

History of the Coptic Church VI:

St. Demetrius, the Vinedresser

St. Demetrius was the 12th successor of St. Mark, the Apostle. Pope Julian, the 11th Patriarch saw a vision in his last days in which an angel said to him “Who will come to you in the morning bringing a bunch of grapes, he will be your successor.”

While St. Demetrius was dressing his vineyard, he saw a cluster of grapes had ripened early and harvested them. He decided to offer this first fruit to his pope. Once, Pope Julian saw Demetrius with his presentation of grapes, he spoke to his bishops saying “this man will be your pope” and informed them about the vision that he saw. After St. Julian’s departure to the Heavenly Kingdom, bishops, priests, and laymen consecrated St. Demetrius the 12th pope of Alexandria in 191 AD.

St. Demetrius grew up in Alexandria as a vinedresser. His parents persistently persuaded him to get married, however, he and his wife decided to live the life of virginity. It has been a steadfast Coptic tradition that the pope should live a life of virginity even before the founding of monasticism and so some of the laymen of that time criticized St. Demetrius’ papacy due to his marriage. St. Demetrius was a humble holy man and did not speak of his vow of virginity concerning his wife and himself. The Lord’s Angel appeared in a vision unto him and commanded him to tell his congregation about his vow of celibacy. The next Sunday, after the Divine Liturgy, the pope asked his congregation to stay for a while. He and his wife held a censor with fired charcoal and walked around the church before the congregation who wondered how the fired charcoal did not burn one of them. St. Demetrius declared his vow with his wife to live as virgins before the Lord and so the congregation glorified the Lord who works through his saints.

St. Demetrius was a simple vinedresser, who did not have much scholarly education in his formative years and so when he became the 12th pope he decided to rigorously study to compensate for what he had missed. He was very humble and used to sit at the feet of the church’s deacon who taught him the hymns. He obtained much theological education at the School of Alexandria in a very short time. St. Demetrius was extremely intelligent and the Holy Spirit shined upon him. St. Demetrius invented a special calendar known as the “*Apokty Calendar*” which was used to determine the Glorious Resurrection Feast every year and is still used in our Oriental Churches today.

It was difficult to determine the Glorious Resurrection Feast every year as the feast is linked to and should come after the Jewish Passover. However, the Jewish Passover is dependent upon the harvest season and the Jewish calendar is lunar not solar and for this reason the Jewish Passover is always between April and May. St. Demetrius invented a special calendar, comprised of both lunar and solar years, to adjust the time of the Glorious Resurrection Feast so the feast doesn’t come before the 1st week of April and not after the 1st week of May. St. Demetrius’ calendar is composed of 19 solar-lunar years. The lunar calendar is less than solar calendar by 11 days and so in 19 years it will be 209 days. St. Demetrius divided those 209 days on his 19-years calendar by adding one month to every 2 or 3 years as follows:

1st solar year is more than the 1st lunar year by 11 days.

2nd solar year is more than the 2nd lunar year by $11 + 11 = 22$ days

3rd solar year is more than the 3rd lunar year by $22 + 11 = 33$ days.

So the 3rd lunar year will be a leap year with 13 months instead of 12 months and the other 3 days will be added to the 4th solar year.

4th solar year will increase by $3 + 11 = 14$ days
 5th solar year will increase by $14 + 11 = 25$ days
 So the 5th lunar year will be a leap year by subtracting 5 days from the 6th solar year
 6th solar year will decrease by 5 days less and so $11 - 5 = 6$ days.
 7th solar year will increase by $11 + 6 = 17$ days
 8th solar year will increase by $11 + 17 = 28$ days
 So the 8th year will be a leap by subtracting 2 days from the following year.
 9th solar year will increase by $11 - 2 = 9$ days
 10th solar year will increase by $9 + 11 = 20$ days
 11th solar year will increase by $20 + 11 = 31$ days
 So the 11th year will be a leap year and one day will be added to the following year.
 12th year will increase by $1 + 11 = 12$ days
 13th year will increase by $12 + 11 = 23$ days
 14th year will increase by $23 + 11 = 34$ days
 So the 14th year will be a leap and 4 days will be added to the following 15th year
 15th year will increase by $11 + 4 = 15$ days.
 16th year will increase by $15 + 11 = 26$ days
 So 16th will be a leap year and 4 days will be subtracted from the following year
 17th year will increase by $11 - 4 = 7$ days.
 18th year will increase by $7 + 11 = 18$ days
 19th year will increase by $18 + 11 = 29$ days
 So the 19th will be a leap year.

After he finished his invention, St. Demetrius discussed his calendar with his holy Senate members in Alexandria and they consented to use it for determination of the Glorious Resurrection Feast. One century later, the Fathers of the Council of Nicea decided to use St. Demetrius' calendar to determine the Glorious Resurrection Feast within the realm of the entire Catholic Church and it remained in use until 1582 AD when the Roman Bishop Gregory the 13th decided to celebrate the Glorious Resurrection Feast the first Sunday following the completeness of the full moon after spring temperance (March 21st) regardless of the Jewish Passover and so Catholics sometimes celebrate the Glorious Resurrection Feast at the end of March and thus the celebration may have coincided with the Jewish Passover.

On 194 AD, Septimius Severus began to persecute Christians in Egypt and exiled St. Demetrius to Osieem. During that persecution St. Lionidas, Origen's father was martyred. St. Demetrius appointed Origen at the age of 18 years as the dean for the catechumen's School of Alexandria.

A heresy proclaiming the death of the human spirit appeared within the Arabia state (whose Christians belonged to the See of Alexandria) at that time and so St. Demetrius sent Origen there where he taught the Christians the Orthodox faith. In 216 AD Origen the Scholar went to Asia Minor to establish a catechumen school there but while on this mission accepted the priesthood sacrament from Alexander the Bishop of Jerusalem and Theosteet the Bishop of Caesara of Cappadocia. St. Demetrius convened a council in Alexandria which excommunicated Origen because he had castrated himself and had also accepted the priesthood from another pope, not his own pope.

St. Demetrius lived to the age of 105 years and departed after spending 32 years and 7 months on the See of St. Mark.