

Church as a Bride in the Teaching of the Church of East
By
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The Syriac fathers described the mystery of the Church through numerous images. The following are some of the images which are frequently found in the East Syriac liturgical prayers, Hymns and the writings of the Church fathers: bride, mother, daughter, heaven, flock, vineyard, heavenly tabernacle etc. Many of these images are also found in the books of the Old and the New Testaments. Although each one of the above-mentioned images describe one aspect of the mystery of the Church, yet in our paper we are going to focus only on the images of the Church as a bride and a mother.

The imagery of the Church as a Bride of the heavenly bridegroom, Jesus Christ is clearly found in both Old and New Testament books. In the Old Testament the relationship between God and the people of Israel is described by using the nuptial imagery of a bride and a bridegroom. (Hosea 1:2, 2:5) Ezekiel also writes about Jerusalem's nuptial relationship with Yahweh and her infidelity (Ezekiel 16:4-5). Then He, God, meets with her for the second time and unites her with Himself in marriage. Finally she has repented of her sin, came back to God and, God decorated her once again with marital gifts. It is written:

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.”¹

¹ (Ezekiel 16:8-14)

Saint Paul in his epistle to Ephesians says, Christ loved his bride, the Church. He died on the Cross for her in order to sanctify her and wash her in Baptism with water through the Word. Then He clothed her in the finest clothes so that she might become unto Him the most beautiful bride. It is written:

*“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”*²

Marriage is considered a covenant of grace confirmed by an oath. In this marriage covenant Yahweh always remained faithful to His bride, Israel, who was not so faithful to Him. Even though she constantly committed acts of adultery, yet, God remembered the covenant He made with her in the days of her youth. And finally, God established an everlasting covenant with her. It is written:

*“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.”*³

The covenant of God with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai was interpreted by theologians as a wedding covenant.

*“According to the rabbinic understanding, the covenant at Sinai is the marriage of Yahweh with Israel. The Torah is the marriage contract, Moses is the friend of the Bridegroom and Yahweh comes to Israel as a bridegroom to His bride.”*⁴

The imagery of the Church as Bride in the New Testament:

The fathers of the Church from the very beginning have learned about the imagery of the Church as a bride of Christ from the writings of the New Testament

² (Eph. 5:25-27)

³ (Ezekiel 16:59-60)

⁴ (Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam -680010, Kerala, India. 1998, Pp. 256-257 Quoted, E. Stauffer, Gameo, 654.)

and especially from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins recorded in Matthew 25.

In the New Testament the concept of marriage is used also to reveal the eschatological wedding celebration in which all the saved Christians as a bride will eternally be united to Christ the heavenly bridegroom in heaven.⁵

Saint Paul in his Epistle to Ephesians explicitly explains the relationship between a husband and a wife in terms of the relationship between Jesus and the Church. (Ephesians 5:21-23) Again in his second Epistle to Corinthians, Saint Paul, describes the believers of the Corinthian's church collectively as a bride betrothed to Christ. He has presented her as a pure Virgin unto her husband Jesus Christ. It is written:

*"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, **so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him**."*⁶

Saint John the Evangelist in his book of revelation applies the imagery of the eschatological "wedding of the Lamb" to the union of Christ the heavenly bridegroom with His bride the redeemed Church in heaven. It is written:

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."*⁷

Meaning of the imagery:

From the imagery of the Church as the bride and God as the bridegroom we learn two important facts. First, God loves His bride the Church, secondly, the Church plays an important role of a bride. This imagery of a bride and a bridegroom reveals the eternal and unconditional love of God to the work of His hand mankind (John 3:16). Therefore all these nuptial imageries teach us the intimate, unconditional, and unbreakable union of Christ and the Church.

The imagery of the Church as a bride in the East Syriac Tradition

⁵ (Matthew 22:2-14, Luke 5:34,)

⁶ (2 Cor.11:2)

⁷ (Rev. 19:7-8)

In the Liturgical prayers of the Church of the East, the imagery of the Church as a bride and Christ as a bridegroom is very understandable. The following anthem by means of using nuptial imageries such as: betrothed, dowry, washed and clothed with the garment of glory, describes the intimate relationship of Christ the bride groom with His bride the Church.

*“O Church the decorated Bride. The Bride of the King and the daughter of light. Glorify and confess the heavenly bridegroom. That from the water of Baptism, Has purified and consecrated you by His grace. Blessed are you O Church for your bridegroom is the Son of the King. Blessed are you for the angles are desiring your wedding feast. Blessed are you for the father through prophets has created your beauty. Blessed are you for the Son through the Apostles wrote your dowry. Blessed are you for the Holy Spirit is pleased with you and perfected your beauty. Blessed are you for you became the Bride of the father and the spouse of the Son of God. Blessed are you for David in his psalms called you the bride and the Son the groom. Blessed are you for the priests and levities have ministered your bridal chamber. Blessed are you for He has betrothed you from the water of Baptism. Blessed are you for He has clothed you with the garment of glory in Jorden. Blessed are you O Church for within you sing angles and Men Halleluiah.”*⁸

Terminological considerations:

The Rite of crowning, occupies an important part in both liturgies of the holy matrimony and that of the holy Baptism, of the Church of the East. Using of the same wedding symbolism in the celebration of the Holy Baptism is an indication that, in the Church of the East, there is a close link between the celebration of the holy matrimony and that of Baptism. In the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism every single baptized individual is betrothed as a bride to Jesus Christ the bridegroom. Thus, every baptized Christian individually and all Christians collectively (the Church) are the bride of Christ the groom. In regard to the betrothal of the Church and the betrothal of the individual Christian to Christ, Sebastian P. Brock says:

“The theme of betrothal to Christ has two separate aspects: the betrothal of the Church, and the betrothal of the individual Christian. The betrothal of

⁸ All the liturgical anthems have been translated from Aramaic into English by the author himself. (Khudra Vol. III Ps 584-485, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

*the Church to Christ belongs to sacred time and space, and provides the paradigm or model portrayed in mythic terms, for the betrothal of Christians to Christ which is seen as taking place in historical time and space at baptism.”*⁹

