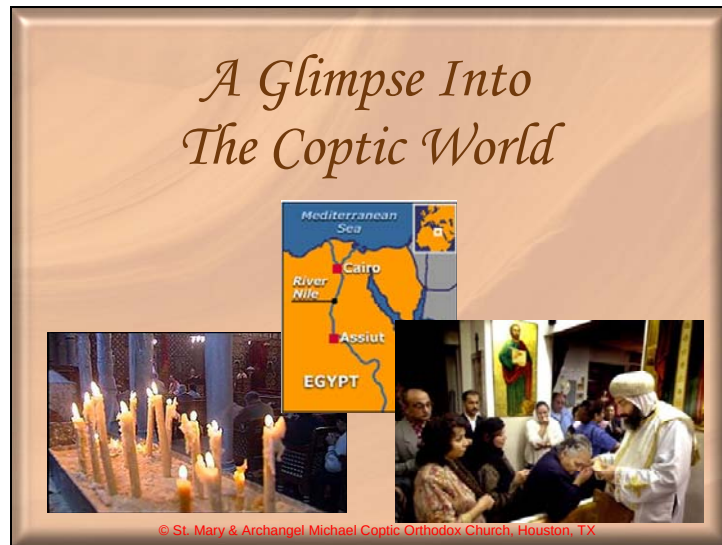


A Glimpse Into The Coptic World

Presented by:
St. Mary & Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church
Houston, Texas
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Slide 2



The word COPT is derived from the ancient Egyptian word HI KA PTAH meaning house of spirit of PTAH.

According to ancient Egyptians, PTAH was the god who molded people out of clay and gave them the breath of life;

This believe relates to the original creation of man.

The Greeks changed the name of "HI KA PTAH " to Ai-gypt-ios.

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The Arabs called Egypt DAR EL GYPT which means house of GYPT; changing the letter g to q in writing.

Originally all Egyptians were called GYPT or QYPT, but after Islam entered Egypt in the seventh century, the word became synonymous with Christian Egyptians.

According to tradition, the word MISR is derived from MIZRA-IM who was the son of HAM son of NOAH

It was MIZRA-IM and his descendants who populated the land of Egypt.



The Coptic language and writing is the last form of the ancient Egyptian language, the first being Hieroglyphics, Hieratic and lastly Demotic.

Scribes started transliterating Egyptian signs in Greek, then they added seven extra letters from the Demotic alphabet to accommodate the sounds for which there were no Greek letters:

Shay, Phay, Khay, Houry, Jenja, Tsheema, Tee

The emergence of this new script cannot be dated precisely but some inscriptions survived dating to the Kushite dynasty (750-656 B.C.) It is documented, however, that St. Pantaenus, the second dean of the Christian School of Alexandria, introduced the Coptic Alphabet, and that The Holy Bible was translated into the Coptic language under his guidance, assisted by his disciples, Clement and Origen.

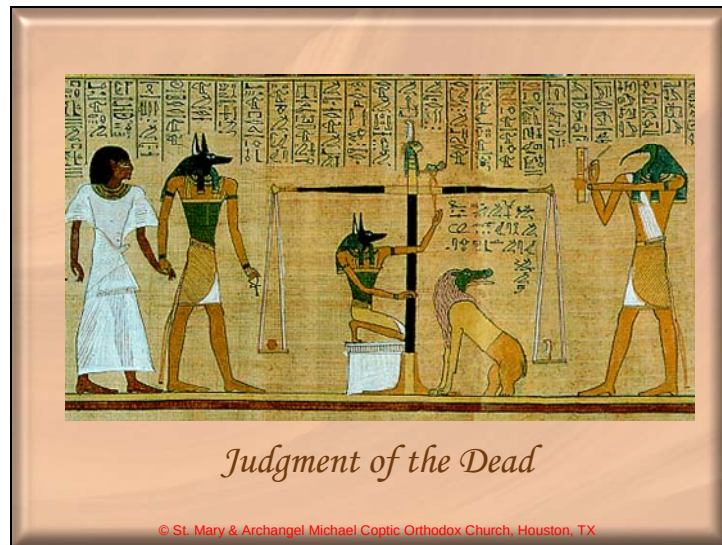
Slide 5



According to honored tradition, St. Mark brought Christianity to Egypt in the first century (around 43 A.D.).

St. Mark's first convert was a Jewish shoemaker in Alexandria by the name of Enianos.

