

Abba Antony

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SAINT ANTONY MONASTERY
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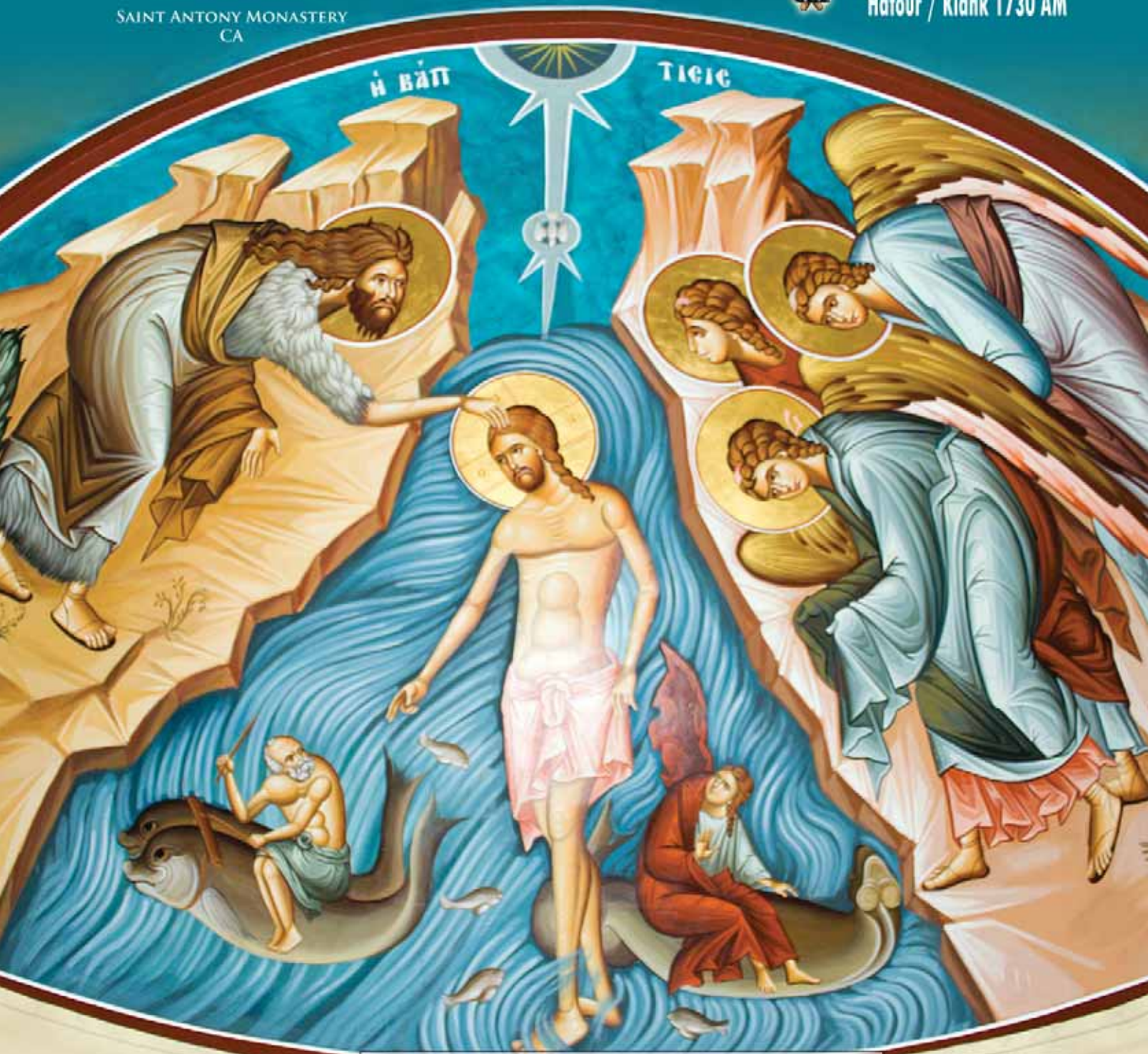