Before we dig deeper in the mystery of the Church as the bride of the heavenly bridegroom, Jesus Christ, it is of great importance to acquaint ourselves with some Syriac words which are frequently used to denote a bride and a groom in the liturgy of the Holy matrimony of the Church of the East. The words which signify bride are: Kaltha and Mekhirta. Kaltha means the crowned or garlanded one. However Mikhirta which is derived from the root Mkhar means the betrothed one. Robert Murray in his book the Symbols of Church and Kingdom says:

*“Before proceeding it is best to familiarize ourselves with the relevant Syriac words. Several come from the verb mkhar, which, though is Syriac its meaning is almost limited to betrothing and marrying, reflects a common Semitic background of buying and barter. The passive participial give us words for fiancé or bridegroom (mkhira) and fiancée or bride (mkhirta), while the nomen agentis, makhora, is the go - between or ‘betrother’. This word is used above, but the words for ‘bridegroom’ and ‘bride’ here are not those just mentioned, but are respectively ‘hatna’ (from a Semitic root reflecting primitive circumcision customs in connection with marriage) and ‘kalltha’, which refers to the crowning at the wedding ceremony. As this is practiced also at baptism in the Syriac rites, it is natural that Syriac writers are frequently led through this imagery to link the theme of baptism with that of the Church as bride”*¹⁰

Betrothal.

In accordance with the Semitic tradition, the following are the three steps of a ritual of marriage: 1. placing a mark on the bride, for example placing a ring on her finger. This act usually takes place while a bride and a groom are too young. And it is usually done by their parents. Their intention is simply the booking of the

⁹ (Sebastian P. Brock, The Harp, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2, 3. July 1991. A Review of the Syriac and Oriental Studies. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI Baker Hill, Kottayam- 686 001, Kerala, India Pp.204-5)

¹⁰ (R. Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom. Cambridge University Press 1975, Ephrem, Diatessaron commentary p 132)

bride for the groom. 2. The Ceremonial betrothal or engagement. This is completed with the presence of the bride, groom, clergy and guests. In this stage the consent of the bride and groom is required. 3. The crowning and consummation of marriage. This ritual is fulfilled in the Church with the presence of the wedding party, people and clergy. It is mentioned in the writings of the Old Testament that on the day God the Father made a covenant with Moses on the Mount Sinai on that same day He betrothed Israel as a bride unto Himself. Saint Ephrem the Syriac says the betrothal of the chosen people of God took place on Mount Sinai.

*“Nisan the victorious month which was sent by the victorious One was resplendent and victorious in Egypt, delivering and Escorting out the royal bride. It sprinkled the ground before her with its abundance filling it with flowers scattered Everywhere; lightening served as torches that gave illumination. White thunder roared its acclaim; the mountain skipping before Her. Blessed is the Exalted One who escorted the despised Girl. **A chaste wedding feast took place in the wilderness, with The bridal chamber set on Mount Sinai.** The Holy One Descended and took in **betrothal** the daughter of Abraham His Beloved friend.”¹¹*

The following anthem also refers to the Church as the bride of the Father the King of kings.

*“Blessed are you O faithful Church, **the bride of the Father**, the King of kings. According to the forecasts of the prophets, your beauty was made intact with gold.”¹²*

Jacob of Serug in the following Hymn says: God the father betrothed a bride, the Church to His only begotten son Jesus Christ. A man and a woman whom Moses mentioned in the book of Genesis symbolize Jesus and the Church.

*“**The Hidden Father betrothed a bride to His only begotten,** Having instructed her through prophecy in a symbolic way. In His love he built a great palace for the bride of light and depicted*

¹¹ (Ephrem, Hymns on Resurrection, 3:1-2, Quoted from, S. Brock. The Luminous Eye..... 93-94.)

¹² (Khudra Vol. III P 601, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

*The bridegroom in various ways in her royal home. Moses Entered in and like a skilled artist, delineated the bridegroom And the bride, and then covered the great picture with a well. ... He called them “man and woman” although he knew the Truth, that **the one was Christ and the other the Church**, both Being veiled ... After the wedding feast ie. The redemptive Mysteries. Paul entered in and beheld the veil lying there; he Seized and removed it from the fair couple And began to Show what the covered picture was: **‘in those called ‘man and Wife’ in the prophetic writings I recognize Christ and his Church, the two being one.**”¹³*

The betrothal of the Church at the Jordan River:

According to the writings of the Sacred Scriptures the betrothal of Rebecca to Isaac by Eliezer took place at the well of water (Gen. 24:10), The betrothal of Rachel to Jacob took place at the well of Jacob (Gen. 29:9), And the betrothal of Zipporah to Moses took place at the well (Ex. 2:15). The fathers of the Church believed the above mentioned three betrothals, are types, predicting and pre-figuring the betrothal of the Church to Christ by John the Baptist at His Baptism in the Jordan River. The following liturgical anthem says:

“At the well Eliezer betrothed Rebecca for Isaac. And at the well Jacob betrothed Rachel. And Moses too at the well betrothed Zipporah. And also our life-giver betrothed the Church unto Himself at Jordan River by the mediation of John. And has torn the prescription of the sins of our race. And the Lord fixed a spiritual throne for His Church. And made a promise unto her. That you and your children will be lift up there.”¹⁴

Robert Murray in his book, symbols of the Church and the Kingdom, also affirms that the Old Testament betrothals which took place by a well of water are indeed types of the betrothal of the Church to Christ at the Jordan River:

“In the Diatessaron commentary, Ephrem mentions, apropos of Christ’s baptism, those who plighted their troth by a well; Eleazer (for Isaac) with

¹³ (S. Brock, “Jacob of Serugh on the veil of Moses”, Sobornost 3 (1981) 74.75. quoted from, Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam - 680010, Kerala, India. 1998, Pp. 266-267)

¹⁴ (Khudra Vol. 1 P. 629, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

*Rebecca, Jacob with Rachel and Moses with Zipporah: “All these were types of Our Lord who espoused His Church at His baptism in the Jordan. Rachel appears as a type of the Church also in her weeping, which, says Ephrem, is because Christ was not born among her children, since Leah is of the ‘former nation’ but Rachel of the Church.”*¹⁵

