

THE ESSENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF
FASTING
IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

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DEFINITIONS AND MEANING:

- * Fasting in Hebrew is **‘sum’**, meaning to cover the mouth; in Greek its **‘nesteuo’**, meaning to abstain.
- * Fasting was not found in the Pentateuch, but it occurred in the Historical Books of; II Samuel 12:16, I Kings 21:9-12, Ezra 8:21.
- * In the Webster Dictionary, fasting means, to go without food or some kinds of food, *esp.* as a religious exercise.

IN THE BEGINNING:

- * God created man vegetarian. Adam and Eve ate vegetarian food in the Garden of Eden-the earthly paradise; ***“And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.”*** (Genesis 1:29).
- * Even after they sinned and were exiled from the Garden (Gen. 3:18), they continued being vegetarian.
- * Even all the animals used vegetarian food as God said; ***“Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.”*** (Gen. 1:30).
- * The Bible did not allow meat consumption except after the Flood, ***“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood”*** (Gen.9:3, 4).
- * The Great Flood took place during Noah’s (Noe’s) time (Gen. 9:3), when the world had gone astray and God decided to flood it to clean it, ***“.. for the earth is filled with violence through them-people; and I will destroy them with the earth”*** (Genesis 6:13).
- * Man maintained the meat as part of his daily diet, till Moses time, and God gave tem through Aaron by Moses, five fasts per year. When the Lord God led His people in the Sinai

desert, He provided them with vegetarian food, which was *'the manna'* (Numbers 11:7, 8).

* He did not allow the consumption of meat (quails) except after the people complained and cried out for meat, as they deteriorated in spirit. (Numbers 11:13, 31, 33)

Why is fasting important and vital for God's people?

THE ESSENCE, GOAL AND PURPOSE OF FASTING:

"To loose the bond of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh" (Isaiah 58:6,7).

* We cannot be saved without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but our faith lacks sincerity if it does not reach out to others.

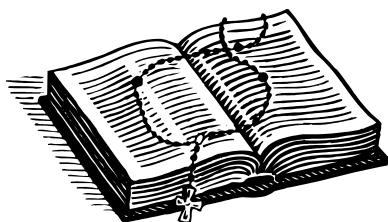
* Fasting can be beneficial spiritually and physically. God says He wants our fasting to go beyond our own personal growth to acts of; **righteousness, kindness, charity, justice, and generosity**. This truly pleases God.

SO, to summarize the above:

SINNERS need to repent, to turn away from their wrong ways and feel sorry/have remorse like the prodigal son...

FRUITS bring forth fruits worthy to be in your life such as; love, joy, peace, goodness, purity, etc.

DEEDS being compassionate and kind toward others, Matthew 25...



Is Fasting Biblical?

EXAMPLES in The BIBLE Attesting to Group Fasts:

a) **The Fasting of the people in the days of Esther:**

These people fasted together at one time, and for one purpose and through unity in prayers and fasting. God accepted their fasting and answered them (Esther 4).

b) **The Fasting of the people of Nineveh:**

All fasted together, not in secret, and God accepted their fast and forgave them their sins (Jonah 3).

c) **The Fasting of the people in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah:**

Nehemiah said; “Now, on the twenty fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dust on their heads” (Nehemiah 9:1).

And Ezra says; “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions” (Ezra 8:21).

d) **Fasting in the days of Joel:**

The Bible says; “Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room” (Joel 2:12-17).

e) **The Fasting of the Apostles in the New Testament:**

When Christ was asked why His disciples did not fast, He said; “.. *when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, then they will fast*” (Matt. 9:15). And they indeed fasted together, not in secret, and the Lord accepted their fast.

The Bible also says; “*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’. Then having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away*” (Acts 13; 2, 3).

f) **The Apostle St. Paul fasted a lot, and all the people in the ship (Acts 27; 21).**

Congregational fasting is an evidence of the unity in spirit.





