

THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

ITS ROOTS IN HISTORY & ITS ARTICLES OF FAITH

THE COPTIC CHURCH AND ITS ROOTS

Century (A.D.)

1st & 2nd

- St. Mark the Evangelist - Martyred (68 A.D.)
- St. Mark's successors (Popes)
- School of Alexandria - Catechism

3rd

- Roman Persecution
- Coptic Calendar
- Origin of monastic life - Desert fathers

Early 4th - mid 5th

- Church councils - Defending the faith
- Schism (division) at Chalcedon, 451 A.D.

Mid 5th - mid 7th

- Under the Byzantine Rule

Mid 7th - mid 9th

- Arab Conquest, 641 A.D.
- Under the Islamic Empire

THE COPTIC CHURCH AND ITS ROOTS

Century (A.D.)

Mid 9th - End of 18th

- Under independent Arab Rulers
- Under the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire

19th - Present

- Modern Age

ST. MARK & HIS SUCCESSORS

- The writer of the 2nd Gospel of the New Testament
- The founder of the Egyptian (Coptic) Church
- The first pope & patriarch of Alexandria
- The founder of the School of Alexandria

The Coptic Church, established by St. Mark, based on the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, has offered to the world: great leaders, unique experiences, and valuable teachings

ST. MARK

Childhood

- Born in Cyrene, one of 5 major cities (“Pentapolis”) in north Africa, of righteous and wealthy Jewish parents.
- They lost most of their possessions in a barbarian raid and migrated back to Jerusalem - where St. Mark was brought up.

ST. MARK

Apostleship

- The Lord Jesus chose St. Mark as one of the Seventy Apostles, and his mother's house for the Last Supper.
- The same house was the meeting place for the Apostles where the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the Day of Pentecost.
- To emphasize his role as an eye-witness of the Lord Jesus, the Church gave him the title "Beholder of God".

ST. MARK

Evangelism

- St. Mark accompanied St. Paul and St. Barnabas on their first missionary journey but left them at Pamphilia and returned to Judea.
- On the second journey, he went with St. Barnabas to Cyprus. He then went to Pentapolis, his birthplace, then to Egypt.

ST. MARK

In Egypt

- He entered Alexandria in mid 1st century A.D., when it was the most outstanding center of culture and a home for many philosophers and a magnificent library.
- He preached to Anianus, a shoemaker, after he healed his finger. Then, together they spread the Good News in Alexandria.
- He ordained Anianus as Bishop for Alexandria with 12 priests and 7 deacons. Then he left to Pentapolis, going to Rome where he again joined St. Paul in his ministry (Col 4:10, 2Tim 4:11, Phil 1:24)

ST. MARK

In Egypt

- When he returned he found that the Christians had already built a Church and grown in number significantly. He wrote his Gospel and continued to serve them until 68 A.D.
- He was seized and killed on Easter night, 68 A.D., and received the crowns of Apostleship, Evangelism and Martyrdom.

ST. MARK'S SUCCESSORS

- They carry the title “POPE” which means “Father of Fathers”: Pope and Patriarch of the Great City of Alexandria, all of Egypt, Ethiopia, Nubia, Sudan and the Pentapolis – the See of St. Mark.
- It was said about the prelates who succeeded him that they were "wise and good, meek and simple, and they taught the people with diligence and singleness of heart."
- They established Catechistic Schools to teach the fundamentals of Christianity, hence the name catechumen for the people who were being taught the new faith.

THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA

- Pre-Christian school encouraged and funded by Ptolemy, 323 B.C. Ptolemy also ordered the famous Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the "Septuagint" by 70 of the Jewish rabbis.
- It started as a school of science and literature, then expanded into philosophy and theological matters. The culture in Alexandria was quite advanced and diverse.
- The School of Alexandria played a critical role in the era of spreading the faith and leading the Christian teaching worldwide. It produced some of the most prominent Christian philosophers and Church fathers, e.g. Origen.

THE COPTIC LANGUAGE

- Pantaeenus and Clement (2nd century scholars) formalized the Coptic Language, based on the common Egyptian Language at that time (derivative from the ancient Hieroglyphic Language). They used the Greek Alphabet, with the addition of 6 letters.
- They also translated the Bible into Coptic in the second century. This is one of the most ancient translations of the Bible. Other valuable Coptic manuscripts are also in existence.
- It was the dominant language in Egypt until the 10th century when finally it was overcome by Arabic as the Arab rulers forced their language on the Egyptians.

