

Once Upon a

SAINT

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St. Teklehaimanot



Drawing by Miriam, age 8

My dearest children, in thirteenth century Ethiopia, a priest whose name was Sagazab lived with his wife Sarah. They were very holy, always praying or serving the poor. They were unfortunately unable to have children.

A pagan named Montmely was ruler of the land. He destroyed Churches and killed Christians. One day, Montmely's soldiers attacked the village of Abouna

Sagazab and Sarah (Abouna means "father"). The two were separated. Sarah was taken, and because of her beauty was thought to be the perfect new bride for Montmely. Meanwhile, Abouna Sagazab was chased, and threw himself into a lake to escape the soldiers.

Abouna Sagazab prayed, "St. Michael! Please help me stay underwater until the soldiers leave! If I come up I will be killed!!"

St. Michael appeared before Abouna Sagazab, brilliant and majestic. "Sagazab, I will help you. You and Sarah will have a child, a holy son who will do great good for the Lord's cause. Now the soldiers are gone, and I will take you back to your village."

St. Michael transported Abouna Sagazab home. Sarah was not there. The village had been largely destroyed, so now he must work to help the families left behind. Not long after, Abouna Sagazab was celebrating Liturgy. He put Sarah's name on the altar and the whole congregation prayed for her. At the end of the service he noticed a beautiful woman arrayed in spectacularly rich wedding garments praying devoutly. He went to welcome her, and to his surprise she indicated her wedding garments:

"See! I have come to be your wife."

Abouna Sagazab laughed: "priests do not remarry, and anyway I already have a wife, my dearest Sarah."

The woman tore off her veil: "oh husband! It is I, Sarah! I was dressed in these clothes and was about to be married to that horrible Montmely! I pleaded with St. Michael to save me, and found myself home! Oh! God is so good! So you see, I *am here to be your wife!*"

Abouna Sagazab and Sarah gave everything they had to

the poor (including those rich wedding garments!), and they thanked St. Michael. Soon after, Sarah gave birth to a son, who they called Teklehaimanot, which roughly means "to plant the True Faith."

Straight away the baby began to perform miracles. He began to talk when he was just three days old. Once there was a famine in the land and Sarah began to cry. Teklehaimanot was only a year and a half, but he gathered his mother's tears and turned them into flour! He increased the oil, honey and ghee as well. Teklehaimanot was a prayerful boy, and studied the psalms and Bible. As a young man Teklehaimanot traveled with his father. While visiting a beautiful Church in Egypt, he found himself kneeling before the Coptic Patriarch Kyrillos. The Patriarch laid his hands on Teklehaimanot's head and consecrated him a deacon! Apparently, the Patriarch had had a dream the night before, where he saw Teklehaimanot. St. Michael also appeared to him.

"Kyrillos! This dark young man you will see tomorrow is to be ordained a deacon and later a priest!"

Teklehaimanot increased his prayer and fasting. He became a priest, and wandered around, casting out demons and performing miracles. In Ketana there is a story of a devil haunting a tree. The people worshiped the tree and served the devil, being terrified of him. Abouna Teklehaimanot prayed, and the tree uprooted and began to follow him!

The devil pleaded, "Teklehaimanot! Let me go!"

Abouna Teklehaimanot replied, "yes, but first tell the people of Ketana who is the King of Heaven and Earth, so they need not be afraid of ridiculous haunted trees!"

After a pause, the devil shouted, "fine, anything you say. The real King is... Jesus! (Oh, how that name burns my tongue! How cruel you are, Teklehaimanot, to make me say it!) Christ the King makes my power look like a particle of dust next to a desert!"

Abouna then commanded the devil to return to hell, and told the people all about God. They were so relieved and happy! Many thousands of people were baptized.

In Damout, Abouna Teklehaimanot built a Church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and began smashing idols and preaching about God. King Montmely's son saw what was happening.

"Why do you break all our gods?" He demanded.

The holy man looked hard at the prince. "These idols

look less like gods than you do, but you are possessed by a demon like they are. Out demon! I will baptize this prince so that he might reflect God's image more perfectly!"

With that, a demon in the shape of a monkey jumped out of the prince. The prince was baptized, along with his wife and son. Well, you can imagine what Montmely thought about his son becoming Christian! He sent his soldiers to fetch Abouna Teklehaimanot and the prince. He tortured them, demanding that they renounce Christ. They would not. What's more, whatever wounds they were given immediately healed! Montmely tried to get the wild animals to eat them, but around Abouna, the animals were tame. He tried to throw a spear and kill Abouna Teklehaimanot himself, and found his arm paralyzed. Finally, he hung the saint from a tree, but the tree bent down so that Abouna Teklehaimanot was standing on solid ground.

Montmely sighed. "Very well! I give up! I guess I will have to be Christian too! My kingship will serve Christ the King from now on, because He is more powerful than I am!"

Having converted much of Ethiopia, Abouna Teklehaimanot retreated to a monastery. He had many visitors, and while he stayed in multiple hermitages, he was always found again by people seeking his wisdom and miracles. He fasted all the time and prayed. Once he was visiting a monastery that was below a tall cliff. The other monks tied a rope at the top so he could climb down. To their horror, the rope broke, and Abouna was falling!

Suddenly, Abouna Teklehaimanot sprouted six wings and flew to the monastery below. He ministered to the hermits in the desert and later went to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, always preaching and praising God. He finally went to Shawiry, where he spent the last of his days.

By this time Abouna Teklehaimanot was getting quite old. He was nearly 100! He would often eat nothing and stand on one leg, praying. One day his right leg broke! He didn't hesitate, but stood on his left foot instead. He contracted a plague, and as he was dying he saw a beautiful vision: Christ, Mama Mary, and the Archangel Michael were waiting to take him Home to Heaven, surrounded by other angels and a glorious light. The heavenly light remained in the cave for a little while after his death, and the cave smelled better than the most amazing perfume.

St. Teklehaimanot is so important to the Ethiopian Church that they celebrate his feast on the 24th of every month. The rest of the Churches celebrate his feast on the 30th of August.