

Pope Shenouda III



Agbeya Psalms and Prayers (1)

Holy, Holy, Holy

Translated by: Dr Wedad Abbas

The "Trisagion" Hymn is derived from the Praise Song of the Seraphim which Isaiah the Prophet heard and passed on to us.

He said, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'" (Isa 6: 1-3)

The other song of the three holies is derived from the song of Nicodemus, which he chanted while preparing the body of the Lord Christ - glory to Him - for burial. When he was holding the Lord's hand he wondered how he could put that hand which created heaven and earth in covers! Immediately he saw the Lord smiling to him, so he said, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal! The church added to this praise song and used it among the church prayers."

God is Holy:

While praying this hymn we remember the words of the Scripture on God's holiness and similar prayers. St. John the Visionary describes in the Revelation how he was in the Spirit and saw the Lord sitting on a throne in heaven, and how the four living creatures with six wings each and full of eyes around and within, were chanting day and night with no rest, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" (Rev 4: 1-8) He describes further another great and marvelous sign in heaven: seven angels, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God, and singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy." (Rev 15: 1-4)

Yes, indeed, God is holy. He alone is holy, for, "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, no, not one." (Ps 14: 3)

The Holy Virgin Mary in her praise song mentions this divine attribute of holiness: "For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name." (Lk 1: 49) Hannah the mother of Prophet Samuel likewise says in her praise song: "No one is holy like the Lord." (1 Sam 2: 2)

We also remember God's holiness when we pray Psalms (99: 9, 3; 111: 9): "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; For the Lord our God is holy." "Let them praise Your great and awesome name." "Holy and awesome is His name." We read the same in the Revelation, "These things says He who is holy. He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens" (Rev 3: 7)

Also see how beautiful are the praises we chant on Good Friday with the tune of "Agios/Holy!"

It is a long tune, by which we chant the Lord's holiness at the time of His crucifixion between two thieves for false accusations. Amidst all of His accusers we say to Him: "We know, O Lord, who You are: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory.' You are Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal!"

Your holiness is unquestionable even at the time of Your crucifixion - the two thieves crucified with You were crucified for their own sins, but You, the Righteous and Blameless, who alone are Holy, "Separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens." (Heb 7: 26) You were crucified for our sins, therefore we praise You and chant, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

In the Prayer for the Departed we chant the same hymn "Agios/Holy".

It is as if we say to Him while seeing the departed for the last time, "Remember, O Lord, that You alone are holy, whereas none of mankind is without sin even if living for one single day, therefore forgive them, for they have put on flesh and dwelt in this world. You know our frame, remember that we are dust (Ps 103: 14)."

We chant the same hymn likewise in the Prayer for ordaining a new monk.

We pray over the person to be ordained monk the Prayer for the Departed. This is to make the person aware of the holy life he is starting, having died to the world and is coming into communion with God through prayers and meditation in a life of continual praising, similar to that of the Seraphim who praise God continually, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." (Isa 6: 3)

With the three holies Praise Song we remember the "Preparation Prayer" said by the priest before the Divine Liturgy.

The father priest says, "You, O Lord, who knows the heart of every-

body, the Holy who rests in His holy people, who alone are sinless and forgiving sins ... You know, O Lord, that I am not deserving or prepared to this Your holy ministry, and have no boldness to approach and open my mouth before Your holy glory ..."

