

The Basilica

The first church known to have been built on this site was built by Pope Sixtus III immediately following the Council of Ephesus (431), which agreed the appropriateness of calling Mary, a creature, the Mother of God.



The truth of Mary's astonishing title of Mother of God is established in the fact that Jesus is, and was from the moment of his conception, fully human and fully divine. Mary could therefore not be mother of the human Jesus, *without* also giving birth, being mother, to the one who is Son of God.

This church was the first to be dedicated to Our Lady. It received its last major re-ordering and refurbishing in the 1740s, in readiness for the Holy Year of 1750.

However by tradition St Mary Major's church is built on the site of an earlier church built by Pope Liberius in the 350s. Though not dedicated to Our Lady it was built under her instruction of the Blessed Virgin. On 4 August 352, she told him the Pope to build a church on the Esquiline Hill, on a spot which he would find marked by snow. The bronze relief, shown above, depicts the Pope marking out the ground, outlining the building in the August snow!



A. The Baldachino and Principal Altar

The present altar, and the baldachino that surrounds and covers it, date from the 18th C. refurbishment. The great baldachino incorporates four porphyry columns from an earlier 15th C. altar.



Look around you...

Unless you are very lucky, you are probably sharing this place of pilgrimage with many other people. Are they pilgrims or, by desire or misfortune, are they tourists?

This sheet is designed to help you spend quality time here as a pilgrim, and to engage prayerfully with the reason this place is here.

A Pilgrim's Worksheet for St Mary Major's

In the urn beneath this, the main altar of the church, are relics of St Matthew the Evangelist.

B. The Confession

The 'confession', in front of and below the principal altar, contains a statue of Pope Pius IX kneeling in prayer.

Pope Pius was pope from 6 June 1846 to his death in 1878. Pope for over 31 years, he is the longest serving Pope in the history of the Catholic Church to date.

Pope Pius convened the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), which decreed papal infallibility, but the council was cut short due to the loss of the Papal States.

Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary - that Mary was conceived without original sin.

You might like to follow the good example set by the statue of the Pope and spend some time in this place for quiet prayer. Your prayer might be helped by knowing that in this 'cave' beneath the church is a most remarkable relic. In the beautiful reliquary at the altar are the piec-



es of the manger of Jesus, brought from Bethlehem, perhaps in the 6th Century. Overleaf is a prayer for peace in the Holy Land.

Prayer for peace for families and for the peoples of the Holy Land:

Immanuel, God with us,
show us where you may be found today:
In each human birth,
in family joy,
In relentless tragedy,
in treasured babes,
and homeless families.

Immanuel,
we rejoice that you are with us
in everything,
through everything.
Lord Christ, be born in us today.

Word of God become flesh in us
that we might live your gospel,
Light of the world, shine in us and through us
for the sake of your world.

Loving God, help us to see your grace,
hear your voice and follow in your way;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

C. Apse

The apse mosaic dates from 1295. The central medallion of the apse shows the Coronation of the Our Lady. The area below shows important moments of her life. In the centre of the medallion, enclosed by concentric circles, Jesus and Mary are seated on a throne. Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, places a crown on the head of Mary, his mother and mother of the Church,

