

Mar Elias Monastery (دير القديس ايليا) (مار الياس) Ιερά Μονή Αγίου Ηλίας

Sitting high on a hill on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, is the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Prophet Elijah, known locally as Mar Elias. This Monastery, dedicated to the biblical Prophet Elijah, overlooks both Bethlehem and the Herodium in the West Bank. According to Christian tradition, it was on this spot that the Prophet Elijah rested as he fled the vengeance of Jezebel, after slaying the Ba'al priests on the Carmel. The Monastery is also believed to be the burial place of both Saint Elias, an Egyptian monk who became the Patriarch of Jerusalem in 494CE, and the Greek Orthodox Bishop Elias of Bethlehem, who died in 1345CE. The site of the monastery is also associated with the spot that the Virgin Mary rested after fleeing Bethlehem with Jesus and Joseph to escape Herod, who had ordered the execution of all the children in the city. It is also traditionally believed that on this spot, Jesus crossed paths with a man planting chickpeas. When Jesus asked the man what he was planting, he sarcastically replied stones, and Jesus responded that from that point on all he would harvest is stones. When the man later tried to collect his chickpeas, they would become stones. The site was originally founded as a monastery in the 6th century during the Byzantine period, serving the pilgrims traveling between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Monks serving in the monastery were known for their cultivation of olives and grapes. During the Persian conquest in 614CE the monastery was left in ruins, but then later rebuilt. After suffering severe damage during two earthquakes in 1034 and 1160, the monastery was rebuilt by the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Comnenus during the Crusader period. This 12th century structure is largely what is seen today. In the 1990s, excavation work carried out in the area surrounding Mar Elias Monastery, uncovered a very interesting find, known as the 'Monk in Chains.' On a hill opposite the monastery, a man-made subterranean cave dating to the Byzantine period was uncovered. The cave consisted of two rooms with stone covered walls, a vaulted ceiling, niches carved into the walls to be used as storage, and personal belongings including a knife, belt buckle, and glass lamp that had previously hung from a hook in the ceiling. Also found within the dwelling was the skeleton of a man whose upper body was wrapped in chains. It is believed that he was a solitary monk living an ascetic life within the cave and the chains were a form of self-castigation. Today, the remains of this solitary monk are on display in the monastery's main church. Mar Elias Monastery and its church are open to the public and is an excellent place for travelers between Jerusalem and Bethlehem to stop and take in the history and beauty of the site, acting today as a resting point between the two cities as it has done for pilgrims throughout the centuries. Visitors can take in the magnificent Byzantine style paintings that adorn the church and enjoy a delicious local meal in the restaurant within the compound.

Site Religion & Type

- [Christian Site](#)
- [Church](#)
- [Monastery](#)

Target Group

- [Free Independent Travelers \(FITs\)](#)
- [Families](#)
- [Local Families](#)
- [Organized Groups](#)
- [Christian Groups](#)

Denomination with high relevance

Orthodox -
Armenian
, Orthodox - Assyrian
, Orthodox - Ethiopian
, Orthodox - Greek
, Orthodox - Russian

Address

Hebron Road
Jerusalem
PS-JEM
Palestinian Territories

31.734861,35.210491
[View in Google Maps](#)

Best time of day to visit

AM

Best Time of Year to Visit

Weather Consideration

bad weather days
, Suitable for rainy

Year round

Estimated time of visit

Less than an hour

Dress Code

Modest Clothes
, Trousers Allowed For
Female Visitors

Entry Limitation

No limitations

Booking On Site

No

Booking Online

No

Booking via Phone

No

Advance booking required

No

Free For

Free (locals only) , Free for everyone

Bathrooms

Free

Handicap bathroom

No

Food outlet

Restaurant

Parking

Private parking free

Stairs

No

Wheelchair Friendly

Yes

Stroller Friendly

Yes