

## ***ST. MARY IN THE COPTIC[1] RITE***

It is too difficult to give an account of the prominent place of St. Mary in the Coptic Church in this short treatise. For St. Mary is commemorated and invoked in every daily hymn and liturgy, and even in every canonical hour, day and night. Various Marian feasts are celebrated yearly and monthly, and there are also Lord's feasts in which we honour her with the Lord (such as the feasts celebrating Annunciation, Christmas, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, the First Miracle Jesus made in Cana of [Galilee](#) etc). Her icons have special characteristics and a certain order in the Coptic Church building[2] . The richness and beauty of the antiphones, and the tones of the Coptic Marian hymns, are truly amazing, especially those of the Marian month (Keyahk), before Christmas.

### **1. ST. Mary in the Daily hymns**

The Coptic Church gives special attention to hymning as an expression of the heavenly nature which she gained through her unity with the Risen Christ. From the first centuries she has inspired hymns for every day of the week, offered as a loving sacrifice by the believers and as a method for raising their hearts to heaven, preparing them all the week to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy. These simple and lovely hymns were used also to teach the people the Orthodox beliefs and to protect them from heresies. The daily assemble of the local Church to sing hymns preserves the unity of the Church.

Every daily hymn consists of: the Lord's Prayer, Prayer of Thanksgiving, Psalms, passages from the Holy Scriptures, Four "howces" (means "hymns") and ("Lobsh" means "explanation" ) , Theotokia of the day (hymn giving praise to St. Mary the Theotokos) etc

### **Characteristics of the Theotokias:**

1. Through the Theotokias the people repeat the name “Mary” as a sign of the close friendship with her and their deep desire to call her by name.

This name “Mary” was borne by only one person in the Old Testament, the sister of Moses and Aaron (:20f; )

There are different explanation for the etymology of the name “Mary”[3] :

A. As the names “Moses” and “Aaron” are purely Egyptian, it is possible that their sister received an Egyptian name “Meri-Yam”, which consists of two words:

“Meri” is the perfect passive participle of the Egyptian verb “Mr” (to love), i.e., it means “beloved”. “Yam”, was used for the Hebrew Divine Name “Yahwah”.

Then “Meriam” means “the Beloved of God”[4]

B. The ancient rabbis saw in Mary’s name a symbol of Israel’s bitter servitude in Egypt. Mary means “bitterness” (Hebrew Merur). They state that her name was born of the Egyptians’ hard treatment of the Jews.[5]

C. Some early Christian writers see that the Hebrew word “Maryam” consists of two words:

“Mar” means “bitter”, “Yam” means “Sea”.

It means “bitter of sea” or “Myrrh of Sea”.

D. Others see that it is the feminine gender of the Aramic word “Mar” (Master), i.e., it means “Lady”.

2. The Theotokias use an enormous number of titles for St.Mary, taken from her various offices and privileges, such as:

“Second dome, holy of holies, golden vessel of manna, golden lamp-stand, golden censer.

My lady, holy, undefiled, true virgin, beautiful dove, holy flower, precious stone,

Theotokos, mother of Emmanuel, mother of the Refuge, mother of the Holy One, mother of the Master, mother of the Beloved, mother of Jesus Christ, mother of God’s Son, rejoiced of Eve, joy of the generations, boast of Jude, preaching of Moses, friend of Solomon, daughter of Joachim”.[6]

“Burning bush seen by Moses, uncultivated field that has produced the

Fruit of Life, treasure which Joseph bought and found with a Pearl hidden in it, she who gave suck to the Feeder of every body, Rational mount (of Sinai), and mount which Daniel saw, perfect, chaste, rejoiced of angels, mother of Christ, mother of all living".[7]

"Second heaven, eastern gate, Jerusalem - the city of our Lord, rational paradise, pure bride of the Pure Bridegroom, incorruptible, unblamed, chosen vessel, handmaid, factory of the inseparable unity (between His divinity and His humanity".[8] "Glory of all the virgins, new heaven, the Woman of the Book of ".[9]

"Mediatrex".[10]

3. The Theotokias are very rich with the types and symbols of St. Mary, mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, together with simple and deep theological explanations from the point of view of St. Mary's offices, privileges and relation to the Holy Trinity, to the heavenly hosts, to the believers and to the whole human race.

4. Through these hymns, the church clarifies the mystery of Incarnation, the mystery of our salvation and many aspects of the Christological theology:

"God, the Word, became Man without separations!

He is one of two:

The holy and incorruptible divinity, who is one with the Father;  
and the pure human being, not of human seed, equal  
to us..."

*Theotokia* of Sunday.

He is still God,  
came to us and became Son of Man !  
He is the True God,  
Who came and redeemed us !

*Theotokia of Thursday.*

5. There is no need to state that these Theotokias have an eschatological aspect, for it is the expression of the Coptic Church for her life. They explain the Old Testament rites and actions as symbols and types of the mystery of Incarnation in view of the heavenly kingdom. As an example, the conclusions of the Theotokias of Wednesday to Saturday (Batis)[\[11\]](#) is:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who bears the sins of the world, may You consider us of your sheep who will be at your Right Hand !

That on your fearful second advent, we will not hear the terrible voice:

“I do not know you!”

But will be worthy of bearing the full, joyful voice of your mercy, saying aloud:

Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take, for your heritage, eternal life, for ever. The martyrs will come with their sufferings, and the righteous with their virtues.

The Son of God will come in His glory and His Father’s glory, and reward each one according to his deeds....”

6. These Theotokias are in fact liturgical hymns, preparing us spiritually to participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy and receive the Communion, the True Manna, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, Son of St. Mary.

7. Their title “Theotokia” declares that the principal and theological foundation of the Coptic devotion to St. Mary in these hymns is “her motherhood to God (OeotOKoc)” beside other theological bases, i.e., her perpetual virginity and her close friendship with her relatives the whole human race.

8. In all our genuine Marian texts and hymns the Church makes a clear distinction between Jesus Christ to whom worshipping is due, and St.

Mary to whom veneration is due.

