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Foreword

For centuries, the story of the Virgin Mary has been a source of inspiration for millions of people across the world. From the earliest days of Christianity to the revelations of the Qur'an, Mary is honored as a woman of faith, humility, and devotion. Her name carries with it a message of peace, hope, and unity that transcends borders and religions.

The House of the Virgin Mary, located on the slopes of Mount Koressos near ancient Ephesus, has become a sacred place of pilgrimage, drawing both Christians and Muslims together in prayer. Pilgrims light candles, leave written wishes on the Wishing Wall, and experience a deep connection to the divine.

In our digital age, these traditions have found new life online. This book has been prepared to share the history, spirituality, and beauty of the House of the Virgin Mary — and to invite you to join this tradition through our online project. Whether you are visiting Ephesus in person or connecting from afar, you are part of a living story that continues to inspire faith and unity today.

— HouseOfVirginMary.com Project Team

History of the House of the Virgin Mary

The House of the Virgin Mary, located on the slopes of Mount Koressos near the ancient city of Ephesus, holds a special place in the history of faith. It is believed to be the final residence of Mary, the mother of Jesus, where she lived under the care of the Apostle John after the crucifixion.

The Discovery in the 19th Century

The site remained hidden for centuries until the visions of a German nun, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824), inspired its rediscovery. Though she never visited Ephesus, her detailed descriptions of Mary's final dwelling guided researchers. In 1881, French priest Julien Gouyet followed her visions and identified a small stone house that matched her account. Later, in 1891, Lazarist priests confirmed the location, bringing worldwide attention to the site.

Archaeological and Historical Studies

Archaeological investigations revealed that the foundation of the building dates back to the 1st century AD, while the upper parts were reconstructed in later centuries. The simple stone structure consists of a modest chapel and adjoining rooms. The surrounding area also revealed signs of ancient Christian pilgrimage.

Vatican Recognition

The Catholic Church has not formally declared the house as an article of faith, but it has strongly supported devotion at the site.

- In 1896, Pope Leo XIII blessed the shrine and encouraged pilgrimages.
- In 1951 and 1956, the Sacred Congregation of Rites confirmed its sanctity.
- Successive popes, including Paul VI (1967), John Paul II (1979), Benedict XVI (2006), and Pope Francis (2014), visited the site, affirming its importance for Christians around the world.

A Place of Unity

Today, the House of the Virgin Mary is unique as a shrine visited not only by Christians but also by Muslims, who honor Mary (Maryam) as one of the purest women chosen by God. This makes the house a powerful symbol of interfaith respect and harmony.



Virgin Mary in Christianity

The Virgin Mary, known as the Mother of Jesus, occupies a central role in the Christian faith. From the earliest centuries of the Church, she has been honored as a model of humility, obedience, and faith. Her life, as recorded in the Gospels, offers believers an example of complete trust in God.

Mary in the Bible

- The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:26–38).
- At the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11), Mary intercedes with Jesus, leading to His first public miracle, turning water into wine.
- At the foot of the Cross (John 19:25–27), Jesus entrusts Mary to the Apostle John: *“Behold your mother.”* This moment is seen as the beginning of Mary’s spiritual motherhood over all Christians.

Mary in Early Christian Tradition

At the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, Mary was affirmed as **Theotokos** (“God-bearer” or “Mother of God”). This council, held near the very city where the House of the Virgin Mary is located, confirmed her unique role in salvation history.

Church Fathers such as St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, and St. Ambrose spoke of Mary’s holiness and obedience. Devotion to Mary spread throughout the Christian world, inspiring hymns, prayers, and works of art.

Symbol of Faith and Devotion

Mary’s image has inspired some of the greatest works of Christian art — from the mosaics of Byzantium to Renaissance masterpieces by artists such as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Botticelli. She is depicted as mother, intercessor, and queen, always pointing believers toward Christ.

