



The Holy Virgin St. Mary

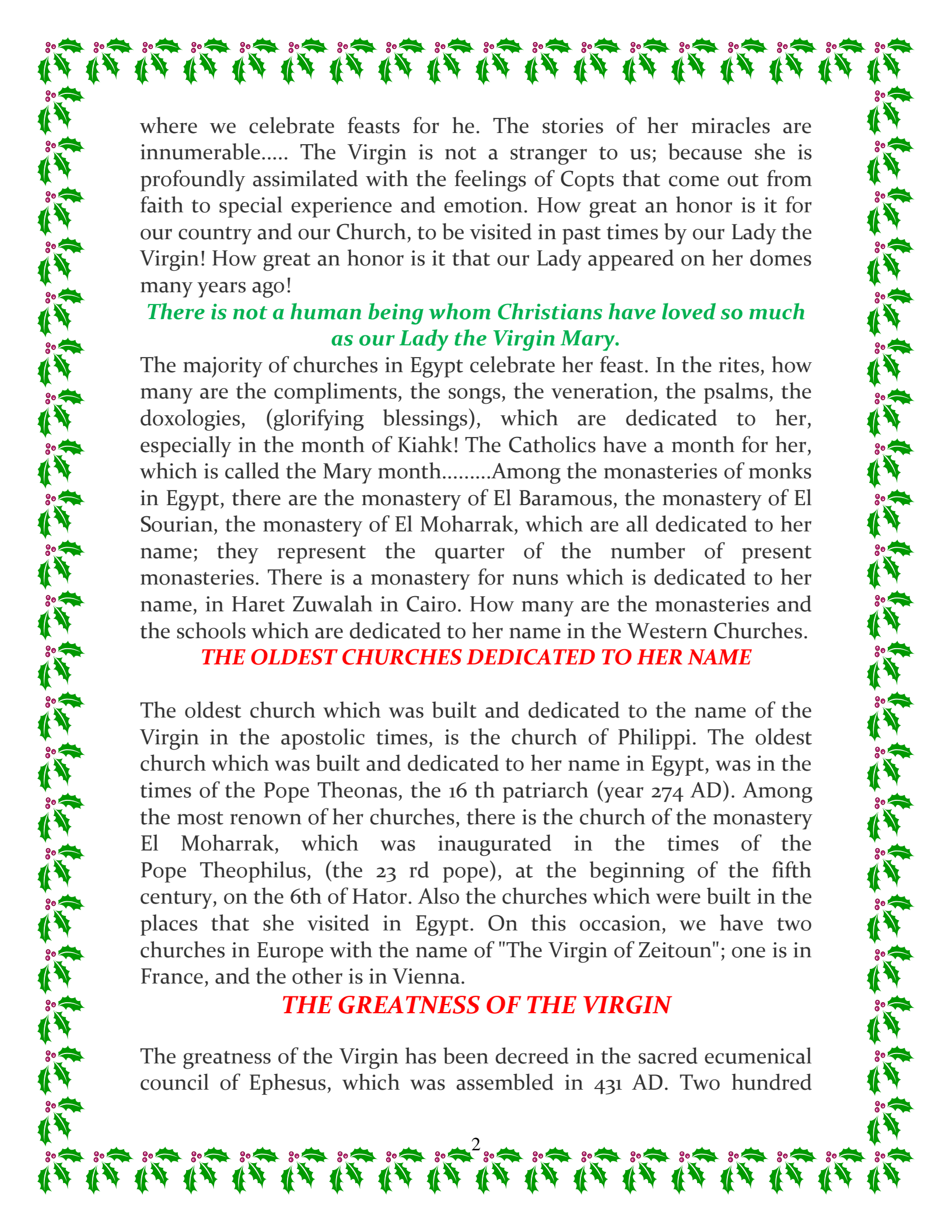
Pope Shenouda III

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

OUR MOTHER THE SAINT VIRGIN

There is no woman about whom the prophets prophesied, and about whom the Holy Bible cared, like the Virgin Mary.....There are numerous symbols about her in the Old Testament. In the New Testament also, there are her biography, her praise, and the miracles. How many are the glorifying expressions and the contemplations, which were cited about the Virgin in the books of the fathers. How full of praise are the surnames by which the Church calls her, and which are inspired from the Spirit of the Holy Bible.....! She is the mother of all of us, the lady of all of us, the pride of our kind, the queen at the right side of the King, the Virgin with perpetual virginity, the pure, the filled with grace, the saint Mary, the powerful and helpful compassionate mother, the mother of the Light, the mother of mercy and salvation, the true vine.

This is the one whom the Church elevates over the rank of archangels, so that we say about her in her hymns and songs: O Mary, you have been raised above the cherubim, and have become higher than the seraphim, O Mary. Mary who was bred up in the temple, and lived the life of prayer and contemplation since her childhood, and who was the sacred vessel whom the Lord has chosen to come inside her. Long generations waited for the birth of this Virgin, so that the fullness of the time would become complete by her (Gal.4:4) She has removed the shame of Eve, and saved the reputation of women after sin. She is the mother of God, in perpetual virginity. She is the Virgin who came to our country during the childhood of Christ, and inhabited our land for years, during which she sanctified it, and blessed it..... She is the Virgin who appeared in Zeitoun 32 years ago, and attracted to her the feelings of the crowds, with her light, her appearance, and her visit to us..... She is the Virgin who makes miracles in numerous places,



where we celebrate feasts for her. The stories of her miracles are innumerable..... The Virgin is not a stranger to us; because she is profoundly assimilated with the feelings of Copts that come out from faith to special experience and emotion. How great an honor is it for our country and our Church, to be visited in past times by our Lady the Virgin! How great an honor is it that our Lady appeared on her domes many years ago!

There is not a human being whom Christians have loved so much as our Lady the Virgin Mary.


The majority of churches in Egypt celebrate her feast. In the rites, how many are the compliments, the songs, the veneration, the psalms, the doxologies, (glorifying blessings), which are dedicated to her, especially in the month of Kiahk! The Catholics have a month for her, which is called the Mary month.....Among the monasteries of monks in Egypt, there are the monastery of El Baramous, the monastery of El Sourian, the monastery of El Moharrak, which are all dedicated to her name; they represent the quarter of the number of present monasteries. There is a monastery for nuns which is dedicated to her name, in Haret Zuwalah in Cairo. How many are the monasteries and the schools which are dedicated to her name in the Western Churches.

THE OLDEST CHURCHES DEDICATED TO HER NAME

The oldest church which was built and dedicated to the name of the Virgin in the apostolic times, is the church of Philippi. The oldest church which was built and dedicated to her name in Egypt, was in the times of the Pope Theonas, the 16 th patriarch (year 274 AD). Among the most renowned of her churches, there is the church of the monastery El Moharrak, which was inaugurated in the times of the Pope Theophilus, (the 23 rd pope), at the beginning of the fifth century, on the 6th of Hator. Also the churches which were built in the places that she visited in Egypt. On this occasion, we have two churches in Europe with the name of "The Virgin of Zeitoun"; one is in France, and the other is in Vienna.

