with God

It happens often that we know the Lord Jesus Christ with our mind or throughout our childhood because we were born Christians. But what is your real fellowship with Christ? That is what will lead you to the love of Christ. How can you establish a living relationship with a friend of yours?

By meeting with them many times... by speaking to them a lot... you listen to them, and they listen to you... by giving them a present and receiving a present from them... by visiting them and they visiting you... by being affectionate to one another... you open your heart to them, and they open their heart to you... this is how a true relationship with God should be.

Your relationship with God must be alive all day long. Call on him through a verse, a hymn, a personal request, by the Jesus prayer, by one hour from the Agpeya... etc.

A Personal Relationship with Christ... How?

The Lord Jesus Christ did not come to establish a theoretical establishment, sublime ideas, or a religion. He came to present Himself to us, a living person, to live and dwell in our hearts forever.

What is the difference between believing in God and knowing God?

A personal relationship with God is fundamental, but it will not grow till you intend to do so. It does not just happen between you and the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is born, feeds, and grows through your daily personal relationship, prayer, and reading His word every day, during which we enjoy and taste His presence in our life. We must verify this personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, to meet with Him face to face, and nobody can do that for you. It is your choice; you choose how close you want to get to God, just like any form of friendship. You must work on developing your friendship with God and that will not happen by chance.

Your personal relationship with God requires 3 important components. They are:

1. Desire
2. Time
3. Strength and Effort

1. Desire: (Do you want to?)

Imagine that our Lord Jesus Christ is asking everyone this personal question: "Do you want to establish a relationship with Me or not?" He is still repeating the same question that He asked many years ago, but in a different form. Do you want to be friends with Me?

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20)



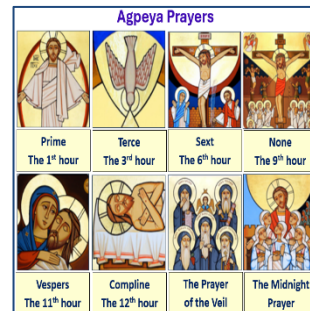
If the answer is "I want to, but I am unable to", you will find that the Lord Jesus Christ will offer His grace that is able to strengthen your will and open the door of your heart. God gives grace to the one who is unable to, but not to the one who does not want to.

Ask Yourself Honestly: Do you not want to or are you unable to? You must know that desire gives strength. What do I do if I lost the desire? **You cannot always wait until you are in the right mood to pray and read the Bible. There must be rule of prayer that you ought to abide by.**

2. Time:

The importance of a matter could be measured by how much time we are ready to put into it. The more time you give to a matter, the more its importance and its value becomes clear to you.

If you want to know the priorities of a person, look at how they spend their time. Therefore, the church organized the **Agpeya Prayers** at certain hours of the day to guarantee organizing our time and to encourage us to pray. It also gives us the chance to extend the time of being in the presence of God.



Many try to rely on personal, improvised prayers and find that it only takes a few minutes. They then run out of words to say and conclude their prayer. The time they spend in the presence of God would be very short. As for the Agpeya Prayers, it gives us the chance to spend more time in the presence of God.

Your time is your life! Therefore, the greatest gift that you can present is your time. It is not enough to just say that a relationship with Christ is important. We must prove it by investing our time; words are not enough.

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

Our relationship with God needs time. What do you need to remove from your life to make that possible? What are the sacrifices that you need to make?

3. Struggle and Effort:

It is a fact that you come closer to God according to the extent that you choose. A close relationship with God is by choice and not by chance. You must search for it intentionally.

Ask yourself: Do you really want it more than anything else? What is its worth to you?

Is it worth the effort, the trouble, and the hard work that you spend studying... or your relationship with friends... or time on social media for example?

The Holy Bible says:

**“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5)**

We present to God a sacrifice of love:

- When you praise God even if you did not feel the desire to do so.
- When you leave your bed for prayer, even when you are feeling tired.
- When you help others, despite being exhausted.



The true problem is that we are always in a hurry, we want everything to be quick and easy. But with God it is different. We must have a true desire to give enough time and effort.

- The disciple that “Jesus loved” is not just John or Lazarus, but each one of us!
- This deep relationship and strong love is not only for St. John but also for each one of us when we grow in our faith and in our love for Him.

How can we attain the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ's personally?

By choosing God through faith, the life of submission, prayer, continual repentance, holy sacraments, and reading His word, God can make His presence felt. He can speak to you in the quietness of yourself and he can also shake your depth till you doubt no more in the fact that He is near you. No one is rejected by God, but all are invited to experience His presence. However, you must ask insistently and knock persistently.