Slide 6



Although Egypt before the Christian era was a pagan country, there was a stream of traditional thought and belief that prepared the way for the Christian message to spread and flourish.

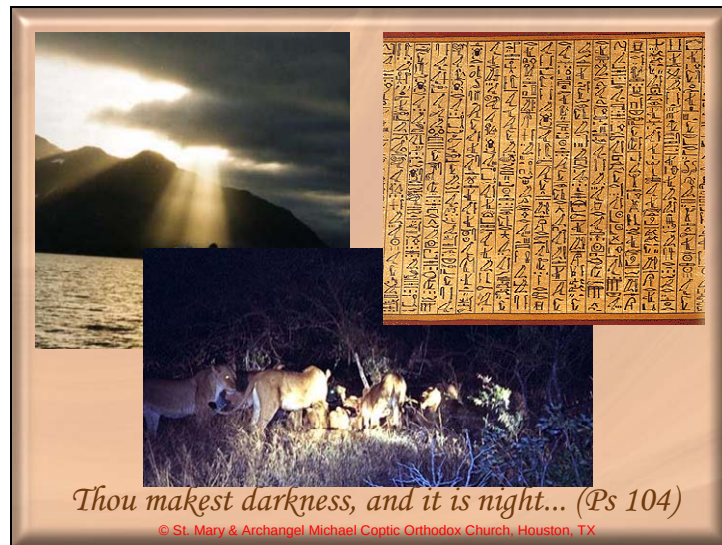


An Egyptian text known as the Insinger Papyrus shows a certain continuity of thought. Deeply rooted in the tradition, is the belief of a world creator who was also a creator of order in nature. This text reads:

*"When people raise their hands the god knows it.
He knows the impious man who thinks of evil.
He knows the godly man and that he has the greatness of god in his heart
He gives good judgment through the counsel which no one knows.
He creates abundant value without there being a store house behind him
It is he who makes the way safe without there being a guard.
It is he who gives the just law without there being a judgment.
The hidden work of god, he makes it known on the earth daily.
He created light and darkness....
He created the earth, begetting millions...
He created day, month, year.... He created summer and winter....
He created food before those who are alive, the wonder of the fields.
He created the breath in the egg where is no access to it.
He created sleep to end weariness. He created remedies to end illness.
Great is the counsel of the god in putting one thing after another.
The fate and fortune that come, it is the god who sends them."*

(Papyrus Insinger, Ancient Egyptian Literature, Lichtheim, M., Vol. III, P184f.)

Slide 8



Akhenaten's hymn is specially remarkable, it dates back to 1,355 years before Christianity.
Notice how it compares with Psalm 104:

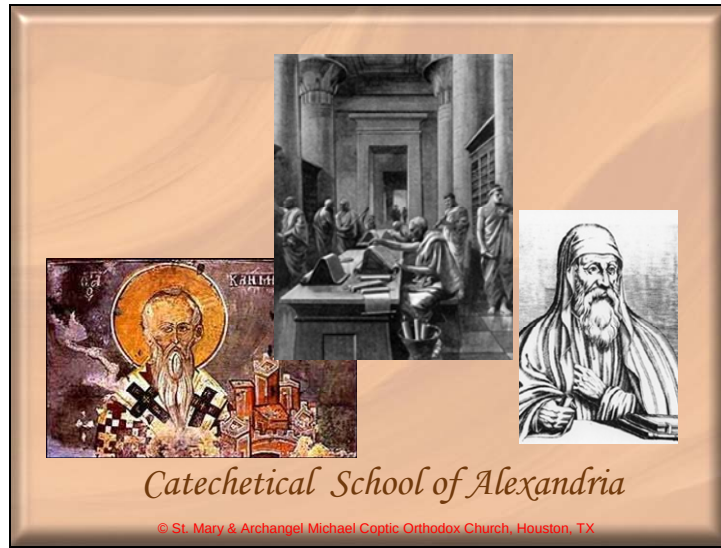
(AKHENATEN'S HYMN)

*When thou dost set in the western horizon.
The earth is in darkness. like to
death... Every lion has come forth from
his lair, All the reptiles bite.*

(PSALM 104: 20-21)

*Thou makest darkness, and it is night:
wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.
The young lions roar after their prey,
and seek their meat from God.*

Slide 9



The first important institution of religious learning in Christian antiquity was the Catechetical School of Alexandria.

It was founded by St. Mark; Athenagoras, a Christian scholar, was its first dean.

