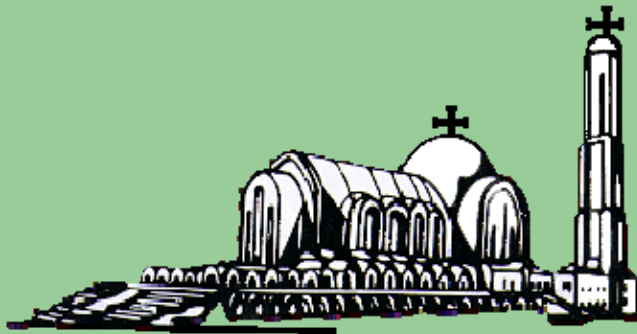




St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church
Pre-Service Training Seminars



Lecture 10:

*STRUCTURE OF THE
COPTIC CHURCH*

**“For God is not the author of
confusion, but of peace”
(1 Corinthians 14:33)**



Structure of the Coptic Church

Church Shape:



- ❖ The church building is confirmed according to specific well defined shapes, in three designs:
 - A. The Cruciform Shape:** This type gives an idea of the mystical nature of the Church, as being the crucified Body of Christ. It was very common in the Byzantine style, but rarely used in the Coptic Churches.
 - B. The Circular Shape:** This design refers to the eternal nature of the Church as being an endless line. This type is very common in the Coptic architecture.
 - C. The Shape of a Ship:** This is the most commonly used shape in the Coptic Orthodox Church. This is symbolic of Noah's ark as those in Noah's ark were saved from the flood, likewise the Church of God alone has the ability to save men. This describes the church in the form of a ship.