January

2014

Issue No. 1 in Year 24

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Yermo, CA 92398
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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

MIDNIGHT PRAISES: DAILY	4-5:30 AM
VESPERS: SAT.	5 PM
DIVINE LITURGY:	
MON., TUES. & THUR.	6 AM
WED. & FRI.	9 AM
SAT. & SUN (1ST)	5:30 AM
(2ND)	9 AM

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VERSE OF THE MONTH

Whoever guards his
mouth and tongue
keeps his soul from
troubles.
(Proverbs 21:23)

WE WANT YOUR COMMENTS & FEEDBACK!

PLEASE WRITE YOUR COMMENTS BELOW:

PLEASE DETACH & RETURN - THANK YOU!



SAYING OF THE MONTH

We must not let any
season pass without
thanksgiving.
St. Athanasius the Great

CONTACT INFORMATION

MONASTERY OFFICE

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BAPTISM

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PLEASE SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO:
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ALL MEN WHO WOULD LIKE TO SPEND A NIGHT AT THE
MONASTERY MUST CONTACT FATHER KYROLOS SAINT
ANTONY BEFORE PLANNING YOUR STAY. HE CAN BE
REACHED AT (760) 559-5358. THANK YOU.

MAGAZINE CALENDAR & DIARY

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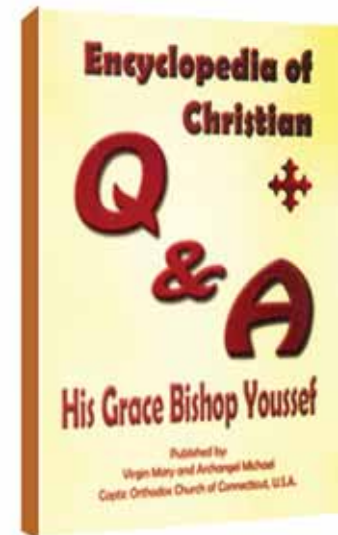
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P.O. Box 100 Barstow CA 92312

DESIGNED AND PUBLISHED BY SAINT ANTONY MONASTERY CALIFORNIA

Book of the Month

Encyclopedia of Christian



"This reference book provides extensive insight into most aspects of Christian life, such as the church traditions, rites, dogma, comparative theology, spirituality, faith, ecumenical, social, contemporary issues, etc. This is an accumulation of questions that His Grace Bishop Youssef has received over a span of more than ten years. For every question, His Grace responded diligently with depth and professionalism, consulting the scholars and specialists if needed, to ensure the accuracy and precision of the answers. It took more than four years of work on this book to format and index its enormous amount of information in a way that would make it easy to search through and access the desired topics."

This book is available from our Monastery Bookstore.

To Order Please call:

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PRAYER BEFORE STUDYING

Most blessed Lord, send the grace of Your Holy Spirit on me to strengthen me that I may learn well the subject I am about to study and by it become a better person for Your glory, the comfort of my family and the benefit of Your Church and our Nation. Amen
Christ, the true light, who enlightens and sanctifies every person coming into the world, let the light of Your countenance shine upon me (us) that I (we) may see Your unapproachable light; and guide my (our) steps in the way of Your commandments, through the intercessions of Your all-holy Mother and of all the Saints. Amen.

PHYSICAL ADDRESS AND DRIVING DIRECTION 43725 Bragdon Rd. Newberry Springs CA 92365

DIRECTION: FROM HWY 15 N.