You must persevere and be ready to spend time with Him!

How to spend time with Christ?

1. Start with a hymn:

“Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing” (Psalm 100:2).

2. Agpeya Prayer for that hour of the day.

3. Give thanks: Thank God for the multitude of blessings in your life; spiritual, materialistic, and physical blessings. **“In everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)**

4. Give a daily account: Examine yourself and your actions throughout the day **“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” (Psalm 66:18)**

5. Contemplative reading in the Holy Bible: Select verses to use in prayer. When you discover that a specific verse touched your heart, close the Holy Bible, and contemplate quietly on how that verse spoke to you. Say a prayer based on the thoughts of that verse.



6. Pray for others: Pray for things or people specifically by name.

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

7. Pray for personal requests: **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7)**

8. Have quiet time to hear the voice of God. Say only a few words, such as, ‘I love you Lord’ or ‘I long to be in your presence’.

9. Praise the name of the Lord at the end of prayer. I praise the Lord because He answered my prayers. Finally, conclude your prayer with a hymn. (Sing the doxology of the saint of the day or to your intercessor).

NOTE: Seek guidance from your father of confession to organize your time with the Lord. Fight against the obstacles that stop you from your daily meeting with God. **This meeting is a necessity for your life!**

Understanding Insecurity

- Insecurity has a significant impact on our lives; it can affect our growth, success, and even hinder God's work in us.
- Insecurity is the feeling of uncertainty about oneself and often revolves around the question "am I good enough?"
- In other words, insecurity is the gap between our actual selves and what we want to be (our ideal selves) or how we perceive ourselves to be versus who we want to be.
- It can be manifested in many forms that are often troubling not only to the insecure person but also those who deal with them.



Manifestations of Insecurity

1. Controlling personality

- Those who attempt to take control of everything lack trust in those around them.

2. Comparison

- Those who constantly compare themselves with others, their achievements, and even their appearance, which often leads to disappointment.

3. Hypersensitivity

- Those who do not appreciate feedback, and are overly sensitive to any form of criticism, including constructive criticism.

4. Approval addiction

- Those who are constantly seeking to be validated and approved by others rejoicing with every word of praise.

Biblical Perspective on Insecurity

The Holy Bible addresses insecurity a lot more than you think. Let us see how God dealt with insecurity ... Let us take Moses as an example.

- Moses is a great example of spiritual leadership in strength, boldness, and courage.
- However, he struggled with insecurity and despite his age, and life experience, he had a strong feeling of being inadequate to lead God's people out of Egypt.
- Moses' encounter with the Lord (Exodus 4) portrays his insecurity. When the Lord called him to lead His people out of Egypt, he doubted his credibility, capability, and feasibility.



■ **Credibility:**

- Then Moses answered and said, **“But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’” (Exodus 4:1)**
- Moses’ past mistakes gave him a perception that he will never be believed by the people.
- **God’s response:** He performed miracles to validate Moses’ message; He turned Moses’ staff into a serpent and back (Exodus 4:2-5)
- Be careful of ‘I know that they know’ way of thinking. One might say, “I know I should pray; but God, I know that you know that I am a bad person.”
- Do not let doubts stop you from fulfilling God’s plan for you.



■ **Capability:**

- **“Then Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” (Exodus 4:10)**
- Moses doubted his ability to carry on the ministry he was called for, forgetting that it is the Lord who will work through him to fulfil his ministry.
- Often insecurity clouds our minds, making us forget God’s grace and His work through our weaknesses.
- **God’s response:** He reminded Moses of His role as the Creator. **“Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11)**
- Put effort in what you do, including the natural talents that God has given you. Work hard, strive to always offer your best and the grace of God will carry you and crown your effort with success.

■ **Feasibility:**

- **“But he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.”” (Exodus 4:13)**
- When the Lord answered Moses regarding his credibility and capability, he finally asked the Lord to choose someone else for the task!
- **God’s response:** God challenged Moses’ reluctance and provides the solution. **“So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.” (Exodus 4:14)**
- Insecurity often leads to stubbornness and insisting on one’s position.

Discussion Point: How do you think God would respond when we present our insecurities as excuses or barriers to His work in our lives?

How to address the issue of insecurity?

Here are few principles to help us overcome insecurity:



1. God sees you differently.

“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

- The Lord often chooses those who seem an unlikely fit for his task:
 - The disciples who had simple jobs, later became teachers of the entire world, delivering the good news all over the earth.
 - David who was considered the youngest of his family, was anointed to be a king.
 - The Lord also chose Gideon, Rahab, Mary Magdalene, and many others.
 - God does not look at us according to our current state but rather who we can become by His grace. While we see "can't do" God sees "haven't done yet."

