

*The Holy Family* **i**  
**n** *Egypt*

# INTRODUCTION

Egypt is the cradle of human civilization: a fact hardly contested among authoritative historians. But Egypt also enjoys a **focal geo-political position**, connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. On its land, migrations of people, traditions, philosophies and religious beliefs succeeded each other for thousands of years. Evidence of this succession is still visible in the accumulation of monuments and sites attesting to a uniquely comprehensive cultural heritage. Indeed, one of the phenomena which shaped Egypt's distinctive identity, and explains its pervasive influence on the then known world, was a **dynamism** that accommodated and re-formulated these successive cultures into one homogenous and harmonious Egyptian canvas. Egypt is **one civilization** woven of **many strands**, threaded by successive and intertwining eras; and of these, the most luminous are, without doubt, the Pharaonic, the Graeco-Roman, the Coptic Christian, and the Islamic eras.

Because the Egyptian people are the essential product of this "harmony in diversity", "**otherness**" has become an integral component of their awareness, a basic constituent of their national and cultural identity. This characteristic has yielded one important result: Egypt was, and still is, the land of **refuge** in the widest sense of the word, a place of **tolerance and dialogue** for peoples, races, cultures and religions.

On this land of Egypt, **the first voice proclaiming the Oneness of God** rang out in the 14th century B.C. through **Akhnaton's** monotheistic creed. **Moses** and **Jesus** lived in this same land. Later, **Islam** entered without conflict.



The ancient altar-stone.  
The Monastery of Al Muharraḡ - Assiut.

The advent of the Holy Family to Egypt, seeking refuge, is an event of the utmost significance in our dear country's long, long history.

Moved by the spirit of prophecy, Hosea foresaw the flight from **Bethlehem** where there was no safe place for the Christ Child to lay his head, and the eventual return of the holy refugees from Their sanctuary in Egypt, where Jesus had found a place in the hearts of the Gentiles, when he uttered God's words: "**Out of Egypt have I called My Son**". (Hosea 11:1).

In the Biblical Book of Isaiah, the prophet provides us with a divinely inspired

prediction of the effect the holy Infant was to have on Egypt and the Egyptians: "**Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will totter at His Presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in the midst of it**". (Isaiah 19:1).

The authority of Old Testament prophecy, which portended the crumbling of idols wherever Jesus went, further foreshadowed the singular blessing to be bestowed upon Egypt, for its having been chosen as the Holy Family's haven, and upon its people for having been the first to experience the Christ's miraculous influence.



God's message, also delivered through the prophetic utterance of Isaiah, ***"Blessed be Egypt, My People"*** (Isaiah 19:25), was an anticipation of the coming of St. Mark to our country, where the Gospel he preached took firm root in the first decades of Christianity. For Isaiah goes on to prophecy: ***"In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt; and a Pillar to the Lord, at its border. And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt"***. (Isaiah 19:19 & 20).

According to the traditions of the Coptic Church, 'the altar' mentioned is that of

the Church of Virgin Mary in Al-Muharraq Monastery, a site where the Holy Family settled for a period of more than six months; and the altar-stone was the 'bed' upon which the Infant Saviour lay. Al-Muharraq Monastery is located, literally, "in the midst of the land of Egypt" ....standing at its exact geographical centre. As for the "pillar at its borders.... which will be for a sign and for a witness..." surely there can be no more demonstrable, concrete proof of the fulfilment of the prophecy than that the Patriarchal See of the Apostolic Church in Egypt, established by St Mark himself, is situated in Alexandria, on Egypt's



An icon of St. Demiana - The Church of Abu Sefein - Old Cairo.



An icon showing Virgin Mary carrying the Infant Jesus.

northern borders. But the prophecy, knitting a perfect pattern of things to come, does not stop there. It continues, ***“Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and will make sacrifice and offering”***. (Isaiah 19:21). As Christianity in Egypt spread, churches were built throughout the length and breadth of the land, and the sites chosen were, primarily, those which, had been visited and blessed by the Holy Family's sojourns. The New Testament records the fulfilment of these Old Testament prophecies as they unfold in their historical sequence.

***“...behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word, for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him”***. (Matthew 2:13).

Joseph complied. A donkey was fetched for the gentle Mother, still so young in years, to ride with her newborn Child in Her arms. And so they set out from Bethlehem on their predestined journey, the hardened old carpenter, who was Mary's betrothed, striding ahead, leading the donkey by its leash into the untracked paths of a wilderness dark as the desert nights, and unending as the months of never ending horizons.

Such an arduous journey it was, fraught with hazard every step of the way. In those far-off days, there were three routes which could be followed by travellers traversing Sinai from Palestine to Egypt, a crossing which was usually undertaken in groups, for without the protection of wellorganized caravans, the everpresent dangers – even along these known and trodden paths – were ominously forbidding.



But, in their escape from the infanticidal fury of King Herod, the Holy Family – understandably – had to avoid the beaten tracks altogether, and to pursue unknown paths, guided by God and His Angel. They picked their way, day after day, through hidden valleys and across uncharted plateaus in the (then) rugged wastelands of Sinai, enduring the scorching heat of the sun by day and the bitter cold of the desert nights, preserved from the threat of wild beasts and savage tribesmen, their daily sustenance miraculously provided, the all-too-for her Infant allayed by the faith that infused her with His birth.

And so they arrived, at last, safely, for God had pre-ordained that Egypt should be the refuge for the One who was to bring the message of peace and love to mankind.

The tortuous trails they followed in their passage across Sinai, and their subsequent travels within Egypt, are chronicled by Pope Theophilus, 23rd Patriarch of Alexandria (384 - 412 AD). He testifies, in his celebrated annals, that on the eve of the 6th of Hathor (the Coptic month corresponding roughly with November), after long prayer, the Holy Virgin revealed herself to him and, from Egypt, bade him record what he had seen and heard.

It is a source which no Christian believer would question.



*An icon showing Jesus Christ sitting on the Throne, Coptic Museum.*



An icon showing the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt -Coptic Museum - Old Cairo.

