

# Introduction to Liturgy

## Introduction

### I. The Importance of Liturgy in Our Christian Life

Liturgy holds immense significance in the life of the Universal Church for several reasons:

1. **Channels of Grace:** Through the liturgy, Christians receive divine graces. The seven sacraments of the Church, organized by liturgical rites, are the channels that transmit the graces of salvation to us throughout the entirety of a Christian's life their earthly life, their death, and their glorious resurrection.
2. **Communal Prayer:** The liturgy also encompasses liturgical prayer, which is not merely a prayer of individual piety [1], but the prayer of the entire Mystical Body of Christ. Consequently, it possesses great salvific value, supported by the merits of Christ and the holy believers who have offered these prayers in hermitages, monasteries, and churches throughout the generations and continue to do so. It is a hymn of praise rising from the earth to meet the praises of the heavenly hosts.
3. **Educational Role:** The liturgy serves a formative and educational role. Through it, the Church expresses its faith and doctrine, teaching its children their beliefs. Every rite contains an educational segment including Holy Scripture readings, sermons, and *madrashé* (hymns/discourses).
4. **Preservation of Faith:** Liturgy has always been one of the vital elements that preserved the Christian faith across the world. Therefore, it is essential to study it in seminaries and theological courses to ensure it is understood, practiced in

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[1]: In all Eastern Churches, prayer is communal, as is evident in their liturgical rites. Liturgical prayer does not only urge the believer to seek refuge and protection under the Lord's care but also to unite with and join His flock. Thus, the believer becomes a member of the community and an active part of the Body of the Church according to their calling, status, and ecclesiastical rank (layperson, deacon, priest, monk, etc.).

a living way and developed by the faithful according to the requirements of contemporary life.

## **II. The Importance of Studying Liturgies**

1. To learn how current rites originated and the roles of Christ, Tradition, and the Church in their formation.
2. To understand how and why liturgies evolved and diversified.
3. To provide a brief overview of each Eastern Church and its specific liturgy.
4. To track the development of liturgical studies over the last fifty years.

## **III. Liturgical Study Addresses the Following Questions:**

1. Is the current method we follow in practicing liturgical rites, correct?
2. Is it possible to develop and change these rites?
3. Which elements of the liturgy can be developed, and which are untouchable and cannot be altered?

## Chapter One

### The Meaning and Definition of Liturgy

#### I. Meanings of the Word "Liturgy"

**1. Etymological Meaning** The term "Liturgy" is used in all languages, including Arabic. However, the origin of the word is Greek, composed of two roots:

- **"Leiton":** meaning "the people." From this, European languages derive words such as "laic" (lay/secular).
- **"Ergon":** meaning "work, labor, service, or prayer."

#### 2. Among the Ancient Greeks

- In Ancient Greece, the word referred to political, social, and religious contexts. It meant performing a service or a task for the public good, either by officials responsible for justice and peace or by wealthy citizens who funded periodic services (e.g., organizing festivals or emergency tasks like outfitting ships during wartime).
- In Late Classical Greek, it came to mean the service rendered by the people to the gods. Thus, "Liturgy" indicates either a service provided *to* the people or a service performed *by* the people.

**3. In the New Testament** The word appears sparingly in the New Testament (only 15 times) and carries several meanings:

- **Ritual Worship:** "When the days of his ministry (*leitourgias*) were completed, he went to his home" (Luke 1:23).
- **Social Services:** "For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service (*leitourgēsai*) to them in material blessings" (Romans 15:27; cf. 2 Corinthians 9:12).
- **The New Christian Worship:** "While they were worshiping (*leitourgountōn*) the Lord..." (Acts 13:2).

- **Spiritual Christian Worship:** In contrast to Old Testament worship characterized by animal sacrifice (Romans 15:16; Philippians 2:17).

**4. Current Meaning** In the texts of the Greek Church, the word "Liturgy" refers to one specific rite: the **Divine Liturgy** (the Mass) and its various forms. For example, they speak of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Liturgy of St. Basil, or the Liturgy of Mar Addai and Mari.

**5. Meaning of the Word "Rite" (Taqsa)** The word "Taqsa" is also Greek in origin, meaning **order and arrangement**. While commonly used to describe the weather (cold or hot), in ecclesiastical terminology, it refers to "Church religious rites/orders."