GOALS OF FASTING

BENEFITS OF FASTING:

- + When the nation was faced with disaster, Johoshaphat (II Chronicles 20:6-12) called upon the people to get **serious with God by going without food for a designated time**. By separating themselves from the daily routine of food preparation and eating, they could **devote the extra time to considering their sin and praying to God for help**.
- + Hunger pangs would reinforce their feelings of **penitence and remind them of their weakness and their dependence upon God** (II Chronicles 20:3).
- + Before making all the physical preparations for the journey, Ezra made spiritual preparations; **their prayers and fasting prepared them spiritually by showing their:**
 - a) **Dependence on God for protection.**
 - b) **Faith that God was and is in control.**
 - c) **Affirmation that they were not strong enough to make the trip without Him.**
- + Ezra and the people humbled themselves by fasting and prayer (Ezra 8:21-23).
- + Fasting humbled them because going without food reminded them of their **complete dependence on God's provision**.

+ Fasting also gave them extra time **to pray and meditate on God.**

+ **Our Lord Jesus Christ fasted to bless our fasting** (Matthew 4:2).

He taught His disciples that fasting and prayer indicate faith and humility before God, without which there can be no hope of success (Matthew 17:21).

CONCLUSION

FASTING: are holy days... to be filled with the Spirit... and to war against wickedness & be victorious.

Fasting & prayer; are the wings of the eagle...

Fasting & mercy; blessed are those who have mercy...

Fasting & repentance; change, otherwise what's the use of fasting...

Fasting & Holy Communion; to be empowered and benefit...

Fasting & almsgiving; 10% is the min.; we offer an act of love for others...

Fasting & seclusion; sanctify a fast, call for repentance and seclusion...

Fasting & ascetism; renounce gluttony...

Fasting & reading the Holy Scriptures; we live by God's word, read it during holy Lent .. one chapter a day keeps the devil away

FAITH + FORGIVENESS + PRAYER





TYPE OF FOOD DURING FASTING

Does God mind what type of food do we eat when we are Fasting?

TYPE OF FOOD DURING FAST:

The Lord God said to Ezekiel;” *Also take for yourself **wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet** (small grain of an Indian cereal plant), and **spelt** (a wheat that has lax spikes with spikelets containing two light red kernels); put them into one vessel, and make bread of these for yourself .. and **your food which you eat shall be by weight, 20 shekels a day, from time to time you shall eat it. You shall also drink water by measure**” (Ezekiel 4:9)*

* **The wisdom** behind using vegetarian food is that it is not conducive to lust and not provocative to the flesh.

* **Second**, it was the original type of food which God gave man, and designed his digestive system for.

* **Third**, the holy church likes to have its believers re-live the life in the Garden of Eden as vegetarians to elevate and promote them spiritually.

IMPORTANT POINT:

The Church does not forbid the consumption of meats and related foods but **abstain from these during fasts** as self-restraint and not because these are unclean.

At the conclusion of fasts, the faithful believers do actually consume these kinds of food which they were self-restraining from for spiritual exercise.

St. John Chrysostom says:

‘This is the rule of the most perfect Christianity.

CARING FOR OTHERS/YOUR NEIGHBOR Indeed, even though you fast, or sleep on hard ground, or even suffer unto death, yet take no thought for your neighbor, you have done nothing great; despite what you have done, you still stand far from this model of a perfect Christian’.

So fasting and feasting can be harnessed as enhanced spiritual disciplines that once again transcend just what goes in and out of the stomach.

Consider the following:

Fast from criticism, and feast on praise.

Fast from self-pity, and feast on joy.

Fast from ill-temper, and feast on peace.

Fast from resentment, and feast on contentment.

Fast from jealousy, and feast on humility.

Fast from selfishness, and feast on humility.

Fast from fear, and feast on faith.

Fast from bitterness, and feast on forgiveness.

Fast from discontent, and feast on gratitude.

Delight in fasting and feasting for the right reasons.



SERMON ON FASTING

By: The Thrice Blessed Pope Kyrillos VI
Translated by Father Athanasius Iskander of Canada

The late Pope Kyrillos VI of triple blessedness wrote this moving message to his children that had immigrated to other countries on the occasion of holy Lent. It was written shortly before his departure. We are reproducing it on the occasion of Lent and also on the occasion of the anniversary of his Holiness' departure on March 9, 1971.

Peace to you from the Lord and grace and blessing. Our Good and Compassionate God, Who preserves His children everywhere and in all ages, Who gave us His promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.", the same be with you in your sojourn, preserve you from every offense, from every wickedness and from every vile thought, confirmed in His love and keeping His commandments, grounded in your Orthodox dogma and in the traditions of your church, which we have received from our fathers the Apostles and from the holy Saints of the church. May the Lord grant us to hear all good news concerning you, at all times.

