

SIMPLIFYING FAITH LECTURE SERIES

By His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy

4 The Sacrament of Baptism

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

The Importance of Baptism:

Baptism is very important for us as Christians. The Lord Jesus Christ made it a condition to enter and see the kingdom of heaven. Immediately before His ascension He commanded His disciples and said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Mt 28:19), meaning baptize them in the name of the one Triune God with three Hypostaseis.

The Lord Jesus Christ also told His disciples, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved but he who does not believe will be condemned*” (Mk 16:16). Here he places a condition for baptism with faith. Just as faith is a condition to gain salvation, the Lord Jesus made baptism a condition of salvation. He did not say, he who believes will be saved but said, “*...he who believes and is baptized will be saved*”.

Repetition of Baptism:

Baptism is completed through three immersions and yet it is one baptism. In the Orthodox Creed of Faith we say, “*We believe in one baptism for the remission of sins...*”.

Male circumcision was a symbol for baptism in the Old Testament, just as a person cannot be circumcised twice, likewise baptism cannot be repeated. This is evident in the epistle of Saint Paul to the Hebrews where they wished to repeat baptism after they repeated sin. He said, “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*” (Heb 6:4-6). In saying, “*...it is impossible for those...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance...*”, he means they cannot repeat baptism. There are, however other means of repentance besides baptism.

Of course, John the Baptist baptism of repentance differs from that of Christ our Lord, which still involves repentance and forgiveness of sins, but also includes many other aspects that will be mentioned later, such as the new birth from God.

Baptizing Children:

Baptism is of great importance. This is the reason people ensure baptizing their children while they are little, to guarantee them the kingdom of God. Normally boys are baptized after forty days and girls after eighty days from birth, unless the child's life is at risk. If the child's life is at risk, the church permits the mother or any present person to baptize if no priest is available, even before the completion of the set period. This is an extreme exception and should not to be applied except in serious cases.

In such cases it becomes sufficient to anoint the child three times on the head in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is done when there is no time to prepare a baptism font, or the child's health condition does not permit immersion in water. For example, if the child is in an incubation at the hospital. In this case the priest anoints him with the baptism water. If the priest is not available, any Orthodox Christian can anoint him.

Knowing that Trinity is in One and One is in Trinity, the church teaches its people, even the simple, the principals of the Christian faith through its rites, sacraments, etc. Through making the sign of the cross, the church proclaims that the cross is the power of God for salvation and through baptism it teaches that God is one in three Hypostaseis.

One baptism with three immersions or three immersions in one baptism. Hence, baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The priest tells the baptized, "...I baptize you (name) in the name of the Father (first immersion) and the Son (second immersion) and the Holy Spirit (third immersion)".

The Christian Name:

As the priest immerses the baptized in water he calls him by name saying, "I baptize you...". This is the Christian given name, by which he should be called thereafter. It should not be the name of a Saint chosen at baptism and later forgotten. The name uttered during the immersion should be the name of the baptized throughout his life from this moment. If a parent wants to name the child after a Saint's name, this should be done at birth.

If the baptized is not a Christian, and wants to change his name, the new name¹ should be uttered at his baptism, as was the usual case during the times of conversion from heathenism.

We baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, according to what is written in the gospel of Saint Matthew: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Mt 28:19).

¹ The new name by which he shall be called the rest of his life.

The Sign of the Cross:

The Galilaon oil before baptism, the Miron after baptism, and the prayers and anointments are all done with the sign of the cross. Thus the church teaches her children that salvation is by the cross and with the baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism and Faith:

The One Who died on the cross is the Son, the incarnate Word of God. Hence, through the rite of the sacrament of baptism, as well as the recited confession of faith, the congregation at all levels receive the Christian faith. The person lives his whole life remembering that he had three immersions in one baptism; hence, his faith in the Trinity.

Some heretics² baptize with one immersion. This baptism is utterly rejected and not approved of by the church. Therefore, any person baptized in this way should be properly re-baptized. If he was baptized on the wrong faith, then he must be re-baptized on the true faith. The new baptism should be accomplished with a true confession of the genuine faith.

Saint Paul said in his Epistle to the Ephesians “...*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*” (Eph 4:5). ‘*One Lord*’ means, one Father, Son and Holy Spirit in One God. ‘*One faith*’ means, a straight, sound orthodox faith. ‘*One baptism*’, as mentioned in the creed “...we believe in one baptism for the remission of sins...”.

