



# The School of Alexandria

Year 11-12

# Memory Verses

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*“In that day there will be an altar  
to the Lord in the midst of Egypt”*

*(Isaiah 19:19)*

*“Blessed is Egypt My people”*

*(Isaiah 19:25)*

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# 1. Purposes

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- To recognise that Alexandria was the most important centre for Christian learning up until the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.
- To have pride in our Church as Coptic fathers defended the Church from the most dangerous heresies (St Athanasius: Arianism, St Cyril: Nestorianism).
- To understand the foundations of our belief and the importance of tradition.
- To understand our Church so we can preach to others.

## 2. What is the School of Alexandria?

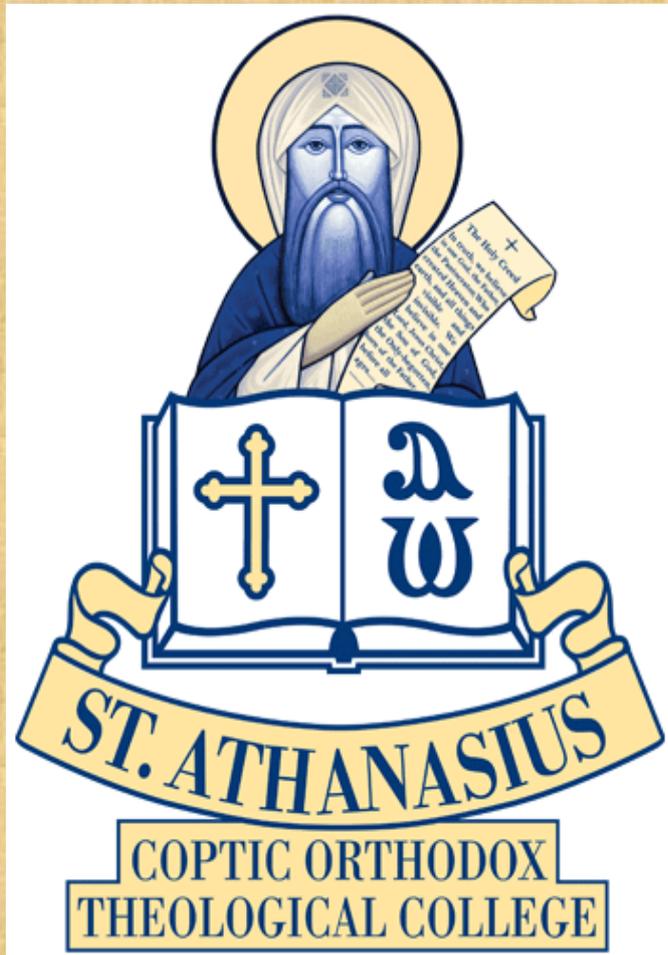
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- It was a centre of Christian and secular learning established in Alexandria in the Second Century.
- It provided Christian and general education to Christians and those who were interested in the faith.
- It was led by some of the greatest minds the world has ever seen, Origen, St Athanasius and St Cyril.
- It formed the basis of knowledge held by Copts all over Egypt and provided the foundation for the refutation of heresies, ie. Arianism and Nestorianism.

## 2.What is the School of Alexandria? (cont)

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- It was shut down in about the 5<sup>th</sup> Century by the Chalcedonians (Eastern Orthodox) who used it as a tool of persecution.
- Pope Cyril the 5<sup>th</sup> re-established it in 1875 as the Coptic Orthodox Theological College which we know today.
- Some of the great modern day deans include Deacon Habib Girgis and His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.
- The work of the great fathers continue to this day.