Structure of the Coptic Church



Saint Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Delray Beach, FL, USA



Structure of the Coptic Church



Virgin Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Lynnwood, WA, USA



Structure of the Coptic Church



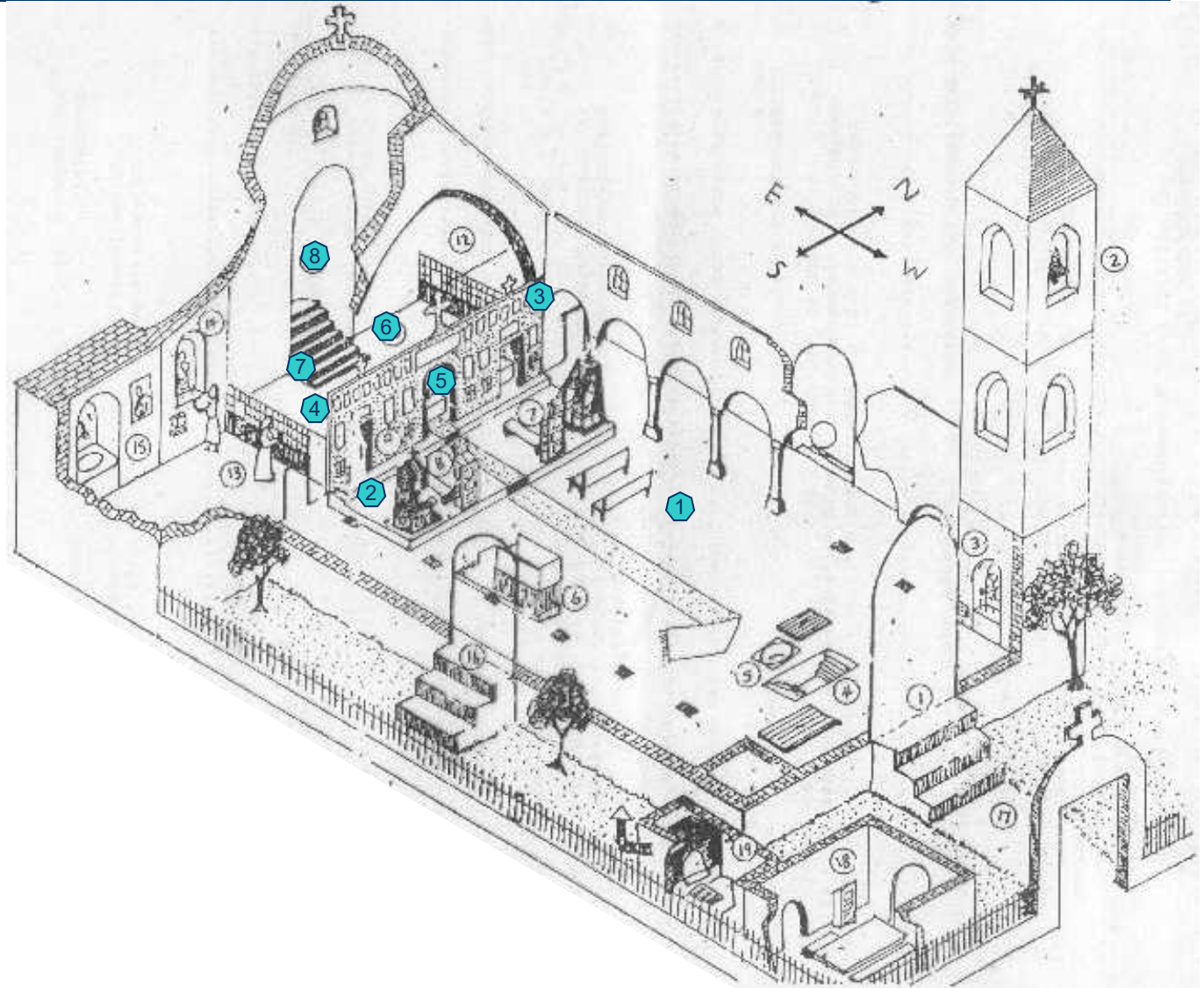
St. George Cathedral, Cairo, Egypt



Structure of the Coptic Church



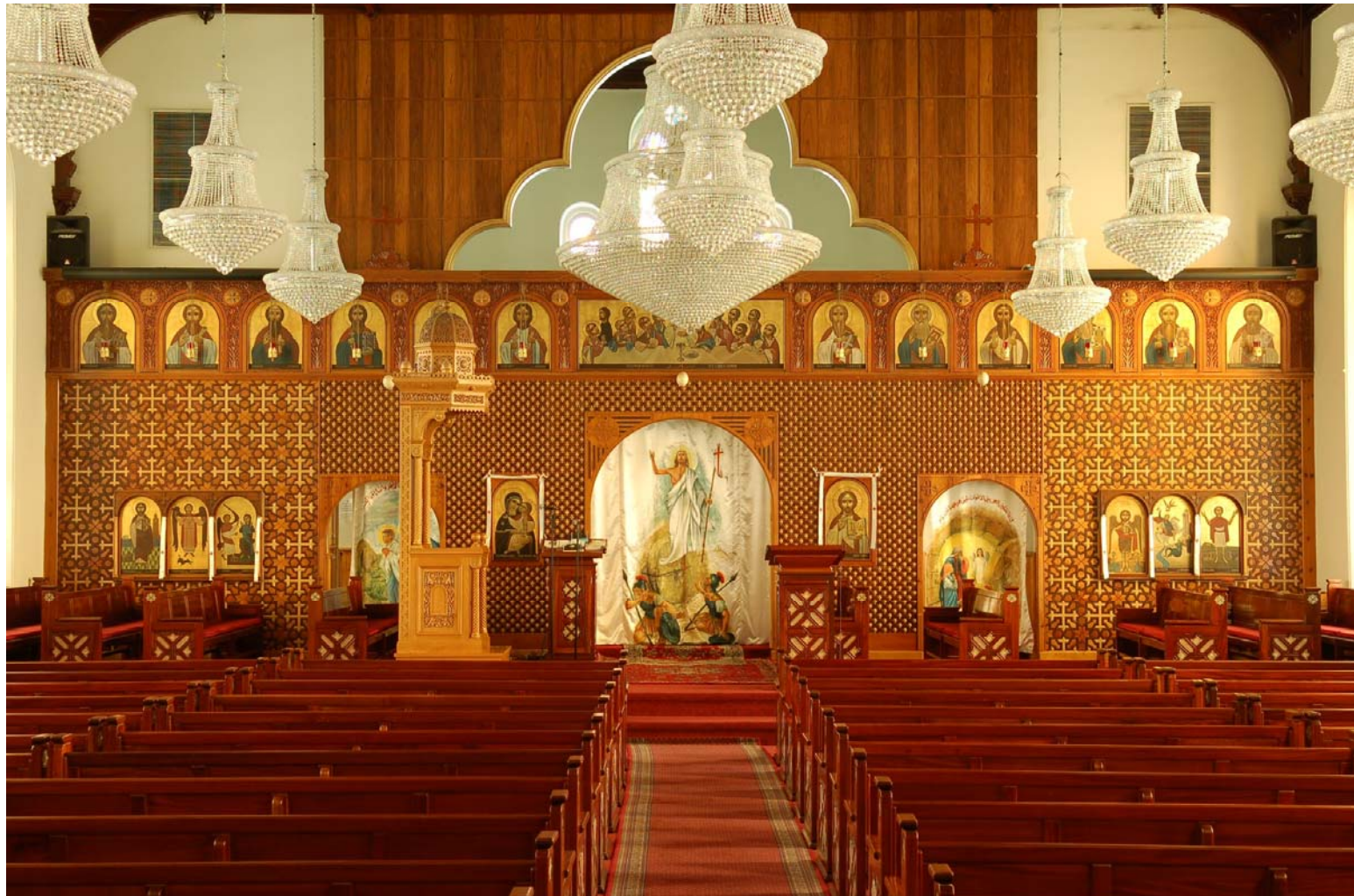
	Area
1	The Nave
2	The Chancel
3	The Iconostasis
4	The Sanctuary
5	The Altar
6	The Ciborium
7	The Tribune
8	The Niche





