



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 40, The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

(Wikipedia)

The Church of the Nativity, or Basilica of the Nativity, is located in Bethlehem in the West Bank. The grotto it contains holds a prominent religious significance to Christians of various denominations as the birthplace of Jesus. The grotto is the oldest site continuously used as a place of worship in Christianity, and the basilica is the oldest major church in the Holy Land.

The holy site known as the Nativity Grotto is thought to be the cave in which Jesus was born. In 135, Emperor Hadrian had the site above the Grotto converted into a worship place for Adonis, the mortal lover of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of beauty.

The site was associated with the birth of Jesus at least since the second century CE, is attested by Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) who noted in his Dialogue with Trypho that the Holy Family had taken refuge in a cave outside of town:

But when the Child was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find lodging in that village, he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger, and here the Magi who came from Arabia found Him.

Constantinian basilica (326–529 or 556)

The first basilica on this site was built by Emperor Constantine I, on the site identified by his mother, Empress Helena and Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem. The construction started in 326 under the supervision of Bishop Makarios, who followed Constantine's orders and was dedicated on 31 May 339.

Construction of this early church was carried out as part of a larger project following the First Council of Nicaea during Constantine's reign, aimed to build churches on the sites assumed at the time to have witnessed the crucial events in the life of Jesus.

The structure was burned and destroyed in one of the Samaritan Revolts of 529 or 556, in the second of which Jews seem to have joined the Samaritans. The basilica was rebuilt in its present form in the 6th century by Byzantine Emperor Justinian I.

The Persians under Khosrau II invaded Palestine and conquered nearby Jerusalem in 614, but they did not destroy the structure. According to legend, their commander Shahrbaraz was moved by the depiction above the church entrance of the Three Magi wearing the garb of Persian Zoroastrian priests, so he ordered that the building be spared.

The Church of the Nativity was used as the primary coronation church for Crusader kings, from the second ruler of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1100 and until 1131. The Crusaders undertook extensive decoration and restoration on the basilica and grounds,

By 1846, the Church of the Nativity and its surrounding site lay in disrepair and vulnerable to looting. Much of the interior marble flooring was looted in the early half of the 19th century, much of which was transferred to use in other buildings around the region, including the Haram ash-Sharif (Temple Mount) in Jerusalem.

The religiously significant Silver Star marking the exact birthplace of Jesus was stolen in October 1847 from the Grotto of the Nativity. The church was under the control of the Ottoman Empire, but around Christmas 1852, Napoleon III forced the Ottomans to recognise France as the "sovereign authority" over Christian holy sites in the Holy Land. The Sultan of Turkey replaced the Silver Star at the Grotto, complete with a Latin inscription.

In 2012, the church complex became the first Palestinian site to be listed as a World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Committee at its 36th session on 29 June.