According to the words of St. Epiphanius of Salamis, in Cyprus, “Let Mary be honoured, but let the Lord be worshipped!”[\[12\]](#)

St. Ambrose gives a warning in this respect: “Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit, too, must be adored when we adore Him, who is incarnated of the Holy Spirit. But let no one apply this to Mary, for she was the temple of God, not the God of the temple. And therefore He alone is to be adored, who worked in the temple”.[\[13\]](#)

9. These Theotokias provoke us to repent:

“Your mercies, O my God, are innumerable....

May You, my Lord, not remember the sins I have committed, nor count my transgressions!

For You chose the publican, saved the adulteress and remembered the thief who was at Your Right Hand.

May You teach me, a sinner, repentance....”

*Conclusion of Theotokia (Adam)*[\[14\]](#)

## **2. Mary in the Keyahk's hymns**

As we celebrate Christmas on 29th of Keyahk, the whole month ( before Christmas) is devoted to hymning many Marian hymns, added to the daily hymns, as a preparation for Christmas.

In this month - which we can call the Marian Month -the believers in [Egypt](#) assemble in evening of every Saturday and remain in the church giving hymns until the end of the Eucharistic Liturgy of Sunday.

## **The Characteristics of the Keyahk's hymns:**

Beside those characteristics of the "Theotokias" which we have already mentioned, these Keyahk's hymns have the following characteristics:

1. If we eliminate the hymns which were introduced lately by someone who had no theological knowledge, the keyahkal hymn is truly a heavenly symphony, praises not only St. Mary as the mother of God, but also the whole Church as being the holy [dwelling](#) place of the Incarnate God. In other words, through the incarnation of God's Son in the holy womb of St. Mary we see Him dwelling in our souls by the sanctification of His Holy Spirit.
2. These hymns have a social trend, every member is praising God, not individually but through all God's saints, through His membership of the One Church. "I praise you in the midst of the great community (Church)" ( ).

For this reason many hymns are devoted to praise some saints also, as if they assemble with us to give hymns to the Incarnate God, the Saviour of the human race.

## **3. Types and Symbols of St. Mary in the Coptic Hymns**

### **1. The Tabernacle:**

The Theotokia of Sunday calls St. Mary "the second dome, the holy of holies at the Tabernacle etc."

At the Annunciation, angel Gabriel said, "the power of the Most High shall overshadow (episkiazein) you" ( ). The same verb "episkiazein" (in Hebrew "shakan" means "dwelling"), was used for the Tabernacle, where God was [dwelling](#) among His people, and at the moment of Christ's transfiguration, where the Lord was present among two of His prophets and three of His disciples, a cloud covering them in shadow.

According to the book of Exodus (40:35) Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle because the Lord abode (shakan) in it and the glory of the Lord filled it. Thus, St. Mary is the True Tabernacle, where God Himself dwelt among His people.

If Moses was unable to enter it because of God's glory, who can enter the mystery of St. Mary who bore God Himself in her holy womb?!

“Who can declare: how honourable is the dome (tabernacle) of Moses, who made it at Mount of Sinai?!  
O Mary, the Virgin,  
You are assimilated to the tabernacle!  
You are the true dome, wherein God dwells!”

*Theotokia of Sunday.*

## **2. The Ark of the Covenant:**

St. Mary is assimilated to the Ark of the Covenant, made of incorruptible wood, inlaid with gold inside and out...

“And You, Mary, also put on the glory of divinity inside and out”.

*Theotokia of Sunday.*

The Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God, remained three months at the house of Obed-edom before David brought it to his house (); and St. Mary, who bore the Lord Himself, remained also three months at the town of Judea.

The bearing of the Ark simulated the joy of the people and caused David to make joyous leaps, dancing before the Lord (, ); and the arrival of St. Mary simulated the joy of Elizabeth and caused the baby, John the Baptist, to leap within his mother's womb. The verb “leap” (skirtan) used in (St. ) is the same used for David's joy before the Ark, and it is used in

the Holy Scripture to indicate the leaps of joy which accompany the coming of the Lord (; Wisdom 9:9; ) and for heavenly joy ( ).

St. Mary, the True Ark of God, became the cause of the rejoicing for all creatures:

“Hail, the Theotokos, the rejoiced of Angels!”

*Theotokia of Tuesday.*

“They offered honour to you,  
O city of God,  
for you became the [dwelling](#) place of those who are rejoicing!”

*Theotokia of Wednesday.*

### **3. The Cover of the Ark:**

The cover of the Ark was called in Hebrew “Sekina” which means “[dwelling](#) place”, for it represents God’s seat of mercy, overshadowed by two Cherubim. God appeared between the Cherubim in blue (symbol of heaven), and from there He used to speak to Moses.

St. Mary is this cover, a type of the Church, where God sits on His Throne of mercy among His people, and it is filled with His heavenly creatures:

“Two icons of Cherubim, made of gold,  
overshadow the cover continuously, with their wings.  
They overshadow the holy of holies, in the second dome!  
Thousands and ten thousands (of angels) overshadow you also,  
O Mary!  
They praise their Creator, who dwelt in your womb, who took our likeness...”

*Theotokia of Sunday*

#### **4. The Vessel of Manna:**

“You are the pure golden vessel of Hidden Manna, wherein is the Bread of Life,  
which came down from heaven and granted Life to the whole world...  
He came out from the Father,  
and you have born Him immaculately,  
He gave us His precious Body and Blood,  
that we may live for ever!”

#### *Theotokia of Sunday*

In the Old Testament God fed His people with Manna, but then He also gave us the Rational Manna, he who descended from heaven into the Virgin’s womb. The Lord Himself says, “Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the Bread which comes from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live forever: and the Bread that I will give is my Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”. ().

It is noteworthy that St. Mary was not merely a vessel but the Hidden Manna received from her body.

#### **5. The Golden Lamp-stand:**

“You are the pure golden lamp-stand, that bears the ever- lightened Lamp.

He is the unapproachable Light of the world..,  
who was incarnated of you without adulteration....

All heavenly choirs cannot be compared with you, O golden lamp-stand.

He who dwelt in your womb O Mary the Virgin, gives light to every body in the world!

He is the Sun of Righteousness, whom you bore, and Who healed our

sins..”

### *Theotokia of Sunday*

St. Mary became superior to all heavenly creatures because of the True Light she bore. He shines, and no creature can behold His essence!