## II. Definition of Liturgy

Liturgy is a living phenomenon; it expresses the sentiments of faith lived by the believer in a specific time and place. Therefore, it is subject to the laws of continuous development and renewal. It is difficult to find a short definition that captures all its aspects, as it can only be truly understood through practice.

The concept has evolved over the years. Initially, researchers focused on external appearances, sometimes neglecting the underlying spiritual meanings. Gradually, through official Church documents, this concept became clearer and more integrated.

**Final Definition:** Liturgy is the set of symbols, words, and movements through which the Church, in union with Christ her Head, expresses the worship due to God.

## III. Liturgy and its External Manifestations

Liturgy includes the following elements:

**1. A Set of Symbols** Established by Christ or the Church to remind the faithful of heavenly truths. The human mind—especially that of the general public—is deeply affected by symbols that use sensory signs to point toward things beyond sensory perception. Eastern rites are particularly rich in symbolism.

- **Direct Benefit:** A practical purpose (e.g., a candle provides light).
- **Indirect/Symbolic Benefit:** Pointing to something higher. A candle symbolizes the Light of Christ and the believer who "burns out" for God. Incense provides a pleasant fragrance but also symbolizes the love of Christ, divine grace, and sacrifice for the atonement of sins.

**2. A Set of Words** Speech is the natural tool for expressing our internal thoughts. While God does not "need" words to know our hearts, human speech is necessary for us to clarify our thoughts, support our emotions, and prevent distraction. Words allow for **official public prayer**, where Christ promised to be present among two or three gathered in His name. This is further enhanced when chanted, as "singing in church is praying twice."

**3. A Set of Movements** Liturgy involves ordered physical movements so that the human person prays with their entire being—soul and body. Since the body is also God's creation, it must bow to God, join the soul in atonement for sin, and express inner reverence through external posture.

## Chapter Two

### Liturgical Laws and Fundamental Principles

#### I. Liturgical Tradition

**A. Liturgy as a Fixed Reality and a Continuous Process** Liturgy is characterized by two complementary and inseparable qualities:

1. **Liturgy as a Constant Phenomenon:** This quality reflects the theological and spiritual nature of the liturgy as the voice of the Church spread across the earth through all generations. Indeed, it is the voice of Christ echoed by the one Church in every time and place. What is practiced today represents the essence of what believers practiced in the past and what future believers will continue to practice. The Divine Liturgy, for example, is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Liturgy is thus a distinct Christian practice linked to the priestly work of Christ within the Church.
2. **Liturgy in Continuous Evolution:** It did not descend from heaven as a single, complete, and final form from the beginning. Because liturgy is practiced by human beings living in different times and places, it is influenced by the circumstances of each era. It is inevitably subject to continuous development. However, these changes and renewals must not touch the **essence** or nature of the liturgy, but only its **external forms**. Liturgy remains itself; it is the life of the Church as a living organism, and these changes are signs of life.

**B. Liturgy as Ecclesiastical Tradition and the Rule of Faith** Revelation has two sources: Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Liturgy is one of the manifestations of Ecclesiastical Tradition:

1. **Liturgy as a Transmitter of Foundations:** It conveys the rules and doctrines intended by Jesus Christ for the establishment of His Kingdom. We find ritual practices such as: "*Do this in memory of me*" (Luke 22:19); "*...baptizing them in*

*the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19); and *"If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven"* (John 20:23).

2. **The Law of Prayer is the Law of Belief:** This constant value is exemplified by the maxim of Pope Celestine I (422–432 AD): *"Lex orandi, lex credendi"* (The law of prayer is the law of belief). This means the Church expresses the doctrines of faith received from its Founder through liturgy, prayers, and rites. Therefore, the existence of a specific doctrine within the universal liturgy is proof that it stems from the original source: the Apostles and Christ.

**C. Apostolic Tradition Includes Rites and Ceremonies** St. Paul says: *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance..."* (1 Corinthians 15:3). The tradition received by the Apostles includes not only doctrinal teachings but also the **salvific sacraments** to be practiced and celebrated. Thus, "tradition" encompasses the customs, formulations, and rites practiced by Christians from the very beginning.

