

## **JESUS AND KING ABGAR: NO DOUBT THE LORD COULD WRITE!**

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Ever hear comments such as “The Disciples were all illiterate,” “None of them knew Greek;” or, in the case of the Tradition about Jesus and King Abgar “But Jesus couldn’t write”. Oh, really.

The great Church Historian Eusebius [his history covers the first 300 years, to St. Constantine the Great, who ‘liberated’ Christianity] supplies written evidence of a letter exchange between King Abgar of Edessa and Christ:

Written evidence of these things is available, taken from the Record Office at Edessa, at that time the royal capital. In the public documents there, embracing early history and also the events of Abgar’s time, this record is found preserved from then until now; and the most satisfactory course is to listen to the actual letters, which *I have extracted from the archives and translated word for word from the Syriac as follows* (emphasis supplied)

[Eusebius, *THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH*, Book 1, #13, p. 31.]

King Abgar had written Christ and requested he come to Edessa, even suggesting that he relocate there since it was a big enough place for both of them. Here is King Abgar’s letter:

COPY OF A LETTER WRITTEN BY ABGAR THE TOPARCH TO  
JESUS AND SENT TO HIM AT JERUSALEM BY THE COURIER  
ANANIAS

‘Abgar Uchama the Toparch to Jesus, who has appeared as a gracious saviour in the region of Jerusalem – greeting.

I have heard about you and about the cures you perform without drugs or herbs. If report is true, you make the blind see again and the lame walk about; you cleanse lepers, expel unclean spirits and demons, cure those suffering from chronic and painful diseases, and raise the dead. When I heard all this about you, I concluded that one of two things must be true – either you *are* God and came down from heaven to do these things, or you *are God’s Son* doing them. Accordingly I am writing to beg you to come to me, whatever the inconvenience, and cure the disorder from which I suffer. I may add that I understand the Jews are treating you with contempt and desire to injure you: my

city is very small, but highly esteemed, adequate for both of us.’ (all emphases supplied)

[*ibid.* 31.]

Eusebius also records Christ’s responsive letter to the King sent back via the same courier:

It is desirable also to hear the letter which Jesus sent him by the same letter-carrier. It is only a few lines long, but very impressive:

JESUS’S REPLY TO THE TOPARCH ABGAR BY THE COURIER ANANIAS

‘Happy are you who believed in me *without having seen me!* (emphasis supplied) For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen will believe and live. As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it must at once be taken up to the One who sent me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you.’

[*id.* pp. 31-32.]

Attached to the archive document was additional comment in Syriac that after the Ascension the Apostle Thomas sent Thaddaeus, one of the Seventy, to cure King Abgar:

King Abgar to Thaddaeus:

Are you really a disciple of Jesus the Son of God, who said to me ‘I will send you one of my disciples who will cure you and give you life?’

Thaddaeus:

You wholeheartedly believed in the One who sent me, and for that reason I was sent to you. And again, if you believe in Him, in proportion to your belief shall the prayers of your heart be granted.

King Abgar:

I believed in Him so strongly that I wanted to take an army and destroy the Jews who crucified Him, if I had not been prevented by the imperial power of Rome from doing so.

Thaddaeus:

Our Lord has fulfilled the will of His Father, after fulfilling it He was taken up to the Father.

King Abgar:

I too have believed in Him and His Father.

Thaddaeus:

For that reason I lay my hand on you in His name.

[*id.*, pp. 32-33.]

When he did this, Abgar was instantly cured of the disease and disorder from which he suffered.

[*id.*, p. 33.]

When he arrived in the country (Edessa) Thaddaeus restored Abgar to health by the word of Christ, and amazed all the inhabitants by his wonderful miracles.... From that day to this the whole city of Edessa has been devoted to the name of Christ, providing most convincing proof of our Saviour's goodness to them also.

[*id.*, Book 2, # 1, p. 36.]

All this happened in the year 340. [fn 1 – 'of the Selucid era – apparently A.D. 30, the probable year of the Ascension'.]

[*id.* p. 34.]

Here we may leave for the present this *valuable document, literally translated* (emphasis supplied) from Syriac.

[*id.*]

The fourth century nun Egeria's account of her late fourth century pilgrimage to the Holy Land is further evidence of the Tradition of the Lord's letter to King Abgar of Edessa. Her recollection of her pilgrimage is full of spirituality and details regarding how early Christianity was and what and how the Liturgy was celebrated in the Mother Church, Jerusalem: <http://www.ccel.org/m/mcclure/etheria/etheria.htm>.

Egeria confirms the records at Edessa:

The letter is kept with great reverence at the city of Edessa, where the memorial is.

[Egeria, *ibid.*, JOURNEY INTO MESOPOTAMIA, p. 23.]

Egeria states that she received both letters, to Christ and His reply, from a holy bishop of Edessa:

It was very pleasant to me to receive from the holy man himself the letters of Abgar to the Lord and of the Lord to Abgar, which the holy bishop had read to us there. For *although I have copies at home, yet it seemed to me more pleasant to receive them from him lest perhaps*

*something less might have reached us at home and indeed that which I received here is fuller (emphasis supplied).*

[*id.*, THE STORY OF KING ABGARUS, p. 26.]

From the spiritual proof and further written evidence in the Edessa archives, we can be assured that Christ, indeed, can write and did so to King Abgar. Christ can do anything. A most important spiritual message from the exchange between King Abgar and Jesus is the clear faith he has in Christ. There were only two alternatives re Christ to King Abgar in his mind. Each of these expressed his unconditional belief in Him. Either He was God who had come down from heaven or God's Son, who was doing these wonderful things. Isn't this the faith we are called to believe? A faith clear and concise, pure and expressed in simplicity by one who had *not* seen the Lord.

*Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have **not** seen, **and yet** have believed (all bold emphases supplied).*

[St. John 20:29]

Our faith is not determined by reasoning and logic but by our simple faith itself.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.