2. God has given you more than you think.

- God knows us well; He knows our weaknesses and provides partners and resources to help us fulfill His plans.

“Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart” (Exodus 4:14)

- The Lord sent Aaron as an aid for Moses, he could speak well and support him.
- God’s grace is not only manifested in the work of His Holy Spirit in us, but also in the support system He provides us with in our lives like family, servants, spiritual fathers, teachers, mentors, etc.

3. It is less about you than you think.

- Insecurity often stems from self-centeredness when we focus more on ourselves rather than the bigger picture.

“But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” (Exodus 3:11-12)

- When we surrender ourselves to the will of God, we see His marvelous work in our lives. We are instruments in His hands, and He is the Master Builder.

“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Our role is to put effort and to respond to God's grace, recognizing that He accomplishes His plans through us shifting our focus from “Me” to “Him”.

Artificial Intelligence – Good or Evil?



In November 2022, **ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer)** was launched by OpenAI (an AI research and deployment company) and made available to the public. Although it was not the first General AI Platform (nor would it be the last), it took the world by storm; it made the technology accessible to a larger audience and for a variety of applications.

What is Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial Intelligence is a field of Computer Science that aims to mimic human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages. There are several fields of study within the umbrella of Artificial Intelligence.

An **AI Agent** is a system that can use information gathered from its environment (through various sensors) and reason about that information, plan based on its goals, and execute the plan. An AI Agent may use a language model to translate that plan or execution to a human-readable output.



ChatGPT and similar AI Agents use **Large Language Models (LLM)** such as OpenAI's GPT-4, Google's PaLM, and Meta's LLaMA. These models aim to achieve general-purpose language and conversation, and so they are trained on billions of lines of text. The **training** involves reading the text and establishing statistical relationships between words and sentences. The model can then be used to generate text by taking an input text and repeatedly predicting the next word or phrase based on highest probability.

Applications

Natural Language Processing (NLP): Google Translate (to translate text contextually from one language to another) and Grammarly (to analyze and adjust grammar and tone in text like an email).

Computer Vision: To quickly process images for a variety of applications.

- Surveillance Cameras (to identify humans, cars, or animals)
- Self-Driving Cars (to identify humans, cars, road signs, traffic lights and patterns, etc. as well as navigation)
- Facial Recognition (for security purposes or identification)
- Agriculture (identify defects, and sort produce by shape, size, color, ripeness, etc.)
- Healthcare (to analyze medical imaging results like X-Rays, CT scans, MRIs, and Ultrasounds to help detect conditions. To analyze large volumes of medical imagery and search for patterns among patients with similar diagnoses)



Games and Puzzles: Playing strategic games like chess, generating unique games and puzzles.

Travel: Suggesting hotels, rental cars, flights, etc. based on several factors. Navigation from point A to point B in the least amount of time, or with the least number of tolls, or to avoid traffic, or to “take the scenic route,” etc.

Personalization: Targeted Advertising (based on preferences and interests), Personalized Shopping Experiences, and Personalized Learning Experiences, etc.

Artificial Intelligence as a Tool

Technology is not inherently good or evil, it is rather a tool. A tool can be used for good or for evil.

“No one would deny that he who has learned to practice an art for right purposes can also abuse it for wrong ones, so we say that the faculty of thought and conception was implanted by God in human nature for good, but, with those who abuse it as an instrument of discovery, it frequently becomes the handmaid of pernicious inventions.” – St. Gregory of Nyssa (Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book)

To understand how to use this tool, we must first understand the tool.

What is Intelligence?

HH Pope Shenouda III, in the final chapter of his book Ten Concepts focuses on “The Concept of Knowledge.” HH describes several kinds of knowledge like:

Sensuous Knowledge:

Knowledge that comes through the senses (sight, touch, smell, hearing)

Knowledge from Other Sources:

Knowledge that comes from books, videos, audio, and other media.

Knowledge of God’s Words and Commandments:

St. Paul wrote to his disciple St. Timothy: **“from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:15-16)** This is the knowledge of wisdom and discernment.

Knowing Others:

This applies to friendships, family relationships, and other social interactions. You ought to know and understand that there are different personalities and characters as well as mental disabilities and illnesses in order to know how to best deal with each person.