## II. Vital Liturgical Development

1. **Simultaneously Divine and Human:** Liturgy expresses and proclaims the Christian faith. This faith cannot remain vital if preached in the same style in every place and time; thus, diversity and evolution are natural. Liturgy enters history with the Church, framed by specific times and places, receiving external influences during its formation.
2. **External Influences:** These influences surround the emergence and development of liturgy. They do not touch the essence (Apostolic Tradition) but affect the external forms according to geography, civilizations, religious surroundings, and social customs. While often positive, these influences can sometimes be negative. The measure of success is: *Does the development make the tradition of Christ and the Apostles shine more brightly?*
3. **The Colors (Varieties) of Liturgy:**

- **Diversity of Traditions:** External influences led to the rise of Latin, Chaldean, Syriac, and Coptic liturgies.
  - **Centers of Origin:** Sources were often specific cities like Rome, Seleucia, Antioch, Alexandria, Edessa, and the Upper Monastery [1].
  - **Genius of Peoples:** For example, the Chaldeans were known as "physicians" of the soul, while the Copts were "engineers" of structure.
  - **Inter-Liturgical Influence:** The Liturgy of Jerusalem introduced rites like the Veneration of the Cross and Holy Week services into other traditions.
4. **The Stabilization of Liturgy:** After a period of diversity, liturgy entered a phase of stabilization due to:
- **Written Tradition:** Documenting rites gave them a legal character, making generations feel a duty to repeat them exactly.
  - **Ecumenical [2] and Local [3] Councils:** These fixed certain ritual issues.
  - **Political and Religious Influence:** Major cities imposed their liturgies on others (e.g., Rome and Constantinople).
  - **Isolation:** Political conflicts (e.g., between Persians and Romans) isolated traditions like the Chaldean and Armenian.
  - **Holy Scripture:** Fixed certain prayers and Eucharistic formulas.

### III. Stages of Liturgical Development

1. **The Stage of Spontaneity (1st–4th Century):** Initially, there were no ritual books except the Old Testament. The Church inherited the reading of Jewish scriptures and added New Testament readings as they became available. There were no unified texts for the Eucharistic prayer or Baptism. The celebrant followed key themes but had the freedom to formulate expressions spontaneously. St. Justin Martyr (d. 150 AD) noted that the celebrant prays "as far as he is able."

2. **The Stage of Formulation (Mid-4th–7th Century):** With the end of persecutions [4], the increase in believers and the building of large churches created a need for order. To prevent unqualified or heretical clergy from using improper prayers, rites were documented and fixed. This era saw the great work of figures like St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephrem, and Isho'yahb III.
3. **The Stage of Compilation (8th–12th Century):** Activity shifted from composing new formulas to adapting and compiling old ones. During this time, churches exchanged texts; for example, the Chaldean Church adopted the Anaphoras of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius, and the hymn "Holy God" (Qadisha Alaha) was introduced.
4. **The Stage of Finalization (13th–14th Century):** The structure of liturgies became fixed in the form we recognize today. The liturgical year, sacramental rites, and melodies became permanent. Printed ritual books today are largely based on manuscripts from this period.

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- **[1] Centers:** Rome (Latin), Seleucia (Chaldean/East Syriac), Alexandria (Coptic), Antioch (West Syriac), Edessa (Byzantine influence).
  - **[2] Ecumenical Councils:** Global meetings of bishops to define faith and universal laws.
  - **[3] Local Councils:** Meetings of a specific Church's bishops to decide internal regulations.
  - **[4] Edict of Milan (313 AD):** Issued by Constantine the Great, ending three centuries of Roman persecution and granting religious freedom.

## Chapter Three

### The Eastern Rites

#### I. The Origins of Eastern Rites

We can summarize the preceding information as follows:

1. **Apostolic Expansion:** After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles spread throughout the East and the West, carrying the "Good News" (the Holy Gospel) to the peoples of the earth, who then embraced Christianity.
2. **Ancient Civilizations:** These peoples possessed ancient and deeply rooted civilizations.
3. **Preservation of Essence:** These nations preserved the essence of the Christian faith and the Apostolic Tradition.
4. **Cultural Expression:** However, they expressed their Christian beliefs and worship through their own languages, according to their unique genius and local customs. Thus, in every major city, a specific method or "Rite" emerged for prayers and worship ceremonies.