In regards to the betrothal of the Church at Christ’s own baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, Jacob of Serugh in his Homilies 7-9, e.g. says:

*“The Levite (John the Baptist) sang, and the Bride rejoiced at his songs;
The desert echoed with the good tidings of the royal Bridegroom.
The guests are gathered, awaiting the Royal Son,
And the Bride sits in eagerness and fear as she looks for His arrival.
Our Lord shone out like a daylight in the midst of darkness;
The Voice (John) was stirred to utterance at the Epiphany of the Word,
He pointed out to the Bride, the daughter of light, the Man to whom she was betrothed.”*¹⁶

The Holy Apostles, the Betrothers of the Church:

Saint Paul in his second epistle to Corinthians speaks about himself as the one who has betrothed the Church to Christ. It is written:

*“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised (betrothed) you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin (bride) to him.”*¹⁷

Speaking of the Church of Nisibis, Saint Ephrem also adopts the imagery of the Apostles being the betrothers of the Church in his carmine Nisibena 6 saying:

*“Be jealous for me, for I am thine
And to thine, Lord, am I betrothed:
The apostles who betrothed me to thee*

¹⁵ (R. Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom. Cambridge University Press 1975, Ephrem, Diatessaron commentary p 135)

¹⁶ (Sebastian P. Brock, The Harp, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2, 3. July 1991. A Review of the Syriac and Oriental Studies. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI Baker Hill, Kottayam- 686 001, Kerala, India Pp. 205)

¹⁷ (2 Cor. 11:2.)

*Told me that thou art the jealous one.
A bulwark to chaste wives is jealousy
Of their husband.....”*¹⁸

Saint Ephrem in his Nisibene hymn also speaks about Apostles as betrothers of the Church.

*“The apostle her betrothed was jealous over her,
That she should not be corrupted by names.”*¹⁹

The following Liturgical anthem confirms the role of the Holy Apostles as betrothers of the Virgin Church to the heavenly bride groom, Jesus Christ.

*“Blessed is the one who has built His Holy Church upon the rock of faith. And placed in her Apostles and Prophets. And teachers who are knowledgeable of the truth. O Church gather your children. You were barren from the beginning. But now your children grew in number. **Rise up and shake yourself from the dust. O Virgin betrothed through the Apostles.** The Bride that John proclaimed. You who were lonely and abundant. Kings became nursing parents unto her. Reveal the veil from your face. And rejoice with your young children. And be proud about your Virgins. For they are singing glory within you every day. The rise of the sun you do not need. The rising of your Lord will shine upon you. Behold the sources of the living water and salvation flow within you. Behold your sons will come from far away. Your daughters from the ends of the earth. And will enter into your edifice the mighty ones of the nations. And the kings will worship unto your honor. And the nations will give up their engraved sculptures. And they will come and take refuge within you. Arise O Church and become a shelter unto all the nations and ethnic groups.”*²⁰

Robert Murray believes, Aphrahat and Ephrem are among the very first fathers of the Church of the East who initiated the idea that the holy Apostles are the betrothers of the Church. Aphrahat Says: “*He is the bridegroom and the apostles are the ‘betrothers’, and we are the bride; let us prepare our dowry.*” Again Aphrahat is addressing his readers (presumably bishops and clergy) as betrothers of

¹⁸ (Geevarghese Panicker , The Church in the Syriac Tradition, Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (Seeri) Baker hill, Kottayam-685001, Kerala, India P.24.)

¹⁹ (Ephrem, Nisibene Hymns XX: 5.)

²⁰ (Khudra Vol. III Ps 597- 598, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

the adorned bride, the Church: “*You are apostles, ‘betrothers’ of the bride adorned.*”²¹

The Holy Trinity and the Betrothal of the Church:

In the liturgy of the Hallowing of the Church we come across many hymns confirming the idea of the betrothal of the Church by God the father Himself. The following anthem says:

*“God whose being is from eternity, by His love betrothed you as a bride to Himself.”*²²

However in accordance to the following anthem, all the three persons of the Holy Trinity were actively involved in the act of the betrothal of the Church to Jesus Christ.

*“On the day of the Hallowing of the holy Church let us sing glory to the **Father who depicted (portrayed) her on Mount Saini and the Son betrothed her in His baptism and the Holy Spirit who came down and sanctified her in the upper room.** And the Lord who rules forever and ever. O Lord establish (rectify) her by your hands. O Lord dwell in her by your mercy. O Lord Keep your promise unto her. O Lord bring her enemies to an end. O Lord reproach her adversaries. O Lord preserve her inhabitants. O Lord place your right hand upon her children forever”²³*

The Church, on earth and the Church in heaven.

Even though the church on earth is not a perfect Church, yet it is a type of the heavenly Church, the adorned bride of the Lamb, and the Holy City of God. The following anthem says, the earthly Church is indeed the actualization of the Old Testament type and the anticipation of the eschatological Church.

²¹ (R. Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom. Cambridge University Press 1975, P.131, (Dem. XIV. 681: 26-684:1. Dem. XIV. 680: 10-11.)

²² (Khudra Vol. III, P. 566, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

²³ (Ibid Ps 603-604)

*“Blessed is the One who has established His Church on earth and lifted her up and placed her in heaven. And behold heavenly and earthly beings (as in one Church) raise glory within her”*²⁴

Consequently what was prefigured at Mount Sinai, took place at the Jordan River and the fulfilment is yet to come when the Lord betroths His Church through the missionary works of the Holy Apostles. Sister Spohy Rose says:

*“Even the betrothal at Jordan was not a real one but only an ideal one; what was prefigured at Mount Sinai is ideally happened at Jordan, yet the realization is to come and that happened when Christ betrothed her through the apostles.”*²⁵

The following anthem states that, the earthly Church starts her journey towards perfection here on earth and fully accomplishes it in heaven.

