



## The First Patriarch of Egypt

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"  
Romans 10:15

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## Introduction

A unique, spirited figure in the history of Christianity emerged and secured the Papal See of Alexandria when the church began in Egypt. He was the young man named John Mark who would acquire many titles: Apostle, Evangelist, Martyr, and Beholder-of-God. Born into the Libyan culture, this young man later grew up in the shadow of Christ. His parents were drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ and opened their home to Him and to His disciples.

The evangelist Mark became best known as the writer of the second account of the Holy Gospel. He established Christianity throughout Northern Africa, including Egypt, Libya, Nubia, and Sudan. His life ended with severe tortures and martyrdom for the sake of Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul addresses the Jews by shining a light of divine prudence on those who are called to the ministry of evangelism:

<sup>1</sup> Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel<sup>[a]</sup> is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

<sup>5</sup> For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'"<sup>[c]</sup> (that is, to bring Christ down from above) <sup>7</sup> or, "Who will descend into the abyss?"<sup>[d]</sup> (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"<sup>[e]</sup> (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. <sup>13</sup> For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."<sup>[g]</sup>

### Israel Rejects the Gospel

<sup>14</sup> How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,<sup>[h]</sup> Who bring glad tidings of good things!"<sup>[i]</sup>

<sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?"<sup>[j]</sup> <sup>17</sup> So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:

"Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."<sup>[k]</sup>

<sup>19</sup> But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:

"I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation."<sup>[l]</sup>

<sup>20</sup> But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me."<sup>[m]</sup> <sup>21</sup> But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."<sup>[n]</sup>

Footnotes:<sup>i</sup>

- a. Romans 10:1 NU-Text reads *them*.
- b. Romans 10:5 Leviticus 18:5<sup>ii</sup>
- c. Romans 10:6 Deuteronomy 30:12
- d. Romans 10:7 Deuteronomy 30:13
- e. Romans 10:8 Deuteronomy 30:14
- f. Romans 10:11 Isaiah 28:16
- g. Romans 10:13 Joel 2:32
- h. Romans 10:15 NU-Text omits *preach the gospel of peace, Who*.
- i. Romans 10:15 Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15
- j. Romans 10:16 Isaiah 53:1
- k. Romans 10:18 Psalm 19:4
- l. Romans 10:19 Deuteronomy 32:21
- m. Romans 10:20 Isaiah 65:1
- n. Romans 10:21 Isaiah 65:2

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+10&version=NKJV>

## His Early Years

The land of Libya cradled the infant Mark from his birth. Born into a noble Jewish family, St. Mark relished a life of financial comfort and an exceptional education. He was learned in several languages including Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, and pursued studies in Law.<sup>2</sup> When his family relocated to Israel due to the attacks of the Berbers, they found a home near Jerusalem and settled there. Not much is mentioned about St. Mark by name, but by astute understanding, wisdom, and study of the Holy Scripture, the Church fathers have recognized him at several pivotal points in the ministry of Christ.

He was the young man holding the pitcher of water where the disciples were

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<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+10&version=NKJV>

<sup>2</sup> HH Pope Shenouda III p. 11

commanded to go and prepare the Passover.<sup>3</sup> It was at his family's home at Jerusalem in the "upper room" that Christ celebrated the Last Supper and the first Holy Eucharist with His disciples.<sup>4</sup> St. Mark was also the young man draped in a linen cloth following close behind Christ, but then fled naked when the Roman soldiers arrested the Lord in Gethsemane.<sup>5</sup> Again, the family of St. Mark and their "upper room" was sanctified on the day of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Blessed Mother, the honorable apostles, and some other believers.<sup>6</sup>

## Rejected by St. Paul

Despite the fact that John Mark was one of the seventy apostles, a dispute erupted between the apostles Paul and Barnabas regarding him. St. Paul was annoyed that Mark had departed from them in Pamphylia,<sup>7</sup> but St. Barnabas, the cousin of John Mark,<sup>8</sup> wanted to continue mentoring him. The result of the division between them led to two teams: Barnabas with Mark and Paul with Silas. This divergence did not have any negative impact on the ministry because both chief apostles wanted the best for this godly service and divine calling. Their heated discussion highlights the seriousness and commitment required to perform the work of an evangelist.

