



## Adeeb Joudeh **AL-HUSSEINI**

As a Muslim and the current custodian of the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, Adeeb Joudeh Al-Husseini considers the church his second home. He cherishes many pleasant childhood memories of experiences in this shrine as he was escorted by his father. Here, he also learned the true meaning of Muslim-Christian coexistence, which is deeply rooted in Palestinian history and culture.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built in 333 AD by the Roman Emperor Constantine, seven years after his mother, Queen Helena, had marked the location of Golgotha during a visit to the Holy Land. The church is considered the oldest and holiest in Christianity. Tradition also has it that it was built on the rock where Jesus was crucified.

Even though he spent years struggling and fighting with the Crusaders, Muslim leader Saladin Al-Ayoubi believed in Christian-Muslim coexistence. He did not wish to make the Holy Land off-limits to Christian pilgrims, and in a display of tolerance he offered free passage to all genuine pilgrims. The wise leader also sought to follow the steps of Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab in granting Christians protection for their churches so that they could live in peace. He ordered that the keys to the church be retained by the Joudeh Al-Husseini Al-Ghodayya family, the descendants of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). At the time, this family was part of the Holy Land nobility, and its members commanded top positions in the city and its shrines, mainly Al-Aqsa Mosque. The idea behind handing the keys to Joudeh Al-Husseini was to protect the church from harm by reminding any successor who might think of destroying the church of the fact that the nobles of Jerusalem, highly influential Muslims, hold its keys.

Adeeb Joudeh Al-Husseini, the current custodian, is assiduous in opening the church daily at 4 a.m. and closing it at 8 p.m. In addition to being the custodian of the keys to this holy shrine, Adeeb Joudeh Al-Husseini is also the Seal Holder of the Holy Tomb. The family puts its seal on the Holy Wax before the Holy Fire emerges on Holy Saturday, which marks the beginning of the celebration of Easter. There are 165 Royal Decrees currently in the custody of the Joudeh Al-Husseini family, and they act as proof that the custody of the keys has been in this family for more than 800 years.

