



Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

ST. MARY AND ST. MOSES COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

Diocese of Mississauga and West of Canada



1334 Benjamin Avenue. Windsor, Ontario Canada. N8X 4M9

Tel: (519) 252 – 7366

Fax: (519)252 - 5936

www.windsorcopts.com

Apep / Mesra

| Issue 80 |

August 2022

Under the auspices and guidance of H.G. Bishop Mina bishop of Mississauga, Vancouver and west of Canada

THE VIRGIN MARY AND THE FAST DEDICATED TO HER NAME

By. Thrice-blessed Pope Shenouda III

There is no woman about whom the prophets prophesied, and about whom the Holy Bible cared about, like the Virgin Mary. There are numerous symbols about her in the Old Testament. In the New Testament also, there is her biography, her praise, and the miracles. How many are the glorifying expressions and the contemplations, which were cited about the Virgin in the books of the fathers. How full of praise are the titles by which the Church calls her, and which are inspired from the Spirit of the Holy Bible! She is the mother of all of us, the lady of all of us, the pride of our

race, the queen at the right hand of the King, the Virgin with perpetual virginity, the pure, the filled

with grace, the Saint Mary, the powerful and helpful compassionate mother, the mother of the Light, the mother of mercy and salvation, the true vine.

This is the one whom the Church elevates over the rank of archangels, so that we say about her in her hymns and songs: O Mary, you have been raised above the Cherubim, and have become higher than the Seraphim, O Mary. Mary who was brought up in the temple, and



lived the life of prayer and contemplation since her childhood, and who was the sacred vessel whom the Lord chose to dwell within. Long generations waited for the birth of this Virgin, so that the fullness of the time would become complete by her (Gal 4:4). She has removed the shame of Eve, and saved the reputation of women after sin. She is the mother of God, in perpetual virginity. She is the Virgin who came to our country Egypt during the childhood of Christ, and inhabited our land for years, during which she sanctified it, and blessed it. She is the Virgin who appeared in Zeitoun 32 years ago, and attracted to her the feelings of the crowds, with her light, her appearance, and her visit to us. She is the Virgin who makes miracles in numerous places, where we celebrate feasts for her. The stories of her miracles are innumerable. The Virgin is not a stranger to us; because she is profoundly assimilated with the feelings of Copts that come out from faith to special experience and emotion. How great an honour is it for our country and our Church, to be visited in past times by our Lady the Virgin! How great an honour it is that our Lady appeared on her domes many years ago in the land of Egypt! There is not a human being whom Christians have loved as much as our Lady the Virgin Mary.

THE VIRGIN'S FAST

The Church celebrates the fast of our Lady the Virgin beginning with the first of Mesra, (the 7th of August). It is a fast for which people care very much, and they practice it with forceful asceticism. Some add days to it, in regard of the great love of people for the Virgin. The fast of The Virgin is an occasion for spiritual renaissance in the majority of churches. They prepare a spiritual program for daily sermons, and daily masses too in some churches, even the churches which are not named by the name of the Virgin.

Copts in Egypt, and especially women, take great care for the fast of the Virgin, in a manner that exceeds description. There are many who fast it (with water and salt), that is without even oil. Many add a third week to it, as a kind of vow. There are also those who vow to fast this fast without eating or drinking till the appearance of the stars in heaven.

What then is the secret behind this great care? Firstly, the Copts love the Virgin because she visited and blessed their country, and left her traces in numerous places where churches have been built. Secondly, the multiple miracles which occurred in Egypt through the intercession of our Lady the Virgin, made many people vow to build churches dedicated to her name. The apparition of the Virgin in her church at Zeitoun, and the many miracles that accompanied this apparition, have certainly increased the affection of the Copts for the Virgin, and for the fast which bears her name.

