

The Story of Saint Catherine's Prison

“Near Famagusta is another city called Salamis, set on the seashore, where there was once a noble and wealthy city. It is there that St. Catherine was born and her tomb remains still.” ~ German priest Ludolf von Suchen of Westphalia

In the 12th century, the story of the beloved St. Catherine was brought to Europe by the Crusaders returning from their battles in the East. She was from a noble blood line of Roman emperors and her father was Constantine, King of Salamis. In 290 A.D. Constantine was appointed the new ruler of Egypt. When Constantine left to rule Egypt, he decided to leave his brother in charge of the Salamis kingdom. Unexpectedly, Constantine died in Alexandria, Egypt. During this time, Catherine converted to Christianity and her conversion sent her uncle, the interim king, into a rage. He had Catherine imprisoned in Salamis, later in Paphos, and finally Alexandria, Egypt. She was brought before the new Alexandrian emperor, Emperor Maxentius, who had replaced her deceased father. Emperor Maxentius was persecuting Christians. Catherine reprimanded him for this cruelty and asked him to stop. Insulted and astounded at Catherine's boldness, the Emperor held Catherine prisoner at his palace. He called his scholars in to try to trick her into committing heresy against the Roman religion so she could be put to death. However, she converted many of the Emperor's scholars to Christianity with her eloquence and knowledge of religion and science. The Emperor became so outraged he had his scholars put to death and Catherine was tortured and thrown into the palace's dungeon. The Empress, Maxentius' wife, had heard of this extraordinary young woman. The Empress and the Emperor's military general secretly snuck into the prison to meet and talk with Catherine. They listened to Catherine and were converted and baptized into Christianity. The Emperor discovered their secret encounter and had them, the Empress

and his general, put to death. The Emperor ordered Catherine to be broken on the torturer's wheel, yet when she touched it, it was miraculously destroyed. Distraught and infuriated, Emperor Maxentius ordered Catherine to be beheaded. After her death, her body was carried to Mount Sinai by angels and the place where Catherine's body was found is also believed to be the site of the burning bush seen by Moses. One of the royal tombs in Salamis is known as St. Catherine's Prison. In spite of the many catastrophic earthquakes that destroyed Salamis, St. Catherine's Prison has remained intact throughout the ages.

Story Location Clue: St. Catherine's Prison is located north of Famagusta and just west of the city of Salamis, which is south of the Karpas Peninsula.