

Saint Savva's Lavra

One of the most important monasteries in the desert of Judea is the Lavra of Saint Savvas the Sanctified. The relic of the Saint is kept in the main 6th century church which is a Basilica with a dome. The first cave-Church, dedicated to Saint Nikolaos was inaugurated by the founder Saint Savvas in 484. In the Lavra there are also the hermitages of Saints Savvas and John of Damascus. Saint John wrote most of his theological writings in the Great Lavra which was founded by Saint Savvas in 485 A.D.

However, the acme period of the Lavra does neither coincide with the years of the Hegoumenia of the founder, nor with the years of prosperity of the other monasteries in the desert of Judea in the 5th and 6th centuries. The pinnacle of the monastery began after the Persian invasion in 614 and the Arab conquest of Palestine in 638. The best and most glorious years of the monastery were throughout the 8th century and the first 50 years of the 9th.

Over 150 monks lived there, amongst whom great figures of Orthodoxy, such as Saint John of Damascus, Saint Cosmas the Melodist, Saint Stephen the Melodist, Saint Theodore, Saint Theophanes, Saints Mihail, Theophanes and Theodore Sygelos.

The signs of the passing time and misfortunes, the slaughtering and looting that the monastery had to endure due to its location in the heart of the desert between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea are still visible at present. Nevertheless it stands haughty and proud in the heart of the desert, awaiting every single pilgrim. The most remarkable shrines of the monastery are:

The tomb of the founder of the monastery Saint Savvas

The main church, a 6th century Basilica with a dome where the relic of the Saint is kept

The first Cave-Church, dedicated to Saint Nikolaos, which was inaugurated by the founder, Saint Savvas

Saint John of Damascus' hermitage

Saint Savvas' hermitage

The chapels of Saint George, Holy Archangels, and the Forty martyr Saints, which are kept as sacristies at present

In the 4th century the area of the Gallery was encompassed in a majestically built Basilica called "The Church of Holy Zion". The church of Holy Zion was destroyed by the Persian army in 614. A few years later it was rebuilt by Patriarch Modestos, but it faced destruction again by the Arabs. After the deportation of the Crusaders from Jerusalem, the area of the gallery was invaded by Muslims and for a long period of time it was used as a mosque.