

Holy Shrines outside Jerusalem

The Holy Monastery of Martha and Mary in Bethany – Lazarus' Tomb

The famous for Lazarus' resurrection town of Bethany is located east of the Mount of Olives. Lazarus' tomb is kept there. Four hundred metres away from the tomb there are ruins of a building that is said to have been Martha and Mary's house and where there used to be a church. On the south-east side of the town, on the way towards the river Jordan, there is a rock in the shape of the back of a donkey. It is said that Christ sat on that rock before entering the town and Lazarus' sister, Martha, met Him there and falling at His feet told him; "if you had been here my brother would not have died" (John 11:21).

Lazarus' Tomb

Lazarus' mention is found in the Gospel of Saint John the Evangelist "Now, a certain man was sick..." (John 11). The tomb belongs to the Muslims at present and its entrance is at the bottom of 24 steep steps which were carved in the rock in the 17th century. Saint Helen had built a three-aisled Basilica over the tomb in the 4th century. The floor of the building was covered with colourful mosaics. This Christian church survived the Persian raids in 641. It was deserted however later on and Archimandrites Theodosius and Seraphim rebuilt it in 1965.

The canticles at Saint Lazarus's Church are lit by the nuns of the holy Nunnery of the Greeting of the Saviour, whose Hegoumen Archimandrite Theodosius offered the land of the site and helped in obtaining the building licence for the church. On Saint Lazarus's feast (Lazarus Saturday) there is an Episcopal Liturgy at the Nunnery of the Greeting of the

Saviour.

At the end of the Episcopal Liturgy Priests and congregation perform a Litany around the Saint's tomb and the Archbishop reads the Holy Gospel of Saint Lazarus' Resurrection in three languages, Greek, Arabic and Russian and then the Litany proceeds to Lazarus' Church to end with a petition prayer to the Saint. The two-storey church has been built over Lazarus' house and the yard hosts the Saint's tomb. From the pilgrim's guide book by Mr Dimitris Takos (1896) we learn that "The Roman Saint visited a splendid Church by Lazarus' tomb, where there also was a nunnery in 1139". Ieronymos writes that the church was built at the end of the 4th century. It is thought that Saint Helen built it. The tomb was inside the church that was rebuilt in 1103 after al-Hakim's persecution. Martha and Mary's house used to be at a 40 metres distance to the south of the church and Simon the leper's house was also nearby.

The Holy Monastery of Palm-bearing Bethphage

In the town of Bethphage there is a Church that belongs to the Greek Orthodox Christians and according to the tradition it is the place where Jesus started the route towards his triumphal entrance in Jerusalem whilst seated on a donkey. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem holds an annual representation of this event there.

The Holy Church of Saint George in Lydda

Lydda is located on central Israel. The church of Saint George witnessed the peak of Christianity in Lydda. Sources reference the existence of Lydda's Diocese, the first among twenty-five autonomous Dioceses which belonged to Jerusalem and later on it became an Archdiocese. At present there is an Archbishop of Lydda who lives at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Historically, the construction of the church is attributed to Emperor Justinian. The Christian tradition mentions that Saint

George was born in town Diospolis of Palestine, the present Lydda. Saint George is said to have been serving the Roman army in Asia Minor and he martyred for Christ during Diocletian's persecutions. His relic was transferred to be buried in his hometown Lydda. Lydda was a Christian shrine in the 5th century and a marvellous Basilica hosted the Saint's tomb. This Christian church was destroyed by the famous Imam al-Hakim in 1010, reconstructed by the Crusaders, demolished in 1191 by Salah ad-Din and rebuilt in 1442. Parts of this 5th century Basilica are preserved to this day in the Lydda Mosque named Jamaa al-Khabir.

The New Testament references the miracle of the healing of the paralyzed Aneas in Lydda by Apostle Peter (Acts 9:32-35). Today's building of the Church of Saint George and his tomb was built by the Patriarch of Jerusalem Cyril ii, who also contributed to the covering of the floors and the tomb with marble. The church is 20 metres in length and 17 metres wide. It is decorated with Corinthian style panel capitals and the interior decoration has elements from the Byzantine, Crusades' and later epochs. The church used to be three-aisled. At present there are only the aisles of Saint George and Theotokos' Entry in the Temple.

The Holy Church of Saint George in Ramla

The former vigorous and populous Ramla is now a small town in the fertile valley of Saron, being the first stop between Joppa and Jerusalem while it is one of the most central towns of Palestine. Ramla is town Ramathem of the Old and Arimathea of the New Testament, hometown of Joseph and Nicodemus who buried our Lord. Saint Luke calls it town of the Jews. Here is our monastery in honour of Saint George. It is an unforgettable stop for the pilgrims who enjoy the generous hospitality of the Hegoumen. The church is remarkable for its oldness but also for the famous pillar of the Synaxarion the so-called pillar of the widow. The church was built in 784 at

the time of Queen Irene as it is written on the north wall inscription which commemorates among others the Patriarch of Jerusalem Polykarpos, and the Bishop of Lydda Dositheos who refurbished the church in 1417. The church was burned down by the French in 1518.

Four pillars were holding the church dome, the fourth of which on the right side, was the pillar of the widow with the inscription "to be placed on the right side of the temple". Only the dome was refurbished in 1817 while the walls of the sanctuary and the west gate remained as they were. At present there is only a part of the pillar of the Synaxarion lying in ruins on the right side of the church with some letters of the old inscription.

The Holy Monastery of Jacob's well

The only Christian shrine in Samaria is Jacob's well. The well has been there since the pre-Christian years according to the Gospel (John 4:4-30). Christ met the Samaritan woman there on his way to Jerusalem from Galilee. The first church that was built over the well was in the 5th century and ever since the place is considered a holy shrine. The initial church was destroyed and today the well is at the far end of a small underground chapel, below the present church that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has built.