

The Church of Saint Lazarus

Coordinates: 34.911495°N – 33.634793°E

The Church of Saint Lazarus is a 9th century church in Larnaca, Cyprus. It belongs to the Church of Cyprus, a Greek Orthodox Church.

The structure is named for the new testament figure, Lazarus of Bethany. Lazarus was the subject of a miracle, recounted in the Gospel of John, in which Jesus raises him from the dead. According to Orthodox tradition, sometime after the Resurrection of Christ, Lazarus was forced to flee Judea because of rumored plots on his life and came to Cyprus. There he was appointed by the apostle Paul as the first Bishop of Kition (present-day Larnaca). He is said to have lived for thirty more years, working to establish numerous churches. He lived a normal lifespan for the time, and when he died of old age, he was buried for the second time.

Tradition says that the place of Lazarus' tomb was lost during the period of Arab rule beginning in 649. In 890, a tomb was found in Larnaca bearing the inscription "Lazarus, four days dead, friend of Christ." Emperor Leo VI of Byzantium had the remains removed from the tomb and transferred to Constantinople in 898. The transfer was apostrophized by Arethas, Bishop of Caesarea, and is commemorated by the Orthodox Church each year on October 17th. The transferred relics were later looted by the Fourth Crusade in the early 13th century and were brought to Marseille but subsequently lost.

The Church of Saint Lazarus is an elongated building with a tripartite sanctuary, semicircular apses internally and three-sided externally and a five-sided apse in the center. The interior structure of the church is divided into three aisles with bulky double pillars and arched openings going through them. These pillars bear the weight of the domes thus forming the central aisle while the north and south aisles bear a semi-cylindrical roof, intersected by cross-vaults. The stonework of the church consists mainly of square limestone block about a meter in thickness. The church has an open porch, from which steps descend into the church.

Under Frankish and Venetian rule (the 13th to 16th centuries), the church became Roman Catholic. A stone covered portico of Gothic style was added on its south side during this time.

The three imposing domes of the Orthodox Basilica Church and the original bell tower were destroyed, probably in the first years of Ottoman rule (1571 AD), when the church was turned into a mosque.