THE GREATNESS OF THE VIRGIN

The greatness of the Virgin has been decreed in the sacred ecumenical council of Ephesus, which was assembled in 431 AD. Two hundred

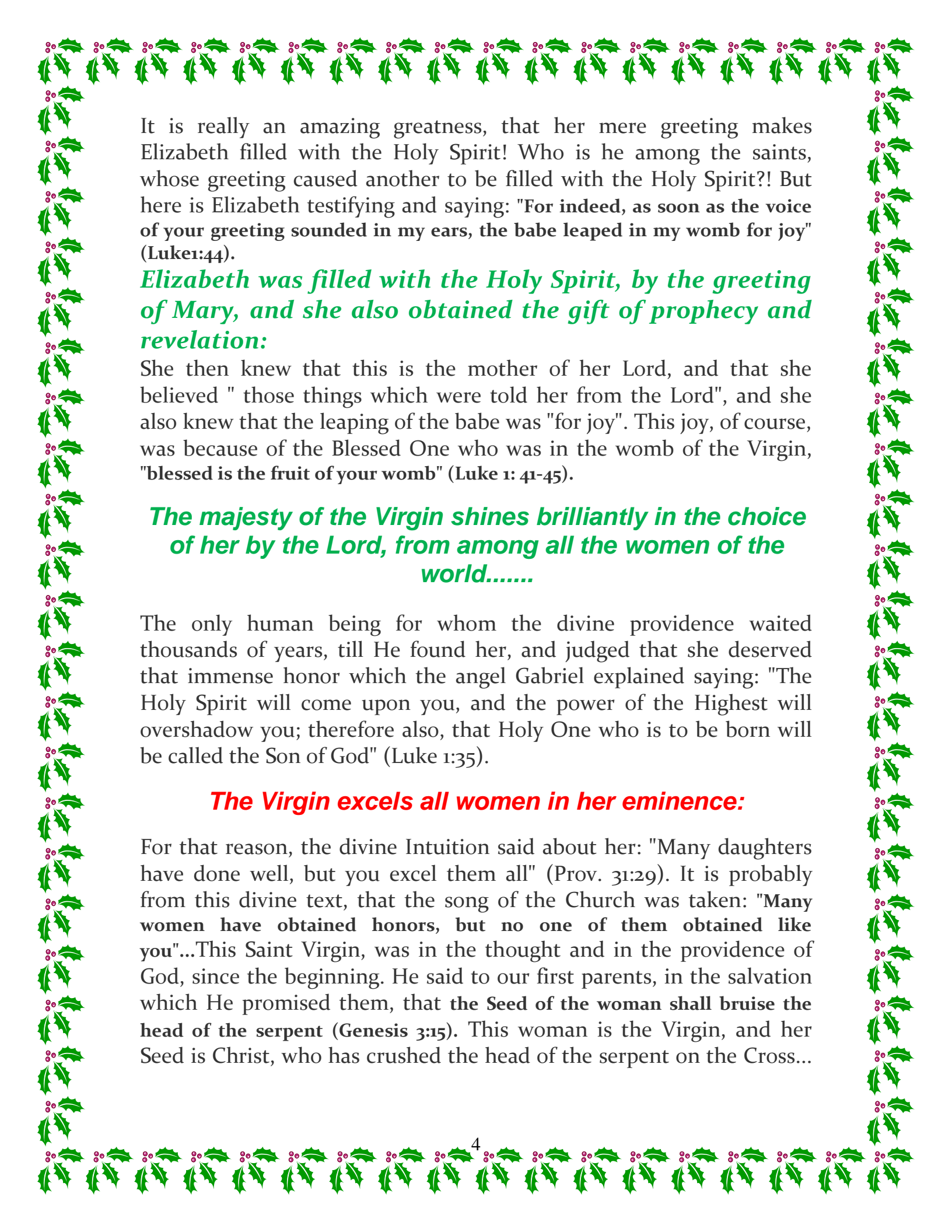


bishops from the world were present. They formulated the prelude to the creed of the Christian Faith, in which it is cited: "We venerate you, O mother of the true Light, and we glorify you, O Saint Virgin Mother of God, because you gave birth for us to the Savior of the world, who has come and delivered our souls". What are the foundations upon which the ecumenical council formulated this prelude? That is what we shall explain now: The Virgin is the blessed saint, whose blessing is continuous throughout the generations, as it has been mentioned in her hymn: "For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:46). The Church calls the Virgin by the surname of "the queen". This was mentioned by the psalm, about her: "At Your right hand stands the queen" (Ps. 45:9). That is why, many artists, when they draw the pictures of the Virgin, they put a crown on her head, and she appears in the image, on the right side of the Lord Christ.

The reverence of the Virgin appears in the salutation of the archangel Gabriel to her:

"Peace to you, O you full of grace, **the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women**" (Luke 1:28). That is, with a special blessing, to which also St. Elisabeth gave testimony. "Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42). Saint Elisabeth found herself small in front of the greatness of the Virgin, and she spoke with the feeling that she was not deserving, although she knew that her son "will be great in the sight of the Lord", and that "He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1: 15-17). She said: "*But why is it granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" (Luke 1:43).

Probably the most evident proof of the greatness of the Virgin, and of her position in the sight of the Lord, is that when her mere greeting arrived to Elisabeth, the latter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and her babe felt it and leaped in her womb for joy. The divine Intuition says in that: "And it happened, when Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41).



It is really an amazing greatness, that her mere greeting makes Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit! Who is he among the saints, whose greeting caused another to be filled with the Holy Spirit?! But here is Elizabeth testifying and saying: "For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44).

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, by the greeting of Mary, and she also obtained the gift of prophecy and revelation:

She then knew that this is the mother of her Lord, and that she believed " those things which were told her from the Lord", and she also knew that the leaping of the babe was "for joy". This joy, of course, was because of the Blessed One who was in the womb of the Virgin, "blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1: 41-45).

The majesty of the Virgin shines brilliantly in the choice of her by the Lord, from among all the women of the world.....

The only human being for whom the divine providence waited thousands of years, till He found her, and judged that she deserved that immense honor which the angel Gabriel explained saying: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

The Virgin excels all women in her eminence:

For that reason, the divine Intuition said about her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all" (Prov. 31:29). It is probably from this divine text, that the song of the Church was taken: "Many women have obtained honors, but no one of them obtained like you"...This Saint Virgin, was in the thought and in the providence of God, since the beginning. He said to our first parents, in the salvation which He promised them, that the Seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). This woman is the Virgin, and her Seed is Christ, who has crushed the head of the serpent on the Cross...