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Nave:





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Nave:



- ❖ The nave gets its name from the Latin “naives,” meaning a ship. It is usually divided into two parts or “Choirs”:
 1. The Chancel, or Chorus of Deacons.
 2. Chorus of Believers, or the nave of the church.
- ❖ The chancel contains seats for deacons, two candelabra and two lecterns (bookstands) on which the lectionaries are placed. It is separated from the sanctuary by the iconostasis and from the rest of the nave by a screen or a fence. This is to show a distinction from the sanctuary to the rest of the church.
- ❖ Attached or close to the chancel fence are the relics of the saints. These were kept under the altar in ancient times, to protect them and to be prayed upon during services. They are now set up at the chancel fence so that the congregation may be able to take the saints’ blessings.



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Nave:

- ❖ The lectern (bookstand) is usually wooden with a sloping book rest that is moveable. It has many designs and carvings including crosses on it. The best design is the one in Old Cathedral in Cairo, belonging to the Hanging Church, which date back to the tenth century. The ivory enrichments give it a most delicate appearance as a finished work of art. The crosses and tablets are clad with Arabic inscriptions.
- ❖ In ancient times the nave was divided into parts by a colonnade (a series of regularly spaced columns). The southern side (right) is reserved for women, and the north side (left) is for men. So, the women sit on the right hand of the men, as the Queen sits at the right hand of the King.





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Iconostasis:





Structure of the Coptic Church



The Iconostasis:

- ❖ The Iconostasis represents one of the most important architectural features of Orthodox churches. It is a rigid screen made of wood or marble, containing icons of our Lord, His angels and his saints. It lies between the sanctuary and the nave of the church.
- ❖ The Iconostasis, which is derived from the Byzantine churches, contains three doors: the Royal door, which is the entrance to the main sanctuary; and a door on each of the other side for the side sanctuaries. The side doors were used for preparation of the host, which is still the case in the Byzantine churches, but not in the Coptic Church, where they are considered as Royal doors as well. On the inner side (side of the sanctuary) curtains are fitted, which are drawn open or closed depending on the church service. In ancient times and in some of today's monasteries, curtains were placed behind the doors that were locked. The key would be kept with the archdeacon. It is opened during the Liturgy, and this symbolizes catching a glimpse of the splendor of heaven.



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Sanctuary:





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Sanctuary:





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Sanctuary:



- ❖ The Sanctuary, as viewed by the Orthodox Church, represents heaven itself or God's residence place among His heavenly creatures and saints.
- ❖ The following traditions are observed by the church to indicate its reverence:
 - Laymen are forbidden to take part in the Communion inside the Sanctuary area.
 - We can only step into the Sanctuary bare-footed, in response to the divine commandment to Moses "Take off your shoes... for the place whereon you stand is holy ground". (Ex 3:5). Taking off the shoes indicates the feeling of unworthiness to be present in such a holy place.
 - The church ordains that: "No talking is allowed in the Sanctuary, except for urgent matters".



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Altar:

- ❖ The English word 'Altar' is derived from the Latin word 'Altare', which means the place or the sculpture upon which sacrifices are slain. Other names for the Altar e.g. table (the Table of the Lord) and 'Mazbah' in Arabic.
- ❖ The Altar material can be made of wood, stone, or metal.
- ❖ The Coptic Altar takes the shape of approximately a cube, which resembles the Tomb of the Lord.