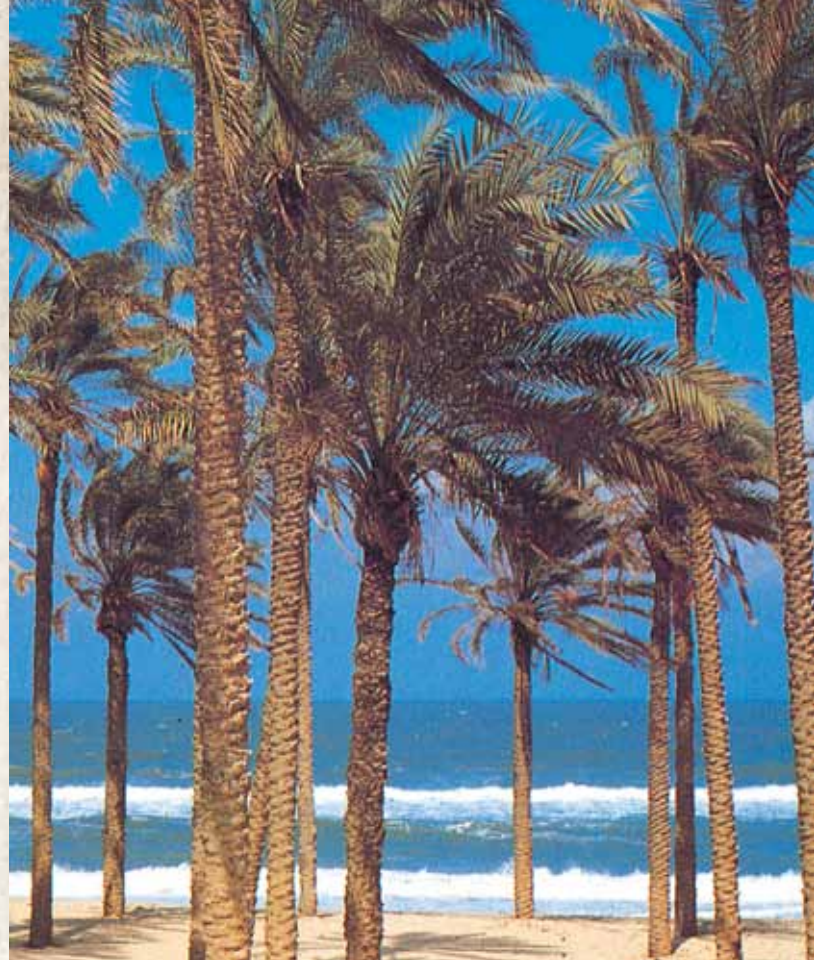


An icon showing the Annunciation to Virgin Mary - Coptic Museum - Old Cairo,

Besides, it is a virtual certainty that, at a time when happenings of a momentous or historical nature were transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the next, the account of Pope Theophilus's vision confirmed the oral tradition of supernatural occurrences which accompanied the arrival of a wondrous Child in the towns and villages of Egypt some 400 years earlier.



THE TRAVERSING  
BY  
THE HOLY FAMILY  
OF SINAI DESERT  
ON THEIR WAY TO  
EGYPT



# THE HOLY FAMILY AT EL-ZARANIK AND FARMA

According to the sources of the Coptic Church, chief among which is the vision documented by Pope Theophilus, and recorded in the Coptic Senexarium the Holy Family proceeded from **Bethlehem** to **Gaza**, and thence to **El-Zaranik** (also known as Floussiat), some 37 kms west of **El-Arish**;

then they threaded their way along northern Sinai until they reached **Farma** (ancient Pelusium) mid-way between El-Arish and present-day **Port Said**. It was their last stop in Sinai; and with the next leg of their journey they put the perils of the wilderness behind them.



*Ruins of ancient monuments -  
Farma - east of Port Said.*



*Ruins of Flousseya Church -  
El Zaranik - west of El-Arish.*

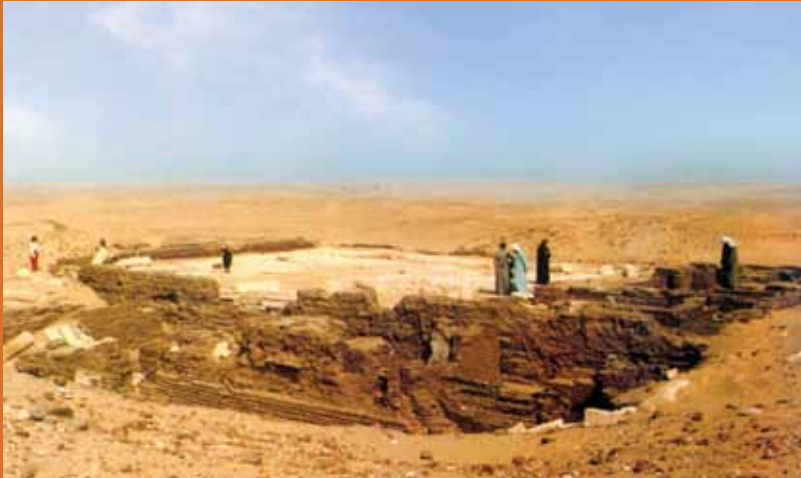




Ruins of Farma Church- Farma.



Ruins of coptic mounments - Farma.



Tel El-Kanaes - Farma.



Top of a column at Farma.



# THE HOLY FAMILY AT BASTA TOWN

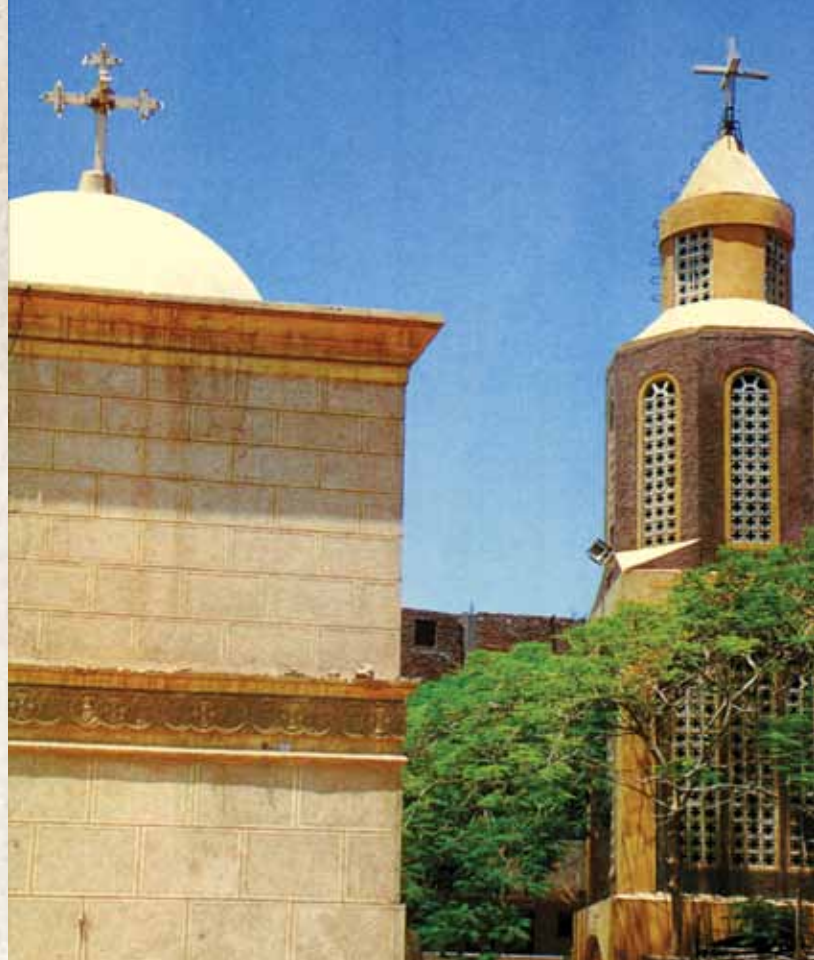


*Ruins of Pharaonic monuments - Tel Basta - Sharqiah.*

Tel Basta — or Basta — which they now enter, is a short distance from Zagazig, the main town in the Sharqiah Governorate about 100 kms north-east of Cairo. Here, Jesus caused a waterspring to well up from the ground, and His presence caused the idols to crumble, as foretold by the prophets of old. The townsfolk, in consequence, turned malevolent and aggressive, whereupon the Holy Family turned their backs on the town and headed southwards.