## **6. The Burning Bush:**

“The bush which Moses saw in the wilderness, was flaming, but its branches were not consumed; it is a type of Mary the spotless Virgin. For the Word of God came and He was incarnated of her. The Fire of His Divinity did not consume her womb, and she was virgin even after her childbirth.

### *Theotokia of Thursday*

The bush was not only unconsumed, but also grew green and blossomed beautifully (). In the Armenian rite we find the same idea:

“You, who was inflamed by the Sun like the bush, but was not consumed, gave to men the Bread of Life, and interceded for us that Christ might blot out our sins”.

### *For Benediction.*

St. Ephram also says, “She bore Christ in her virginal womb as the bush on Mount of Horeb bore God in its flame.”

Pope Theodosius of Alexandria mentions the words of Christ addressed to His Father concerning His mother at the moment of her death, saying:

“Receive from me, O my Gracious Father, the bush which received the Fire of Divinity and was not consumed.

I offer You, O my Father, a royal gift today, even the soul of my Virgin Mother.”[\[15\]](#)

### **7. Aaron’s Rod:**

“You are truly more superior than Aaron’s rod,  
You are full of grace”  
What is the rod, but “Mary”!?  
The rod is a symbol of her virginity.  
She conceived and brought forth the Son of the Most  
High - the Word Himself - without human seed”.

*Theotokia of Sunday*

The lifeless rod blossomed forth ( ) as a symbol of St. Mary who brought forth “Life”.

### **8. Jacob’s Ladder:**

“You are the ladder seen by Jacob,  
which is fixed on earth.  
It rose very high to heaven,  
and the angels were descending on it !”

*Theotokia of Tuesday*

### **9. The Rational Mount:**

“The living Word of God came down on the Mount of Sinai, to give the Law

He also came down within you, O rational mount!..”

“He is the Stone which was cut from the Mount seen by Daniel.  
No human hand touched Him.

The Word of the Father came down and was incarnated  
of the Virgin without human seed, to save us ”

*Theotokia of Tuesday*

### **Other Types and Symbols:**

The daily hymns mention other types and symbols of St. Mary, such as: Aaron's censer, Ezekiel's gate, Noe's Ark, God's city, light cloud on which God sits (: 1), New Jerusalem etc..

### **4. Mary in The Coptic Liturgies**

Marian texts and hymns have a prominent place in our liturgies. Their theological meanings and tones are well ordered to fit various occasions.

We give examples for the place of the Marian texts in some Coptic liturgies:-

#### **1. The Eucharistic Liturgy:**

A) Before the offertory, the following Marian hymn is sung:

“Hail, Mary the Queen,  
she looks like an unseedy vine, which is uncultivated, though the Bunch  
of Life was found in it!..

The Son of God, the truly Almighty, came down and was incarnated of the  
Virgin..

You found favour, O Bride,  
many persons honoured you,  
for the Word of the Father was incarnated of you!  
You are the high tower,  
wherein the Pearl was found..”

Truly this hymn is very suitable, for the church is prepared for the

offertory and the priest has to choose the “Lamb” i.e., the heavenly King, while he is standing by the royal door, i.e., the door of heaven. St. Mary, in this hymn, is called the Queen, to remind us that the heavenly King, her Son, gave His life up on our behalf, that we might become one with the Queen sitting on the Right Hand of the King.

She is also called the Bride, to remind us that the Eucharistic Liturgy, represents the mystery of union between the Heavenly Bridegroom and the Church. It represents mystery of the spiritual [matrimony](#) between the Crucified Christ and our souls!

She is also called the “high tower”, for she could enter heaven by the merit of her Son’s blood, waiting for us there!

Lastly this hymn is the hymn of the mystery of Incarnation realized in the holy womb of St. Mary, the mystery which leads us to receive the holy Body and Blood of the Lord!

B) At the incensation, the people sing the following hymn:

“This is the censer of pure gold,  
containing the ambergris,  
that was entrusted to the hands of Aaron the Priest,  
to offer incense over the altar”.

On fasting days they say:

“The Virgin is the gold censer; our Savoir is its ambergris;  
She bore Him, who saved us and forgave our sins” -

And on the period of Great Lent:-

“You are the pure gold censer, containing the Blessed Coal Fire!”

These hymns state that incensing is a symbol of the mystery of Incarnation, for the Incarnate God offered Himself as a sweet fragrant sacrifice, acceptable by the Father, for our sake.

According to the Ethiopian rite, at the incensation of St. Mary's Icon, the priest says:

"You are the gold censer, which bore the live Coal Fire...  
Blessed be He.. who was incarnated of you.  
Who offered Himself to His Father for incense and acceptable offering".

And on going outside the Iconostasis (Icon-stand), the priest also says:  
The censer is Mary;  
the incense is He who was in her womb,  
which is fragrant, the incense is He whom she bore,  
He came and saved us,  
the fragrant ointment,  
Jesus Christ   ".

C) At the incensation of St. Mary's Icon, the Coptic priest says the following three texts:

"Rejoice[16] , O beautiful dove,  
which has borne God, the Word, for us.  
We give you salutation with Angel Gabriel saying:  
Rejoice (Hail), You are full of grace,  
the Lord is with you".  
"Hail (rejoice), O Virgin, the true queen,  
Hail, the Glory of our race.  
You have borne Emmanuel, for us".  
"May we ask you to remember us, O faithful mediatrix,  
with our Lord Jesus Christ,  
that He may blot out our sins".

D) Before reading a chapter from the “Acts” it is said:

“Rejoice (Hail), O Mary, the beautiful dove,  
that bore God, the Word, for us!”

This hymn of St. Mary as a beautiful dove is sung before reading a chapter of the Acts of the Church. St. Mary is a prototype of the stainless Church, who received the holiness of God through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God!

It is noteworthy that all Marian hymns sung through the readings (the Liturgy of the Word) concentrate on the Divine Incarnation, as if we have not only heard the Word of God but also receive the Word as a Person, [dwelling](#) within our souls.

E) After the prayer of Reconciliation, usually we sing the following hymn:

“Rejoice, O Mary, the handmaid and Mother, for the angels sing hymns to Him, who is on your lap, the Cherubim becomingly worship Him, and the Seraphim too without intermission.

