

Do We Actually Know Where Christ Was Born?

During the Christmas season, many Christians from around the world make a pilgrimage to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

These Christmas visitors flock to the Church of the Nativity, which is regarded by some as the traditional site of the birth of Jesus. But after 2,000 years, do we really know where Jesus was born?

The Church of the Nativity is one of the oldest churches in the world. And Prof. Qustandi Shomali of Bethlehem University argues, "This is the place where Jesus Christ was born."

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"The Church of the Nativity was built over this place in 326 when Emperor Constantine decided to declare Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire," Shomali said. "Since then, pilgrims from all around the world started coming to Bethlehem to visit this place. The place where Christianity started."



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Inside the church, the original columns from the 4th Century still stand. Constantine's mother, Queen Helena, built the church. But why would she build it here?

"We do know that the identification of the site where Jesus was born already traditionally goes back to the middle of the first century at least," Shomali said.

In the first century, the Roman emperor Hadrian destroyed the

town of Bethlehem. After he destroyed the town, Hadrian built a temple and planted a grove of trees over the site where Christian pilgrims had come to honor the place where Jesus was born.

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“Around what was left of the house which was only a cave where the virgin gave birth to the Child,” said Stephen Pfann of the University of the Holy Land. “People remembered this. People within 15 years were already going back to that site to visit it.”

“In fact, this temple instead of destroying the place, preserved the place,” Shomali added.

Jerome wrote in 396 A.D., “Even amongst those who are strangers to the faith it is known that inside that grotto he who is adored and glorified by the Christians was born.”

Through the centuries, the church itself went through a number of changes, but it is still one of the few churches in the Holy Land that was never completely destroyed.

The main entrance into the Church of the Nativity is called the Door of Humility because you have to bend to get inside the church. It was originally built by the crusaders and then altered by the Ottomans in order to keep mounted horsemen out of the church.

Fourteen hundred years after Queen Helena built the church, Christian pilgrims still come from around the world. Many record their personal pilgrimage both inside and outside the church. The central place lays inside the grotto. Many believe it's the very cave where Jesus was born. A star marks the exact location.

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