Barnabas, the name by which he was best known by his fellow apostles meaning "*son of encouragement*," also had a second

<sup>3</sup> Mk 14:13-15

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 14:23-26

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 14:51,52

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1 & 2

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* 15:36-41

<sup>8</sup> Col 4:10

name, Joseph (or Joses).<sup>9</sup> He knew St. Mark better on a personal level because of his relationship to him as a close relative (cousin or uncle). He knew his character and understood his potential. The great apostle Paul, the zealous converted Saul of Tarsus<sup>10</sup> who had once persecuted Christians, was less familiar with young Mark's moral fiber and persona, and therefore took a more deliberate stance by sternly admonishing him in order to impart on him the critical need to launch a solid foundation of dedication and commitment for the ministry.

### **Trusted Companion to Sts. Peter and Paul**

After a strict warning following St. Paul's first mission trip and being excluded from his second, John Mark had become a more seasoned apostle at his young age and was consequently more spiritually ready for the seriousness of the missions ahead. Thus, he was invited to join the elder apostle Paul on other mission trips. He called for him specifically by name, saying, *"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry."*<sup>11</sup> Contrary to popular belief, it was actually St. Paul and St. Mark who established the Church of Rome.<sup>12</sup>

John Mark also accompanied and assisted St. Peter in his ministry. The apostle Peter even referred to him as a son, as he mentioned in his first epistle: *"She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son."*<sup>13</sup> The holy Book of Acts reveals that the home of John

Mark continued to be a refuge and a consecrated church for the believers. After an angel of the Lord appeared to St. Peter while he was in prison and miraculously released him, *"he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying."*<sup>14</sup>

St. Mark is considered a "universal preacher."<sup>15</sup> It is believed that he preached on three continents during his ministry, Asia, Europe, and Africa. In addition to Egypt, he also evangelized in Judea, Bethany, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Syria, Antioch, Cyprus, and the Five Western Cities. He also traveled to Paphos, Pamphilia, Rome, Colossi, Venice, Aquila, Ethiopia, Nubia, and Sudan.<sup>16</sup>

### **Egypt—A Significant Country of Spiritual Distinction**

The Holy Bible reveals that St. Joseph the Carpenter was visited by an angel who advised him to take the infant Christ and His mother and flee from Bethlehem to Egypt.<sup>17</sup> King Herod, the unjust and morally corrupt ruler, was infuriated by the possibility that the Christ would overthrow his miniscule kingdom. The Magi had disclosed to Herod the reason for their travels was to welcome this newborn King.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in a tyranny, the brutal monarch ordered the slaughter of the innocent male children of Bethlehem up to the age of two.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, the same land from where the archprophet Moses

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<sup>9</sup> Oden p. 86

<sup>10</sup> Acts 9:1-22

<sup>11</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 4:11

<sup>12</sup> H.H. Pope Shenouda III p.21

<sup>13</sup> 1 Pe 5:13

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<sup>14</sup> Acts 12:12

<sup>15</sup> H.H. Pope Shenouda III p. 20

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* p.20

<sup>17</sup> Mt 2:13-15

<sup>18</sup> Mt 2:1-6

<sup>19</sup> Mt 2:16-18

had led an exodus of God's people to the Promised Land, God the Son traversed in the flesh to Egypt and there took refuge for a few years until the instruction of the angel was revealed to St. Joseph to return to Israel.<sup>20</sup> This historical era preceded the arrival St. Mark the Evangelist by approximately fifty-five years. At least one generation witnessed and most likely some subsequent generations heard about this extraordinary and peculiar *Holy Family* that had graced their land long before St. Mark's evangelistic ministry began in Egypt. The Holy Bible lists many distinguished biblical figures who had also walked along the sands of Egypt. Amongst them are Joseph and his brothers—the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel,<sup>21</sup> Jacob,<sup>22</sup> Moses,<sup>23</sup> Joshua,<sup>24</sup> Caleb,<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah,<sup>26</sup> and St. Peter.<sup>27</sup> Even before the martyrdom of St. Mark, a young boy by the name of Eudaemon (Wadamon)<sup>28</sup> is noted as Egypt's first Christian martyr. Thus, Egypt, once a powerful pagan nation, has evolved into a humble Christian powerhouse and a fertile land for saints and martyrs.