I write you in these holy days wherein our Lord has fasted forty days and forty nights on our behalf, wishing you on the occasion of the Fast, the fullness of the blessing and the fullness of Grace. May you complete it in purity and in righteousness that ye may rejoice in the resurrection of the Lord and in it's effectiveness in your life.

Fasting was the first commandment:

Fasting, my children, is the first commandment that God has delivered unto mankind, when He commanded our fore-

parents Adam and Eve that they should not eat certain fruits in the Garden. And fasting was the first deed that our Lord and Master Jesus Christ did after being baptized, even before He started His preaching ministry among the people.

And fasting was the first deed that our fathers the Apostles did when the Bridegroom was taken from them. And while they fasted and prayed the Holy Spirit spoke unto them (Act 13:2).

Fasting is the weapon by which we defeat the devils, for the Lord said, "This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting." (Mat 17:21).

Fasting is a necessary weapon:

Fasting is a weapon the Prophets have used, for Moses, Elijah, David, Ezra and Nehemiah have all fasted.

Even the Gentiles fasted, entreating the mercy of God, like the inhabitants of Nineveh who fasted and the Lord did cast His wrath away from them.

And Daniel the Prophet fasted even as he sojourned, and how beautiful is the saying of the Bible concerning him, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat." (Dan. 1:8) And he did eat vegetables. The three holy children also fasted with him and while they fasted, God gave them favor in the eyes of every one and granted them health and strength, so that "their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." (Daniel 1:15).

Fasting is a weapon by which we subdue the lusts of the flesh, that the spirit may be lifted up and strengthened. That is why fasting is laced by spirituality, for it is not a virtue of the flesh. Indeed Christian fasting is abstaining from all food for a period of time, followed by eating food that is devoid of animal fatness, however, in addition to this, fasting has to be accompanied by spiritual virtues that would give it its spiritual nature.

The importance of repentance:

Fasting must be accompanied by repentance, compunction and confession of sins. When the Ninevites fasted, they put on sackcloth and they turned, every one, from his evil ways and from the violence that was in their hands. And they cried mightily unto God. And God saw their repentance and showed mercy unto them. The importance of repentance to accompany fasting is expounded for us fully in the Book of Joel, where the Lord exhorts us, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning....sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." (Joel 2:12-15).

In the same manner did Daniel the Prophet fast, "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God and made my confession." (Daniel 9:3, 4). In the like manner did Nehemiah, Ezra and David fast. God desires this repentance while fasting, when the spirit has victory over the flesh, when we subdue the flesh and crucify it with all its affections. (Gal 5:24).

So, make your fast, my children, pure and holy, that it may be acceptable before God like the fasts of the saints. Preserve your purity in the land of your sojourn. Live the life of repentance that is pleasing to God. Let this season be a season for confession of sins and communion of the holy Mysteries, that ye may abide in the Lord and He abides in you, even as the living branches that bear fruit abide in the True Vine. And the God of all mercies preserve, confirm and strengthen you.

Fasting and other spiritual means:

Let your fast be also accompanied by prayer and by reading the Bible and spiritual books and the lives of the

saints. Let your fast be also accompanied by meditation, especially concerning the holy and precious memories with which this blessed season abounds.

Celebrate the holy Pascha, with all it's profound chants and lections and moving memories, with all befitting ascetism and compunction, knowing that this season, so profound in it's spiritual rituals and prayers, is but a fountain for the spirit, that satisfies and satiates man and provides him with a wonderful provision that is profitable unto eternity.

Set your minds on all the spiritual means that avail unto your edification. Walk worthy of the Gospel of Christ, according to the vocation wherewith ye are called. (Eph 4:1).

Be a light unto the world:

Be a light wherever ye dwell, that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Mat 5:16), showing in your lives a good example and a living testimony to the Spirit of God that works in you.

Offer unto all a bright image of your holy church, her true orthodox faith, her glorious and wonderful history and her profound and ever-felt influence in the Christian world.

And our Loving God, Who was with Abraham in the land of his sojourn and preserved him bound with His obedience, and Who was with Daniel and the three children in the land of their sojourn and preserved them in their faith, in their fasting and in their prayer, and Who was with Joseph the righteous in the land of his sojourn and preserved him in his purity and truth, the Same be with you also in the land of your sojourn. May He preserve you with His strong right hand, holy and perfect and abounding in every good work.

