



The History of the Coptic Church

Part 2

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Welcome back my friends; through the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we will continue delving into the depths of our sacred Coptic history to learn more of our glorious and great Coptic Orthodox Church.

When our Lord Jesus Christ was born, the Roman Empire extended for about 2 thousand miles in width from the Antonios Wall and the northern borders of France to the Atlas Mountains and the Tropic of Cancer, known as the "Cancer Latitude." The Roman Empire extended for about three thousand miles in length from the Atlantic Ocean to El-Frate River.

The Roman Empire was one of the most beautiful regions in the world between the lines of 24 and 56 to the North and surface area of one million, 600 thousand square miles. Most of this surface area was excellent cultivated land. During this era Alexandria, Rome, and Athens were the most important cities in the world.

Egypt during this time, was a Roman state under the direct authority of Roman Caesar. Egypt was a Mediterranean state, which was self-supporting. The production of wheat, linens, and cotton was unsurpassed. Egypt exported many products to approximately 100 countries, including Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Even with the abundance of exports, native Egyptians had limited freedom due in large part to the many dominating nations who settled there throughout history.

Egypt during the time of the Roman Empire included 3 divisions and about 36 states. The Greek language was the most frequently spoken. Egypt was the "bread basket" for the Empire. It was first among the other states, in industry and trade.

Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, was renowned for its great architecture, stately museums, temples, and its famous Library and University. The Alexandrian Library was one of the 7 wonders of the world. The City of Alexandria was divided into 5 sections containing official government buildings, which included that of the Roman governor. This section included people of Greek, Jewish, Roman, Persian, Syrian, and Egyptian lineage. As mentioned by Philo, at the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, about 40% of the Alexandrian people were the rich Jewish who worked in industry and trading. This can explain why the Holy Family fled to Egypt.

The Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

As mentioned in the Holy Gospel of St Luke 2:1-7, *"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn."*

It is known that a general census took place every 14 years in the Roman Empire (included were Egypt, Syria, and Palestine). In Syria, the census first took place at the time of Kerenlios, governor of Syria. During this period of history, Herod was the king of Judea and Augustus was the Roman Caesar.

The calendar utilized in Rome at that time was related



to the foundation of Rome and its symbol was “Announbis conditae A.V.C.” Dionysius Exiguus later changed this to the Christian calendar on 526 AD and its symbol was Anno Domini (A.D.).

However, we believe Dionysius to be inaccurate with his calculations by approximately 4 years as he calculated the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ on 754 A.V.C., but Herod, the Elder who killed Bethlehem's children died on April 750 A.V.C. and so if we add 3.5 years, the duration of the presence of the Holy Family in Egypt according to Coptic history to the date of the death of the king, Nero which was on 4 B.C. We further know that the Lord Jesus Christ was born in 7 B.C., which is the same time at which Kerenlious was the governor of Syria.

A papyrus, dating back to the 4th century, which was studied in Kilon University, Germany, revealed that the Holy Family stayed about 3 years and 11 months in Egypt. The papyrus was written by Fayoum in Coptic dialect and mentioned that the Month of Bashans was the most blessed month of the year. Therefore, our beloved Coptic Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Visit to Egypt on the 1st of June each year.



The Blessed Lord Jesus Christ's Birth and the Scientists of Astronomy:

The scientist Johannes Kepler in 1603 observed that Saturn and Jupiter in the whale's group become very close together and appear as one star. Kepler reviewed the writings of Jewish author Abravanel who mentioned that the Messiah would appear when Saturn touches Jupiter in the whale's group and so according to the statistics done by

Kepler, he noted that this occurred in 7 B.C. The year of the Lord Jesus Christ's birth was 7 B.C.

Also in 1925, the German scientist Schnabel read the writings before the Babylon Era, which belong to the Sippar's Astronomy School in Babylon, Egypt. These writings predicted that Saturn and Jupiter would become very close in 7 B.C. This explains the trip of the Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem.

The Christian History:

As previously mentioned, Dionysius Exiguus was the first in 526 AD to use the Christian calendar. Exiguus purported that the Lord Jesus Christ was born on December 25, 753 A.U.C. However, as all scientists know Exiguus made a mistake in his



calculations. By the comparison of the Holy Gospel of St Matthew 2:1 and the Holy Gospel of St Luke 3:1 we can accurately conclude the following: The Lord Jesus Christ was born before the death of Nero who died the spring of 750 A.U.C. As denoted by Yousifous, the Lord Jesus Christ began His preaching at the time of sharing Tebarious Caesar with Augustin Caesar on 765 A.U.C. This signifies to us that when the Lord Jesus Christ was 30 years of age, Tebarious Caesar had 15 years in authority, and with the addition of these 15 years to the beginning of Tebarious authority, we can conclude that the Lord began His earthly ministry on 779 A.U.C. This further proves that He was born on 749 A.U.C. approximately 4 years before the date mentioned by Exiguous. Being impossible to correct on the Christian Calendar, scientists added the years to the period between Adam and the Lord Jesus Christ to be 4004 instead of 4000. Can you then calculate the date of the Lord Jesus Christ's birth to have been on December 25 or January 7?

