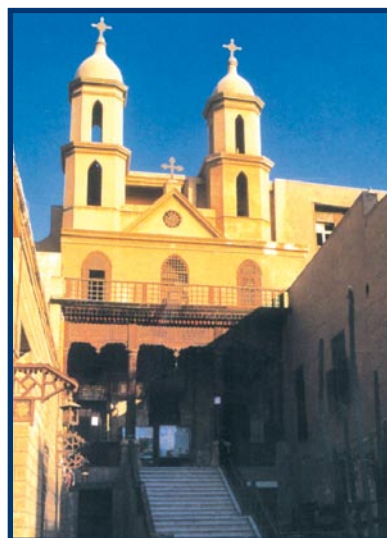


Benedictine Monasticism in the West based its monastic rules on those of Saint Pachomius. Many visitors came from the west in the early years of monasticism to learn from the simple Egyptian monks. People such as **Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Jerome, Saint John Cassian and Saint Palladius** wrote many books about the lives and sayings of the desert monks of Egypt as they experienced them. Monasticism is still thriving today, through a revival led by **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**. Many young men and women who were all well educated have chosen to leave the world and lead the monastic life because of a deep love for God. There are many inhabited monasteries and convents in Egypt as well as new monasteries being established abroad in Europe, U.S.A. and Australia.



Icon of Saint Anthony and Saint Paul

(g) **Prayer:** By means of public and private prayers, the church encourages her children to spend as much time with the Lord Christ as possible, and to deepen the relationship of love with him. Several aspects of Coptic prayer are: **Liturgy, Praises, Seven Canonical Hours, Passion Week, and Continual Prayer.**



The Hanging Church of Saint Mary in Old Cairo

9 Doctrine, Practice and Spirituality

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a deeply spiritual and conservative church that does not want to change any of the doctrines or rites as handed down to her by the founding Fathers of the Church in the early centuries of Christianity. The following are the seven basic corners of the Coptic Orthodox Church doctrine and practice:

(a) **The Bible:** The Holy Bible is the basic foundation of Coptic Orthodox faith and life. It is used frequently during communal prayers, Bible Study Groups are conducted in all churches, and every family and individual is encouraged to study it at home.

(b) **The Creed:** In her liturgies sacraments, prayers and all other ministries, the Coptic Orthodox Church uses the Nicene Constantinople Creed. It best summarises her doctrine.

(c) **The Sacraments:** A sacrament is an invisible grace given under a visible (material) sign. It should be administered by a canonical priest. The Coptic Orthodox Church believes in seven sacraments and these are: **Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation), Repentance and Confession, Eucharist, Unction of the Sick, Matrimony and Priesthood.**

(d) **The Virgin Mary:** Saint Mary is called, "*Theotokos*" meaning Mother of God. The Coptic Orthodox Church believes in the **perpetual virginity of Saint Mary**, before, during, and after the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like all other human beings, Saint Mary was born with the original sin (Ps. 51; Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22); but sanctified by the descent of the Holy Spirit since the incarnation of the Son of God.

(e) **Intercession:** The church asks, not only for the intercession of Saint Mary, but also for that of the angels, apostles, saints and martyrs.

(f) **Fasting:** Fasting for the Coptic Orthodox Church is a spiritual practice for the whole congregation, and it is not merely fasting from animal protein, but fasting helps one to conquer his bad habits and to express his love of God by trying to come closer to him. Fasting lasts for more than half of the year on different occasions, such as lent and advent.

10 The Copts Today

The Coptic Orthodox Church has in the last forty years spread all over the world. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has established over 200 churches abroad since his enthronement in 1971. These churches are in **Africa, Europe, U.S.A., Latin America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific and Asia**. The Coptic Orthodox Church is also very active in the ecumenical movement, having dialogues with many churches such as the **Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and various Protestant Churches**. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III was also one of the presidents of the **W.C.C.** and the **M.E.C.C.**

Today there are 10 million Copts all over the world. There is a large Coptic community in Victoria with seven churches, two schools, a monastery, one theological college and a conference centre. In 1999 His Grace Bishop Suriel was appointed to be the Bishop of the Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions, which includes Melbourne, Canberra, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand and the South Pacific.

