

[LECTIONARY](#)

A set of four books containing the readings for the various liturgies of the Coptic church. Different lectionaries existed according to different rites in Upper and in Lower Egypt; it was only with the coming of the printing press (see CYRIL IV) that a certain uniformity evolved among the Coptic churches in the whole of Egyptian territory.

In the beginning, for the reading of a passage from the Psalms, the whole Psalter was used, and for a section from the Gospels, a book containing the whole Gospel of Matthew or Mark or Luke or John, with an index indicating to the reader at what point he was to begin and end. At a second stage, it appeared more practical to consign to a special book, the lectionary, those passages that could be properly read on the different feasts and celebrations, drawn from the various biblical books. This multivolume book—for it rapidly grew beyond a single volume—was given the name *kata meros*, probably from the Greek, signifying “in parts,” which does indeed indicate its content. The indexes previously in use continued to circulate—we still have manuscripts—but they do not give the sections to be read in full, only the beginning and end of each lection, which could be a source of confusion.

The [lectionary](#) in use today was printed for the first time in 1900-1902. Information will be found in Hanna Malak’s study (1964) about the publication of each volume, both for the Orthodox and for the Catholic Copts. The original term, no doubt Greco- Coptic, has given rise to the Arabic transliteration *qatamarus* according to the vocalization adopted. As in the ancient manuscripts, there are two editions, one bilingual with the two texts, Coptic and Arabic, in parallel columns, the other with the Arabic text only.

We may add one point that is important for the history of the calendar of the feasts celebrated in various places. The [lectionary](#) consists of two principal elements. It supplies, of course, the passages from the Old and

above all the New Testament that ought to be read at an office or mass; and before these biblical sections, it includes a rubric mentioning the feast or the saint, the whole forming a precious calendar, for the SYNAXARION itself is a literary work, reflecting the personal researches of its authors. Moreover, the Synaxarion has been remodeled several times, and thus does not render an account of the actual usage of each church. These calendars, at least some from the environs of Cairo, and also some of the most ancient, have been studied or published and translated into [French](#) by François Nau (1913). Some date from the twelfth century, well before the oldest manuscripts of the Synaxarion. As for the choice of the biblical pericopes, or passages, it is examined at least for the annual lectionaries by U. Zanetti (1988).

The commentaries on the [lectionary](#) are also important, as they provide a kind of spiritual commentary on the lections made at each celebration.

Four lectionaries are used in the Coptic church on various occasions through the year: the annual *qatamarus*, the Great Lent *qatamarus*, the Pascha *qatamarus*, and the Pentecost *qatamarus*.

The Annual *Qatamarus*

This includes the readings assigned for all Sundays and weekdays through the year, with the exception of those collected separately in the three other lectionaries.

Far from being gathered at random from the various books of the Bible, the Gospel readings for the Sunday liturgy are methodically arranged and coordinated so that the Gospel lections for the four Sundays of every month in the Coptic calendar combine to present a particular theme. The themes of the twelve months are planned to correspond with the beginning and end of the year, the establishment and consummation of the church, and the creation and termination of the world. These themes become apparent when the subjects of all four Sundays of a given month

are examined as one unit, as follows: (1) Tut: the love of God the Father for mankind; (2) Babah: the authority of Christ and His power of purifying souls and bodies; (3) Hatur: the word of the Gospel, its blessings and rewards; (4) Kiyahk: the nativity of [Jesus](#) Christ; (5) Tubah: the grace and blessings of salvation; (6) Amshir: spiritual nourishment; (7-9) Baramhat, Baramudah, and Bashans: during the months in which the church observes Great Lent and celebrates Easter and Pentecost, the Gospel readings are closely related to fasting, prayer, and repentance; (10) Ba'unah: the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; (11) Abib: Christ's authority imparted to His disciples; and (12) Misra: the consummation of the church.

Each of the above-mentioned themes is fully expounded through the readings apportioned for every Sunday. Thus, in Tut, the first month of the year, the general theme of which is the portrayal of God's love for mankind, the lections are designed to reflect the following constituent elements: *first Sunday* (Lk. 7:28-35): the wisdom of God the Father as revealed in sending John the Baptist to pave the way for Christ; *second Sunday* (Lk. 10:21-28): the manifestation of the gospel of [Jesus](#) Christ; *third Sunday* (Lk. 19:1-10): the promise of salvation given to those who, like Zacchaeus, are willing to accept it; and *fourth Sunday* (Lk. 7:36-50): Christ's mercy and compassion toward sinners.

Two further points are worthy of note in the general framework of lections. First, when a month contains a fifth Sunday, its reading is invariably taken from Luke 9:12-17, which relates the miracle of feeding the five thousand.

