

- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which the righteous, the just and the cross bearers pursued and dwelt in the mountains, deserts, and holes of the earth because of their great love from Christ the King.
- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which the Apostles pursued, and they preached to all nations and made them Christians, and baptized them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Acts 1-28).
- ❖ Fasting and Prayer are those which the martyrs pursued until they shed their blood in the name of Christ, who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate.

Church Fasts

The Coptic Orthodox Church, in its wisdom, has designated certain periods of fasting throughout the year. These times of fasting coincide with important events during the year. The times of fasting account for over 200 days during the year. A few examples follow:

1. **The Weekly Fast** - Since the apostolic age, the church has been aware of the value of fasting and designated Wednesday and Fridays as days for fasting (with the exception of the Holy 50 Days after Christ's Resurrection). This designation was done in memory of Christ's betrayal and the plotting of the Jews to crucify Him (Wednesday) and His crucifixion (Friday).
2. **The Nativity Fast** - The aim of this fast is a spiritual preparation to receive the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This fast lasts for forty days plus three days in memory of the

general fast observed during the reign of Al Moiz (an Arab ruler in Egypt) when El Muqattam mountain was miraculously moved in response to a challenge which, if not met, would have resulted in the death of an innumerable number of Christians.

3. **The Holy Great Fast** - The church fasts for 55 days (8 weeks, Monday through Friday equals 40 days of strict abstinence commemorating our Lord Jesus Christ's fast. Strict abstinence are not permitted on weekends). This fast is set so that we may be prepared to experience and enjoy the glorious Resurrection of our Lord.
4. **The Fast of the Apostles** - The goal of this fasting period is to fill the soul with passion and zeal to preach the Word with an apostolic thought. This fast begins on the Monday following the feast of Pentecost and continues until the feast of the martyrs Peter and Paul on Epep 5 (Coptic Calendar) or July 12th.
5. **The Fast of the Holy Virgin St. Mary** - This fast takes place fifteen days before the celebration of the Assumption of the body of the Holy Virgin St. Mary.

Fasting & Prayer



“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart , with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” (Joel 2:12)

What is Fasting?

Fasting in the Coptic Orthodox Church is a spiritual practice by which man can express his love of God and grow closer to Him. Fasting is a spiritual preparation for feasts so that the festive joy of these feasts may truly be felt by the faithful. During these fasts the faithful abstain from food containing any ingredients that originate from an animal. The consumption of fish is allowed during certain fasts. In addition to this, the faithful abstain from food and drink for several hours a day. Fasting is not only limited to a change in one's diet but also a concerted effort to abstain from those things that may not be pleasing to God (sins). Hence, fasting has three dimensions: abstinence from food, followed by controlling the quantity of food eaten, and the quality of food chosen.

Why Do We Fast?

Fasting is essentially a spiritual exercise commanded by God intended to restrain the body so that the spirit may flourish. By abstaining from food we overpower the body's desire to satisfy its hunger. When it is time to eat we further put the body under subjection by limiting how much food and what kind of food it can have. By doing this we prepare for future struggles between our bodies and our spirits.



Fasting in the Bible

As with other practices and rituals of the Coptic Orthodox

Church, her basis for fasting is built on the foundation set before her by the teachings found in the Holy Bible. Several instances are found in the Bible in which fasting took place. The following are only a few examples of many:

- ❖ The people's fasting in the days of Esther – “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” (Esther 4:16).
- ❖ The fasting of the people of Nineveh – “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them...Let neither man nor beast, nor ox nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, nor drink water.” (Jonah 3:5-7).
- ❖ The fasting of the Apostles – “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:23).
- ❖ The Lord Himself fasted for us 40 days and 40 nights – “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” (Matt 4:1, 2).



Fasting and Prayer:

A Commandment from God

Fasting, as seen throughout the Bible, is not a complete spiritual preparation unless it is accompanied by prayer. Our Lord Himself taught us that fasting and prayer cast out demons as He said, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). Many instances exist in the Bible in which men of God fasted and prayed for one reason or another. As prayed during the Divine Liturgy in the Fraction Prayer of the Holy Great Fast, some of these instances are outlined below:



- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which Moses pursued until he received the Law and Commandments written with the finger of God (Exodus 34:28).
- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which saved Daniel from the lions' den (Daniel 6).
- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which raised Elijah the Prophet to Heaven (1, 2 Kings)
- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which the people of Nineveh pursued, so God had mercy upon them and forgave them their sins and lifted His wrath away from them (Jonah 3:5-10).
- ❖ Fasting and prayer are those which the prophets pursued and prophesized concerning the advent of Christ many generations before His coming.