Fare ye well in the Lord, my blessings and earnest prayers accompany you. May you enjoy a holy season and a happy and blessed feast.

* * * *

SHORT HISTORY ACCOUNT ON FASTS IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

HOW MANY FASTS DOES THE COPTIC CHURCH DOES:

We will present them chronologically, as the holy Church practiced them.

1. **The Apostles' Fast**, starts after Pentecost and concludes in 12th July, which is equivalent to 5th of Abib AM (Coptic Calendar)
2. **Great Lent** is 55 days
3. **Wednesdays and Fridays** throughout the year, except during Easter tide
4. **Nineveh's Fast**, (publicly known as Jonah's Fast) – is two weeks before Great Lent)
5. **Nativity Fast**, is 43 days (usually starts on November 25th till January 7th)
6. **St. Mary's Fast**, is 15 days from the 7th – 22nd of August

* * * * *



First: THE APOSTLES' FAST

* It is a fast for service, and is the oldest fast known and practiced by the church (**100 Words of Benefit, part 2, H. H. Pope Shenouda III**).

* It is the first of all the fasts practiced by the Coptic Church, which was practiced by the early Church, awaiting the “**promise of the Father**”, i.e. ‘**The Holy Spirit**’.

* After the glorious Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into the Heavens, the Apostles fasted (**Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23**), fulfilling the divine

command “... **but the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast**” (**Matthew 9:15**).

* It was named as such, because the fathers of the Ecumenical Council of Nicea, in 325 AD, have called it so, **to honor the Apostles. Before that, it was called ‘The Fast of Pentecost’.**

* Also, in that Council, it was decreed that the period of fasting for this fast should be between ‘**The Feast of Pentecost**’ and the ‘**Feast of the Apostles**’, which falls on 5th of Abib, i.e. July 12th, **for on this day the honored Apostles: St. Peter and St. Paul were martyred in Rome by Nero in the year 67 & 68 AD respectively (The historian, Ibn El-Assal).**

* **This canon** is mentioned also in the Canons of Pope Christetholos, the 66th Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria in the 11th century.

As Moses fasted before telling the people about the Law, which he took from God, the Apostles fasted before the Holy Spirit

descended on them as tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4), and before they preached the Good News to the whole world.

The ranging period of this fast is minimum 15 days, but should not exceed 49 days, since it is tied with the Resurrection Feast (April/May).

Resurrection has to be celebrated after the Jewish Passover, which follows a lunar calendar, thus the fluctuation of days.

SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATIONS

In This fast, the spiritual person should rejoice for he receives many benefits.

He is elevated above the fleshly desires, to be fed spiritually.

He receives 'power' from on high to serve the Lord with the talents given to him/her.

Through repentance and prayers, we lift up our hearts-as mentioned in the divine liturgy-so it may be accepted, and be before the Lord, God, where He can smell it as a sweet savor before Him.

Saint Paul the Apostle, says concerning the Church; that the Lord Jesus Christ has acquired it by His precious Blood (Acts 20:28)... it is the ambassador of heaven on earth (2Cor.5:20)... it is the unseen Body of Christ, where He is its head (1Tim.3:15)... Therefore, he orders that every believer should be obedient to it, and warns against those who opposed it... and considers those who do not listen as a heathen (Matt.18:17).

The Church is:

The house of God... the door of heaven... the Kingdom of God... the ark of salvation... the spring of grace... the source of blessings... the origin of the sacraments... its message and mission is to protect and preserves the pure faith, through its shepherds; the bishops and priests.



Second: GREAT LENT

GREAT LENT HISTORY

BIBLICAL REFERENCES ATTESTING TO THIS FAST;

In the Gospel of **St. Matthew 4:2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1,2** tells us our Lord Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, then He was tempted by Satan.

Satan's temptations focused on three crucial areas;

- a) Physical desires,
- b) Pride and power,
- c) Atheism & possessions.

These are the devices which he has been using, and is using, and will continue to use. but dresses them according to the society and time of use!

Our Lord God, and Savior Jesus Christ, was victorious in the three temptations, and never gave in or sinned, to give us victory over temptations and sin by His divine Word.

As His followers, we ***“ought also to walk just as He walked”*** (1 John 2:6).

The Lord Jesus blessed those who do follow His example (John 13:15-17).

