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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

Christ is risen from the dead,
(trampling down death by death)
with high power and authority;
binding Satan in chains and (upon those in the tombs bestowing life)
setting Adam free,
and from how on it will be joy and peace.

The Radiant Fifty Days: A Foretaste of the Eternal Sabbath

In the sacred rhythm of the Orthodox liturgical year, there exists a season of unparalleled luminosity known as **Be'ale Hamsa**—the "Fifty Days of Joy." Stretching from the glorious dawn of the Resurrection unto the fiery descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this holy tide is not merely a segment of the calendar, but a sanctified *Kairos*. It is a window into eternity, where the Church steps out of the shadows of the Fall and into the unwaning light of the "Eighth Day."

The essence of this season is found in the profound theological concept of **ዕረፍተ ነፍስ** (*Erefta Nefs*)—the Repose of the Soul. During these fifty days, the Church acts as a living icon of the Heavenly Kingdom. To signify this, the ancient rigours of the spiritual life are transformed: the traditional fasts of Wednesday and Friday are suspended, and the penitential prostrations of the *Metanoia* are set aside. This is not a concession to human weakness, but a bold proclamation of Christ's victory. By withholding the *Kanona* (penance), the Church declares that the Lord has delivered us from the "Death of the Soul." As the Prophet Isaiah once whispered of this restoration: *"The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve"* (Isaiah 14:3).

At the heart of this celebration stands the person of our Lord, the **Firstfruit** (*Bekur*) of our own rising. As St. Paul assures us, *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept"* (1 Corinthians 15:20). Because the Head has risen in glory, the Body—the Church—is assured of its own transformation. The "Sovereignty of the Earth" (*Sir'ate Midir*), governed by hunger, thirst, and the inexorable march of decay, is here superseded by the "Order of the World to Come." In this Paschal atmosphere, even our worship changes; the Divine Liturgy and the sacred Chants are performed in a manner that precludes exhaustion, mirroring the effortless praise of the angelic hosts.

This liturgical "ease" serves as a pedagogical tool, teaching us to contemplate our final inheritance. We look forward to a realm where the "Power of the Flesh" (*Hayla Zer*) and the "Animal Nature" (*Hayla Ensesa*) are refined into spiritual glory. It is a state beyond the cycles of birth and ageing, beyond the reach of the tempter, and beyond the silence of the grave. We are reminded of the promise in the Apocalypse: *"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more... and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes"* (Revelation 7:16-17).

Week I: The Awakening of the Body (The Octave of Pascha)

The Theme: *Victory over the Grave.* In this first week, the "Firstfruit" (*Bekur*) breaks the soil of death. We reflect on the physical reality of the Resurrection. Our "Sovereignty of the Earth" (*Sir'ate Midir*) begins to dissolve as we realize that the body is not a prison to be escaped, but a temple to be glorified.

- **Scripture:** *"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."* (1 Corinthians 15:26)
- **Reflection:** If the Grave could not hold Him, what "earthly order" can possibly bind you?

Monday Ma'dot:

The Ontological Crossing from Shadow into Substance

In the immediate radiance of the Glorious Resurrection, the Holy Church set aside the Monday of the Easter Octave as a day of profound mystical contemplation known as **Ma'dot**—a term signifying "The Great Crossing." This is the day when the faithful pause to behold the cosmic bridge spanning the chasm between the old world and the new. It is a liturgical celebration of the definitive transition of the human soul: a passage from the cold dominion of Death unto the vibrant Kingdom of Life, from the depths of *Hasar*—the ignominy of our fallen nature—unto the unshadowed heights of Divine Glory, and from the desolate silence of Sheol unto the verdant, life-giving pastures of Paradise.

The theology of *Ma'dot* find its ancient, prophetic echo in the Exodus of Israel. Just as the Hebrews stood between the iron chariots of Pharaoh and the surging deep, humanity once stood trapped between the crushing guilt of sin and the locked gates of the grave. Yet, as the Prophet Moses sang of that first deliverance, *"Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation"* (Exodus 15:13). On this day of *Ma'dot*, the Church proclaims that Christ has fulfilled this shadow. He is the Captain of a greater Exodus who did not merely part the waters, but trampled down the gates of brass and shattered the bars of iron, leading the captives of old out of the darkness and into the morning of the Eighth Day.