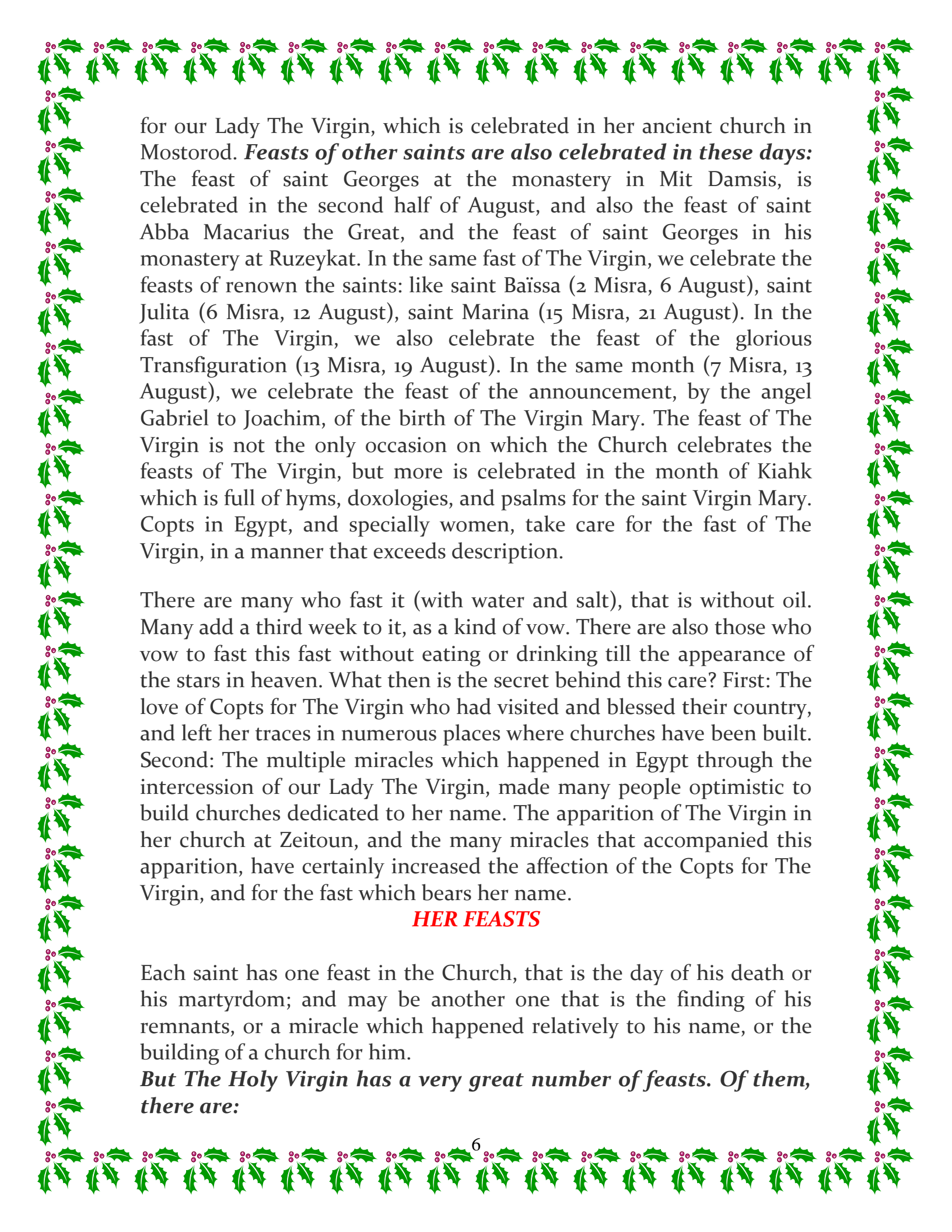
A LIFE SURROUNDED BY MIRACLES

In the life of The Virgin, miracles begin before her birth, and continue after her death. From these:

1. She was generated with a miracle, from sterile parents, with an annunciation from the angel.
2. The miracle of her betrothal, in a divine manner which determined who will take her and care for her.
3. The miracle of her conception of Christ while she is a virgin, and the continuation of her virginity after giving birth.
4. The miracle during her visit to Elizabeth who, when she heard the voice of her greeting, the babe leaped for joy in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.
5. Innumerable miracles during her visit to Egypt, one of which is the fall of idols (Is. 19:1).
6. The first miracle which the Lord did in Cana of Galilee, happened through her request.
7. The miracle of the dissolution of iron, and the deliverance of the apostle Matthias, happened through her intervention.
8. The miracle of Christ receiving her soul, at the hour of her death.
9. The miracle of the striking of the Jews by the Lord, when they wanted to attack her corpse after her death.
10. The miracle of the ascent of her body to heaven.
11. The miracles which happened everywhere by her hands, about which books were written.
12. Her apparition in numerous places, and especially her wonderful apparition in our churches in Zeitoun, and in Papadopoulos.

THE VIRGIN'S FAST

The Church celebrates the fast of our Lady the Virgin beginning with the first of Mesra, (the 7th of August). It is a fast for which people care very much, and they practice it with forceful ascetism. Some add days to it, in regard of the great love of people for The Virgin. The fast of The Virgin is an occasion for spiritual renaissance in the majority of churches. They prepare a spiritual program for daily sermons, and daily masses too in some churches, even the churches which are not named by the name of The Virgin. There is a great feast