***“Blessed is He who has founded His Church on earth and finished her habitation (residence) on high.** And by the stones of sapphire arranged her foundation. And made His glory to dwell within her and sanctified her. Blessed are you o holy Church. Blessed are you O decorated Church. Blessed are you O mother of all wisdom. Blessed are you O Tent of glory. O Church blessed is He who gave you, authority in heaven and on Earth. And entrusted priesthood to your hands. **And promised Kingdom unto you.** Blessed is the one who revealed His Mysteries to His Church. And has filled her with glory. And He has withhold from her the reproach of the evildoers. Unto Him be glory from the mouth of all. O Church rejoice with your wedding feast. And clap your hands on the day of your banquet. And sing glory by your harp. For He has decorated your head with the crown of excellency.”*²⁶

The Betrothal of the Bride on the Cross:

The betrothal of the Church to Christ the bridegroom on the Cross became a common theme in the liturgical hymns, anthems, prayers of the Church and the

²⁴ (Ibid P 575)

²⁵ (Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam -680010, Kerala, India. 1998, p.272, for details, Cfr. J. Jeremias, “Numphe”, 1104 -5.)

²⁶ (Khudra Vol. III, Ps 615-616, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

writings of the fathers. The fathers of the Church believed the water and the blood, which came forth from the pierced side of Christ, denote the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist from which the Church was born. Thus, in those regards the Church was born on the Cross from the pierced side of Jesus, Jacob of Serugh says:

*“Christ slept on the Cross- and Baptism came forth from him:
The Bridegroom slept, and His side was pierced in His sleep,
He gave birth to the Bride, as happened with Eve, in Adam His type.”*²⁷

The following anthem also confirms the idea that Christ has indeed betrothed and redeemed His Church by His suffering and death on the Cross:

*“Holy is the eternal King whose crown will never perish. For He has made His glory to dwell within His Church. And sanctified her for His honor. Angels in heaven rejoice through her wedding feast. And her children sing glory within her. Unto Christ who has come, betrothed her and redeemed her by His Cross, and the Holy Spirit. Who has liberated her from error.”*²⁸

The Liturgy of the holy matrimony of the Church of the East confirms the idea of the betrothal of the Church on the Cross. The Priest in the prayer of the blessing of the cross says:

*‘We worship, O my Lord, your Holy Cross, O our Savior (repeat) by which there came about salvation for all races of men, for demons are terrified by it, and by it many wonders are performed, and by it the Holy Church has been saved and espoused to the heavenly bridegroom.’*²⁹

The Birth of the Church from the side of Christ:

For the fathers of the Church of the East the birth of Eve, the mother of mankind from the side of the first Adam, (Gen. 2:21-22) prefigures the birth of the

²⁷ (Sebastian P. Brock, the Harp, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2, 3. July 1991. A Review of the Syriac and Oriental Studies. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI Baker Hill, Kottayam- 686 001, Kerala, India Pp. 206)

²⁸ (Breviarium Vol. III, P. 406 Rome 1938)

²⁹ (The Order of espousal, the blessing, the crowning and the fastening of the Throne, , Urmiae , Typis Missionis Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis, 1892, p. 20)

Church from the pierced side of the second Adam, Jesus Christ on the Cross. Saint Ephrem, in his commentary on the Diatessaron, comments on John 19:34 says:

*“There came forth blood and water, which is the Church, and it is built on him, just as (in the case of) Adam, whose wife was taken from his side. Adam’s rib is his wife, and the blood of our Lord is his Church. From Adam’s rib there was death, but from our Lord’s rib, life. The olive tree (symbolizes) the mystery of Christ, from which spring forth milk, water and oil; milk for the children, water for the youths and oil for the sick. The olive tree gave water and blood through its death, (just as) the Messiah gave these through his death.”*³⁰

Jacob of Serugh a Syrian Orthodox poet of the early 6th Century writes on the same episode as follows:

*“The bridegroom’s side has been pierced and
From it the bride has come forth,
Fulfilling the type provided by Adam and Eve
For, from the beginning God knew and depicted
Adam and Eve in the likeness of the image
Of his only begotten;
**He slept on the Cross as Adam has slept his sleep,
His side was pierced and from it there came
Forth the daughter of light.**”*³¹

Robert Murray agrees with the Syriac fathers, especially with Saint Ephrem who, in his commentary on the marriage at Cana of galilee, says; the birth of Eve from the side of Adam, is a type of the birth of the second Eve, the Church from the side of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

*“In Ephrem’s comment on the marriage at Cana, Christ is presented as the heavenly Bridegroom, ready for his marriage, typified by the earthly bridegroom of Cana. Christ’s espousal at His baptism, the anticipatory symbol of His death, were fulfilled on Calvary, **when the Church was born from His side, the second Eve from the second Adam. ‘There came forth blood and***

³⁰ (Carmel McCarthy, Saint Ephrem’s commentary on the Tatian’s Diatessaron, Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the University of Manchester 1993, XXI, 11.P. 323)

³¹ (P. bedjan, homiliae Selctae Mar Jacob Sarugensis (paris lipzing: 1905 -10) III, 299-300. Quoted from, S.P. Brock. “The mysteries ……” 463.)

*water, which is his Church, and it is built on Him; like Adam for his wife was taken from his side. The rib of Adam was his wife and the blood of our Lord, his Church.”*³²

The virgin birth of Eve from the side of Adam and the virgin birth of the Church from the side of Christ paved the road for theologians to link the birth of Eve and Church to the virgin birth of Christ from the blessed Mary. Sebastian P. Brock says:

*“Since the birth of Eve from Adam’s side and the birth of the Church from Christ’s side are both virgin births, this in turn allows the introduction of yet a further strand into the typological spider’s web, namely Christ’s own birth from Mary.”*³³

The Motherhood of Baptism:

In the list of the Holy Sacraments of the Church of the East Baptism is counted number one. Thus Baptism is considered as a gate through which the baptized men and women enter into the Church. In the liturgy of Baptism the font of Baptism is described as a mother or is referred to as womb of the mother Baptism. Thus from the womb of the Holy Baptism a baptized man and woman is born again not from the desire of the flesh but rather from the desire of the Spirit and incorporated in the mystical body of Christ the Church. Narsai speaking of the newly baptized says:

*“Peering out from the water as a baby from inside the womb...he resembles a baby as he is lifted up from the midst of the water, and like a baby everyone embraces and kisses him.”*³⁴