In Christian spirituality, prayers such as the **Hail Mary** and the **Rosary** continue to unite the faithful in devotion. Shrines dedicated to her, including the House of the Virgin Mary near Ephesus, remain places of pilgrimage and prayer for millions.



Virgin Mary in Islam

The Virgin Mary, known as **Maryam** in Arabic, holds an extraordinary position in Islam. She is one of the most honored women in the Qur'an and is regarded as a symbol of purity, obedience, and devotion to God. Her life and example are revered not only by Christians but also by Muslims around the world.

Mary in the Qur'an

Mary is mentioned more times in the Qur'an than in the New Testament. She is the only woman referred to by name and is the subject of an entire chapter: **Surah Maryam (Chapter 19)**.

Key passages include:

- *"O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you. He has chosen you above all women of all nations."* (Qur'an 3:42)
- *"And [mention] when the angels said, 'O Mary, indeed God gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary.'"* (Qur'an 3:45)
- The story of Mary's miraculous conception and the birth of Jesus, described with reverence and awe (Qur'an 19:16–34).

A Symbol of Purity and Faith

In Islam, Mary is considered the most righteous of women, chosen by God for her faith and devotion. She is a model of chastity, humility, and prayer. The Qur'an describes her as constantly engaged in worship, living a life dedicated to God's service.

Shared Honor Across Faiths

The reverence for Mary in Islam creates a unique bridge between Christians and Muslims. While theological interpretations differ, both faiths honor her as the mother of Jesus and as a woman chosen by God for a divine mission.

In many Muslim-majority countries, including Turkey, Mary is deeply respected. Pilgrimages to the House of the Virgin Mary near Ephesus often include not only Christian pilgrims but also Muslim visitors who come to pay their respects and offer prayers.

Ephesus Ancient City

The ancient city of **Ephesus**, located in present-day Turkey near the Aegean coast, was one of the most important cities of the Greco-Roman world. It served as a major center of trade, culture, and religion, leaving behind a remarkable legacy that still fascinates millions of visitors each year.

A Center of the Roman World

Ephesus was founded in the 10th century BC by Greek colonists and later became part of the Roman Empire. During its peak in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, the city had a population of nearly 250,000, making it one of the largest and wealthiest cities of the Roman world. Its strategic location on trade routes made it a hub of commerce and culture.

The Temple of Artemis

Among its most famous landmarks was the **Temple of Artemis**, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This massive temple, dedicated to the goddess Artemis, was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. Although little remains today, its fame contributed to Ephesus's status as a spiritual and cultural capital.

The Library of Celsus

Another iconic structure is the **Library of Celsus**, built in the 2nd century AD. With its magnificent façade and once holding over 12,000 scrolls, it symbolized the city's dedication to knowledge and learning. Today, it stands as one of the best-preserved ruins of the Roman world.

Early Christianity in Ephesus

Ephesus also played a crucial role in the history of Christianity. The Apostle Paul preached here for several years, and the city is mentioned in the New Testament. The **Council of Ephesus (431 AD)**, which declared Mary as Theotokos (Mother of God), was held nearby, forever linking the city with the story of the Virgin Mary.



The Seven Sleepers Legend

Among the many sacred traditions linked to the city of Ephesus, the story of the **Seven Sleepers** is one of the most enduring. Revered in both Christianity and Islam, the tale speaks of faith, divine protection, and the hope of resurrection.

The Christian Tradition

According to Christian legend, during the 3rd century AD, seven young men of Ephesus were persecuted for their faith under the Roman Emperor Decius. To escape persecution, they took refuge in a cave near the city. Falling into a deep sleep, they miraculously awoke centuries later, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II. Their awakening was seen as a sign of the truth of the resurrection and God's power over life and death.

The cave of the Seven Sleepers became a place of veneration for early Christians, drawing pilgrims who sought inspiration from their courage and faith.

