

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

Eleona, The Olive Grove Church

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching his disciples. He taught along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He taught as they walked the roads of Judea. And He taught them at 'Eleona' just east of the ancient city of Jerusalem. Eleona means 'Olive Grove', so the first church built on the Mount of Olives was named The Eleona Church. It was built in about 327 A.D. (at the same time the Church of the Nativity was being constructed in Bethlehem). This is another archeological site that has one layer of archeology stacked on top of another all the way back to the first century A.D.



The modern-day Eleona church is today known as 'Pater Noster' which in Latin means, 'Our Father,' the beginning phrase of The Lord's Prayer. (Photo by Chip Thompson 2016).

French royalty built the modern church. Princess Tour d'Auvergne built the church in 1874 over the ruins of a Crusader Church. Found in the rubble of the Crusader church were three plaques engraved with 'The Lord's Prayer' in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The French Princess, in turn, had The Lord's Prayer inscribed on thirty-seven additional plaques in various languages of the world which she hung in the courtyard. This church, therefore, received the nickname of Pater Noster Church.

The eleventh century Crusader Church had been built over the ruins of a early fourth century Byzantine Basilica constructed

by Emperor Constantine. He named the original church Eleona because it was situated on the top of the Mount of Olives. Constantine built his church over a first century cave to commemorate a famous sermon that Jesus preached to his disciples. The grotto/cave was the focal point of this earliest church.



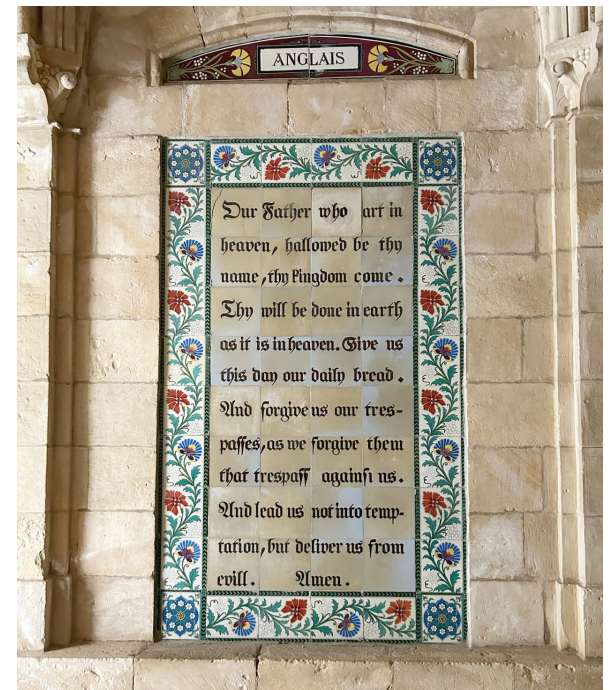
Upper left is the cave. Upper right, at the back of this cave is the apse (the focal point) of the early fourth century church. And below is the view of Jerusalem that Jesus and his disciples would have had from the entrance of this cave. (Photos by Chip Thompson, 2016).

So, what exactly was Constantine's Eleona Church commemorating? When Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem, the gospels tell us they spent their nights on the Mount of Olives. This cave was memorialized by the earliest Jewish Christians as the place where Jesus taught his disciples. The cave provided shelter and had an amazing view of the first century Jewish Temple (which stood where the golden Dome of the Rock stands today.) Eusebius, the first Christian historian, lived his entire life in Caesarea Palestinae (Israel). He wrote 'The Church History' between 290-325 A.D. Eusebius said this about The Eleona Church; "In that cave the Savior of the Universe initiated the members of his guild in ineffable mysteries."

The 'ineffable mysteries' to which Eusebius was referring are found in Matthew chapters 24-25, known today as The Olivet Discourse. This discourse is an outline, the framework for the end times (the final days of this world as we know it). This prophetic discourse perfectly describes the world in which we

are living today. It tells us exactly what will happen just before Jesus Christ returns to earth in power and great glory. You really need to read these chapters for yourself. In accordance with the prophetic message given to us by Jesus himself, we believe His return is imminent. The question is this, "Are you ready to meet Jesus?" And, when you do, will the future King of Kings be your Savior or your Judge? The answers to these questions depend entirely upon your determination to study and believe the good news of the gospel as taught by Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

It was also near this spot on the Mount of Olives that Jesus commanded his disciples to go into all the world and preach His gospel to every nation. Today the Pater Noster Church stands as a witness to the fulfillment of this command. If you ever visit Israel and go to The Pater Noster on Eleona/The Mount of Olives, you will see The Lord's Prayer displayed in 140 different languages. You will see Christians from all over the world searching to find The Lord's Prayer in their own native tongue. You also should search out and find the plaque written in English, the language of our nation.



This is the Anglais (English) Lord's Prayer on display at the Pater Noster Church. (Photo by Chip Thompson, 2022).