Liturgical scholars today agree that the Apostles and their successors did not prescribe a single specific rite for all Christians. In the early Christian centuries, ecclesiastical leaders had full freedom to conduct rites in their own manner.

Over time, a degree of standardization emerged in the major Christian capitals, and this movement spread to surrounding regions. Major cities began to impose their specific rites on entire provinces based on the ecclesiastical organization resulting from local and ecumenical councils. During the first five centuries, geographic ecclesiastical organization followed the civil and political structures of that era, dominated by two great empires: the **Roman** and the **Persian**.

- **The Roman Empire:** Since the time of Emperor Diocletian (294 AD), the empire was divided into provinces, and provinces into dioceses. Among these were Egypt (capital: Alexandria) and the Diocese of the East (capital: Antioch).

Later, Emperor Constantine founded his new capital, Constantinople (Byzantium), in 325 AD, to lead the Diocese of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Patriarchates were formed in these capitals, each leading the ecclesiastical authority in its respective diocese. This resulted in the disappearance of local rites in subordinate cities and the spread of the Patriarchal city's rite. Thus, the Constantinian Rite (Byzantine Rite) gradually replaced the rites of Asia Minor, the Antiochian Rite replaced various local rites in the East, and the Alexandrian Rite superseded all ancient Egyptian rites.

- **The West:** The Roman Rite prevailed over almost the entire West, except for a few places like the Diocese of Milan (Italy), which preserved what is known today as the **Ambrosian Rite**.
- **The Persian Empire:** Outside the Roman borders, the **Chaldean Church of the East** was formed in Mesopotamia and surrounding areas. It organized under the leadership of the Patriarch (whose seat was in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, then Baghdad) and developed its own unique rite.
- **Armenia:** From the early centuries, a national church was organized in Armenia with its own rites, though it adapted much from neighboring traditions.

By the end of the first five centuries, five distinct Eastern Rites had formed, each with its own ceremonies for the Mass, the Sacraments, and the Daily Office (Divine Office):

1. **The Alexandrian Rite** (Egypt).
2. **The Antiochian Rite** (Syria, Lebanon, Jerusalem, Amman).
3. **The Byzantine Rite** (Asia Minor/Turkey).
4. **The Chaldean Rite** (Mesopotamia, Iran, Gulf, India, China).
5. **The Armenian Rite** (Armenia).

## II. The Spread of Eastern Rites

In the following centuries, two phenomena significantly impacted the development and unification of these rites:

1. **Sectarian and Political Divergence:** Standardization did not eliminate all local differences. New sub-rites emerged due to sectarian and political factors as some churches rejected central authority and sought independence, preserving their specific customs.
2. **Missionary Activity:** The primary rites spread to many lands through missionary work, as missionaries carried their faith and rites to the nations they evangelized.

### Branches and Spread

1. **The Byzantine Rite:** At the beginning of the 8th century, it replaced the Roman Rite in Calabria and Sicily (Southern Italy). In the 9th century, it replaced the Syrian Rite in Cyprus and spread to Bulgaria and Romania. In the 11th century, Russia embraced Christianity through Byzantine missionaries. By the 12th and 13th centuries, the Melkite Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem abandoned their ancient Syriac rites in favor of the Byzantine Rite.
2. **The Syrian or Antiochian Rite:** This branched into three:
  - **The Syriac Rite:** Used today by the Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches; it is the closest to the ancient Antiochian Rite.
  - **The Maronite Rite:** The rite of the Maronite community, which originated around the Monastery of St. Maron on the Orontes River in Syria.

**The Malankara Rite:** Used by a group in Malabar (Southwest India) who initially rejected union with the Holy Seat [1] due to Latinization attempts by Portuguese

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**[1] Roman Seat (Pontifex Maximus):** The official title for the head of the Catholic Church, the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome, and the head of the Vatican State. Since the 11th century, it has been exclusive to the Pope, symbolizing his universal spiritual and administrative authority.

missionaries. They joined the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. A group later returned to communion with Rome in 1930 under Archbishop Mar Ivanios.

3. **The Alexandrian Rite:** Includes two rites:

- **The Coptic Rite:** The rite of Alexandria, adopted by Coptic Orthodox and Coptic Catholics.
- **The Ethiopic Rite:** A branch of the Alexandrian Rite due to the Egyptian Church's historical jurisdiction over Ethiopia.