### **The Mission in Egypt and Northern Africa**

Commissioned by the Holy Spirit to traverse to Egypt, St. Mark arrived in approximately 43 A.D. He walked through the metropolis of the modern city of Alexandria. Fluent in

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<sup>20</sup> Mt 2:19-21

<sup>21</sup> Gen

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Ex

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *Jer*

<sup>27</sup> 1 Pe 5:13 (Babylon here is believed to refer to a small district in present-day Cairo, Egypt)

<sup>28</sup> Synexarion: Mesore 18 (August 24)

Greek, he was able to converse with the upper class of Egyptian scholars. The humble and poor class of Egyptians did not know Greek, but only their native Coptic language. Thus, he strived to reach out to them and learn their language and culture.

Laboring with many strides on the sandy earth of Egypt, his sandal strap broke. He sought the aid of a shoe cobbler to repair it. While he awaited the mending of his sandal, the cobbler named Annianus, accidentally pricked his finger with the mending tool, and called out in pain to a "one god." Seizing this opportunity, St. Mark asked Annianus if indeed he knows who that God is. The cobbler replied with ignorance of any personal knowledge of who it can be. From this critical crossroads, the evangelist Mark began to preach the Gospel of peace by teaching the simple cobbler about "the one true God"—Jesus Christ. Annianus believed and joined the mission.

Most Bible scholars believe St. Mark traveled to Egypt twice. The second time was around 60 A.D. Shortly after his first arrival and due to his relentless missionary work, many people converted to Christianity and were baptized. The stalwart faith was delivered to a people eager to receive it, entrusted and ensured to be passed on from generation to generation, as we chant in the Divine Liturgy.<sup>29</sup> Annianus, fervent in the Christian faith, was eventually ordained a bishop and was appointed to be St. Mark's first successor to the Papal See of Alexandria.

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<sup>29</sup> The Divine Liturgies of Sts. Basil, Gregory, & Cyril (people's response before the Introduction to the Fraction) p. 185, 263, 347

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!”<sup>30</sup>*

## **The Symbol of the Lion**

The prophet Ezekiel foretells of the Holy Gospel.<sup>31</sup> He describes the face of a man—the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, a lion—the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, an ox—the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, and an eagle—the Holy Gospel according to St. John. Thus, these four incorporeal creatures reveal the New Covenant and Christ’s ministry for Salvation. These same four creatures are also mentioned by St. John the Beloved in the Holy Book of Revelation.<sup>32</sup>

The Gospel account according to St. Mark roars from the beginning with the “voice of one crying in the wilderness.”<sup>33</sup> The anticipated prophecy of the Forerunner, John the Baptist, is at last revealed. He is no reed shaken by the wind. John the Baptist knew Christ from afar although their only other known meeting was in their mothers’ wombs. The Baptist knew he must prepare the way for the Messiah as it was written by Isaiah the prophet.<sup>34</sup> Others believe the lion is symbolic of Christ, *“the lion of the tribe of Judah.”*<sup>35</sup>

Tradition tells us that while still a boy, young John Mark and his father were startled when a lion appeared and threatened their lives. St. Mark did not fear

and courageously assured his father that no harm will come to them.

*“Once a lion and lioness appeared to John Mark and his father Aristopolis while they were traveling in Jordan. The father was very scared and begged his son to escape, while he awaited his fate. John Mark assured his father that Jesus Christ would save them and began to pray. The two beasts fell dead and as a result of this miracle, the father believed in Christ.”<sup>36</sup>*

Thus, icons of St. Mark reveal a younger man who is often depicted with a lion seated at his feet. For example, the symbol of Venice, Italy, represents St. Mark as a winged lion.

His symbols are proudly displayed on banners and flags throughout many Italian provinces. A spectacular basilica in Venice, Italy, named in his honor is inlaid with the most intricate and majestic mosaics, artistry, and gold leaf overlays throughout and above its doorways.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, a bold depiction hangs above one of the doors into the basilica showing a detailed mosaic of the thievery of the body of St. Mark from Egypt to Italy. Was this theft the work of a crafty and dubious mind? Perhaps, but Divine intervention prevailed. In reality, this theft may have actually preserved St. Mark’s pure body from the devastating persecutions that would continue to plague Egypt’s history and the destruction some of its ruthless rulers may have inflicted on his blessed relics.

