

Ethiopia and its New Millennium

By Befekir Kebede

Ethiopia is an ancient country with a lot of its bed-rock traditions and monuments intact. The Church of Bete Giorgis in Lalibela - northern Ethiopia – was carved out of a single giant stone during the 12th century and it still draws large crowds not just from within Ethiopia but around the world as well. And not only does it attract tourists for its old and unique architecture, but also for being a place where medieval rituals of the Church are still practiced in Modern Ethiopia. Axum, which was Queen of Sheba's capital in the 10th century BC, still has its historical obelisks that were carved out of tall granite stones during the 4th century.

Ethiopia is the place where coffee was discovered first; it is the resting place of the Arc of the Covenant; has produced successive world-class sporting heroes; and is the only African nation to have maintained its independence in the face of European colonization.

But significant milestones are not confined to the distant past in Ethiopia. Just last year in 2006, Ethiopian scientists uncovered the remains of a 3.3-million-year-old human-like child in the country – the oldest discovered ancestor of human beings to date. Until this discovery, the best example of this family of early human ancestors was Lucy – an adult woman found in Ethiopia in 1974.

Yet, 2007 is a year that is set to mark an important milestone in Ethiopia's history. The country will start the year 2000 on 12 September. This is due to the fact that Ethiopia follows the old Christian calendar known as the Julian calendar. For anyone setting foot in Ethiopia from anywhere else in the world, the very first impression they are likely to come across is that – all of a sudden - they are eight years younger. The Julian calendar is Ethiopia's official calendar and is used to carry out internal day-to-day social, economic, cultural and educational activities.

Many Ethiopians see the new millennium as an unprecedented opportunity to provide a more up-to-date and accurate image of Ethiopia to the world. This is due to the fact that the country's general image has been tarnished by relentless reports of famine in the mainstream media, leading many outsiders to believe that Ethiopia is a featureless, barren land inhabited by suffering and destitute people.

Ethiopia does remain a third world country with various worldly problems. However, it is far from the image that has been relentlessly solidified in the

media for decades. Ethiopia is beautiful; possesses magnificent landscapes, is inhabited by diverse, cheerful, and courteous people, and has a history of many thousand years.

Ethiopia is a country where so many different cultures come together as one to form a fascinating nation. It is a country where the works of nature can truly be appreciated. And most of all, Ethiopia is a country where faith is the rule of life. It is a country where its people live cheerfully for they have faith and conviction that can be seen in everything they do.

Above and beyond, Ethiopia is culturally diverse, it has been existent since the beginning of time, and is incomparably unique. It is one of the richest countries in the world if affluence is measured in terms of cultural diversity and possession of historical records. One aspect of its uniqueness is having its own calendar, making it the only country to celebrate the year 2000 eight years later than the rest of the world.

For Ethiopia, the new millennium is more than just a day of celebrations; it is a whole new beginning and a motivation to look forward to the future with enthusiasm and hope. It is an occasion that only comes once in a thousand years in which Ethiopians from all walks of life should hold hands together to reflect on the past and to start afresh.