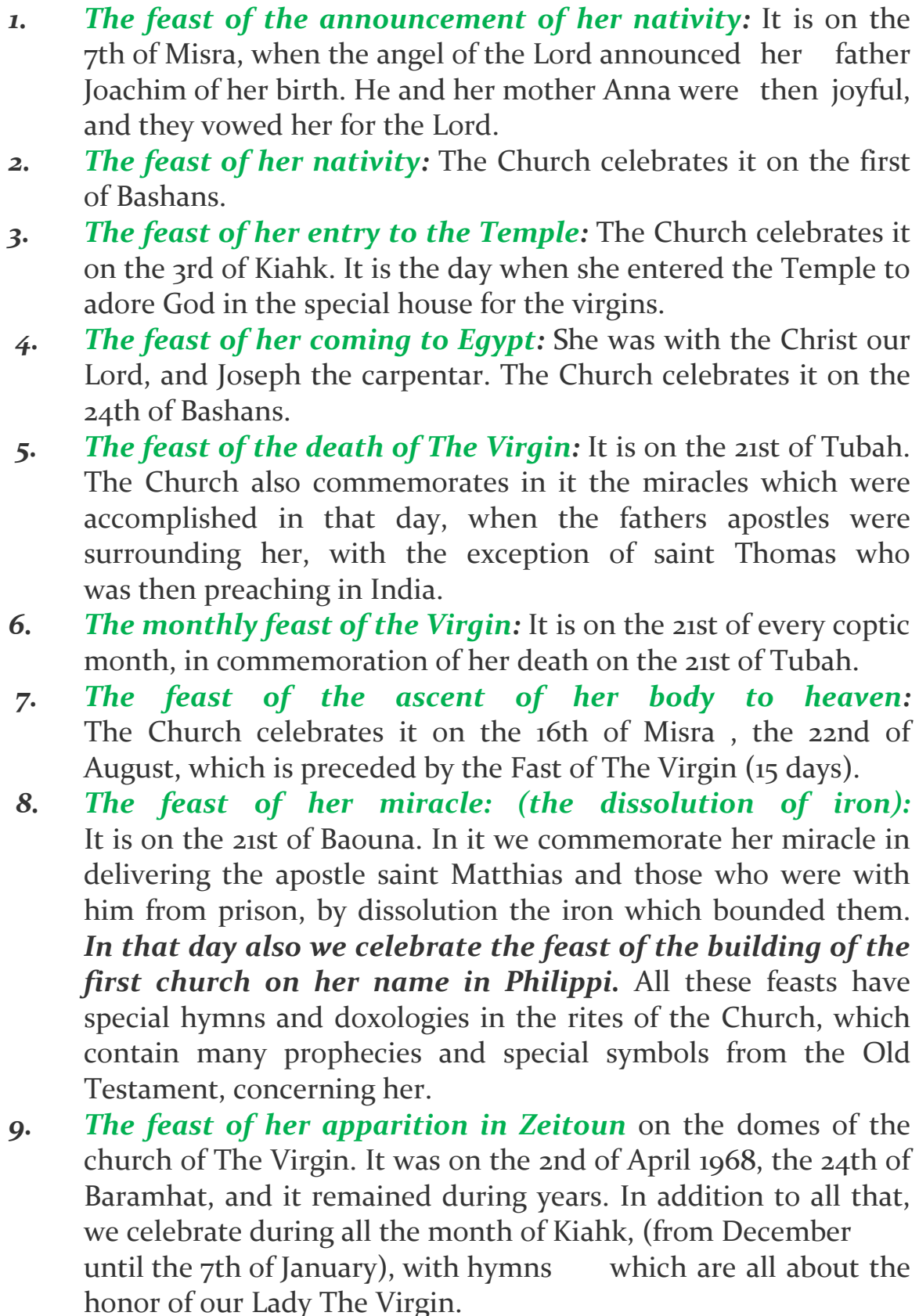
for our Lady The Virgin, which is celebrated in her ancient church in Mostorod. *Feasts of other saints are also celebrated in these days:* The feast of saint Georges at the monastery in Mit Damsis, is celebrated in the second half of August, and also the feast of saint Abba Macarius the Great, and the feast of saint Georges in his monastery at Ruzeekat. In the same fast of The Virgin, we celebrate the feasts of renown the saints: like saint Baïssa (2 Misra, 6 August), saint Julita (6 Misra, 12 August), saint Marina (15 Misra, 21 August). In the fast of The Virgin, we also celebrate the feast of the glorious Transfiguration (13 Misra, 19 August). In the same month (7 Misra, 13 August), we celebrate the feast of the announcement, by the angel Gabriel to Joachim, of the birth of The Virgin Mary. The feast of The Virgin is not the only occasion on which the Church celebrates the feasts of The Virgin, but more is celebrated in the month of Kiahk which is full of hymns, doxologies, and psalms for the saint Virgin Mary. Copts in Egypt, and specially women, take care for the fast of The Virgin, in a manner that exceeds description.

There are many who fast it (with water and salt), that is without oil. Many add a third week to it, as a kind of vow. There are also those who vow to fast this fast without eating or drinking till the appearance of the stars in heaven. What then is the secret behind this care? First: The love of Copts for The Virgin who had visited and blessed their country, and left her traces in numerous places where churches have been built. Second: The multiple miracles which happened in Egypt through the intercession of our Lady The Virgin, made many people optimistic to build churches dedicated to her name. The apparition of The Virgin in her church at Zeitoun, and the many miracles that accompanied this apparition, have certainly increased the affection of the Copts for The Virgin, and for the fast which bears her name.

HER FEASTS

Each saint has one feast in the Church, that is the day of his death or his martyrdom; and may be another one that is the finding of his remnants, or a miracle which happened relatively to his name, or the building of a church for him.

But The Holy Virgin has a very great number of feasts. Of them, there are:

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1. ***The feast of the announcement of her nativity:*** It is on the 7th of Misra, when the angel of the Lord announced her father Joachim of her birth. He and her mother Anna were then joyful, and they vowed her for the Lord.
 2. ***The feast of her nativity:*** The Church celebrates it on the first of Bashans.
 3. ***The feast of her entry to the Temple:*** The Church celebrates it on the 3rd of Kiahk. It is the day when she entered the Temple to adore God in the special house for the virgins.
 4. ***The feast of her coming to Egypt:*** She was with the Christ our Lord, and Joseph the carpenter. The Church celebrates it on the 24th of Bashans.
 5. ***The feast of the death of The Virgin:*** It is on the 21st of Tubah. The Church also commemorates in it the miracles which were accomplished in that day, when the fathers apostles were surrounding her, with the exception of saint Thomas who was then preaching in India.
 6. ***The monthly feast of the Virgin:*** It is on the 21st of every coptic month, in commemoration of her death on the 21st of Tubah.
 7. ***The feast of the ascent of her body to heaven:*** The Church celebrates it on the 16th of Misra , the 22nd of August, which is preceded by the Fast of The Virgin (15 days).
 8. ***The feast of her miracle: (the dissolution of iron):*** It is on the 21st of Baouna. In it we commemorate her miracle in delivering the apostle saint Matthias and those who were with him from prison, by dissolution the iron which bounded them. ***In that day also we celebrate the feast of the building of the first church on her name in Philippi.*** All these feasts have special hymns and doxologies in the rites of the Church, which contain many prophecies and special symbols from the Old Testament, concerning her.
 9. ***The feast of her apparition in Zeitoun*** on the domes of the church of The Virgin. It was on the 2nd of April 1968, the 24th of Baramhat, and it remained during years. In addition to all that, we celebrate during all the month of Kiahk, (from December until the 7th of January), with hymns which are all about the honor of our Lady The Virgin.



THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY IN THE CHURCH'S FAITH

The Orthodox Coptic Church honors our Lady The Virgin with due honor without exaggeration, and without lessening of her position.