No favour we plead save your supplications and intercessions unto our Lord Jesus Christ, O mistress of us all and mother of God..”

Now, through the reconciliation which Jesus Christ has made, St. Mary as an archetype of the Church, rejoices!

We ask her to pray and intercede for us, through the reconciliation Jesus has made!

F) After the consecration of the Holy Elements, all the Church becomes united in Jesus Christ, and we commemorate the saints, that we may be assisted by their prayers.[\[17\]](#) It is naturally that we remind her before all other saints:

“In the first place, she is the ever-virgin the Mother of God and the all-

glorified, pure St. Mary, who gave birth to God, the true Word”.[\[18\]](#)

G) Through receiving Holy Communion a hymn called (PIWIK, Pioiek means “the bread”) is sung:

“The Bread of Life who came down from heaven, gives life to the world.  
You, O Mary, conceived the Rational Manna,  
who came down from the Father,  
You immaculately bore Him;  
Who gave us His precious Body and Blood,  
that we may live forever.”

## **2. The Sacrament of Matrimony:**

Through the service of holy matrimony, the priest, deacons and people are thinking on the eternal wedding-feast of Christ and the Church.

For example, at the first part of the ceremony (called: the Agreement of Dual Possession) all the people, after hearing the Gospel concerning the Incarnation of God the Word, their Bridegroom, () sing in the “Palm-Sunday” tone, the following response, as if they are receiving the Bridegroom within their inner Jerusalem:

“Rejoice, O bride-chamber diversely adorned of the True Bridegroom who has united Himself with humanity!”

St. Mary as the prototype of the Church, the heavenly Bride, is praised by various hymns.

A) Immediately after reciting the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the deacons sing “This is the censer...”[\[19\]](#), and at the “Order of the Holy Crowning” they sing: “The Virgin is the gold censer”.[\[20\]](#)

B) Throughout the three prayers of marriage the deacons sing the

following responses:

“The gate of sunshine is Mary the Virgin,  
the pure bride-chamber of the pure Bridegroom”.

“All the kings of the earth walk in your light, and the nations in your splendour, O, Mary, the Mother of God.

Solomon calls you in the Song of Songs:

My sister and my beloved, my true City, Jerusalem!” “You are more bright than the sun,

You are the east,

which the right looks towards, with joy and exultation!”

It is wonderful while the priests asks God thrice to grant the bridal couple a chaste bridal-chamber, and blessed life through their unity, the deacons and the people proclaim their rejoicing for the holy bride-chamber, the Virgin’s womb, where the Bridegroom unites Himself with our humanity. Thus St. Mary becomes the “East” where the Sun of Righteousness shines upon the whole world, and all the kings (believers) come joyfully to this mystery.

C) At the end of the service, the deacons sing the following ode:

“Rejoice, enlightening bride,  
the mother of the Giver of Light.

Rejoice. You who received the Word,  
who dwelt in your womb.

Rejoice, you who are more glorious than Cherubim.

Rejoice, you who bore the Saviour of our souls.

Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

Thus, the Coptic matrimonial ceremony, from its beginning until the end, attracts our attention to St. Mary as the enlightening bride, in order that we also be prepared to be Christ’s eternal bride!

### **3. The office of the Holy Baptism:**

Before receiving the grace of Baptism the candidate or the Godfather and (or) the Godmother have to declare, before the bishop or the priest, the Virginal birth of Christ as an essential part of the Christian Creed.

### **4. The Sacrament of Healing the Sick:**

Through this liturgy the priest repeats his request to St. Mary that she may pray and intercede for the forgiveness of our sins, calling her “the Mother of Salvation”. The Church asks her triumphant members to pray for those who are still struggling, that God may heal their spirits, souls and bodies.

“... Through the intercession of the Virgin, the Mother of Salvation; she whom we praise saying:  
Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the Fruit of your womb..”

“Through the intercessions of the mother of God, and the supplications of the angels, and the blood of the martyrs, and the prayers of the saints..”

“O holy Virgin the T’heotokos, without human seed, intercede for the salvation of our souls”.

### **5. The Liturgy of “Washing the baby”:**

The Coptic Church, as a mother, looks after her children even before baptizing. On the eighth day of the birthday the priest, deacons and the family of the baby partake of a certain ceremony, called “Washing the baby”. They give thanks to the Lord for the gift of the baby and ask Him to prepare the baby for the spiritual rebirth.

On this occasion the Church reminds the family of the Only - Begotten Son who was born of St. Mary.

“Who is not incarnate, but has been incarnated;  
Who is the Word become Man.  
He Who has no beginning now begins.  
Subjecting Himself to temporality, though Himself timeless.

Mary, our mistress, the mother of God, Mary, the mother of our Saviour,  
intercede that He may forgive us our sins..”.

*The response.*

I think you can easily conceive the place of St. Mary in all the liturgies of the Coptic Church which I have not discussed.

## **5. Mary in the Festival Ceremonies**

Through the incarnation of God’s Son of the Virgin Mary, the gates of heaven are opened to us, and all our days become feasts. For this reason suitable Marian hymns are sung in every feast, reminding us that through the Virgin’s Son, Jesus Christ, we receive the Lord’s joy in our life.

We here refer to some Marian texts and hymns used on certain feasts.

### **A. The Christmas:**

We have already mentioned that from the first of Keyahk until Christmas (29th of Keyahk) the church has a special Marian program to attract our thoughts towards the virginal birth of Christ.

Besides the ordinary Marian texts, other Marian texts and Christological texts having a Marian attitude are admitted to the Eucharistic Liturgy of the feast, such as:

“Today, the True Light shines upon us,  
out of Mary the Virgin and chaste bride!”

“According to the prophets’ sayings,

Mary has brought forth our Saviour, the Gracious  
Lover of men, in Bethlehem..

*Doxology of Christmas*

“He bowed down from the heaven of heavens  
and came down to the Virgin’s womb.  
He became man like us, but without the sin..

*Doxology of Christmas*

Come, all of you,  
that we may worship our Lord Jesus Christ,  
whom the Virgin has brought forth,  
her virginity remaining unbroken..

