

Mission San Gabriel Archangel

On the east side of Los Angeles, you may be able to catch a glimpse of Mission San Gabriel Arcángel. Due to its rich history, this church has been lovingly named the “Godmother of the Pueblo of Los Angeles.” Established as the first mission in Los Angeles in 1771, Mission San Gabriel has provided both Native American and Spanish explorers with agricultural resources, the hope for gold, and all that the Wild West had to offer.

The current site is the fourth location of San Gabriel Arcángel, with its last move happening in 1776. This is where San Gabriel struck gold, literally and figuratively, and became the wealthiest of all the early missions in this area. The Mission Museum built in 1812 of adobe and tiled brick is visible from the train. The original purpose of this building was to provide sleeping quarters for the mission fathers and house books; some dating all the way back to the 16th century.

Inside those beautiful walls can be found a lovely painting with an interesting story behind it. The painting is entitled “Our Lady of Sorrows,” and dates back over 300 years. As legend goes, a major conflict occurred between the Spanish missionaries and the native Shoshone tribe which wanted to drive these strangers away. One of the Padres defending this mission laid the painting on the ground in front of the Shoshone aggressors. The Shoshones are said to have been awed by the beauty of the painting, and immediately made peace with their new Spanish friends,.

Just west of the museum is the mission’s „campo santo,” or cemetery. In the cemetery you can find many tombstones with rich history. For example, that of José de los Santos, the very last Native American to be buried on these grounds, who passed away in 1921 when he was 101 years old. In close proximity to the cemetery is Mission San Gabriel Arcángel’s baptism pool. There have been well over 25,000 baptisms in just the 63 years between 1771 and 1834. It was considered the most prolific site for baptism in the mission chain. Baptisms are still performed here today. This brief glimpse of Mission San Gabriel Arcángel provides a peek into the rich history of California missions – a vital part of California’s development.

Source(s):

Hoffman, Eva J. "A Guidebook to Amtrak's Sunset Limited." Flashing Yellow Guidebooks, Golden, CO, 2009.

Author(s):

Written by Meredith Reigle (Undergraduate Student) and edited by Susan G. Scott (Lecturer) in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2009.