

MONASTICISM

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Aim

✠ To know about the monastic life, its history and its rules.

Key verses

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven; and come follow Me” (Matt 19:21)

What is Monasticism?

Monasticism is not only a name or belonging to a monastery. It is not the monks dress, or appearance from their kolonsowa (head garment) to their belts.

It is said that the monks are earthly angels and heavenly humans.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1John 2:15-17).

Monasticism is a total withdrawal from every person and every material thing to connect to the One and Only “God”, who fills the heart, mind, and time. The monk shall never achieve this spiritual level if he still desires worldly things. Here we remember what Jesus Christ said to Martha, “you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed and Mary has chosen that good part which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42).

The goal of true monasticism is a continuous life filled with prayers (**especially Jesus Prayer**). A true monk escapes people to be with God.

History of Monasticism and Spreading to the whole world:

- Saint Paul: the First Hermit (228 AD- 341 AD)
- **St Anthony** the Great (251 AD- 356 AD), who established the Monastic system on 270 AD and became **the father of all the monks** all over the world. St Anthony had left for the desert after hearing the Gospel in Church which was, “If you want to be perfect, go, and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matt 19:21).
- In 315 AD, **St Bakhomious** (290 AD- 350 AD) established the life of community Monasticism in Upper Egypt. ‘Prayers and labour together’.
- Monasticism spread throughout Egypt. Before the Arab conquest of Egypt (641AD), there were around five thousand monasteries and nunneries.

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- Monasticism spread from Egypt to Ethiopia in the 4th century, it was also spread to Palestine and Syria
- Monasticism spread to the West:
 1. Through the Coptic monks who were preaching in Ireland and from there to Scotland and the rest of Europe.
 2. Through the Western travellers who visited Egypt and lived in its monasteries and among their monks.
 3. Through St Athanasius, the 20th Pope of Alexandria, and the book he wrote about the life of his teacher St Anthony the great (Vita Antoine).

Degrees of Orthodox monasticism

In the [Eastern Orthodox Church](#), the process of becoming a [monk](#) or [nun](#) is intentionally slow, as the [vows](#) taken are considered to entail a life-long commitment to [God](#), and are not to be entered into lightly.

When a candidate wishes to embrace the monastic life, he will enter the monastery of his choice as a guest and ask to be received by the [Hegumen](#) (Abbot). After a period of at least three days the Hegumen may at his discretion clothe the candidate as a [novice](#).

After a period of about three years, it may be decided to ordain the novice as monk. The abbot who performs a tonsure must be of at least the rank he is tonsuring into. A [bishop](#), however, may tonsure into any rank, regardless of his own.

The habit / garments of monks and nuns are identical, except that nuns wear an additional scarf. Each successive grade is given a portion of the habit, the full habit being worn only by those in the highest grade "Great Schema"

1. **Rassaphore**, means "Garment Bearer". Giving him the outer garment, Rassaphores will be given a [prayer rope](#).
2. The next rank, **Stavrophore**, means "cross-bearer", given a cross to wear at all times. This cross is called a Paramand—a wooden cross attached by ribbons to a square cloth embroidered with the [Instruments of the Passion](#) and the words, "I bear upon my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" ([Galatians 6:17](#)).

In the [Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria](#) there are only two degrees of professed monks, corresponding to the Rassaphore combined with the Stavrophore and the Great Schema. The two rites of Rasaphore and Stavrophore are served one immediately following the other, as a single service, very seldom nowadays to be separated by several years. When the two rites are separated, the portions of the habit that were given in the previous rite are not given a second time in the latter rite.

3. As for the **Great Schema**, which is made of a leather cord twisted in design and has 5 to 7 small crosses along its length and worn crosswise around the neck, flowing down cross wise front and back.

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It is usually granted to bishops either upon their consecration or shortly afterwards and it is usually granted when a monk has reached a high degree of asceticism or has been living as a hermit and also to the monks, abbots who have been in the monastic life for over 30 years.

Eastern Orthodox monks are addressed as "Father" even if they are not priests; but when conversing among themselves, monks will often address one another as "Brother." Novices are always referred to as "Brother."

Nuns who have been tonsured to the Stavrophore or higher are addressed as "Mother". Novice and Rassophore nuns are addressed as "Sister".

The Principles & Role Models of Coptic Monasticism:

A) Main Principles:

Principle	Life of our Lord Jesus Christ
(a) Celibacy & Chastity	Our Lord lived a life of celibacy and spoke about “...those who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God...” (Matthew 19:11).
(b) Obedience	“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience through the tidings He suffered...” (Hebrews 5:8)
(c) Meditation & Retreat	Our Lord said about Himself, “...The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head...” (Luke 21:37).
(d) Manual Labour & Serving others	Our Lord said about Himself, “...The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...” (Matthew 20:28).
(e) Self chosen poverty (asceticism)	Jesus said, “If you want to be perfect, go, and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21). “For where your treasure is there your heart will be also...” (Luke 12:33 - 34).

B) Role Models/ Precursors:

The Complete/ perfect model of all Christian monasticism, communal and solitary, is our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 2: 5-8) “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”.

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Elijah: According to the [Books of Kings](#), Elijah [raised the dead](#), brought fire down from the sky, and ascended into [heaven](#) on a whirlwind. He was very Frank and honest, chosen to obey God more than King Ahab and his wife. (Multiplying the oil and flour and raising the child of the widow).

Elisha: Elijah's Disciple, he inherited the wonder-working power of Elijah which is shown throughout the whole course of his life. The Prophet passed some time on [Mount Carmel](#) (2 Kings 2:25). He always served others (Multiplying the oil of the widow, Praying for God to give the Shénomite woman a child and raising him up, Cure of Naaman from Leprosy).

John the Baptist: "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea... John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River". ([Matthew 3:1-6](#))

The female role models for monasticism are [St Mary the mother of Jesus](#) and the [four virgin daughters of Philip the Evangelist](#) (Acts 21:9).

St. Paul the apostle: "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am". ([1 Corinthians 7: 7](#))

The first Christian communities lived in common, sharing everything, according to the [Acts of the Apostles](#).

PLACES OF THE SAINTS

What is your feeling when you visit the places of the saints; for example, when you visit a monastery for the feast of a saint?

1. The trip to the monastery is not a visit to look at or to promenade but to seek the blessing and the spiritual benefit.
2. Therefore, the singular visits are more deep and beneficial than the excursions where many crowd together.
3. In your visit to the monastery, bear in mind all the spiritual memories and thoughts relating to this sacred place.
4. Remember that you are in a place full of reverence and silence, not noise and loud voices which occur in the cities. The saints used to keep silent and devote themselves to contemplation and praying. You too, keep silent and enter into the depth of your soul so that you can go into the depth of God.

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5. Do not waste the time of the excursion in laughs and fun with your companions, in your way to and from the monastery, in order not to lose the spiritual benefit.
6. Do not make comments on all what you see or hear. Do not judge this or that lest you receive condemnation instead of blessing.
7. Remember the names of the saints who lived at that place and the virtues of each of them, meditate on their lives and their deep relation with God and what you can do to follow their footsteps.
8. Take with you a prayers' book and a notebook to write your contemplations. Contact those from whom you can benefit spiritually.
9. Remember that every span of the ground was watered by the tears of the saints and that you are moving on holy land.
10. Seek the intercession of the saints of the monastery and utilize your visit by pouring out your prayers before God, asking for their prayers to support you.
11. Benefit from the quiet nature and calm atmosphere and sit and examine yourself in depth.
12. Ask yourself openly what you benefited from the trip

Glory is to God, forever. Amen.