As written in the Apostolic Teachings, chapter 18, "you should celebrate the Feast of the Lord's birth on the 25th of the 9th month for Hebrew which is the 29th of the 4th month for Egyptians." The Hebrew year is less than the Coptic Year by 11 days. The Hebrew Year also depends on the moon's movement while the Coptic Year depends on the solar system. Therefore, one month every three years was added to the Hebrew year to coincide with the solar calendar.

When the Romans designed their calendar which also depended upon the solar system, their calendar started with January and ended with December and so December becomes similar to the 9th month of the Hebrew Year and the 4th month of the Coptic Year so December 25th equals the 25th of the 9th month of the Hebrew Year and 29th of the 4th month "Kiahk" of the Coptic Year as denoted in the Apostolic Teachings.

In 1082 AD, Pope Gregory 13th, observed that the solar calendar is 365.2422 and not 365.25 as was known so Pope Gregory did the "Gregorian Correction" where the difference 0.0078 day/year for one day every 128 years so he added 13 days placing 29th Kiahk on January 7 and every 128 years, the difference will increase by one day so 29th of Kiahk will be 8th of January 2101 AD and the 9th of January on 2229 and so on.

The Flight of the Holy Family From Bethlehem to Egypt:

The Holy Gospel of St Matthew 2:13-15 states, "*Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.' When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'*"

1. The Holy Family in Bethlehem: After St Joseph had received instruction from the Angel of God to take the young Child, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His mother and flee to Egypt; he also took Salome, a mid-wife. The Family stayed for a while in a grotto, known by Bethlehem residents as "Magharat El-Sayyidah or Magharat El-halib" situated southeast of the Basilica of Nativity.

The Armenian tradition asserts that when St Mary the Virgin tried to breast feed the child, Lord Jesus, drops of her milk fell upon a stone that became white. St Paula built a church upon this site in the name of the Virgin, St Mary. This grotto is filled with white soft stones known as the "virgins'



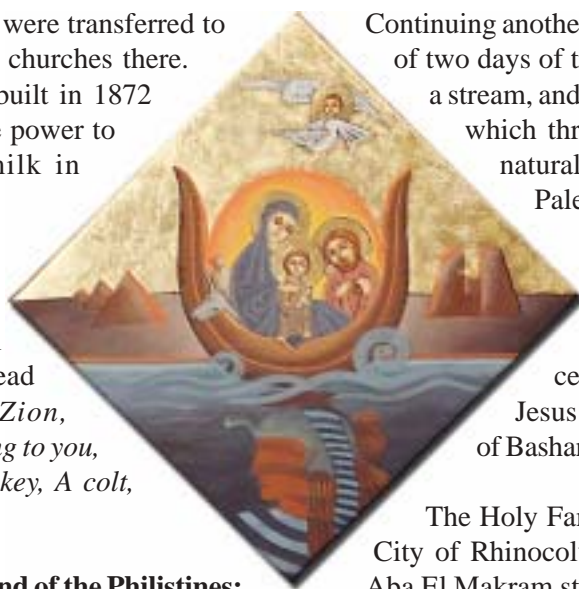
milk.” Some of the stones were transferred to Europe for the building of churches there. The present Basilica was built in 1872 AD and its stones have the power to stimulate the flow of milk in lactating females.

The Holy Family in its trip to Egypt used a donkey. In the Holy Gospel of St Matthew 21:5 we read *“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”*

2. The Holy Family in the Land of the Philistines:

The Holy Family went first to the ancient Philistine city and seaport of Ashkelon on the Mediterranean Sea where Samson killed thirty Philistines (Judges 14:19). From there, they proceeded in an almost easterly direction to Hebron. Then they traveled to Gaza about 40 km to the west, where the site of the ancient Canaanite stronghold of Gaza was. They took the route that ran parallel to the shore of the sea, and crossed the Valley of Gaza in about two hours. After a days’ journey from Gaza, the Holy Family arrived at the ancient township of Jenysos, today known as Khanyun, a section of the Gaza strip.

By walking continually on this route, they would have arrived at Raphia, the frontier town between the Gaza strip and the Province of Egypt. Raphia had been the battleground of the contending forces of Ptolemy IV and Antiochus the Great in 217 BC. It was conquered by Alexander Jamoeus the Maccabee and annexed to Judea. Gabinus again restored it to Egypt.



Continuing another 44km, along the caravan route of two days of travel, the Holy Family crossed a stream, and entered the Valley of Al-Arish, which throughout history has formed a natural boundary between Egypt and Palestine.

3. The Holy Family in the Land of Egypt: Our Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates the Feast of the Lord Jesus Christ’s Flight to Egypt on 24th of Bashans, which is the first day of June.

The Holy Family would have arrived at the City of Rhinocolura, the present day Al-Arish. Aba El Makram stated that there were 2 churches in the third century in this city.

The next town entered was Ostrakini, which has since disappeared and replaced today by a small village called Straki, which is in close proximity to Al-Arish. Abraham the Bishop of Ostrakini at the Joint Ephesian Council mentioned this city in 431 AD.

