Bishop of Alexandria ; Confessor and Doctor of the Church ; born c. 296; died 2 May, 373. Athanasius was the greatest champion of Catholic belief on the subject of the Incarnation that the Church has ever known and in his lifetime earned the characteristic title of "Father of Orthodoxy", by which he has been distinguished every since. While the chronology of his career still remains for the most part a hopelessly involved problem, the fullest material for an account of the main achievements of his life will be found in his collected writings and in the contemporary records of his time. He was born, it would seem, in Alexandria , most probably between the years 296 and 298. An earlier date, 293, is sometimes assigned as the more certain year of his birth; and it is supported apparently by the authority of the "Coptic Fragment" (published by Dr. O. von Lemm among the Mémoires de l'académie impériale des sciences de S. Péterbourg, 1888) and corroborated by the undoubted maturity of judgement revealed in the two treatises "Contra Gentes" and "De Incarnatione", which were admittedly written about the year 318 before Arianism as a movement had begun to make itself felt. It must be remembered, however, that in two distinct passages of his writings (Hist. Ar., lxiv, and De Syn., xviii) Athanasius shrinks from speaking as a witness at first hand of the persecution which had broken out under Maximian in 303; for in referring to the events of this period he makes no direct appeal to his own personal recollections, but falls back, rather, on tradition. Such reserve would scarcely be intelligible, if, on the hypothesis of the earlier date, the Saint had been then a boy fully ten years old. Besides, there must have been some semblance of a foundation in fact for the charge brought against him by his accusers in after-life (Index to the Festal Letters) that at the times of his consecration to the episcopate in 328 he had not yet attained the canonical age of thirty years. These considerations, therefore, even if they are found to be not entirely convincing, would seem to make it likely that he was born not earlier than 296 nor later than 298.

Alexandria, was the city in the north of Africa, part of Egypt, and within the Eastern

Roman Empire. It has links to Alexander the Great, and had been populated by the Greeks, and Jews of Hellenic origin. The Septuagint version of Bible was translated for their sake, by the elders of Jerusalem three hundred years before Christ.

After the conquest by Muslim rulers from Arabia, and demise of the Eastern Roman empire, the whole area came under the Islamic rule. Today the Coptic Church has inherited the ancient heritage of this era.

St. Athanasius is mentioned in the Litany of the Saints, and a well known writer and preacher of his times, and his writings form the basis of Patristic Theology.

Learn more about the ancient heritage of Christianity here