

- the rod of Moses has done a lot of miracles because God's power was on the rod (Exodus 4 through 14);
- Elijah's mantle has parted the river Jordan not once but twice because God's power was on his mantle (2 Kings 2:7-14);
- the river Jordan has cleaned Naaman of his leprosy because God's power was on the river (2 Kings 5:1-14);
- the sick were anointed with oil and healed because of God's power (Mark 6:13, James 5:14);
- the power of God was demonstrated when the blind man got his sight back after washing in the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-12);
- a piece from Saint Paul's clothing healed many who were sick and demons were casted out through it because the power of God was on his clothing (Acts 19:11-12);
- Saint Peter's shadow fell on the sick sitting on the sides of the street because God's power was on his shadow (Acts 5:15). Thus, we need to be cautious so that we do not find ourselves at odds with the owner of the Cross, Christ, saying things that are not of the Cross. This is because being an enemy of the Cross is being the means for the fulfillment of bad prophecy. Regarding this, the apostle Saint Paul said, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things." (Philippians 3:18-19).

Therefore, as the prophet David prophesied early on, "Thou hast given a token to them that fear Thee, that they might flee from the bow. That thy beloved ones may be delivered" (Psalm 59[60]:4-5), we should steadfastly hold-on to our sign, which is the Cross that our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ sanctified and honored with His blood and gave to us so that we can flee from the bows of the devil and be saved. We should boast in the Cross saying as Saint Paul said, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14). There are those who accept the Cross only as a symbol; nevertheless, to us the Cross is our strength, salvation, redemption, and deliverer of our soul.

We shall now see why we observe Meskel (Feast of the Holy Cross).

Why Do We Celebrate Meskel?

Meskel is observed on Meskerem 17 (first month of the year in the Ethiopian calendar) (September 27). It is commemorated because after the Lord died on the Cross and resurrected, the sick were healed by touching the Cross and rubbing their bodies against it. The Jews who saw this dumped the Cross at a landfill out of ill will. Through time the place turned into a small

hill from the accumulation of debris. Although they were unable to dig out the Cross, the Christians had an idea where it was laid. However, as the Christians left the city of Jerusalem after Titus' siege in 70 A.D. as well as due to the overall change in the city's landscape and urban surrounding, it was impossible to locate where the Cross was buried. As a result it was left covered for 300 years. Afterward, in the fourth century, mother of the great Emperor Constantine, Queen Helena went to Jerusalem and made relentless effort in quest of the Cross. Finally, following what an elderly man named Kyriakos told her, she asked for the gathering of some wood to bundle and install it for a bonfire (Demera), scattered frankincense on it, and as she lit it, the smoke rose to make a rainbow-like shape over the area where the Cross was buried, like one would point at something with his finger. Without wasting time, she had the excavation started on Meskerem 17 and found the Cross on Megabit 10 (seventh month of the year in the Ethiopian calendar) (March 19). The Cross did a lot of miracles after it was unearthed. The building of a church was finished on Meskerem 17.

In Ethiopia, we celebrate Meskel with bonfire (Demera), by participating in the Divine Liturgy (Kidassie) and Hymns (Mahlet) for the aforementioned reason. Additionally, having seen the miracles done through the Holy Cross, well respected monarchs of that era divided the Holy Cross into four to take for themselves and the piece where the right hand of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ rested (the right wing/segment) is found at Gishen Debre Kerbie Mariam yet the whereabouts of the remaining three pieces is unknown. The right segment of the Cross was brought to Ethiopia during the reign of Atsie Dawit, Ethiopian emperor of the 14th century. After it came to the land of Ethiopia, there was an attempt to build a church to house it; however, the ground would shake resisting to stay still so they went to several churches looking after the right place until God told them "rest My Cross on a cross-shaped landscape" which led to the only place found with such a shape—Gishen Debre Kerbie—where the right segment of the Cross is kept to this day.

Unaccountable number of people have benefited a lot from the blessings of the Holy Cross and we should commemorate the holiday appropriately so that we too are partakers of the same blessing.

May we have a happy holiday and may we receive benediction from the Cross. Amen.

Glory be unto God

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

Meskel (The Feast of the Holy Cross)

Prior to the era of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a cross was used as an instrument of punishment. This method of painful execution was started in Persia (the present day Iran). During that time, the Persians were worshipping an "earth god" called "Ormuzd". They believed that if an offender is punished while in contact with the ground, he would desecrate their "earth god". As a result, they started crucifying criminals far above the ground on a cross. Execution by crucifixion slowly expanded and became a common practice of the Roman Empire. In addition, before the birth of Christ, victims of crucifixion were considered cursed. As God said to Moses, "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). We may then ask ourselves, "If a victim of crucifixion is considered cursed, why did our Lord Jesus Christ die on a cross?"

"Why Did Our Lord Jesus Christ Die on a Cross?"