*Doxology of Christmas*

“The Virgin brings forth the Supreme One,  
and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One.  
The angels together with the shepherds glorify Him,  
and the Wisemen guided by the star were journeying to Him.  
For God, who exists before all ages, became a Child for our sake!”

*After the Reading of “Acts”*

“Rejoice (Hail), New Heaven,  
for the Sun of Righteousness, the Lord of the whole  
world, shines out of you!

*Spasmos*[\[21\]](#) (Adam)

“The Begotten-Son of the Father, before all the ages, was born of the  
Queen, and her virginity remained unbroken!”

*Spasmos (Batis)*

**B. The Annunciation:**

“Rejoice (Hail), Mother of God, the exultation of the angels  
Rejoice, the Chaste One,  
the preaching of the prophets!  
Rejoice, full of grace,  
the Lord be with you.  
Rejoice, those who receive the joy of the world from the angel!”

*Spasmos (Adam).*

**C. The Marian Feasts:**

One of the various beautiful Marian hymns, usually sung on the feasts of St. Mary, is “The Ten Chords”:

“David moved the first chord of his lyre, saying aloud: at your right hand stands the queen, O King ()).

He moved also the second chord of his lyre, saying aloud: Listen, daughter, look and pay careful attention: forget your people and your father’s house (Ps, 45:10).

He moves the third chord of his lyre, saying aloud: All the glory of the King’s daughter is within, her robe is gold woven ()).

He moved the fourth chord . . . saying: With her virgin companions enter before the King, in her train ()).

He moved the fifth chord . . . saying: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, on His holy mountain ()).

He moved the sixth chord . . . saying: The wings of a dove covered with

silver, its pinions with yellow gold ().

He moved the seventh chord . . . saying: The Mountain of God is a rich mountain ().

He moved the eighth chord . . . saying: On the holy mountain He founded the city; the Lord loves the gates of Zion ().

He moved the ninth chord . . . saying: Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God ().

He moved the tenth chord . . . saying: The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. Intercede for us with the Lord . . . .”

Another Marian hymn, used on the veneration of St. Mary or any other feast is:

“Rejoice, O Mother of God, the Virgin and advocate for the world before the Saviour, our God.

Rejoice, O Mother of God, the Virgin and Mother of Emmanuel.

You are unmarried, at the order of the angels. Rejoice, O our advocate before the Father, our God, we glorify you” .

#### **D. The Great Lent:**

Among the various hymns of the Great Lent, which concentrate on repentance and fasting as a preparation for celebrating the Easter, is a Marian hymn specially for this period, called “Meghalo” (Great). In fact it is a hymn offered to Christ, the Son of the Virgin, sung before the “Trisagion”, as if the church decided to declare that virginal birth of Christ and His [resurrection](#) coincided.

The hymn is:

“Holy God, the Great Archpriest for ever.  
Holy Almighty, who is of the Order of Melchizedek.  
the Perfect One.

Holy the Immortal who is incarnated of the Holy Spirit  
and St. Mary the Virgin, with great mystery;  
have mercy upon us..”

This hymn is completed with another main hymn, called “Apenshois” (O our Lord), in which we say:

O incense which in her womb;  
O incense which she brings forth,  
May You forgive us our sins!

We give hymns together with the angels, saying aloud:  
Worthy (Aksios),  
Worthy  
You are worthy (of honour) O Mary, the Virgin!

### **E. The Holy Week (Paschal Week):**

Through this week all the candles (lamps), before the saints’; icons are extinguished and no incensing may take place before the icons; and even the commemoration of the saints is dismissed at the Eucharistic Liturgy of Maundy Thursday. for we have to pay all our attention to the events of this Great week that precede Easter.

Nevertheless St. Mary’s hymns find a place in this week because of the correlation between the Incarnation of the Virgin and the mystery of the Cross.

Every night before reading the explanation of the gospels, we say:-

“Hail (Rejoice), Mary the beautiful dove, who born forth God the Word,

for us.”

On Good Friday, before singing the Trisagion, a beautiful hymn called “O Monoghenis” (“Only - Begotten Son”) is sung.

Through it the Church reminds us that the Crucified One, who appears in weakness, is the same One who is born of the Virgin. God emptied Himself to become a man on our behalf ().

“O Only-Begotten Son, the Word of God,  
the Immortal and Eternal,  
who accepted everything for our salvation!  
You are incarnated without alteration!  
You are the Crucified Christ and God!  
By death, He trampled upon death:  
He is One of the Holy Trinity;  
who is glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit!”

## **F. The Easter:**

The Holy Fathers assimilated St. Mary’s womb to the Lord’s Tomb; for as the Lord was born of St. Mary while her virginity remained unbroken, so He also rose again while the seals of the tomb were unbroken. The divine office of Easter according to the Byzantine rite states, “O Christ, who did not break the Virgin’s gate by your birth, You rose from the dead, having kept intact the seals, and You have opened unto us the gates of Paradise”.

According to the Coptic rite, on Easter the following Marian text is used:

“May you be enlightened,  
may you be enlightened,  
O Mary the Virgin”

*Spasmos (Adam) 3*

St. Mary who stored up in her heart the marvellous events concerning her Son () had been enlightened by the brightness of the Risen Lord, and she conceived in a more perfect way, His mystery.

## **6. ST. Mary in the Canonical Hours**

In every canonical hour we venerate St. Mary and ask her prayers and intercession for our spiritual progress.

1. In the prayer of the matins, before the creed, we say:

“Hail Mary!

we beseech you, holy one, full of glory, ever-virgin, Mother of God,  
Mother of Christ,  
may you lift up our prayers to your beloved Son,  
that He may pardon us our sins.

Hail, holy Virgin, who brought forth the True Light, Christ our Lord,  
may you ask the Lord on our behalf, to show pity on our souls and  
blot out our sins.

O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, holy and faithful advocate of the  
human race, intercede for us with Christ whom you mothered, that  
He may grant us forgiveness of sins.

Hail, Virgin, true Queen!

Hail, the honour of our race, who gave birth to Emmanuel.

We ask you to remember us, O faithful advocate with our Lord Jesus  
Christ, that He may forgive us our sins”.

