

San Juan Capistrano



Seventh Mission

Founded: November 1, 1776 by Father Junipero Serra

Named for: Saint John of Capistrano, Italy

Location: in the community of San Juan Capistrano on Interstate 5 just off U.S. Highway 101

Called the "Jewel of the Missions" Mission San Juan Capistrano is probably the best known of all the California missions. Famous for its beautiful gardens, it is the spring home for thousands of swallows that annually migrate some 2,000 miles from their winter homes in Central America. Their arrival in San Juan Capistrano is celebrated on March 19th, Saint Joseph's Day, with the ringing of the mission bells.

Originally founded by Fr. Lasuen on October 30, 1775, the site was abandoned after eight days when they received word of an attack at the San Diego Mission. They quickly buried the bells for safe keeping and fled to the Presidio (fort) in San Diego for shelter.

When Fr. Serra returned a year later he found that the cross erected earlier by Fr. Lasuen was still in place and the bells remained safe in their hiding place in the ground.

Within the first year a little chapel that is still in use today was completed. It is believed to be the oldest church in California, and since it is one of only two still standing where Fr. Serra is known to have said Mass it is called "Father Serra's Church".

In 1796 work was begun on a large stone church that was to be the most magnificent of all the California mission churches. Under the guidance of an expert stonemason from Mexico the natives transported the stones from a quarry six miles away. Nine years later the church was completed. The Great Stone church was built in the shape of a cross, 180 feet long and 40 feet wide. Above the front entrance is a 120 foot tall belltower that could be seen for miles.

Tragically, this magnificent church only stood for six years. The devastating earthquake of 1812 destroyed this pride of the California missions. Even more tragically, 40 bodies were dug out of the rubble, as the quake struck during a Mass. No plans were ever made to rebuild the Great Stone Church.

When an attempt at restoration was made in 1860, so little was known about this painstaking process that they actually destroyed more than they restored. Later, in the 1890s, restoration attempts were successful in saving Father Serra's Church from disintegrating. The most recent and thorough restoration began in 1987 after the Whittier earthquake.

Who was this Mission named after? _____

What is this Mission sometimes called? _____

Why was the Mission abandoned after just 8 days? _____

Describe the building of the Mission. _____

What destroyed this Mission? _____