# THE HOLY FAMILY AT THE TOWN OF MOSTOROD

*Virgin Mary Church - Mostorod – Kalyoubeia..*





# THE HOLY FAMILY AT THE TOWN OF MOSTOROD



*Icons At Virgin Mary Church - Mostorod.*





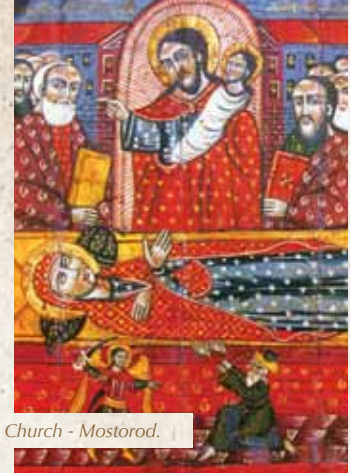
In due course, they reached **Mostorod** (which came to be called, in those days, 'Al- Mahamma') only about 10 kms away from Cairo. 'Al-Mahamma' means 'the Bathing Place', a name given to the town because the Virgin Mary bathed the Christ Child and washed his clothes. It is worthy of note that, eventually, on their way back to Palestine, the Holy Family stopped once more at Mostorod and, this time, caused a spring to gush from the earth which still flows forth to the present day.



*A well at the Church.*



*Icons At Virgin Mary Church - Mostorod.*



*Steps of the Crypt - Virgin Mary Church - Mostorod.*



*Interiors of the Crypt.*



*Interiors of Virgin Mary Church - Belbeis.*

# THE HOLY FAMILY AT THE TOWN OF BELBEIS

*Virgin Mary Church- Belbeis - Sharqaiah.*





# THE HOLY FAMILY AT THE TOWN OF BELBEIS

From Mostorod, the Holy Family made their way north-eastwards to **Belbeis** (ancient Philippos), back in Sharqiah Governorate, and at a distance of about 55 kms from Cairo. They rested there in the shade of a tree which came to be called, 'The Virgin Mary's Tree'.



# THE HOLY FAMILY AT SAKHA & SAMANOUD

*Virgin Mary Church- Sakha - Kafr El Sheikh.*



# THE HOLY FAMILY AT MENIET SAMANOUD

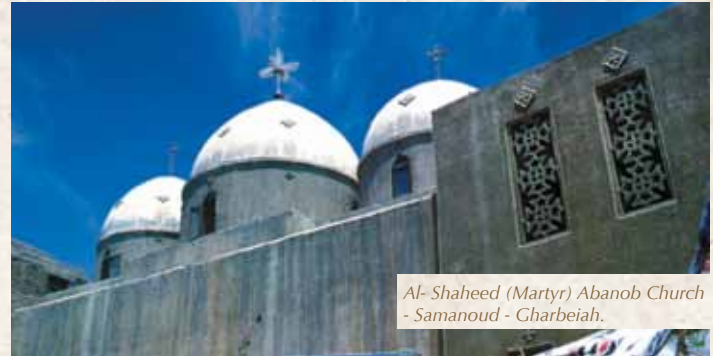
Having left their mark on Belbeis, the Holy Family set off in a north-westerly direction and, reaching the small township of **Meniet Samanoud** (known also Meniet Genah), they crossed the Nile to the city of **Samanoud** (or Jemnoty) in the Delta, where the local population received them with a kindness and hospitality that earned them deserved blessing. There is in Samanoud, to this day, a large granite trough which, according

to local belief, was used by the Virgin for kneading dough, and a water-well which the Christ Child Himself hallowed..

Again towards the north-west, the Holy Family now travelled until they reached the city of **Sakha** in the lake-district of **Burullus**, in the present-day Governorate of Kafr El-Sheikh



*Christ's footprint on a stone - Virgin Mary Church - Sakha - Kafr El Sheikh.*



*Al-Shaheed (Martyr) Abanob Church - Samanoud - Gharbeiah.*





*Interiors of Martyr Abanob Church - Samanoud - Gharbeiah.*

# THE HOLY FAMILY AT SAKHA TOWN

The Coptic name of the town, 'Pekha - Issous', (vernacularized to Lysous) means, 'the foot of Jesus'; for the Holy Child's foot-print was marked, here, in bas-relief on a



*Baptismal font at Virgin Mary Church - Sakha.*

rock. The rock was preserved, but hidden for centuries for fear of robbery, and only unearthed again 13 years ago.

The natural course of the Holy Family's journey from Samanoud to Sakha would have taken them through many of the towns and cities now lying in both the Governorates of Gharbia and Kafr El-Sheikh and, according to some folk traditions, through the Belqas wastelands as well.



*Veil of the Sanctuary - Virgin Mary Church - Sakha.*

# THE HOLY FAMILY AT WADI EL NATROUN

*El - Sorian Monastery - Wadi El Natroun.*





## THE HOLY FAMILY AT WADI EL NATROUN



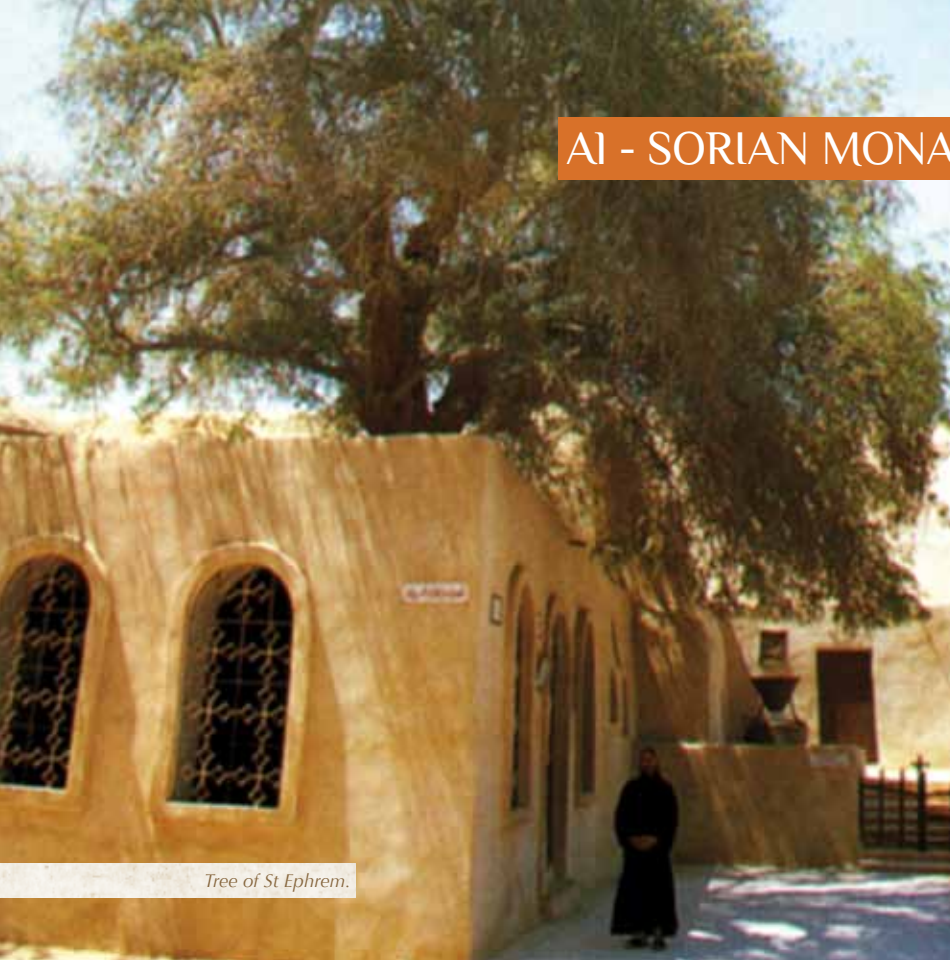
Anba Beshoy Monastery.