For more information please contact us at

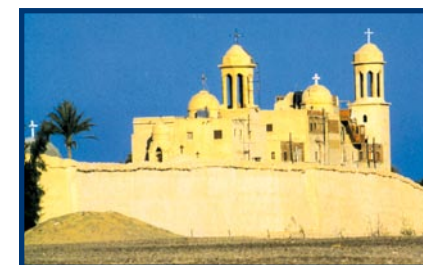
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The Coptic Orthodox Church



History, Beliefs and Spirituality



1 Blessed Egypt

Egyptian civilisation began more than three thousand years before Jesus Christ. God blessed Egypt from early times by saying, **“Blessed is Egypt My people.” (Isaiah 19:25)** God also said, **“There will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt.” (Isaiah 19:19)** This prophecy has been fulfilled through Christianity entering Egypt in the first century A.D.. The holy family visited Egypt and blessed places which have become holy sites, including the church of Saint Mary in Zeitoun, Cairo. At this church on the 2nd of April 1968, Saint Mary appeared on top of the domes of the church and many miracles took place. These apparitions lasted for more than two years.

2 The Term “Copt”

The word **“Copt”** basically means Egyptian. It is derived from the Greek word **“Aigyptos.”** By removing the first and last two letters in the Greek word we have, **“gypt”**, which has thus become the words **“Egypt”** and **“Copt.”** Later on in history the term **“Copt”** was used to refer to the **Orthodox Christians of Egypt**, who were referred to by Leeder as **“The modern sons of the pharaohs.”**

3 The Founder of The Church

The good news of Christianity arrived to Egypt through **Saint Mark** the apostle around **55 A.D.** Hence the Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest churches in the world, spanning 20 centuries of history. Saint Mark was one of the four evangelists who wrote the oldest of the four Gospels **“The Gospel According to Saint Mark.”** On entering Alexandria, he broke his sandal strap and went to a cobbler to repair it. The cobbler accidentally pierced his hand and cried out, **“O the one God.”** Saint Mark rejoiced at hearing this expression and miraculously healed the man’s wound and began to preach to this cobbler Anianus about the one God. Anianus and his family were baptised and many others followed. The apostle appointed Anianus as bishop and ordained three priests and seven deacons to assist him. Saint Mark is regarded as the first of an unbroken chain of 117 popes. The current pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church is **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III** whose title is, **“Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark.”** The founder of the church, Saint Mark is also the first saint and martyr, and many others followed throughout history. He was dragged through the streets of Alexandria by the pagans on Resurrection Eve in **68 A.D.** and was tortured until death the next day.



4 Church of Martyrs

After the martyrdom of Saint Mark in 68 A.D., the Coptic Orthodox Church enjoyed an almost unbroken peace until 202 A.D.. From 202-642 A.D., namely during the Roman period, twenty one persecutions overtook her. The seventh persecution inflamed by emperor **Diocletian**; his reign **(c. 284 A.D.-c. 305)** is considered by the Copts as the age of persecution. So profound was the impression of the persecution of Diocletian on Coptic life and thought that the Copts decided to adopt for Church use a calendar of the martyrs, the **“Anno Martyri.”** The first year of the calendar was **284 A.D.**, the year of the disastrous accession of Diocletian. The months used for this calendar are those inherited from the period of ancient Egypt. **The Coptic calendar has 13 months**, 12 of them are 30 days each and the 13th is 5 days (or 6 during a leap year). The Coptic New Year begins on 11 September.