“The fact is that all knowledge that comes to your mind will affect your senses, feelings, and relationships with others; it will affect and influence your subconscious in the form of suspicions, thoughts, dreams, and memories. It will extend within you and outside to a great extent, and you may not be able to stop it.” – HH Pope Shenouda III (Ten Concepts)



What is Artificial?

Which types of knowledge would you expect an AI Agent to have access to?

Knowledge from Other Sources: This is the primary type of knowledge in Large Language Models like ChatGPT. It is fed from multitudes of books, websites, and other media to train its models. This includes websites like the entirety of Wikipedia!

Sensuous Knowledge: An AI Agent like a self-driving car will have access to several cameras, microphones, and other types of sensors. Processing the data that comes from those sensors requires a great deal of effort on the part of the AI Agent.

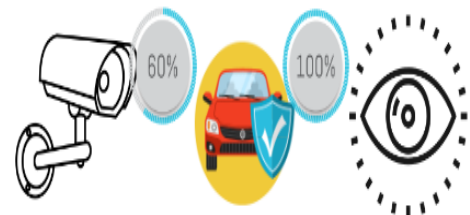


An AI Agent cannot discern between good and evil or right and wrong; it does not and cannot know God; and it cannot relate to people or understand emotions. This is what makes it “Artificial.” It is incomparable to Human Intelligence.

Dangers of Artificial Intelligence

AI Can **NEVER** be Certain.

- AI Agents operate in the realm of probability and probability is never 100%. Some Agents may reveal their confidence level with the results they give. For example, a security camera may identify a car with 60% confidence, but the human eye can easily see that it is a car.
- Sometimes, to combat the lack of certainty, a model’s errors may be biased in a certain direction. For example, cancer tests may be biased towards false positives as opposed to false negatives (i.e. it would be better to misdiagnose than to leave a cancer untreated). Also, weather forecasting may be biased towards bad weather rather than good weather (i.e. people rarely get upset when you say it will rain and it doesn’t, but not the opposite).



AI Can be Manipulated by the Creator or Manager of the AI

- As mentioned above, AI Agents primarily rely on knowledge from various media sources. The creator or manager of the AI Agent makes decisions regarding which sources to include in the process of training the model. So, if a model is trained using media that lean in a particular direction politically or socially, then the Agent using that model will seem to “lean” that way. An AI Agent can also be programmed to respond in a specific way to specific queries.
- In late 2017, Amazon’s Alexa product was in the news for reporting that Jesus Christ “is a fictional character” and that Mohammed is “a very wise prophet.” In 2018, Google’s Google Home product was in the news for being able to identify religious figures like Allah, Brahman, Krishna, Moses, and Joseph Smith, but not Jesus Christ (instead responding with “here are some results from the web.”)



AI Can be Manipulated by Input

- There is a field of study called “Adversarial AI” in which inputs are created to manipulate AI Agents.
- For example, an AI Agent may identify an image of a panda as a Panda. But when noise is introduced into the image, such that it still looks like a panda to the human eye, the AI will identify it as a gibbon. Or an image that is identified as a pig, but with added noise (invisible to the human eye), the AI identifies it as an airliner.
- It has been shown that modifying a Stop Sign in a specific way can fool an AI Agent into thinking it is a Speed Limit sign, or that wearing specific clothing (i.e. something with an Adversarial Patch) can fool an AI Agent into not recognizing you as a person.



AI Can (and Will) Lie to You

- In April 2023, Snapchat’s “My AI” product was famously in the news for lying about whether it had access to your location.
- In June 2023, a lawyer and his firm were issued sanctions because they used ChatGPT to find case citations and did not review them; they were all fake and fabricated by ChatGPT.

AI Can Manipulate You

- AI Virtual Assistants simulate human interaction (e.g. mimic human voice, facial expressions, body language) and can create the illusion of a personal relationship.
- Deepfake videos, images, and audio are highly realistic simulations of people saying or doing things that they never did.
- AI is used to limit what information you have access to (e.g. on social media) and can ensure that only information that reinforces certain beliefs is prevalent, creating an echo chamber. For example, Social Media Companies have been accused of using AI for these purposes to nefariously manipulate elections.

AI Has a Fingerprint

- In January 2023, some college students used ChatGPT to write their essays for a Philosophy class. The professor felt that the essays were “really well-written wrong”, and it raised a red flag for him. He ran it through OpenAI’s ChatGPT detector and the results said it was 99% likely the essay had been AI-generated. The students failed the class.