Symbols of Baptism in the Old Testament:

In the old testament baptism was referred to through symbols. One of these symbols is Noah’s ark, another is the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, a third is entering the promised land and circumcision.

a. Noah’s Ark:

God commanded Noah to build a huge ship or an ark, because He was going to flood the earth. It took Noah one hundred and twenty years³ to build it, and he built on land at a distance from water, therefore the evil people mocked him. Throughout construction those who lived in sin mocked him over the size of the ship and his inability to move it into the water. His reply was that God commanded him to build this ark because a flood will come upon the earth to wash it of sins. He had faith that salvation will be fulfilled through the ark. The wicked and sinful people mocked him and refused to listen.

He continued building with his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Finally, no one survived the flood except Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives. Eight human souls were saved while the world perished in the flood waters.

²Heretics are those who are not of the sound Christian faith, but innovate and introduce wrong doctrines within Christianity.

³ People lived long during this era.

The flood was a symbol for salvation through baptism. In the book of Genesis we read the following, “*Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, and the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died.*” (Gen 7:17-22). The birds, every creeping thing, and every living creature died except Noah, his family, and the animals and creatures that he took with him into the ark.

Noah took at least a male and female of each species by which life on earth could be renewed. The ark was huge and divided into many sections, which is a sufficient reason for taking him one hundred and twenty years to build. He took seven pairs from the clean animals in order to offer sacrifices. Of the unclean animals, (lions, tigers etc.), he only took one pair.

Animals were obedient to him; if for example he ordered the lion to enter a certain section he obeyed. He was a prophet empowered by the Holy Spirit, Who inspired his actions and gave him the authority which enabled him to save the living creatures on earth.

Saint Peter the apostle wrote, “...*while the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us-baptism...*” (1Pet 3:20-21). Here, Saint Peter makes a link between the ark and baptism.

An interesting incident in the story of the flood tells that when Noah wished to know if life had returned to earth, he sent a dove out of the ark. The dove returned with an olive branch in her mouth. He took her in, knew that life started on earth once more, and realized that it was safe to leave the ark.

Noah only had enough storage for the period of the flood. They could not survive inside the ark where there is no planting or vegetation forever. Therefore, they were awaiting the sign to return to earth once more.

The point of importance to us here is that some people with faith were living inside an ark surrounded by a very strong vicious flood. By being inside an ark that was build by faith, and through their faith, they survived all without perishing. Hence, from death evolves life. This is the philosophy or significance of baptism.

Pope Shenouda III, in his book on ‘comparative theology’ in the section on baptism, states that baptism is needed for salvation as it is sharing in the death of Christ. It is faith in death which is the means for life and a confession that the wages of sin is death (see Rom 6:23).

The person is buried in baptism to start the new life. The old man is buried and the new man emerges out from baptism. This concept is also clear in the story of the crossing of the red sea.

b. Crossing the Red Sea:

At that time, the people of Israel were the only people who believed in God. On the other hand Pharaoh and the Egyptians were pagans worshiping idols. God wanted to save His people from the slavery and tyranny of Pharaoh, and from the eradication and murder plotted against them by the Egyptian people.

As Pharaoh chased the people of Israel with his army and chariots, they panicked at finding the red sea ahead of them and Pharaoh behind them. Moses the prophet calmed them saying, *“Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today...The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace”* (Ex 14:13-14). He held the rod by which he performed all the previous miracles and struck the sea at God’s command. It split on the left and the right and the water stood erect as a fence on both sides. A dry road was open in the midst of the sea and Moses ordered the people to cross.

A frightened person would never have the courage to walk amidst water that stands as a fence, fearing it might collapse on him and kill him. He would prefer, to wait on the shore and fall once more in Pharaoh’s captivity, and survive. The threat from Pharaoh’s army was less than death, since Pharaoh only pursued in order to capture the people of Israel and return them to slavery. Even if Pharaoh’s army killed some, the remainder will survive.

This was a test of faith: will they cross while water is standing on both sides? Here, the question would be: would one accept to die in order to live or not? Saint Paul says, *“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,...”* (1Cor 10:1-2).

The phrase *‘baptized into Moses in the sea’* shows that crossing the red sea was a symbol of baptism. *‘...baptized into Moses’* means that they received and accepted the divine command put on Moses’ mouth, and believed by the faith which Moses offered in saying, *“...Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord...The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace”* (Ex 14:13-14).

