

## 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 vision documented by Pope Theophilus, and recorded in the Coptic Senexarium, the Holy Family proceeded from Bethlehem to Gaza, and then to El-Zaranik west of El-Arish; then they threaded their way along northern Sinai until they reached Farma mid-way between El-Alish and present-day Port Said. It was their last stop in Sinai.



*Ruins of Flousseyia Church - El-Zaranik - west of El-Arish*



*Ruins of Coptic Monuments - Farma*

### The Holy Family at Basta Town

The Holy family then came to Tel Basta near Zagazig. Here, Jesus caused a water spring to well up from the ground, and His presence caused the idols to crumble. The Holy Family then headed southwards.

### The Holy Family at the town of Mostorod

In due course, they reached Mostorod known as '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. On the 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.



*Steps of the Crypt - Virgin Mary Church Mostorod*



*Icons at Virgin Mary Church*



*Virgin Mary Church - Mostorod - Kalyoubeia*



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Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate  
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**Blessed be Egypt  
My People** (Isaiah 19:25)

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

## The Holy Family at Sakha Town

The Coptic name of the town, 'Pekha-Issous', means, 'the foot of Jesus'; for the Holy Child's footprint was marked, here, in bas-relief on a rock. The rock was hidden for centuries for fear of robbery, and only unearthed 13 years ago.



*Christ's Foot print*

*Veil of the Sanctuary -  
Virgin Mary Church - Sakha -  
Kafir El Sheikh*



*Baptismal font at  
Virgin Mary Church - Sakha*



*Tower of Virgin Mary  
Church - Sakha*

## The Holy Family at Wadi El Natroun

Their trail from Sakha, is recorded in the documentation of Pope Theophilus' vision, and attested to by Coptic practice in the Christian era. For it was to Wadi el-Natroun that they now came, after crossing the Rosetta branch of the Nile to the western Delta and heading south into Wadi el-Natroun 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, inspiritual commemoration of the Holy Family's passage through the Valley.



*Anba Besboy Monastery*

*To be continued...*

## 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'.



*Virgin Mary Church -  
Belbeis -  
Sbarqiah*



## The Holy Family at Meniet Samanoud

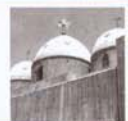
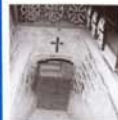
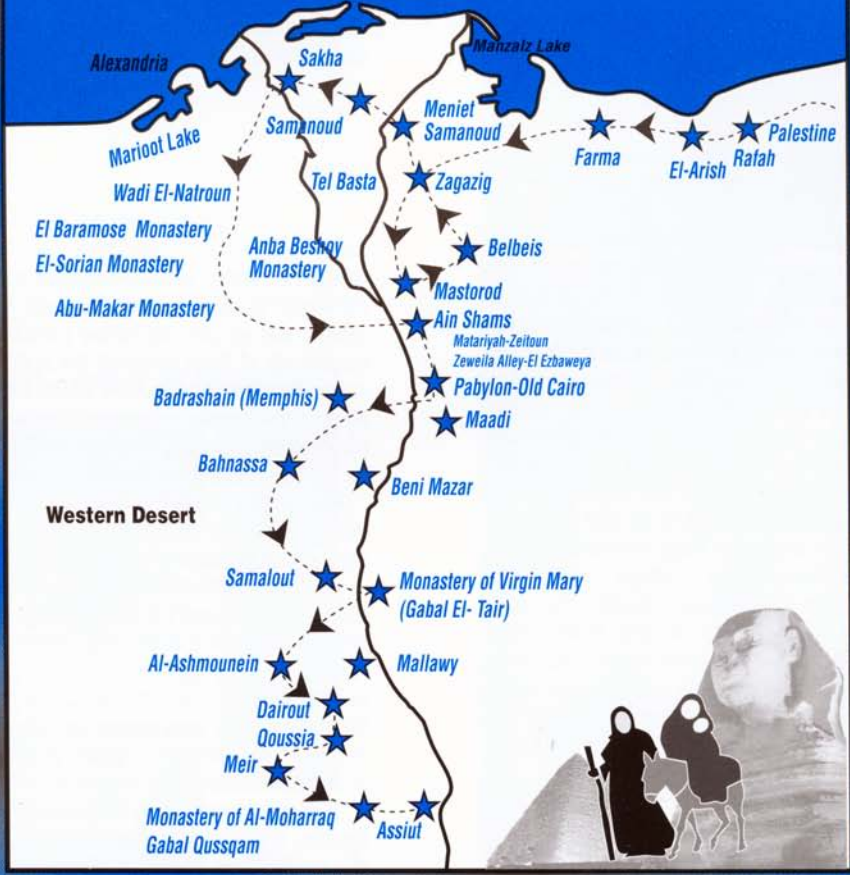


*Interiors of Martyr Abanob Church-Samanoud-Gharbeiah.*

Having left their mark on Belbeis, the Holy Family set off in a north-westerly direction and, reaching the small township of Meniet Samannoud, where they were received with kindness and hospitality. In Samannoud, to this day, there is a large granite trough which, according to local belief, was used by 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-Sh...

# Mediterranean Sea



In celebration of  
the beginning of  
third millennium,  
of the Holy Family's  
visit to Egypt.  
(June 1st - Bashans 24th)

## The Holy Family in Egypt

The advent of the Holy Family to Egypt, seeking refuge, is an event of the utmost significance in our country's 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 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-Muharrag 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 Savior lay. Al-Muharrag Monastery is located, literally, "In the midst of the land of Egypt". ... standing at its exact geographical center.

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 fulfillment 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 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 fulfillment 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 new-born Child in Her arms. And so they set out from Bethlehem on their pre-destined 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 well-organized caravans, the ever-present 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-human fears of the young Mother 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 Harbor (the Coptic month corresponding roughly with November), after long prayer, the Holy Virgin revealed herself to him and, after relating the details of the Holy Family's journey to, in, and from Egypt, bade him record what he had seen and heard.

It is a source which no Christian believer would question. 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' 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.

This text was prepared and revised by a cathedral Committee headed by His Holiness Pope Shenoda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Sea of St. Mark.