

welcome to the

# COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH



ST. GEORGE & ST. ANTHONY  
COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

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# WHAT IS THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH



The Coptic Orthodox Church is the ancient Christian Church of Egypt. It is one-part of the worldwide Orthodox Church, established by the Apostles in the first century. The word 'Coptic' derives from the Greek word for 'Egyptian'. It is a Christian community which has its roots in Egypt, where over ten million members are found. But now perhaps two million members of this Church are living and worshipping outside of Egypt (also known as the diaspora), and especially in Western countries. Many thousands of Canadian, American, British, French, Australian and others from the West are finding a spiritual home in this ancient Church.

Although many Coptic Orthodox churches today have services that include the Arabic and Coptic languages, most of them pray and serve in the language of the local culture where the church is established. While the Coptic heritage of hymnology, iconography, liturgical worship, and spiritual practices are all preserved, the language of prayer should always conform to the needs of the local members.

Although the Coptic Orthodox Church may appear to be a recent presence in the West, it represents the earliest and original Apostolic Christianity. Far from being something new and alien, the Orthodox Faith is ancient and universal (catholic), and has a great deal of wealth to offer all those seeking a true and genuine relationship with God.



Have mercy on us, o God, the Father the Pantocrator. All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us.

## OUR HISTORY

The Coptic Orthodox Church can trace its history back to the first century, and to the preaching of the Christian faith by St. Mark, the Evangelist and Apostle. St. Mark is celebrated in the Coptic Orthodox Church as the great Evangelist, the Martyr, and the 'Beholder of God'. We recognize him as the Patron Patriarch of the Church as he is the one who brought the message of salvation to Alexandria and thus established the Church there before receiving the crown of martyrdom.

This small community of Orthodox Christians, established by the preaching of St. Mark in the first century, has continued to grow. The present senior bishop is Patriarch Tawadros II, and he is the 118th such leader of the Church of Alexandria, in a direct and unbroken continuity through almost two thousand years. Coptic Orthodox Christians call him 'Pope' Tawadros, Pope meaning 'Papa' or father. And so Coptic Orthodox Christians use the word Pope for the Patriarch of Alexandria. However, the term is not at all understood as a title, rank or indication of hierarchy. Rather it is used to describe the relationship of Christians with their father the bishop, as it was used in Alexandria, prior to being adopted by the bishop of Rome .



# A CHURCH OF HOLY TRADITION



The Coptic Orthodox Church holds to the importance of Holy Tradition. The word 'Tradition' comes from the Greek word used frequently in the Scriptures, *Paradosis*. Explained in its truest sense, this word means the handing down of something from one person or group, to another person or group. In the context of the Orthodox Church, this is not limited to teachings of doctrines and rites. In the Coptic Orthodox understanding, Holy Tradition is the work of the Holy Spirit experienced in the entire life of the Church from the time of Christ, the apostles, even until today.

And so Holy Tradition is expressed both in the expression of oral and written tradition over the centuries. We see it expressed first and foremost in the Holy Bible, which is understood to be the divinely inspired written account of God's revelation to humanity. The Coptic Orthodox Church, along with the other Apostolic Churches, recognizes 49 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. Holy Tradition is also found within the sacramental life of the Church, the Patristic teachings of the early Church Fathers, the documented lives of the saints, the three Holy Ecumenical Councils confessed by all Oriental Orthodox Christians, as well as many other texts and sources that are used in the liturgical life of the Church.





# A Church of Holy Mystery



The Coptic Orthodox Church embraces mystery in its fullness. As St. John Chrysostom puts it, “A God you can understand, is no God at all!” And so the Church approaches God in humility, accepting that we can only apprehend the revelation of God without every fully understanding the mystery of all that God is and does. Part of this is lived out in the sacramental life of the Church. The sacraments are usually referred to as the Holy Mysteries.