We celebrate this "Crossing" because Christ Himself has become our True Pascha. The Apostle Paul encapsulates this ontological shift with categorical clarity, urging the faithful to *"purge out therefore the old leaven... for even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"* (1 Corinthians 15:7). In this Paschal Victory, Christ is not merely a guide; He is the Bridge itself. By taking our humanity into His death, He crossed over into our mortality so that we might cross over into His immortality. The reproach of Adam is washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and the promise once whispered to the thief on the cross—*"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43)—becomes the universal inheritance for all who are found in Him.

Ultimately, *Ma'dot* teaches us that the Resurrection is not a static historical fact to be admired from afar, but a dynamic movement to be joined. We are now a people in transition, daily "crossing over" from the "Egypt" of our old habits into the freedom of the New Life. We walk the desert of this world no longer as slaves to the elements, but as free citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem, fed by the Manna of the Eucharist and guided by the Pillar of Fire. Because the Bridge of the Cross has been laid across the abyss, we have passed from death unto life, and our journey is now a perpetual ascent into the heart of God.

Tuesday - Thomas

The Mystery of the Wound: St. Thomas and the Certification of Joy

As the second day of the Easter Octave dawns—traditionally celebrated within the liturgical cycle as the Tuesday of Thomas—the Church pauses to contemplate the intimate and earth-shattering encounter between the Risen Lord and the Doubting Apostle. This is the day of "Sacred Touching," a moment where the ethereal glory of the Resurrection met the cold, hard requirements of human grief and skepticism. St. Thomas, having missed the initial appearance of the Lord, stood as a representative of all humanity that struggles to bridge the gap between sight and faith. He famously declared a condition for his belief that was both visceral and daring: he would not be convinced by mere reports or ghostly apparitions, but demanded to see the print of the nails in the hands and thrust his own hand into the side where the Roman spear had pierced the very Heart of God.

In this demand, Thomas unwittingly echoed the ancient longing of the Prophet Isaiah, who spoke of a Suffering Servant by whose *"stripes we are healed"* (**Isaiah 53:5**). He sought the physical proof of that healing, wanting to ensure that the One who stood before him was truly the same Man who had endured the ignominy of the Tree. When the Lord appeared once more, He did not rebuke Thomas with lightning or wrath; instead, He offered the ultimate condescension of Divine Love. Christ invited the Apostle into the sanctuary of His wounds, saying, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing"* (**John 20:27**). In that staggering instant, the "ribs" of the New Adam became the doorway to a new creation, proving that Christ's victory did not erase His scars but glorified them as eternal trophies of His affection for mankind.

Overwhelmed by the tangible reality of the Incarnate God, Thomas cried out with a confession that has become the foundation of all Christian dogmatics: *"My Lord and my God!"* (**John 20:28**). In this short, breathless sentence, the "unbeliever" became the first to explicitly name the Risen Jesus as both Sovereign and Creator. This was the certification of the Resurrection—the proof that the body which rose was the same body that was broken. Yet, the Lord concluded this encounter with a benediction that travels through the centuries to us: *"Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"* (**John 20:29**). On this day, the Church does not merely remember a doubter; she celebrates the Apostle whose touch confirmed the hope of the world. We learn that while Thomas saw and believed, we are invited to a higher beatitude—to touch the Lord not with the finger of the flesh, but with the hand of faith, finding in His glorified wounds the healing of our own.

Wednesday – Lazarus

The Master of the Abyss: Lazarus and the Herald of the General Resurrection

Within the sacred tapestry of the Lenten journey, the Church pauses to behold a miracle that stands as the definitive earthquake before the Passion: the raising of Lazarus from the four-day grip of the grave. This event is not merely a display of divine power, but a tactical strike against the kingdom of Death, serving as one of the primary catalysts for the earthly authorities to plot the death of Christ. By calling forth His friend from the tomb, the Lord demonstrated that Death possesses no sovereign authority over the Author of Life; rather, Death is but a servant that must release its captives at His command. As the Prophet Hosea once cried out in a daring challenge to the abyss, *“O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction”* (**Hosea 13:14**), so too did Jesus stand at the mouth of the cave in Bethany to enact this very ruin. He did not merely perform a resuscitation; He revealed His own identity, declaring to a grieving Martha and to all generations: *“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”* (**John 11:25**).