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Altar:

- ❖ It must be hollow so that relics of saints can be kept inside or beneath it. Nevertheless, recent trends tend to keep these relics in a container next to the icon of the saint to enable the people to kiss it and receive their blessing.
- ❖ In the Coptic Church, the choir is usually raised three steps above the rest of the Nave, while the sanctuary is often raised one step above the choir.
- ❖ The Altar is never raised above the sanctuary, but is fitted directly on its ground, as directed by the divine commandment. (Exod. 20 : 26).





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Altar:



- ❖ The Altar is consecrated by a bishop who anoints it by Chrism. The Liturgy of the Eucharist can be temporarily held on an unconsecrated Altar as long as a consecrated Altar-Board is placed upon it.
- ❖ The Altar must not be left without coverings, which often consist of three layers:
 - I. The first cloth covers the Altar completely from all sides, and is decorated with four crosses (one at each corner) or just a big cross in the centre. The most commonly employed material, in the Coptic rite, is the white linen as an indication of purity, but in recent times red cotton velvet is sometimes used.
 - II. A white linen cover is placed on the above, which hangs only about 15 cm. from the Altar surface.



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Altar:



III. The third layer is used only during the celebration of the Liturgy of Eucharist to cover the Holy Gifts, and is called 'Prospharine' derived from the Greek word 'prosphora', i.e., 'oblation'. It represents the stone that the angel rolled away from the Tomb of Christ. After the prayer of Reconciliation, the priest and the deacon lift it up from its place and shake it so that the little jingles attached to its edges produce audible sounds. It resembles the earthquake that took place during the resurrection of Christ.

- ❖ The Altar has held a distinct sanctity ever since the Early Church. Nothing is placed on it, apart from the Holy Elements, the sacred vessels and the Gospel.



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Altar:

- ❖ As for candlesticks, one is placed on the right side of the Altar, and the other on the opposite side. They refer to the two angels guarding the Lord's Tomb.
- ❖ On the surface of the Coptic Altar, an oblong rectangular slot is engraved to a depth of about 2.5 cm., in which a consecrated Altar-Board is loosely embedded. The Board is generally made of wood, or rarely of marble, upon which the following are painted:
 - A Cross or a number of crosses.
 - The first and last Greek letters, A & W
 - Occasionally few selected psalms such as (Ps. 86 (87): 1, 2) or (Ps. 83: 3)





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Ciborium/Canopy:

- ❖ The majority of the main Coptic Altars, and sometimes the side ones, are surmounted by a wooden or stone canopy, which rests upon four pillars of stone or marble. It is known as the Ciborium; a term that is probably derived from the Greek word 'Kiborion', which originally meant the hollow seed case of the Egyptian water lily. Later, the term was applied to drinking cups because of the similarity in shape between them, and eventually it was adopted by the church for the above- mentioned canopy which takes the shape of the bowl of a cup.





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Ciborium/Canopy:



- ❖ More widely, this term is now commonly employed in the liturgical terminology to designate:
 - The structure that is mentioned above.
 - The covering suspended over the bishop's throne.
 - The dome-shaped vessel that is used to contain the holy communion for the sick.
- ❖ Although the Coptic Altar is bare, devoid of any ornament or painting, the Coptic Ciborium is generally rich in paintings on both the interior and exterior surfaces.
- ❖ The icon of the Lord, surrounded by the Cherubim and the Seraphim often occupies the centre of the dome, for it represents the heaven of heavens in which the Lord and His heavenly creatures dwell.



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Ciborium/Canopy:

- ❖ Icons of the four Evangelists are painted on the four pillars; as if the four corners of the universe are sanctified by the word of the Gospel.
- ❖ On the top, a large Cross is mounted in the centre of the Ciborium and sometimes another four crosses are mounted on the sides, so that they all refer to the five wounds of the Lord.