### 3. Foundation of the School of Alexandria – St Mark

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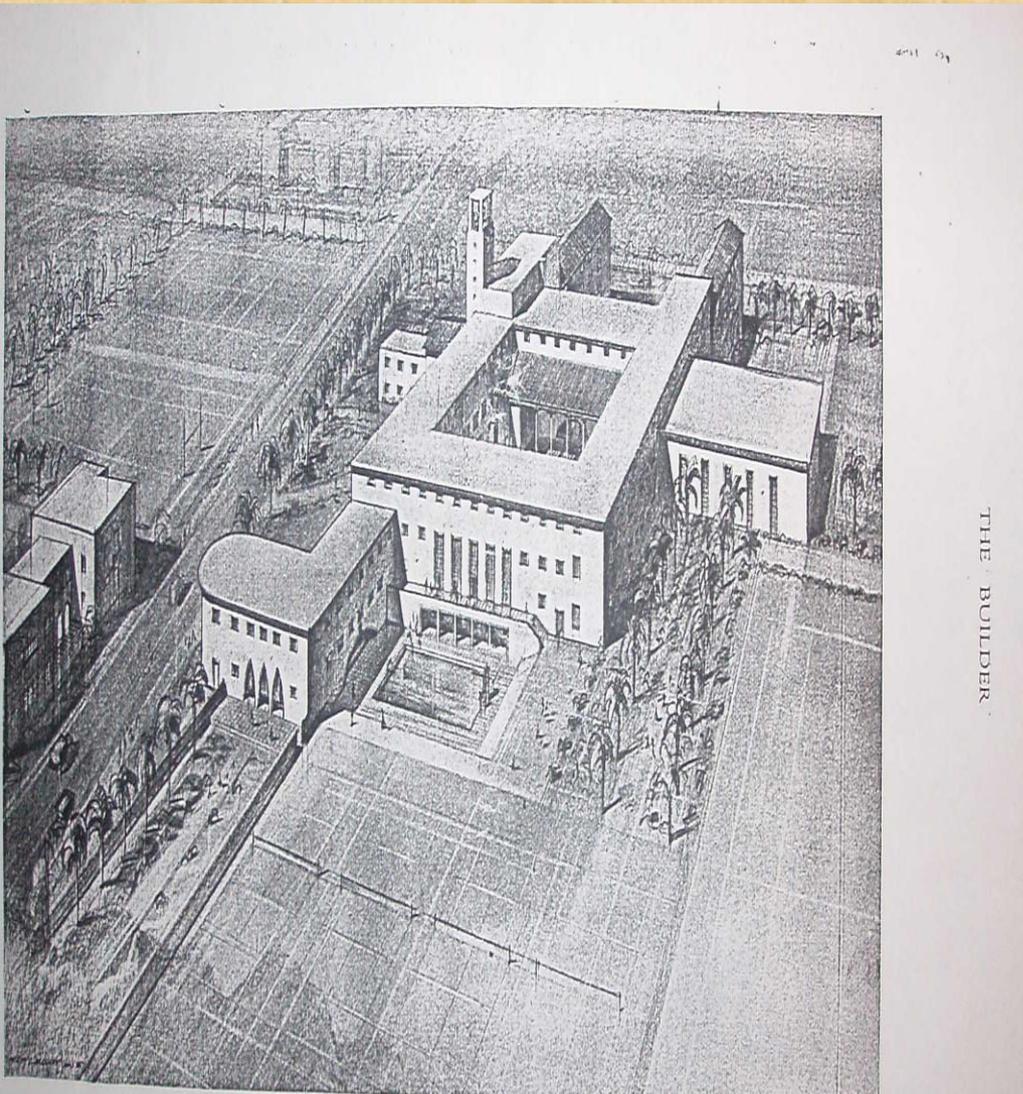


- Sandal torn
- Went to Ananias the cobbler to repair it
- Ananias injured himself and cried “*Oh the One God*”
- St Mark 1<sup>st</sup> healed his finger in the name of Christ
- Then taught him who the One God was.
- Ananias was convinced and invited St Mark to his home
- Ananias and his family were baptized by St Mark.