The significance of the "four days" is profound in the theological tradition, for it signifies a state where corruption had fully set in, yet even the dissolution of the flesh was no barrier to the Word that spoke the universe into being. In this moment, Christ bridged the gap between the Old Covenant expectations and the New Covenant reality. He proved that He is the Lord of the *Sheol* mentioned by the Psalmist, who wrote, *“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption”* (**Psalms 16:10**). By raising Lazarus, Jesus offered a "type" or a foretaste of the Universal Resurrection that awaits all creatures. He stood as the Sovereign Judge who holds the keys to the tomb, demonstrating that He has the power to summon all souls to a final standing—transforming the graveyard of history into a harvest field of eternity.

On this day, the Church contemplates the dual nature of this rising: for those who believe in Him, it is a "Resurrection unto Glory" (*Tinsae ze-le-Kibir*), a transition into the unwaning light of the Godhead; but for those who reject His grace, it serves as a "Resurrection unto Reproach" (*Tinsae ze-le-Hasar*), a standing before the truth they sought to evade. This mystery of Bethany serves as a warning and a hope, illustrating that the voice which whispered *“Lazarus, come forth”* (**John 11:43**) is the same voice that will one day shatter every sepulchre in the world. We learn that while the death of Lazarus was the "reason" for Christ's journey to the Cross, it was also the proof that the Cross would not be the end. The Lord who commanded the stone to be rolled away from His friend's tomb was already preparing to roll away the stone of His own, securing for all humanity a path from the corruption of the earth to the incorruptibility of the Spirit.

Thursday – Adam

The Serpent-Crusher's Triumph: The Fulfillment of the Ancient Promise to Adam

On this hallowed day, the Holy Church turns her gaze back to the very dawn of human history, contemplating the moment when the ancient shadows of Eden were finally dispelled by the blinding light of the Resurrection. We remember with trembling joy the fulfillment of the **Protoevangelium**—the "First Gospel"—uttered by the Creator in the aftermath of the Fall. When all seemed lost in the garden of disobedience, God spoke a word of war and hope to the serpent, declaring: *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (**Genesis 3:15**). For five millennia, Adam and his weary progeny waited in the twilight of Sheol for this "Seed" to arrive, watching for the One who would turn the "bruised heel" of suffering into the iron foot of victory. This promise was the flickering lamp that guided the Patriarchs through the desert and the Prophets through the exile, a persistent whisper that the "handwriting of ordinances" against us would one day be blotted out.

This "Crossing" from bondage to liberty was gloriously realized when the New Adam, Jesus Christ, descended into the lower parts of the earth to shatter the bronze gates that held the first Adam captive. In the mystery of His death and rising, the Lord did not merely save individuals; He ransomed the entire human lineage. He took the hand of the first father, Adam, and with him all his children, leading them in a triumphant procession from the dust of the earth to the glory of the heavens. As the Apostle Paul triumphantly proclaims in his letter to the Corinthians, *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”* (**1 Corinthians 15:22**). The tree of the Cross has superseded the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the blood of the Lamb has washed away the stains of the forbidden fruit. By His wounds, the enmity is abolished, and the flaming sword of the Cherubim is sheathed, for the way to the Tree of Life is once again open to the sons and daughters of men.

On this day, the Church invites us to stand between the two Gardens—Eden and Gethsemane—and behold the total restoration of our nature. We see the fulfillment of the Psalmist's cry, *“Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness”* (**Psalms 30:11**). The liberation of Adam is our own liberation; his release from the "Hasar" (reproach) of sin is the pledge of our own dignity as children of God. As we remember this ancient promise fulfilled, we recognize that in the Resurrection of Christ, the history of man has been rewritten. We are no longer defined by the fall of the first Adam, but by the rising of the Second, who has led us out of the darkness of the grave and into the marvelous, unwaning light of His eternal Kingdom.