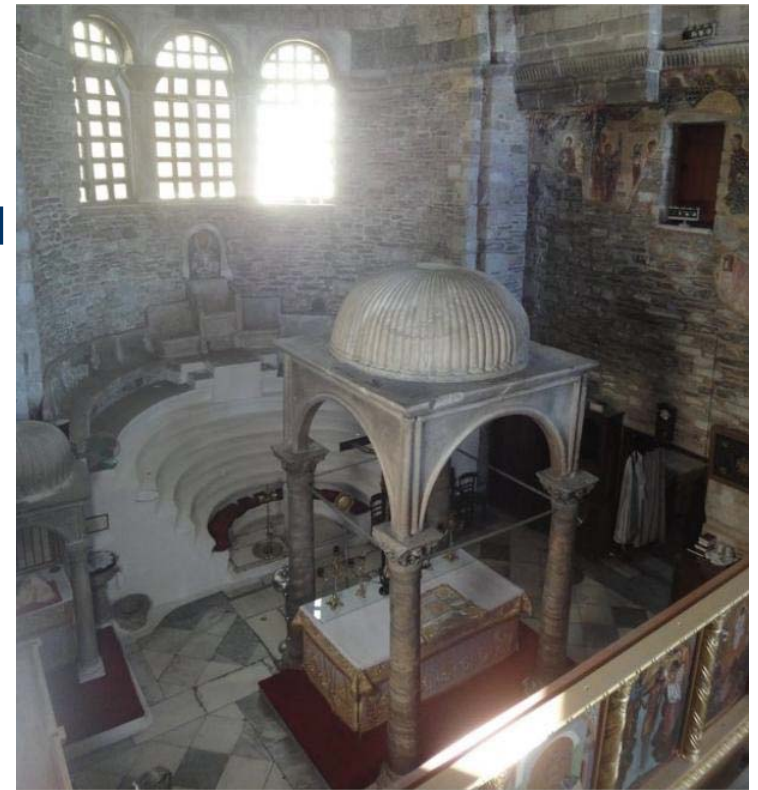




Structure of the Coptic Church

The Tribune:

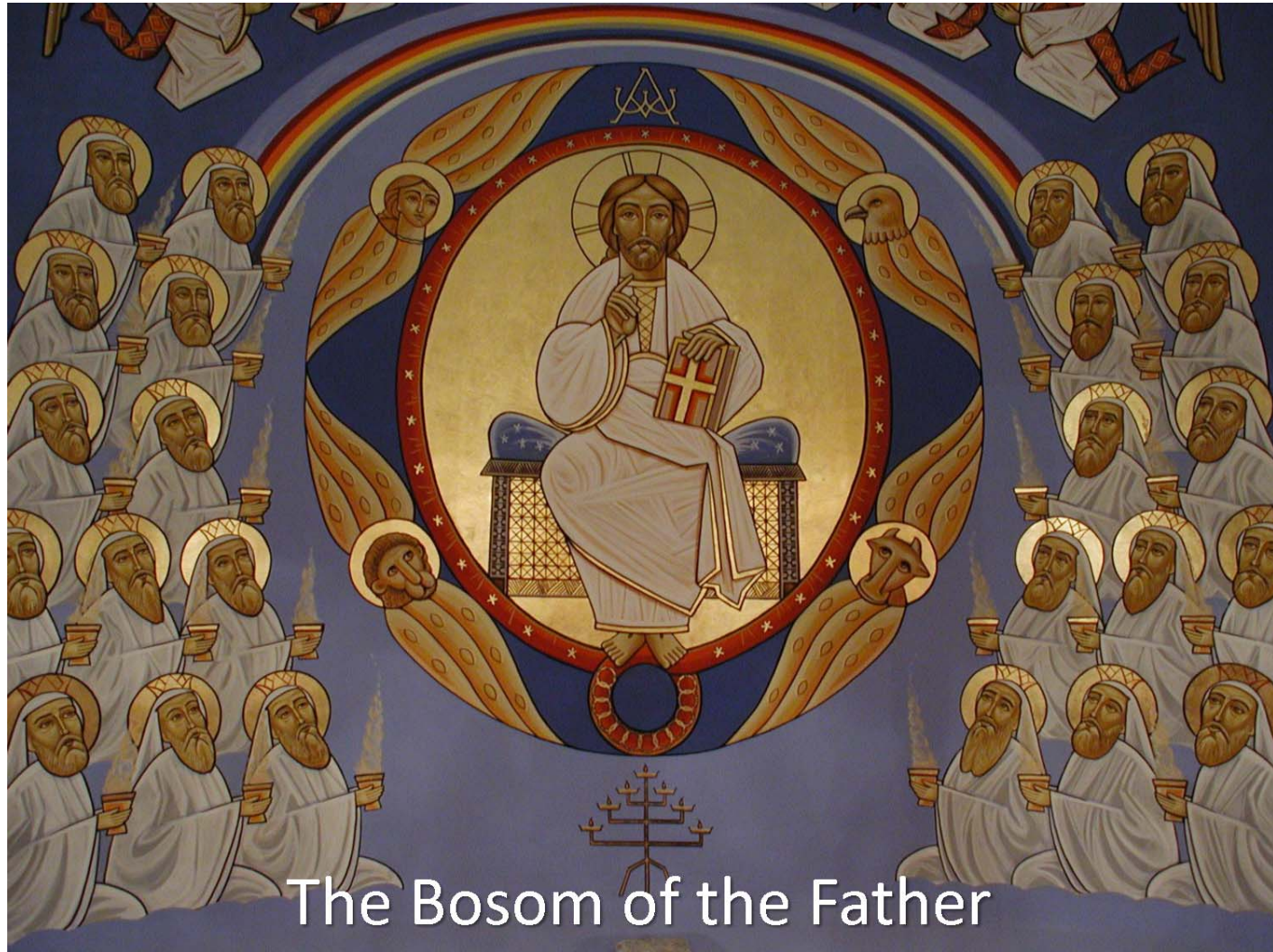
- ❖ Behind the Altar and around the eastern wall of the Sanctuary lies the 'Tribune'.
- ❖ It is often made of marble or stone and consists of seven semi-circular steps.
- ❖ Typical examples are the ancient Church of St. Menas in Marriout, near Alexandria, and the Churches of Old Cairo: the Suspended Church, Abu-Serga, Abu-Sefein and St. Barbara.





