

The Egyptian Orthodox Church is an Oriental Orthodox Christian church based in Egypt, Africa and the Middle East.

The head of the Church is called the "See of Alexandria" and is the Patriarch of Alexandria or the Holy See of Saint Mark, who also carries the title of Coptic Pope. The Coptic Pope presides from Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in the Abbassia District in Cairo. What separates this church from others is they only believe in the first 3 ecumenical councils, Nicaea AD 325, Constantinople AD 381 and Ephesus AD 431.

According to its tradition, the Coptic Church was established by Evangelist Mark (Gospel of Mark), during the middle of the 1st century (c. AD 42).

FAITH:

The Coptic Orthodox Church split away from the broader Christian community in 451 A.D. They differ about the nature of Christ. Coptic Christians believe that Christ had two natures — one human and one divine — united as one "without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration." Catholics and other Christian denominations believe in the incarnation of Jesus, which similarly holds that Christ was both fully human and fully divine.

Coptic theology and practice have much in common with the Catholic Church — but diverge in several major areas. Like Catholics, Coptic Christians believe in the Ten Commandments, and they practice the sacraments of baptism, confession and confirmation. But unlike Roman Catholics, they don't believe in the infallibility of the pope or in purgatory. The Coptic Orthodox Church only ordains men to the priesthood and if they wish to be married, they must be married before they are ordained.

HISTORY:

Christianity spread throughout Egypt within half a century of Mark's arrival in Alexandria. Coptic Christians teaching's show that from the New Testament writings found in Middle Egypt, which date around the year AD 200, and a fragment of the Gospel of John, written in Coptic, that they are a direct religion of Jesus' teachings. In the 2nd century, Christianity began to spread to the rural areas, and scriptures were translated into the local languages, namely Coptic.

The Muslim invasion of Egypt took place in AD 639 with a gradual conversion to Islam over the centuries. This changed Egypt from a Christian to a largely Muslim country by the end of the 12th century. Egypt's Umayyad rulers taxed Christians at a higher rate than Muslims, driving merchants towards Islam and undermining the economic base of the Coptic Church. The Coptic Church did not disappear, the Muslim tax policies made it difficult for the church to retain the Egyptian elites.

Between 640 and 1800 - There is not much history during this time period.

In 1855 the *jizya* (non-Muslim) tax was abolished. Shortly thereafter, the Copts started to serve in the Egyptian army. This helped the religion grow as now they were not held in contempt of the Muslim controlled government. Currently there are 18–22 million members worldwide, with about 15 to 20 million in Egypt, it is the country's largest Christian church. The current church is structured much like other large religions with districts for Europe, the USA, South America and Asia.

NOTE WORTHY:

In the summer of 2001, the Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches mutually recognize baptisms performed in each other's churches, making re-baptisms unnecessary, and to recognize the sacrament of marriage as celebrated by the other.