HOW OLD IS GREAT LENT:

* At the end of the second century, Abba Demetrius I, the 12th Pope of Alexandria (188-230 AD), established the reckoning of the Epact, by which the fasting were determined on a fixed basis.

* The Christians used to fast the holy forty days right after Theophany (Jesus' baptism), as the Lord Jesus fasted after His baptism. Then they fasted Passion Week separately.

* Pope Demetrius I, adjoined the Great Lent to Passion Week. He wrote in this respect to Agabius Bishop of Jerusalem, to Maximus the Patriarch of Rome and to other bishops.

* This was approved and decreed in the Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 AD, (during the reign of Emperor Constantine) and the XIXth Patriarch of Alexandria-Pope Alexandros I, who was given the task to inform the churches of the world with this yearly event.

* They all approved of it and followed it to the present time except the Church of Rome which deviated from that in the 16th century, following the Gregorian calendar.

- Previous to this Epact, Christians used to celebrate Resurrection once every 33 years! So, some Christians could depart from this world without celebrating Resurrection.

- Because of this, the Church made the life history events of our Lord Jesus, included in the 365 days of the year.

An extra week was added later on, at the beginning of the Great Fast for preparation, and Passion Week at the end of the holy forty days, thus, 55 days for Great Lent.

We will attempt to explain the week of preparation and Passion Week additions.

What about the ‘preparation’ week:

* Since Great Lent is one of the holiest fasts, our beloved church ordered its healthy people to fast till sunset or till 5:00 pm, and then eat but a little. Having compassion on its congregation, the church allowed this ‘preparation’ week to let people proceed gradually to start the 40 days in a good spirit of ascetism [**The Precious Stones, vol.2, p.379; late Bishop Gregorios**].

* Another point of view regarding this preparation week is, Great Lent had to be 8 complete weeks, for the week is fasted in abstinence for 5 days-from Monday to Friday, but not Saturdays and Sundays.

[Bright Saturday is where the Lord Jesus announced freedom to those who were in the bondage of the enemy for centuries, and Sunday is the day of the Lord-Resurrection, proclaiming victory over death].

Some Canons regarding Great Lent:

- 1- The holy forty fast has to be practiced with great ascetic life, not even fish is allowed. [**Council of Laodicea, canon # 50**].
- 2- No marriage or banquets are allowed [**Didiskalia, # 52**].
- 3- This fast should not have any marriage intimacy at all, and avoid all other desires, and women should not beautify themselves, keep that till resurrection [**St. Basil the Great, canon # 30**].

Some Canons regarding Passion Week:

1-To fast till sunset, and without any sweets or honey [**St. Basil the Great**].

2- From Monday till Saturday, try to eat bread and salt, only [**Didiskalia, chapter 31**].

3- If marriage intimacy is not accepted during the holy forty, howbeit more holy and revered is keeping your purity during Passion Week, woe to the person who practice it during these holy days [**Didiskalia, chapter 30**].

GLIMPSE ON PASSION WEEK:

- The Lord gave Himself to the power of darkness, by His own free will, for 40 hours.
- He was crucified on the Cross at noon time, and rose from the dead, very early Sunday morning...



Third: WEDNESDAYS & FRIDAYS

This has been practiced since the early apostolic time, other than Easter-tide, and the Major Feasts especially; Nativity and Theophany.

+ We fast Wednesday, conveying our rejection for the betrayal of Judas Iscariot to give up his Teacher to be killed (Matthew 26:1; Mark 14:1).

+ We fast Friday, conveying our sorrow for it is our sins that slain Christ on our behalf on the wood of the Cross. In the Old Testament, God ordered His people to fast ‘Yom Kippur’, i.e. sin offering, the priest shall make attonement... for you to be cleansed (Leviticus 16;29).

+ And our Lord Jesus is the true sacrifice, Who carried the sins of the world (Hebrews 9:12)

+ In the Didache, or the Didaskalia, chapter 8, the Apostles said; ‘We order you to fast Wednesdays and Fridays’.