In the Coptic Orthodox mindset, everything in the life of the Christian believer ought to be sacramental. Wherever and whenever we call upon the Holy Spirit to work in and through the Church, we are witnessing a mystery. Nevertheless, the Coptic Orthodox Church still recognizes seven great mysteries or sacraments which are most common in the Christian world: (next page)

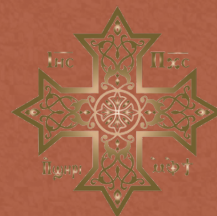


# Sacraments

- + Baptism
- + Chrismation
- + Holy Eucharist
- + Repentance & Confession
- + Crowning/Marriage
- + Holy Unction of the Sick
- + Priesthood or Holy Orders



# AN ASCETIC AND SPIRITUAL CHURCH



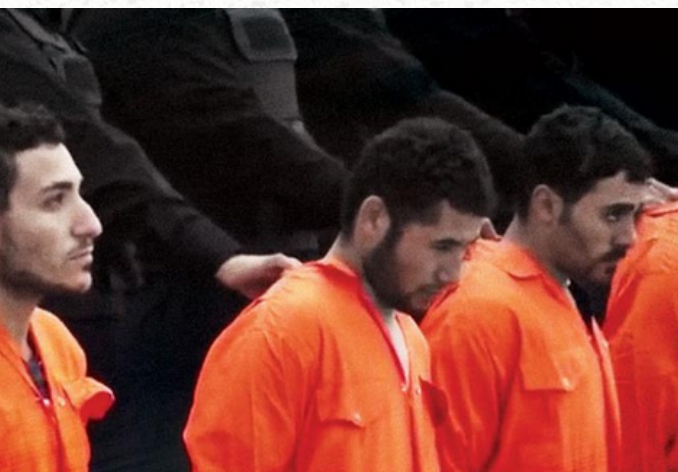
The Coptic Orthodox Church is proud to call herself the founder of Christian monasticism. It is in the deserts of Egypt, in the early fourth century, that the Christian world began to see hermits, monks and nuns who sought the spiritual life with the Lord Almighty in the solitude of the wilderness. The Coptic Orthodox Church produced monastic pioneers such as St. Paul the Hermit, St. Anthony the Great, and St. Syncletica of Alexandria who have paved the way for hundreds of thousands of men and women to follow in the monastic tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Today, the Coptic Orthodox Church recognizes a great number of monasteries and convents in and outside of Egypt, including several in Canada, America, Australia, and Europe.

This same monastic tradition has greatly influenced the spiritual culture of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Spiritual life of the Orthodox Christian has one main purpose: to create a genuine and loving relationship of union between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ. To achieve this goal, the Christian believer is taught from a very young age to pray, read Holy Scripture, participate in the Holy Mysteries frequently, to fast, and to serve and love their neighbours. All of the prayer, the worship, the fasting, the service, the spiritual Tradition which surrounds every Orthodox Christian, is intended to support and encourage this personal union with God. The rituals and spiritual culture are not practiced to please a distant God, but to bring about a closer union, and a more complete transformation, by the experience of life with God himself.





# A CHURCH OF MIRACLES AND MARTYRS




In April of 1968, the Holy Theotokos, St. Mary appeared on top of a Church in Zeitoun, Egypt. Her apparition was witnessed by millions who would flock around the Church to get a glimpse of this divine apparition. The Holy Virgin continued to appear, sometimes several times a week, for an ongoing period ending in 1970. All during the reign of our Father among the saints, His Holiness, Pope Cyril the sixth, then Patriarch of Alexandria. News reports, pictures, and media broadcast all confirmed this miraculous apparition which led to the spiritual revival and even conversion of many who had witnessed it with their own eyes. The Coptic Orthodox Church continues to appear in headlines, but these days for less joyful reasons. The Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt and the middle east have been targeted by terrorist groups because of their Orthodox Christian faith. In February of 2015, 21 men were beheaded by ISIL terrorists on a beach along the Mediterranean coast. Twenty of these men were of Coptic Orthodox descent, while the 21st is said to have proclaimed his faith in Christ when seeing the witness of the others who were with him. Although the Church condemns all hateful crimes against humanity, we rejoice in the fact that the Coptic Orthodox Faith continues to produce martyrs even today, just as it did since the establishment of the faith in the very first century.



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