1. ***She is, in the belief of the Church, the mother of God,*** (Theotokos in Coptic), and not the mother of "Jesus" as the Nestorians had claimed, those whom saint Kirillos the Alexandrian fought, and whom the sacred ecumenical council of Ephesus excommunicated.
2. ***The Church believes that the Holy Spirit has sanctified the depository of The Virgin during the pregnancy with Christ.*** That was according to what the angel said to her "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The sanctifying by the Holy Spirit of her depository, makes the One born of her, be conceived without the impurity of the original sin. As for The Virgin herself, her mother conceived, like all people, and so The Virgin said in her hymn: "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). ***That is why the Church does not agree that The Virgin was conceived without the impurity of the original sin, as our brothers the Catholics believe.***
3. ***The Church believes in the intercession of The Virgin.*** She places her intercession before the intercession of angels and archangels, because she is the mother of God, and she is the Queen who is at the right hand of the King.
4. ***The Holy Bible gives to The Virgin the surname "filled with grace".*** It is regrettable that the Bayreuth translation of the Bible, in a way that lessens the situations of The Virgin, translates this surname "highly favored one".....All human beings are highly favored, but The Virgin is filled with grace..... although grace does not mean infallibility.
5. ***The Church believes in the perpetuality of the virginity of The Virgin.*** The only exception to this rule, are our brothers the Protestants, who claim that The Virgin gave birth to sons after Christ.

6. *The Church believes in the Ascent of the body of The Virgin to heaven, and celebrates that feast on the 16th of Misra.*

HER SURNAMES AND SYMBOLS

A. Surnames as regards her greatness and her relation with God:

1. *We give her the surname of The Queen who is by the right side of The King.* In this, we mention the words of the psalm "At your hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir" (Ps. 45:9). That is why, in her icon, she is portrayed at the right hand of the Christ our Lord. And we say about her in the divine mass "the Lady and the Queen of us all"

2. *Also we say about her: "Our mother the Holy Virgin".*


When the Christ our Lord was on the Cross, He said about that to his disciple the beloved saint John: "Behold your mother" (John 19:27).

3. *The Virgin is also compared to the ladder of Jacob"*

That ladder which "was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven" (Gen. 28:12). That is the symbol of The Virgin who, by her giving birth to Christ, made the inhabitants of the earth reach to heaven.

4. *She was also called "the bride"* because she is the true bride of the Lord of glory. The word of the Lord in the psalm was realized in her: "Listen, O daughter consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him" (Ps. 45:10-11). That is why she was called the friend of Solomon, who is the virgin of the Song of Songs. It was said of her in the same psalm: "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the king in robes of many colors" (Ps. 45:13-14).

5. *We also give her the surname "the beautiful pigeon"* in remembrance of the beautiful pigeon that carried to our father Noah a branch of olive tree, as a symbol of peace, bringing to him the good news of the deliverance from the waters of the flood...(Gen. 8:11). With this surname, the priest burns incense in front of her icon when he goes out of the sanctuary and says: "Hail to you, O Virgin Mary, the beautiful pigeon". The Virgin is compared to the pigeon in her simplicity and her purity and the action of the Holy Spirit in her. She resembles the pigeon which brought the good news of the deliverance



after the flood, because she brought the good news of the deliverance by Christ.

6. *The Virgin is also compared to the cloud* because of her height on the one hand, and because the prophecy of her coming to Egypt, compared her in this manner. It was mentioned about this in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst" (Is. 19:1). The expression "cloud" is a symbol of the Lord who will come upon the clouds. (Matt.16:27).


B. Her surnames and symbols as regards her motherhood to the Christ our Lord:

7. *One of the surnames by which The Virgin has been described is "Theotokos"* that is: "the mother of God". This surname has been called upon her by the sacred ecumenical council of Ephesus in 431 AD. Saint Kirillos the Great insisted on that surname in his response to Nestorius. Saint Elizabeth addressed her with that surname "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43).

8. *One of her surnames is also: "the golden censer"*. We call her "Te shury" that is the censer in Coptic; and sometimes "the censer of Aaron"..... As for the fire which it contains inside her, coal in it symbolizes the human nature of Christ, and fire symbolizes His divine nature, as it has been said in the Holy Bible: "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).The censer symbolizes the womb of The Virgin where divinity was united with humanity. The censer being of gold, that points to the greatness and the purity of The Virgin. Regarding the purity and the sanctity of The Virgin, we call The Virgin in her hymns "the golden censer" (Te shury ennub, in Coptic).

9. *The Virgin is also surnamed "the second heaven"* because as heaven is the abode of God, so The Virgin Mary was an abode of God during the sacred pregnancy.

10. *The Virgin is also surnamed "the city of God"*: The prophecy in the psalm is realized in her: "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" (Ps 87:3). Or what was said of her "the city of the great King", or certain prophecies which were said about Jerusalem, are realized in her.....or Zion as it was also said in the psalm: "And of Zion it will be



said, "This one and that one were born in her; and the most High Himself shall establish her" (Ps. 87:5).


11. In this quality, she was surnamed "the vine where was found the cluster of life" that is Christ. The Church asks for her intercession with that surname in the prayer of the third hour, saying to her: "O mother of God, you are the true vine who bears the cluster of life"

12. By this quality of motherhood, she has other surnames of which we mention: The mother of the true light, considering that it has been said of the Christ our Lord, that He is "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9). Likewise she was surnamed "**the golden lamp**" because she bears the Light. And also: "the mother of the Holy One", considering that the angel, when he announced her with the birth of Christ, said to her: "also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). "The mother of the Savior", because the Christ our Lord is the Savior of the world: "and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

13. Among her symbols also: "the bush which the prophet Moses saw" (Exodus 3:2). We say in the song: "The bush which the prophet Moses saw in the desert, is the symbol of the mother of Light. She has carried the fire of divinity in her womb, without being touched by any harm". It was said of the Lord that He is "a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29) to which the fire which is burning inside the bush, is a symbol, and the bush symbolizes The Virgin.

14. Also among her symbols: "the ark of the Testimony". This ark was made of acacia wood that cannot be moth -eaten, and was covered with gold from inside and outside (Ex.25:10,22), as a symbol of the purity and the greatness of The Virgin. It also symbolized the things which were inside the ark that were a symbol of the Christ our Lord. There was kept "the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant" (as a symbol of the incarnated Word of God).

15. The Virgin is also compared to the pot of the manna; because the manna was a symbol of the Christ our Lord, as being the live bread who came down from heaven, everybody who eats from him lives by Him, that is also the bread of life (John 6: 32,48,49). Since the Lord Christ is compared to the manna, so it is possible to compare




the Virgin to the pot of the manna, who carried this celestial bread inside her.

16. *The Virgin is also compared to the rod of Aaron which germinated:* that is: she miraculously sprouted and carried the buds of life, (Num.17:6 -8); although a rod has of course no life in it that can produce blossoms and yield fruit. This symbolizes the virginity of The Virgin who could not sprout or produce posterity; but she gave birth through a miracle. This description is mentioned in the hymn of Sunday.

17. *The tabernacle of meeting (the dome of Moses).* The tabernacle of meeting was the place upon which The Lord used to come, and The Virgin is she upon whom The Lord came. God manifested his love for his people in the two cases. That is what we say in the book of the hymns (Al Plasmodia): "You have been compared, O Virgin Mary, to the tabernacle which Moses made on the mountain of Sinai, where God was inside".