We can call this the baptism of Moses just like we have the baptism of John the Baptist. And there is the baptism of Christ which is the Christian baptism completed in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through the later, one can enter the kingdom of heaven after leading a holy life. Since through baptism one is born of God and called to live according to the power of the new birth and the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit strengthens and confirms him in God through repentance and partaking of the Eucharist (i.e. the body and blood of Christ).

Here, we must clearly understand that in baptism the person accepts death in order to live; this is the philosophy behind baptism. Our teacher Saint Paul mentioned the following in his Epistle to the Romans, *“...we were buried with Him through baptism*

into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Therefore, baptism is burial and resurrection.

When I baptize a little baby, the mother loses her breath as I immerse her baby deep into the water. The baby goes into the water and completely disappears. Mothers are usually frightened and grasp. However, accepting to bury the child in this way is what causes this child to pass over from death to life, from the old to the new person, to become a son of God and a member in the body of Christ.

We all want to get rid of the old person, but how can we? When one is fed up with himself there is a common saying that we hear people say, “I might as well go and bury myself”. In the Church we put this saying into action. We are buried in baptism to get rid of the old man, to be in the likeness of Christ in His death and resurrection from the dead, and to unite with Him.

Notice, Christ stayed in the tomb three days, hence we are immersed three times in the name of the Trinity, not forgetting that baptism is burial and resurrection with Christ.

In the old testament, the little child was circumcised on the eighth day from his birth. That is, on the first day of the second week of his birth. When we consider the week; Sunday is the first day, Monday is the second, Tuesday is the third, lastly Saturday is the seventh, then we start again with Sunday which is the first (i.e. the 8th day).

Christ rose on the dawn of Sunday. His resurrection was on the eighth day and circumcision was performed on the eighth day. Eight people were saved in the ark. The number eight is associated with salvation and resurrection from the dead, besides, in the Holy Bible it always symbolizes the new life in Christ. When one is baptized, he unites with Christ in His resurrection from the dead. Saint Paul says, *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with...” (Rom 6:5-6).*

Sharing in death with Christ through baptism is very significant. It results in crucifying the old man, as Saint Paul says, *“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:11). “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24)* The Christian person has crucified the body. When sin approaches such a person he responds “could a dead man sin?” In other words we count ourselves dead to sin, as Saint Paul said: *“...reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin...” (Rom 6:11).* He also said, *“...you are not your own...For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1Cor 6:19-20).*

Christ bought us with His blood, therefore we are owned by Him. Saint Paul says, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).*

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” The old man is buried in baptism, unable to live, being nailed on the cross. Who is alive then? The new man who was bought by Christ and is owned by Him. Christ gave us His life on the cross that we may live the new life. The new alive person rejects the sins of the old person, as the life that he is living now is the life of Christ, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”*

Saint Paul also says, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Gal 3:27). Put on Christ with all His righteousness and the salvation granted by His blood through baptism. Put on the divine image which was lost with the original sin.

c. Entering the Promised Land:

A third symbol of baptism in the Old Testament is the entrance of the people of Israel into the promised land, led by Joshua the son of Nun. To enter the promised land, the Israelites were faced with the Jordan River. God commanded Joshua for the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant,⁴ and blow the horns; and as their feet dip in the water the river shall be split into two. It was so, and all the people crossed while the priests were standing in the middle of the river carrying the Ark of the Covenant. After all the people crossed the river the priests also crossed and just as they stepped on the shore the water returned.

Before the water returned, Joshua took twelve stones from the Jordan River, one stone for each tribe⁵. He then built an altar and offered sacrifice to the Lord.

During their sojourn in the land of Egypt and in the wilderness of Sinai the people of Israel could not practice the commandment of circumcision which was a sign of membership among the people of God. Joshua decided to use this day of crossing the Jordan River to circumcise all the men of Israel. Subsequently, he called that place Gilgal which literally means “rolling”, since the Lord said to Joshua, *“This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you”* (Josh 5:9), since the people were not able to perform the law of circumcision in Egypt.

Notice that crossing the Jordan River to reach the promised land was coupled with circumcision. The connection between circumcision and baptism is evident. Moreover, the river split once the priests descended into the water, and in the New Testament the sacrament of baptism is completed by priests.

