



Glory of Bharath » Bharath Darshan

Dear Sai brothers and sisters,

This month the whole world rejoices the Descent of Divinity on a silent and a holy night in a manger. Let us travel to one of the oldest churches in India to celebrate the joyful occasion.

Basilica of Bom Jesus

The name Bom Jesus basically means "good Jesus" or "infant Jesus". The Basilica of Bom Jesus or Basilica of Bom Jesus is located in Goa. The church is located in Old Goa, which was the capital of Goa in the early days of Portuguese rule, about 10km from the city of Panjim. Close to the convent of St Francis, the 1605 church of Bom Jesus is known principally for the tomb and the mortal remains of St Francis Xavier, a member of the Society of Jesus, who came to India with the Portuguese to spread Christianity in India. He is often credited for baptizing various people in Goa and he also preached the teachings of Jesus. Acknowledged as a world heritage site, an ornate domed reliquary in silver contains his remains.

The Basilica of Bom Jesus church at Goa India is around 400 years old. The relic attracts a huge number of devotees from all over the world, especially during the public viewing of his body every ten years (last held in 2004). Till some years back, the body of St Xavier was ritually exposed- in its coffin- once every decade, to allow pilgrims to view it. The saint is said to have miraculous powers of healing and the pilgrims come from all over the country.



Thus, during public viewing, the saint's body is carried in a three-hour ceremony from the Basilica of Born Jesus to the Se Cathedral, where thousands of visitors; Hindus as well as Christians queue for viewing the casket file past, touch and photograph it before attending open-air Mass in the square outside.



The Basilica of Bom Jesus is one of the richest churches in Goa. The Professed House is next to the basilica and is a two-storied laterite building covered with lime plaster. It is carpeted with marble flooring and inlaid with valuable and rare gems and stones. The interior of the Church is simple except for the highly structured gilded altars. In 1946, it became the first church in India to be elevated to the status of Minor Basilica and is considered as one of the best examples of baroque architecture in India. On the west, the three-storey Renaissance facade encompasses Corinthian, Doric, Ionic and Composite styles. The Church also has kept paintings of St.

Francis Xavier. The Tomb of St. Francis Xavier was the gift from the Grand Duke of Tuscan.

History

This monument built in 1695 and has emerged as a landmark in the history of Christianity. It contains the body of St. Francis Xavier; a member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) founded by Ignatius Loyola. St. Francis Xavier died in 1552, while on a sea voyage to China on December 2nd, 1552. The following year, while transferring Francis Xavier's remains to Goa, in accordance with his wishes, it is said that the saint's body was as fresh as the day it was buried. Thus, this miraculous phenomenon started attracting huge number of devotees from all over the world. The Tomb of St. Francis Xavier (1696) was the gift of the last of the Medicis, Cosimo III, The Grand Duke of Tuscany. The tomb was carved by the 17th century Florentine sculptor Giovanni Battista Foggini. It took ten years to complete.



During the 450 years of Portuguese rule in Goa, St. Francis Xavier was believed to have afforded protection to the rulers who handed over their symbols of office to the saint during every changeover of the office of Governor General. The Saint had miraculous healing powers, which were experienced by the erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad when he came for the Exposition of 1878.

Site & Architecture



The Basilica of Bom Jesus was completed in 1605 its exterior is of laterite, excepting the facade, was lime plastered, which was subsequently removed. The church is cruciform on plan. The roof was originally tiled. The Renaissance facade has varying design elements that include Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Renowned throughout the Catholic world, this church is one of the richest churches in Goa. The 16th century cathedral of Bom Jesus is carpeted with marble flooring and inlaid with precious stones.

The church was India's first Minor Basilica, and is considered one of the best examples of baroque architecture in India. The layout follows simple Renaissance norms while the detailing and decoration is unabashed Baroque. It's an opulent structure, which incorporates white marble and has beautifully gilded altars decorated with frescoes and inlay work. The flying buttresses on the northern side of the church are recent additions. A Professed House is a two-story building covered in lime plaster, which is linked to the Church by a colonnaded arcade. Built in the 16th C by the

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Jesuits, the Professed House features a facade of black granite.

On the southern side in the transept is a chapel with gilded twisted columns and floral decorations of wood, where the sacred relics of the body of St. Francis Xavier are kept. The interior of this chapel is richly adorned with wooden carvings and paintings, depicting the scenes from the life of the Saint. In the bottom row are two paintings showing St. Francis Xavier being received by certain Portuguese noblemen and his interview with the King of Bango in Japan. In the middle row are three paintings respectively showing Xavier praying with fervor for cessation of plague that broke out in Manas Island, kissing the repulsive ulcer wound of a patient in a hospital at Venice and the Pope Paul III pronouncing his apostolic benediction on the eve of his departure to India.

In the top row are, three paintings of Xavier as a servant of a knight, his sad demise at Sancian, an island off the coast of China and the saint in ecstasy. There are also other paintings on the remaining three sides of the chapel, fixed in decorated wooden frames depicting the scenes from his life and the miracles performed by him. A painting, in oil on canvas, of ST. Francis Xavier is mounted on the top of the wooden door at the back of the chapel.

The rectangular base of the tomb is of jasper of reddish and purple colours decorated with carvings in white marble. Above the basement is another rectangular mass of slightly lesser dimensions having a plaque in bronze on each of its four sides depicting the scenes from the life of the saint, and two cherubs holding scrolls.

The church encompasses two chapels, a main altar and a sacristy besides a choir at the entrance. A projecting gallery, which was intended for the use of dignitaries on solemn occasions, runs along the two longer sides. The two columns supporting the choir bear slabs inscribed in Portuguese and Latin recording that the construction of this Church of Jesus was commenced on 24 November 1594 and Fr. Alexia de Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa and Primate of India consecrated it on 15 May 1605, when it was completed.



As one enters, beneath the choir, to the right is an altar of St. Anthony and to the left is an exceedingly well-carved wooden statue of St. Francis Xavier. In the middle of the nave on the northern wall is the cenotaph of the benefactor of this church, Dom Jeronimo Mascarenhas, the Captain of Cochin, who died in 1593, bequeathing the resources out of which this church was built. Opposite the cenotaph, projecting on the southern wall is a profusely carved wooden pulpit with a canopy on top. The pulpit has on its three sides the figures of Jesus, the four evangelists and four doctors of the church. The bottom of the pulpit depicts seven figures as though supporting it.

The main altar at the end of the nave is flanked by two decorated altars in the transept, one dedicated to Our Lady of Hope and the other to St. Michael. The richly gilded main altar has the figure of infant Jesus and above it is a large statue of St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the order of Jesuits, gazing with fervour at a medallion on which is inscribed "HIS". Above the medallion, the Holy trinity - the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are depicted. In the transept on the northern side is the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.



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