The Adoration of St. Mary

By Bishop Youssef

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Southern United States

As Biblical history has recorded, St. Mary is the central figure in the two Gospel accounts of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The "Mother of God" is seldom mentioned in the New Testament outside of the birth narratives in the opening chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke. The name of St. Mary is mentioned only once in the Holy Gospel of St. Mark and the Holy Book of Acts. The Blessed Virgin is never explicitly named in the New Testament Letters. The name of St. Mary is only "referred to" in two episodes written by St. John in his Holy Gospel.



Why then has St. Mary carried a name that has long been remembered as the JOY OF GENERATIONS? It is through her enduring example of obedient faith, strong will, and spiritual purity that we come to understand why she is REJOICED OF ANGELS. It is through the Lord Jesus Christ's love for His mother and her complete trust in Him that we are capable of realizing the true meaning of, "Honor thy father and thy mother." With these thoughts in our hearts, let's explore the inspiring, heavenly nature of the Blessed St. Mary.

Despite the Virgin's few Biblical references, we learn that she experienced many emotional peaks and valleys within her sixty years of life. We are told of many hardships the Blessed Mary faced in her lifetime- the possibility of a divorce, a long, long journey to Bethlehem while great with a child, giving birth to her Son in a shelter for animals, placing her newborn child in an animal's feeding trough for His first bed, angelic warning that King Herod the Great wanted to kill her infant, and finally watching her only Son being taunted and crucified on a cross.

St. Mary also experienced many joys in her life. Among them were: shepherds proclaiming the angelic hosts' announcement of the Messiah's birth; two aged and devout prophets in the Temple exalting her Son; wise men from the distant East kneeling down to worship the baby Jesus; and witnessing our Lord Jesus Christ's first miracle at the Wedding Feast. We further know that St. Mary was present at the Day of Pentecost and filled with the Living Flame.

There is no known documentation that alludes to St. Mary as being depressed, of her complaining due to the challenges present in her life, nor to boastfulness as having given birth to the Son of God. Rather St. Luke gives us insight into St. Mary's quietness, of strength and character. He writes, "St. Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

Due to St. Mary's obedient and positive response to the Annunciation, our salvation through her Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, became possible. Through her will and faith, she voluntarily submitted to the will of God. As stated in the book, St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept, "Her freely willed agreement with the Divine Plan announced by the angel was a fundamental and necessary condition of the union of God and man in Christ. The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father, of His power and His spirit; it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin." Therefore when our Orthodox Church honors the "Mother of God" it is not just because God chose her but also because she herself chose submission to the will of God. St. Mary said, "I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be according to Your word" (Luke 1:35-38).

Along with her obedient faith and strong will, St. Mary was also profoundly perceptive. Although she was young at the time of the Lord Christ's birth, the Blessed Virgin Mary was deeply aware of her "low estate" which had been elevated by a blessing from God that all generations would henceforth come to recognize and remember. The humble, quiet, Mother of Emmanuel intertwined her own personal experience with her belief that God was now helping "His servant Israel" since He had "scattered the proud" and "put down the mighty" while He exalted "those of a low degree" and "filled the hungry with good things" (Luke 1:48, 51-53). Therefore we are able to recognize the free grace of God because St. Mary played an active role in conceiving Jesus Christ. The Divine Incarnation was realized because she perceptively and faithfully accepted obedience.

The Blessed Mary's virginity can and should be viewed as far more than a physical state. Her virginity should also be thought of as a special state of inner, spiritual holiness or purity. Spiritual purity is a total consecration to God and permanent union with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. It represents virginity of heart and soul, which Christians can receive by acceptance of the Holy Spirit into their lives. St. Athanasius describes St. Mary's spiritual purity:

"She was a lady wise and filled with the love of God. She had a harmonious disposition and a love for good works. She remained continually at home, living a retired life and imitating a honeybee. Her speech was calm and her voice was low. She generously distributed to the poor what was left over from the works of her hands. She prayed

solitarily to God for two things; not to let a bad thought take root in her heart and to grow neither bold nor hard of heart."

St. Ambrose reinforces this description of St. Mary emphasizing that she was humble, silent, moderate in speech and unsullied in reputation. She was devout and faithful in reading the Scripture. He further states she was modest and had great respect for others.