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<sup>30</sup> Ro 10:15

<sup>31</sup> Ez 1:10

<sup>32</sup> Rev 5:8

<sup>33</sup> Mk 1

<sup>34</sup> Is 40:3

<sup>35</sup> Rev 5:5

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<sup>36</sup> <http://stabraam.org/the-coptic-faith/history-of-the-coptic-church.html?showall=1>

<sup>37</sup> The Basilica of St. Mark

## **The Cyrillic Liturgy**

The oldest Divine Liturgy known is attributed to St. Mark, the Beholder-of-God. It was written in Greek and translated into Coptic by St. Cyril I, the Pillar of Faith (24<sup>th</sup> Patriarch).<sup>38</sup> It is the foundational Liturgical rite upon which all the other Liturgies are based, St. Basil and St. Gregory according to the Oriental Orthodox Churches, in addition to the other Liturgies used in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

Because the tunes in the Coptic Orthodox Church resemble what was known about ancient Egyptian melodies, St. Mark used the culture and music of the land of Egypt and applied the Divine Liturgy on that unique musical notation and style of chanting.

## **The Holy Gospel According To St. Mark**

In sixteen vibrant chapters, St. Mark shares a rapid survey of the three year ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is considered the first written account of the Holy Gospel and begins when Christ is an adult at the Jordan River ready to introduce the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. With humility our Lord was baptized in the Jordan River at the hand of His cousin John the Baptist.<sup>39</sup> In this perfect moment, the Holy Scripture reveals the manifestation of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thereafter, Christ retreats to the wilderness where He is tempted by Satan. No details are mentioned about the temptations of Christ which other Gospel writers provided,

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<sup>38</sup> Fr. Athanasius El Makary. List of Patriarchs

<sup>39</sup> Mk 1:9-11

but, it is in the style of St. Mark to spare the details in his writing.

Most Biblical scholars agree that St. Mark's account of the Holy Gospel was most likely written around the year 60 A.D. He may have started it while he was in Italy, but completed his Holy Gospel account when he returned to Egypt. Some believe he may have written some of it from memory since he was an eyewitness to many details; and others believe most of his account was transcribed from events shared by St. Peter.

St. Mark had been traveling to many different parts of the world before he arrived in Alexandria the first time and on his second and final visit. It is also believed that he attended the First Council of Jerusalem in 50 A.D.

## **Achieving the Crown of Martyrdom**

Because refusing pagan worship was considered a crime, St. Mark's message about Christianity infuriated the pagan government, especially as more people were turning their lives over to Christ. Those who love and fear the Lord do not and cannot compromise their eternal life with Him even if it costs them the price of their own bloodshed. Throughout his ministry, St. Mark hastened to teach the faith and establish strong roots so that the faith of the Church of Alexandria will never be shaken, not even by its most fierce adversaries.

To end his victorious evangelism ministry, the government under the rule of the iniquitous Emperor Nero ordered to have him killed. St. Mark was dragged throughout the streets of Alexandria,

tortured, and martyred on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of Baramouda (May 8<sup>th</sup>) in 68 A.D.

## Conclusion

In the sixth century, an authenticated ancient basilica bore a telling inscription, *“This is the house of Mary, mother of John, called Mark; Proclaimed a church by the holy apostles under the name of the Virgin Mary, mother of God, after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, Renewed after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in the year A.D. 73.”*<sup>40</sup>

Tradition reveals that it was a ritual of all the newly appointed patriarchs to take the blessing of the honorable and blessed apostle, St. Mark, on the second day after their ordination.<sup>41</sup>

The mission continues on two thousand years later. The number of successors to St. Mark who presided over the Papal See of Alexandria stands at 116, and the churches in his name exist on six continents. The Coptic Orthodox Church treasures this most beloved patron saint for having established the enduring faith of Christianity in Egypt. The words of St. Paul the apostle are most applicable to the resilient preservation of the faith through the utmost integrity of our highly venerated first patriarch, St. Mark the Apostle, Evangelist, Martyr, and Beholder-of-God.