Entrance of the Monastery Chapel.

Their trail from Sakha, is recorded in the documentation of Pope Theophilus's vision, and attested to by Coptic practice in the Christian era. For it was to **Wadi el - Natroun** (Natroun Valley) that they now came, after crossing the Rosetta branch of the Nile to the western Delta, and heading south into Wadi el-Natroun (then called Al Asqeet) in the Western Desert of Egypt. In the earliest decades of Christianity, the desert expanses of Wadi el-Natroun became the site of anchoritic settlement and, later, of many monasteries, in spiritual commemoration of the Holy Family's passage through the Valley.

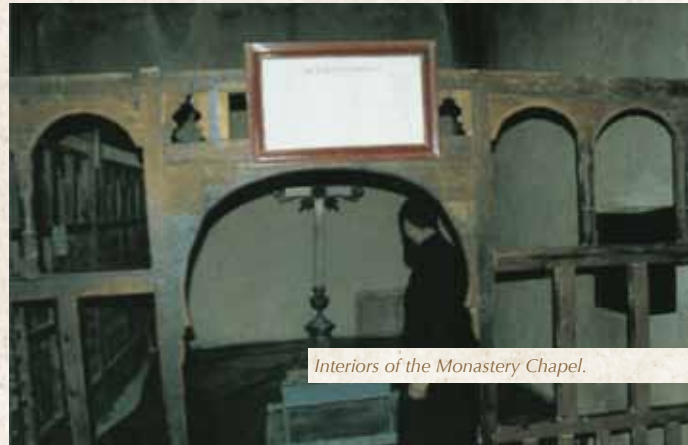
## AI - SORIAN MONASTERY



*Tree of St Ephrem.*



*Ancient Refectory Table-Al-Sorian Monastery.*



*Interiors of the Monastery Chapel.*





*Abu Makar Monastery.*



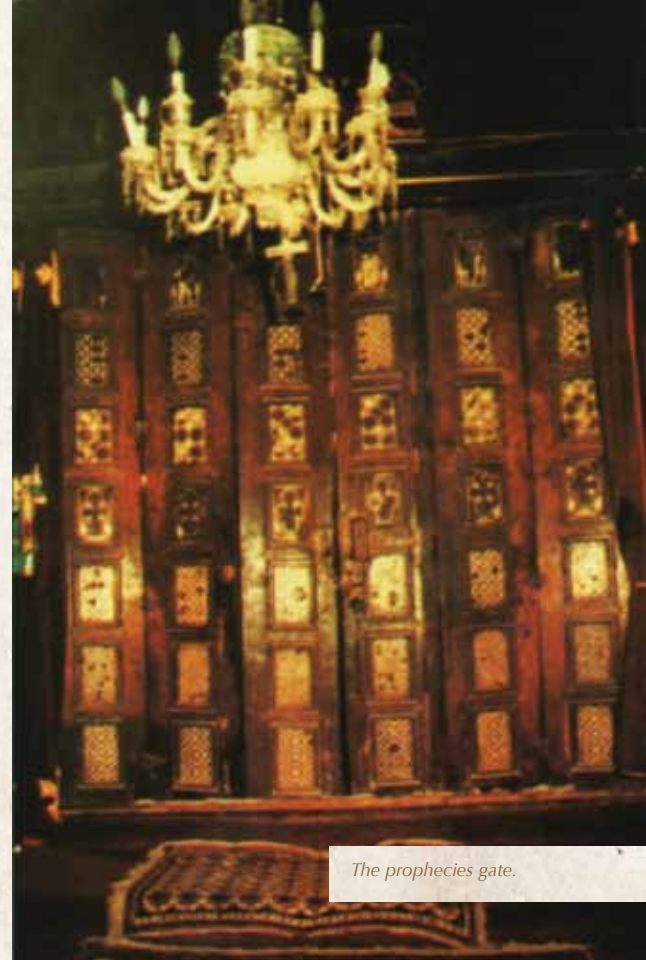
*Annexes to Abu-Makar Monastery.*



*Al - Baramose Monastery -  
Wadi El Natroun.*



*Abu Makar Monastery Church -  
Wadi El Natroun.*



*The prophecies gate.*





*Grapes squeezer.*



*Anba Beshoy Monastery - Wadi El Natroun.*



# THE HOLY FAMILY AT MATAREYA, AIN SHAMS & ZEITOUN

*An icon at Virgin Mary Church - Zeitoun.*





# THE HOLY FAMILY AT MATAREYA & AIN SHAMS



*Virgin Mary Church - Zeitoun.*



*Veil of the Sanctuary - Virgin Mary Church - Zeitoun - Cairo.*

Eventually, they left the desert behind them and made their way southwards, crossing the Nile to its eastern bank, and heading for **Matariyah** and **Ain Shams** (ancient Heliopolis, the site of the oldest 'university' in history called since earliest Pharaonic times, 'On'). Both these adjacent districts are outlying suburbs of present day Cairo, only 10 kms or so from the city centre.



*Ain Shams Obelisk - Ain Shams.*



*St. Mary's Tree - Matariyah - Cairo.*



## THE HOLY FAMILY AT ZEITOUN

At the time of the Holy Family's arrival there, Ain Shams was home to a large Jewish community, who had erected a temple — the Synagogue of Unias, — for their worship. In Matariyah, a tree still stands to this day, still regularly visited, called 'Mary's Tree', for the Family is believed to have rested in its shade. Here, too, the Infant Jesus caused water to flow from a spring, from which He drank and blessed, and in which the Virgin washed His clothes. She poured the washing

water on to the ground, and from that spot, the fragrant balsam plant blossomed: besides the healing and pain-soothing properties of this balm, its essence is used in the preparation of the scents and perfumes of which the holy Chrism is composed.



*An icon at Virgin Mary Church - Zeitoun.*



# THE HOLY FAMILY WITHIN THE AREA OF OLD CAIRO

*Entrance The Cathedral of St. Mark - Ezbekieh Central Cairo.*



# THE HOLY FAMILY WITHIN THE AREA OF MID-CAIRO

Setting out next towards Old Cairo, the Holy Family rested for a while in Zeitoun, on their way; then proceeded along a course which traverses what are now crowded, bustling quarters of Cairo, within which the serene landmarks of an earlier Coptic heritage still stand, marking the paths the Holy Family followed. A listing of these landmarks, at this point, may be of pertinent interest:



*The Cathedral of St. Mark - Ezbekieh.*



*Entrance of Virgin Mary Church - Zuwaila Alley - Central Cairo.*



*An icon at Virgin Mary Church-Zeitoun.*

# In Central Cairo

- The Church of Virgin Mary in Zuweila Alley.
- The Church of St George the Martyr.
- The Church of St. Mercurios Abu Sefein.
- The Convent of the Virgin Mary.
- The Convent of St George.