4. **The Rite of the Church of the East:** Branches into:

- **The Chaldean Rite:** The rite of Mesopotamia, which spread via Chaldean missionaries to the Gulf, Mongolia, India, and China. It later receded following Islamic conquests and the invasions of Tamerlane.
- **The Malabar Rite:** The rite of Indian Christians who received the faith from Chaldean missionaries.

5. **The Armenian Rite:** Originated in Armenia and spread globally, particularly in the Near East, due to the migration of its followers. It has no sub-branches.

### III. Review of the Major Eastern Churches and Their Rites

#### 1. The Byzantine Church

##### Historical Overview

Byzantium was originally a small city on the banks of the Bosphorus and the seat of a bishop subordinate to the Metropolitan of Thrace in Illyricum (modern-day Turkey). In **330 AD**, Emperor Constantine [1] designated it as his capital to be near the borders shared with the Persians due to ongoing wars.

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[1]: Considered the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. He was instrumental in the Edict of Milan (313 AD), which declared religious tolerance. He convened the first Ecumenical Council (Nicaea) in 325 AD and built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Constantine rebuilt and adorned the city until it became a masterpiece of beauty, naming it "**Constantinople.**" After its fall in 1453 AD, it would be renamed "**Istanbul,**" a Greek-derived term meaning "towards the city."

As Constantinople became the capital of the Roman Empire, its religious importance grew until it was called "**New Rome.**" At the First Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, which granted honorary primacy to its bishop, a competition for prestige and influence began with the ancient patriarchates. Rivalry specifically arose with Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria. Cyril succeeded in excommunicating Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. However, Constantinople succeeded in excommunicating Monophysitism and Patriarch Dioscorus at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. In **Canon 28**, the Council fathers affirmed Constantinople's rank as second only to Rome. Pope Leo, however, refused to confirm this canon, believing it undermined the rights of the Churches of Alexandria and Antioch—both of which possessed ancient apostolic foundations.

Eventually, competition with the Bishop of Rome escalated until a schism occurred over what were often minor pretexts. On **July 16, 1054**, a papal legate placed a bull of excommunication against the Patriarch of Constantinople on the altar of the **Hagia Sophia** (Holy Wisdom). Rome officially lifted this excommunication on December 7, 1965.

### **Liturgical Rites**

This church expanded and established its rite in two ways:

1. **Adoption:** Churches that abandoned their original rites for the Byzantine one, such as the Churches of Jerusalem and Georgia.
2. **Missionary Work:** Through Byzantine evangelization of other nations, founding new churches including the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, as well as the Churches of Russia, Romania, Greece,

Serbia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Poland, Albania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

Today, Orthodox churches recognize the **Ecumenical Patriarch** in Constantinople only as a "first among equals" (honorary primacy), as most are now autocephalous (independent) and headed by their own Patriarchs or Archbishops. The most striking feature of Byzantine rites is their **grandeur**, as it was the rite of the Emperor, with ceremonies designed for Great Cathedrals.

- **The Liturgy:** They use two main liturgies. The oldest is the **Liturgy of St. Basil**, which recounts the history of salvation (and has been adopted by the Latins in modern times). The second and most frequently used is the **Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom**. They also have the "Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts" for communion during Great Lent.
- **Language:** Greek remained the official language, though today the vernacular (Russian, Slavonic, English, Arabic, etc.) is commonly used.
- **Icons and Prayers:** The Byzantines hold a deep devotion to icons. They are central to ceremonies, evidenced by the **Iconostasis**—a wall separating the sanctuary from the nave, adorned with images of Christ and the saints. Icons bridge the physical and spiritual worlds for believers. The rite is also rich in ancient, concise, yet theologically dense prayers.

## 2. The Syriac Antiochian Church

### Historical Overview

Antioch was the second seat of Christianity after Jerusalem and its second major center of influence. St. Paul used it as the base for his missionary journeys. It was there that believers were first called "**Christians**." St. Peter also resided there for a long period before departing for Rome; thus, many Eastern Patriarchs claim the title "Patriarch of Antioch and All the East."

While the city of Antioch was a Roman province with Greek culture and language, the rural areas (such as Edessa, modern-day Urfa) spoke **Syriac**. Edessa was an independent kingdom until 200 AD and a major Syriac cultural hub, leading to the recording of the rite in the Syriac language.