2. Often, before reciting the Creed we start with its introductory:

“We glorify you, O Mother of the True Light, we venerate you, O holy  
virgin, Mother of God, for you gave birth to the Redeemer of the

world, for us. Glory be to our Master and King”

3. In every canonical hour, after reading the Gospel, we recite some short prayers to God, suitable to the occasions we are reminded of at these hours, concluding with a supplication to St. Mary, asking her on our behalf.

#### A) AT MATINS[\[22\]](#)

You are the honourable mother of the Light. Everywhere under the sun, they offer you glorification, the ‘Theotokos’ (Mother of God), the second heaven. For you are the bright and unchangeable blossom, the Mother, and the ever-virgin, as the Father chose you, the Holy Spirit overshadowed you and the Son deigned to be incarnated from you.

May you ask Him to redeem the world He had created, and deliver it from tribulations.

Let us sing to Him a new hymn and bless Him, now and ever and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

#### B) THE TIERCE

“You are the true vine bearing the Grape of Life, O Mother of God.

In union with the Apostles, we beseech you, O full of grace, to ask for our salvation.

Blessed be the Lord our God!

Blessed be the Lord every day!

May He prepare our way before us as He is God of our salvation”.

#### C) THE SEXT

Because of the multitude of our sins, we are ashamed before God, nor do we have any excuse.

We ask your intercession with Him, whom you have brought forth, O Mother of God, the Virgin.

For your intercessions are abundant and acceptable to our Saviour.

May you not refuse to intercede with your Son for the sinners.

For He is merciful and capable of our salvation, just as He suffered to redeem us

D) AT NONE

“When the mother saw the Lamb, the Shepherd, and the World’s Redeemer hanging upon the Cross, she said through her tears:

The world rejoices because it has received salvation, but my heart (bowels) in burnt at witnessing the crucifixion you are suffering for all mankind, O my Son and God”.

E) AT COMPLINE[23]

O pure virgin, slip the shadow of your incentive aid upon your servant. Cast away from me evil thoughts and raise my sick soul to pray in vigilance, because it has long lain in deep sleep. You are a capable, merciful and helpful mother; the mother of the Spring of life, my King and God, Jesus Christ, my hope.”

## **7. ST. Mary in the Ethiopian Liturgies**

The Ethiopian Church, the daughter of the Coptic Church received the [faith](#) from Alexandria, and with it a great love for St. Mary.

King Zara Yaqob (1431-1468) commanded that every Church in Ethiopia should have an altar dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, and her feasts should be celebrated like Sundays under pain of excommunication.

In fact, the Ethiopian hymnology to St. Mary is very rich and numerous, and I hope that I can write about it in a special book, if God permits.

They celebrate her assumption monthly in a Great Marian feast.

We can conceive their love towards her from their custom of speaking of all heretics as “Enemies of St. Mary”.



St. Mary, the Ark of Testimony, where the Manna (Christ) was present (found in a Seidic Coptic Manuscript of the Senxarium) see Church, House of God P. 332 - 335.

## **8. Feasts of St. Mary in the Coptic Church**

### **1. *The Annunciation to her parents: (7th of Messra)***

This festival commemorates the creation of St. Mary, the living Ark of the Covenant, the [dwelling](#) place of the Most High and the second heaven.

### **2. *Her Nativity (1st of Pashans)***

The Copts usually celebrate the feasts of the saints to commemorate their falling asleep, their [martyrdom](#) or their departure to paradise; but they are anxious to honour St. Mary on the day of her birth as a day of joy.

3. ***Her Presentation in the Temple (3rd of Keyahk)***

According to the Church tradition, St. Mary was consecrated to God by the vow of her mother, who exclaimed that she would bring her firstborn son or daughter to the Lord and he or she would minister to Him all his or her days of life.

4. ***Her Falling Asleep (death) (21st of Touba)***

5. ***The Assumption, or the Appearance of her body into heaven (16th of Messra, 22nd of August)***

The greatest Marian feast is preceded by a fast for a fortnight.

6. ***Dedication of the Church to Her Name at Philliponis & at Atrib (Egypt) (21st of [Ba-ouna](#))***

7. ***Her Apparition in Zeitoun (Cairo) (2nd of April)***

This Apparition is unique in the history of Marian apparitions [\[24\]](#) . It started on 2nd of April 1968 and has been repeated often every day for hours at a time, and for many months. These apparitions occurred on the domes of St. Mary's Church, seen by several hundred thousands of people of all ages and ranks, Christians and Moslems. People were crowded every night around the Church praying and giving hymns, to see the brilliant figure of St. Mary stand before one of the Church domes, sometimes kneeling before the Cross and at another time holding the Child Jesus. Birds like doves often accompanied the Apparitions. Many persons repented and innumerable miracles happened because of the Apparitions.

**Statement by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch (Pope):**

Ever since the evening of Tuesday, April 2, 1968 (Baramhat 24, 1684), the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, has been appearing in the Coptic Orthodox Church named after her in Shareh Tomanbey, Zeitoun, Cairo.

The vision, which is still appearing, has been seen on various nights and in different forms. Sometimes the Virgin is seen in full form, but on other occasions only the upper half appears, surrounded by a glorious halo of shining light.

The vision is sometimes seen through the openings of the dome of the church and sometimes outside the dome. The vision moves and walks across the dome and bows before the cross on the dome, which becomes clothed in a glorious light. She turns to the onlookers and blesses them with her hand and with the movement of her holy head.

The vision has often appeared in the form of a bright nimbus, or in the form of a light preceded by forms of heavenly objects such as quick-moving doves.

The vision has remained for long periods, occasionally as long as two and a quarter hours, as at dawn on Tuesday, April 30, 1968 (Baramuda 22, 1684), when the vision appeared in full shining form from 2:45 am. till 5 am.

The vision has been seen by many thousands of people of different religions and sects. Some foreigners, some priests and men of learning, or from professions and from many other groups. They have affirmed with full awareness that they have seen her and have agreed unanimously in their descriptions of each vision and the time of its occurrence, so much so that the unanimity has rendered the appearance in this place of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, a vision unique in its nature and needs no statement or affirmation.

Two important factors have accompanied the apparition. The first has been the revival of [faith](#) in God, in the other world, in the saints, and in the dawning of the knowledge among many who had stayed away, and many have repented and changed their lives.