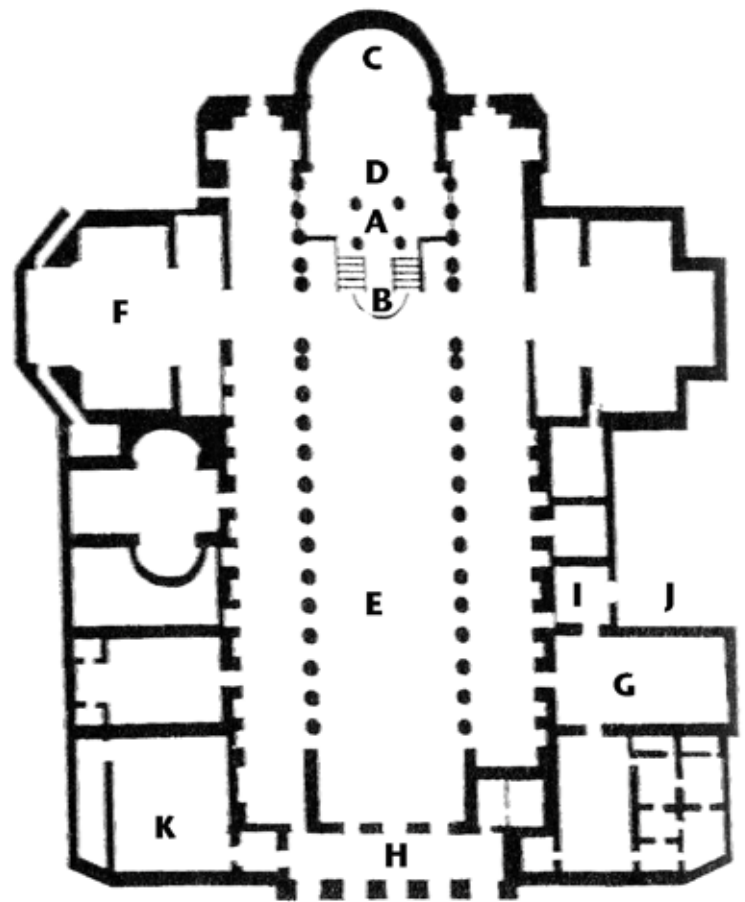


his heavenly bride. At their feet are the sun, the moon and a choir of angels.

D: Triumphal Arch

This arch stands above the baldachino: it is decorated with an exceptional 5th C mosaic.

The first set of images, beginning in the upper left, shows the Annunciation to Mary (who is weaving a purple veil for the Temple where she serves); then the Annunciation to Joseph, the Adoration of the Magi



and the Massacre of the Innocents (here look for the woman in a blue robe ; she is St. Elizabeth, fleeing with her son John the Baptist in her arms.

The second set, (upper right) shows the Presentation in the Temple, the Flight into Egypt and an apocryphal story in which the authorities of Egypt (and their idols) give honour to Jesus.

At the bottom of the arch are, on the left, Bethlehem on the left and on the right, Jerusalem. In the centre of the arch is an empty throne, flanked by the apostles of Rome, Peter and Paul. It serves to remind us that we look forward to the second coming of Jesus who will come as judge of heaven and earth.

E. The Nave mosaics and frescoes

Above the columns, on both sides of the nave are two sets of 18 mosaic panels, dating from 430-440. The series begins on the left, near the main altar and shows episodes from the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. On the opposite side are episodes from the lives of Moses and Joshua.

Above the mosaics are a series of paintings of new Testament scenes, mostly from the life of Mary.



- A.** The Baldachino and Principal Altar
- B.** The Confession
- C.** Apse
- D.** Triumphal Arch
- E.** The Nave mosaics
- F.** Borghese Chapel and icon of the *Salus Populi Romani*
- G.** Baptistry
- H.** Portico and Doors
- I.** Gift Shop
- J.** Museum (access via Gift Shop)
- K.** Loggia (Ticket and access from Museum)

F. Borghese Chapel and the icon of the *Salus Populi Romani*

This chapel dates from the early 17th C, and was built to house the icon of Mary, known as the *Salus Populi Romani*, (Protector of the Roman People). In popular tradition this is held to have been painted by St Luke, although it seems more likely to date from the 9th or 12th C. Historically this has been Rome's most important Marian icon in Rome.

Pope Francis made pilgrimage to this icon the day after his election to the Papacy. He regularly returns, too, after his missionary journeys.

This is another place in which we might pause and pray.

Salve, Regina, mater misericordiae; vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve. Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevae. Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle. Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte. Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsiliu ostende. O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee to we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.



G. Baptistery

In the baptistery look out for the memorial to an ambassador to the Holy See from the Congo, early in the 17th Century. Sadly after the long and arduous journey to Rome, the ambassador died shortly after his arrival in the city. However, his memory is preserved here.

H. Portico and Doors

On the far left of the Portico is the Holy Door. Open for this Holy Year, the doors in the centre date from 1949 and were the gift of Pope Pius XII. The panels illustrate events from the life of Mary.

At the left of the Portico are the doors leading to the Loggia, (the balcony at the front of the Basilica). However you can only visit the Loggia on a guided visit, beginning from the Museum.

I. Gift Shop

Do try not to linger too

long here! However, you need to pass through it to get to the museum.