The **Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)** caused a schism in the Antiochian Church:

1. **The Melkites:** Those who remained doctrinally aligned with the Emperor, affirming the "two natures of Christ" and adopting the Byzantine rite.
2. **The Non-Chalcedonians:** Those who rejected the council, embracing **Monophysitism** (One Nature). They were often called **Jacobites** after the monk Jacob Baradaeus, who was ordained bishop in 543 AD with the help of Empress Theodora. He traveled throughout Syria organizing the church and ordaining clergy.

In the 17th century, a portion of the Syriac Antiochians joined the Catholic Church while maintaining their Syriac rite. In 1930, a group of Indian Syriacs (the **Malankara**) also entered into communion with Rome.

### **The Rite**

The rite consists of elements from the Greek liturgy of Antioch translated into Syriac. Even today, Greek phrases remain, such as "*Stomen kalos... Kyrielison*" and "*Sophia Theou... proskhomen.*" It also incorporates original Syriac elements, notably the works of **St. Ephrem**.

The Syriac rite is distinguished by its vast number of **Anaphoras** (Eucharistic prayers)—having 72 in addition to the Anaphora of St. James. It is also known for a massive repertoire of hymns and ecclesiastical poetry, leaving less room for standard psalms compared to other rites.

### **1. The Maronite Church**

#### **Historical Overview**

The Maronites trace their origin to the monk **St. Maron**, who lived during the late 4th and early 5th centuries AD. A group of monks became his disciples near the

city of Apamea (Qalaat al-Madiq, Syria). Following St. Maron's death in 410 AD, they built a large monastery between Apamea and Homs, establishing a church beside it known as the "**Monastery of St. Maron.**" These monks were renowned for their strong faith and fierce adherence to the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon.

A large number of locals followed their lead and adopted their beliefs, becoming known as "**Maronites.**" In the 7th century, the monastery had a famous abbot named **John Maron** (685–707 AD). Since the Melkite Antiochian Patriarchal See was vacant between 622 and 742 AD, he was elected as their Patriarch, thereby preserving their unity.

With the Arab-Islamic conquest (636 AD), they spread into the mountains of Lebanon, where they built churches and monasteries and established the permanent seat of their Patriarchate. From there, they expanded to Cyprus and eventually the whole world. During Ottoman rule, the Patriarch was considered the civil head of the community. The Maronite community has always remained doctrinally united with the Roman Church without any schism or separation; they are all Catholic.

### **Liturgical Rites**

The Maronite rite belongs to the Antiochian and Jerusalem traditions. However, because the Maronites were fortified in the mountains, their liturgy preserved ancient, distinctive characteristics and remained free of Greek influence. Consequently, there is a strong resemblance to the **Chaldean rite**. Common elements include their liturgy called "**Sharar**" (meaning "Confirm"), which corresponds to the Chaldean Liturgy of Addai and Mari, as well as the rites of repentance.

## **2. The Coptic Church**

### **Historical Overview**

The roots of this church go back to **St. Mark the Evangelist**, which is why it is called the "See of St. Mark." The name "**Copt**" is derived from the name of their homeland (Egypt).

The Church of Alexandria held a supreme position in the ancient Christian world before the rise of Constantinople, ranking second only to Rome. For a long time, Alexandria was the center of science, philosophy, and civilization in the Roman Empire. Its Theological School, led by **Origen** in the 3rd century, was a beacon of religious scholarship. Rivalry over religious leadership between Alexandria and Constantinople led to the **Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)**, which excommunicated Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria. The Copts rejected this council and adopted **Monophysitism**. Because Egypt was under Roman control, Emperors tried to force Chalcedonian doctrine upon them. Thus, the Copts sought liberation from the Roman yoke and welcomed the Arabs in 640 AD as liberators.

In the Middle Ages, relations with Rome were good. A movement to join the Catholic Church began in the 15th century, and the number of faithful and clergy grew until the first Catholic Patriarch was appointed in 1899.

### **Liturgical Rites**

The liturgy was conducted in **Greek** during the early centuries, as it was the language of the educated class. However, Chalcedon was a turning point; when Dioscorus was excommunicated and Alexandria's rank was given to Constantinople, a movement toward independence deepened. The people gradually translated the old Greek liturgy into their national language, **Coptic**. Centuries later, Arabic was introduced alongside Coptic.