Friday – The holy church

The Mystical Bride: The Ecclesiology of the Blood and the Living Stone

On this sacred day, the Holy Church enters into a profound contemplation of her own divine origin and the mystery of her life as the Body of Christ. She remembers that her very foundations were laid not in the shifting sands of human ambition, but in the depths of Christ's Passion and the brilliance of His Resurrection. As the Apostle Paul reveals in his mystical discourse on the marriage of Heaven and Earth, Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her and present her to Himself in splendor (Ephesians 5:25-27). This is the day we celebrate the Church as the "Fulness of Him who fills all in all," recognizing that we are not merely a gathering of like-minded souls, but a living, breathing organism—the very Flesh and Bone of the Risen Lord. We are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The Church proclaims that her life was purchased at an infinite price; she was not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver or gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19). This Blood is the "Living Water" that washed her clean, as the Seer of Patmos beheld: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Revelation 1:5-6). From every tribe, every tongue, every people, and every nation, she has been gathered—a singular flock under one Shepherd. This universal calling mirrors the ancient promise to Abraham that in his seed all nations would be blessed (Genesis 22:18), a promise now realized in the blood-bought unity of the New Covenant. The Church reflects on the mystery that neither the celestial hosts of heaven nor the great thinkers of earth could find the source of life; it was only the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who was found worthy to open the seals and grant life to the world (Revelation 5:5).

As the Church preaches her own life today, she describes herself as a spiritual house being built of "Living Stones"—the faithful who have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light. We have been summoned from diverse ways of life and varied cultures to be chiseled and fitted onto the One Stone which the builders rejected, but which God has made the head of the corner (1 Peter 2:4-7). In this divine architecture, there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, for all are integrated into the life of Christ. This is the mystery of the Church: a community that lives by the life of another, a Bride who wears the righteousness of her Groom, and a temple where the Spirit of God dwells. By remembering her redemption in Christ, the Church invites all humanity to cross the threshold of her doors, to be washed in the same Blood, and to become part of the eternal edifice that the gates of Hades shall never prevail against.

Saturday – The Holy Women

The Messengers of the Morning: The Holy Women and the Triumph of Love

On this radiant day, the Holy Church turns her heart toward the aromatic and courageous witness of the Myrrh-bearing women, those faithful daughters of Zion who transformed their deepest terrors into a burning, sacrificial love for the Body of Christ. As the shadows of the Sabbath began to fade into the dawn of the first day of the week, these holy women did not succumb to the paralysis of fear that had scattered the chosen Disciples; instead, driven by a devotion that surpassed the dread of Roman seals and temple guards, they ventured into the darkness toward the sepulchre. They sought to anoint the broken Body of their Lord with spices and myrrh, enacting a final, tender liturgy of grief that was destined to become a litany of glory. In their persistent vigil, they embodied the longing of the Bride in the Song of Solomon, who cried out in the night, *"I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets... I will seek him whom my soul loveth"* (**Song of Solomon 3:2**). Their sleepless "coming and going" at the tomb was the labor of a love that refused to accept the finality of the grave, proving that where sin abounded, grace and feminine fortitude did much more abound.

The Church celebrates the singular honor bestowed upon Mary Magdalene, who, through her tears, was granted the first glimpse of the Risen Sun. She stood as the new Eve in the new Garden, hearing her name spoken by the Voice that once called the stars into being, and becoming the "Apostle to the Apostles." Alongside her, the holy women beheld the terrifying yet comforting vision of the angelic hosts, whose countenances were like lightning and whose raiment was white as snow (**Matthew 28:3**). The angels' proclamation—*"He is not here: for he is risen, as he said"* (**Matthew 28:6**)—shattered the ancient curse that had rested upon womanhood since the Fall. Whereas the first woman had once brought a message of death to Adam, these "New Women" were commissioned to carry the message of Eternal Life to the world. As the Psalmist prophesied, *"The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it"* (**Psalms 68:11**), and indeed, the company of these women became the first heralds of the New Creation.

As the Church reflects on the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, she teaches us that the path to the Resurrection is paved with "fervent love." The holy women remind us that the heart which seeks Christ in the darkness of the "tomb" of this world will invariably be met by the Light of His presence. They teach us that our own "spices"—our prayers, our virtues, and our sacrifices—are never lost, for Christ accepts the intent of the heart and rewards it with the vision of His glory (**John 20:1-18**). By celebrating their witness, the Church invites every soul to cast off the "grave-clothes" of fear and to run, as they did, with "great joy" to announce that Death has been swallowed up in Victory. This is the day we remember that the first witnesses of the greatest miracle in history were those whose love was stronger than death, and whose faith was the first to touch the hem of the Risen Lord's garment.

Glory to the Almighty God! Amen.