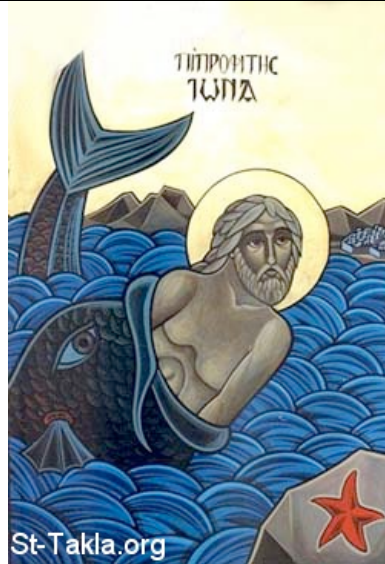
+ Do not refuse the Lord’s fast, i.e. Wednesdays and Fridays, unless you are sick. Exclude the 50 days after Resurrection [Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, the 20th Pope of Alexandria].

+ ‘There is no need to break your Wednesday and Friday fasts, if it is not necessary’. [St. Jerome]

+ ‘Do not disguise the fasts, and do not ignore Wednesdays and Fridays fasts’ [St. Ignatius, epistle 5; St. Augustine, epistle 6].

+ ‘The early Christians used to fast these two days, as they received from the Apostles. They used to abstain from food till the ninth hour (3:00 pm).

We fast them to proclaim Christ’s Passion, and offer an accepted fast to God’ [St. Epiphanius, epistle 75].



Fourth: FAST OF NINEVEH

Publicly known as: Jonah's Fast

HISTORY:

* It is a very old fast, practiced by the Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Church adopted it from them, during the papacy of Pope Abraam Ibn-Zar'a, the 62nd Patriarch of Alexandria-Egypt (968-970 AD).

* The holy synod of the Coptic Church declared this fast to precede Great Lent by two weeks.

* According to the Coptic scholar, Ibn-Makeen, it was at this time of the year that the people of Nineveh fasted in the old, when Jonah the prophet warned them that their city will be destroyed. He also said that the Coptic Church adopted that fast due to the good relationship between the two churches, and the unity in their dogma and orthodox teachings.

WHY DOES THE CHURCH FAST THIS ONE?

Nineveh used to be the capitol of Assyria in Iraq. These people accepted the warning of God, sent to them by Jonah the prophet - so all fasted; infants, children, men, women and even the cattle and animals. God looked at their humility, meekness, tears, and repentance, had compassion on them and turned His wrath away from them (**Jonah 3:15**).

+ This fast is to remind the Christians all over the world with the great mercy of God, and His great compassion for those who repent (**Joel 2:13; Psalm 103:9; Lament. 3:22**).

+ This could also be taken as a preparation for Great Lent.

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH NINEVEH'S FAST?

+ It is three days duration, and is treated as the Great Lent fast, for it is of the highest degree in abstinence and ascetism, and fish is not allowed in it.

+ Some people fast till the evening, at sunset, as some people in Upper Egypt fast the three days continuously without food or drink (72 hours), and conclude by the Divine Liturgy on the third day.

+ The Coptic scholar Ibn-Makeen said, abstinence in this fast is favored, till the end of the day, which differs than the optional fasts, which has no set standards.

THE CHURCH RITES FOR THIS FAST:

Raising of Matins' Incense: After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the 'Lord have mercy' hymn is sung instead of the 'verses of cymbals', then the litanies of the sick and the travelers, followed by the 'doxologies' in the tune of the weekdays of Great Lent. The priest then prays 'Efnoti nai nan', then the sanctuary curtain is closed, the candles are extinguished, the lights turned off, and the prophecies of the day is read. This is to remind us about the period of time when heaven ceased to talk to man, referring to the dark

time of 400 yrs. before Christ's coming in flesh. At the conclusion of the prophecies, the curtain is opened, the candles are lit, and a group of litanies and supplications are prayed with 'metanias', and after the Gospel the appropriate response of each day is said, then they conclude.

The Liturgy: The third, sixth, ninth, eleventh and twelfth hours of the Agpeya are prayed before the 'Offering of the Lamb', same as the weekdays of G. L.

After the offering of the Lamb, 'Alleluia a ee a ekhon..' is prayed, and after the 'Thanksgiving prayer' 'nef senti ..' is said followed by 'eklenomen taghonata..'. After the 'servants' absolution' the hymn of 'entho te tishori..' is sung, and in the 'Intercessions' the special one for Jonah is prayed before the one of the Apostles. After the Catholic Epistle is read 'share efnoti' is sung. Note that every day has its own response for the Gospel response, and the fraction for G. L. is said. During Communion Psalm 150 is said in the manner of G. L. weekdays, then 'je efesmaro-oot' followed by 'pi may roumi', and they conclude as in G. L. saying 'soma tos' excluding the part of G. L.

