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## The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

**The Third Sunday of zemene sibket (ኖላዊ/The Good Shepherd)** - *The Church focuses on the **proclamations** and **prophecies** about the coming of the Messiah.)*

### **Liturgical Readings:**

Heb. 13:16—end; 1Pet 2: 21 —end; Acts 11:22—end

Psalm 80:1

John 10: 1 – 22

### **The Anaphora of Our Lord**

## **Jesus Christ is Our Good Shepherd**

The Lord declares in the Gospel according to John: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). In these words, beloved, we encounter the tender, unwavering love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Shepherd who knows each of His sheep, calls them by name, and leads them to verdant pastures and still waters. He is not a hireling, concerned only for gain or personal safety, but the true Shepherd who gives His life for the flock entrusted to Him. Today, we reflect upon this profound mystery, recognizing Christ as the source of our security, our guidance, and our eternal hope.

From the earliest times, God has revealed Himself as a Shepherd to His people. The psalmist prays, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock” (Psalm 80:1), invoking the divine guidance that protects, sustains, and nourishes. This imagery resonates through salvation history: shepherds were entrusted with life itself, guiding vulnerable flocks through danger, providing for them, and defending them against all perils. Even in the earthly vocation of men, we see examples of courage and care for the sheep. The young David, tending his father’s flocks, risked his life to protect them from lion and bear (1 Samuel 17:34–35), foreshadowing the ultimate Shepherd who would lay down His life for His flock.

Jesus Christ is that ultimate Shepherd. He comes not as one who exploits, but as one who serves. The Good Shepherd knows the needs of His sheep intimately, and His care extends beyond mere sustenance to the assurance of life eternal. When Lazarus lay in the grave, Christ wept and declared, “This sickness will not end in death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4). In this, we witness the shepherd’s heart: He does not abandon the lost or the suffering; rather, He enters into the darkness of death itself to bring life, hope, and restoration.

The prophets of old anticipated this Shepherd who would care for the nations. Isaiah spoke of a servant sent as a light and a covenant to the peoples: “I will make You a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). Here we perceive the universal scope of Christ’s shepherding love: His flock includes not only Israel, but all peoples, and His guidance extends to every corner of creation. The Good Shepherd’s concern is not limited by boundaries, race, or status; His care is total, tender, and relentless.

The epistle of Hebrews reminds us of the ethical response required of those under His care: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13:16). To follow the Good Shepherd is to embody His love in action, feeding the hungry, comforting the afflicted, and guarding the weak. Likewise, Peter exhorts us, saying, “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps... who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:21–22). The Good Shepherd leads not only by instruction, but by example: selfless, humble, and holy, calling His flock to a life of imitation and devotion.

In the early Church, the apostles were called to shepherd the burgeoning community of believers. When the disciples in Antioch were sent to minister to the scattered faithful, “those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen... they preached the word to no one but the Jews only. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene... who went to Antioch and spoke to the Greeks also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:19–20). Here we see the Shepherd’s mission extended through His servants: shepherding is not solitary but communal, and the Good Shepherd works through the hands, voices, and hearts of His followers to bring the lost into the fold.

Beloved, the Good Shepherd knows each of His sheep by name, calls us to hear His voice, and promises us safety: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27–28). In the turbulent valleys of life, when wolves of sin, fear, and despair threaten to scatter us, we may trust in His protection. He is not a distant overseer, but a Shepherd who walks among us, tenderly correcting, guiding, and laying down His life to rescue and redeem.

The Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, with its profound liturgical and ascetical heritage, reminds us that following the Good Shepherd is not passive. It requires attention to the voice of Christ in Scripture, in the sacraments, in prayer, and in the ethical witness of our lives. It calls us to imitate Him in humility, compassion, and courage, embracing suffering when necessary, yet always anchored in hope, for the Shepherd who laid down His life also rose in glory.

Let us, therefore, heed the call of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Let us open our hearts to His voice, follow His guidance, and embody His care in the world. May we never fear the shadows, for He walks with us. May we imitate His example, offering love, mercy, and service to those entrusted to us. And may our proclamation be steadfast and unwavering: Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd, who calls, protects, and saves His flock; to Him be glory now and forever. Amen.