### 3. Foundation of the School of Alexandria (cont)

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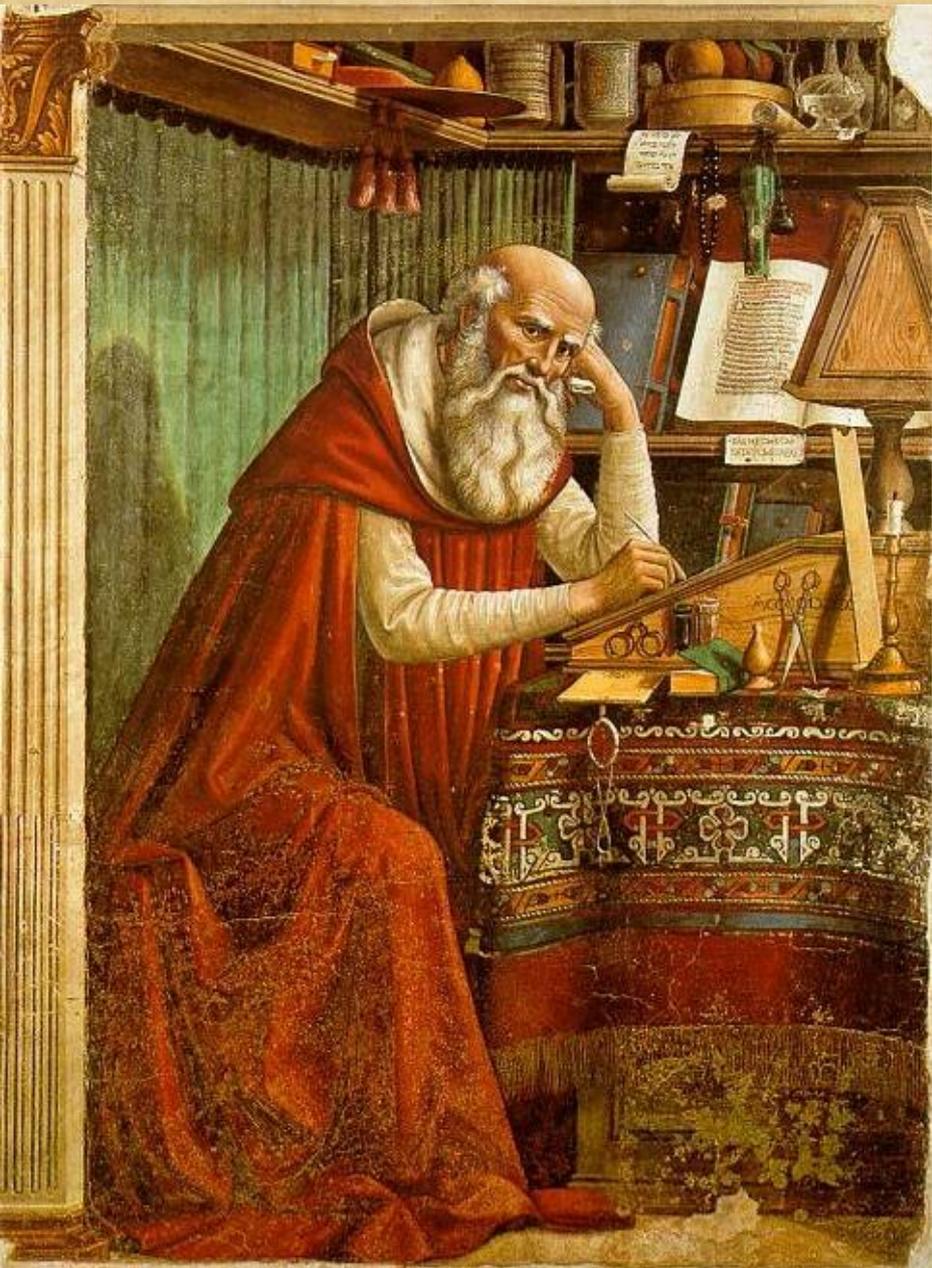
- St Jerome records that the School of Alexandria was founded by St Mark the evangelist himself.
- He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to establish it to teach Christianity, as this was the only way to provide the new religion a solid foundation in the City.
- The School became the oldest centre for sacred sciences in the history of Christianity.



NEW BRITISH GIRLS' COLLEGE, ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT.  
MR. G. GREY WORNUM, F.R.I.B.A., Architect.