The Qur'anic Account

The story also appears in the Qur'an, in **Surah Al-Kahf (Chapter 18)**, where the "Companions of the Cave" (*Ashab al-Kahf*) are described as young believers who sought refuge from a tyrant ruler. God caused them to sleep for many years, preserving their faith and protecting them from harm. Their miraculous awakening is presented as a lesson in God's mercy and power.

Symbol of Shared Faith

The legend of the Seven Sleepers represents a rare example of a story embraced by both Christians and Muslims. In Ephesus, the site traditionally associated with the cave remains a place of reflection, reminding visitors of the resilience of faith in times of trial.



Lighting a Candle

Among the most cherished practices at the House of the Virgin Mary is the simple yet profound act of **lighting a candle**. This tradition, found across many faiths, symbolizes prayer, devotion, and the presence of divine light in the world.

A Symbol of Prayer and Faith

In Christian tradition, lighting a candle represents a prayer lifted to heaven. The flame is a reminder of Christ as the *"Light of the World"* (John 8:12) and of Mary's role in bringing that light into the world through her faith. Each candle is a visible sign of hope, love, and intercession.

For pilgrims, lighting a candle at the shrine is both a personal act of devotion and a way to join countless others in a shared spiritual journey. The glow of hundreds of candles together creates an atmosphere of peace and reverence.

A Universal Gesture

The symbolism of light is not limited to Christianity. In many cultures and religions, lighting a flame is a sacred gesture: a call for guidance, a plea for healing, or an offering of thanksgiving. This universality makes the candle a fitting bridge between different faith traditions at the House of the Virgin Mary.

The Online Experience

In the digital age, the tradition continues online. Visitors to our project can light a virtual candle, leaving their prayers and intentions just as they would at the shrine itself. This online practice makes the sacred experience accessible to all, uniting people across distances and cultures in a shared act of devotion.



The Wishing Wall Tradition

One of the most touching and unique traditions at the House of the Virgin Mary is the **Wishing Wall**. Here, visitors leave handwritten notes expressing their hopes, prayers, and dreams. Over time, this wall has become a powerful symbol of faith, love, and human connection.

Origins of the Tradition

The Wishing Wall emerged as pilgrims began writing their personal prayers and tying them to the walls near the shrine. These small pieces of paper, cloth, or ribbon carry requests for healing, peace, family, and blessings. While the exact origin of the custom is unclear, it reflects a universal human desire to connect with the sacred and to leave behind a tangible expression of one's deepest wishes.

Symbolism of the Wall

The wall is not just a physical structure but a spiritual one. Each note represents a personal story, a cry of the heart, or a whispered prayer. Together, thousands of these notes form a mosaic of humanity's longing for hope and divine guidance. The tradition shows how people from different backgrounds, cultures, and religions can unite in their shared humanity.

The Online Wishing Wall

In today's digital age, the Wishing Wall has found a new form online. Through our project, people around the world can now submit their wishes virtually, continuing this sacred tradition without the need to travel. The online Wishing Wall preserves the same spirit of faith and unity, allowing global participation in what was once a purely local practice.



Prayers Section

Prayer has always been at the heart of the House of the Virgin Mary. Pilgrims come to offer prayers for peace, healing, protection, and thanksgiving. In this section, we present a collection of traditional Christian prayers, universal prayers for humanity, and short invocations that can be offered at the shrine or online.

1. The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

2. Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

3. Glory Be (Doxology)

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

4. Prayer for Peace

Lord of all nations,
grant us peace in our hearts,
peace in our families,
and peace among peoples.
Through the intercession of Mary,
Mother of Peace,
guide us into unity and reconciliation. Amen.

5. Prayer for Healing

Loving God,
we place before You all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.
Through the prayers of the Virgin Mary,
bring comfort, strength, and healing.
Grant health to the sick, hope to the troubled,
and peace to the dying. Amen.

6. Prayer for Families

Holy Mother Mary,
watch over our families.
Protect our children,
guide our parents,
and keep love and faith strong in our homes. Amen.

7. Prayer for Travelers and Pilgrims

O God, who guided Mary and Joseph on their journey,
protect all who travel.
Grant safety to pilgrims visiting holy places,
and guide those who join us in prayer online.
Through Mary's intercession, keep us safe on every road. Amen.

8. Prayer of Thanksgiving

We thank You, Lord,
for the gift of life,
for the love of family and friends,
and for the faith that unites us.
Through Mary, we offer You our gratitude
and ask for continued blessings. Amen.

9. Universal Prayer for Humanity

God of all people,
You created us as one family.
Help us to overcome division and hatred.
May the prayers written on this wall
become seeds of peace, justice, and love
for the whole world. Amen.

10. Prayer for Protection

Virgin Mary,
Mother of Jesus and Mother of us all,
cover us with your mantle of protection.
Guard us from harm,
strengthen us in faith,
and keep us close to your Son. Amen.

11. Prayer for the Sick Child

Mary, gentle mother,
watch over all children who are sick.
Bring them healing,
and give courage to their parents. Amen.

12. Pilgrim's Prayer

Blessed Mother,
we have come to your house in faith.
Hear our prayers,
and carry them before your Son.
May our journey make us stronger in faith and love. Amen.

Pilgrimage and Visitors

For centuries, the House of the Virgin Mary has been a place of pilgrimage, drawing believers from around the world. Pilgrims come seeking healing, peace, and a deeper connection to God. The site is unique because it welcomes both Christians and Muslims, making it a symbol of faith shared across religions.

A Place for All Nations

Each year, thousands of people from every corner of the globe travel to Ephesus to visit the shrine. Some come as part of religious pilgrimages, others as tourists inspired by history, but most leave with a sense of peace and spiritual renewal. The House of the Virgin Mary offers a quiet space of prayer and reflection, set among the beautiful hills of Turkey's Aegean coast.

Papal Visits

The shrine has received worldwide recognition thanks to visits from several popes, each of whom affirmed its spiritual importance:

- **Pope Paul VI (1967):** The first pope to visit the House of the Virgin Mary, blessing the site and encouraging devotion.
- **Pope John Paul II (1979):** Offered prayers at the shrine, calling it a place of interreligious unity.
- **Pope Benedict XVI (2006):** Visited during his trip to Turkey, highlighting Mary as a figure who unites Christians and Muslims.
- **Pope Francis (2014):** Celebrated Mass at the shrine and spoke of Mary's universal role as a mother for all humanity.

These visits strengthened the House of the Virgin Mary as a place of international pilgrimage and dialogue.

Pilgrims Today

Pilgrims often light candles, write prayers on the Wishing Wall, and participate in liturgies held at the chapel. Muslim visitors also come to show respect, often offering silent prayers for health and blessings. This diversity of faith makes the site not only sacred but also a living testimony to peace and coexistence.



Conclusion & Invitation

The House of the Virgin Mary is more than just a historic site. It is a place where faith, history, and human longing come together. For centuries, pilgrims have climbed the slopes of Mount Koressos, lit candles, tied prayers to the Wishing Wall, and found peace in the quiet presence of Mary's house.

Today, the tradition continues not only in Ephesus but also across the world. Through the online project, people can now light a candle, write a prayer, and become part of this sacred story from wherever they are. The House of the Virgin Mary stands as a reminder that faith transcends borders, uniting people of every nation and religion in hope and love.

As you close this book, we invite you to join this living tradition:

- Write your prayer on the Online Wishing Wall.
- Light a virtual candle in honor of your loved ones.
- Share in the spirit of peace and unity that the House of the Virgin Mary represents.

May this journey inspire you, comfort you, and remind you that you are never alone. Just as thousands have done before you, you are now part of a sacred story that continues to bring light to the world.

Connect With Us

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