



Celebrating Christmas in a New Cathedral: President El Sisi Attends Coptic Christmas Mass

On Saturday, 6 January, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi attended Coptic Christmas mass and inaugurated the newly-constructed Nativity of Christ Cathedral in Egypt's New Administrative Capital. The new cathedral is now the largest Christian cathedral in the Middle East, accommodating as many as 8,200 worshippers.

President El Sisi's attendance at the cathedral this year also fulfilled his promise at Christmas mass in Cairo in 2017, in which he committed to Egypt's Coptic community that they would celebrate Christmas together at a new cathedral in the New Administrative Capital the following year.

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AND FOSTERING INTERRELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

President El Sisi's visit marks the fourth consecutive year he has attended Christmas mass with Egypt's Coptic community, since becoming the first president to do so in 2015. President El Sisi first attended mass as a show of solidarity with Egypt's Coptic community, emphasizing in his remarks the unity of all Egyptians from many faiths. He told congregants, "It is important that the whole world watch us, the Egyptians... You noticed that I am not using another word than Egyptians ... We are the Egyptians."

Speaking at this year's mass, President El Sisi reiterated his message of peace and tolerance, saying that "the inauguration of the new Nativity of Christ Cathedral in the New Administrative Capital sends a message of peace and love to the entire world." President El Sisi also told worshippers, "We will not allow anybody to break the unity of Egyptians or pose a threat to our country." Following the service, President El Sisi personally greeted many of the worshippers.



"The president made a promise when he came to offer season's greetings in 2017 and has fulfilled it... This Christmas we will be praying in the new cathedral which has been named 'The Nativity of Christ.'"

COPTIC POPE TAWADROS II



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A NEW CATHEDRAL FOR EGYPT'S COPTIC COMMUNITY

The new Nativity of Christ Cathedral in Egypt's New Administrative Capital marks a major achievement for Egypt, as it is not only the largest in the Middle East, but also enshrines the role of the Coptic community in a prominent place in Egypt's new capital.

Construction of the cathedral was financed as part of a joint fundraising appeal, which solicited donations from both Muslims and Christians. As a gesture of interfaith solidarity, the two accounts were combined so that donations equally supported construction of both faiths' buildings. Construction is nearing completion on the Al Fattah Al Alim Mosque, which neighbors the cathedral.

The cathedral stemmed from a pledge made by President El Sisi at Christmas mass in 2017 to build a place of worship for Egypt's Copts in the new capital. In his remarks at mass this year, Pope Tawadros II "extended thanks to President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi for the establishment of the new Nativity of Christ Cathedral in the New Administrative Capital," and "thanked all Egyptians for their generous donations and strenuous efforts to establish this project.



A LASTING COMMITMENT TO INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION

President El Sisi's leadership in building a new cathedral builds on his commitment to rebuild and restore damaged Coptic churches. In 2016, while attending Christmas mass, President El Sisi vowed to rebuild and restore all churches that had been damaged by acts of terrorism by the operatives of the Muslim Brotherhood organization in the summer of 2013.

These horrific acts perpetrated by extremists saw 56 churches, alongside numerous Christian-owned properties, destroyed and damaged. By 2017, all 56 churches had been successfully restored and rehabilitated by Egypt's Armed Forces.



Before



After