It is evident that the Church of the East gives the title of the spiritual motherhood to baptism not to the Church, simply because the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism is the one that conceives and gives birth spiritually to the sons and daughters of the Church. Saint Jacob of Serug refers to the water which flew from

³² (R. Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom. Cambridge University Press 1975, Pp.137-138)

³³ (Sebastian P. Brock, The Harp, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2, 3. July 1991. A Review of the Syriac and Oriental Studies. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI Baker Hill, Kottayam- 686 001, Kerala, India P. 195)

³⁴ (Ibid P. 192)

the side of the Lord as the second mother, baptism. “*There flowed from his side the second **mother, baptism**”.*³⁵

In another place Jacob of Serug speaks more explicitly about the motherhood of the Sacrament of the holy baptism saying:

*“Christ came and opened up baptism on his cross so that it should be the **mother of living things in place of Eve**. Water and blood for the fashioning of spiritual children, flowed and **baptism became the mother of living things**.”*³⁶

In the following Hymn, Jacob of Serug, describes the New Eve who was born from the side of the second Adam as both a bride and a mother. He calls the Church a bride and Baptism a mother.

*“Christ slept on the Cross, and baptism came forth from him; the bridegroom slept, and the side was pierced in his sleep, he gave birth to the bride, as happened with Eve, in Adam his type. The stillness of the sleep of death fell upon him on the Cross, **and from him came forth the mother who gives birth to all spiritual beings: the lord of Adam produced the new Eve in his sleep to serve as mother of the children of Adam, in Eve’s place: water and blood for the fashioning of spiritual babes flowed from the side of that living one who died in order to bring life to Adam.**”*³⁷

The following anthem also speaks of Baptism as a spiritual womb that gives birth spiritually to all those who are baptized in the name of the most glorified Trinity.

*“At your Baptism, O our Savior, the fountains of water were sanctified, and **they have become a spiritual womb for human race**.”*

³⁵ (Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam -680010, Kerala, India. 1998, p.278)

³⁶ (Ibid, p.278)

³⁷ (P. Bedjan, Homiliae Selectae II, 589; Quoted from, S. p. Brock, “The Mysteries.....465-466”.

*That out of them, they will be born again and their names be recorded as the first fruits of heaven.”*³⁸

Purification of the Bride through the water of Baptism:

It is recorded in the Books of the Old Testament that, God the father has bathed His bride, the Israelites in the dead sea. Thus prior to the nuptial covenant, He purified His bride (the people of Israel) and anointed them with oil. Having done that, He took her as a bride into His bridal chamber. Saint Paul in his epistle to Ephesians clearly speaks about the custom of taking a nuptial bath before the nuptial union of the bride and the groom, takes place. It is written:

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”*³⁹

The Liturgical books of the Church of the East also talk about Christ the heavenly bridegroom who through His Baptismal water at Jordan River has washed, purified, sanctified and anointed His bride, the Church, before the nuptial union took place.

*“O Church the decorated Bride. The Bride of the King and the daughter of light. Glorify and confess the heavenly bridegroom. **That from the water of Baptism, He has purified and consecrated you by His grace.** Blessed are you for He has betrothed you from the water of Baptism. Blessed are you for He has clothed you with the garment of glory in Jordan. Blessed are you O Church for within you sing angles and Men Halleluiah.”*⁴⁰

Narsai in his Liturgical Homilies speaks about the purifying power of the baptismal water saying:

“With the name of the divinity, the three names, he consecrates the water, that it may suffice to accomplish the cleansing of defiled. The

³⁸ (Khudra Vol. I, P 648, printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

³⁹ (Eph. 5:25-27)

⁴⁰ (Khudra Vol. III Pp. 584-485, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

*defilement of men He cleanses with water: **yet not by the water but by the power of the name of the divinity** which there lights down.”⁴¹*

Purification of the bride through the Word and the Spirit:

In addition to the water of Baptism, Christ has purified and sanctified His bride the Church, through his life-giving words and spirit. In His priestly prayer, Christ is praying to God the Father on behalf of the Holy Church saying: “*Sanctify them in truth; thy Word is the truth.*” (John 17:17) So His words are the truth and the spirit. “*The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and Life.*”⁴²

In all the Liturgical celebrations, the role of the Holy Spirit has been recognized as Sanctifier. Thus the Holy Spirit, which hovers over the water of Baptism, provides water with the sanctifying power. Saint Ephrem in one of his faith hymns associates the sacramental power of the Holy Spirit with fire:

*“Fire and Spirit are in the womb of her who bore you,
Fire and Spirit are in the River in which you were baptized.
Fire and Spirit are in our baptismal font,
In the Bread and Cup are Fire and Spirit.”*⁴³

Again, in the following hymn Ephrem speaks about fire as a type of the Holy Spirit that forgives the sins of the baptized people.

*“In fire is the symbol of the Spirit,
it is a type of the Holy Spirit,
Who is mixed in the baptismal water,
So that it may be for absolution and in the bread,*

⁴¹ (R.H. Connolly, the Liturgical Homilies.....P. 50)

⁴² (John 6:63)

⁴³ (Sebastian P. Brock, The Harp, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2, 3. July 1991. Hymn on faith 10:17, A Review of the Syriac and Oriental Studies. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI Baker Hill, Kottayam- 686 001, Kerala, India P. 198)

So that it may be an offering.”⁴⁴

The following liturgical anthem speaks, as well, about the sanctifying power of fire and Holy Spirit in the sacrament of the Holy Baptism.

*“I have cleansed myself in the life-giving waters. **By fire and spirit I have been purified** and I am united in marriage to the marvelous bridegroom. I was rejected and detached, but the Son of the King in his love has saved me and he has cured me with oil and water and I disregarded my offence in his pleasures.....”⁴⁵*

The Church, through the mouth of her worshipers in a prayerful spirit, confesses that Christ the groom in water and Spirit has sanctified her and made her a holy bride unto Himself.