The school was not only limited to theology. Science, mathematics and humanities were taught there.

Some of the most famous scholars and teachers of this school were St. Pantaenus, St. Clement, Origen the Scholar, and St. Didymus the Blind.



By the third century, a new thought was developed.

Thousands of anchorites and ascetics were living either alone or in groups in the desert

A large monastic movement was in full gear.

Among the first were St. Anthony and St. Paul, they were followed by others who became pillars of monasticism;

among them: St. Macarius the Great, St. Shenouda the Archmandrite, St. Pachom the Father of Monastic Communities, and St. Moses the Black.



Christianity was recognized as the official religion in Egypt and throughout the Roman Empire around 312 AD.

Several Ecumenical councils took place, among them:

- The Council of Nicea in 325 AD

- The Council of Constantinople in 381 AD

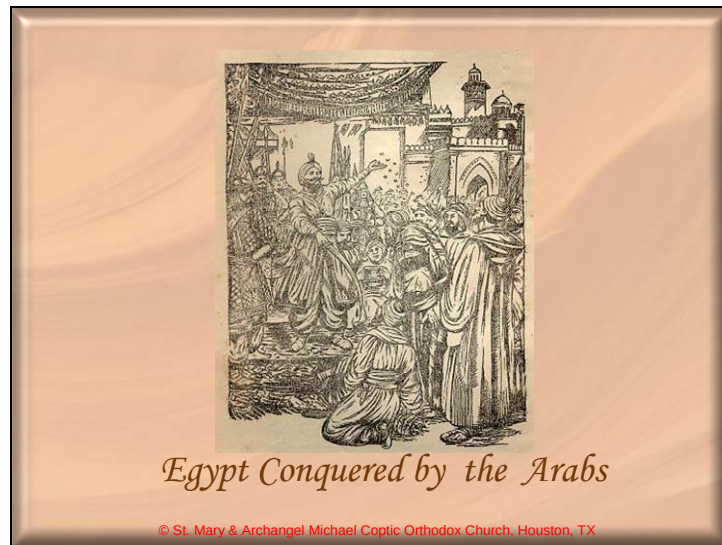
- The Council of Ephesus in 431 AD

Lastly the Council of Chalcedon in 451 resulted in the separation of the Egyptian (Coptic) Church from both the Byzantine and the Western (Latin) Churches.

This resulted in the Creation of two Christian Orthodox families:

- The Oriental Orthodox family represented by the: Syrian, Armenian, Indian, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Egyptian (Coptic) churches

- The other known as the Eastern Orthodox, which consists of about 19 churches, including the Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Romanian Orthodox churches.



Egypt was conquered by the Arabs in 641 AD.

The Copts deeply repressed by Byzantine rule gave support to the conquerors.

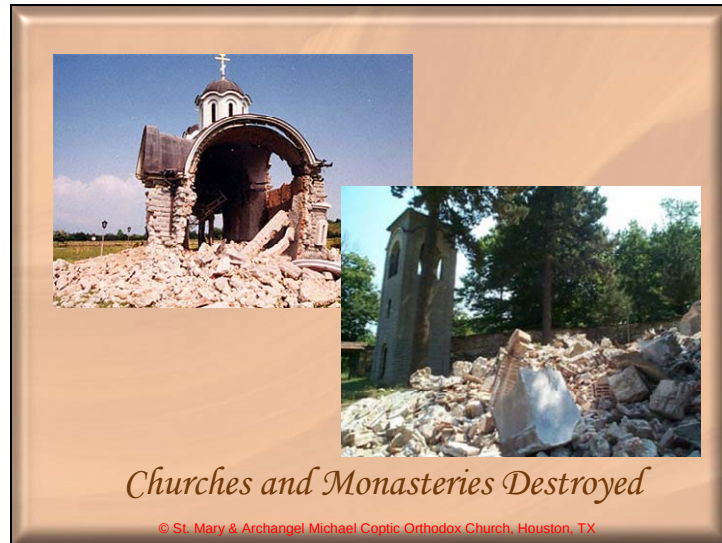
The Arabs were at first indifferent to the Copts and tolerant of their religion.

But by the eighth century, increased taxation on non-Muslims and prohibitive fees for the right to construct and rebuild churches evoked resentment.

Also during that time, many of the Coptic paintings and frescoes were destroyed.

Non payment of taxes was enforced by severe penalties and more Copts were forced to accept Islam.