## In the down-town district of Clot Bey:

- The Cathedral of St Mark in Azbekieh.
- Numerous churches attached to the Cairo headquarters of many of Egypt's monasteries.
- The Church of the Virgin Mary (known by the name: Ezbaweya).



*Top of the Sanctuary - the Church of Abu Sefein - Old Cairo.*



*An icon at the Church of Abu Sefein.*



# THE HOLY FAMILY WITHIN THE AREA OF OLD CAIRO



*Interiors of the Church.*



*Steps of the Crypt - the Church of Abu Serga.*

The area now called Old Cairo, known as Misr El Kadima, is among the most important locations visited by the Holy Family where the spiritual impact of their presence is most felt still; though their stay was brief, for the Governor of what was then Fustat — enraged by the tumbling down of idols at Jesus's approach — sought to kill the Child. But they took shelter from his wrath in a cave above which, in later years, the Church of Abu Serga (St Sergius) was built. This, and the whole area of the Fort of Babylon, is a



*The Church of Abu Sefein.*

destination of pilgrimage not only for the Egyptians but for Christians from around the world. An air of piety and devotion pervades the whole district.

Here, too, it is useful to list the sites which visitors to the Fortress of Babylon section of Old Cairo take in:

- The Church of Abu Serga and the Crypt of the Holy Family beneath it.
- Al-Muallaqa (Hanging Church), dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Patriarchal See of the Coptic Church in the early centuries.



*The ancient altar of the Church of Abu Serga.*

- The Church of St Barbara.
- The Church of St George (in the Palace of Waxworks).
- The Church of the Virgin. identified by its alternative name of Qasriet Al-Rihan (Basil Pot).
- The Convent of St George.
- The Coptic Museum and the ramparts of the Fortress of Babylon.
- The Greek Orthodox Church of St George.
- The Jewish Synagogue of Ben Ezra.

**The Fustat section of Old Cairo, which lies west of the Mosque of Amr Ibn AL-Aas, includes:**

- The Church of St Mercurios Abu Sefein.
- The Church of Amba Shenouda.
- The Church of the Virgin Mary of Al-Demshiria.
- The Convent of Abu Sefein.
- The Church of the Virgin of Babylon El Darag.
- The Church of Saints Abakir and Yohanna.
- The Church of Prince Tadros Al Mishriqi.



*Virgin Mary Church (Qasriet Al Rihan).*



*Entrance of the Church of Saints Abakir and John.*



*Interiors of the Church of St. Barbara - Old Cairo.*



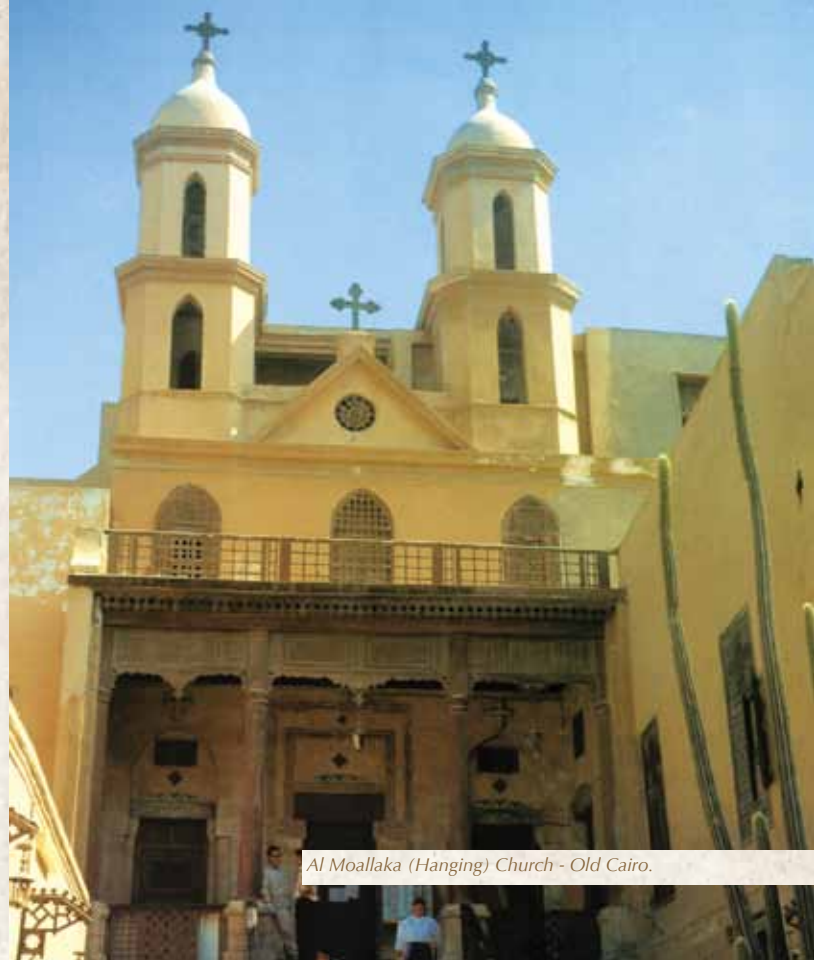
*Interiors of the Church of Al Malak Al Qibli - Old Cairo.*





*The Greek Orthodox Church of  
Mari Gerges (St. George).*

- The Church of the Archangel Mikhail (known also as Al-Malak Al-Qibli — or 'Southern Angel').
- The Church of St. Mena in Zahraa - Misr El Kadima.



*Al Moallaka (Hanging) Church - Old Cairo.*



*The Convent of Mari Gerges (St. George).*



*Virgin Mary Church of Babylon El - Darag.*



*Virgin Mary Church of Al-Damsheria.*



*Interiors of Al-Moallaka Church.*

# THE HOLY FAMILY AT MAADY

*The Monastery restoration started through a Divine inspiration that came out of this icon during the Epiphany of 1983 G.*





# THE HOLY FAMILY AT MAADY

After their short, but all-too-felt, stay in Old Cairo, the Holy Family moved in a southerly direction, reaching the modern Cairo suburb of **Maady** which, in earliest Pharaonic times, was an outlying district of Memphis, the capital of Egypt then; and, at Maady, they boarded a sailing-boat which carried them up the Nile towards southern Egypt. The historic church built upon the spot from which they embarked, also dedicated to the Virgin, is further identified by

the denominative, 'Al-Adaweya', the Virgin's Church 'of the Ferry'. (In fact, the name of that now modern suburb, Maady, derives from the Arabic word which means 'the Crossing Point').

The stone steps leading down to the Rivers bank, and believed to have been used by the Holy Family, are accessible to pilgrims through the Church courtyard.



*The Holy Bible - Virgin Mary Church - Maady.*

An event of miraculous import occurred on Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Coptic month of Baramhat - the 12<sup>th</sup> of March-1976 A.D. A Holy Bible of unknown provenance was carried by the lapping ripples of the Nile to the bank below the Church. It was open to the page of Isaiah 19:25 the page declaring, **“Blessed be Egypt My People”**. The Bible is now behind glass in the Sanctuary of the Virgin in the Church for all to see.



