

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD!

Commemorated on May 24

This holy day is celebrated on the fortieth day after the Resurrection of Christ, on the Thursday of the sixth week of Pascha. The ascension of Christ into heaven is mentioned in the prophecies of the Scriptures. Christ Himself, upon His resurrection, said to Mary Magdalene: *"I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God"* (John 20:17).

This great event, with which Jesus' life on earth concludes, is briefly mentioned in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. But in the Acts of the apostles there is a fuller account. Gathering His disciples, Jesus commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to await what had been promised by the Father, that is the descent of the Holy Spirit. *"John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence . . . Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:5, 8)..

. Saying this, He went with His disciples to Bethany and stopped on the Mount of Olives. "While they beheld, He was taken up, and



a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11).

Then the disciples returned to Jerusalem to where the Theotokos and the myrrh-bearing women were in prayer. In the Gospel of Mark it is written that upon ascending to heaven, the Lord sat upon the right side of God the Father, that is, the human soul and body of Jesus Christ took on the same glory as His Divinity.

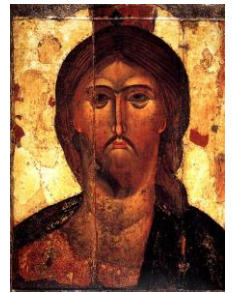
Ascending to heaven, Jesus Christ promised to always be invisibly

on earth among those who believe in Him. †

Catechism Minute

The God-Man

There is a single, unique, and unprecedented event in the world's history: the incarnation of God. God and man were united in the person of Christ and became the divine and extraordinary person of the God-man. Never before has another such person existed, nor will again, in the history of the world and of humanity. In



Christ the God-man, two natures have been united: the divine and the human, without confusion, distinct, separate, and independent, each unchanged by the other. Christ, the Son of God, is also the Son of Man--perfect God and perfect Man. He is truly the God-man in the full sense of the word. As God, He is born of God the Father "before all ages." As human, He was born "of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary," the place being Bethlehem in Judea, and the time being one thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-one years ago.

The event of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God and His retaining both His divine and human natures have made a profound impression, resulting inevitably in much debate. The Third, Fourth, and Sixth

Ecumenical Councils dealt with this matter. The Third Ecumenical Council decided with its infallibility to call Christ "Perfect God and perfect man, with a rational soul and body . . . one in divine essence with the Father and of the same essence as humanity."



The hymnologists of our Church express beautifully all that pertains to the God-man Christ. The Theotokion of the *stichera* of the third tone (Saturday Vespers) speaks about the human birth of Christ, that "He never underwent change or mixture or division, but He guarded the attributes of both natures."

Whereas, the Theotokion of the *stichera* of the eighth tone (Saturday Vespers) speaks on the same subject more clearly, saying "He that was born of the Father out of time, His Only-begotten Son, He Himself was born of you [i.e., the Theotokos], assuming flesh, God by nature and becoming man in nature for us, not being divided into two persons, but His two natures remaining unconfused."

A few words should be said here about the purpose of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God. It is very simple. With the disobedience of Adam and Eve, man fell and lost Grace. He was alienated from God. He was expelled from Paradise. In order for fallen human nature to be restored, the Son and Word of God had to assume the whole of

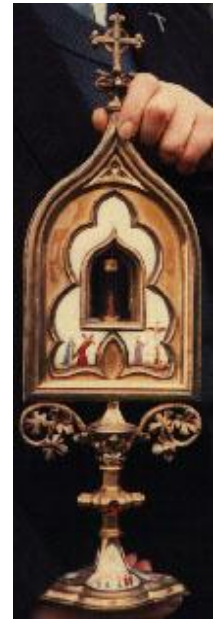
human nature completely, to restore it to Heaven through His Resurrection and Ascension. "Carrying deceived human nature upon Your shoulders, O Christ, through Your Ascension You brought it before God and Father." This was the purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God. As St. Athanasius writes, "God became man in order for us to become godly." No one should think that we humans can become gods and be given a divine nature. No. We can become godly in the moral sense. We return to our first state. The wall of animosity has been torn down between God and Man and communication between them is free.