We praise Him as "Holy", and remember that everything belonging to Him is holy:

God's name is holy. We say in (Ps 103: 1) "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" He requires us not to profane His holy name (Lev 22: 2). We say to Him daily, "Hallowed be Your name." (Mt 6: 9)

God's Spirit is holy. He is "the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28: 19). St. Paul the Apostle commands us, saying, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph 4: 30) We also say with the Psalmist, "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." (Ps 51: 11)

The place where God appears is holy, therefore God said to Moses on appearing to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." (Ex 3: 5) (Jos 5: 15)

God's house is likewise holy: "Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever." (Ps 93: 5) The Scripture also says, "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp ... therefore your camp shall be holy." (Deut 23: 14) God's temple is holy: "The Lord is in His holy temple, The Lord's throne is in heaven." Naturally therefore heaven is holy, as the Psalmist says, "He will answer him from His holy heaven." (Ps 20: 6) And if we say that our hearts are His holy temple, they also are holy as the apostle says, "For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." (Cor 3: 17)

In the first house constructed for God there was the sanctuary and the Tabernacle, the Holiest of All.

St. Paul the Apostle spoke about both in (Heb 9: 2, 3). God's mountain is likewise holy, for the Lord speaks about His holy hill in (Ps 2: 6) and the Psalmist says, "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness ..." (Ps 15: 1, 2) We also chant the words of (Ps 87: 1): "His foundation is in the holy mountains." (Ps 87: 1)

God's Scripture is holy, and likewise His commandments and law. St. Paul says to his disciple Timothy, "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation." (2 Tim 3: 15) He also says, "... the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures." (Rom 1: 1, 2) "The law is holy, and the commandment holy." (Rom 7: 12)

Priesthood is holy, and likewise offerings. The apostle says, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God." (1 Pet 2: 5)

The Sacraments accomplished by the priests are Holy Sacraments.

Likewise the ointment by which the priests, the tent of meeting, the holy vessels were anointed is called holy ointment. The Lord commanded Moses to make it, "You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy." "This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations ... It is holy, and it shall be holy to you." (Ex 30: 29-32)

Even the priestly vestments were holy as the Scripture says, "The holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed in them and to be consecrated." (Ex 29: 29) Until now we consecrate the garments of the priests before they put them on.

Aaron himself was holy to the Lord, and the Lord commanded Moses concerning Aaron's turban, "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet: 'Holiness to the Lord' and you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban." (Ex 28: 36, 37) And concerning the vestments of Aaron the Lord said, "You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest." (Ex 28: 2, 3)

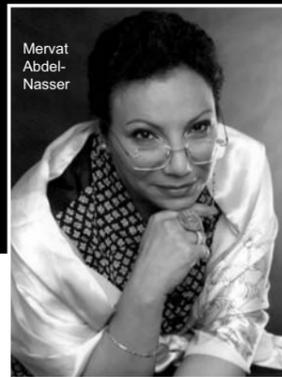
The offerings given to God were likewise holy offerings. The Scripture describes the sin offering as "most holy" (Lev. 6: 29), and likewise the trespass offering and the peace offering, all were "most holy" (Lev 7: 17). We even are required to offer our bodies as a holy sacrifice to the Lord, as the apostle says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren ... that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy ..." (Rom 12: 1)

The fast we offer to God is a holy fast, as the prophet says, "Consecrate a fast; call a sacred assembly." (Joel 1: 14; 2: 15) God's people also are holy (Deut 27: 9), a holy nation (Ex 19: 6), and Jerusalem is the holy city (Mt 4: 5).

At Tunal-Gabal in Minya



A rebirth of ancient Egypt



Mervat Abdel-Nasser



An invitation to the soft opening of Mervat Abdel-Nasser's Foundation for Creativity and Cultural Development, a centre for culture and civilisation that she founded on her own initiative in Minya, Upper Egypt, is an eye-opener to others planning breakthrough projects in modern-day Egypt.

Talaat Radwan

region is also home to the Sheikh Abada district, an important site of Islamic history.

Self-sustainable

Despite the cultural and archaeological wealth, the lack of organised tourism in the region meant the area was totally neglected. The sites are off the beaten track and reaching them often involves venturing along unpaved paths through a labyrinthine desert landscape. This has deprived the local people of the chance of making a livelihood out of tourism, and at the same time getting in touch with their cultural and historical roots and thus steering away from religious fanaticism and sectarian strife.

