

The History of the Coptic Church, Part III

The Birth of the Church

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Having summarized Egypt antiquity, Egypt in the Holy Bible including the blessing of the visit of the Holy Family, I would like to reflect upon the 60 years following the visit, to the establishment of our Coptic Church of Alexandria. The apostle, St Mark, the Evangelist and Beholder of God, preaching and teaching confirmed and founded the Coptic Church as the holy and apostolic church.

The Birth of the Coptic Church:

The Church was born on the day of Pentecost. Fifty days after the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ when the Holy Spirit came upon the chosen apostles during the third hour (9am) was the moment of the birth of the Church. This fulfilled the Lord Jesus Christ's promise of sending them power from the Highest. The Holy Book of Acts describes the birth of the Church: *"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."* (Acts 2:1-4)

The Church was born in Jerusalem so the Church of Jerusalem was considered the mother church for all the Christian churches in the world. The Word of God was growing and the number of disciples increased (Acts 6:7) where the Lord was the worker in and by them and daily multitudes were saved and added to the Church (Acts 2:24).

Very early, the Church of Jerusalem offered her fruit as a sacrifice to the Lord. Her fruit being St Stephen, the archdeacon and first martyr, stoned to his death by the Jews of Jerusalem because of his preaching and witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ at which time "the one to be later called St Paul the apostle" was consenting to his death by stoning (Acts 7: 54-8:1).

The Holy Book of Acts describes the establishment of the churches in many different regions of the world:

1. The Church in Samaria (Acts 8:4-25).
2. Early preaching to the Ethiopian Church by St Phillip (Acts 8:26-40). Later on St Athanasius would ordain St Fromntios as the first bishop of the Ethiopian Church.
3. The Gentile Church in Antioch. Antioch was a major city near the Mediterranean Coast of Syria, an international city and center for Greek civilization. Most of the comprised populations were Syrian but many Greeks and Jews were residing there as well. The Apostles sent out St Barnabas to Antioch to preach there where his teachings bore fruit. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul where he brought him to Antioch and both stayed there for one year. They assembled the Church and taught great numbers of people. It was here in Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:19-21).

4. Establishment of the churches in Cyprus (Acts 13:14-12), Pisidia (Acts 13:13-14), Iconius and Galatia (Acts 14:7), Philippi and Macedonia (Acts 16:11-40), Thessalonica, Berea and Athens (Acts 17), Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), Ephesus (Acts 19:8-9) and Rome.

In the first three centuries there were four main Sees in the world Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria. Later on, the See of Jerusalem and Antioch began to lose their positions and the See of Constantinople the capital of the Eastern Empire began to appear. In the fourth century Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople were the main Sees in the Church.

The Church of Alexandria:

As previously mentioned Alexandria was the third leading city in the world following only Rome and Athens during the Apostolic Era continuing in this order to the sixth century. In philosophy and science, Alexandria was the first city in the world where it was famous for its school, the greatest center for culture and science, in the world at that time. The Alexandrian Library at the time in history was to become one of the wonders of the world. The seeds of Christian faith began to take root in Alexandria even before the evangelism efforts of St Mark. Alexandria was geographically located near Jerusalem and had multitudes of Jews who lived in Alexandria. In the Holy Book of Acts we read about Apollos who was born in Alexandria and was noted to be an eloquent man and mighty in the Holy Scriptures (Acts 18:24-28).

St Luke wrote his Gospel to Theophilus who was Christian and a man of wealth from Alexandria (Luke 1:1-4). Tradition imparts that St Simon the Canaanite came to Egypt and preached the Word in the southernmost parts of Egypt (Aswan and Nopa). However, the establishment of the Church of Alexandria is credited to the efforts of St Mark the Apostle.

The Beholder of God, St Mark the Apostle, the Evangelist and the Martyr:

1. Birth of St Mark:

St Mark authored the Holy Gospel of St Mark and founded the Church of Alexandria and is considered the Church's first pope. St Mark was born in Adenapolis one of the five western cities in northern Africa (Adenapolis, Apollonia, Bitolmais, Toshira, and Birnis).

St Mark's parents were wealthy but as a result of barbarian tribes lost most of their wealth having to depart for the safety of Jerusalem. At that time this family was not aware of the plan of God waiting upon St Mark in Jerusalem. According to the book, "Lamp of Darkness" St Mark lived about 89 years and 5 months. St Mark was martyred on April 26, 68 AD. With this in perspective, it can be calculated that St Mark was approximately 21 years of age at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ's birth. The length of time in which St Mark spent upon the Alexandrian See was 7 years, 8 months, and 1 day.

St Mark was one of the seventy apostles and was the apostle whom was appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ to eat the Passover meal at his home. His home which was known as Zion's room was also the place where the apostles gathered together following the Holy Crucifixion, the place where the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles as tongues of fire on the Pentecost, and also it is also considered the first Church in the entire world.

The Gospel recorded the following about our first pope, the apostle, St Mark:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ celebrated the Passover with His holy disciples in St Mark's home (Matthew 26:18, Mark 14:13, and Luke 12:10-12).
2. Appearance of the Lord after His Glorious Resurrection to the apostles happened in St Mark's home (John 20:19, Luke 24:33).
3. The coming upon the disciples of the Holy Spirit happened in St Mark's home (Acts 1:13 and 2:1).
4. St Mark was with St Barnabas and St Paul 47 AD (Acts 11:27-30).
5. From 47 AD to 49 AD, the first preaching trip involving the apostles Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Seleucia, Salamis, Paphos and Perga in Pamphyli (Acts 13:1-13).
6. 50-52 AD St Mark departed with St Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts 15:39).
7. St Mark was with St Paul in Colossy (Colossians 4:10) in 61 AD.
8. 64 AD-66 AD St Mark departed to Rome for St Paul (2 Timothy 4:11).
9. When the first Council was held in Jerusalem under the leadership of St James the Bishop of Jerusalem, to discuss the acceptance of the Gentiles without circumcision, St Mark attended.
10. After St Mark's preaching with St Barnabas and St Paul, the Holy Spirit led him to preach on his own which brought the saint to Egypt.