<sup>37</sup>Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas C. Oden p.100

<sup>41</sup> HH Pope Shenouda III p. 62

**from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**<sup>42</sup>.

In June 1968, Pope Paul VI of the Roman Catholic Church rightfully returned relics of St. Mark the Evangelist to a delegation sent by H. H. Pope Kyrillos VI. The esteemed entourage consisted of Egyptian and Ethiopian metropolitans and bishops, who had the honor to travel to Italy to receive the blessed relics of our beloved patron saint and deliver them back to his land of Egypt.

To date, in the year 2012, the names of all the Patriarchs of the Church of Alexandria and the See of St. Mark are listed and preserved upon every holy altar. Thus, our fathers the patriarchs of the church continue to pray and intercede on our behalf, for our good, the good of all the Church, and the good of its current and future spiritual leaders.

The blessed names of the 118 patriarchs of the Great See of St. Mark and the Church of Alexandria (written here in the pronunciation of Coptic or Greek) are listed on the following page.<sup>43</sup>

May the intercession of the Blessed Virgin St. Mary, the prayers of St. Mark the Evangelist, and the holy blessings of all our beloved patriarchs and spiritual leaders be with us always. Glory be to God, forever, Amen.

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<sup>42</sup> Ro 8:37-39

<sup>43</sup> Fr. Athanasius El Makary. List of Patriarchs

**118<sup>th</sup> Popes of the Great See of St. Mark and the Church of Alexandria**

1	Markos	41	Isaac	81	Youanis IX
2	Annianus	42	Simon I	82	Benjamin II
3	Mellious	43	Alexandros II	83	Petros V
4	Kerdonos	44	Kozman I	84	Markos
5	Primos	45	Tawadros I (Theodoros)	85	Youanis X
6	Yostous	46	Kha'il (Mikhail)	86	Ghobrial IV
7	Omanious	47	Mina I	87	Mattaous I
8	Markianous	48	Youanis IV	88	Ghobrial V
9	Claudianus	49	Markos II	89	Youanis XI
10	Agripinious	50	Yacoub	90	Mattaous II
11	Youlianous	51	Simon II	91	Ghobrial VI
12	Demitrious	52	Yusab I	92	Kha'eil VI
13	Heraclias	53	Kha'il II (Mikhail)	93	Youanis XII
14	Dionysius	54	Kozman II	94	Youanis XIII
15	Maximous	55	Shenouda I	95	Ghobrial VII
16	Theona	56	Kha'il III (Mikhail)	96	Youanis XIV
17	Petros I (Sealer of the Martyrs)	57	Ghobrial I	97	Ghobrial VIII
18	Archillaous	58	Kozman III	98	Markos V
19	Alexandros	59	Makarious I	99	Youanis XV
20	Athanasius	60	Theophanius	100	Mattaous III
21	Petros II	61	Mina II	101	Markos VI
22	Timotheus I	62	Abram El Soryani	102	Mattaous IV
23	Theophilus	63	Philotheus	103	Youanis XVI
24	Kyrillos I	64	Zacharias	104	Petros VI
25	Dioscorous I	65	Shenouda II	105	Youanis XVII
26	Timotheus II	66	Christotholous	106	Markos VII
27	Petros III	67	Kyrillos II	107	Youanis XVIII
28	Athanasius II	68	Kha'il IV (Mikhail)	108	Markos VIII
29	Youanis I	69	Makarious II	109	Petros VII
30	Youanis II	70	Ghobrial II	110	Kyrillos IV
31	Dioscorous II	71	Kha'eil V	111	Demetrious II
32	Timotheus III	72	Youanis V	112	Kyrillos V
33	Theodosius I	73	Markos III	113	Youanis XIX
34	Petros IV	74	Youanis VI	114	Makarious III
35	Damianous	75	Kyrillos III	115	Yousab II
36	Anastasious	76	Athanasius III	116	Kyrillos VI
37	Andronicus	77	Youanis VII	117	Shenouda III
38	Benjamin I	78	Ghobrial III	118	Tawadros II
39	Aghatho	79	Theodosius II		
40	Youanis III	80	Youanis VIII		



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