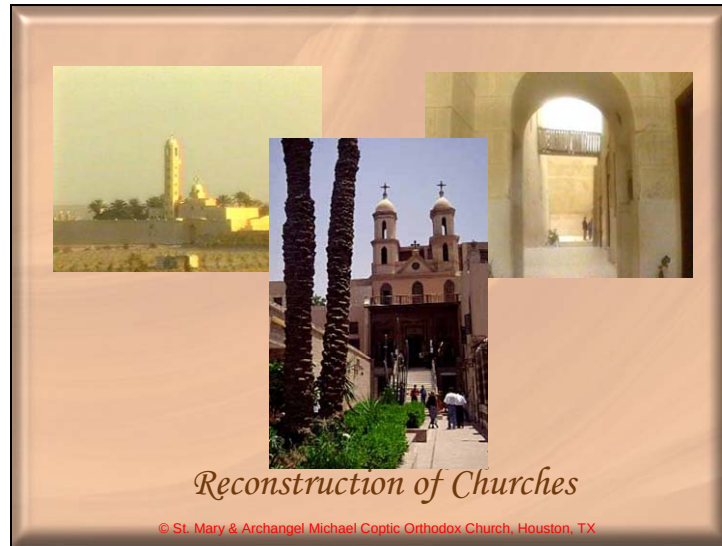
By the ninth century Islam had gained predominance.



During the reign of the Muslim ruler, Al-Hakim Be-Amr Allah, many churches and monasteries were destroyed and Christians were severely and violently persecuted.

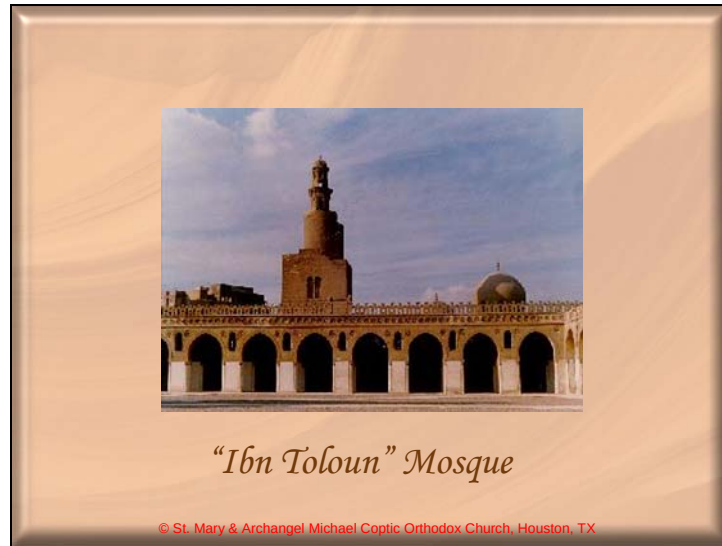
In the Fatimid period. (969 - 1171 AD). Egypt enjoyed a great era of prosperity and the Coptic church flourished.

The Fatimids' sympathetic attitude toward the Copts was expressed among other things in the employment of Copts in the government and their own participation in the Christian feasts.



But more significant is the reconstruction and adornment of Churches and Monasteries in Fatimid times.

New heights in Coptic artistic expression were reached, especially in monastic centers in middle and Upper Egypt.



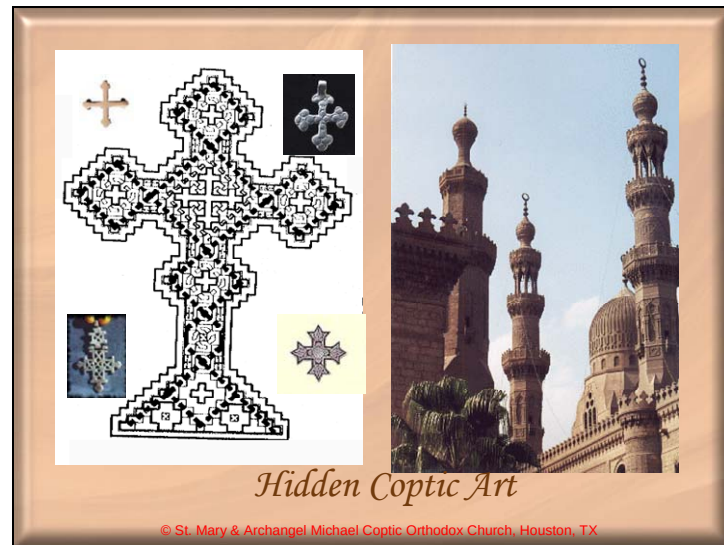
Coptic art owes a great debt to two main sources: classical and ancient Egypt.