This section of our Catechism is quite long, important, and difficult to comprehend. We must continue in the next section to see correctly how the Incarnation took place, and what its meaning is. We shall look at quotations from the Gospel and the Holy Fathers concerning the divine and human nature of Christ, in order to understand the relationships between them. It is not possible of course, to deal with this exhaustively, but at least enough can be said that the teaching of the

Incarnation of the Son of God does not seem to be arbitrary, but rather based upon Holy Scripture and the truth that the Incarnated God has taught. †

Eucharistic Miracle Blanot, France

The Eucharistic miracle occurred in a small town called Blanot, in France. It was Easter Sunday, March 31, 1331. Because of the solemn occasion, two men of the parish were also serving Holy Communion in addition to the altar boys. At Communion



time, the two men approached the altar railing, took their places at each end, and turned the long cloth over the railing. The parishioners took their places, held their hands underneath the cloth, and waited for the approach of the priest. One of the last to receive was a woman names Jacquette. The priest placed the Host on her tongue, turned, and started walking back to the altar. It was then that the two men, and a few communicants saw the Host fall from her mouth, and land on the cloth that covered her hands. Immediately, the two parishoners giving out Communion informed the priest. The priest immediately

left the altar and approached the railing; but instead of finding the Host, all that was there was a spot of blood the same size as the Host. When Mass was over, the priest took the cloth into the sacristy and tried to scrub the blood spot with water; but instead of getting smaller and lighter, it just got bigger and darker. The priest and his assistants were astonished and the priest exclaimed, " This is the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ." The priest then took a clean knife, and cut out the area of the cloth stained with the Holy Blood, and he reverently placed it in the tabernacle. Fifteen days later, there was an investigation, and the relic was proven to be true. Sometime later, a crystal tube was made for the relic. At either end are rings of gold and copper, with a cross surmounting the top. The tube, with the cloth clearly visible, is sealed and kept in a special ostensorium. This is adorned at its base with four painted panels depicting events in the history of the relic. Each year on Easter Monday, according to ancient custom, the relic is solemnly exposed in the church of Blano. †

Syrian Christians Afraid of Possible Islamist Rule

DAMASCUS, May 14-

Christians living in conflict-torn Syria are afraid that their



community would fall victim of religious extremism if President Bashar al-Assad regime collapses and Islamists come to power.

"I am afraid that we will suffer bad times," a member of Damascus's Christian community, who identified himself as Jorge, told RIA Novosti.

A full-fledged civil war will break out in Syria if Assad's enemies and their western supporters continue efforts to topple the president, he continued.

"If the regime falls..., Islamists will come to power," Jorge said, adding that Islamists "wrongly believe that we support the current regime," and for that reason they will complicate the life of Christians.

"Sunni Muslims who predominate Syria think that if President Assad's regime representing the interests of the Alawi minority falls, they will live better. But I personally think that they are wrong. Syria is a secular state and its people, including Muslims, will not like it if the new power starts thrusting orthodox Islamic norms of moral and behavior on them," he added.

According to Jorge's opinion, extremist forces rather than liberals would come to power in Syria.

Another Syrian, an engineer from Homs, said on conditions of anonymity that he is sure that if Assad's regime falls, Christians will be "expelled from the country in one day."

Presently, the situation in Homs is quite complicated, almost all of the local Christians have moved away. Their homes have been occupied by militants and their families, and the shops have been looted. Refugees are temporarily living in other regions of the country.

Jorge said Islamists are trying to show that if the regime changes, Christians would not come under attack. "They do it to appease them [the Christians], attract them thus losing their support of the regime," he said.

Muslim leaders put messages on social networks saying that Christians and Muslims have for centuries lived together in Syria; they also try to distance themselves from the damage that has been inflicted on Christian homes and churches in Homs.

