

## THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Students of early church history often disagree, but there is one thing they all agree upon: the early church was consumed by earnest expectation of the imminent "Parousia" (the Lord's second coming). Some even say that this expectation was the driving force behind the fervor that the early church exhibited in its practices.

Our Lord told His Disciples: "I go to prepare a place for you....And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself." (Jn 14:2,3). This was the Lord's promise to His bride (the church) and the church was consumed by the desire for her Bridegroom to come back and receive her unto Him.

Maranatha ! exclaims St. Paul at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians (1Co 16:22), and even though the letter was addressed to a Greek community, yet he includes this Aramaic word -no doubt part of the earliest Liturgy- that meant: Come Lord !.

The day of the Parousia- we are told by our Lord- is known only to God the Father (Mat 24:36). It comes suddenly, like lightning (Mat 24:27) and unexpectedly, like the day Noah entered into the Ark and the flood came suddenly and took the whole old world by surprise. People were eating and drinking and even getting married when the flood came. (Mat 24:38,39). Hence the Lord's advice to the church: "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Mat 24:42).

The early church expected the Parousia to be in the middle of the night. This is based on what we read: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching...and if He shall come in the second watch or come in the third watch and find them so, blessed are those servants." (Luke 12: 37,38). The parable of the ten virgins also suggests this: "And at midnight, there was a cry made: Behold the Bride-groom cometh." (Mat 25:6).

Our Coptic Church, so faithful to the traditions of the old church, keeps this tradition alive in its practices. The same two chapters mentioned earlier (Luke 12 and Mat 25) are appointed to be read as part of the canonical hours of the midnight prayer.

Another tradition also kept by our church, is the vigil on Great Saturday (saturday before Easter) when the whole church keeps vigil all night, praising the Lord and meditating on the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelations), which -more than any other book in the Bible- speaks to us about the Lord's Parousia (second coming).

"Behold I come quickly." "Seal not the sayings of the prophesy of this book, for the time is at hand ...and behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." "Surely I come quickly. Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev 22: 7,10,12,20).