

National Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom, Vallarpadam, India

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The National Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Vallarpadam is one of the famous Marian shrines in India. Vallarpadam Basilica, as it is also known, is also referred to as 'Lourdes of Kerala'.

History: Towards the end of the 15th century, Portuguese missionaries reconstructed a damaged church at Vallarpadam. This was the first church in Asia to be dedicated to the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost of 1524, the Portuguese missionaries dedicated an altar to Our Lady of Ransom, venerating it with the portrait of Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, which they had brought from Portugal. Many people experienced miraculous healings, others a strong sense of protection after praying at this altar.

In 1676, a huge flood devastated the church, carrying away the portrait of Our Lady along with it. Despite the efforts of many, it could not be retrieved. However, the Diwan (senior-most minister) of the King of Cochin succeeded in recovering it. To his surprise, the portrait was completely dry! His piety increased on coming to know the miracles associated with it. Without delay, he donated land to build a new church to enshrine this portrait. He also donated the Sanctuary Lamp to the new church, which has been burning ever since!

On 23 May 1752, a Hindu lady, Meenakshi-Amma and her son, residents of Vallarpadam were travelling by water. When the boat reached deep waters, a storm blew up and capsized it, throwing both mother and son into the raging waters. Realising the inevitable danger, Meenakshi-Amma called out to Our Lady of Vallarpadam to save their lives. She pledged to serve Our Lady, for the rest of her life as an *adima* (slave). Meanwhile, Vicar of the church, Rev. Fr. Miguel Correa had visions in his dreams of Our Lady on two consecutive nights, showing him Meenakshi-Amma and her son. Unable to

ignore this prompting, he initiated a search on the third day - and the mother and son were rescued! Faithful to her promise they lived the rest of their life at the church-yard, praising God who has done marvellous things for them. In order to commemorate this miracle, Church authorities approved the inclusion of Meenakshi-Amma and her son into the Portuguese portrait.

On 1 December 2004, Pope John Paul II granted the title of Minor Basilica to the church ◊