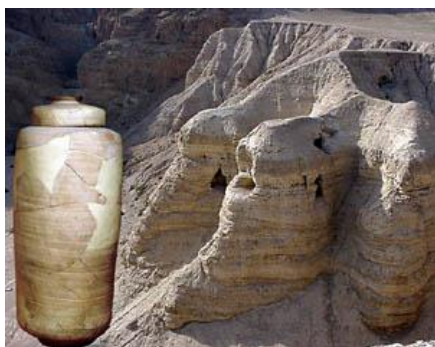
The engineer from Homs said that government forces could have "pushed out" Islamist militants from Homs if they continued shelling the city for at least three more days. "But then they adopted [UN and League of Arab States Ambassador] Kofi Annan's plan and gunfire was terminated. But this does not bring anything good to us. Our homes remain occupied by militants."

He said the majority Christians do not consider emigration a possibility. "This is our homeland. Christians have been living in Syria long before the Muslims. Why should we move

away?" Christians make up about ten percent of Syria's 23-million population. Approximately half of Syria's Christians belong to the Antiochian Orthodox Church. †

Archaeological Discoveries of the Twentieth Century

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS



The initial discovery was by chance in 1947, and not by archaeologists! Bedouin shepherds found seven scrolls or parts of scrolls and fragments, along with store jars and broken pottery jars in a cave overlooking the northwest end of the Dead Sea. When a dealer acting on behalf of the shepherds sold the scrolls, they came to the attention of scholars in Jerusalem and then the scholarly world.

Subsequent investigations in the area of the cave of discovery ultimately led to the recovery of documents in a total of eleven caves and the excavation of a modest ruin nearby known as Khirbet (the ruin of) Qumran. All of this was occurring as the modern State of Israel was coming into existence, with all the political upheaval involved in that development. As this century ends

and a new one begins, efforts for a peaceful political settlement in the region continue and give signs of reaching fruition. In the meantime, scholars continue to study the multitude of fragments recovered and to attempt to assess their significance.

Among the more than eight hundred documents represented by whole scrolls, incomplete scrolls, and a myriad of fragments which have been recovered are complete copies or portions of all the books in the Hebrew Bible (our OT), except for the Book of Esther. These texts are older by at least a thousand years than any previous biblical texts written in Hebrew that we had prior to the discovery. They provide a window into the textual history of the OT prior to the closure of the canon. Besides copies of scriptural texts, from the caves in the Qumran area came sectarian documents that open a panorama on the obscure Jewish group apparently related to the production and deposition of the manuscripts. This group was likely the Essenes, previously known from references to them in the writings of Flavius Josephus, Philo Judaeus, and Pliny the Elder.

All the texts discovered, taken together, open a critical window into events in Palestine in the decades prior to and following the birth of Christ (although no NT texts were found among the scrolls) up to the time of the First Jewish Revolt against the Romans. The historical period of the Dead Sea Scrolls illuminates the environment in which Christianity developed in Palestine, the transformation of Judaism into Rabbinic Judaism in the aftermath of the First Revolt of the Jews against

the Romans with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the context in which the canonization of Holy Scripture was progressing.

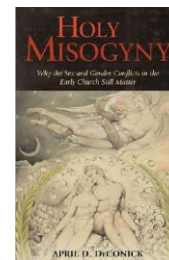
The Dead Sea Scrolls now reside mainly in the Shrine of the Book, a part of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem where they are on display. The Copper Scroll can be seen in the Archaeological Museum in Amman, Jordan. Many of the small fragments are housed in the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem. Scholars work almost exclusively with photographs and microfilm of the fragments, however, and these are available to scholars at many of the major universities around the world. It is likely that researchers will still be at work on the scrolls fifty years hence. †

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Holy Misogyny

By April D. DeConick

DeConick, a specialist in early Christian history and theology, non-canonical gospels and Gnostic and mystical traditions, and the author of many books on these topics, is the Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of Biblical Studies at Rice University in Houston.



Holy Misogyny traces how the record of women's lives and activities in the early church was intentionally erased and replaced with misogynist narratives which were declared to be the "word of God." DeConick calls the loss of the female aspect of God "one of the great tragedies of Christianity." The imbalance has also warped human perception and understanding, likely giving rise to a world marked by war and aggression and lacking in concern for the weak and dispossessed.



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