

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

The Infant Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Saint Joseph, accompanied by Salome, mother of Zebedee's children, made the journey to Egypt in compliance with a [divine](#) message communicated to Joseph in a dream, directing them to leave Bethlehem and seek refuge in Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod the Great (Mt. 2:13). This was also in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, "An oracle concerning Egypt: Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them" (Is. 19:1).

The incident is glorified in the Coptic Doxology and the DIFNAR hymnal, as well as in the SYNAXARION. The *Difnar*, in particular, cites under 24 Bashans a reference to the swift white cloud descending upon Egypt, symbolizing the Virgin [Mary](#) in purity and ethereality: "I praise the Lord, my Savior, and magnify His Virgin Mother, the light cloud came to Egypt, the saintly Virgin Mary, with our [Lord Jesus](#) Christ in her arms."

PALLADIUS, [Bishop](#) of Helenopolis (c. 365-425), who spent several years with the monks of Egypt, recorded his visit to the region of al-Ashmunayn (Hermopolis Magna), to which Jesus went with [Mary](#) and Joseph, that there might be fulfilled the word of Isaiah quoted above. According to Palladius, "We also saw there the house of idols wherein all the idols that were in it fell down upon their faces on the ground when our Redeemer went into the city."

Various historians have traced a route likely to have been followed by the group. The Coptic Synaxarion also records the itinerary, and many homilies refer to names of places visited by the holy family in the Delta and in Upper Egypt. It is now accepted that the group crossed the Sinai Peninsula by the northern caravan route alongside the Mediterranean littoral from Gaza to Raphia (modern Rafah) and came to the present al-'Arish. Their last station in Sinai was Pelusium (modern al-FARAMA,

regarded as the eastern key city to Egypt). Having crossed the Isthmus of Suez south of Lake Manzalah, they came to the city of Bubastis near Zaqazq. It is believed that at this spot a spring of water was made to flow for them, where the Blessed Virgin bathed the Infant Jesus. Accordingly, this spot was given the name of al-Mahammah (the bathing-place), now known as Musturud, where a church dedicated to the Virgin [Mary](#) was built in 1185.

The group then resumed their journey to BILBEIS, from which they followed a long and circuitous route to avoid their pursuers. Consequently, they took the road to Minyat Jinah (the present Minyat Samannud), to al-Burullus, Sakha, and further west to Wadi al-Natrun. Their next stage took them in a southeasterly direction to Heliopolis; then they settled for a while at the spot now known as al- Matariyyah, where they took shelter under a tree, which is still known by the name of *Shajarat al-'Adhra Maryam* (tree of the Virgin Mary). The next station was at HARIT ZUWAYLAH in the northeast district of Cairo, commemorated by the Copts in the Church of the Blessed Virgin [Mary](#) and a convent.

Later the Holy Family proceeded to BABYLON, and at a spot near the present al-Ma'adi, they crossed the Nile and penetrated [Upper Egypt](#) via Memphis, Samalut, al-Ashmunayn, as far as Mir and Qusiyyah, at the spot where the monastery of Our Lady known as DAYR AL-[MUHARRAQ](#) now stands.

It is believed that the group later returned to Palestine following the same route that they had taken in the outbound journey. The Coptic Synaxarion states that on their return they lodged in Old Cairo in a cave beneath the spot where the Church of Abu Sarjah now stands (see BABYLON)

The duration of the Holy Family's stay in Egypt is difficult to determine with precision; historians waver between one and four years. Whatever the case may be, another [divine](#) message was communicated to Joseph in

a dream: “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead” (Mt. 2:20). This message, like the earlier one, was also in fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy, “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1).

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[BISHOP GREGORIOS](#)

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