K. Museum

The Museum is worth a visit. It is also here that you can book a visit to visit the Loggia, and some private rooms which are well worth a visit

The museum contains the usual church vessels and vestments, but also the figures from what is believed to be very first nativity set — created in the late 13th century to house the relic of the crib of Bethlehem, (the relic which is now in the reliquary in the Confession beneath the main altar.)



L. Loggia

The Loggia gives a great view over the piazza in front of the basilica, and also gives you a view of 13/14th C mosaic decorations of the facade of the basilica, which are otherwise pretty much hidden from view.



Our Lady, Mother of Mercy

Mary of Nazareth was the humble servant of God's mercy when she accepted the invitation of the angel to bear a son and name him Jesus - a name which means 'God saves'.

Mary accepted God's will and bore God's Son, incarnate by the Holy Spirit. Thus she became Mother of God.

In time she became also Mother of the Church, a model of faithfulness for all Christians.

No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of his love.

Chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, Mary, from the outset, was prepared by the love of God to be the Ark of the Covenant between God and man. She treasured divine mercy in her heart in perfect harmony with her Son Jesus. Her hymn of praise, sung at the threshold of the home of Elizabeth, was dedicated to the mercy of God which extends from 'generation to generation' (Lk 1:50). We too were included in those prophetic words of the Virgin Mary. This will be a source of comfort and strength to us as we cross the threshold of the Holy Year to experience the fruits of divine mercy.

At the foot of the cross, Mary, together with John, the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. Let us address her in the words of the *Salve Regina*, a prayer ever ancient and new, so that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes towards us, and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus.

Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 24

The Magnificat: Mary's song of praise

My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy his name!

His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear him.

He puts forth his arm in strength
and scatters the proud-hearted.
He casts the mighty from their throne
and raises the lowly.

He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty.

He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and his sons for ever. (Luke 1:46-55)

Lord, have mercy.	Lord, have mercy.	Virgin most renowned,	Queen of Apostles,	pray for us.
Christ, have mercy.	Christ, have mercy.	Virgin most powerful,	Queen of Martyrs,	pray for us.
Lord, have mercy.	Lord, have mercy.	Virgin most merciful,	Queen of Confessors,	pray for us.
God, the Father of Heaven,	have mercy on us.	Virgin most faithful,	Queen of Virgins,	pray for us.
God the Son, Redeemer of the world,	have mercy on us.	Mirror of justice,	Queen of all Saints,	pray for us.
God the Holy Spirit,	have mercy on us.	Seat of wisdom,	Queen conceived without original sin,	pray for us.
Holy Trinity, One God,	have mercy on us.	Cause of our joy,	Queen assumed into heaven,	pray for us.
Holy Mary,	pray for us.	Spiritual vessel,	Queen of the most holy Rosary,	pray for us.
Holy Mother of God,	pray for us.	Vessel of honour,	Queen of Peace,	pray for us.
Holy Virgin of virgins,	pray for us.	Singular vessel of devotion,	Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,	have mercy on us.
Mother of Christ,	pray for us.	Mystical rose,	Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,	have mercy on us.
Mother of divine grace,	pray for us.	Tower of David,	Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,	have mercy on us.
Mother most pure,	pray for us.	Tower of ivory,	Grant, we beg you, O Lord God,	that we your servants, may enjoy
Mother most chaste,	pray for us.	House of gold,	lasting health of mind and body,	and by the glorious intercession
Mother inviolate,	pray for us.	Ark of the covenant,	of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin,	be delivered from present sorrow
Mother undefiled,	pray for us.	Gate of heaven,	and enter into the joy of eternal happiness.	Through Christ our Lord. R. Amen.
Mother most amiable,	pray for us.	Morning star,		
Mother most admirable,	pray for us.	Health of the sick,		
Mother of good counsel,	pray for us.	Refuge of sinners,		
Mother of our Creator,	pray for us.	Comforter of the afflicted,		
Mother of our Saviour,	pray for us.	Help of Christians,		
Virgin most prudent,	pray for us.	Queen of Angels,		
Virgin most venerable,	pray for us.	Queen of Patriarchs,		
		Queen of Prophets,		

This worksheet is one of a series prepared to accompany times of pilgrimage in the UK and overseas.

The prayer *Immanuel, God with us* is taken from *Gathering for Worship, Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples*, 2005. The Baptist Union of Great Britain. Other texts, illustrations and layout are © Allen Morris, 2014. For more information email: allenmorris@rcdow.org.uk