The Lord Christ who is symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant is the cause of fulfilling salvation through baptism. He descended into the Jordan River on the day of His baptism. However, on the day of His baptism the heaven was split open instead of the water. As if Christ is telling us, if Joshua cut off the water for the people to enter the promised land, I split the sky for you to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁴ The ark of the covenant was then put in the holy of holies in the tabernacle of meeting.

⁵ Jacob had twelve sons. The twelve tribes are their generation or offspring.

The people of Israel crossed from the eastern to the western banks of the river but Christ, symbolized by the Ark, allows us to cross from earth into the kingdom of heaven.

John the Baptist, a priest after Aaron's priesthood (being the son of Zacharias the priest) descended into the water with the Lord Jesus to baptize Him just as the Ark was with the priests in the water. Our Lord Jesus Christ is, however, the true ark of the true covenant, and the river is the same Jordan River.

Christ, Baptism and the Old Testament Symbols:

The Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove and settled on the head of the Lord Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Ark of the Covenant, and also Noah's Ark. The body of Jesus is Noah's ark because through offering it as a sacrifice on the cross, we were saved from the flood of this world and eternal damnation.

The Holy Spirit in the Jordan River took the same form as the dove that came through the window of the ark. The scene at the Jordan was very similar to that of Noah's Ark where life on earth was renewed. The olive branch is a symbol of the olive oil which is used in the holy anointment by the Miron.

After baptism, an adult exchanges the long white tunic he wore in the baptism font for his clothes, and is anointed by the Holy Miron this anointment of the Holy Spirit, on his forehead, neck and two hands (similar to anointing the sick). The title Christians comes from being christened and anointed with the holy oil, and it is also an ascription to Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the One to establish the sacrament of Baptism. He "*break to pieces the heads of the dragons in the water*" (Ps 74:13) giving the water the power of the new birth. With His baptism, He illustrated baptism as a way to salvation when, "*...suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Mat 3:17). This meant that baptism is also the way to receive sonship to God. The Father's declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ as His Son was coupled with establishing the sacrament of baptism. This is a hint from the Lord that He is preparing the way for us to reach regeneration, through which we become children of God by means of baptism.

The trinity appeared at the Son's baptism in the Jordan. The voice of the Father was heard from heaven, the Son immersed in the water, and the Holy Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, Triune in One, who is God. This is the first Holy apparition of the Trinity clearly witnessed by John the Baptist, and celebrated in the church by the Feast of Epiphany.

The crossing of the Jordan River in the Old Testament was a symbol for the sacrament of baptism as well as for the baptism of our Lord Christ in the Jordan River.

Effects of baptism are: salvation, regeneration from the water and the Spirit, washing away sins, remission of sins, death and resurrection with Christ, and renewal. In baptism we put on Christ, thus joining the membership of the Church as circumcision

joined the people of Israel. Saint Paul linked baptism to circumcision in his Epistle to the Colossians saying, *“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead”* (Col 2:11–12).

The Lord Jesus Christ placed baptism as a condition of entry into the kingdom of heaven and said to Nicodemus, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (Jn 3: 3,5). Also, Saint Paul said in his epistle to Bishop Titus, *“...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Tit 3:5). Hence salvation is accomplished in the regeneration, and renewal of the Holy Spirit happens in baptism.

In terms of forgiveness of sins, it is mentioned in the book of Acts that Saint Peter, on day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church said, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38).

Baptism in the name of Christ:

Some may ask, ‘Is baptism in the name of Jesus Christ or in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?’ The baptism in the name of Christ is the one commanded by Him saying, *“...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Mt 28: 19). There is no difference between the two because the baptism in the name of Christ is what Christ commanded to be done in the name of the Trinity, in which Christ is the Son, making it voluntarily the baptism of Christ.

Incidents Revealing the Effect of Baptism:

a. From the History of the Church:

Once, there was a governor’s wife in Antioch who wanted her two sons to be baptized in Egypt. On the way, the sea was troubled and the boat was about to sink. She baptized them by anointing them (as an exception) either with some water, her saliva or she might have scratched herself and anointed them with her blood. Upon arrival to Alexandria, it was “Baptism Sunday” and Pope Peter, the Seal of the Martyrs, was baptizing some children. Each time he puts this woman’s children into the water, it would freeze in the font. He called the mother and asked for an explanation. She told him that she was worried that the children might die without being baptized, so she anointed them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He advised her that this baptism was sufficient since baptism could never be repeated. He only anointed them with the Holy Miron and prayed upon them. This reveals the greatness of the sacrament of baptism, and that it is unrepeatable.

b. From Contemporary Life:

In our days, a virtuous nun called Mother Youanna, the sister of the virtuous Mother Adrosis (the Abbess of the Monastery of El Amir Tadros), was a physician before

becoming a nun, and her name was Dr. Eva Hanna Samy. During her practical year, Dr. Eva worked in the cancer clinic in Fom-El-Khalig, Cairo. A twelve year old boy who was being treated for Leukemia, would come to the clinic with his mother, and sometimes with other family members. He entered the clinic with 80% cancer in his blood and it increased to 90% during his stay. They would run tests on cells from the bone marrow extracted from the Sternum in the chest.