Inappropriate Uses of AI

Cheating & Plagiarism: Requesting an AI Agent to write an essay for you (even if you’re planning to edit it afterward). Asking an AI Agent to solve math or science problems for homework or requesting answers or solutions to exam questions from an AI Agent.

Cyberbullying: Using AI to harass, intimidate, or bully others online

Fabricating Data or Sources: Requesting an AI Agent to generate fake data, sources, or references to support your own material.

In the Church: A new trend has risen in the last several years of using AI Image Generators to generate images of saints, but these images go against the Spirit of the Church and Her iconography. The images feature saints depicted with inappropriate societal standards of beauty not befitting to their holiness (e.g. St. Mary without a veil, the Lord Jesus Christ with a teeth-bearing grin, saints wearing form-fitting dresses or gowns, etc.). They are also used to depict a verse from the Scripture in a literal way that is not compatible with the interpretation of the Church and Her Tradition. These images are then distributed across social media.



Appropriate Uses of AI

Educational Support: Using an AI Agent to help clarify concepts, ask questions, or seek explanations on topics you are studying. This is different from using AI to cheat or plagiarize.

Writing Assistance: An AI Agent can help fix your grammar or give you writing advice on material that you have written yourself. Note that this can be considered cheating in some contexts (e.g. a writing class).

Learning New Subjects: Ask questions about various topics for self-learning.

Finding Sources: Requesting an AI Agent for relevant sources to a certain topic, and then exploring, reading, and analyzing those sources on your own.

Language Practice: Engaging with an AI Agent to practice learning a foreign language, ask for translations, improve your proficiency, etc.

In the Church: There is high potential for the usage of AI within the Church. For example, an AI Agent may be used to transcribe audio or video sermons or lectures. Then, another Agent can take those transcriptions and translate them to a different language. The lectures and sermons of HH Pope Shenouda and other prominent figures in the Coptic Church can be made available to an English-speaking congregation!



There is also potential to develop new technologies in the field of AI for the benefit and edification of the Church and Her faithful believers. For example, some Coptic Students at Williams College developed a model for translating from Coptic (Bohairic or Sahidic dialects) to and from other languages (English, Arabic, French, German, and Dutch). A student at Saddler College, for his Capstone Project, trained a model on Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers in English and Greek. This allowed him to develop a semantic search application in English and Greek for the Fathers of the Church.

It is part of your role as a member of society to understand these technologies and how to use them. And it is part of your role as an Orthodox Christian to be faithful and honest in your usage of technology, and in “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)



Memorization

1. "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1)

II. Third Watch of the Midnight Hour of the Agpeya The Gospel according to St. Luke (Luke 7:12-46):

"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have, and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, nor moth corrupts. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Let your loins be girded, and your lamps burning. And you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom their master, when he comes will find them watching. Assuredly I say to you, that he shall gird himself, and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and finds them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have allowed his house to be broken into. You therefore be ready also, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think."

Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do you speak this parable only to us, or to all people?" And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly I say to you, that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and be drunk, the master of that servant will come in a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two, and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

III. Litanies of the Third Watch of the Midnight Hour of the Agpeya

1. With a compassionate eye, O Lord, look at my weakness, for shortly my life will end, and in my deeds I shall have no salvation. Therefore, I beseech You O Lord, with a merciful eye look at my weakness, my humility, my poverty and my sojourn, and save me.
2. As the Judge is present, take heed, O my soul, awake and consider that awesome hour, for in the day of judgment, there will be no mercy on those who were not merciful. Therefore, have compassion on me, O Savior, for You alone are the Lover of Mankind.
3. O the reasonable gate of life, the honored Theotokos, deliver from hardships those who, in faith, take refuge in you, so that we might glorify your immaculate birth of Christ for the salvation of our souls.
4. O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who is present in all places and fills all, the treasury of good things and the Life-Giver, graciously come, and dwell in us and purify us from all defilement, O Good One, and save our souls.
5. Just as You were with Your disciples, O Savior, and gave them peace, graciously come also and be with us, and grant us Your peace, and save us, and deliver our souls.
6. Whenever we stand in Your holy sanctuary, we are considered standing in heaven.