18. *The Virgin is compared to the gate in the East.* That which the prophet Ezekiel saw, and of which the Lord said: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut (Ez.44:1-2). The prophet saw the glory of the Lord at this gate which is in the East, and the house was filled with it (Ez. 43: 2,4,5). That symbolizes the virginity of the Virgin who was from the countries of the East; and how this virginity remained sealed. Because she was that gate from the East, she was qualified as:

19. *The gate of life, the gate of deliverance:* It was said about Virgin in the book of Ezekiel: "As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way" (Ez. 44:3). Since the Lord is the Life, then she is the gate of the Life. The Lord said: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). That is why the Virgin is the gate of the Life, that gate out of which the Lord came out, granting life to all those who believe in Him....It is not astonishing that we surname the Virgin "the gate", because the Church also was surnamed "the gate". Our father Jacob said about Bethel: "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:17).



20. *She was compared to the "Holiest of all"* That in which the chief priest entered once a year, to make atonement for all the people. The Lord of glory came once inside the Virgin Mary for the redemption of all the world.

THE VIRGIN'S VIRTUES LIFE OF HUMILITY

Humility was a fundamental condition for her of whom the Lord of Glory will be born.

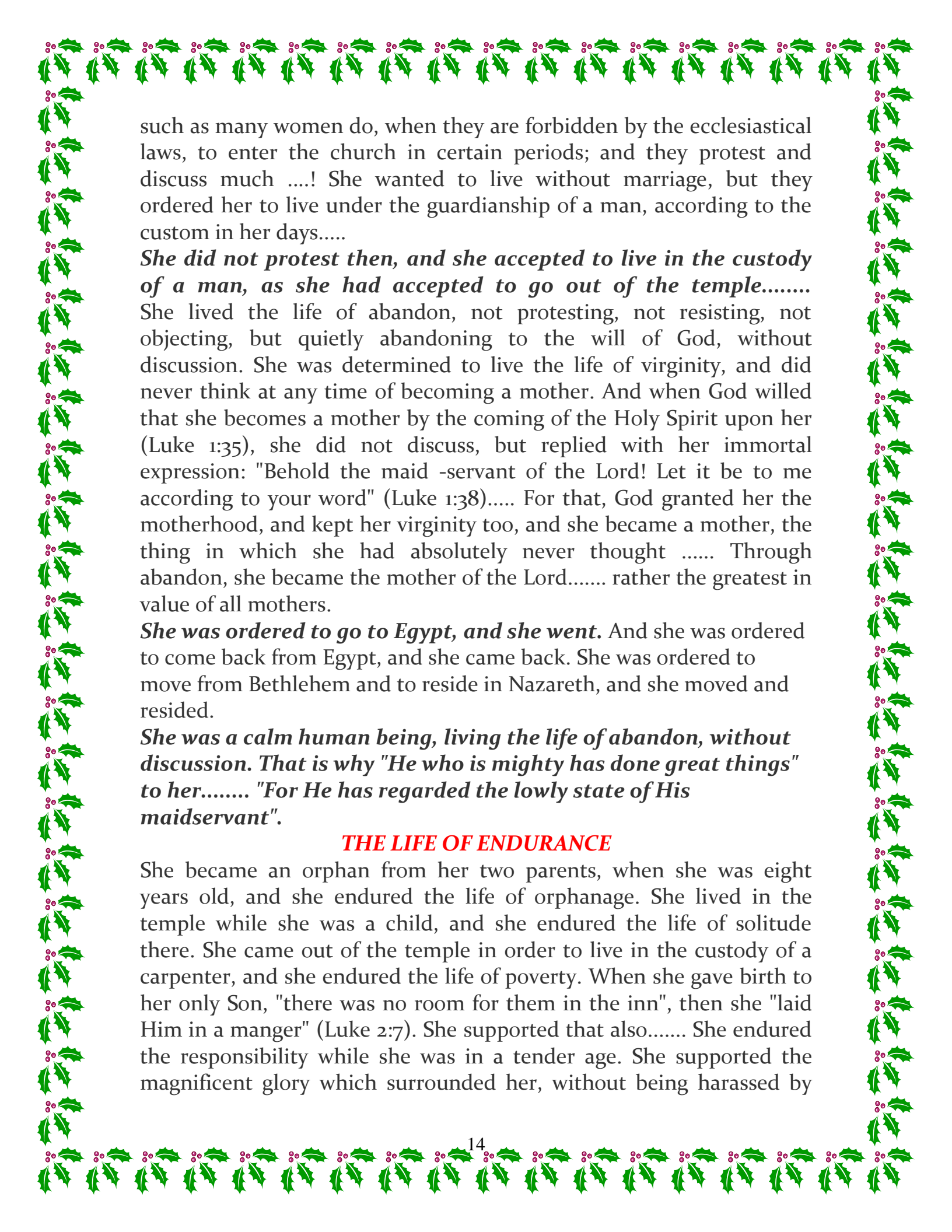
It was indispensable that He would be born from a humble person, who could bear the glory of the divine Incarnation from her....the glory of the coming of the Holy Spirit in her...and the glory of the nativity of the Lord from her, and the glory of all the generations blessing her, and the humility of Elizabeth in front of her saying to her: "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). Likewise to bear the glory of all the apparitions of angels, and the worship of the Mages in front of her Son, and the many miracles which happened by her son in the land of Egypt, and the light of this Son in her bosom.

That is why, "the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4) waited for this human being from whom the Son of God was born.

This humility was manifested in her life, as we shall see: The angel announced to her that she will become the mother of the Lord, but she said: "Behold the maid-servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38), that is his slave and his maiden. The magnificent glory which was given to her, absolutely did not decrease by her humility. But rather it was because of this humility that the Lord granted her that glory. "For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant" and made great things for her (Luke 1: 48, 49). The humility of the Virgin was also manifested in her going to Elizabeth in order to serve her, during the period of her pregnancy. As soon as she heard that she was pregnant, in her sixth month, she travelled to her in a tiring journey across the mountains. She remained with her for three months, till her days were complete to give birth (Luke 1: 39-56). She did so while she was pregnant with the Lord of glory. Her lack of talking about the glories of the divine Incarnation, is a sign of her humility.

LIFE OF ABANDON

She lived saintly and purely in the temple. Then came a time when they said to her to go out of the temple. She did not protest or object,



such as many women do, when they are forbidden by the ecclesiastical laws, to enter the church in certain periods; and they protest and discuss much! She wanted to live without marriage, but they ordered her to live under the guardianship of a man, according to the custom in her days.....

She did not protest then, and she accepted to live in the custody of a man, as she had accepted to go out of the temple.....