We must not close the subject of St. Mary's virginity without declaring her perpetual virginity. St. Mary did not cease to be a virgin in giving birth to the Lord Christ. She continued as a virgin even after giving birth to the Savior. Her perpetual virginity can be attested to the documented early second century Apocryphal writings. "The Ascension of Isaiah" (Charles, 1900, p. 74-76) states "her womb was found the same as before she had conceived." According to the "Odes of Solomon" (Odes of Solomon 19:8), "she travailed and brought forth a son without incurring pain." The "Protoevangelium of James" reveals that a woman called "Salome" made trial of St. Mary's virginity soon after birth. (Protoevangelium of James, 18-20)" Early patristic thought concurs with these documents and further purports that St. Mary did not have any children save the Lord Christ.

"Brothers of Jesus" (Mark 6:33 and Matthew 13: 55-56) was not a referral to actual brothers of Jesus. Brothers in this context simply meant close relatives, cousins. Abraham called his brother's son, Lot, his brother (Genesis 13:8). Laban used the same term for his son-in-law (Genesis 29:15). If the Lord Jesus had actual brothers why were they not included in the escape to Egypt? Why when the Book of Luke 2: 41-52 tells the story of Jesus in the temple (twelve years after Jesus birth), does the Holy Family consist of only three? St. Matthew refers to Jesus as the heir of Joseph, the son of David. If there were older brothers (previous sons of Joseph from another marriage) would Jesus have been the rightful heir? Wouldn't the Lord Jesus Christ have left His mother in their home and not entrusted her to the care of St. John?

St. Jerome's viewpoint is the "brothers of Jesus" were the sons of St. Mary of Clopas. St. Mary of Clopas was the wife of Alphaeus and the sister of Virgin Mary (John 19:25). Cousins could definitely be called "brothers." Some locations in Upper Egypt continue with this tradition until today.

Finally, and of great significance, we know that the Lord Jesus Christ held His mother in high esteem. It is written that He was not particular about the kind of place in which He would be born, or the clothes which He would wear, nor the food He would eat, but He was definitely particular about the virgin who was to be His mother.

On more than one occasion, Jesus stressed the importance of the command, "honor your father and mother." An example of His carrying out this command can be found within the first miracle He performed. According to the fourth Holy Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ worked His first miraculous sign at a marriage feast in the town of Cana in Galilee. This wedding event is described only by St. John who tells of St. Mary being in attendance. At the wedding feast the wine has all been consumed before the feast had concluded. Fearing that the host of the party might be humiliated before their guests, she instinctively turned to her Son and requested that he "do something." In spite of His reservations, He did as His mother requested.

St. Mary clearly and undeniably trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. When she requested that He "do something," she did not repeat her request. Out of assurance and confidence she told the servants, "Do whatever He tells you."

In performing this miracle, Jesus teaches us many lessons. He honored His mother and saved a humble Galilean family from humiliation. Also by manifesting His Divine Glory only to a few (the Lord's mother, His disciples, and some of the servants) He has continued to wait for "His Hour" thus also honoring the Heavenly Father.

Honoring His mother was supremely manifested at His Crucifixion. As He was dying, He tenderly and lovingly committed St. Mary to the care of St. John. As St. Mary was standing near His cross, she was entrusted to "the disciple whom He loved" (John 19:26).

If the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, honored St. Mary, so should we. Obedient faith, strong will, and utter purity are just a few of the terms, which describe the heavenly nature of St. Mary's, a humble handmaid of the Lord that has become the Mother of many and of the One. The richness and beauty of her nature cannot be fully described nor realized. St. Mary was not a priest, she did not teach, nor did she baptize anyone. She did not instruct the disciples. Yet the Blessed Mary was a sacred shrine chosen worthy of the Kingdom.

