

THE SEASONS

OF THE
COPTIC
ORTHODOX
CHURCH

The Coptic Orthodox Church observes a liturgical year that narrates the story of Christ's life, salvation, and our spiritual journey. It is organized around fasts, feasts, and seasons that consistently direct us back to Christ and the early Church.

Coptic New Year (Nayrouz)

1

THEME: RENEWAL, COURAGE, AND HOPE

DATES: SEPTEMBER 11 – SEPTEMBER 27 (1 THOUT – 17 THOUT)

Nayrouz, meaning “new beginning,” marks the start of the Coptic liturgical year. This season honors the martyrs whose faithful witness strengthened the Church and reminds us that faith triumphs over death.

Focus

- Renew our dedication to Christ and to our spiritual practices.
- Begin the year with repentance and hope to live a new life in Christ.
- Learn courage and faithfulness from the martyrs and to live out our faith even when hard.

Advent (Nativity Fast & Feast)

2

THEME: PREPARING OUR HEARTS

DATES: NOVEMBER 25 – JANUARY 7 (16 HATHOR – 29 KIAHK)

The Nativity Fast is a season of fasting and prayer that prepares the Church to receive Christ, the Word made flesh. The forty days recall Moses fasting to receive the Word, and the additional three days recall the miracle of the moving of Mount Mukattam in Egypt. During the month of **Kiahk**, special hymns honor St. Mary, teaching us how to carry Christ in our own hearts.

Focus:

- **Prepare our hearts** to be a manger for Christ's birth and presence in our lives
- This season is not about sorrow, but about clearing space for God. As Christ emptied Himself to enter the world, we empty ourselves to receive Him. Not allowing distractions and busyness to occupy our lives.
- Our Prayer becomes a **posture of readiness** like:
 - The Virgin Mary's obedience to the call of bearing Christ
 - The shepherds' readiness to worship
 - The Magi's seeking out the Messiah

The fast concludes with the **Feast of the Nativity** on January 7th (Liturgy is prayed on January 6th in the evening). This is a true celebration of Christ coming to be clothed with humanity so we can be clothed in Divinity. We are no longer weak but can partake of His Divine Nature. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

“He clothed Himself in our humanity, and clothed us in His glory.” St. Ephrem the Syrian

Great Lent

3

THEME: REPENTANCE, PRAYER, AND RENEWAL

DATES: VARIES ANNUALLY BUT USUALLY AROUND MARCH/APRIL

Great Lent is a 55 day journey with the primary purpose of repentance and spiritual struggle. It begins with a week of preparation, calling believers to intentional repentance, and continues with **forty days of fasting in imitation of Christ**, who fasted in the wilderness after His baptism. The journey concludes with Holy Week fasting, leading to the Resurrection.

Through fasting, prayer and almsgiving believers are invited to walk with Christ in His victory over temptation and sin.

The Sunday Gospel readings guide the Church through healing encounters with Christ, including the Prodigal Son, the Samaritan Woman, the Paralytic, and the Man Born Blind.

Focus

- Repentance & Confession through emptying ourselves of sins and distractions in our lives.
- Commitment to the pillars of prayer, fasting, and giving which trains us to rely on Christ rather than ourselves
- Engaging more deeply in the scripture as this was the weapon against Satan on the Mount of temptation.

Holy Week (Pascha Week)

4

THEME: WALKING WITH CHRIST TO THE CROSS

DATES: VARIES ANNUALLY BUT USUALLY IN APRIL

Holy Week or Pascha, which means **passover** from death to life, is the most sacred and solemn week of the Church year which is the last week of the 55 days.

Through extended, Scripture-filled services, the Church walks daily step-by-step with Christ from His triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the last supper and the Garden of Gethsemane. From there the temperature is raised even more as we walk through betrayal of Judas, the suffering of the Crucifixion, death and Burial, and descent into Hades to rescue the righteous as we wait in anticipation for the Resurrection.

The Church does not merely recall these events, but invites us to enter into the mystery of Christ's saving work.

Throughout Pascha Week, the Church calls us to watchfulness, repentance, and deep attentiveness to Christ's words and actions.

Focus

- Holy Week invites us into **stillness and silence**. By slowing down, reducing noise and distractions, and embracing silence, we make space to hear Christ's voice and follow Him.
- Through the Gospel readings, hymns, and prayers, the Church directs our gaze to **Christ alone**
- In the light of Christ's suffering and self-giving love, we **examine our hearts** allowing Christ to expose, heal, and restore what is broken within us.