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Niche:



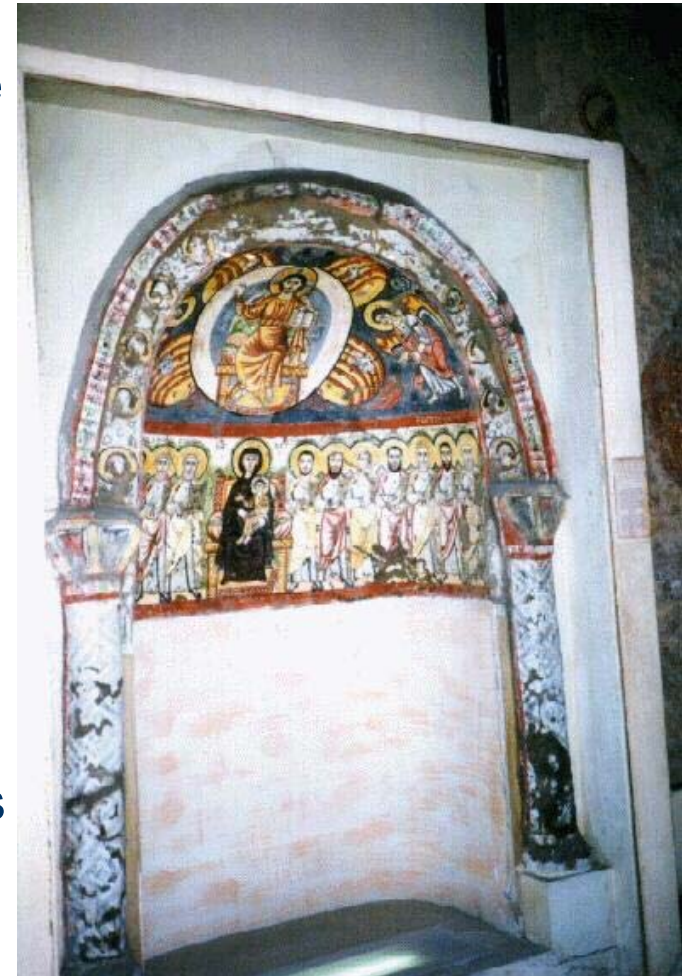
The Bosom of the Father



Structure of the Coptic Church

The Niche:

- ❖ The Niche is the apse that represents the eastern wall of the Sanctuary, which surrounds the tribune.
- ❖ It is often occupied with the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ coming on the cloud, carried by the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the four Living creatures, with the twenty four heavenly Presbyters offering incense. The Lord appears holding the planet Earth with one hand, for He is the Almighty one, and the pastoral rod with the other hand, for He is the Shepherd & Redeemer who liberates men from sin's captivity.





Structure of the Coptic Church

The Niche:

- ❖ Thus in this sense, the Niche represents the Bosom of God, for the Lord longs for His church, and she waits for His coming.
- ❖ In front of this icon, a sanctuary lamp that is permanently lit, is fitted. It is known as the Perpetual lamp and represents the star which appeared to the wise men and guided them to where the Lord was born.