5 The School of Alexandria

The school of Alexandria was undoubtedly the earliest important institution of theological learning in Christian antiquity. It was a school in which many other disciplines were studied from the humanities, science and mathematics; but its main discipline was religion. According to Eusebius, **its founder was Saint Mark** who appointed **Justus** as its dean (later on, Justus became the sixth patriarch). Most of the eminent leaders of Alexandria were known to have been connected with it, either as teachers or students. The first great head of school was **Pantaenus**. Besides being a great teacher, he was credited as one of those who adopted the Greek alphabet in the Coptic script. He was elected by **Pope Demetrius I** for Christian mission to India. His successor was **Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 A.D. – c. 215 A.D.)**, the most illustrious pupil. Clement wrote abundantly although much of his work was lost. **Origen (c. 185 A.D. – c. 254 A.D.)** followed Clement about the year 215 A.D. He was Clement’s most brilliant pupil. As a young man he was extremely ascetic by nature. He carried the word of the Gospel (Mathew 19:12) literally and to the extent of mutilating himself. This fact of becoming a eunuch contributed to his future troubles with **Pope Demetrius I**. He wrote many great works, one of the most important being the **“Hexapla,”** this was a critical edition of the Old Testament combined in six parallel columns all the available text in both Greek and Hebrew scripts. Other important deans of the school were **Heracles** and **Didymus the blind** who formed a system of engraved writing for the blind, fifteen centuries before Braille.

After the council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., the school was closed down due to persecution from the emperors of Constantinople. In 1893, **Pope Kyrillos V** inaugurated a new seminary in Cairo. Besides this main one, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has established many seminaries in Egypt, Europe, the U.S.A and Australia.

6 The Coptic Orthodox Church and Heresies

In Egypt, two major heresies in succession gained considerable ground throughout the country; one was **Gnosticism** and the other was **Arianism**. The first one was refuted by **Clement, Origen, and Athanasius**. Arianism, which said that the Son was not of the same essence of the Father was condemned by **318 bishops at the ecumenical council of Nicea in 325 A.D.**

It was **Saint Athanasius** that defended the faith against Arius and produced the **Nicean-Constantinople Creed** that is proclaimed in all churches today. There were other heresies by **Nestorius** and **Eutyches**, which were fought at other councils. The Coptic Orthodox Church recognises three Ecumenical Councils, namely **Nicea 325 A.D., Constantinople 381 A.D., and Ephesus 431 A.D.** The Coptic Orthodox Church has been unjustly labeled as being **“Monophysite,”** that is, only believing in one single nature of Christ and that being the divine nature. **This is not the case, the Coptic Orthodox Church believes in “one incarnate nature of God the Word” which is what Saint Cyril taught; a union of natures in Christ; both fully human and fully divine at the same time.**

7 The Coptic Orthodox Church and Mission

The Copts spread the faith in every direction beyond their geographical frontiers. They preached in **North Africa** and in **Ethiopia** where Saint Athanasius ordained **Frumentius** as bishop there. An Egyptian Legion from Thebes was sent by Diocletian to Gaul (France and Switzerland) to quell a rebellion. It was led by **Saint Maurice** who earned martyrdom, together with all the soldiers of the legion, for refusing to sacrifice to the idols. His statue stands today in one of the public squares of Saint Moritz. The **Theban Legion** was followed by missionaries who led themselves and reached the lake of Zurich, where they baptised converts until they themselves were martyred. Saint Verena who was also with the Theban Legion spent the rest of her life in Switzerland, educating people to become Christians and teaching them the principals of hygiene. Finally the Coptic missionaries reached as far as the **British Isles**. It is believed that **Irish Christianity** was influenced by **seven Egyptian monks** who are now buried in the desert Uldith, and there is much in the ceremonies and architecture of Ireland in the earliest time that reminds us of early Christian Egypt.



The Church of Saint Mary in Zeitoun, Cairo

8 Monasticism

Monasticism is basically leading a life of solitude, living in the desert away from the world in a life of prayer, contemplation, fasting and other ascetic practices. It is being alone with God, where the monk concentrates all of his life on being with God and doing his will. Monasticism is built on three basic principals of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Monasticism was founded by the Egyptian, **Saint Anthony**, known as **“the father of monasticism.”** Other important names in monasticism are **Saint Macarius** and **Saint Pachomius**, both from Egypt. It was Saint Pachomius who began to constitute monastic rules and began community life.