

The San Clemente Mosaic



Background

If you ever have occasion to visit the ancient church of San Clemente in Rome, you will be utterly amazed at the symphony of creation and redemption you can almost hear as you stand there in admiration of the magnificent panorama in the dome above you.

This medieval mosaic (created in the 1100s AD) was not painted. It is made up of tens of thousands tiny pieces of colored stones that depict a vast Vine springing from the Tree of Life at the foot of the Cross and filling the entire dome. Below the Tree are four rivers of water that spring forth to water the earth while antlered stags and other animals drink from the streams on either side (Ps 42:1).

What To Look For

Key Figures: Mary and John stand at Calvary in the center of the dome with 12 turtle doves adorning the wood and 12 sheep at the base of the dome, symbolizing the 12 Apostles.

Prophets and Patron Saints: The saints to the top left and right of the dome are St. Lawrence and St. Paul (left) and St. Clement and St. Peter (right) while below them are the Old Testament Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah respectively.

Church on earth: One of the most delightful features of this mosaic are the various representations of the members of the Church of Christ on earth: common workmen carrying out their daily tasks (along the very bottom edges) and clerics, bishops, saints, and doctors of the Church in the row above them.

Creation: A magnificent presentation of Genesis Creation narrative is found at the very top of the dome in several concentric half-circles depicting: chaos, sun, moon, heavens, and earth.

There is absolutely nothing like this radiant mosaic wonder that has been giving glory to God in the Eternal City for nearly a thousand years.