The latest test revealed a percentage above 90% of cancer. Dr. Eva was then a servant at Saint Mary's church in Garden City⁶. When she found out that the case of the boy was serious, she started to speak to the family about baptism, its effects, and the partaking of holy communion from the body and blood of the Lord. They were a protestant family but were touched by her words and longed to receive these blessings. She advised them that baptism is required before partaking of the Holy Communion, and that the boy may even be cured as a result of baptism. The twelve year old boy, his mother, his father and the whole family agreed to be baptized, especially when they knew that His Holiness Pope Shenouda III would personally perform the baptism rites for them.

Dr. Eva and Dr. Marcel had already asked His Holiness to baptize the boy and His Holiness had agreed and prepared baptismal cloths for the whole family. His holiness baptized them in Saint Mark's Cathedral, Anba Ruweis- Abasseya- Cairo. They were very joyful and spent time with His Holiness who welcomed them and prayed for the boy.

The boy then returned to the cancer clinic in Fom-El-Khalig. They ran a test on him directly after baptism and to the surprise of everyone the result was 0%. If there were ever a chance of healing with medication, it is impossible for the percentage to have drop from 90% to 0% suddenly and not gradually. Other children with the same disease in the clinic had passed away in the presence of this boy and Dr. Eva. This was in 1981 and His Holiness the Pope was notified of the miracle, but he is not one to brag of miracles.

This story reveals to us: the blessings that God gives on the hands of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the effect of the sacrament of baptism, the faiths of His Holiness, Dr. Eva, Dr. Marcel, the boy's mother, the boy himself and his whole family. All these factors influenced the boy's healing.

Baptism and Other Sacraments:

Baptism cures the body just as it cures the spirit and the soul from sin. The Lord Jesus Christ told the man born blind to go wash in the Lake of Siloam. This symbolized baptism as he came seeing (see Jn 9); spiritual enlightenment is embodied by the opening of his blind eyes.

Moreover, baptism is able to cure actual illnesses. We ask that God discharges any magic or spell, and casts out all devils that are present in the water or in the person

⁶ Dr. Eva was recommended to the service in this church by Dr. Marcel Sobhi, the wife of Fr. Augustinus Hanna who was previously Mr. Maher Ragheb Hanna – solicitor and currently a priest at the church in West Covina – California. However, she used to serve in Damiette before being in Cairo, as she loved the church and the service since her youth.

baptized. However, if the person falls ill after baptism, we cannot anoint him with the water of baptism. It is inappropriate because baptism cannot be repeated. Another sacrament, namely 'unction of the sick', is performed to heal the baptized person. If the sick man is a non-baptized person but he accepts the faith and is baptized, there is no need for the unction of the sick, because baptism will be a cure for him.

The person confesses his sins before baptism, the priest then recites the absolution during the rites of the baptism. Thus the sacrament of confession is embedded into the sacrament of baptism. The baptized is not required to confess as a separate step from baptism, because during baptism, confession and absolution from sins take place. If he sins after baptism, he will have to undertake the sacrament of confession as an independent sacrament which leads to permission for partaking of the holy communion. Therefore, Holy Communion is received consequent to the sacrament of baptism.

Orthodox Baptism:

Obviously, there is a difference between protestant and orthodox baptisms. Protestants do not believe baptism is crucial for salvation, but rather a mark or an indication of faith, they even sometimes consider it a duty or obligation.

Protestants believe that salvation is only through faith based on the words of Saints Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" (Acts 16:31). What they said in this incident did not mean 'do not get baptized'. They singly wanted to prevent him from killing himself, since the man wanted to kill himself out of fear. Consequently, the apostles wanted him to believe only and be saved.

In fact, when he believed, he was baptized with all his household. By saying 'believe', the apostles meant that faith in Christ is the only means required for receiving all heavenly blessings and graces.

