

Palm Sunday

One of the most popular [feasts](#) among the Copts, this occurs on the seventh Sunday of Lent and has been celebrated by the Coptic church from early Christian times in order to commemorate the entry of [Jesus](#) into Jerusalem. This begins Holy Week, which is called the week of suffering (Jum'at al-Alam).

The Copts throng their churches from early morning carrying with them plaited palm leaves in the shape of crosses or a round cake of holy bread, or both, decorated with [olive](#) twigs and flowers. Religious services on Palm Sunday begin at daybreak and last until the afternoon, although nowadays some curtailment is practiced in town churches. The celebrations include seven processions: three within the sanctuary beyond the iconostasis around the altar, three around the interior of the church, accompanied by censers and a great wooden cross decked with branches of palm and three candles. The procession halts [briefly](#) before icons and relics. The seventh tour takes place around the altar, while the [choir](#) chants hymns. Members of the congregation join in the three central rounds of the procession within the church.

After the reading of the [Gospel](#) and the office of matins, the Liturgy of either Saint Gregory or Saint Basil is reiterated until the time of communion, when the office of the dead is held at the [ninth hour](#) of Palm Sunday. This traditional office among the Copts is especially practiced in behalf of those whose death might occur between Palm Sunday and [Easter](#) Monday, for no regular funerary functions are allowed for private individuals whose death falls in the course of Holy Week. Once the celebrations are completed with the aspersion of holy water and the benediction, the faithful withdraw with their palm crosses and their holy bread.

As a rule, they break the fast on meals consisting [essentially](#) of fish, as this happens to be the only day of Lent when fish is permitted.

In the early centuries of Coptic history, a special procession is said to have been conducted outside the church through the city or town headed by the clergy and followed by the community of the faithful. This tradition remained in force until it was forbidden by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim at the turn of the tenth century.

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ARCHBISHOP BASILIOS

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