Old Cairo was inhabited exclusively by Copts.

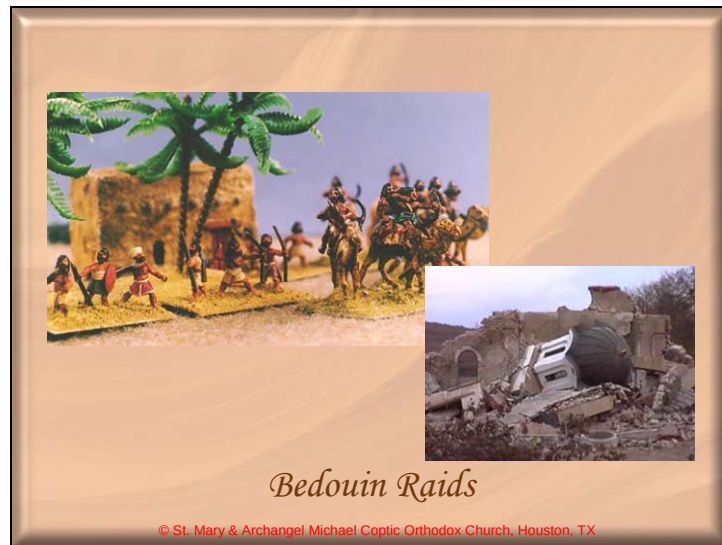
Arabs recruited local labor from their ranks.

The Copts built most of the famous mosques in Cairo.

An example is "Ibn Tuloun" mosque which is considered a masterpiece of Islamic Art.



The Coptic artist disguised crosses and symbols from the Old and New testament on the walls and wood carvings which would only be discernible to Copts.

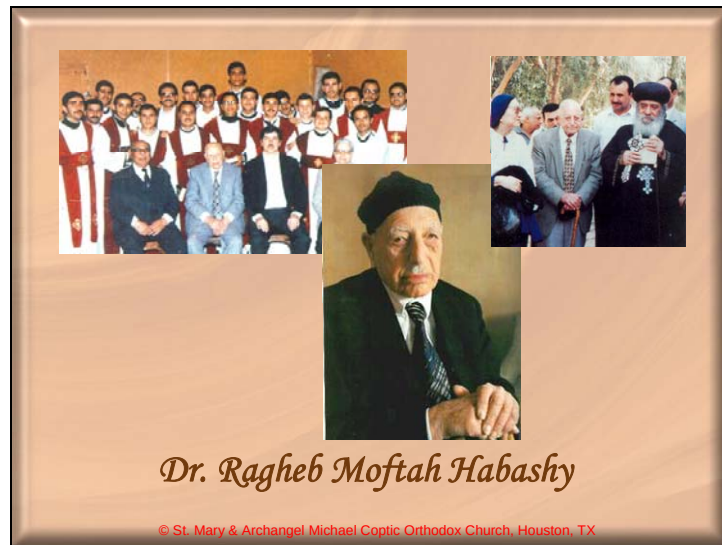


During the Ayyubid dynasty (12th century), the situation changed and there was an erosion of good will.

Christianity declined with the coming of the Mamluks.

Artistic expression seemed drained of its strength.

During medieval times, churches and monasteries were plundered and destroyed by Bedouin raids.



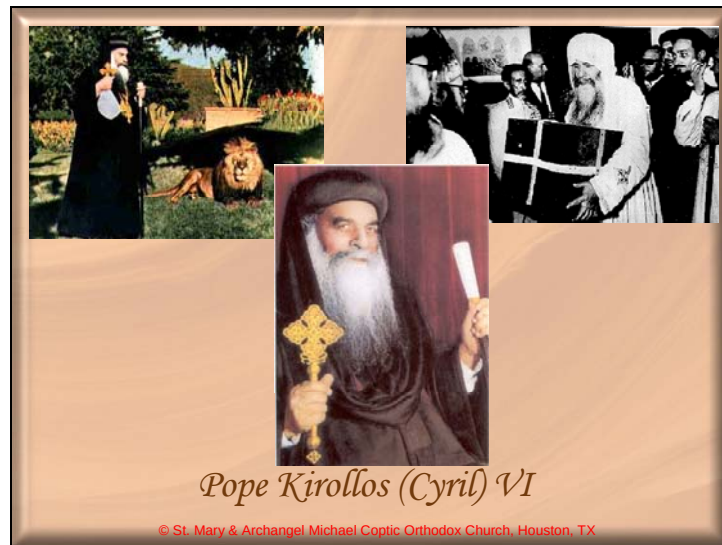
Not until the middle of the nineteenth century under the leadership of the great reformer, educator and statesman Pope Kirolos IV (110 Pope of Alexandria) did the Copts regain a sense of prestige and position.