*The ancient stone steps - Virgin Mary Church - Maady.*



*An icon of st. Demiana - Virgin Mary Church - Maady.*



*Virgin Mary Church - Maady.*



THE HOLY FAMILY,  
QUITS SOUTHWARD TO THE  
TOWNS OF UPPER EGYPT

*Virgin Mary Church - Al Garnous Monastery - Maghagha - Minia.*



## THE HOLY FAMILY AT AL GARNOUS MONASTERY - MAGHAGHA

The sail-boat docked at the village of Deir **Al-Garnous** (the later site of the Monastery of Arganos) 10 kms west of Ashnein el Nassara (a small village near the town of Maghagha).

Outside the western wall of the Church of the Virgin there, a deep well is believed to have provided the Holy Family with the water they needed.



*Interiors of Virgin Mary Church -  
Al Garnous Monastery - Maghagha.*



*A well at Al Garnous  
Monastery - Maghagha.*

## THE HOLY FAMILY AT AL BAHNASSA

They went on from there to a spot later named **Abai Issous**, “the Home of Jesus”, the site of present-day **Sandafa** village, east of **Al-Bahnassa** which, itself, stands some 17 kms west of the town of **Beni Mazar**.



*St. Mary Tree at Minja.*





# THE HOLY FAMILY AT GABAL AL TAIR - SAMALOUT



*Al - Abed (the Worshipper's) Tree - Nazlet Ebeid - Minia.*

On towards the south they went from Bahnassa to Samalout and crossed the Nile again from that town to the spot on the east bank of the River where the Monastery of the Virgin now stands upon **Gabal El-Tair** ('Bird Mountain') east of **Samalout**, 2kms south of Meadeyat Beni Khaled. It is known by this name (Gabal El-Tair) because thousands of birds gather there. The Holy Family rested in the cave which is now located inside the ancient church there. Gabal El-Tair is also

called **Gabal El-Kaf** ('Palm Mountain'). Coptic tradition maintains that, as the Holy Family rested in the shade of the Mountain, Jesus stretched His little hand to hold back a rock which was about to detach itself from the mountain-side and fall upon them. The imprint of His palm is still visible.

When they resumed their travels, the Holy Family passed a laurel tree a stone's throw south of Gabal El-Tair, along the pathway flanking the Nile and leading from the Mountain to Nazlet Ebeid and the New Minia Bridge of today. It is claimed that this tree bowed for worship the Lord Christ - glory be to

Him - as He was passing. The configuration of the Tree is, indeed, unique: all its branches incline downwards, trailing on the ground, then turn upwards again, covered in a cloak of grain, covered in a cloak of green leaves. They call the tree Al Abed— "The Worshipper".

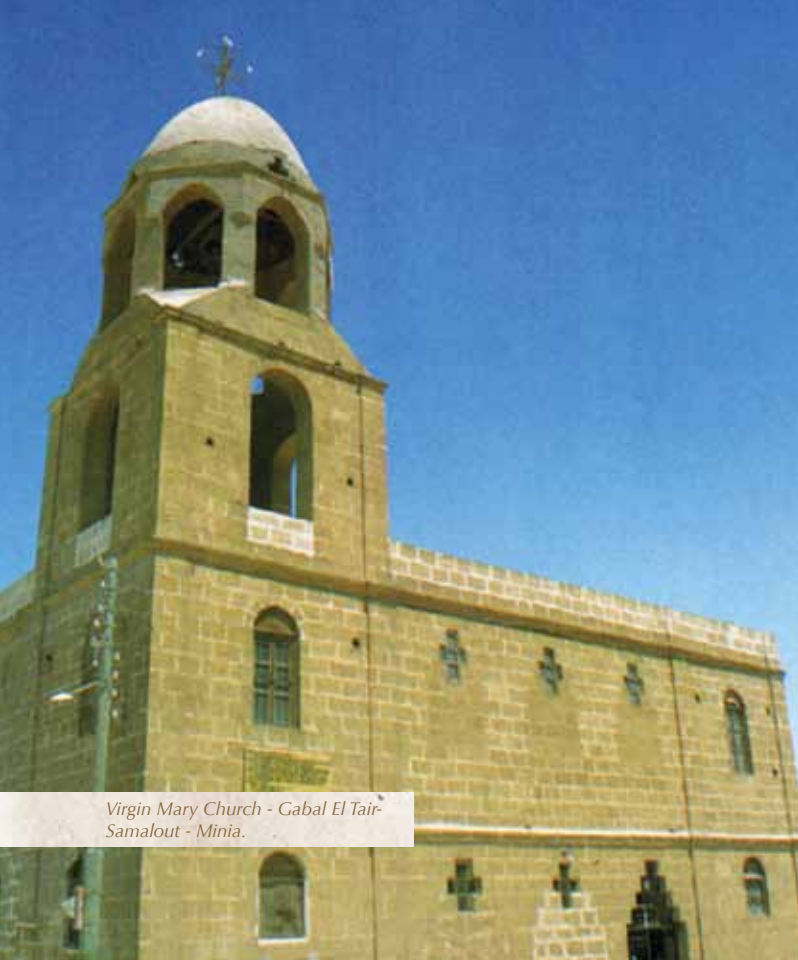


*Maunde basin at El Barsha Monastery Church.*



*Veil of the Sanctuary - El Barsha Monastery Church - Minia.*





Virgin Mary Church - Gabal El Tair-  
Samalout - Minia.



El - Barsha Monastery Church.



Date of establishing the Church 1938 G.