Through her motherhood we discover the nature of her Son as the Incarnate Son of God. The Blessed Virgin's life attests to God's redeeming deed and through her life's example we can examine man's role in attaining the heavenly life. Our spiritual love to St. Mary is second only to that of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Truly we adore St. Mary. She was wise and filled with the love of God. Her faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ was unsurpassed. Her purity in conduct was that befitting Heaven. May we follow her example of consecration to God and direct our hearts, minds, souls, and senses toward the Holy Spirit in preparation for the eternal wedding feast.

"O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, holy and faithful advocate of the human race, intercede for us with Christ whom you mothered, that He may grant us forgiveness of sins."

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

"Whose faiths follow, considering the outcome of their conversation?" Heb 13:7

SAINT ANBA MACROBIUS

Saint Anba Macrobius, the son of the governor of the city of Kaw, departed in peace. When Anba Severus, Archbishop of Antioch, was wondering around the cities of Upper Egypt, he came to the city of Kaw and Macrobius ministered unto him. He accompanied Anba Severus in his visit to the monastery of Anba Moses, where he saw from the holiness of the monks, their asceticism and devoutness, made him ask Anba Moses to accept him as a monk. Anba Moses indicated to him the hardship of the monastic life and its difficulties especially he was raised in luxury and family wealth, and the one that slept on silk, could not take the rough life. When Anba Moses saw the insistence of Macrobius on the monastic life he asked him first to resign his job that he took after his father, and to relinquish all his money and possessions. He went to his city Kaw, appointed his brother in his place, returned and put on the monastic garb. When his brothers Paul, Ilias, and Joseph saw what their brother had done, they came to him and became monks by the hands of Anba Moses. Anba Macrobius built many monasteries and many monks, about a thousand gathered around him, and he also built convents for about a thousand nuns. He used his money to build many places for those that did not desire the monastic life, and he supported those who sought his help. Then he sent to Anba Moses asking to send him brethren to prepare those gathered around him for the monastic life, they came and put on them the monastic garb. Christians from



the cities of Assuit, Shatb, and neighboring cities came and gave him many gifts and much money to help him in building the churches and monasteries. He accepted it from them and blessed them. Anba Macrobius increased in virtues, asceticism and giving alms to the weak, needy, widows, orphans and the lonely, beside caring for his monasteries. His alms were from his own money not from that was offered. God granted St. Macrobius the gift of healing, they brought him the sick and he healed them with the power of God and the strength of their faith.

The father the Patriarch Anba Theodosius, heard about him and he wrote to him praising and encouraging him to be steadfast in virtue, asceticism and loving the strangers and asked him to come for the people of Alexandria to be blessed by him. When he came to the Patriarch, he rejoiced with him and called the people of Alexandria to receive the blessing from him, and he ordained him a priest. Macrobius returned to his monastery, the people of Assuit and Shatb received him with songs and hymns until they came to the monastery. Many miracles were performed through his hands, and when he finished his good strife, he departed in peace. Multitudes gathered from Assuit, Shatb, Abu-Sergah, Kaw and the neighboring cities, and his brother Anba Yousab, who was appointed as his successor in running the monasteries in the fear of God, prayed and buried him. The appearance of his body was on the seventh day of the blessed month of Tubah, seven hundred thirty three years after his departure by the hands of the deacon Los El-Talawy the servant of his monastery's church, during the days of Anba Yousab, bishop of Akhmeem and the notable Isaac the scribe of the prince Eiz-Eldeen El-Hamawy. Anba Yousab, bishop of Akhmeem, took the body out of its tomb in the mountain, down to the church of the monastery, where they buried him with hymns and praises.

May his prayers be with us. Amen.

Question and Answer:

Question

Beginning on the first of Mesra (August 7th), the Church celebrates the fast of our Lady the Virgin, St. Mary. This fast is near to the hearts of the people and it is practiced with strict asceticism. Copts in Egypt, especially the women, care for the fast of the Virgin in a manner beyond description.

The fast of the Virgin is an occasion for spiritual revival within the Church. The Church prepares a spiritual program that includes daily sermons, praises and liturgies for the Virgin. In the ancient church of St. Mary in Mostorod, there is a great celebration for our Lady the Virgin.