At the southwestern end of the caravan route from Judea to Egypt lies the famous city of Pelusium “Al-Farma” which was the capitol of the state of Agstamnike, seaport and key to the country of Egypt.

Jeremiah the Prophet came to the city as referred to in the Holy Book of Jeremiah 43:5-8: *“Instead Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers led away all the remnant of Judah who had come back to live in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been scattered. They also led away all the men, women, and children and the king’s daughters whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had left with*



Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah. So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the Lord and went as far as Tahpanhes. In Tahpanhes the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.”

At the western side of Al Farma, an ancient church still stands today that is considered as one of the most important places visited by the Holy Family.

- 4. The Holy Family in the Nile Delta:** During the time of Gaius Turranius (7-4 BC) the Roman Prefect of Egypt, the Holy Family crossed the narrow isthmus Al-Ouantara. Today it exists as a small village along the Suez Canal. It was over this particular isthmus separating Lake Manzala from Lake Ballah that the ancient caravan route continued from Judea to Egypt. This route had centuries prior been traveled by Abraham and Jacob and his family (Genesis 12:10-42).

In the footsteps of the Patriarchs, the Holy Family entered into the Province of Goshen, the present day El-Sharkia Governorate in Goshen. Visom and Ramsis were the cities the Jews built for Pharaoh, extending to the suburbs of present day Cairo City. This explains how Joseph came to marry Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On (Genesis 41:45).

The first city the Holy Family visited in the Nile Delta was Bubastis

(“Tella Basta”) 2 kilometers south of Zaga Zig. They were not well received in this town, therefore, they went a day’s journey farther southwards until they reached the town of Bilbais along the modern Ismailia Canal. Today, there is only one Coptic Orthodox Church at Bilbais, the Church of St George in the north eastern part of the town, about one kilometer from the main road.

In “Tella Basta,” the Holy Family was not welcomed. A spring of water erupted with this visit that became known for its healing properties. It did not heal any illnesses of the people of Basta.

It was mentioned in the vision of Pope Theophelias, 23rd Pope of Alexandria that in “Tella Basta” 2 thieves met the Holy Family. One was Tetus, an Egyptian and the other, Dimakos, a Syrian. They stole belongings of the Holy Family causing St Mary to weep. Also at this city the people refused to provide the Holy Family with any water. The Lord Jesus Christ touched the earth

with His Holy finger and soon a spring of water rose from the earth to quench their thirst. The water of this spring is believed to have healing powers for those of all diseases. For the people of Basta though, it provides no healings. From this city was St Apollo, the son of Yartos, who was martyred during the Era of Didadianos (284-305).

In Bilbais, there remains a root of a very ancient tree referred to as St Mary the



St Mary the Virgin's Tree



Virgin's Tree. It has been told that when soldiers of Napoleon tried to cut this tree, it began to bleed. The soldiers quickly fled frightened at this bleeding.

The Holy Family continued their journey northwards until they reached the next town of Sebennytyos (Samannud) on the west side of the Damietta branch of the Nile. The local tradition in Samannud relates that the present church of St Abanoub was built on the ruins of an ancient church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, which in turn was built on the site where the Holy Family visited. In this church the relics of St Abanoub reside. The name "Samannud" means the founders of gods and was known for its production of golden idols.

Having crossed the Damietta branch of the Nile, the Holy Family traveled westwards until they reached a place known today as Sakha, situated about 2 kilometers south of Kafr-Elshaikh. It was at this location that the Lord Jesus Christ placed His Holy foot upon a stone and the mark of the sole of His foot remained. It is referred to as "Bikha Isous (in Coptic)" meaning footprint of the Lord Jesus Christ. This stone was discovered about 1986 AD during excavations of a church.

St Simon, who stood for 50 years over the Pillar in the 7th Century distinguished the town of Sakha. St Saverius the Antiochian visited this city in the 6th Century. We celebrate his memory the 2nd of Babah.

After Bikha Isous, the Holy Family traveled westwards and crossed the Rosetta branch of the Nile. Continuing onward they saw from afar the Desert of Scetis (Wadi El-Natrun) and the Lord Jesus Christ blessed it and told His mother, "My mother, in this

desert, there will reside many monks who will live the spiritual life and serve God as angels."

The town nearest the Desert of Scetis is Terenouti "Al-Tarrana" about 40 kilometers from the present Monastery of St Macarius. 300 years following this blessed visit, St Macarius came to this area and built 2 monasteries, the Monastery of El-Baramous and the Monastery of St Macarius. Now there are five monasteries in this region:

1. The Monastery of Anba Bishoy
2. The Monastery of St Mary the Virgin and Anba John Kama "El-Surian Monastery"
3. The Monastery of St Mary, the Virgin, "El-Baramous"
4. The Monastery of St Macarius
5. The Monastery of St George in El-Khatatba

In the next issue we will continue our trip with our Holy Family in its visit to our Holy Land, Egypt. May the blessings of The Holy Family be with us all Amen. Remember me in your prayers.



Monastery of the Holy Virgin. (El-Baramous).