### 3. Foundation of the School of Alexandria (Cont)

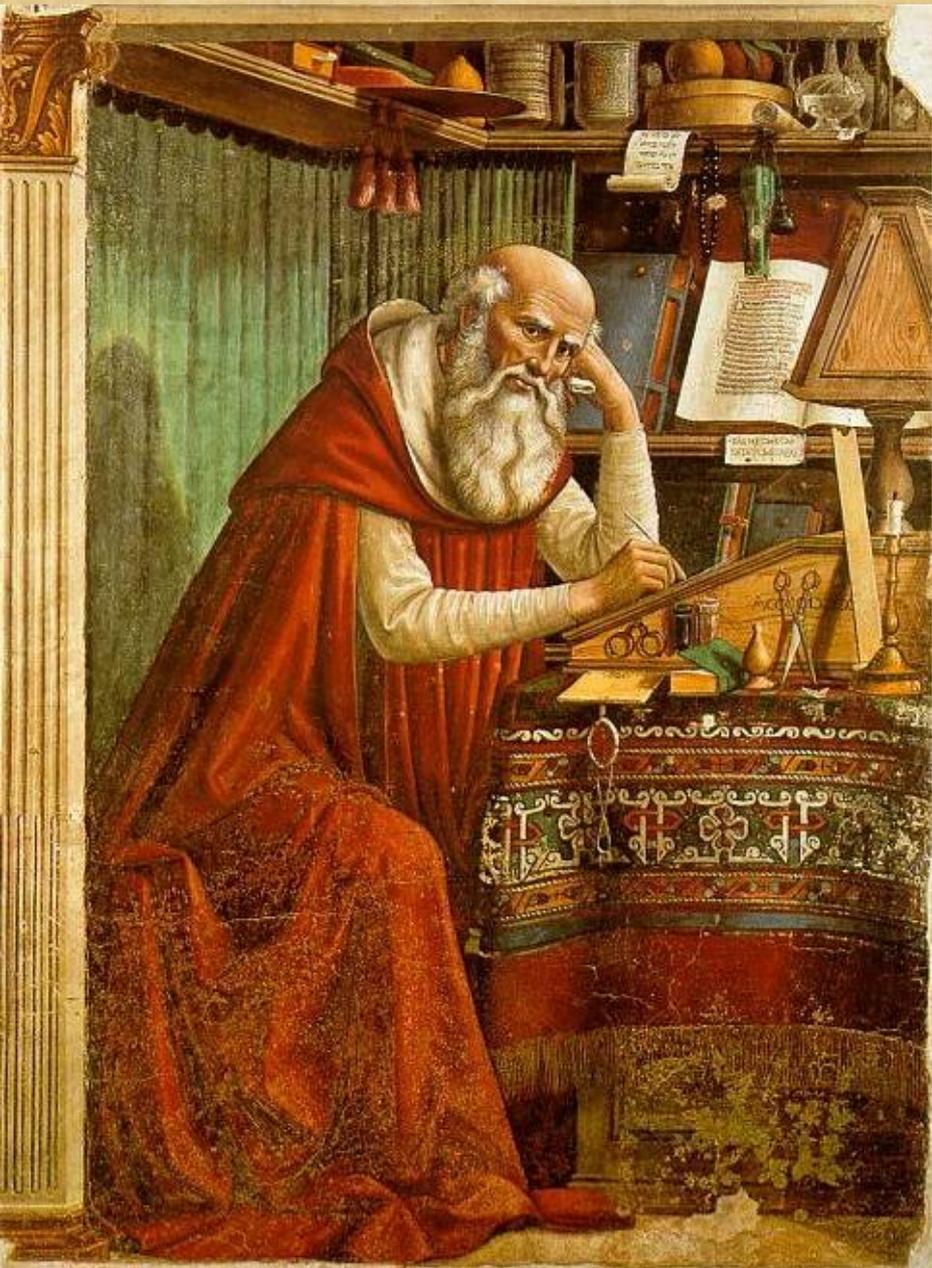
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- Phillip Schaff states  
*“Alexandria... was the metropolis of Egypt, the flourishing seat of commerce, of Grecian and Jewish learning, and of the greatest library of the ancient world, and was destined to become one of the great centers of Christianity, the rival of Antioch and Rome. There the religious life of Palestine and the intellectual culture of Greece commingled and prepared the way for the first school of theology which aimed at a philosophic comprehension and vindication of the truths of revelation.”*