There are many who fast the Virgin's fast with water and salt or oil. Many add a third week to the fast, as a kind of a vow. There are also those who vow to fast this fast without eating or drinking until the appearance of the stars in heaven (sunset).

What then is the secret behind this care?

Answer

The main reason for this care is due to the love of the Virgin by the Copts for she has visited and blessed Egypt numerous times beginning with Christ's Flight into Egypt. The Virgin has left her traces in numerous places where churches have been built. In addition, many miracles have occurred in Egypt through the intercession of our Lady the Virgin. This has made many people enthusiastic in building churches dedicated in her name. The apparition of the Virgin in her church at Zeitoun, and the many miracles that accompanied this apparition, have certainly increased the affection of the Copts for the Virgin and for the fast which bears her name.

Her Feasts

Within the Coptic Church, each saint has one feast day dedicated to them within the Church. This day is the day of their death or martyrdom and not the day of their birth as their death marks their true heavenly birthday where they begin their eternal life with Christ. An additional feast day may be added for the discovery of the saint's relics, for a miracle which was performed by this saint, or for the dedication of a church built for the saint.

The Holy Virgin St. Mary has many feasts within the Coptic Church, mainly:

The feast of the announcement of her nativity (7th of Mesra): when the angel of the Lord announced to her father Joachim of her birth. Joachim and her mother Anna were filled with joy and they vowed to dedicate her to the Lord.

The feast of her nativity which the Church celebrates on the 1st of Bashans.

The feast of her entry to the Temple. The Church celebrates this feast on the 3rd of Kiahk. This is the day when she entered the Temple to worship God and dwelt in the sanctuary for 12 years.

The feast of her arrival to Egypt (24th of Bashans) with Christ our Lord and St. Joseph the carpenter.

The feast of the departure of the Virgin (21st of Tubah) commemorating the miracles which happened on the day of her departure surrounded by the apostles.

The monthly feast of the Virgin (21st of every Coptic month) in commemoration of her departure on the 21st of Tubah.

The feast of the ascension of her body to heaven (16th of Mesra) is celebrated on the 22nd of August which is preceded by the Fast of The Virgin (15 days).

The feast of her miracle of the dissolving of iron (21st of Paona): On this day we commemorate her miracle in delivering the apostle St. Matthias, and those who were with him, from prison by dissolving the iron which bound them. Also, on this day we celebrate the feast of the building of the first church in her name in Philippi.

The feast of her apparition in Zeitoun on the domes of the church of St. Mary. Her apparitions began on the 2nd of April 1968 (24th of Baramhat) and continued for many years.

The Holy Virgin Mary in the Church's Faith

The Coptic Church honors our Lady the Virgin in due honor without exaggeration, and without lessening her position. She is, in the belief of the Church, the mother of God (Theotokos in Greek), and not the mother of "Jesus" as the Nestorians had claimed and were excommunicated at the council of Ephesus due to this heresy.

The Church believes that the Holy Spirit has sanctified the womb of the Virgin during her pregnancy with Christ. That was according to what the angel said to her "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The sanctifying by the Holy Spirit of her womb makes the One born of her to be conceived without the impurity of the original sin. As for the Virgin herself her mother Anna conceived her in the natural state, and so the Virgin said in her hymn: "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). That is why the Church does not agree that the Virgin was conceived without the impurity of the original sin as our brothers, the Catholics, believe.

The Church believes in the intercession of the Virgin. The Church places her intercession before the intercession of the angels and archangels, because she is the mother of God, the Queen who is seated at the right hand of the King.

The Holy Bible gives the Virgin the surname "filled with grace." It is regrettable that the Beyrouth translation of the Bible lessens the status of the Virgin by translating this surname to "highly favored one." All human beings are highly favored, but the Virgin is filled with grace although grace does not mean infallibility.

The Church believes in the perpetual virginity of St. Mary unlike our brothers the Protestants who claim that the Virgin gave birth to sons after Christ.