- 1- **EXIT MINNEOLA RD. # 198** then at the end of the ramp **TURN RIGHT.**
 - 2- At the **FIRST STOP SIGN** make a **LEFT** on **YERMO RD.** and follow for **3.3 Miles.**
 - 3- **TURN LEFT** onto a Bridge called **COYOTE LAKE RD** and follow for **1.3 Miles.** This is a curved asphalt road which turns into **Hacienda Rd.**
 - 4- **TURN LEFT** onto a dirt road called **BRAGDON RD.** and follow for **5 Miles** and you will find the **Entrance of the Monastery** on your **LEFT-HAND.**
- MAKE SURE ALL POWER LINES AND POLES ARE ON YOUR LEFT WHILE DRIVING ALONG BRAGDON RD.**

He First Loved Us

By His Grace
Bishop Serapion



Our relationship with God is a relationship of love. Saint John the Apostle says, “We love Him, because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19). Our perception of God’s love for us leads to loving Him. God’s love for us is an unlimited subject, as it is related to God’s unlimited and incomprehensible love for mankind as a whole. We cannot perceive the depth of God’s love for us because our mind and perception are limited; yet let us try to speak for even a little bit of God’s love for us.

God’s fatherhood is an indication of His love for us:

Saint John the Apostle says, “Behold, what manner of love the Fr. has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1). Our Lord Jesus Christ

taught us that when we address God in our prayer we say “Our Fr. who art in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9). We are the sons of God by adoption, and also because he created us after His image and likeness.

Therefore, he called every human being saying, “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26). When man drifted away from God’s commandments, God rebuked man reminding him of His fatherhood, saying, “...I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” (Isaiah 1:2) Also He blames man in the Book of Malachi, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear.” Malachi 1:6). God

allowed the people in the Old Testament to call Him their father. Therefore, the people in the Book of Isaiah cry to God, saying, “Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of your holiness and of your glory...Doubtless you are our father... You O Lord, are our father. our redeemer; your name is from everlasting.” (Isaiah 63:15, 16). Also the people address him saying, “But now, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you are our potter; and we all are the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8). David the Prophet chants on God’s fatherhood to humanity, saying, “Like as a father pities his children so the Lord pities them that fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103: 13, 14).

God’s fatherhood in the Old Testament

God, in His love for mankind, called humans as His sons even in the Old Testament. He made them lead a life of righteousness and holiness as His own sons.

God’s fatherhood in the New testament

In the New Testament, God’s fatherhood is manifested in its deepest form. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the image of the unseen God, speaks to us about God’s fatherhood to us, when he invites us to pray and say, “Our Fr. who art in heaven...” When He talks about perfection, He says, “Be therefore perfect, even as your Fr. which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:48). When He taught us to love our enemies, He wanted us to be truly sons of the heavenly father: “That you may be the children of your Fr. which is in heaven, for He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on

the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) On the three foundations of worship, namely prayer, fasting and alms (giving), our Lord teaches us indicating that worship is a relationship between us and our heavenly father. The alms should be in secret, as they are given to God not to human beings, “And your Fr. who sees in secret himself shall reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:4) Prayer should not to for the sake of showing off before people, but our Lord says, “But you, when you pray, enter into your chamber, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Fr. who is in the secret place, and your Fr. who sees you in secret, will reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:6). You need not repeat your words redundantly, “for your Fr. knows what things you have need of.” (Matthew 6:8). Also fasting should not be to show off before people, but as a worship to the heavenly Fr. who sees in secret. (Matthew 6:17, 18). God’s fatherhood and the life of holiness: God’s fatherhood make us lead a life of righteousness and holiness. Therefore, Saint John the Apostle says, “Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him. and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

The life of righteousness and holiness is a gift bestowed on us by our loving God, as “He came to take away our sin; and in Him is no sin.” (1 John 3:5). This kind of life is a sign of our sonship to God. In other words, we lose our sonship to God if we live in sin. In the Old Testament, God called human beings as His sons; yet those who sinned had deprived themselves from sonship to

God. In the book of Genesis, the divine inspiration called the sons of Sheth the sons of God; whereas the daughters of Cain are called daughters of people. “That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair.” (Genesis 6:2). In the New Testament, the divine inspiration distinguishes between the sons of God and the sons of Satan, “In this, the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother.” (1 John 3:10). God had called every body to be His children and to call Him ‘Our Fr.,’ yet not all the people responded nor did they become confirmed in the sonship of the loving God.