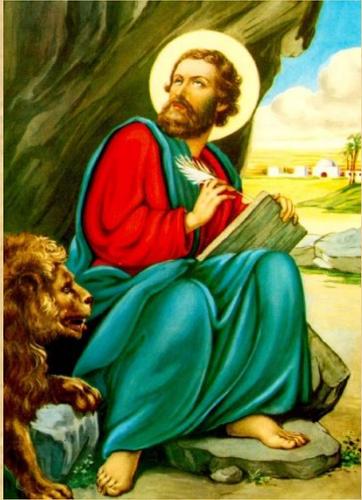
### 3. Foundation of the School of Alexandria (Continued)

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- Dom. D. Rees states, *"The most renowned intellectual institution in the early Christian world was undoubtedly the Catechetical School (Didascaleion) of Alexandria, and its primary concern was the study of the Bible, giving its name to an influential tradition of scriptural interpretation. The preoccupation of this school of exegesis was to discover everywhere the spiritual sense underlying the written word of the Scripture."*

# 4. Famous Deans of the School of Alexandria



St Mark

Pope Shenouda



St Clement

Archdeacon Habib Girgis



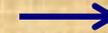
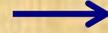
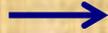
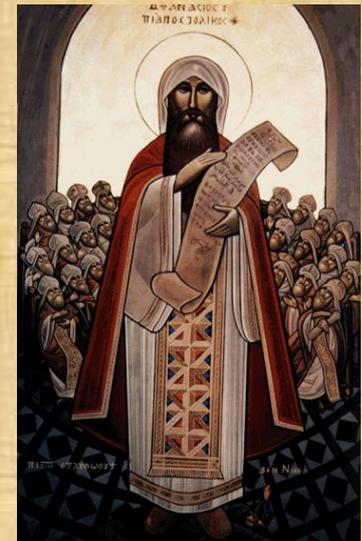
Origen

St Cyril



St Didymius

St Athanasius



## 4. Famous Deans – Origen (185-254AD)

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- The most controversial figure in the history of the Church.
- He longed to follow his father to martyrdom but was thwarted by his mother hiding his clothes.
- Origen was the most distinguished and intelligent Dean of the School of Alexandria – he is said to have written 6000 works.
- He was the most influential father in establishing Alexandria as an allegorical school (looking beyond the literal meaning of the text). It is for this reason that the Coptic church has such a rich Biblical tradition.