The Church believes in the Ascension of the body of the Virgin to heaven, and celebrates this feast on the 16th of Mesra. She endured a life of poverty. When she gave birth to her only Son, "there was no room for them in the inn", and she "laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). She endured these responsibilities at a young age. She endured the magnificent glory which surrounded her, without being harassed by the thoughts of greatness. It was not possible for her to declare that she had given birth to Christ while she was a virgin so she kept silent and endured this as well. She suffered the tiring voyage to Egypt and back. In Egypt, she suffered from being expelled from town to town as in every city they entered the idols would topple in front of the Christ (Is. 19:1). She endured suffering as a poor foreigner. She accepted that a sword would pierce through her own soul also (Luke 2:35) because of that which her Son met, the persecutions, the insults, and lastly the suffering and the shame of the cross. The Virgin was not satisfied only to endure negatively, but she lived in jubilation of the Lord as she said in her hymn: "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47).

Feasts of other saints celebrated in these days include:

In the same fast of the Virgin, we celebrate the feasts of the renowned saints: Saint Païsa (2nd Mesra, 6th August), Saint Julietta (6th Mesra, 12th August), and Saint Marina (15th Mesra, 21st August).

We celebrate the feast of the Annunciation by Archangel Gabriel to Joachim, of the birth of The Virgin Mary on the 7th of Mesra (August 13th)

On the 13th of Mesra (August 19th) we also celebrate the feast of the Glorious Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The feast of Saint George at the monastery in Mit Damsis is celebrated in the second half of August as well as the feast of Abba

Macarius the Great, and the feast of Saint George in his monastery at Ruzeykat.

VERSE OF THE MONTH:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us). Matthew 1:23

Sayings of the Fathers:

- ❖ Mary, having merited to give flesh to the divine Word, and thus supply the price of our redemption, that we might be delivered from eternal death; therefore she is more powerful than all others to help us to gain eternal life.
.....St. Augustine

- ❖ If God is slow in answering your request, or if you ask but do not promptly receive anything, do not be upset, for you are not wiser than God.
.....St. Isaac of Syria

- ❖ “Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.
.....St. John of Kronstadt

THE CHURCH COMMEMORATES THIS MONTH “ SYNAXARIUM ”

- ❖ Martyrdom of St. Abakragoun (25 Apep)1 August
- ❖ Departure of the upright St. Joseph the carpenter
(26 Apep)2 August
- ❖ Deoarture of St. Mary the Magdalene (26 Apep) 4 August
- ❖ Start of St. Mary fast (1 Mesrah)7 August
- ❖ *Departure of St. John the solider (5 Mesrah)11 August*
- ❖ *Annunciation of St Joachim with the birth of virgin
Mary (7 Mesra)13 August*
- ❖ Confession of St. Peter the Apostle, That Christ is the son
Of the living God (8 Mesra)14 August
- ❖ Departure Of St. Moisis Bishop of Ouseem (11 mesra).....17 August
- ❖ Commemoration of the honorable Archangel
Michael (12 mesra).....18 August
- ❖ Feat of transfiguration of our Lord On Mount of Tabor
(13 Mesra)19 August
- ❖ Commemoration of departure of StMary known as
Marina the ascetic (15 mesra).....21 August
- ❖ Assumption of the body of virgin Mary (16 mesra).....22 August
- ❖ Commemoration of the Holy and Pure Virgin Mary
(21 Mesra)27 August
- ❖ Departure of Micah, the profit (22 Mesra)28 August
- ❖ Martyrdom of thirty-thousands Christian in Alexandria
(23 Mesra).....29 August
- ❖ Departure of St. Bessarion the great (24 Mesra)..... 31 August

CHURCH SERVICES SCHEDULE:

PLEASE, CHECK CHURCH WEBSITE IN THE FIRST PAGE.

YOUTUBE SERVICE STREAMING ADDRESS:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_MI2B3NKLi1Y8P3nQR5Amw/live