Secondly the vision has led to many miraculous hearings, evidenced scientifically and by unanimous affirmation.

**The Patriarchate gathered information about all that is stated above through individuals and committees of priests who investigated the truth and who saw the vision themselves and affirmed this in reports handed to His Beatitude Pope Kyrillos VI.**

In making this statement the Patriarchate declares with every faith, with deep joy, and with overflowing thanks to the heavenly grace, that the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light, has appeared clearly and steadily on many different nights. The vision has lasted varying periods of time, sometimes lasting over two hours uninterruptedly. The appearances began on Tuesday, April 2, 1968, and are still continuing in the Coptic Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary in Shareh Tomanbey in Zeitoun along the Mataria route in Cairo, the route which, it is historically acknowledged, the Holy Family traversed during their stay in Egypt.

May God make this a sign of peace for the world, for our dear land, and our blessed people.

***Saturday, May 4, 1968***

***Baramuda 6, 1684***

***The Coptic Patriarchate***

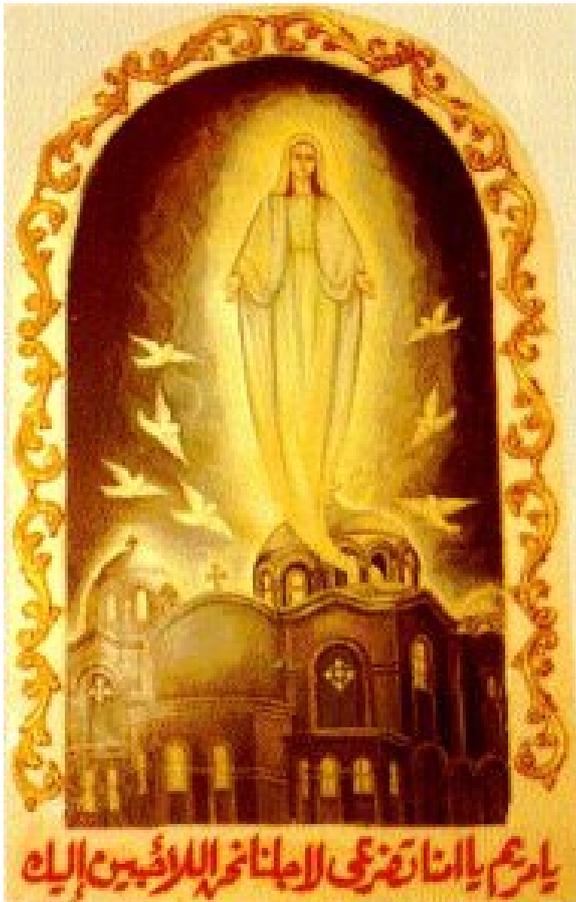
***Cairo***

***The Egyptian Government's Report***

The Director of the General Information and Complaints Department submitted to the Minister, Mr. Hafez Ghanem, a documental report asserting emphatically the appearances of the Blessed Virgin at the

Coptic Orthodox Church at Zeitoun.

“The investigations have proved twenty-seven appearances (to that date) of the Blessed Virgin in various luminous forms. At certain times mysterious doves either preceded, accompanied or followed the apparitions . . .”[\[25\]](#)



Design representing the apparition of the virgin St Mary on the domes of the Zeitoun church, April 2, 1968 A.D.

## **9. ST. Mary's Assumption**

### **Her Falling Asleep**

St. Mary as a daughter of Adam died as a victim of his sin. St. Augustine states:

“Mary, sprung from Adam, died on consequence of sin;  
Adam died in consequence of sin,  
and the, flesh of the Lord, sprung from Mary, died to destroy sin”.[\[26\]](#)

According to the Coptic (Boheric) discourse of Theodosius, Pope of Alexandria (c. 567), “On the Falling Asleep of Mary”, she checks the grief of the Apostles with the question[\[27\]](#): “Is it not written that all flesh must taste death? I also must return to the earth, as all the inhabitants of earth”.[\[28\]](#)

The Coptic (Boheric) text gives another reason for her death that is an argument for the reality of the Incarnation. According to this text Christ said to His Mother “I would prefer that you would not taste death, but to translate you up to the heavens like Enoch and Elias. But even these also must at last taste death. But if this happened to you, wicked men would think that you are a power which came down from heaven, and that this dispensation took place in appearance alone . . .”

### **Her Falling - Asleep Story**

After the death of her Son, Jesus Christ St. Mary lived under the [care](#) of St. John according to her Son's commandment. She witnessed the “New life in Jesus Christ” and helped the Disciples and Apostles by her love and prayers.

When she was about 60 years old on the 20th of Tobi, St. Mary, the Disciples and the Virgins of the Mount of Olives[\[29\]](#) were all gathered

and the Lord Jesus appeared and greeted them.[30] He told them that he would return back the next day and receive his mother's soul.

On the 21st of Tobi the Lord returned in the chariot of the Cherubim, accompanied with thousands of angels and David the sweet Singer. The assembled men and women wept, and St. Mary also wept, but the Lord consoled them. He kissed her and blessed them and bade St. Peter to look upon the altar for heavenly garments, which the Father had sent to shroud St. Mary in.[31] She turned to the east and prayed in a heavenly [language](#) and then lay down, still facing eastward.[32] The virgins stood about St. Mary singing, and Jesus sat by her. David the Singer rejoiced and said "Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints".

At the ninth hour[33] the Lord received her soul, shrouded her body in the heavenly garments and they were fastened thereto. He bade the Apostles to take up the body; Peter bearing the head and John the feet, and carry her to a new tomb in the field of Jehoshaphat....

### **At the Field of Jehoshaphat**

The Coptic text says[34] "When we came to the field of Jehoshaphat, the Jews heard the singing and came out intending to burn the body". The Apostles set down the bier and fled.[35] Darkness came on the Jews and they were blinded and smitten by their own fire. They cried out for mercy and were healed and many were converted.

### **Ruben and the Bier**

Our Sinaxarium relates that a Jewish man, called Ruben[36] , tried to upset the bier, but his hands withered to the elbow, He began to weep, asking the Apostles to pray for him that he might be saved and become a Christian. They knelt and prayed, and his hands were loosened and he was healed. He was baptized at once, and began to preach.