## 4. Famous Deans – Origen (185-254AD)

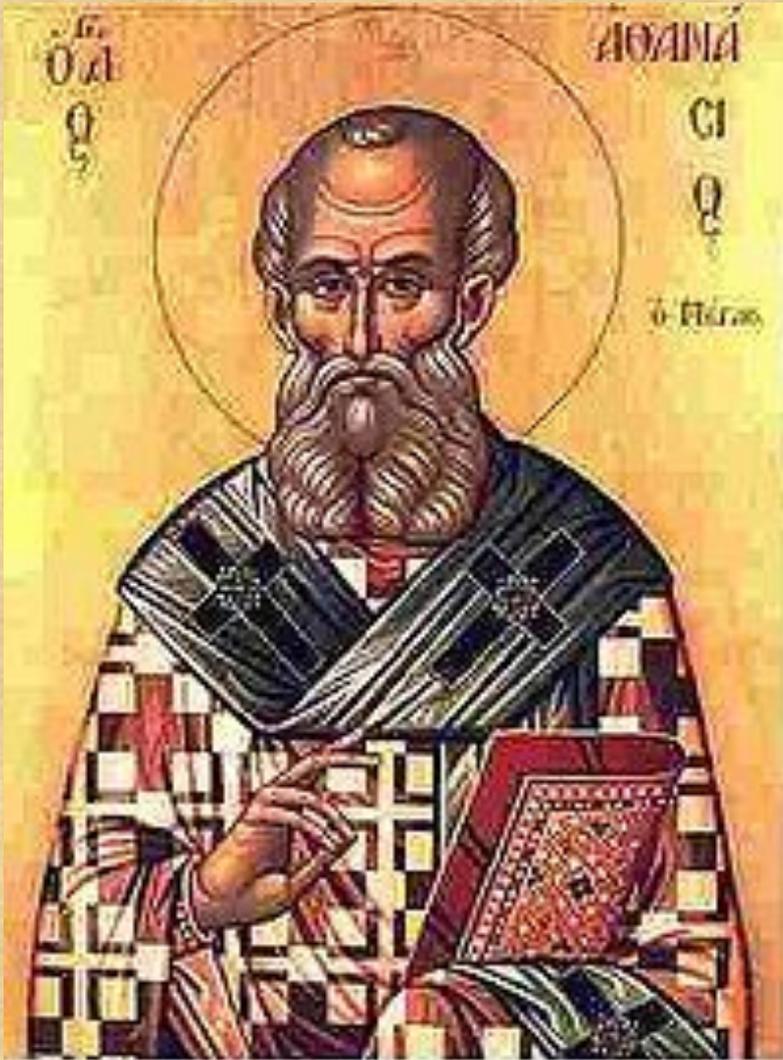
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- He castrated himself following a literal interpretation of Christ's teaching.
- When he accepted Priesthood without the permission of the Pope (as a eunuch) he was exiled to Caesarea.
- St Gregory the Miracle Performed (Origen's disciple) writes;
  - *He truly was a paradise to us after the likeness of the paradise of God.*
- J Quasten writes;
  - *The School of Alexandria reached its greatest importance under Origen, the outstanding teacher and scholar of the early Church...a man of encyclopaedic learning, and one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen.*

## 4. Famous Deans: St Athanasius (293 -373AD)

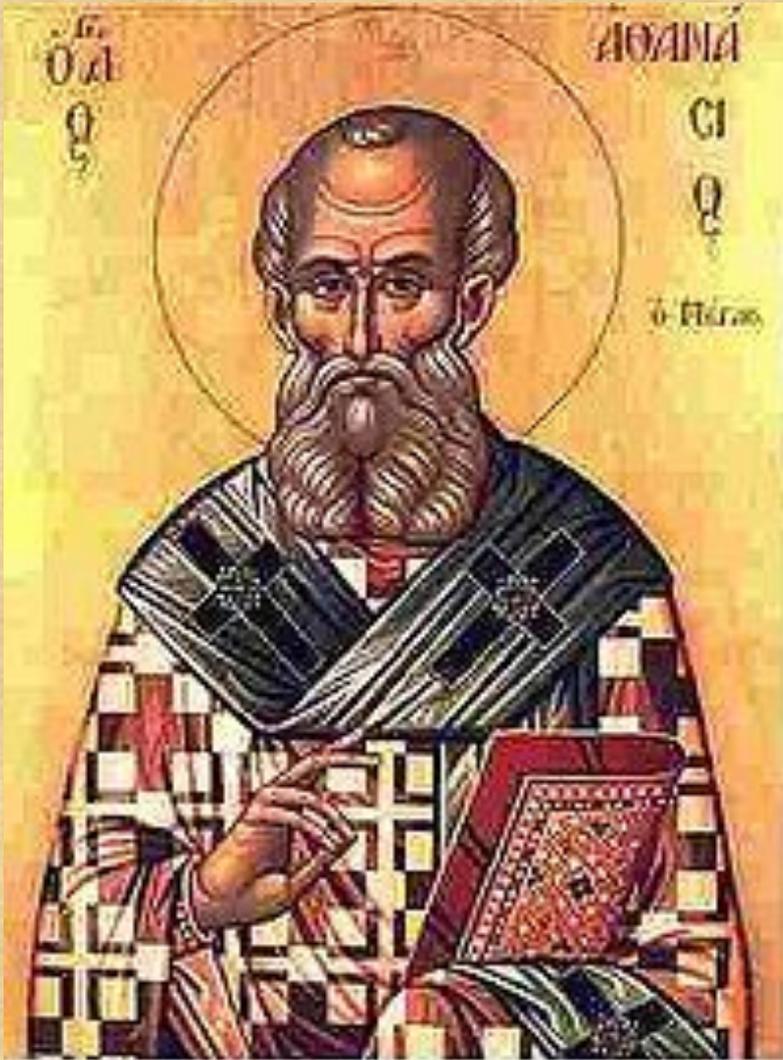
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- Fought his whole life against the Arian heresy.
- Arian heresy preaches that the Son is not equal to the Father.
- He defended the Church at the Council of Nicea and was instrumental in the formulation of the Nicene Creed.
- He was exiled 5 times and endured great hardship.
- The famous saying Athanasius Contra Mundum (Against the World) is attributed to him because he truly fought the world in his defence of Christianity against Arianism.

