



A Brief History of St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church In Atlanta, GA

As all other churches in North America, St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church in Atlanta started as a small Coptic community of a few families in the late 60's and early 70's. From 1971-1974 they used to meet monthly in the house of one of the parishioners to pray and read the bible under the guidance of Fr. Mankarios Awadalla of St. Mary Church in Ottawa, Canada (approximately 10 families). From 1975-1985, Fr. Meena Kamel of St. George Church in Brooklyn, New York used to conduct a Divine Liturgy once a month on Friday evenings in different places like Emory University, First Baptist Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. From 1986-1988, Fr. Samuel Azer of St. Mark Church in Chicago, Illinois administered vespers Friday evening and the Divine Liturgy Saturday morning in the first weekend of every month in a hall at the Greek Orthodox Church.



Under the guidance of Fr. Constantine Naguib of St. George Church in Bachus, Alexandria, a bank account was opened in 1985 for the church and the church was registered in the state of Georgia. In 1988, the church land was purchased and the construction process started in December. H.H. Pope Shenouda III blessed Atlanta by a papal visit to open the church (basement) in October of 1989 with a group of bishops including Anba Rewis, Anba Mousa, Anba Tadros and Anba Paula.



St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Atlanta, Georgia

Phase I (basement) completed in 1989

Also, in 1989, Fr. Bachoum Habib of St. George church in Tampa, Florida started to serve the Coptic community in Atlanta before opening the church building and



then by serving the Divine Liturgy twice every month in the church building until 1990. From 1990-1992, Fr. Isaac Bassily of St. George church in Daytona, Florida served the Divine Liturgy in the church twice every month. H.H. Pope Shenouda delegated priests to also serve the major feasts in Atlanta. Among them were Fr. Silwanes Abba Meena in 1990, Fr. Rafael Anba Bishoy in 1991, Fr. Girgis Sobhi of St. Mark Long Island, New York (Nativity and Epiphany 1992) and Fr. Mikael Abdel Nour (Resurrection and Holy fifty days 1992).

Sunday School Service started in 1986 with 5 classes to serve ages 4-21 on Saturdays and a youth meeting on Sundays. The church board of deacons was selected for the first time in 1985.

In December 1992, H.H. Pope Shenouda III & H.G. Bishop Paula of Tanta delegated Fr. Luke Wassif of St. Paul Church in Tanta to be the first permanent priest of Atlanta. He arrived in Atlanta on Monday, January 4, 1993 and served his first liturgy on the Nativity Eve. From that time on, the Church in Atlanta started to have a full service including liturgies, meetings, activities, retreats, visitation, confession, etc.

In September 1993, H.H. Pope Shenouda III established the Diocese of the Southern United States and delegated H.G. Bishop Youssef (who was a general bishop at that time) to oversee the new Diocese-including the church in Atlanta-

and a new era of great religious service started in all of the churches under his care.

In April 1995, right after the Pascha feast, the construction of the main sanctuary (upper floor) started and was completed by the beginning of 1996. H.G. Bishop Youssef opened the new sanctuary with the evening offering of incense on Saturday, March 23, 1996 and the first Divine Liturgy on Sunday, March 24, 1996.



St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church after the completion of Phase II in March 1996

The main sanctuary (in the name of St. Mary) measures 107' long, 60' wide and 20' high and can accommodate at least 350 people. After opening the main sanctuary upstairs, the process of remodeling the first floor (basement) began to accommodate a small chapel (in the name of St. Paul), big social hall, bookstore, Sunday school classes and the kitchen.

On Saturday, December 14, 1996, during the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of



his enthronement, H.H. Pope Shenouda III began a visit to Atlanta presiding over the evening offering of incense service and giving a sermon. On Sunday, December 15, he consecrated the alters of the church (St. Mary upstairs and St. Paul downstairs).

The wooden work of the Iconostasis was made in Egypt in a factory named Ashbelia for Decorations that is owned and managed by Nader Guirguis. He and some of his workers came to Atlanta in May 1999 and stayed for about 2 months to install it. The icons were written by 2 professors of art in the Coptic Institute for Graduate Studies, Dr. Youssef Nassief and Dr. Bedour Latif, who came to Atlanta in May of 1999. They completed the work by December of the same year.

On December 10, 2000, because of the growing congregation and the increasing demands of the service, H. G. Bishop Youssef ordained Fr. Eleia Eskander a priest to serve the church with Fr. Luke Wassif who was promoted to Hegomen on the same day.

On May 29, 2002, the church bought a house next to the church (2.4 acres) to be used for Sunday school classes and other activities. On June 29, 2004, the church bought a piece of land (4+ acres) on the east side of the city to build another church in the name of St. Paul to serve the growing number of families in that area.



Upper sanctuary with iconostasis completed in December 1999

When Fr. Luke first came to Atlanta in 1993, there were just over 40 families. Today the church has grown to over 280 families. St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church has now become the mother parish for several other mission churches in the Southeast: both Fr. Luke and Fr. Eleia regularly travel to celebrate the divine liturgy with small Coptic communities in Chattanooga, Birmingham, Augusta and Savannah.

We thank God for all His wondrous works.

