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By **Paula Tsoni** December 3, 2023



The 25 Stops of the Holy Family With Infant Jesus in Egypt. Nicolas Poussin, The Holy Family in Egypt. Credit: Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain

Travelers to [Egypt](#) can follow what is believed to be the trail that infant Jesus and the Holy Family followed in this foreign land, thanks to the completion of a long-anticipated project by Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

On December 25th, Christians around the world commemorate the events surrounding the birth of [Jesus Christ](#) and His early years, such as the Holy Family's flight into Egypt.

The story of Mary, Joseph, and infant Jesus fleeing to Egypt to escape King Herod's *Massacre of the Innocents* is recounted in the Gospel of Matthew as well as in the New Testament [apocrypha](#).

The project, which connects twenty-five locations connected to the Holy Family's journey through the country, had been under development since 2013 and launched in May 2022, when the final sites of the trail were opened for the public.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, when the Magi came in search of Jesus, they went to Herod the Great in Jerusalem to ask where to find the newborn “King of the Jews.”

Herod became paranoid that the child would threaten his throne, and sought to kill him, but since he couldn’t know who the child was, he ordered the execution of all male children two years old and younger within the vicinity of Bethlehem.

An angel then appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to take Jesus and his mother into Egypt outside the dominions of King Herod.

Although the historicity of the events is often disputed and cannot be confirmed, the assumed trail of the Holy Family survived in the collective memory through the Armenian and Coptic Christian tradition.

The journey of Joseph, Mary, and infant Jesus across Egypt is believed to have started through northern [Sinai](#) until reaching Farama.

Churches and monasteries were built on the landmarks where legend has it that the Holy Family stayed in, passing through the Delta of the Nile and Cairo, and continuing across Upper Egypt.

Wells blessed by Jesus, a footprint of the Holy Infant and a granite trough used by the Virgin Mary for kneading, are some of the most significant landmarks along the trail.

Stations from the journey of the Holy Family in Egypt

The 3,500-kilometer journey of the Holy Family from Asyut to Sinai connects their twenty-five stations mentioned in the Armenian and Coptic Christian traditions.



came through Rafah in the northeast of Egypt, passing through Tell al-Farama, east of Port Said. They then reached Kafr al-Sheikh in the Delta and went through Tell Basta in al-Sharqiyyah and Samannud in al-Gharbiyyah.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus moved to Wadi al-Natrun in the Western Desert, where the Monasteries of Anba Bishoy, Virgin Mary, al-Surian (the Monastery of the Syrians), Paramus, and St. Abu Maqqar would later be founded.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are said to have stopped at the future sites of these churches during their journey in Egypt.



The Anba Bishoy Monastery in Natrun Valley, Egypt. Berthold Werner, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Their journey then took them to Musturad and Matariya, where the Tree of the Virgin Mary was located.

From there, the Holy Family moved to the Zuwayla Church in Fatimid Cairo, passing through near the future site of the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in what is today the religious complex in Old Cairo.

Landmarks connected to Jesus in Old Cairo

The Zuwayla Church, the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, and the Hanging Church, are among the most popular stations of the trail of infant Jesus. All three of them are located in Old Cairo, which makes them easily accessible to foreign visitors.

The Hanging Church, also known as the "Church of the Stairs" or the "Column Church" was built towards the end of the fourth century, and became the seat of the papacy in the eleventh century.



The Hanging Church in Cairo. Credit: Daniel Mayer, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

It was called the *Hanging Church* because it was built between two of the towers of an old Roman fort known as the *Babylon Fortress*, elevated 13 meters above the ground, the Ministry explains. According to legend, Joseph might have labored at the Fortress.

In close distance, the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus was built around the crypt in which the Holy Family sought refuge.

The first church in the world

Leaving Cairo, the Holy Family then went to Maadi, where they crossed the Nile.

The Church of Virgin Mary in Maadi is believed to mark the exact site from which the Holy Family crossed the Nile to Mit Rahina, and from there traveled to Upper Egypt.

It is on this part of the Nile that a page from the Bible appeared on the surface of the water containing the famous phrase, "blessed are the people of Egypt," the Ministry adds.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus arrived in Gebel al-Tayr in al-Minya, then proceeded to Asyut, where the al-Muharraq Monastery is located. According to legend, this is the location of the first Christian church, consecrated by Jesus Himself.

View of the Al-Muharraq Monastery in Asyut. Credit: Tour Mana Ali, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Believers contend that Jesus, before His Ascension, joined by the Virgin Mary and the Disciples, returned to the small church upon a cloud to bless it and hold the first liturgy.

The location marked by the 1st century AD Church of the Holy Virgin in the al-Muharraq Monastery is said to have been the last station of the Holy Family's journey in Egypt.

From there, they returned to Bethlehem, after an angel appeared to Joseph again and said, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

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