## 4. Famous Deans: St Athanasius (293 -373AD)

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- St Athanasius wrote Life of Anthony, which is a very famous biography of the monastic father, St Anthony. This book Egypt become the centre of monasticism for all the world.
- St Gregory the Theologian writes:
  - *When I praise Athanasius, virtue itself is my theme; for I name every virtue as often as I mention him who was possessed of all virtues. He was the true pillar of the Church. His life and conduct were the rule of Bishops, and his doctrine the rule of the Orthodox faith.*
- St Epiphaneus called him the Father of Orthodoxy.

## 4. Famous Deans: St Cyril (376-444AD)

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- St Cyril is pictured with an icon of St Mary.
- Nestorius was the Bishop of Constantinople and he began preaching that Christ has two natures: human and divine.
- Therefore he could not accept the title of St Mary, Mother of God, as he believed that St Mary gave birth to the man Jesus, and therefore, she should be called *Christokos* (*mother of Christ*).
- St Cyril, like Athanasius before him, defended the faith and insisted that there was only ONE nature in Christ, both human and divine, without mingling.

## 4. Famous Deans: St Cyril (376-444AD)

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- St Cyril was the main father in the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431AD.
- He condemned Nestorius and his teachings.
- St Cyril was the defender of St Mary and her title as Mother of God, and he wrote the introduction to the Creed (We Honour you Mother of Light).
- St Cyril was a perfect example of a humble and just man in the face of persecution, but a fierce lion if the faith is endangered.
- St Cyril wrote:
  - *I am ready to endure with tranquility all blame, all humiliations, all injuries provided that the faith is no endangered. I am filled with love for Nestorius, nobody loves him more than me.*

## 4. Famous Deans: Deacon Habib Girgis (1876-1951)

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- Was the first student of the Modern day School of Alexandria (Theological College).
- In the year 1918, he was appointed as Dean.
- Habib Girgis was worried about the encroachment of Protestant missionaries in Egypt turning people away from Coptic Orthodoxy, so he established the Sunday School movement.
- Sunday School in Egypt, thanks to Habib Girgis, was established even before Egyptian public schools.

## 4. Famous Deans: Deacon Habib Girgis (1876-1951)

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- He was a father to many clergymen and many Copts and was incredibly important in education Coptic laity and reinvigorating the Church.
- He was so saintly and intelligent that it was said that he would give sermons in the presence of the Pope.
- Habib Girgis is an important example to us in that he shows how much can be achieved by a single person, who possesses the Holy Spirit.

## 4. Famous Deans: Pope Shenouda III(1923 - Present)

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- His Holiness Pope Shenouda was ordained Pope in 1971.
- Since that time he has contributed an enormous amount of education to the Coptic Church.
- He is a prolific writer and one the most astute minds of our times.
- He has supervised the greatest period of Coptic immigration and has established solid Churches in the lands of immigration.
- He is one of the most respected Church leaders in the world today.

## 5. What to take away

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- The Coptic Church has defended and preserved the faith throughout the whole of its history.
- We should be proud to belong to a Church with such a rich history.
- It is up to us to continue the work of the School of Alexandria in defending the faith against heresy, and spreading the faith to all nations.
- We must always strive to continue learning about our rich tradition, to ensure that its legacy continues.

**Glory be to our God forever  
Amen**

