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Religious

Holy Virgin appears at Warraq, Giza For the love of the Virgin

By-Victor Salama- Nader Shukry



Late in the evening of Thursday 11 December, sometime after midnight, the official security guards at the gate of the church of the Holy Virgin and the Archangel Michael in the heavily populated district of Warraq al-Hadar in Giza witnessed an unusual light hovering above the church tower. The luminous glow, which paled the surrounding electric lights, also caught the eyes of a group of fellow Muslims sitting at a nearby café. Intrigued, they looked on, only to see the light condense into a female form. A few Coptic passers-by immediately recognised it as a transfiguration of their beloved Holy Virgin. She appeared in her full height in luminous robes, above the middle dome of the church, dressed in pure white and blue and crowned in gold. The crosses on top of the church glowed brightly as she hovered between the domes and the twin towers of the church. The apparition lasted from 1:00am till 4:00am on Friday. Excitement spread; cell phones were used to call friends, take shots and videos of the apparition and send them to loved ones, and the crowd in front of the church rapidly swelled as word got around. The priests, who had long left the church, were called back and rushed to the site to confirm the apparition. Giza Security Authority got wind of the situation and hastened to send security men to cordon off the area, protect the crowds, and enforce discipline. The following few hours saw the news spread in a frenzy of excitement: the Holy Virgin had made an apparition.

Mother of Light

Interestingly, it was the district Muslims who first spread the excitement about the apparition. It is not for nothing that the Holy Virgin says in the gospel of Luke: "From henceforth all generations shall call (me blessed)." (Lk 1: 48). Watani had to be on site to report first hand on the event. Thousands of people were gathered around the church. Despite the biting cold of the Kyahk or December night, the crowd camped there till the following morning; many made small bonfires on the fringe to get some warmth. Hymns and praises for the Holy Virgin incessantly filled the night air. The mood was festive and vendors of hot drinks and snacks especially made good of the event. The crowd comprised Muslims as well as Christians; veiled women could be seen side by side with the unveiled, all anticipating a fresh apparition. At around 1.00am a luminous pigeon was spotted soaring above the domes then landing on the church tower. Ululations rose in joy to excited cries of "The Virgin! The Holy Virgin has appeared!" Hundreds gathered on the neighbouring rooftops, huddled in heavy clothes, and joined the thousands in the streets to sing "O Holy Virgin, Mother of Light, come to us always. Never one to let her loved ones down, the Holy Virgin appeared again in full glory in the early hours of dawn on Wednesday.

So happy

Watani talked to Hamada Mohamed, a worker at the café opposite the church and who was—together with the church guards—the first to witness the apparition. "I was working late that Thursday [10 December] evening. My fellow workers and I saw a bright white light which intrigued us all," said Mohamed. "We went to alert the church guards wondering what was this all about, then we saw the light taking form and settling on the tower. It disappeared then reappeared again. A Copt who was standing close by cried that this was the Holy Virgin. A multitude began to gather and the Holy Virgin appeared once more, this time in her full height, dressed in white and blue, at around 3.00am. She walked on the domes of the church. On other nights she appeared in the form of glowing white pigeons." Mohamed told Watani that the Holy Virgin's apparition is a great joy for both Muslims and Christians. Hassan Mohamed, known as 'Hassan Anbouba', was also among the first who have observed the apparition. He confirmed Mohamed's every word and said the Virgin Mary looked exactly as she was depicted in pictures. I took a photo of the Holy Virgin on my cell phone!" Usama Abu-Hadid, another Muslim who was also sitting at the café that fateful night excitedly told Watani. Her light was more beautiful than the moonlight, he said. The Muslims quickly informed their Coptic neighbours of the apparition. Ashraf Abdel-Malak hastened to the street once his neighbour told him, to see a celestial light emanating from between the clouds and Holy Virgin appearing on the cross between the twin towers of the church. Hanan Mohamed happily commented that the Virgin Mary is honoured in the Qur'an, and is loved by Muslims and Christians alike. "This is why everyone in Warraq is so happy," she said.

When we were certain

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Watani talked to Anba Theodosius, Bishop-General of Giza. Anba Theodosius said that he was a Mar Mina monastery in Maryut, southwest Alexandria on Thursday 11 December when he received a call from the priests of the Warraq Church informing me of the apparition of the Holy Virgin. I advised caution since it was unacceptable that we should issue a statement without being absolutely certain that it was an apparition of the Virgin. We informed Pope Shenouda, who is in America, and he continued to follow up on the event with us. Finally, when it became certain that the Holy Virgin had appeared and thousands had seen her, we issued an official statement to that effect. Interestingly, several manifestations of unusual lights and pigeons have been reported by many Cairo and Giza residents, which were explained as related to the apparition of the Holy Virgin in Warraq.

Scepticism

The church at Warraq, according to Father Bishay who serves there, was built on a piece of land originally donated by a man who gave up his worldly possessions and took orders. The Copts in the district had no place to pray in apart from a shabby basement but, in 2000, the necessary permit for building the church was obtained. The present church was built on an area of 750 square metres in a mere 70-day period. Pope Shenouda III consecrated the church which today serves more than 3000 families.

Maher Nazmy has a special explanation for the apparition. "God wants to bring us, the people of Warraq, closer to Him. Most of us are merchants or small manufacturers and have no time for Him. We are just too preoccupied with our livelihood." Since the Virgin's transfiguration, Nazmy said, the church has been brimming with worshippers.

The apparition brings in a message of peace and a call for reconciliation," Father Daoud Ibrahim, the priest of the Warraq church told Watani.

As soon as we got wind of the apparition," he said, "we notified the bishopric which in turn informed Pope Shenouda III who is in the US for a medical check." The Church, he said, meticulously registered and documented the event, including eyewitness accounts, photographs and videos.

It was normal that the event would draw the ire of sceptics. The media especially appeared either disbelieving or wishing to disbelieve. Yet Fr Daoud says: "Christians are not waiting for an apparition" to prove their belief in the Holy Virgin or in miracles, because they already strongly believe in that.

طباعة أرسل لصديق

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