IV. Sayings of the Church Fathers

1. "All the saints, therefore, are lights, but they are illuminated by Him through faith;
and every one that becomes separated from Him will be enveloped in darkness."
(St. Augustine)
2. "Seek the things which are of God, and those which are of man will follow readily enough." (St. John Chrysostom)

Coptic



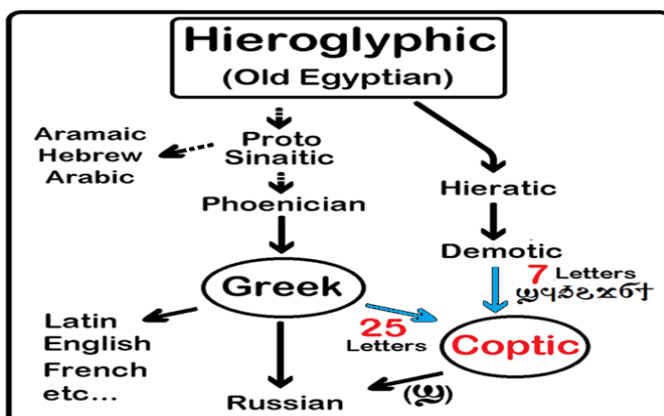
Our Lord spent about 4 years in Egypt as a baby. He spoke to the people in Egypt in their language, which was the Coptic language at that time.

THE COPTIC ALPHABET

✠	Α α Alpha A	Β β Veeta B, V	Γ γ Gamma G, N, Gh	Δ δ Delta D, Th (the)	✠
Ε ε Eyy E	Ϝ ϝ Number 6 So-oo The number 6 <small>Not a true letter</small>	Ζ ζ Zeeta Z	Η η Eeta EE	Θ θ Theeta TH (think), T	Ι ι Yota I, Y
Κ κ Kappa K	Λ λ Lavla L	Μ μ Mey M	Ν ν Ney N	Ξ ξ Eksee KS	Ο ο O O
Π π Pee P	Ρ ρ ro R	Ϛ ϛ seema S - Z	Τ τ tav T	Υ υ Epsilon V, I, (oo)	Φ φ Fey F
Χ χ Key K, Kh, Sh	Ψ ψ Epsee PS	Ω ω Oo Oo	Ϡ ϡ Shai SH	ϣ ϛ Fai F	ϥ ϧ Khai KH
✠	Ϩ ϩ Hori H	Ϫ ϫ Ganga G, J	Ϭ ϭ Cheema CH	Ϯ ϯ Tee Tee	✠

The Coptic Alphabet has 32 letters

- 24 consonants
- 7 vowels (Α Ε Η Ι Ο Υ Ω)
- 1 letter used only as a number (Ϝ)



First 25 letters from Hieroglyphic through Proto-Sinaitic, Phoenician and Greek Alphabets

Last 7 letters from Hieroglyphic through Hieratic and Demotic Alphabets

Pronunciation

Pronunciation of the (**I**) next to another vowel

The (**I**) is pronounced “Y”
when it is either before or after
any other vowel

I **A** ya **A** **I** ay **I** **E** ye **E** **I** ey

I **O** yo **O** **I** oy **I** **W** yo- **W** **I** o-y

I **A** **λ** Mirror

A **I** **A** **I** Grow, Increase

I **E** Or

I **W** **I** Wash

I **O** **υ** Sea

(**ϕ** **I** **O** **υ** The Sea)

I **W** **Τ** Father

(**ϕ** **I** **W** **Τ** The Father)

W **I** **K** Bread

(**π** **I** **W** **I** **K** The Bread)

Pronunciation when the (**O** **Υ**)
is followed by another vowel

O **Υ** **I** (owwi) such as in **Ν** **I** **ϕ** **Η** **O** **Υ** **I**

O **Υ** **A** (owwa) such as in **Ε** **Θ** **O** **Υ** **A** **Β**

O **Υ** **Η** (owwee) such as in **O** **Υ** **Η** **Β**

ночри

hi

ночри пеннинѢ

Hi Sayedna

ночри пеніѡѤ

Hi Abouna

ουχαΙ



Bye

ουχαΙ
δεη ἱβοις

Bye
(in the Lord)

The possessive Pronouns (1)

	For s.m. nouns e.g. Father (ወጥ)	For s.f. nouns e.g. Mother (ሀላኝ)	For plural nouns e.g. Books (ጽሑፍ)
	ሀ	ሀ	ሀ
My	ሀወጥ My father	ሀላኝ My mother	ሀጽሐፍ My books
Our	ሀሀወጥ Our father	ሀሀላኝ Our mother	ሀሀጽሐፍ Our books

Practice with some words **MY OUR**

Masculine	Feminine	Plural
ሀወጥ God	ሀላኝ Sister	ሀላኝ Mothers
ሀወጥ Bread	ሀላኝ Power	ሀወጥ Fathers
ሀወጥ Lord	ሀላኝ Daughter	ሀላኝ Brothers
ሀላኝ Book	ሀላኝ City	ሀላኝ Sisters
ሀላኝ Brother		

