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## THOUSANDS FLOCK TO ZEITOUN, MASARRA CHURCHES FOLLOWING APPARITION REPORTS

*By Diana Maher Ghali / Daily News Egypt*  
 First Published: December 23, 2009

CAIRO: Thousands of Egyptians flocked to the Virgin Mary Church in Zeitoun and Masarra on Tuesday night following the rumored appearance of an apparition of the Virgin Mary across the capital, a week after an alleged apparition was reported in Warraq.

People in the Zeitoun area said they saw a patch of light in the sky, near the bell of the Virgin Mary Church at 8:30 pm. The halo of light kept growing and once it faded, pigeons started flying around the crosses of the church towers, eyewitnesses said.

Ashraf Sami, a 21-year-old college senior, headed to the church once he heard the reports. The trip that would normally take 10 minutes, took him over two hours of wading through heavy traffic.



AFP PHOTO/KHALED DESOUKI  
 Egyptian Copts wait outside the Virgin Mary church in Cairo's Warraq district, early on Dec. 22, for an expected appearance of the Virgin Mary in the sky over the church.

At 11:30 pm "when we finally arrived at the church, we found approximately 40,000 people standing in front of the church waiting for another apparition but nothing happened ... We stayed from 11:30 pm to 2:30 am but nothing more happened," Sami told Daily News Egypt.

In spite of the crowds blocking the street, Sami said people were cooperative, making way for women, families or cars passing through.

By Wednesday morning, traffic in the area surrounding the church was back to normal.

About 20 to 30 people were inside the church. They spoke of the light spotted the night before, but were skeptical about it being an apparition.

Near the Virgin Mary Church in Masarra, Shubra, the crowds were still curious to know more about the alleged apparition, but one member of the church staff told Daily News Egypt that "it was only light in the sky or a cloud."

"What happened in Virgin Mary's church in El Warraq last week is something spiritual. It has nothing to do with science," said Dr Ashraf Latif Tadross, Associate Professor and head of the Galaxy Lab in the Research Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics.

"But concerning the Virgin Mary churches in Zeitoun and El Masarra, the changing color of the cloud isn't necessarily a strange phenomenon," he added, explaining that as the distance separating the clouds from the layers of the atmosphere change, people may see different colors.

Dr. Ahmed Essam, researcher at the Astronomy Department of the National Research Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics, told Daily News Egypt that aside from the meteor showers two weeks earlier, there were no unusual astronomical events.



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