*“Above the angles the groom has placed me in the light mysteriously, says the Church. **In water and spirit He has made me holy by his baptism** and has invited my children to a new life.”⁴⁶*

Again the following anthem says:

*“**By water and Spirit we are sanctified**, by his body and blood We will obtain life. O God Lord, you formed us out of dust, Renew our image by water and spirit. O faithful, clothe us With incorruptibility and make us put on renovation by water and spirit.”⁴⁷*

⁴⁴ (Ephrem the Syriac, Hymns on Faith, 40, 10. Quoted from Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam -680010, Kerala, India. 1998, p.287)

⁴⁵ (P. Bedjan Vol. I, 411)

⁴⁶ (Khudra Vol. III P 589, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁴⁷ (Anthem of the Mysteries, 1 Sunday of Denkha, supplementum, 22, Bathe, II Sunday of Dedication. Supplementum, P. 158.)

Purification of the bride through the Holy Trinity:

The following Liturgical anthem gives the credit of the purification and sanctification of the Church equally, to all the three persons of the Holy Trinity namely: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus it is the Holy Trinity that purified the Church and made her to become the source of sanctification to all those who have been stricken by the arrows of the evil one.

*“Sing praise, O holy Church in the dawn as well as in the evening, to the **Father** and to the **Son** and to the **Holy Spirit**, the worshipful and holy nature, who was pleased to gather you from wandering. **And sanctified you from blemish and impurity. And made you the source of sanctification.** And a place of refuge for all the weak people”.*⁴⁸

Paying the bridal price (dowry):

Our Lord Jesus Christ the son of the King of kings has espoused His bride the Church. He brought her to His bridal chamber and gave her as dowry, the Blood that came forth from His pierced side. He clothed her with a robe of brilliant light, and placed on her head a magnificent crown of praise. The following anthem says:

*“Confess, O Church the queen, the son of the king who has espoused you and brought you into His bed chamber **and gave you dowry, the Blood which He shed it for you from His side, and clothed you with a robe of brilliant light which is imperishable, and placed on your head a beautiful and glorious crown of praise.** And as the censer gives off its fragrance, so you give fragrance to everyone, and He adorned you like the rose and flowers and blossoms of spring. And on Golgotha he freed you from the service of idols. Then worship His Cross on which he suffered for you and exalted your lowliness, and honor the priests who serve you with their labors, and cry out to Him, Glory be to you: Glory be to you.”*⁴⁹

⁴⁸ (Khudra Vol. III P. 564, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁴⁹ (Ibid P. 609)

Clothing the Church (the bride) with the Robe of Glory.

The Syriac fathers believed that Adam and Eve while they were living in paradise, before the fall, were clothed with the robe of glory. But once they broke the commandment of God they were stripped off it. The purpose of God from the plan of Salvation was to make it possible once again for mankind to regain the lost robe of glory. Thus God the word humbled himself and put on a human body in the virginal womb and was born of the blessed Mary.

Then Jesus Christ by His descending into the Jordan River on the day of His Baptism has deposited the robe of glory in the water of baptism and, made it always available for mankind to put it on through the Sacrament of the holy baptism. Saint Ephrem says: *“The River in which Christ was baptized was clothed in light from within.”* (Ephrem, Hymns on the Church, 36:6.). Jacob of Serugh explains how the robe once again becomes available to mankind:

*“Christ came to baptism, he went down and placed in baptismal water the robe of glory, so that the robe which Adam had lost might be there for him.”*⁵⁰

Therefore in accordance with the Baptismal theology of the Church of the East, once the candidates of Baptism descended into the consecrated water of Baptism, they put off the corrupted garment of the flesh, which is stained by sin. Then they put on once again the garment of glory and consequently they come out of the water of Baptism, sanctified, pardoned and clothed with glory. Saint Ephrem in one of the hymns says:

*“In baptism Adam has found
That glory which he had possessed among the trees (of paradise);
He went down and took it up from the water,
He put it on, went up and was held in honour thanks to it.”*⁵¹

⁵⁰ (Sebastian P. Brock, The Harp, Vol. IV, No. 1, 2, 3. July 1991. A Review of the Syriac and Oriental Studies. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI Baker Hill, Kottayam- 686 001, Kerala, India P. 203)

⁵¹ (Ibid P. 203)

Saint Ephrem in his hymns for the Feast of Epiphany says:

*“Baptism is bringing forth the heavenly from the earthly
The baptized when they come up are sanctified
The sealed when they go down are pardoned.
They who come up have put on glory,
They who go down have cast off sin
Adam put off his glory in a moment,
Ye have been clothed with glory in a moment.”*⁵²

Again in regards to the idea of clothing the Church, the bride of the heavenly bride groom, with the robe of glory (robe of light), Saint Ephrem the Syriac says:

*“Adam was stripped of glory - his robe of glory by sin. But this effect of the fall is reversed by the divine word ‘stripping off His own glory’ and putting on a body’, that is, humanity, and so raised the humanity into its original state, **clothed in the robe of glory.**”*⁵³ Saint Ephrem the Syriac goes further by saying: the Merciful One, ‘Jesus Christ’ wove her, ‘the Church’ a garment of light, and clothed her with it.

*“Let the soul thank You - that filthy thing that You wiped clean
Of the stains of debts she increased by her freedom.
For her whose will wove her a stained garment,
The Merciful One wove her a garment of light, and clothed her.”*⁵⁴

⁵² (Ephrem, Hymns for the Feast of Epiphany, 6, 9. Quoted from Christian classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213.toc.html>)

⁵³ (S.P. Brock, the Luminous Eye 65, Quoted from, Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam -680010, Kerala, India. 1998, p.290)

⁵⁴ (Cathleen E. McVey, Ephrem the Syriac Hymns, Paulist Press, N.Y. Mahwah. 1989. Hymns on virginity, 37.6. P.426)

In the following anthem the universal Church all over the world, glorifies and offers thanks giving to the Lord, for clothing her with the garment of glory:

*“Behold, O Christ, the Church in all corners of the world, raises glory unto you. For you have raised her horn and **clothed her with glory.** And behold people of all times, races and generations who are purchased by your blood and redeemed by your Cross, sing within her unto you.”*⁵⁵

Again Saint Ephrem says:

*“With garments of glory I am clothed; with raiment of light I am wrapped. From the water I have become a virgin and behold, angels are rejoicing at me,”*⁵⁶

Putting on Christ in Baptism:

The two early fathers of the Church of the East namely; Aphrahat and Ephrem have believed that clothing the righteous people with the garment of glory denotes putting on Christ Himself.⁵⁷

In the following Hymn Saint Ephrem relates the garment of glory to the body of Christ. *“Your garment, is a fountain of medicines: in your visible clothing there dwells Your hidden power.”*⁵⁸

In accordance with the following liturgical anthems, the garment of light with which the bride is clothed is woven by Jesus Christ Himself. And it is made of purple, gold and light. It is also believed that this light is her bridegroom, Jesus Christ himself.