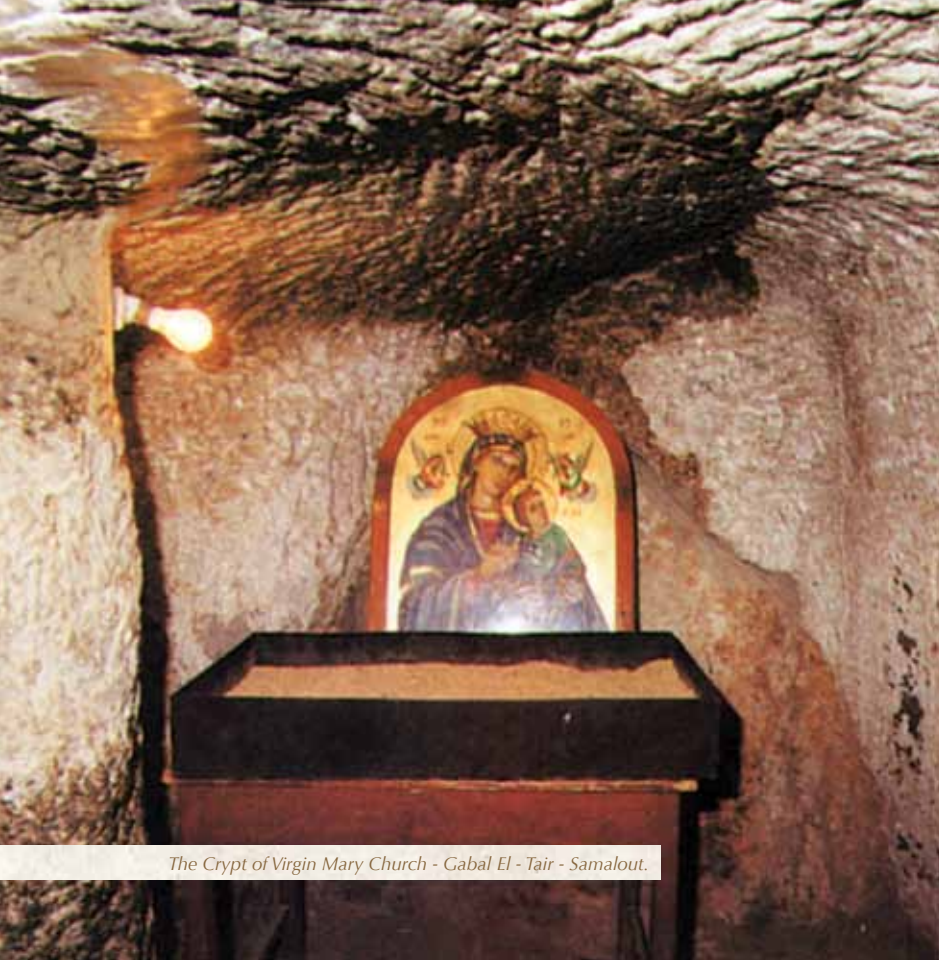
THE HOLY FAMILY  
CROSSES THE RIVER  
NILE FROM THE  
EASTERN TO WESTERN  
BANK



## THE HOLY FAMILY AT AL ASHMOUNEIN TOWN - MALAWY

Once more crossing the Nile, back to its west bank, the Holy Family travelled southwards to the town of **Al-Ashmounein** - or **Hermopolis Magna**- but it seems that they did not tarry long there. Leaving behind them the rubble of fallen idols, they continued still in a southerly direction, for another 20 kms or so to **Dairout Al-Sharif** (which, like Al-Ashmounein, had an alternative Greek name: **Philes**); and thence to **Qussqam** (or **Qost- Qoussia**). Here, too, the recorded events testify that the townsfolk were infuriated when the stone statue of their local deity cracked and fell, and evicted the Holy Family from the town. A historically recorded incident dating to that period refers to the devastation of Qussqam, and Coptic tradition asserts that the ruin that befell the town was the consequence of its violent rejection of the gentle visitors.

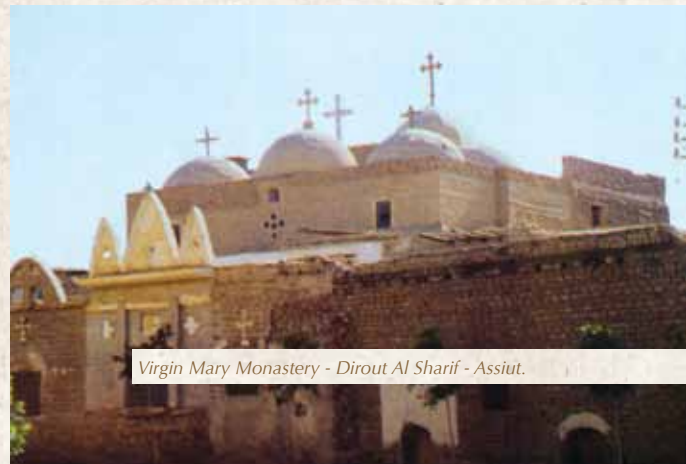
We have an entirely different story in the warm welcome with which the holy refugees were met at their next stop at **Meir** (or **Meira**) only 7 kms west of Qoussia. Here, they found only consideration and hospitality wherever they went, for which treatment the town and its people were signally blessed.



*The Crypt of Virgin Mary Church - Gabal El - Tajir - Samalout.*



*Ruins of Roman Monuments - Al Ashmounein - Minia.*



*Virgin Mary Monastery - Dirout Al Sharif - Assiut.*





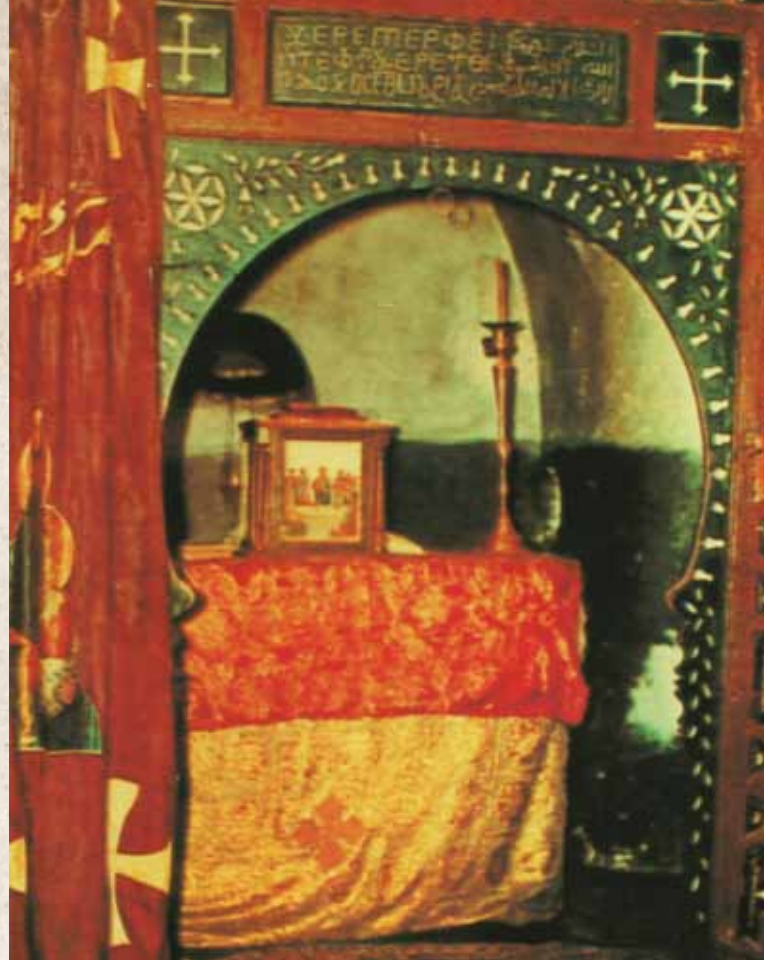
St. Mary's Tree at Virgin Mary Monastery - Dirout Al Sharif.



A well at El Garnous Monastery - Maghagha - Minia.

