

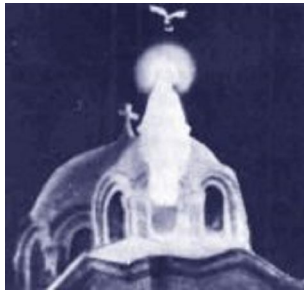


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EGYPT

Christians see Our Lady in the lights that appear in the sky above Cairo

The vision appeared over a Coptic church in one of the capital's suburbs. Some say it is an apparition; a woman says she can see again. A Muslim man was the first person to see it. Other Muslims say it is a hoax done with laser beams.



Cairo (AsiaNews) – A bird flew over the tower of the Coptic Church in Al-Warrak, a suburban neighbourhood in the Egyptian capital. Then, someone dressed in white and blue robes appeared. For Christians and some Muslims, it was an apparition of Our Lady; for others, it was a hoax created by using laser beams, *Middle East online* reported.

For several weeks, a silent crowd running in the thousands has been gathering in front of the church at around 3 am, looking up into the sky. When the mysterious light appears over the church tower, they are jolted into a frenzy of astonished cries.

"The first person to spot [. . .] the Virgin Mary was a Muslim neighbour," said Father Fishay, priest at the al-Warrak parish church. "He took a video and pictures and distributed them to everyone".

Hassan, the Muslim neighbour, said he was sitting at his local coffee shop when at around 8:30 pm, he saw a strong light coming from the church.

More people on the street began to notice the light and saw a bird circling above the church. At around 2 am, a vision of the Virgin Mary in her white and blue robes appeared.

Local Muslims do not deny the sighting, but claim it was a hoax, created with laser beams.

But for Rami, "It's her, with her blue and white clothes".

"The church closes its doors in the evening," Father Fishay said in a measured tone. "We were not there when the image appeared the first time, so we decided to come back the second night and we saw the bird circling the church, then the light."

Kawkab Munir Shehata, 39, is convinced of what she saw. Indeed, the mother of two says that the Virgin Mary restored the sight she had lost in her left eye.

"It was about 3:40 am," Kawkab said. "I felt immense pain which lasted about a quarter of an hour. Then I was ecstatic to find out that I could see clearly." Now, "my left eye is even better than my right one".

For some, the apparition of the Virgin Mary is a response to an article that appeared in a periodical published by Al-Azhar University that questioned the foundations of Christianity.

"Maybe her appearance is to bring people closer together; maybe it will bring about the end of the state of tensions between Muslims and Christians and an end to extremism. Maybe it'll bring back forgiveness like there once used to be in Egypt," Father Fishay said.

Maybe it is a sign of hope for Egypt's Copts, who are 10 per cent of the country's population, and have lived far too long on the margins of society, often victims of violence.

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