⁵⁵ (Khudra Vol. III P. 592, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁵⁶ (S. P. Brock. “An Epiphany Hymn on the Church as the bride of Christ” Harp 2 (1989) 136.)

⁵⁷ (Aphrahat the Persian sage, Dem XIV.39 .ps1 col681.)

⁵⁸ (Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Faith, 10:7, the fathers of the Church, translated by: Jeffrey T. Wickes. P. 122)

*“With His delighted oil anointed my head. By His life-giving chalice watered my heart. His mercies are much better than wine. He wished me a sincere life. He (Jesus) is mine and I am His. **He is pleased with me and put me on (clothed himself with me) and I have put Him on.** By the kisses of His mouth He kissed me. And took me into the heavenly bridal chamber.”*
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The following anthem says: the beauty of the bride ‘the Church’ was perfected with gold and praises the purple which Christ ‘the bridegroom’ has knitted unto her.

*“Blessed are you o faithful Church. The bride of the father the King of kings. In accordance with the proclamation of the words of the prophets. Her beauty was perfected with **gold**. At the presence of those above and those below. Praised is the decoration with which the Father has decorated you. Praised is the **purple** which **the Son of the King has knitted unto you**. Praised is the bridal bed (bridal abode) that which the Holy Spirit fixed firm unto you.....”*⁶⁰

The robe of brilliant light with which the bride is clothed is imperishable. It is written:

*“Confess, O Church the queen, the son of the king who has espoused you and brought you into His bridal chamber and gave you dowry, the Blood which He made it flow for you from His side, **and clothed you with a robe of brilliant light which is imperishable**, and placed on your head a beautiful and glorious crown of praise. And as the censer gives off its fragrance, so you give fragrance to everyone, and He adorned you like the rose and flowers and blossoms of spring. And on Golgotha he freed you from the service of idols. Then worship His Cross on which he suffered for you and exalted your lowliness, and honor the priests who serve you with their labors, and cry out to Him, Glory be to you: Glory be to you.”*⁶¹

Saint Paul in his epistle to Galatians clearly says: in baptism the baptized are clothed with Christ Himself. Therefore the garment of glory and imperishable

⁵⁹ (Khudra Vol. III P. 586, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁶⁰ (Ibid P. 585)

⁶¹ (Ibid P. 609)

brilliant light with which the baptized are clothed is indeed Christ Himself. It is written:

*“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*⁶²

The following anthems confirm what Saint Paul is saying in his epistle to Galatians namely putting on Christ in Baptism.

*“All of you, those who were baptized in Christ, have clothed themselves with Christ from water and Spirit. So that you will rule with Him in the heavenly dwelling place.”*⁶³

Again it is written:

*“Since you rose from water, you rose from among the dead too. **You put on Christ, you put on the Holy Spirit as well.**”*⁶⁴

In accordance with the liturgy of the Holy Baptism, by the grace of God, the baptized puts off in the font of Baptism the old man who was corrupted by the breaking of the Commandment of God and puts on a new Man namely Jesus Christ.

*“Let us all therefore, being beloved children of holy baptism, pray for these our sons and daughters, who are his works, and being perfected and fulfilled in the true faith of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that they may be made worthy to receive this great and wonderful gift of grace, and to put off in absolving Baptism the old man who was corrupted in the lusts of error, and to put on by the washing of the holy water the new man, who in God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth, and to receive from the holy altar the Body and Blood of Christ and earnest of the resurrection of life.”*⁶⁵

⁶² (Galatians 3:27)

⁶³ (Khudra Vol. II, P 530, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁶⁴ (Khudra Vol. I, P 622, printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁶⁵ (The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Adai and Mari and the order of Baptism, Urmiae, Typis Missionis Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis, 1893, P. 68)

However in accordance with the following anthems, clothing the Church with the garment of light and glory will be completed when the bridegroom comes for the second time in his great glory and takes His bride the Church up into His heavenly bridal chamber.

*“The Church, sings glory with the mouth of her children, unto the glorified groom who has betrothed her and made her enter into his bed-chamber. And (He the bride) gave her freedom from the slavery of idols unto her who was submitted to error. And He paved unto her the path of the life to come. And the blessings which do no not pass away. And He tightened her with the armor of the Holy Spirit by which she strengthens and conquers the power of the tyrant ruler. And behold the decorated bride delights and rejoices. In Jesus who has suffered on her behalf and saved her by His Cross. **When he comes in his glory, will clothe her with the garment of glory.**”⁶⁶*

Putting on the robe of glory becomes a reality at the Resurrection when all the righteous people will be clothed with the robe of glory.

*“By one Spirit you were baptized, with one Spirit you were clothed. One Lord you have known. With His name you will be called. And with Him you will rejoice in the dwelling place filled with blessings.”⁶⁷ “Great is your gift towards mortals O merciful Lord. Through water **You have clothed us with your Spirit.** By bread you have fed us with your body. And by your living Blood you have sanctified us. **And you have mixed us with spiritual beings. And from earth to heaven you have elevated us.**”⁶⁸*

Christ adorning His bride, the Church:

In the Old Testament, Prophet Ezekiel (16: 8-14) records the story of Yahweh adorning His bride the people of Israel. This story has been recognized as a prefiguration of Christ the heavenly bridegroom who will adorn His bride, the Church, with spiritual beauty. The following anthem says; Christ has adorned His bride, the Church, with all the heavenly beauties and glorious ornaments.

