

The Neirouz (The Coptic New Year) 1720

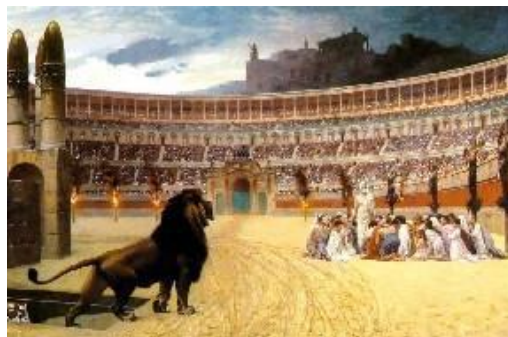
Ⲣⲟⲩⲣⲓ ⲣⲟⲙⲡⲓ ⲙⲃⲉⲣⲓ (Nofri rompi emveri) = Happy New Year

Verse to memorize: (Psalm 65: 11)

" You crowned the year with your goodness."

The Story of the Start of the Coptic Calendar:

In about the year 50 AD (= 50 years after the birth of Jesus Christ), Saint Mark came to Alexandria, the capital of Egypt at that time. St. Mark was a disciple of African origin and the writer of the earliest Gospel. He spread Christianity in the whole of Egypt. The Romans, who were the rulers of Egypt, started to persecute him. Finally, on the Holy Resurrection Sunday, 8 May 68 AD, St. Mark received his crown of martyrdom when they used a rope around his neck to drag him through the streets in Alexandria, until he died.



The Egyptians (the Copts) accepted Christianity very rapidly. The Romans exercised a series of persecutions in an attempt to suppress the growth of a religion which openly defied the divinity of the Emperor. They decreed that Christian conversion should be stopped and that every citizen should carry a certificate testifying that he had offered sacrifice to the Roman gods. Those who refused to conform (the Christians) were tortured with unprecedented ferocity. Some were beheaded, others were thrown to the lions or burnt alive.

The worst persecution was during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284 - 305 AD). Therefore, the Copts took the year of Diocletian's election as Emperor (284 AD) to mark the beginning of the era of the Coptic martyrs. That very year marked the start of the Coptic Calendar known as Anno Martyrum (AM) or the year of the Martyrs.

The Origin of the word “Martyr”:

The Lord Jesus Christ told his disciples that they would be his “WITNESSES” to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). The Greek word for WITNESS is “MARTYR.” The early Church thought of the death for Jesus as the complete and final act of witnessing. Thus the term “martyr” has become to mean one who witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ by dying for His Holy Name.

The Origin of the Coptic Calendar:

The Coptic Calendar is the continuation of the old Egyptian Calendar. The Egyptians were the first to calculate time. They divided the year into 13 months. They named their months after their gods. 12 months were 30 days long each, and a last month, five days long (6 in the leap year), which they called the small month. Therefore, their year became 365 (or 366) days long. The beginning of their year was on the first day of the month of

Tute (the Feast of the Neirouz), which also became the first day of the Coptic year. This corresponds to the 11th of September (or the 12th of September in the leap year).

The Seasons of the Coptic Calendar:

The Coptic (and old Egyptian) year is divided into 3 main seasons, related to the agriculture. Each season has 4 months:

1. The season of the flood of the Nile (Tute, Babah, Hatour and Kiahk)
2. The season of vegetation (Touba, Amshir, Baramhat and Baramouda)
3. The season of reaping and harvesting (Bashans, Baounah, Abib and Misra)

The small month (Nasie) was a chance for feasts and festivals.

This division is still used in the church liturgy in Egypt. Every season has its own prayer (litany). For example, for the first season, “Bless the water of the rivers,” and so on. In the Coptic churches overseas, as the circumstances differ from that in Egypt, the three litanies for the water, the fruits, and the weather are collected in one litany.

The Coptic Calendar was the official calendar in Egypt till the nineteenth century, when the Khedive of Egypt, Khedive Ismael, adopted the Western Gregorian Calendar and applied it in Egypt's government departments.

Why do we eat “Red Dates” in the Neirouz:

The Red date is a symbol of the martyrs:

1. it is red from outside representing their blood which was shed,
2. it is white from inside representing the purity of their hearts
3. and it has a stone in the middle representing the strength of their faith.

What do we learn from this lesson:

- The martyrs witnessed their love to the lord Jesus Christ, by giving their life willingly rather than abandoning their loyalty to Him.
- We also may be witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ by the way in which we live our lives, by setting a good example for others to follow
- We can also witness by showing others the love that we have for the Lord.
- We should never let our Lord Jesus Christ down, even if this means sacrificing our life for his sake.
- The church commemorates the martyrs. Their blood gives our church its strength. We should love them, learn their stories and ask them to pray for us.