Egypt is the **cradle of monasticism**. The desert witnessed the birth and flourish of monastic life, most famously under **St. Anthony the Great** (251–356 AD). **St. Pachomius** (292–346 AD) established the first communal monastic life (cenobitic). Monasticism influenced the liturgy heavily, giving it a "monastic character" marked by its length and the extensive use of Psalms.

### 3. The Ethiopian (Abyssinian) Church

#### Historical Overview

As recorded in Acts 8:26–40, Philip the Deacon baptized the treasurer of the Queen of the Ethiopians, showing that Christianity entered early. The historian Rufinus states that a captive from Tyre named **Frumentius** preached there in the 4th century. When the number of Christians grew, he went to Alexandria and was ordained a bishop by **St. Athanasius**; this ordination established the link between the Ethiopian and Egyptian churches.

The Church of Antioch also influenced the spread of Christianity; in the late 5th century, nine Syrian monks (the "**Nine Saints**") arrived, founded monasteries, and translated the Bible from Syriac and Greek into Ge'ez. Eventually, Coptic influence prevailed, and Monophysitism became rooted there.

Until 1929, the Ethiopian Church had only one bishop—an Egyptian chosen by the Coptic Patriarch. In 1959, they were granted their own Patriarch (Abuna Basilios). While mostly Orthodox, a Catholic community emerged in the 19th century and currently numbers over 150,000.

#### Liturgical Rites

The Ethiopian rite is a branch of the Coptic rite but retains Syriac influences and unique Ethiopian hymns dedicated to the Virgin Mary. They use **17 Anaphoras**. The liturgical language is **Ge'ez**. The liturgy has a distinct African character, incorporating **drums and liturgical dance** during ceremonies.

### 4. The Chaldean Church of the East

#### Historical Overview

This is the church of Mesopotamia, which received the Gospel in the 1st century. For various reasons, it adopted **Nestorianism** in 484 AD. Under Arab rule (637 AD), the church flourished, providing great scientific services in translating Greek and Syriac into Arabic. Between the 7th and 11th centuries, they were missionary

powerhouses, bringing Christianity to **Iran, China, Tibet, and India**. A stone monument in Xi'an, China (781 AD) records this history. Today, over 2,000,000 Malabar Indians in Kerala follow this rite. The movement toward union with Rome was finalized in 1553 under **Patriarch Sulaqa**.

### **Liturgical Rites**

The hallmark of this rite is **simplicity** and the preservation of ancient traditions.

- **The Liturgies:** They use three Anaphoras: **The Apostles (Addai and Mari)**, which dates back to the 3rd or 4th century; Theodore of Mopsuestia; and Nestorius.
- **Prayer Structure:** It is one of the few rites that maintained a "**Cathedral**" (communal/popular) character rather than a purely monastic one. It is the prayer of the people who gather to praise God morning and evening.

### **The Hours of Prayer:**

1. **Sapra:** Morning Prayer (Popular).
2. **Quta'a:** 9:00 AM (Monastic).
3. **Idana:** 12:00 PM (Monastic).
4. **Ninth Hour:** 3:00 PM (Monastic).
5. **Ramsha:** Evening Prayer (Popular).
6. **Lilya:** Midnight (Monastic).
7. **Shahra:** Vigil (3:00 AM).

## **5. The Armenian Church**

### **Historical Overview**

In the 4th century, Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion under **St. Gregory the Illuminator**. Originally using Greek and Syriac, the **Armenian alphabet** was created in the 5th century by **St. Mesrop** and Isaac the Great to translate the Bible and liturgies. In 491 AD, they officially rejected the Council of Chalcedon. Following the tragedies of WWI, many Armenians emigrated to Lebanon,

Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. Today, there are four Orthodox Patriarchates (Etchmiadzin, Cilicia, Jerusalem, and Constantinople) and one Catholic Patriarchate.

### **Liturgical Rites**

The Armenian rite draws from Edessa, Asia Minor, and Jerusalem. It has a single liturgy attributed to **St. Athanasius**. It is famous for its visual beauty, colorful vestments, and what many consider to be the most beautiful hymns and music in the East.

### **Conclusion**

The scientific study of any single church's liturgy cannot be done in isolation. To understand one, we must compare it with others, as they all draw from common springs.