⁶⁶ (Khudra Vol. III P. 596, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁶⁷ (Khudra Vol. II, P 530, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁶⁸ (Khudra Vol. I, P 475, printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

*“O Church adorned bride, the betrothed (Fiancée) of Jesus our savior. Behold thunders within you from all corners, the voice of your children in glory. And confess unto Christ the King. **Who by His grace has increased your splendor and decorated you in all heavenly beauties by the spirit which He has given (unto) you.** Confess to Him along with the one who has sent Him”.* ⁶⁹

The ornaments of the bride:

The ornaments with which the bride of Christ is decorated are Faith, Hope and Charity. In the following anthem, the community of believers who have gathered in a worship service asks the Lord to adorn the sons and daughters of the Church with Faith, Hope, and Charity.

*“Cloth her pontiffs with salvation. And her righteous ones with a beautiful and desirable glory. **Adorn her children with Faith, Hope and Love.** And keep them under the wings of the Cross. Fulfill unto them your grace and the aid of your mercy. And delight them in the bridal chamber that does not pass away.”* ⁷⁰

Robert Murray says: *“Further, the ornaments which beautify the Church are these: it is through innocence, purity and charity.”*⁷¹ In regards the adorning of the Church, Saint Ephrem in his Hymn the Syriac on Fasting says: *“The king has adorned her with fasting, prayer and watching.”* ⁷²

In the following anthem, the fathers of the Church confirm the divinity of the beauty of the bride simply because her beauty is spiritual and springs from God the father himself.

*“Applaud, and praise, O Church the princess. Rejoice and be happy O daughter of the light. **Because all her beauty comes from her father. And with elegant modesty is decorated. She is filled with spiritual beauties.** Mercy flow out upon the lips of the bridegroom who has betrothed you along with His splendor and glory. He conquered the tyrant your adversary. **With qualified features decorated and braided the crown of glory which he has***

⁶⁹ (Khudra Vol. III P. 592, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁷⁰ (Ibid P. 572)

⁷¹ (R. Murray, symbols of the Church and Kingdom, Cambridge University Press 1975. P. 139.)

⁷² (Ibid P. 137.)

***placed on your head.** And the stones of your fortified walls are made of crystals. And your doors are made of pearls. As a prophet has prophesied in the spirit. That all the kings with their crowns, have bowed their heads and worshiped before him, He who makes crowns and anoints pontiffs, the glorified groom who has betrothed you. Pay unto Him glory on behalf of the daughter of Zion. Because she has oppressed His glory and worshipped the calf. Worship, praise, confess and say: glory be unto you.*"⁷³

Adorned bride as a heavenly City:

The Holy Church teaches that Jesus Christ established one Church. This means the church in heaven (the victorious church) and the church on earth (the Militant church) are not two churches but rather one church. The decorated bride, the Church on earth, is a symbol of the Church in heaven. The Church in heaven is also known as the heavenly Jerusalem, holy city of God, Heavenly Paradise, Kingdom, heavenly tabernacle and adorned bride of the Lamb. Theodore of Mopsuestia describing the heavenly Church says:

“Christ Our Lord established a Kingdom in heaven, and Established it there as a city in which He has His Kingdom, Which the blessed Paul calls “Jerusalem which is above, **free, And mother of all**” since it is in it that we are expecting to Dwell and abide. That city is full of immortal companies of Angels and men who are all immortal and immutable ... those Who draw nigh unto Him in this world He wished them to be, Through religion and faith, as in the symbol of heavenly Things, and He **so constituted the Church as to be a symbol of The heavenly things**; and He wished that those who believe in Him should live in it.”⁷⁴

The Crowning of the Bride:

One of the most important part of the Liturgy of the Holy Matrimony of the Church of the East is the liturgy of the crowning. In accordance with the liturgical teachings of the Church, the celebrant Priest, blesses the crown and places it on the head of the bride. Prophet Ezekiel says God Himself has placed a splendid crown on

⁷³ (Khudra Vol. III P. 611, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

⁷⁴ [(A. Mingana (ed & tr. Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, (Wood Brooke Studies 6) (Cambridge: 1933) 23-24)]

the head of Israel, his bride. (Ez. 16:12) The following anthem says Christ the heavenly bridegroom has prepared the imperishable crown of glory and placed it on the head of his bride, the new Israel, the Church.

*“With beauty and glory the Son of God has crowned his betrothed Church. And the congregations of the height and of the earth are invited to her wedding feast. In order to serve in her banquet. **He has knitted crowns unto her from the glorified rays of the light of His hidden Father. And placed them upon her head and adorned her.** On the cross roads he has sent His sign. And invited and called all the generations, to come and give their gifts, in the wedding feast of the Church the bride of the King. **The Son of the most high in His Love betrothed her.** The priests came and cast their ranks. The prophets cast their revelations. The Apostles cast their preaching. The martyrs cast (shed) the blood of their necks. And the assembly of the height their offerings. And all the nations their adoration. Blessed is He who has fixed His throne in His Church. And filled her palaces. And with the celestial beings let us celebrate and say glory be unto you.”⁷⁵*

Conclusion:

The focus of our paper is the imagery of the Church as a bride of Christ. This image teaches us the meaning of the Church as a mystery and communion. The image of the church as a bride is clearly found in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

In the tradition of the Church of the East the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ is expressed through the nuptial language and events. The liturgical prayers of the Church explains the mystery of the church as a bride by using the nuptial realities such as betrothal, bridal bath, paying off of the dowry, adorning, beautifying and crowning. Furthermore we have learned from the Holy Bible, the writings of the Church fathers and the liturgical Hymns that through the redemptive act of Christ the church which was under the slavery of sin was purified, beautified, sanctified and made worthy to become the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom.

⁷⁵ (Khudra Vol. III P. 611, Printed at the Mar Narsai press, Trichur, South India 1962)

Christ through His Baptism at the Jordan River and his sacrificial death on the Cross out of His love for His Church has sanctified her and made her a holy and blameless bride unto Himself.

He made the Church His bride and the mother of all believers through the mystery of water and blood that flowed out of His side. Water and blood symbolize the initial sacraments of the Church such as baptism and Eucharist. Consequently, He enabled her to become both; the bride and the spiritual mother simultaneously. The Church as a virgin and a mother; purified and adorned; as a 'type' and a 'reality' is looking forward of the final communion with the heavenly Bridegroom in the heavenly bridal chamber.