



The Lord Jesus Christ and His Saints

Picture submitted by Peter Dimyan, St. George Church, Brooklyn, NY



The Coptic New Year

The Year of the Martyrs

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Every year we celebrate the Coptic New Year. On September 11 (on the Gregorian leap year, the Coptic New Year is on September 12), we celebrate a New Year, beginning on the first day of the month of: Wout (Thoout). But what is the Coptic New Year? Let's find out now.

The Coptic New Year, also known as the Nayrouz, is a new beginning for Coptic Christians. It is a time to remember and celebrate the martyrs (those who died in Christ's name). We glorify and celebrate what they have suffered for the sake of keeping the faith strong and alive for us.

Many things, such as altar dressings, are often red on this day to represent the martyrs' blood that was shed in Christ's name. Many hymns are sung on this night. These hymns are sung to remember and honor many Christians who suffered under pagan or non-Christian rule. Some of the tunes and hymns are over a thousand years old.

The Coptic Calendar is also known as the "calendar of the martyrs". This is because our Church offered more martyrs than many of the other Churches. That is why our calendar honors the martyrs.

The naming of the Year of the Martyrs started in 284 AD. This was the year Diocletian became Roman Emperor. He tortured and persecuted thousands of Christians.

A commonly asked question is "Why does the Coptic Calendar start at 284 AD, while the common calendar started long before this?"



In the old times they did not use to number the years ‘year 1, year 2...’ and so on. They would name the year for the king. Let me give you an example. If the first king was King Tut, they would name the years like this: ‘Year 1 of King Tut, Year 2 of King Tut...’ and so on. When King Tut died and a new king came, let’s say his name was King Ikhnaton. Then they would start all over again with ‘Year 1 of King Ikhnaton, Year 2 of King Ikhnaton.

But then came a new Roman Emperor named Diocletian.

In the first few years he was Roman emperor, he was a very good and nice emperor. Then he became an awful emperor. He started to torture and persecute Christians very badly. When he first became emperor they started the years as they normally would (Year 1 of Diocletian, Year 2 of Diocletian). But after he persecuted all those Christians, they did not want to name the years after him. If they named the year for him, that would be like honoring him. The people did not want to honor a man like this. So they changed the name from ‘Year of Diocletian’ to ‘Year of the Martyrs’.

They started when Diocletian first became Emperor in 284 A.D. Instead of ending it when Diocletian died in 305 A.D., they kept it going through the next king and the next king. From then on it stayed Year of the Martyrs. This also explains why the Coptic Calendar is also called Calendar of the Martyrs.

This year I hope we all remember all the martyrs and how much they suffered to keep the faith alive for us.

Have a very happy and blessed New Year!