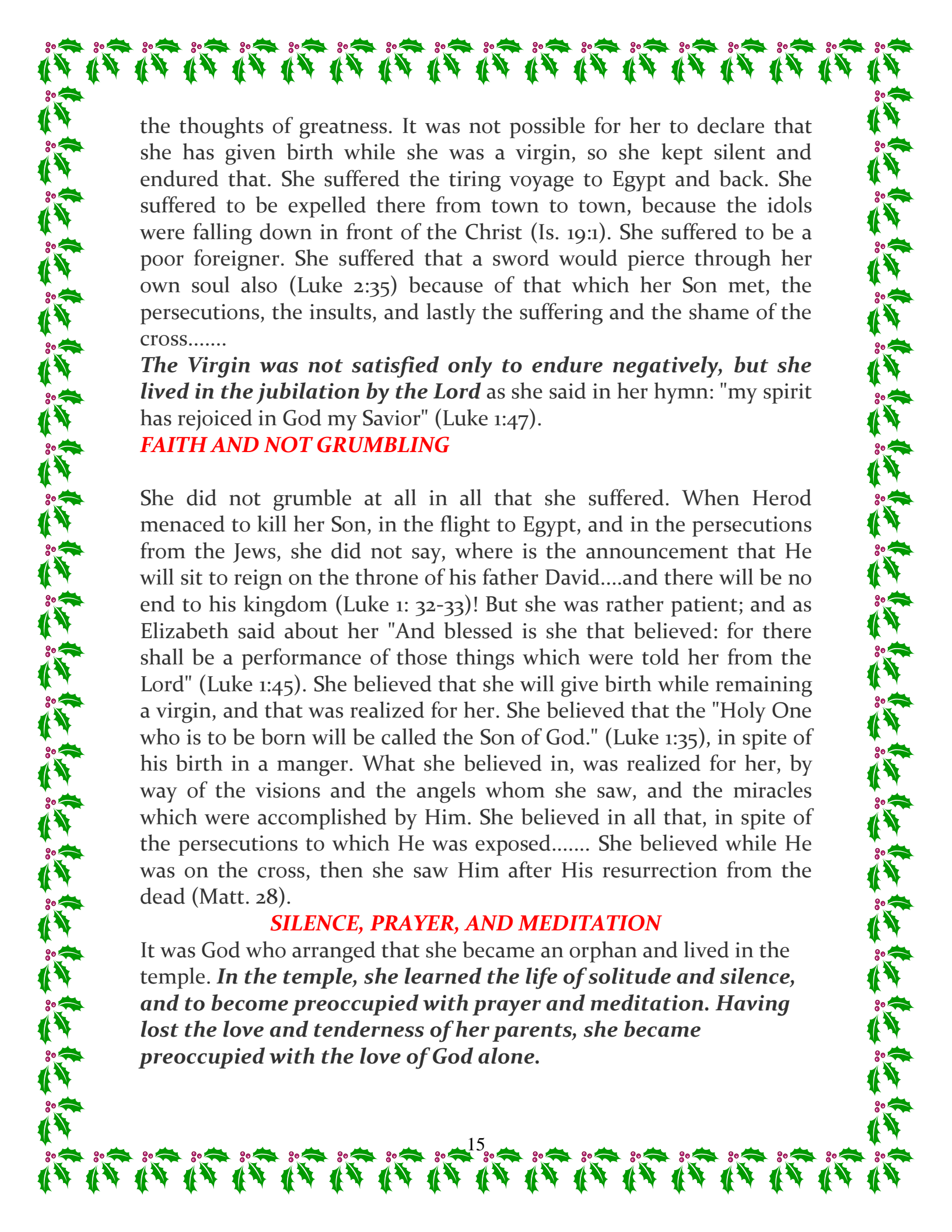
She lived the life of abandon, not protesting, not resisting, not objecting, but quietly abandoning to the will of God, without discussion. She was determined to live the life of virginity, and did never think at any time of becoming a mother. And when God willed that she becomes a mother by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon her (Luke 1:35), she did not discuss, but replied with her immortal expression: "Behold the maid -servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38)..... For that, God granted her the motherhood, and kept her virginity too, and she became a mother, the thing in which she had absolutely never thought Through abandon, she became the mother of the Lord..... rather the greatest in value of all mothers.

She was ordered to go to Egypt, and she went. And she was ordered to come back from Egypt, and she came back. She was ordered to move from Bethlehem and to reside in Nazareth, and she moved and resided.

She was a calm human being, living the life of abandon, without discussion. That is why "He who is mighty has done great things" to her..... "For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant".

THE LIFE OF ENDURANCE

She became an orphan from her two parents, when she was eight years old, and she endured the life of orphanage. She lived in the temple while she was a child, and she endured the life of solitude there. She came out of the temple in order to live in the custody of a carpenter, and she endured the life of poverty. When she gave birth to her only Son, "there was no room for them in the inn", then she "laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). She supported that also..... She endured the responsibility while she was in a tender age. She supported the magnificent glory which surrounded her, without being harassed by



the thoughts of greatness. It was not possible for her to declare that she has given birth while she was a virgin, so she kept silent and endured that. She suffered the tiring voyage to Egypt and back. She suffered to be expelled there from town to town, because the idols were falling down in front of the Christ (Is. 19:1). She suffered to be a poor foreigner. She suffered that a sword would pierce through her own soul also (Luke 2:35) because of that which her Son met, the persecutions, the insults, and lastly the suffering and the shame of the cross.....