Second, since all twelve months of the Coptic Calendar have thirty days each, accordingly, should the remaining five or six days (known as *al-Nasi*) include a Sunday—the final Sunday of the year—its Gospel reading is taken from Matthew 24:3-35, in which Christ talks to His disciples about various warnings of the imminent end of the world and the birth pangs of the new age.

Weekday readings, on the other hand, are selected and arranged to harmonize with the life story of the saint or saints being commemorated on each day, as recorded in the Synaxarion. On certain occasions, such as the feast day of a particular saint, the reading refers to another day in the calendar on which an analogous saint is commemorated. Thus, 24 Babah, 9 Kiyahk, and 23 Ba'unah are the feast days of Saint Hilarion, Saint Biman the Confessor, and Saint Abanub the Confessor, respectively. On each of these days the readings refer to 22 Tubah, the feast day of Saint Antony, the father of monasticism.

Closely related to the Gospel reading of the Divine Liturgy are the two other readings assigned for the service of the raising of incense for the evening and for the morning. For instance, to fit in with the readings apportioned for the liturgy of the first Sunday of Tut—the theme of which is God's wisdom—the Gospel for the evening service is taken from Matthew 11:11-19, and for the morning service from Matthew 21:23-27. The theme of the former reading is God's mercy, and of the latter God's justice, mercy and justice being the woof and warp of God's wisdom.

Similarly, on the third Sunday of Tubah, where the Gospel reading (Jn. 3:22-36) promises eternal life to those who believe in Christ the Savior, we find that the two preceding readings for the evening and morning services (Jn. 5:1-18 and Jn. 3:1-21) refer, respectively, to purification from sin and renewal through baptism.

This system is slightly modified during the months of Babah, Hatur, Ba'unah, Abib, Misra, and the last two Sundays of Bashans, when the story of the Resurrection is read every time from a different gospel in the morning service of incense raising. On the first Sunday it is Matthew 28:1-20, on the second Mark 16:2-8, on the third Luke 24:1-12, and on the fourth John 20:1-18.

Readings from the Pauline and Catholic Epistles and Acts are also closely interrelated and bear directly upon the Gospel of the day and its Psalm-

versicle, thereby helping to provide an integrated message that the church offers day by day to the faithful, as seen from the following example.

On 17 Hatur the church celebrates the feast day of Saint John Chrysostom. A close look at the contents of this day's readings will reveal a common thread. The Gospel (Jn. 10:1-16) speaks of the Good Shepherd and His care for the flock. It is preceded by the Psalm-versicle 73:17, 23, 24: "Thou dost hold my right hand, thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory." The Epistle to Timothy lays down the pastoral duties of a presbyter to his congregation (2 Tm. 3:10; 4:1-22), and in the Catholic Epistle (1 Pt. 5:1-14), the key verse is "Tend the flock of God that is your charge." Likewise the reading from the Acts centers upon the responsibility of the shepherds: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own Son" (Acts 20:28).

Great Lent *Qatamarus*

This [lectionary](#) comprises readings assigned for the three-day fast of Jonah and the seven-week fast preceding Easter, known as Great Lent.

For the fast of Jonah, the lections are all centered upon the idea of salvation through [belief](#) in the resurrection of [Jesus](#) Christ, as foreshadowed by Jonah. The four chapters of the book of Jonah are spread over the three days (Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) and are read before the Gospel of the morning service, which is followed by a relevant sermon.

The main theme of all Great Lent lections is spiritual fortitude. In the first four weeks special emphasis is laid upon the aspects of such fortitude, and in the remaining three weeks, upon its fruits and benefits.

A major feature of worship in Lent is that, with the exception of Saturdays and Sundays, the church commands full abstinence from all food and drink—not just from foodstuffs including animal fat— till the end of the Divine Liturgy of the ninth canonical hour, that is, three o'clock in the afternoon. During the other five days of the week, from Monday to Friday, the evening service does not include the [offering](#) of incense or Gospel reading, but lections for the morning raising of incense contain particular prophecies chosen from the Old Testament.

The Pascha *Qatamarus*

This includes lections apportioned for the Holy Week. Here again the readings from both the Old and the New Testament are particularly correlated to focus the various events that took place in the life of [Jesus](#) Christ throughout Holy Week.

The Pentecost *Qatamarus*

The lections for Pentecost cover a period of seven weeks starting with the Monday that follows Easter Sunday. The readings assigned for each week form a coherent unit the theme of which is closely related to the Sunday Gospel.

Pentecost may be divided into two main sections: The first forty days follow the resurrection and end with the ascension, during which Christ appeared to the disciples. It is particularly significant that the first Sunday in this period is named after Thomas and is also referred to as “New Sunday.” Lections are centered upon the theme of [belief](#) in [Jesus](#) Christ. The last ten days culminate in the descent of the Holy Spirit, the theme being the promise of the Holy Spirit given to the disciples (Acts 1:4-8).

[*See also:* Holy Week; Lent; Pentecost.]

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