The Feast of Jonah: the prayer is conducted in the annual tone, keeping in mind the special responses for Matins' Gospel, the Liturgy and the intercession. The annual regular fraction is prayed, as well as Psalm 150, and they conclude in the annual way.





Fifth: NATIVITY FAST

BRIEF HISTORY:

* It was said that it was limited to the clergy, meaning; bishops, priests and deacons.

* It was officially endorsed during the Papacy of Pope Christetholos 66th, Patriarch of Alexandria (1039 – 1070 AD) [El-la'ale' El-Nafissa, part II, p. 384]

* It was practiced from old times, by the Romans, Syrians, Armenians, and others, and was mentioned by

Metropolitan Youhanna (John), of Nicea in the 4th century.

* The historians of the Protestants claimed that, the early Christians Church used to fast before celebrating the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ [Rayhanat El-Nifous, p.54]

WHY WE FAST IT?

+ In appreciation for God's mercy toward mankind (Luke 1:54), when He send His Only-begotten Son to redeem us, sinners (Galatians 4:4,5).

+ To prepare the people for the Good News, salvation (Luke 2:12), and to participate in the happiness of the angels (Luke 2:13).

+ To resemble Moses, who fasted 40 days to receive the Word of God on tablets, on Mount Sinai. We also fast to receive 'The Word of God' not on tablets, but in our hearts as

God the Incarnate, Who was born of the Ever-Virgin St. Mary, the *Theotokos*.

+ Also, to be prepared to see the manger's Baby in high spiritual status.

DURATION OF THE FAST:

+ The length of this fast is 43 days.

+ At first it was 40 days only, as mentioned in reference to Moses' receiving the tablets. But the Syrian descent Pope Abraam Ibn-Zara', added 3 days, in remembrance of the miracle of moving the Mokatam Mountain, which saved a widespread martyrdom for the Coptic Christians in the 10th century .. as a result, the three days were added to the Nativity so God does not allow His people to be tempted.

+ The fast starts on the 16th of Hatour, till the 29th of Kiahk (25th November – 6th January).

+ **Fish is allowed among other vegetarian food in this fast.** As we all know that fish reproduces asexually, thus there is no physical contact.

THE WORD OF GOD: Holy Scriptures

The Word of God is not to be heard or memorized only, but to be applied [St. Basil The Great Liturgy]..

That's were the Christians get their strength [martyrs].

The Word of God gives cleanliness: ***"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"*** [John15:3].

The Word of God is love: ***".. Let us not love in word of in tongue, but in deed and in truth,"*** [1John3:18].

Action and deed of the Word in us: ***"Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"*** [James1:27].



Sixth: ST. MARY'S FAST

This fast is very well respected and appreciated by many believers and non-believers too.

It is only 15 days long, starts at 1st of Mesra, i.e. August 7th, till 16th Mesra, i.e. August 22nd, on which we celebrate the memorial of the Assumption of the ever-Virgin, holy Theotokos, St. Mary's body into heaven.

Several reasons were given for this fast, among these are the following:

+ The Church called this fast by the Virgin's name in her honor, and in keeping her blessed memory among the generations (Luke 2:48).

+ It was known from old times.

- In 1602 AD, Pope Gabriel VIII, made this fast 'optional' for those who would like to participate in it.

- Yet, all people rush into this fast with fervent love, diligence and great asceticism, in loving memory of the blessed Theotokos.

+ Tradition tells us that St. Thomas one of the twelve disciples of the Lord Jesus, was serving in India, when St. Mary the Virgin departed from this world. On his way back to Jerusalem, he saw the angels, in the presence of our Lord Jesus, carrying her blessed body to heaven. When he returned to Palestine and told the Apostles what he saw, they desired to see this holy scene. So, they fasted this fast, till the Lord granted them to see 'The Body of the Mother of Light', after 15 days fasting.

+ One of the Greek fathers said, this fast takes place before the Feast of Transfiguration, so we lift up our hearts, minds and spirits to heaven to see the Transfiguration of the Assumption of the Virgin's body to heaven.

+ Since the church fasts before its feasts, thus, it is necessary to fast before these two feasts, to be enlightened by the first, and to seek the intercession of the blessed Mother of God St. Mary the Virgin.