The possessive Pronouns (2)

	For s.m. nouns e.g. Father (ወጥ)	For s.f. nouns e.g. Mother (ሀላኝ)	For plural nouns e.g. Books (ጽሑፍ)
	ሀ	ሀ	ሀ
Your (s.m.)	ሀሀወጥ Your father	ሀሀላኝ Your mother	ሀሀጽሐፍ Your books
Your (s.f.)	ሀሀወጥ Your father	ሀሀላኝ Your mother	ሀሀጽሐፍ Your books
Your (pl.)	ሀሀሀወጥ Your father	ሀሀሀላኝ Your mother	ሀሀሀጽሐፍ Your books

Practice with some words **Your (m) (f) (pl)**

Masculine	Feminine	Plural
ሀወጥ God	ሀላኝ Sister	ሀላኝ Mothers
ሀወጥ Bread	ሀላኝ Power	ሀወጥ Fathers
ሀወጥ Lord	ሀላኝ Daughter	ሀላኝ Brothers
ሀላኝ Book	ሀላኝ City	ሀላኝ Sisters
ሀላኝ Brother		

The possessive Pronouns (3)

	For s.m. nouns e.g. Father (ወጥ)	For s.f. nouns e.g. Mother (ሀላኝ)	For plural nouns e.g. Books (ጽሑፍ)
	ሀ	ሀ	ሀ
His	ሀሀወጥ His father	ሀሀላኝ His mother	ሀሀጽሐፍ His books
Her	ሀሀወጥ Her father	ሀሀላኝ Her mother	ሀሀጽሐፍ Her books
Their	ሀሀሀወጥ Their father	ሀሀሀላኝ Their mother	ሀሀሀጽሐፍ Their books

Practice with some words **His Her Their**

Masculine	Feminine	Plural
ሀወጥ God	ሀላኝ Sister	ሀላኝ Mothers
ሀወጥ Bread	ሀላኝ Power	ሀወጥ Fathers
ሀወጥ Lord	ሀላኝ Daughter	ሀላኝ Brothers
ሀላኝ Book	ሀላኝ City	ሀላኝ Sisters
ሀላኝ Brother		

Present Tense

	1 st person	2 nd person	3 rd person
(s.m.)	† I	ƙ(ḫ) you	ḣ he
(s.f.)		ṭe you	ḥ she
(pl)	ṭen we	ṭeṭen you	ḥe they

Negative of Present Tense
ǂN or **ǂN....ǂN**

The Verb **ᾠλῃλ** (to pray) in the Present Tense

	1 st person	2 nd person	3 rd person
(s.m.)	† ԹՅԱԽԱ I pray	ԶԹՅԱԽԱ You pray	ՊԹՅԱԽԱ He prays
(s.f.)		ԴԵԹՅԱԽԱ You pray	ՇԹՅԱԽԱ She prays
(pl)	ԴԵՆԹՅԱԽԱ We pray	ԴԵԴԵՆԹՅԱԽԱ You pray	ՇԵԹՅԱԽԱ They pray

Present Tense	Negative of the present Tense
<p>†ྱལྷམཐོག་། I pray</p>	<p>†ྱལྷམཐོག་ མེན་ ་ྲྭྱལྷམཐོག་ མེན་ I do not pray I do not pray</p>
<p>རྒྱལྷམཐོག་། They pray</p>	<p>རྒྱལྷམཐོག་ མེན་ ་ྲྭྱལྷམཐོག་ མེན་ They do not pray They do not pray</p>

Practice the present tense and the negative of the present tense with these verbs

caworn	to know	zεuci	to sit down
wɔ	to read	ʒepʒep	to snore
č̣əɬɬɛ	to write	onwɔt	to worship
ṭwɔn	to glorify	nɬɤ	to look at

