

## St Gregory the Theologian (328-390AD)

*In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.*

### Aim

† To know about the life of this great St Gregory of Nazianzus.

### Key verses

*“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb 13: 7)*

### Lesson

- Discussion of the **Gregorian Liturgy**, which was put by this great saint. It is very emotional Mass talking to the Son, has great tunes and usually used during feasts in our Coptic Orthodox Church.
- Born in Arianzus in southwest Cappadocia in 328 AD.
- Parents were **Gregory** and **Nona**, wealthy land owners. In 325 AD Nona converted her husband to Christianity from a heretical sect; he was subsequently consecrated bishop of Nazianzus in 329AD. Gregory had a sister and a brother, whom he studied theology and philosophy with at home at an early age.
- Later he studied advanced rhetoric and philosophy in Nazianzus Capadocia (where he met **St Basil**), Alexandria (of which **St Athanasius** was then bishop) and Athens (where he reunited with St Basil). While at Athens, he developed a close friendship with fellow student **Saint Basil of Caesarea** and also made the acquaintance of **Julian**, the later emperor who would become known as Julian the Apostate.
- Setting out by sea from Alexandria to Athens, Gregory was all but lost in a great storm, and some of his biographers infer - though the fact is not certain - that when in danger of death he and his companions received the rite of Baptism. He had certainly not been baptized in infancy, though dedicated to God by his pious mother; but there is some authority for believing that he received the sacrament, not on his voyage to Athens, but on his return to Nazianzus some years later.
- Ten years later, in 361AD, Gregory returned to Nazianzus and was ordained a priest by his father, who wanted him to assist with caring for local Christians. The younger Gregory, who had been considering a monastic existence, resented his father's decision to force a decision between priestly services and a solitary existence, calling it an "act of tyranny". Leaving home after a few days, he met

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his friend **Basil** at Annesoi, where the two lived as ascetics. However, Basil urged him to return home to assist his father, which he did for the next year. Arriving at Nazianzus, Gregory found the local Christian community split by theological differences and his father accused of heresy by local monks. Gregory helped to heal the division through a combination of personal diplomacy and oratory.

- Around this time Julian was emperor who publicly came out in opposition toward Christianity which Gregory battled against. Emperor died in **363** and Jovian, who was an avowed Christian, became Emperor.
- Gregory spent the next few years combating the **Arian Heresy**, which threatened to divide the region of Cappadocia. In this tense environment Gregory interceded on behalf of his friend Basil with **Bishop Eusebius of Caesaria**. The two friends then entered a period of close fraternal cooperation as they participated in a great rhetorical contest of the Caesarean church precipitated by the arrival of accomplished Arian theologians and rhetors. In the subsequent public debates, presided over by agents of the emperor Valens, Gregory and Basil emerged triumphant. This success confirmed for both Gregory and Basil that their futures lay in administration of the church. **Basil**, who had long displayed inclinations to the episcopacy, was elected **Archbishop of the see of Caesaria in Capadocia in 370 AD**.
- In **372** Gregory ordained **bishop of Sasima** by Basil. Gregory felt forced into this position by Basil and the insistence of Gregory's father for him to grow in the church hierarchy.
- In **374** when Gregory's father died, Gregory continued his service assisting the diocese of Nazianzus but refused to be called bishop.
- Donating most of his inheritance to the needy, he lived an austere existence. At the end of **375** he withdrew to a monastery at Selukia, living there for **three** years. Near the end of this period **his friend Basil died, aged 50!** Although Gregory's health did not permit him to attend the funeral, he wrote a heartfelt letter of condolence to **Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa** and composed twelve memorial poems dedicated to the memory of his departed friend.
- After the death of the Arian Emperor Valens, followed closely by the death of Gregory's friend Basil, Gregory was called to Constantinople. He was to head the reorganisation of the Orthodox Church which had been torn asunder by the heresy of Arianism from within and by the harassment of pagans without.
- When the Orthodox **Emperor Theodosius** came to power in **380 AD**, Gregory assumed the direction of the magnificent Church of Agia-Sophia, the most prestigious house of God in all Christendom. While director of this mighty

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church, Gregory took part in a council held in Constantinople in 381AD to settle the differences among the prelates of the Church. Known as the **Second Ecumenical Council**, it resolved the issues and voted to accept **Gregory as patriarch of Constantinople**.

- For as long as he held the post of spiritual leader of Orthodoxy the gallant Gregory served with honour and dignity. Moreover, he was the instrument of God in unifying the Church into a cohesive unit that could withstand any internal or external pressure. He grew weary of the personal attacks that are the occupational hazard of a patriarch and after a moving farewell address; he retired to live out his days in meditation, writing, and prayer. **He died 25 January 390 AD, aged 62.** the church celebrates his departure on 24<sup>th</sup> Tut/ 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- Gregory was also known as the **Trinitarian Theologian** as he was famous for speaking of the Holy Spirit in all his sermons, and emphasizing the Holy Spirit as being part of the God Head.



**Glory is to God, forever. Amen.**