

# The Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is the highest mountain in the suburbs of Jerusalem, 730 metres over the surface of the Mediterranean, comprising of a mountain range with three peaks; The South peak of the Ascension of Christ, around which all the Christian Shrines of the Mount of Olives are gathered. The North peak (Mount Scopus), on which the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is built. The middle peak with the Augusta Victoria Hospital dedicated to the wife of the German Emperor Wilhelm II. In Hebrew it is called Har-Hazeitim, the Mount of Olives.

From the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Mount of Olives attracted many Christian pilgrims and monks, resulting to the building of houses of prayer, churches and monasteries on it. A Christian travelling book of the 6<sup>th</sup> century numbers 24 churches and shrines on the Mount. At present, the Christian pilgrim sites of the Mount of Olives are;

- a) The site of the Ascension of Christ
- b) The Greek Church of Galilee
- c) The Russian Monastery
- d) The Church "Our Father" and the site Dominus Flevit

## The Place of the Ascension

It is placed on the South peak of the Mount of Olives and according to the Historian Euphsevios, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Saint Helen built two churches there which were destroyed in 614 A.D. by the Persian army. Ruins of the first Basilica are found today in the Latin church of Our Father. In that place the Lord taught the Sunday prayer. The second church was big, octagon-shaped, placed at the Site of the Ascension of the Lord. After its destruction by the Persian army it was rebuilt

by the Crusaders in the same octagon shape and in 1187 Salah ad-Din turned it into a mosque. Until now the Site of the Ascension is under a Moslem Registrar's occupation. It is a square cubicle encompassing a stone with the right footprint of the Lord, which was imprinted there at the time of His Ascension. In the recent years, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has built a small church opposite the Site of the Ascension in honour of this event.

### **The Small Galilee**

At the same peak of the Mount of Olives, which is also called "small Galilee" there are monasteries which were built during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. At present the place belongs to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem with the following preserved buildings;

- a) A church dedicated to the Apostles, the "Men of Galilee"
- b) Christ's dinner Table
- c) The church of Theotokos

The first appearance of the Lord to His disciples after His Resurrection took place in the "Men of Galilee" church of the Apostles. The exact place of the Lord's appearance is at the Narthex of the church under the Holy Table. According to the gospel of Mark (16:7) the eleven disciples were there as the angel had told them "but go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall yee see Him as He said unto you". "Then the eleven disciples went into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him they worshiped Him..." (Matthew 28:16,17). The disciples were at the same place on Ascension day, watching the Lord ascending into Heaven and hearing the Angels saying to them: "Ye, men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is take up from

you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). These words are written on the courtyard of the church. The Church is a three-aisled Basilica with three chapels beneath it dedicated to Theotokos, Saint Nikolaos and Saint Mary Magdalene respectively. The crypt under the church is also used as the burial ground for the Patriarchs of Jerusalem. The dinner table of Christ is the place where He appeared to His disciples and ate with them; "... and they gave Him a piece of broiled fish and of a honeycomb. And He took it and did eat before them" (Luke 24:42-43). There is a relevant icon at that place now which illustrates that incident. The Holy Church of the Theotokos is the place where Our Lady held her daily prayers after the Resurrection of the Lord. There, during prayer, Theotokos received the information for Her Dormition and Metastasis from an Angel, who offered her a palm tree branch. Subsequently, Theotokos prepared all necessities for her burial, lay in her bed and slept in the Lord. Then the disciples were gathered there to bury the body of the Theotokos. Some lamentations of the Theotokos' Epitaph are written on the north wall of the Church, while on the south-west side of it, we find the location where Saint Pelagia led a strict ascetic life and was buried.