# AL MUHARRAQ MONASTERY

*The Oldest Altar - stone in history - the Monastery of Al - Muharraq - Assiut.*



## THE HOLY FAMILY AT MOUNT QUSSQAM:



*The ancient fort - the monastery of Al Muharraq*



*Entrance of Virgin Mary Church - the Monastery of Al Muharraq.*

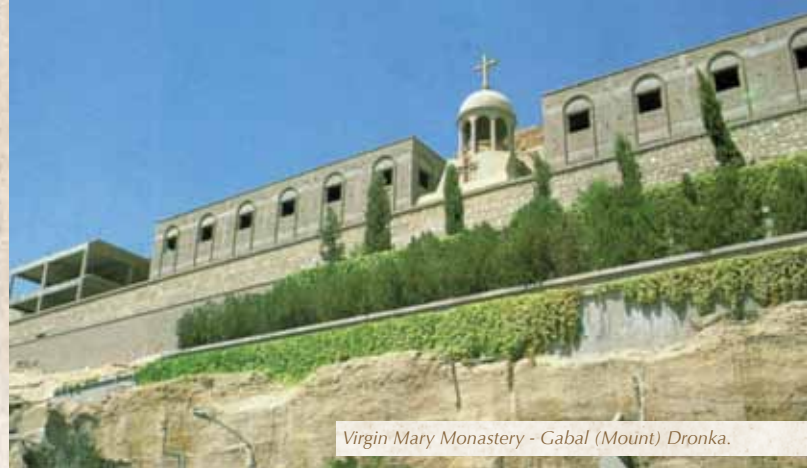
Now it was time for the Holy Family to set out for what is, arguably, the most meaningful destination of all in the land of Egypt, the place where there would be **“an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt”**. Gabal (Mount) Qussqam, which takes its name from the town nearby that was lid waste, is 327 kms south of Cairo, and stands in the Governorate of Assiut. **The Monastery of Al-Muharraq** nestles against the western foothills of the Mountain. It was built around the area where the Holy Family remained just over six months. Their time was spent mainly in a cave which became, in the Coptic era, the altar of the Church of Virgin Mary, built at the western end of the Monastery compound. The altar stone was the resting place of the Child Jesus during the months He dwell there.

The whole area-the Monastery and its surroundings - is redolent of the Coptic Christian ethos. So hallowed are its intimations, that the Copts of Egypt named it the Second Bethlehem.

It was here, at the very spot where **Al-Muharraq Monastery** stands, that the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said **“Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young Child’s life”** (Matthew 2:20 & 21).



# THE HOLY FAMILY AT MOUNT DRONKA - ASSIUT



*Virgin Mary Monastery - Gabal (Mount) Dronka.*



*A crypt at the Monastery.*



## THE RETURN

And so they set forth on **the return journey**. The route they took deviated slightly from the one by which they had come. It took them to **Mount Dronka**, 8 kms south-west of the city of Assiut, and their blessing of this location was commemorated in the Christian era by the building of the mountain-top Monastery of Dronka.

Eventually, they arrived at Old Cairo, then Matariyah, and on to Mahamma, retracing more or less their steps on their outward journey across Sinai to Palestine.

Subsequent Biblical history says it all: at the end, they arrived home, Joseph's old house, in the small town of Nazareth, in Galilee, in the land of Palestine, from where the message of Christ would, in the fulness of time, be heard.

The whole journey, from the initial flight from Bethlehem to the return to Nazareth lasted over three years.

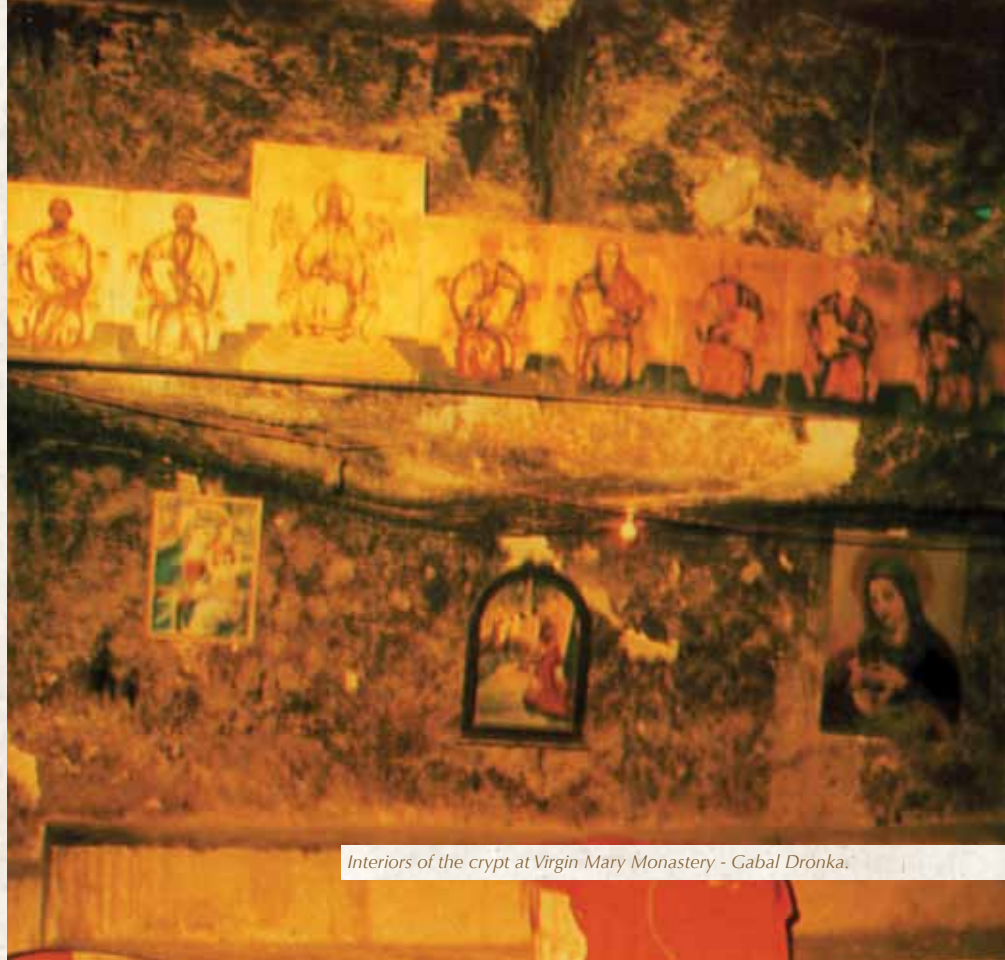
They had covered something like 2000 kms; their means of transport a weak beast of burden and the occasional sail-boat on the Nile. But for much of the way, the delicate Mother and the rugged old Carpenter must have trudged on foot, enduring the fierce summer heat and the biting winter's cold, suffering the pangs of hunger and the parching affliction of thirst... like hunted outlaws. It was a journey of indescribable agony and anguish which the Child Jesus, His Virgin Mother and the Sainted Joseph bore with inner joy, and survived, for the sake of mankind.

*An icon at Virgin Mary Monastery - Gabal Dronka.*





*Chrismatories at the Monastery.*



*Interiors of the crypt at Virgin Mary Monastery - Gabal Dronka.*



# THE HOLY FAMILY'S JOURNEY IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

**"BLESSED BE EGYPT MY PEOPLE"  
(ISAIAH 19:25)**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the Coptic month of Bashans, which corresponds to the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, the Coptic Church celebrates the entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into the land of Egypt. On that day, the churches throughout the length and breadth of the land that gave the Holy Family shelter resound with the words of the Doxology:

"Rejoice, Oh Egypt; Oh, people of Egypt and all ye Children of Egypt who live within its borders, rejoice and lift up your hearts, for the Lover of all mankind, He who has been before the beginning of ages, has come to you".



*Sketch indicating  
The Holy Family  
route in Egypt*