By the twentieth century The Higher Institute of Coptic Studies was founded in an attempt to restore a sense of religious identity and to preserve the Coptic artistic heritage.

Dr. Ragheb Moftah Habashy established the music section of the Institute of Higher Coptic Studies in 1954 and began taping the hymns on modern equipment.

Thus it became easier to standardize the hymns for transcription for use in Holy Liturgies.

One of Dr. Moftah's most important tasks for many years was the teaching of hymns to aspiring church singers at the Coptic Clerical College and at a summer school in Alexandria.



Also under the enlightened leadership and spirituality of Pope Kirollos VI (116 Pope of Alexandria), the Church entered into ecumenical dialogues and took its place on boards and committees of the World Council of Churches.

This patriarch was loved for his humbleness, he was a very simple man.

He realized a need to organize the church and to establish new bishoprics.

He felt a need for education and research.

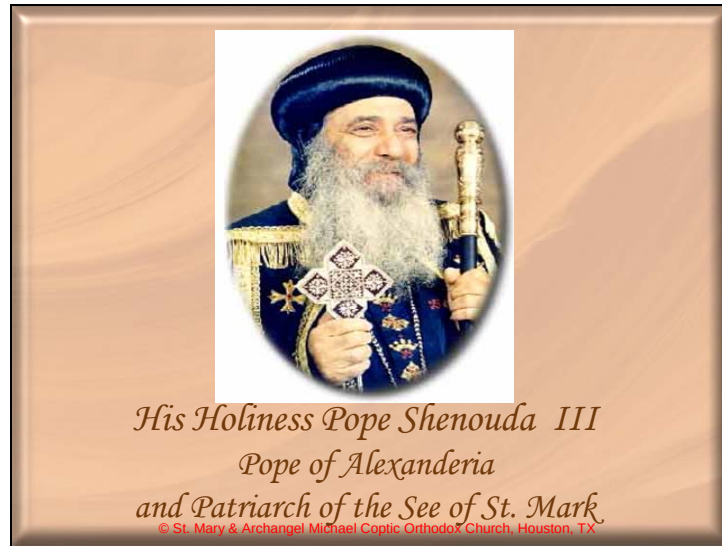
His papacy will be remembered in that during his time, the Virgin Mary's Apparitions happened in Egypt.

He succeeded in reviving the history of the Egyptian Martyr St. Mina.

He brought back the relics of St. Mark to Egypt.

He gave permission to the Egyptians who emigrated abroad to build the first Coptic Orthodox Churches in the United States and Canada.

He was a man of prayers and miracles.



His Holiness Pope Shenouda III (the 117th Pope of Alexandria) is the Coptic Church leader since 1971 until the present.



Pope Shenouda was born in 1923 and has pursued both an ascetic and scholarly life. He joined the monastery of El-Suryan at Wadi El-Natrun (Egypt) in 1954 and subsequently lived as a hermit in several monastic centers in the western desert of Egypt. He was ordained in 1962 as Bishop of higher theological studies. He is also the author of more than 100 books and a large number of articles on spirituality and theology. Pope Shenouda takes a special interest in social services for the community especially in the Sunday school movement.



The Coptic Church is very rich in history, antiquity, art, music and many other aspects. Perhaps the greatest treasure it has is the visit of Christ Himself and the Holy Family to Egypt. No other land outside of His birth country has received this blessing.

Isaiah the prophet spoke of this event saying:

*"Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, And will come into Egypt;
The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence,
And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst." (Isaiah 19:1)*

An ancient hymn reminds us:

"At the very time Christ arrived in Egypt, straightway, all of the statues fashioned by man were shaken down.

For the One Who caused trembling in Herod also brought on the quaking of the idols.

He was hidden in the arms of His Mother, but He acted as God.

He proceeded into Egypt and an angel from on high ministered to His flight."

Isaiah further proclaims saying, "BLESSED BE EGYPT, MY PEOPLE..." (Isaiah 19:19)
And Egypt is indeed blessed!