The main objective of the New Hermapolis is to develop the area economically and culturally by creating a self-sustainable community through the active promotion of alternative tourism, what Dr Nasser calls "tourism for development".

The project encompasses an eco-village modelled on a pattern that existed in ancient Egypt, using local materials. To add a touch of whimsy, each of the 16 rooms is topped with a pyramidion.

The complex also includes a conference hall and a library specialising in the heritage of the Tunal-Gabal area. The garden features endangered tree and plant species that existed in ancient Egypt and serve as a miniature nature reserve to help classify and preserve them.

The project uses sound ecological procedures for water and energy preservation. A drilled well extracts the water needed for daily activities, while heat is generated by solar panels and a recycling station processes waste to turn it into fertiliser.

Dream fulfilled

New Hermapolis will not only create employment opportunities for the local community in the hotel business, but will also help revive the traditional crafts of the area. Dr Nasser dreams of restoring the area's reputation as an intellectual and cultural centre by raising the historical awareness of the local people and encouraging them to understand the real worth of their culture, along with encouraging creativity, fostering local talents and enhancing the process of learning and education of children.

All profits obtained from tourism will be redirected to development of the local community to create a self-sustainable project that will eventually serve as a role model for other communities to follow, and will gradually achieve social advancement in Middle and Upper Egypt. The project is expected to open to visitors next October.

Quitting a teaching job at a prestigious British university; leaving the comfort of her London home to live for three years alone in the harsh conditions of the desert; defying the bureaucracy of Egyptian governmental officials and spending every penny of her savings on a project in the middle of nowhere, Dr Nasser overcame all sorts of challenges for the sake of a dream she firmly believed in.

Turning point

Dr Abdel-Nasser studied at the Cairo University Medical School and is a fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London. She holds a master's degree in philosophy and a doctorate in psychiatry from London University, where she is a consultant psychiatrist and honorary senior lecturer at King's College.

Dr Nasser has always been fascinated by the ancient Egyptian civilisation. A turning point in her life was the innocent answer given by the British youngster in London who, when she asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, said: "An Egyptologist." A few days later a taxi driver told her how much he admired the Egyptian civilisation and said he had a large collection of Egyptology books.

The two events awakened her own passion for Egyptology, one that had absorbed her from early childhood. She decided there and then to pursue her own studies and began to work on the first of several books about Egypt's cultural and philosophical heritage. After many years of dedication to research and lecturing Dr Nasser, believing that action speaks louder than words, moved back to Egypt and poured all her theoretical knowledge into the New Hermapolis project at Tunal-Gabal, 340kms south of Cairo.

Egyptian history in a nutshell

Dr Nasser chose this project site because of its huge significance throughout different stages of Egypt's history. In ancient times Tuna al-Gabal was a centre of the cult of Thoth, the god of wisdom, intellect and writing, and was a destination for the great minds and philosophers of the era from the four corners of the world. The Greeks linked Thoth to their god Hermes, and this gave rise to the ancient name of the town, Hermapolis, where the Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures overlapped.

Not far from Tuna al-Gabal at Tel al-Amarna are the vestiges of Akhetaten, the city built by Pharaoh Akhenaten in the 14th century BC. One of the most important archaeological sites in the whole of Egypt, this was the first centre of monotheism in the Near East. This brief period of monotheism witnessed an innovative cultural, intellectual and artistic movement that, although short-lived, played a unique role in Egypt's history and left a lasting legacy.

Near Tuna al-Gabal lie the Beni Hassan tombs with their magnificent murals depicting scenes of everyday life in the Middle Kingdom (2025 - 1786BC), and the city of Akhmim, also a centre of learning and philosophy that flourished until after the Arab conquest in the 7th century.

The area stands on the route taken by the Holy Family when they fled across Egypt, and contains several landmarks where they are said to have stayed. They



Out of the sands of Tunal-Gabal, rises the resort as an oasis in the desert

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