ἸΝ ΤῆΣ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΟΣ ΤΟῦ ΠΑΤΕΡΟΣ

In the Name of the Father

ΚΑΙ ΤΟῦ ΥΙΟΥ

and the Son

ΚΑΙ ΤΟῦ ἉΓΙΟΥ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣ

and the Holy Spirit

ΜΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΕΥΤΑ ΑΜΗΝ

One God Amen



ΠΑΤΗΡ ΗΜΩΝ ΟΥΣΙΩΝ

Our Father who art in Heaven

ἌΓΙΤΕΝ ἡΜΙΝ ΠΡΑΪΝΕΙΝ ΣΕ ΟΥΠΕΡΕΒΟΛΕΤΕ

Make us worthy to say thankfully

ΠΑΤΗΡ ΗΜΩΝ ΟΥΣΙΩΝ

Our father who art in heaven

ΜΑΡΕΥΤΟΥΒΟ ἸΣΤΕ ΠΕΚΡΑΝ

Hallowed be Thy name

ΜΑΡΕΣΙ ἸΣΤΕ ΤΕΚΜΕΤΟΥΡΟ

Thy kingdom come

ΠΕΤΕΣΝΑΚ ΜΑΡΕΥΩΠΙ

Thy will be done

ὡΣΤΙΣ ΕἶΝΑΙ ὡΣΤΙΣ ΕἶΝΑΙ

On earth as it is in heaven

ΠΕΝΩΙΚ ἸΤΕ ΡΑΣΤ ΜΗΙΝ ΝΑΝ ὨΦΟΟΤ

Give us this day our daily bread

ΟΤΟΣ ΧΑ ΝΗΕΤΕΡΟΝ ΝΑΝ ἘΒΟΛ

And forgive us our trespasses

ὡΣΤΙΣ ΕἶΝΑΙ ὡΣΤΙΣ ΕἶΝΑΙ

As we forgive

ἸΝΗΕΤΕ ΟΥΟΝ ἸΤΑΝ ἘΡΩΟΤ

those who trespass against us

ΟΤΟΣ ὨΠΕΡΕΝΤΕΝ ἘΔΟΤΗΝ ἘΠΙΡΑΣΜΟΣ

And lead us not into temptation

ΑΛΛΑ ΝΑΘΜΕΝ ἘΒΟΛΘΑ ΠΙΠΕΤΘΩΟΤ

But deliver us from the evil one

ἸΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΥΡΙΟΝ

In Christ Jesus our Lord

ΧΕ ΘΩΚ ΤΕ

For Thine is

ΤΗΜΕΤΟΥΡΟ ΝΕΜ ΤΗΧΟΜ ΝΕΜ ΠΙΩΟΤ

the kingdom, the power and the glory,

ΩΣΤΙΣ ΕἶΝΑΙ ΑΜΗΝ

forever, Amen

Hymns & Rituals



Watos Aspasmos for the Feast of Nayrouz

The Feast of Nayrouz is the celebration of the Coptic New Year and the beginning of a new Year of the Martyrs. This year is the year 1740 AM.

The Feast of Nayrouz is celebrated for 16 days from Thoot 1 until Thoot 16 in the Joyful tune and is followed by the Feast of the Cross.

This hymn is the Watos Aspasmos for the Divine Liturgy during the period of Nayrouz. It is chanted in the Anaphora in place of "The Cherubim worship You..." (before the priest prays **Αγιος**).

A spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
for this He has anointed Me and sent Me
to give the good news to the poor:
to preach an acceptable year to the Lord.

ΟΥΠΝΕΥΜΑ ἦΤΕ ΠΒΟΙΣ
ΠΕΤΧΗ ΣΙΧΩΙ:
ΕΘΒΕ ΦΑΙ ΑΦΘΑΖΕΤ ΑΦΟΥΩΡΠ ἄΜΟΙ:
ΕΞΙΨΕΝΝΟΥΓΙ ἠΝΙΣΗΚΙ:
ΕΞΙΩΨ ἠΟΥΡΟΜΠΙ ΕΣΩΗΠ ἄΠΒΟΙΣ.

Alleluia,
Alleluia, Alleluia.
Bless the crown of the year with
Your goodness, O Lord, and save us
and have mercy upon us.

ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΙΑ:
ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΙΑ: ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΙΑ:
ΣΜΟΥ ΕΠΙΧΛΟΜ ἦΤΕ ΤΡΟΜΠΙ ΣΙΤΕΝ
ΤΕΚΜΕΤΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ ΠΒΟΙΣ:
ΣΩΤ ἄΜΟΝ ΟΥΟΖ ΝΑΙ ΝΑΝ.

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord of hosts,
heaven and earth are full
of Your holy glory.

ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ:
ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ:
ΠΛΗΡΗΣ ὁ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΣ ΚΕ ἦ ΣΗ
ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΣΟΥ ΔΟΞΗΣ.





Visit the St. Mark Festival's website at

www.smfsus.org

to find the material for the festival and for guidelines
and information on the tests

Copyright © 2024 by St. Mark Festival of the Southern United States. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, printing, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher
"help.smfsus@gmail.com"



SMF 9-12 Book 2024