MARTYRDOM

- The Coptic Church, though very peaceful and loving towards everyone, suffered severe persecutions across all ages. The faithful Christians in Egypt preferred torture and death (martyrdom) over giving up their faith and love.

Martyrdom is ...

Passion, courage, preaching, and practical proof of the
Christian faith and virtues

MARTYRDOM

- The Coptic Church is known for offering the largest number of martyrs (witnesses to the Lord) in the World.
- **Martyrs = Witnesses:** suffered persecution and death as witnesses for Christ "and you shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8)
- Confessors: suffered persecution and torture but were not killed
- Martyrs and Confessors were persecuted due to their firm stand regarding their Christian faith, their chastity and purity, as well as the Biblical and Church doctrine

MARTYRDOM

- The martyrs knew that this world is temporary with respect to eternal life. They also knew that The sadness, pain & suffering of this world will result in great glory in heaven.

Therefore ...

- They rejected everything carnal or worldly
- They longed to leave the body and be with Christ
- They did all of that with great love and joy

MARTYRDOM

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

(Mat 5:10-12)

MONASTICISM

- Asceticism / Ascetic Life is a chosen life of poverty, solitude, and abstinence.
- Renouncement of social life and comfort for solitude, self-mortification, & religious devotion; leading a very austere (rigidly abstinent) and self-denying life.
- Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” (Mat 19:21)

MONASTICISM

The Coptic Church offered many leaders in the monastic life; most famous worldwide are:

- St. Anthony the Great (c. 251-356 A.D.) – the father of monastic family worldwide
- St. Syncletiki (4th century) – leader of monastic life for women

MONASTICISM

The Monastery of St. Anthony the Great

- Still standing and active in the Egyptian Western Desert
- Near the Red Sea
- Several other monasteries from the 4th – 6th centuries are still standing and active in the Egyptian deserts

MONASTICISM

The Coptic Church also offered the world several forms of monasticism

- Anchoritic / Eremitic – St. Paul of Thebes, St. Mary of Egypt
 - Anchorites / eremites / hermits living in solitude; own prayer, clothing, food & work. Anchorites with no specific cells but wandered in the desert: "wanderers / pilgrims".

MONASTICISM

- Communal – St. Anthony: Eastern Desert; St. Amoun: Nitria; St. Macarius: Scetis
 - Monks lived in a semi-eremitic life, in separate cells, and assembled occasionally for the Divine Liturgies and spiritual conferences.
- Cenobitic – St. Pachomius in Upper (Southern) Egypt
 - Monks (cenobites) lived in a community inside the walls of the monastery, in association with each other, and governed by an abbot and by rules.

ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

The Coptic Church offered the world many of the top Christian thinkers and writers across the ages. These were leaders when the churches worldwide had to hold several local and universal councils to defend the purity of the faith against heresies (wrong teachings)

Council	Alexandrian Pope	Attendees
Nicea, June 325 A.D.	Alexandros; Athanasius the Apostolic	318
Constantinople, May 381 A.D.	Timotheos	150
Ephesus, 431 A.D.	Cyril the Pillar of Faith	200
Ephesus II, August 449 A.D.	Dioscorus	130

SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Bible

- It is the inspired word of God – must be respected and obeyed
- It guides our daily life – reading , meditation and application
- It is a major part in the liturgical practices of the Church

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Prayer

- A daily practice for the believer – “The Agpya” or the prayers of the hours: 7 prayers corresponding to 7 divisions of the day
- Continuous communication with God is the believer daily goal

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Liturgical Practices

- Through the Seven Sacraments
- Build and strengthen the believer's life with the Lord

The salvation of every soul is the daily goal of the Church

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

Sacrament	Action	Result
Baptism	Immersion in the specially blessed water 3 times	Death and resurrection with Christ; New birth
Chrismation	Anointment with the Holy Myron 36 times	Receiving the Holy Spirit
Confession	Repentance and confessing sins in front of a priest	Absolution and forgiveness of sins
Eucharist	Communion/partaking of the Holy Body and Blood	Unity with Christ, forgiveness of sins & Eternal life

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

Sacrament	Action	Result
Matrimony	Special wedding prayer and celebration	Unity between the wedded couple to begin a new family in Christ
Unction	Anointment of the sick with the blessed oil	Comfort and healing in spirit and body
Orders	Ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops	Special grace and authority for the ordained to perform Church duties