

The Cave Church in Antioch



The Altar in the Cave Church

The Cave Church, or St. Peter's Grotto, in Antioch of Syria (now Antakya, Turkey), is believed to have been dug out by St. Peter himself and used as a place of worship by the early Christian community in Antioch. This would make it the very first Christian Church ever built.

Antioch, of course, quickly became the primary center of early church activity after the Christians were dispersed from Jerusalem by persecution. It was also the place where they were first called "Christians." Connected by

the Orentes River to the Mediterranean port of Pieria Seleucia, it grew to be a major center of planning and organization for missionary efforts throughout Asia Minor and beyond. Luke, the Evangelist, was a native of Antioch and Peter, Paul, Barnabus and others used it as both a jumping-off place and a safe haven to which they could return to refresh body and spirit.

The interior of the grotto is austere. Its few permanent objects consist of a simple altar, a single statue, and a stone chair or throne. Mineral deposits from years of seepage can be seen on the wall behind the altar. Some of the walls have the barely discernible remnants of ancient frescoes and the floor indicates traces of long lost mosaics. Yet despite its simplicity, it seems to exude holiness. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." Jn 4:21.



The Bapistry

There is a natural basin inside the Cave Church that, as you can see, was converted into a baptistry. The metal tub is undoubtedly a recent addition.

The exterior stone façade of the church was built by Crusaders who identified the grotto and worshipped there during their rule of Antioch from 1098 to 1268.



Seen from the Exterior