## **Her Assumption**[\[37\]](#)

*This feast commemorates the entrance of St. Mary's body into heaven, as she preceded us and sat at the right hand of her Bridegroom and Son. It bears a powerful witness to the eschatological truth of our faith, i.e. "the world to come".*

- In accord with what has been written, 'You are beautiful' (*Cant. 2:13*), and your virginal body is wholly saintly, wholly chaste, wholly the [dwelling](#) place of God; with the result that thereafter it is wholly free from dissolution into dust... It was impossible that the vessel which had received God, the temple of the Only-Begotten Son, should be held fast by death..

## *Fr. Germanus of Constantinople*[\[38\]](#)

- Today the celestial spirits bring to heaven the Abode of the Holy Spirit, making her enter into the heavenly Jerusalem, to the immaculate Tabernacle, to us inaccessible, close to the Holy Trinity.
- Today the heavenly spirits have carried to heaven the holy body of the Virgin Theotokos, placing it among the angels to share in the unspeakable delights.
- Having lived in this body all-holy life, you are brought by the divine will to the Kingdom of your Son, our God; pray for us . . .

## *Armenian Liturgical Hymns on the assumption*

- I salute the Assumption of the body which the human heart can never conceive . . .
- O Mary, your body was like a pearl, and death itself was shamed when with wonder it saw you ascending resplendent through the clouds to heaven . . .
- O Mary,  
dove of Euphrates

shelter me under your wings in the day of judgment,  
when the earth will give back those whom she  
had taking into her keeping!

*Ethiopian Feast of Assumption*

### **Her Assumption's Story**[\[39\]](#) :

The Lord did not permit that the body in which He Himself had dwelt and from which He had formed His own humanity become a prey to corruption and dissolution.

St. Mary as a human being her body died; but ascended to heaven.

“The assumption according to the narrative of Joseph the Arimathea” states[\[40\]](#) that Thomas the Apostle was absent in [India](#) when St. Mary fell asleep and passed away. On his return he asked about her and was told what happened.

St. Thomas pretended not to believe until he sees the body in the grave. At the grave he told the Disciples that the body is not in the tomb. As they rolled the stone there was no body, they did not know how to explain it, being vanquished by St. Thomas' words. Then St. Thomas told them how he saw her body assuming to heaven, and St. Mary gave him her girdle, and show it to them.

They all rejoiced and asked the Lord to see her again.

In the seventh month after her death (i.e., on 15th of Mesra)[\[41\]](#), the Disciples reassembled at the tomb and spent the night watching and singing hymns.[\[42\]](#)

At dawn on the 16th of Mesra there were great thundering and a choir of angels were heard. The Lord Jesus came on the Cherubim with the soul of the Virgin Mary seated in His Bosom and greeted them.[\[43\]](#)

Other stories state that till the 16th of Mesra her body was not ascended. The Lord came with the soul of His mother and asked the body to accompany Him. He took her into the chariot. The angels went before them, and a voice called "Peace to you, my brethren".[\[44\]](#)

**Fr. TADROUS Y. MALATY**

[\[1\]](#) Coptic Church is the Church of Egypt, or the Church of Alexandria.

[\[2\]](#) See our book: The Church, House of God, Melbourne 1977.

[\[3\]](#) Carol: Mariology, vol. 1, p. 411 f

[\[4\]](#) F. Zorell: Was bedeutet den Name Maria?

in Zeitschen - fur Kathol. Theol., 30 (1906) p. 356-360.

[\[5\]](#) J. Levy: Neuhebraisches und chaldaisches wörterbuch über die Talmudin und Midrashim (Leipzig, 1876-1889) S.U. Merur.

[\[6\]](#) Theotokia of Sunday

[\[7\]](#) Theotokia of Tuesday

[\[8\]](#) Theotokia of Wednesday

[\[9\]](#) Theotokia of Thursday

[\[10\]](#) Theotokia of Friday

[\[11\]](#) Certain tone for these days

[\[12\]](#) Adv. Haer 79:9

[\[13\]](#) De Spiritu Sancto 3:79f

[14] Certain tone for the days: Sunday, Monday and Tuesday

[15] The Falling Asleep of Mary 6:18

[16] The Coptic word (XEPE) derived of the Greek word, is translated Hail or Rejoice. (See the book of the Holy Liturgy In Arabic and Coptic. Cairo 1959, edited by Fr. Atallah Arsanius El-Moharagy, p. 74).

[17] See Fr. T. Malaty: Christ in the Eucharist, Alexandria 1973. p. 488-493 93

[18] Coptic Liturgy: translated by Fr. T. Malaty & N. Fanous, Melbourne 1976 p. 41

[19] Page 91

[20] Ibid.95

[21] “Spasmos” means “kissing”, for it is sung while the people are kissing each other, after Prayer of Reconciliation.

[22] Coptic Orthodox Church: Morning Prayer & Compline, March 1976 (trans. by Fr. Malaty & N. Fanous).

[23] Ibid

[24] Jerome Palmer. Our Lady Returns to Egypt. 1969, p.1

[25] Ibid. p. 41. 42.

[26] In Joannis evangelium 8, 9.

[27] W. J. Burghardt Testimony of the Patriotic Age concerning Mary's Death. 1957, p. 15.

[28] On the Falling Asleep of Mary 5.

[29] Discourse of Theodosius ( Coptic - Boheric )

[30] Assumption of Vergin Mary, Coptic - Boheric text, attributed to Evodius as an eyewitness of the death and assumption of St. Mary

[31] Ibid

[32] Assumption of Vergin Mary, Coptic - Sahidic text

[33] Ibid

[34] Text No. 2 (p. 118).

[35] Text No. 1

[36] The Assumption - Narrative by Joseph of Armethea

[37] Weekly Bulletin 107-109

[38] On Falling Asleep of the Theotokos. PG 98:345

[39] Weekly Bulletin, No. 66

[40] See also Coptic Sinexerium

[41] After 206 days from her death (according to the Discourse of Theodosius).

[42] Behoric Text, Discourse of Theodosius

[43] Discourse of Theodosius

[44] Revillout: Petro. Orient. Apocrophe Copies 1, fr. 16, p. 174



Tags: [Liturgy](#), [Eminent](#)