Indications of God’s fatherhood for us

There are several indications of the fatherhood of our loving God. He is our Fr. who shepherds us, cares for us and is concerned about our salvation and eternal life, as well as our materialistic life on earth. When man fell, God never neglected His love. While He was punishing, He gave the promise for salvation, as God said, ‘the woman’s seed shall bruise the head of the serpent.’ (Genesis 3:15). During the Gregorian Liturgy we pray, “For me, You have changed punishment into salvation.” When man went astray, and all the humanity was corrupt, “There is none that does good, no, not one.” (Psalm 14:3), God never abandoned man, but worked hard to look for the lost ones. Therefore, He sent prophets, the Law and the Commandments. Again, the words of the Gregorian Liturgy deeply express the profound love of God the Fr. and the good shepherd of the sinful man: “You, my Lord, have changed punishment

into salvation for me. As a good shepherd you sought the lost one. As a real father you bore all the trouble for me, who fell down. You have provided me with all the remedies that lead to life. It is You who have sent to me the prophets, for my sake, the sick. You had given to me the Law for help; You had ministered salvation for me when I violated Your Law. As true light, you have shown to the lost and the ignorant.” In the fullness of time, God the Word was incarnate so that He could remove our sins and give us eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ, for Him is due Glory, is the good shepherd, who sacrifices Himself for our sake, recognizes us, keep us and protects us: “I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11). “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” (John 10:14, 27, 28)

As to our needs on earth, it is enough for us to hear the voice of our loving Fr. saying, “Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed... for your heavenly father knows that you have need of all these things.” (Matthew 6:31, 32).

We are captives of God’s unlimited and incomprehensible love, and no words can help us express our gratitude towards this profound love. May we ask our loving God to support our weakness and give us the insight that will enable our deficient meditations in His profound and overflowing love.



It’s a Good Thing Jesus Was Born at Night

Did you ever stop and wonder why Jesus was born at night? Why would God send His Son into the world in the middle of the night? It was bad enough that the Son of God had to be born in a small stinky manger in the middle of nowhere. Why make it worse by making it dark? So dark that Joseph and Mary probably had to hold a candle in order to even see their newborn baby!

A few days ago, I read “*A Christmas Prayer*” by renowned author, Max Lucado, written in response to the tragic events that took place last week in Newtown, CT. In it, he spoke about why Jesus was born in the dark and helped shed some light on the subject (pun intended – HA HA!).

He begins by saying “Dear Jesus, it’s a good thing you were born at night. This world sure seems dark. I have a good eye for silver linings. But they seem dimmer lately...But you were born in the dark right?”

Truly the world was a dark place when Jesus was born. It was dark in the sense that it had been nearly 400 years since God had spoken to His people – 400 years since a prophet had been present to speak the Word of God. That’s 4 or 5 generations that hadn’t heard from God or seen His Presence manifested among His children. What’s that? Darkness.

It was dark in the sense that the children of God were under oppression from the Romans. No hope of being delivered. No hope of being saved. Darkness.

It was dark in the sense that even the chief priests and leaders of God’s people had become, for the most part, corrupt (see Matthew 23). They taught the people to obey their own laws instead of the laws of God. They took advantage of the poor. They mistreated widows. They slayed the prophets and righteous men of God. Darkness darkness darkness.

But it was in the middle of that darkness that our Savior was born.

As we say in one of my favorite Christmas songs ever:

Oh holy night! The stars are brightly shining, It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth. Long lay the world, in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

[FYI – if you want to hear a fantastically touching rendition of this song and other Christmas songs sung in a shopping mall flash mob, check out this link. I can’t get enough of this video. I’ve watched it close to 100 times probably and it still gives me goosebumps every time. Make sure you watch till the end.]

