

# St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City

St. Peter's Basilica is one of the most important churches of Christendom. St. Peter was executed and buried there in 64 AD. His execution was followed by the martyrdom of many Christians, who chose to be buried near the apostle. Some years after his death, a shrine was built over his tomb. After the tyranny of the pagan leaders, Emperor Constantine came to change everything and built the first St. Peter's Basilica.

By the end of the 15th century, the building began to fall into disrepair. A bit later Pope Julius II decided to tear down the original basilica and build a new one in its place. In 1506, the ground was broken and the construction of the greatest church of Christianity began.

### Why it is so important?

Apart from being the burial site of Peter the first pope, St. Peter's Basilica is one of the four papal basilicas (the others being the Lateran Basilica, Basilica of Saint Paul-Outside-the-Walls and Basilica of Saint Mary Major). The church also contains significant relics of many

saints and the remains of many popes and Christian martyrs. It houses several works of art by the masters, like Pieta by Michelangelo and St. Peter's Baldachin by Bernini. It has been the site of many historical events, such as the crowning of the first Holy Roman Emperor.

## FACTS

- ✦ There are no paintings in the basilica, while the pictures may look like paintings they are actually mosaics.
- ✦ The construction took 150 years and it was decorated by many esteemed masters like Michelangelo and Raphael.
- ✦ The basilica has a cruciform shape (which means it is shaped like a cross).
- ✦ Several popes and historical figures are buried in the Vatican Grottoes - an underground level of St. Peter's Basilica.
- ✦ There are 140 statues of saints which stand on the colonnades in the courtyard. Each statue is 3.10 metres tall and they have been standing since 1670.
- ✦ The crucifixion of Peter took place near an ancient Egyptian obelisk. This now stands in St. Peter's Square is revered as a 'witness' to Peter's death ◦



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