Our Lord Jesus Christ willingly died for us on a cross and gave us His holy body and poured out His precious blood. He did this to redeem mankind from the curse and save us from our sins. This is because the body and soul of all humanity was under the bondage of sin. Although we had fallen deeper and deeper into our sins, our Creator did not leave us to perish. He came down from heaven seeking for His sheep, us, who went astray (Matthew 18: 12-14). He was incarnated of the Holy Spirit and of His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35), became man by taking flesh of her flesh and soul from her soul, and was gloriously born in a manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2:7). Indivisibly, God became man and man became God (Matthew 16:13, 1 John 1:1-2, 5:20). He grew and became strong in spirit (Luke 2:40). At the age of thirty, Christ went to river Jordan and was baptized in the hands of Saint John, the Baptist. He then left for the wilderness (desert) and embarked upon forty days and forty nights of fast (Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-23, Matthew 4:2). Thereafter, He appointed His 12 apostles, 72 disciples and 36 female saints (i.e. altogether the first family of Christ was hundred and twenty) (Luke 10:1, Acts 1:15). His teachings of the Gospel lasted for a total of three years and three months. Finally, to redeem us from our sins (curse), He willingly died for us on the Cross. (Mark 15:23-37). That day on the Cross, Jesus Christ completed the salvation journey He started while He was still in His Blessed Mother's womb (John 19:30).

As stated above, our Creator came down to earth and died on the Cross to save us from our sins. He carried

our sins on the Cross and freed us from curse. As Prophet Isaiah said, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5). In addition, Saint Paul wrote in his epistle to the Galatians, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13). Moreover, in his epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul also stated, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Furthermore, in his epistle to the Philippians, he said, "but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:7-8). Saint Peter the apostle also said, "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." (1 Peter 2:22-24). Therefore, we have found numerous gifts through our Lord's sacrifice on the Cross.

1. We Have Found the Gift of Life

As a result of our sins, death had reigned over our lives. Through Adam, sin entered the world and death was passed on to all mankind. Therefore, death reigned over mankind until it was destroyed through Jesus Christ and we were able to regain life (Romans 5:12-14). That is why it is said, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22). In addition, it is said, "among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:3-5). This is because our Savior Jesus Christ abolished death through His own death and gave us life and immortality (2 Timothy 1:10).

2. We Have Found the Bread of Life

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, sin entered the world and brought death upon us (Genesis 3:1-24). The man of God who had come from Judah died also as a result of eating what he was told not to eat (1 Kings 13:20-25). The manna that the forefathers of the Israelites ate in the desert did not save them from death either (John 6:49). Therefore, our Savior Jesus Christ gave us His flesh and blood as the bread of life and saved us from death. He

confirmed this to us by saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:53-54). The Holy Eucharist that is consecrated in our church everyday and we faithfully receive in the form of bread and wine is truly Jesus Christ's holy body and precious blood (Matthews 26:26-29). That is why Saint Paul the apostle said, "therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

3. We Have Found Peace

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." and He gave us this ultimate peace on the Cross. He confirmed this to His apostles when He resurrected from the dead and said, "Peace be with you." (John 14:27; 20:19, 26). In reference to this, Saint Paul said to the Colossians, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:19-20). He also said to the Ephesians, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:13-14).

4. We Are Born Again

Our body and soul ruined because of our sins are restored by the redemption done on the Cross. And this is why Saint Paul the apostle said, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (Romans 6:6). In addition, on his epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul wrote, "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17). As Saint Paul mentioned, our Lord has made us new through His grace, gave us the new testament, and prepared new heaven and new earth for us (Mark 1:15, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1).

5. We Are Reconciled

Due to our sins, we used to live separated from God. Yet, He paid for our trespasses and we were reconciled to Him. The apostle Saint Paul stated, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:10-11). More-

over, he added, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." (Colossians 1:20). In his message to the Ephesians, he wrote, "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God [Himself] in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." (Ephesians 2:14-16, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Therefore, the Cross, through which all these are secured:

Is Our Strength

Christ, through whom the power of God was revealed, did His redemption by being crucified on the Holy Cross, as it is stated in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Hence, the Cross upon which our Lord's holy body was sacrificed and precious blood was poured is venerated on account of Christ. For instance, on Palm Sunday many were spreading their clothes on the road for the colt in honor of Christ. (Matthew 21:8). So, for us who believe that Jesus Christ is the Only-Begotten Son of God and is wholly and perfectly God within the unity of Godhead, the Cross, which is honored due to Christ and on which His power was revealed, is our strength to beat the devil. This is because our Lord beat the devil with the Cross as it was said, "He shall bruise your head" early on (Genesis 3:15). There are events that happened in the Old Testament to symbolize this: When Moses, the senior of prophets, was praying with his arms stretched out on either side in the form of a cross, the Israelites were strengthened and had victory over their enemies. We, who are referred to as "Israel in spirit", too gain victory over demons by the power of the Cross. Father of the 12 tribes of Israel, Saint Jacob, blessed Joseph's offspring having being filled with power when he stretched out his arms in the form of a cross (Genesis 48:13-20). We also find blessings for our body and soul by the power of the Cross.

Our archenemy, the devil, has tried everything to snatch the Cross out of our hands—the Cross on which he was defeated at Calvary early on and later at the Church where Christ's body and blood is consecrated everyday as it was once and for all done at Calvary. While we kiss the Holy Cross and thereby get blessings, there are some who say, "Isn't it just wood? Why do you kiss it? Why do you bow before it?" However, our Church believes in the power of Christ and does not give a chance for the encroachment of doubt through saying, "this is wood, this is just a piece of cloth, and this is only water" as this would be contrary to what is written in the Scripture: