

CHURCH STUDY

FASTS IN THE COPTIC CHURCH

“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

Matthew 17:21

What is Fasting?

Fasting is abstinence or cutting of some food for a period of time.



Not all about food



"Fasting" doesn't mean eating fast food!



Absolution

As Coptic Christians we are all expected to fast following the church guidance.

However under special circumstances, such as sickness, we may obtain absolution from our father of confession.

Fasting is a self-denial exercise and practice of obedience that helps Christians reduce their thoughts and dependence on their passions like addictions to food, television or other entertainment, which are the most significant obstacles preventing us from getting closer to God. Through fasting comes the starting point for true repentance and joy as we prepare for the coming “Feast Day”

Out of the 365 days of the year, Copts often fast between 180 to 210 days!



The times of fasting are dependent on the Coptic calendar

THE FASTING PERIODS



1 - The Fast of the Advent

The Nativity Fast (Advent) is the 43 days before the **Nativity of Jesus (Christmas)** on January 7. The 40 days correspond to the 40 days that Moses fasted on the mountain before receiving the Ten Commandments from God (**the word of God**).



Since Christ is the **Word of God**, we fast those 40 days in preparation of receiving **Him** in the flesh at the Feast of the Nativity.

An additional 3 days were added at the beginning of the 40 days of Advent during the 10th century to commemorate the three days that Coptic Christians fasted before God performed the miracle of moving the **Mountain of Mokattam** in Cairo at the hands of **Simon the Tanner** during the rule of Al Muizz.

Thus the fast of Advent begins on November 25.

2 - The Fast of Nineveh

This fast is 3 days in length and commemorates the repentance of **Ninevah** after **Jonah** delivered God's message.

The Fast of Nineveh begins on a **Monday**, two weeks before the beginning of the **Great Lent**.



3 - The Fast of Great Lent

The Great Lent consists of eight weeks (55 days), which corresponds to:

- A week of preparation
- 40 days that Christ fasted on the mountain
- **Holy Week (Pascha Week)**



4 - The Fast of the Apostles

The fast of the Apostles varies in length each year depending on the date of Easter, which in turn determines the date of Pentecost (50 days after Easter). It begins on the **Monday** following the Sunday of Pentecost and continues until the feast of **St. Peter and St. Paul the Apostle** on July 12 (Feast of the Apostles). This fasting period commemorates the apostles preaching Christianity to the world.



5 - St. Mary's fast

A fifteen day fast that commemorates the **Assumption** of St. Mary's body to heaven.

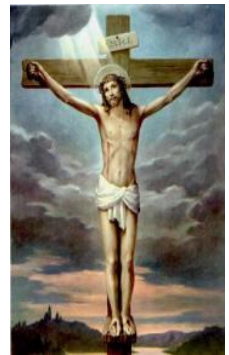
This fast is to ask for her intercessions as the Mother of God.

It begins on August 7 and ends on August 22.



6 - Wednesday and Friday Weekly Fast

Coptic Christians fast every Wednesday in commemoration of **Christ's betrayal by Judas Iscariot**, and every Friday in **commemoration of His crucifixion**. Exceptions are the Wednesdays and Fridays between **Easter and Pentecost** (*the Holy 50 days*) and any day where the feast of the Nativity or Epiphany falls on Wednesday or Friday.



7 - The Paramon Fasts

The day or days preceding the feast of the Nativity and the Feast of Epiphany in preparation of the Feast day.

If the feast day falls on **Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday**, then the Paramon is simply the day immediately preceding the Feast day. **(1 day)**

If the feast day falls on a **Sunday**, the Paramon is the Friday and Saturday preceding the feast (since Saturday is a non-abstaining day). **(2 days)**

If the feast day falls on a **Monday**, the Paramon is the Friday, Saturday and Sunday preceding the feast (since Saturday and Sunday are non-abstaining days). **(3 days)**

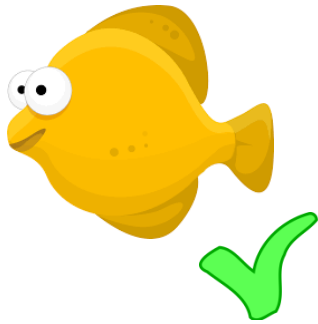
No fish allowed →





FOOD RULES

During the fasting periods, the diet is mainly **vegan**, cooked with either oil or water. No animal products (meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, butter, etc.) are allowed.



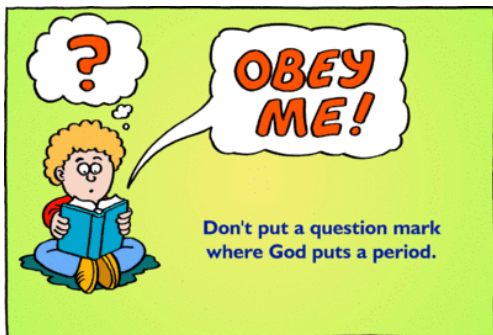
ALLOWED

FISH is only allowed during the Advent fast, the Apostles' Fast, and the fast of St. Mary. With the **EXCEPTION** of Wednesdays and Fridays in these fasts and the Paramon fasts.



STRICT ABSTINENCE

A strict abstinence period (**no food or drink allowed**) is encouraged for those who can do it, as it depends on each individual's strength and spiritual needs (**this is usually based on the suggestion of the person's father of confession**). There is no strict fasting with abstinence on **Saturdays and Sundays** with the **EXCEPTION** of the Holy (Bright) Saturday (Saturday before Easter). It is the only Saturday of the year where a strict abstinence fast is kept.



Non-fasting periods
There are 7 weeks during the year where there is no fasting even **on Wednesday and Friday!** These are the 7 weeks between Easter and Pentecost (the Holy 50 days). These 7 weeks are fast-free because this period is a period of joy in celebration of the Resurrection of Christ.

