

Easter at the Crucifixion Site

"AND AFTER (the crucifixion), Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus . . . besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came, therefore, and took the body of Jesus. . . ."

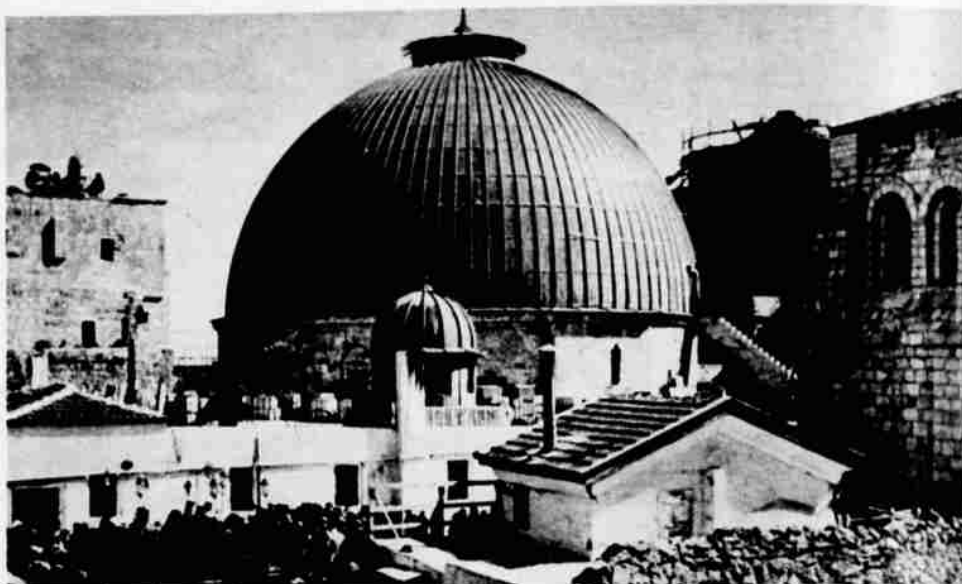
"Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid."

"There laid they Jesus . . . for the sepulchre was near at hand."

The burying place of Jesus, described by St. John, is now the site of an aged church which, despite its outward shabbiness, reflects the most glorious moments of Christianity. Within the area of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried; on the third day, He arose again as a sign of His divinity.

For some 200 years, the place of Golgotha was undetermined except by tradition. Then Constantine the Great ordered Bishop Macarius to locate the skull-shaped hill exactly. Using scripture and tradition, the bishop ordered a temple to Venus north of Jerusalem to be leveled and excavation begun. Below the pagan edifice, historians say, church authorities found a tomb hewn from rock and about 100 yards eastward three crosses which appeared to have faith-healing qualities.

Satisfied that this was Golgotha, Constantine erected several magnificent structures covering



Huge dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Mt. Calvary, Jerusalem, as it was before its last fire.



Monastery pupils pray before the Stabat Mater, the small altar which commemorates the sorrows of Mary.

the sites of the crucifixion and the entombment. In 614 A. D., however, they were set aflame by Chosroes II of Persia. When the Crusades captured Jerusalem in 1099, the first of the present buildings was erected.

Through the centuries, Jerusalem was a battleground for Christian, Jew, and Moslem, but the church was relatively unscathed until 1808 when fire again claimed most of the structure. Once more the house of worship was restored but in such a slipshod manner that few architects expected it to last the century. Yet this awkward basilica survived an earthquake and more fires, although beams must prop it up.

Despite efforts at rehabilitation, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre still is dingy and, to some observers, a "scandal to Christendom." But in Holy Week observances, mortar and stone become unimportant. The vast church is filled with sacred chants and the flickering light of candles at solemn rites. Most of all, it is filled with a deep spirituality that makes this truly a glorious monument to the Resurrection.

Pilgrims entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre this Easter will worship in a shrine beneath the great rotunda. The pink-limestone shrine, 24 by 15 feet, is divided into two chapels. Pilgrims first enter the Chapel of the Angels, then proceed to the mortuary chamber.

Within the marble-lined chamber is Christ's tomb on a raised dais. A marble slab covering the tomb is worn by the kisses of pilgrims through the ages. This is the empty resting place which Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James, beheld in terror on the first Easter morn.

"And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."

"His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

"And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men."

"And the angel answered and said unto the women, 'Fear not ye: for He is risen as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'"

Seeing this sacred place, 20th-century pilgrims experience much of what St. Matthew says the two Marys felt—"fear and great joy." The mourning of Good Friday has ended for them and for the world, and in the time-worn Church of the Holy Sepulchre, novices chant the eternal Alleluia.



Entrance to Holy Sepulchre (left), marble tomb in small chapel directly under dome.

Monks and choir boys (right) kneeling on steps leading up to tomb on Easter Sunday.

The marble slab in tomb is polished and worn by lips of pilgrims from all countries.