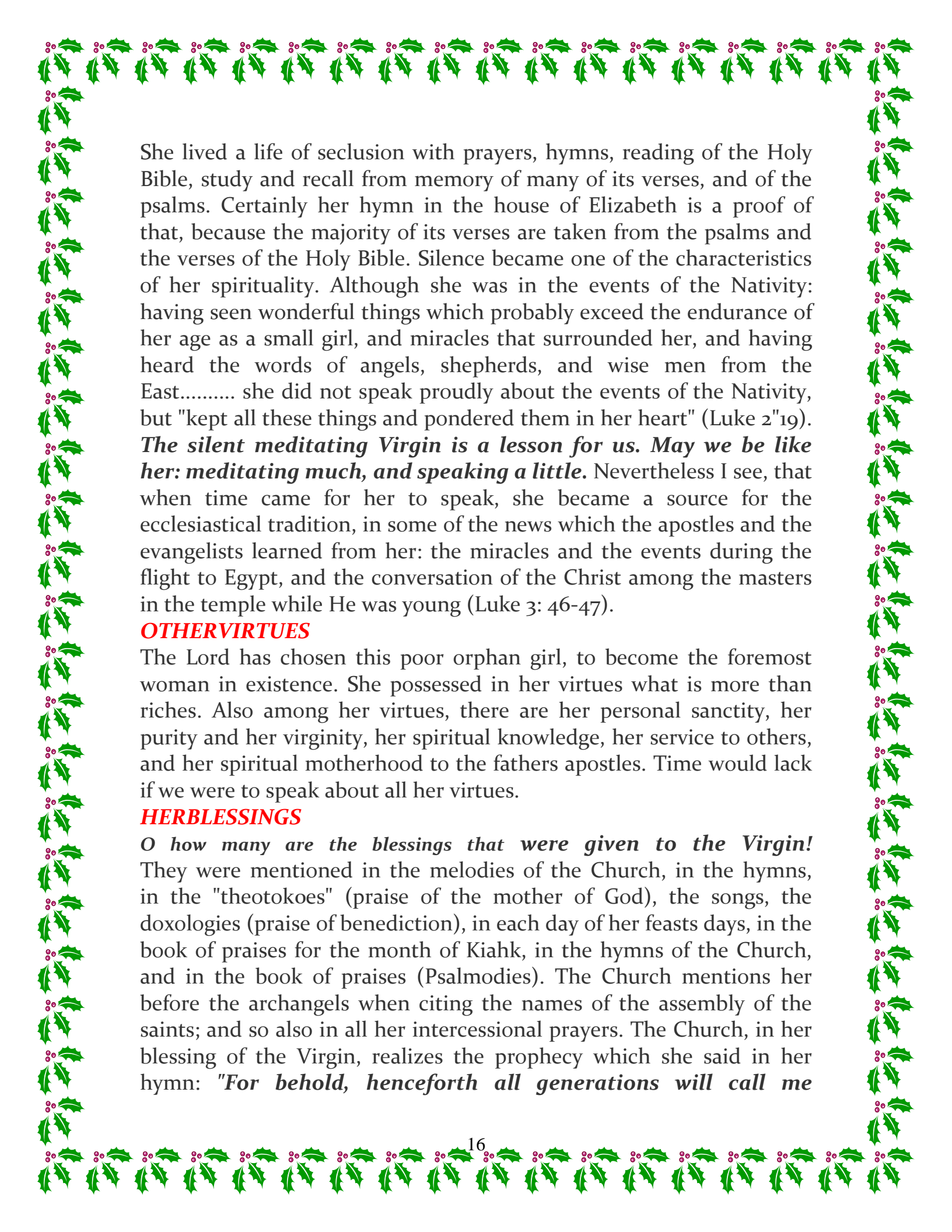
The Virgin was not satisfied only to endure negatively, but she lived in the jubilation by the Lord as she said in her hymn: "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47).

FAITH AND NOT GRUMBLING

She did not grumble at all in all that she suffered. When Herod menaced to kill her Son, in the flight to Egypt, and in the persecutions from the Jews, she did not say, where is the announcement that He will sit to reign on the throne of his father David...and there will be no end to his kingdom (Luke 1: 32-33)! But she was rather patient; and as Elizabeth said about her "And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). She believed that she will give birth while remaining a virgin, and that was realized for her. She believed that the "Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35), in spite of his birth in a manger. What she believed in, was realized for her, by way of the visions and the angels whom she saw, and the miracles which were accomplished by Him. She believed in all that, in spite of the persecutions to which He was exposed..... She believed while He was on the cross, then she saw Him after His resurrection from the dead (Matt. 28).

SILENCE, PRAYER, AND MEDITATION

It was God who arranged that she became an orphan and lived in the temple. ***In the temple, she learned the life of solitude and silence, and to become preoccupied with prayer and meditation. Having lost the love and tenderness of her parents, she became preoccupied with the love of God alone.***



She lived a life of seclusion with prayers, hymns, reading of the Holy Bible, study and recall from memory of many of its verses, and of the psalms. Certainly her hymn in the house of Elizabeth is a proof of that, because the majority of its verses are taken from the psalms and the verses of the Holy Bible. Silence became one of the characteristics of her spirituality. Although she was in the events of the Nativity: having seen wonderful things which probably exceed the endurance of her age as a small girl, and miracles that surrounded her, and having heard the words of angels, shepherds, and wise men from the East..... she did not speak proudly about the events of the Nativity, but "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2"19). ***The silent meditating Virgin is a lesson for us. May we be like her: meditating much, and speaking a little.*** Nevertheless I see, that when time came for her to speak, she became a source for the ecclesiastical tradition, in some of the news which the apostles and the evangelists learned from her: the miracles and the events during the flight to Egypt, and the conversation of the Christ among the masters in the temple while He was young (Luke 3: 46-47).

OTHERVIRTUES

The Lord has chosen this poor orphan girl, to become the foremost woman in existence. She possessed in her virtues what is more than riches. Also among her virtues, there are her personal sanctity, her purity and her virginity, her spiritual knowledge, her service to others, and her spiritual motherhood to the fathers apostles. Time would lack if we were to speak about all her virtues.

HERBLESSINGS

O how many are the blessings that were given to the Virgin! They were mentioned in the melodies of the Church, in the hymns, in the "theotokoes" (praise of the mother of God), the songs, the doxologies (praise of benediction), in each day of her feasts days, in the book of praises for the month of Kiahk, in the hymns of the Church, and in the book of praises (Psalmodies). The Church mentions her before the archangels when citing the names of the assembly of the saints; and so also in all her intercessional prayers. The Church, in her blessing of the Virgin, realizes the prophecy which she said in her hymn: ***"For behold, henceforth all generations will call me***

blessed" (Luke 1:48). The Church offers incense to her, and presents greetings to her. Many are the hymns which begin with the expression "Hail to Mary" or the hymns which begin with the expression "Rejoice O Mary", or the hymn where the prophet David moves the ten cords of his guitar, and he mentions a blessing to her in each cord.

We mention her in the book of prayers of the hours, and in the mass, and in all the books of the Church: In the Synaxaire, in the "Difnar", in the "Katamaras", in the "Psalmodia", and in all the books of hymns and responses..... We mention her in the book of the prayers of the hours, in the third paragraph of every prayer in the prayers of the day, asking for her intercession. We mention her in the creed, and we say in its prelude:" We exalt you, O mother of the True Light and we glorify you, O saint Virgin, mother of God....."

We mention her in the prayer of the benediction, in its beginning and in its end.

We begin the benediction saying: "through the prayers and supplications and implorations which the mother of God, the saint pure Virgin, raises every time for our sake". And after mentioning the names of the angels, the apostles, the prophets, the martyrs, and all the saints, we terminate the benediction saying: "and the blessing of our Lady the Virgin firstly and lastly".....

THE ICON OF THE VIRGIN

There is a difference between images for meditation, and an icon for the rites. In the icons, it is indispensable that she appears with the Christ, as being the mother of God. She must be at his right side, for it has been said in the psalm: "At your right hand stands the queen" (Ps. 45:9). And because she is a queen, there must be a crown on her head, and so the Christ. As a saint, there must be a halo of light around her head, for the Lord said: "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Because she is the second heaven, there are stars, angels, and clouds around her.

Intercede for us, O saint Virgin, in order that the Lord would include us in His mercy.

BY HIS HOLINESS AMBA SHENOUDA III, POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA

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