We do not approve of the protestant baptism because Saint Paul said "... *One Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (Eph 4:5). Both the Orthodox and the Protestants do believe in One Triune God and in the Lord Jesus Christ, but differ in: faith, sacraments in general, baptism in particular, and many other aspects.

How could it be 'one baptism' since the protestants reject the sacrament of priesthood while the priest is the one authorized to perform the sacrament of baptism? How could it be 'one baptism' while it is not based on 'one faith'? Baptism can never be one unless faith is one. Moreover, their faith in the sacrament of baptism is differs from our faith.

Furthermore, their baptized person does not believe baptism is essential for salvation, rather he only considers it a fulfillment of a religious obligation or singly an outward mark or formality. How is he supposed to gain the regeneration from above by the water and Spirit, of which our Lord spoke?

In the above mentioned story of an orthodox baptism in the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Lord declared His ability to heal the boy through this sacrament. It was

miraculous! We never heard of a patient of Leukemia suddenly cured, unless through a miracle through unction of the sick or baptism. This proved that his initial protestant baptism was not according to the will of God.

Baptism is the gateway to the rest of the church's sacraments. The person enters the church through the sacrament of baptism (the door). It enables us afterwards to receive the sacrament of the Miron, the sacrament of the Holy Communion, practice the sacrament of confession, receive the sacrament of the holy matrimony, or be ordained as priest.

Baptism and Priesthood:

Through baptism we all receive a literal priesthood that enables us to generally say "*Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*" (Ps 141:2).

There is, however, the special priesthood which is clear in the following verses said by Saint Paul, "*Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*" (1Cor 4:1). And he also said, "*that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*" (Rom 15:16). When he says, "*servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*", he is referring to the special formal priesthood. No one can be ordained priest unless he is first baptized.

Baptism is the Gateway:

We have seven sacraments in our church, baptism, Miron, confession, Holy Communion, unction of the sick, matrimony, and priesthood. None of these seven sacraments can be practiced except through baptism which is the entrance to life in the church.

For this reason, when the Lord Jesus Christ sent His disciples, He said to them, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" (Mat. 28:19). Thus, the Lord sent His disciples, after His resurrection, to baptize. This illustrates the significance of baptism as a condition for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. No one should deceive himself thinking he can enter heaven without baptism, even the little children. Otherwise, how would the original ancestral sin be forgiven?

A disagreement occurred between Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome over the origin of the soul, whether it is created or born? Saint Augustine claimed it was born when the man is born, while Saint Jerome claimed it was created. Saint Augustine said "if it was created, then it has not inherited Adam's sin, then why do we baptize children?". At this point Saint Jerome could not find a reply.⁷

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III always emphasizes the faith of the church, which states that a person always inherits the original sin by birth. Hence, children must be baptized since Christ said, "*...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot*

⁷ His Holiness Pope Shenouda III book on Comparative Theology part I, the chapter on Baptism.

enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:5). He also said, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:3), even if it was a child. The un-baptized is not only forbidden from entering the kingdom of heaven, but he is even prevented from seeing it. One is granted a new nature through baptism, and this new nature grants him new eyes. Therefore the eyes of the man born blind are opened.

The church arranged that the story of the man born blind to be read on “Baptism Sunday.” When the person is baptized after a birth in blindness, his eyes are open. The Lord Jesus Christ told the blind man, “*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.*” (Jn 9:7), and became a witness for the Lord.

Baptism involves enlightenment through which a person can see the kingdom. Suppose an un-baptized adult or child enters the kingdom, he will not see anything because he is blind and cannot see spiritual objects or the divine glory surrounding the throne of God. Consequently, the church emphasizes that children are baptized when they are young fearing their death before baptism.

In exceptional cases where the child’s life is in danger, the church allows any Orthodox person to carry out the baptism. In such cases, they can anoint the child three times in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The child then is left in God’s safe hands. If the child survives, he is brought by his parents to the priest to be anointed by the Holy Miron (the anointment of the Holy Spirit), but never to be re-baptized.

Baptism not only washes the body of man from the dirt surrounding him, but also washes the spirit within thus one is purified. Water is the sensed medium used in baptism, but the Holy Spirit works with unseen power in this sacrament. It washes the soul from both the original and actual sins which the baptized had committed before his baptism. Consequently, the person is born from God, from above, with the authority to conquer the devil through the living power of the cross.

Glory be to God forever, Amen.