

TOMB OF VIRGIN MARY:

In Jerusalem City; the Tomb of the Virgin Mary is situated near the **Church of All Nations** and the **Garden of Gethsemane**; she had died in year 41AD. The New Testament says nothing about the **death or burial of holy Mary** – but deep underground, accessible only by 47 steps carved from the rock in 12th century; this is a multi-faith place of worship for Muslims and Christians who believe holy Mary is buried there.

The burial chamber is sheltered within a barrier, so that a visitor must bend forward in order to enter – could be to demonstrate their respect for the sanctity of the site. **The tomb is dated as of the 1st century.** A church was built above the tomb during the same period that Constantine built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Most Christians believe that Holy Mary was resurrected after her death.

While partway down, on the right, is a niche dedicated to holy Mary's **parents**, Anne and Joachim. This small chapel was originally the burial place of a Crusader Queen Melisande who died in 1161 AD. Almost opposite is a niche dedicated to **St Joseph**; women connected to Crusader kings are buried here.

The crypt, much of it cut into solid rock, is dark and gloomy. The smell of **incense** fills the air, the ceiling is blackened by centuries of candle smoke, and gold and silver lamps hang in profusion. To the right, a small **aedicule** houses a stone bench on which Mary's body is believed to have lain. The aedicule is richly decorated with Eastern Orthodox icons, candlesticks and flowers, but the interior is bare. Narrow openings on two sides allow **access**, and three holes in wall of the tomb enable pilgrims to touch it.

The church belonged to the Catholic **Franciscans** from 1363 AD until 1757 AD; later it passed to the Eastern Orthodox churches.

Muslims also worship here. In the wall to the right of the Tomb of Mary is a ***mihrab*** niche giving the direction of Makkah. It was installed after Saladin's conquest in 12th century. The place is holy to the Muslims because they believe Prophet **Muhammad** pbuh saw a light over the tomb of his "sister Mary" during his Night Journey to Jerusalem.

A section of the cave has been set aside for Muslims to pray, because the Virgin Mary is revered more in Islam.

The Sacred Christianity also holds that the Virgin Mary died a natural death [the **falling asleep**] but her body was resurrected on the third day after her repose; she was taken up, soul and body, into heaven as **Her tomb was found empty**. Roman Catholics hold that Mary was "**assumed into heaven**" in bodily form.

While coming out of Holy Mary's tomb, the tourists definitely visit **Gethsemane** Church which is seen at immediate left of the Tomb's entrance. It is a small church but very aesthetically carved out of another cave; walls and ceiling all are of stone in natural and original texture. Every time the prayer sessions are on for the tourists. In the area at the foot of Mount of Olives, called the **Kidron Valley**, one can visit **Gethsemane** gardens and its two spectacular churches.

The **Kidron Valley** has vast burial grounds over the centuries. This is where the Messiah would come to raise up the dead; the Jews believed [**Zechariah 14:4**].

MOUNT OF OLIVES:

Gets its name because the area used to be covered in olive trees in ancient times. This is a very significant site and has been used as a Jewish cemetery for over 3,000 years and contains an estimated 150,000 graves. From the top it offers spectacular views of Jerusalem and is just a sight in itself. Most people tend to spend

their time at the foot of Mount of Olives. Here is where you can find the picturesque **St Mary Magdalene Church**, with its golden domes, common in Russian Orthodox churches.

Mount of Olives is a place the **Christians are told about since their childhood**. The area is mentioned several times in the Old Testament and appears several times in the New Testament, since Jesus was 'a regular visitor' of this place. In a city where it is sometimes difficult to separate history and religion, these credentials make Mount of Olives one of the most interesting sites around Jerusalem. One of the most interesting places is the **Church Pater Noster**, built next to the place it is believed **Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer**. There, you can find many tiled panels with the prayer in more than 140 languages.

GETHSEMANE:

Gethsemane, in Hebrew called an 'oil press', is a garden most famous as the place where holy **Jesus prayed** and his disciples slept the night before Jesus' crucifixion - the site recorded as where the **agony in the garden** took place; it appears in the **Gospel of Matthew** [26:36] and of **Mark** [14:31-32]. It was a place that holy Jesus and his disciples customarily visited, which allowed Judas to find him on the night of his arrest. In Christianity, there are four locations claimed to be the place where Jesus prayed on the [last] night he was betrayed – all the four lie here within the radius of 100 yards.

Modern scholarships acknowledge that the location of Gethsemane is unknown – which is also NOT true; **Luke** [22:43–44] may be taken as guidance. In fact, the Garden of Gethsemane became a focal site for early Christian pilgrims; the faithful were accustomed to go there to pray at the place of **eight ancient olive trees**.

A study conducted by the National Research Council of Italy in 2012 found that several olive trees in the garden are amongst the oldest

known to science. Dates of 1092, 1166 and 1198 AD were obtained by carbon dating from older parts of the trunks of three trees. The question is still not settled because olive trees can grow back from roots even after cut down in depth. However the researcher writes: *"All the tree trunks are hollow inside so that the central, older wood is missing [but] only three from a total of eight olive trees could be successfully dated."* Some historian priests held that roots of the oldest trees are possibly much older – could be dating as 3000 years back.

CHURCH OF ALL NATIONS:

It stands outside eastern wall of the Haram Sharif [Temple Mount] nearby Gethsemane - built over the rock on which holy Jesus prayed in agony the night earlier he was arrested before crucifixion. The church is also known as the **Basilica of the Agony**; Christians book **Mark** 14:32-42 is referred.

The current church rests on the foundations of two earlier ones, that of a small 12th century Crusader chapel abandoned in 1345 AD, and a 4th-century Byzantine basilica, destroyed by an earthquake in year 746 AD. In 1920, during work on the foundations, a column of the crusader chapel was found two meters beneath the floor. Following this discovery the architects immediately removed the new foundations and began excavations of the earlier church. After the remains of the Byzantine era church were fully excavated plans for the new church were altered and work continued on the current basilica in April 1922; till June 1924 it was completed.

The basilica is called the **Church of All Nations** because many countries contributed to the cost of construction; national **symbols** of 12 donor countries are inside the ceiling domes. The mosaics in the apses were donated by Hungary, Ireland and Poland. The wrought-iron **wreath** around the Rock of Agony was given by Australia. The church and the whole site provide an evocative place for meditation during night.

Outside: with a roof of 12 small domes, the rich coloured triangular mosaic at the top of the façade makes it a Jerusalem landmark.

Two types of stone were used in the construction of this church: the Lifta stone of Jerusalem and rose-stone from Bethlehem. The building is divided by six columns into three aisles; violet colours were used for the windows to evoke a mood of depression analogous to holy Christ's agony. The facade of the church is supported by a row of Corinthian columns; atop each column sits statues of the Four Christian Evangelists - set below a modern mosaic depicting Jesus Christ as mediator between God and man; the whole set gives the said church a neo-classical look.

During construction, parts of the mosaic floor of the original **Byzantine** church were discovered. These were preserved under glass and may be seen in the floor of the south aisle. The architect then copied this 4th-century mosaic design in the floor of the modern church, to suggest a spiritual **continuity** throughout the ages of faith.