The Holy Fifty Days (Resurrection)

5

THEME: RESURRECTION, JOY, AND VICTORY

DATES: VARIES ANNUALLY (RESURRECTION SUNDAY - PENTECOST)

The Holy Fifty Days begin with the Resurrection of Christ and are marked by joy, light, and victory. There is no fasting during the 50 days of this season. Hymns are joyful, and every liturgy proclaims that Christ has conquered death, which shows us that we have the power to overcome death of sin.

Within the 50 days the Church also commemorates:

- **The Ascension** — 40th day after the Resurrection, Christ ascends to heaven to keep our focus on the heavenly (*25 Baramhat*)
- **Pentecost** — 50th day after the Resurrection Christ sent the Holy Spirit to give us power inside of us to lead us and even convict us of sin. This is the conclusion of the 50 days. (*6 Bashans*)

Focus

- Active participation in the daily readings of the Divine Liturgy
- Increased praise, gratitude, and spiritual reflection
- Living the Victorious and Resurrected life as Christ trampled on death and sin for us

Daily Greeting: ***“Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!”***

Season of the Apostles (Fast & Feast)

6

THEME: WITNESS, MISSION, AND SERVICE

DATES: BEGINS DAY AFTER PENTECOST - JULY 12 (5 EPIP)

The Apostles' Fast is one of the oldest fasts of the Church. It recalls the life of the Apostles after receiving the Holy Spirit and prepares believers to live as active witnesses to Christ. Mission has always been part of the DNA of the Church. The season ends with the **Feast of Saints Peter and Paul** who modeled the life of mission and service to us all.

Focus

- Get involved in Evangelism and Community service
- Faithful witness in daily life to people around us
- Dependence on the Holy Spirit not ourselves
- Fasting is focused more on the lost sheep to come to the Good Shepherd (Christ)

St. Mary's Fast & Feast



THEME: HONORING AND IMITATING THE MOTHER OF GOD

DATES: **AUGUST 7 - AUGUST 21** (1 - 15 MESRA)

This 15 day fast honors St. Mary, the Mother of God (Theotokos–God Bearer). It culminates in the Feast of her Assumption on **August 22nd** and invites believers to imitate her humility, obedience, and faith.

Focus

- Pray and fast for holiness because *“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”* Matthew 5:8
- Draw closer to Christ through St. Mary’s example of obedience and humility.
- Ask for St. Mary’s intercessions in your daily prayers

The Seven Major Feasts



- **Annunciation** — **March 25** (29 Baramhat)
- **Nativity (Christmas)** — **January 7** (29 Kiahk)
- **Epiphany (Baptism of Christ)** — **January 19** (11 Toubah)
- **Palm Sunday** — **Varies** (Sunday before Resurrection)
- **Resurrection** — **Varies**
- **Ascension** — **Varies** (40 days after Resurrection)
- **Pentecost** — **Varies** (50 days after Resurrection)

The Seven Minor Feasts

- **Circumcision of Christ** — **January 14** (6 Toubah)
- **Wedding at Cana** — **January 21** (13 Toubah)
- **Presentation of Christ in the Temple** — **February 15** (8 Amshir)
- **Covenant Thursday (Last Supper)** — **Varies** (Holy Week)
- **Thomas Sunday** — **Varies** (Sunday after Resurrection)
- **Entry of the Holy Family into Egypt** — **June 1** (24 Bashans)
- **Transfiguration** — **August 19** (13 Misra)

Coptic Months

The Coptic calendar is an ancient Christian calendar used by the Coptic Orthodox Church based on the older ancient Egyptian calendar. This calendar is not just cultural — it is the Church's original liturgical calendar, inherited from early Egyptian Christianity.

It dates back to the early centuries of the Church. Its era begins in 284 AD (Era of the Martyrs), marking the persecutions under Diocletian. Keeping it preserves continuity with the early martyrs and saints.

For the Church, changing the calendar would mean disconnecting from its historic identity.

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| 1. Thout — September 11 – October 10 | 8. Baramouda — April 9 – May 8 |
| 2. Paopi — October 11 – November 9 | 9. Bashans — May 9 – June 7 |
| 3. Hathor — November 10 – December 9 | 10. Baona — June 8 – July 7 |
| 4. Kiahk — December 10 – January 8 | 11. Epip — July 8 – August 6 |
| 5. Toubah — January 9 – February 7 | 12. Mesra — August 7 – September 5 |
| 6. Amshir — February 8 – March 9 | 13. Nasie — September 6 – September 10 |
| 7. Baramhat — March 10 – April 8 | |

The month names come from ancient Egyptian (Pharaonic) names, many linked to gods or agricultural seasons.