“So thank you Jesus for being born at night. The world is so dark today and there are so many people who can’t see any light. But the darkness didn’t stop You from coming before and I know it won’t stop You now. That’s actually why You said You are coming – to shine light upon those who are in darkness and living in the shadow of death. And for that I thank You. I thank You and our entire race thanks You. We need Your light so badly these days.”

I don’t know where you are today or what’s going on in your life. I don’t know what darkness might be overtaking you and making you feel hopeless and peace-less and joy-less. But I do know this: Christmas is all about Light.

It’s about how Light has shone in the midst of darkness. And even though that Light was tough to see at first – like I said, even His parents needed some help to see His face – the Light has come and we now have hope. We have hope that no one can take away from us. Why? Because the Light has come down among us.

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)

Fr. Anthony Messeh



Circumcision

The First Major Dispute in the New Testament Church

"Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters" (I Corinthians 7:19).

Introduction

Celebrated on Tobe 6th, the glorious Feast of Circumcision is one of the seven minor feasts observed by the Coptic Orthodox Church. This feast commemorates the circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ Who was born according to the flesh; and was circumcised on the eighth day, in fulfillment of the law.

Circumcision in the Old Testament

During the days of Moses, the ancient rite of circumcision was related to puberty and preparation for marriage. On his way back to Egypt, Moses stopped "...at a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin; and touched Moses' feet with it" (Exodus 4:24-

26). Moses' wife, Zipporah said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me" (Exodus 4:25).

Most Biblical accounts believe her to be saying "...bridegroom of blood by circumcision." Through this incident, God was abruptly reminding Moses that the penalty for uncircumcision was to be "cut off from His people" (Genesis 17:14). Thus, this rite of circumcision, or the covenant of belonging to God did not begin with Moses; but with Abraham and his descendants who were commanded to circumcise every male on the eighth day after birth. Because at that time, circumcision was considered a covenant signifying belonging to God, it was generally performed at the earliest time possible.

Circumcision in the New Testament

After the redemptive act of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Holy Cross, circumcision took a different turn along the road of practices and observances. It was no longer the bodily circumcision, but that of the heart in faith, hope, love, and readiness to follow

the Lord Jesus Christ and become His disciple laboring for the advancement of His Kingdom "but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:29).

Justin the Martyr (c.160) wrote, "The inability of the female sex to receive fleshly circumcision proves that circumcision was given for a sign. It was not given as a work of righteousness."

Tertullian (C.197) stated, "We do not follow the Jews in their peculiarities in regard to food, nor in their, sacred days, nor even in their well-known bodily sign."

During the early days of the New Testament Church when the Gentiles were becoming believers, they were forced to accept the Jewish Law and all of its provisions, particularly circumcision. For many of non-Jewish descent, it was a source of contention and one which faced St. Paul in his evangelization of the gentiles. It was the first major dispute in the New Testament Church.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing; and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters" (I Corinthians 7:19).

This issue of the necessity for circumcision has been adamantly addressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians...He instructs the Galatians to ignore those who insist that Jewish traditions are compulsory for Christians to follow and apply. Further, St.

Paul insists that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is far more important than the works of the law.

The further justification for the gentiles entering into the Church disregarding the Jewish traditions was the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. While St. Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his friends, and family, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the Word" (Acts 10:44). The circumcised (Jewish) believers with St. Peter were astounded that those in attendance were "speaking in tongues and extolling God" a sign which St. Peter considered as a gift of the Holy Spirit "being poured out even on the gentiles" (Acts 10:45-46).

This one time outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the gentiles, was most probably destined to demonstrate to the Jews the validity of the gentiles' salvation. It was typical for the gift of the Holy Spirit to follow the Sacrament of Baptism, but in this particular incidence it did not follow the Sacrament of Baptism, but rather came before it. Some Biblical scholars consider this Holy Spirit outpouring on the gentiles their atypical baptism.

Resolution of the Dispute

Although the controversy surrounding circumcision began in Antioch, it was to be resolved in Jerusalem...

"From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door to faith to the gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:26-28).