

OUR LADY OF ZEITOUN(OUR LADY OF LIGHT) Zeitoun, Cairo, Egypt1968–1971

AFTER the birth of Jesus, when King Herod heard that a new king of the Jews had been born, “he became greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem” (Matt. 2:2–3). In order to rid himself of a threat to his position, “He ordered the massacre of all boys two years old and under in Bethlehem and its environs” (Matt. 2:16). Before this took place, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph with the command: “Get up, take the child and His Mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you otherwise. Herod is searching for the child to destroy Him” (Matt. 2:13–14). According to scripture, the Holy Family left that night for Egypt.

During their journey through the country, they paused at different locations along the way. Each stop, sanctified by their presence, later became a place of prayer, often marked by a small chapel. Some of these buildings grew through the years into handsome structures dedicated to the Holy Family, others developed into monasteries, and some into beautiful churches such as St. Mary’s Coptic Church in Zeitoun-Cairo, a church dedicated long ago to the Holy Mother. It was here that the Blessed Mother made several nightly appearances that were seen by millions.



THE FIRST APPARITION

It all began an hour and a half after sunset, Tuesday, April 2, 1968. As workmen were leaving a nearby garage, they heard a disturbance in the street.

Joining the anxious crowd, they saw a young lady dressed in white walking on the dome of the church.

Thinking she was about to throw herself down, they cried, "Be careful, take care. You will fall." Others cried aloud, "It is the Virgin Mary." Because the workmen were Muslim, they were

thoroughly perplexed. One of these men, Muslim Farouk Mohammed Atwa, had been undergoing operations for a case of gangrene, and the following day the hospital that had examined and treated him declared that he was completely healed.

Traffic along the street was stopped as crowds of people gathered to see the vision.

The Lady appeared in a luminous body. She walked about on the roof and was seen to often bow or kneel before the cross. The priest of the church, Father Costantin, was alerted and he, too, saw the figure. Another observer was Abdul Nasser, president of Egypt who was a self-proclaimed Marxist.

Accompanied by beautiful lights and immense clouds of incense, the Lady sometimes appeared clearly, sometimes opaquely. She was seen to walk about, to bow or kneel before a cross, to smile, bow and wave an olive branch. Some saw the vision clearly while some people saw nothing at all. Many viewers were transfixed, while many prayed the Rosary and sang Christian hymns.

At times the Lady was accompanied by small white figures resembling doves that would fly in the figure of the cross. They would also fly about her and suddenly vanish from sight. None of the birds, however, were seen to flap their wings.

The apparitions were photographed, televised, witnessed by millions, written about



in the international secular and religious press and seen by people of all nationalities and religions. Soon His Holiness, Pope Kyrillos VI, organized a committee of priests and bishops to investigate the events. As a result, on May 4, 1968, the Coptic Orthodox Church officially confirmed the apparitions. Also confirming the appearance of the Blessed Mother were Dr. Henry Ayrout, of the local Catholic college of the Jesuit Order and Rev.

Dr. Ibrahim Said, the head of all Protestant Evangelical Ministries in Egypt. Catholic

nuns of the Sacre-Coeur Order witnessed the apparitions and sent a detailed report to the Vatican. An envoy from the Vatican soon arrived, saw the apparition on Sunday, April 28, 1968, and also sent his report to His Holiness Pope Paul VI in Rome. The report in its entirety is given here:

The Official Statement from the Papal Residence in Cairo on the Apparition of Saint Mary in the Zeitoun Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo, Egypt.

Since the evening of Tuesday, April 2, 1968, the apparitions of the Holy Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of Light, have continued on the Coptic Orthodox Church named after Her in Zeitoun, Cairo.

The apparitions occurred on many different nights and were continuing in different forms. The Holy Virgin Saint Mary appeared sometimes in full form and sometimes in a bust, surrounded with a halo of shining light. She was seen at times on the openings of the domes on the roof of the church, and at other times outside the domes, moving and walking on the roof of the church and over the domes. When she knelt in reverence in front of the cross, the cross shone with a bright light. Waving her blessed hands and nodding her holy head, she blessed the people who gathered to observe the miracle. She appeared sometimes in the form of a body with a very bright cloud, and sometimes as a figure of light preceded with heavenly bodies shaped like doves moving at high speeds. The apparitions continued for long periods, up to two hours and fifteen minutes as in the dawn of Tuesday, April 30, 1968 when she appeared continuously from 2:45 a.m. till 5:00 a.m.



Thousands of people from different denominations and religions, Egyptians and foreign visitors, clergy and scientists, from different classes and professions, all observed the apparitions. The description of each apparition as of the time, location and configuration was identically witnessed by all people, which makes this apparition unique and sublime. Two important aspects accompanied these apparitions: The first is an incredible revival of the faith in God, the other world and the saints, leading to repentance and conversion of many who strayed away from the faith. The second are the numerous miracles of healing which were verified by many physicians to be miraculous in nature.

The Papal Residence has thoroughly investigated the apparitions and gathered information by way of committees of clergy who have also witnessed the apparitions themselves and recorded everything in reports presented to His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI. By issuing this statement the Papal Residence declares, with full faith and great joy and humility of a thankful heart, that the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of Light, appeared in clear forms on many different nights, for periods of variable length, lasting on occasion more than two continuous hours ... It is historically proven that the location of this church in Tumanbay Street, in Zeitoun quarter, on the way to El-Mayarya, Cairo, is on the path taken by the Holy Family when visiting Egypt. May God make this miracle a symbol of peace for the world, and a blessing for our nation as it has been prophesied: "Blessed be Egypt My people."

The report was dated Saturday, May 4, 1968. So widespread did the reports of the apparition become by virtue of television, newspapers and the media reports, that a massive project was inaugurated to restore and renovate the church both inside and out, which has already taken place. Roman Catholic Cardinal Stephanos investigated the happenings thoroughly, including the miraculous cures and the many conversions, and submitted his report to Pope Paul VI in May 1968. The Pope was quick to approve the events as a visitation of the Mother of God.