

Basilica of St John Lateran, Rome

Denomination: Roman Catholic.

Status: Papal Archbasilica. Diocese of Rome. Seat of the Bishop of Rome (the Pope).

Visited by: Bruce and Elspeth Lindsay with Emma, Ruaraidh and Finlay Stewart.

Date of visit: 31 July 2019.

This Church is *the Mother and first of all Churches of Rome and of the World* and has the grand title of *Archbasilica Cathedral of the Most Holy Saviour and of the Saints John the Baptist and the Evangelist in the Lateran*. It is the seat of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, hence its senior rank and status. It is one of four major (or Papal) Basilicas in Rome (and the world) and was founded by the Roman Emperor Constantine (324 - 337 AD). The adjacent Lateran Palace, originally home to the powerful and influential Roman Laterani family, became, through marriage, the property of Constantine who donated it to the Bishop of Rome early in the fourth century. Popes resided in the Lateran Palace until they were exiled to Avignon in 1309. On their return in 1377, Popes settled firstly at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore and then the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere before finally moving to the Vatican Palace in the 1480s.



Between 1123 and 1517 the Lateran Palace hosted five ecumenical councils at which important points of doctrine were formulated. The fifth council, 1512 to 1517, discussed reform of the Church just as Martin Luther launched his attack on the established order and which led to the Reformation.



As with many ancient churches little remains of the original. Fire, earthquake and attack by invading tribes in the fifth century have all played their part in loss and destruction. Over the centuries various restoration works have brought the Basilica to its present state. Although the eighteenth century façade and portico with five huge doors brought from the Quirinal Palace in 1737 are impressive, the true splendour of the Basilica is the interior. The wide nave with intricate mosaic flooring is punctuated by a huge late Gothic Tabernacle with papal altar below; beyond this, a spacious apse with the Papal Chair. The ceiling is of gilded timber and paintings rendered in an extravagant and colourful style.

There are many side chapels to explore and admire, each with its own treasures and artwork. At least eighteen Popes are buried here although only six tombs have survived the ravages of time. Last, but not least, amongst the many items of interest are twelve larger than life statues of the apostles, with Saint Paul taking the place of Judas Iscariot, placed in niches along both sides of the nave.