

St. Paul's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land and St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai



The Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Resurrection

May 17-30, 2011



A PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND AND ST. CATHERINE'S MONASTERY AT MT. SINAI

A Prayer for Pilgrims

Lord Jesus, You traveled with Your two disciples to Emmaus after the Resurrection and set their hearts on fire with Your grace. I beg You: travel also with me and gladden my heart with Your Presence. I know, Lord, that I am a pilgrim upon this earth, seeking my true citizenship in heaven. During my pilgrimage, surround me with Your holy angels to guide me and keep me safe from seen and unseen dangers. Grant that I may carry out my plans for this journey and fulfill my expectations according to Your will. Illumine my mind with the incomprehensible light of Your Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. Help me to see the beauty of all things and to comprehend the wonder of Your truth in everything You have created.

For You are the way, the truth and the life, and to You do I give thanks, praise and glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. AMEN.

Why make a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land?

For the Christian, Jerusalem – the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ – will always be the center of the world. In the course of 20 centuries, millions of Christians have made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with their goal being Jerusalem as the most important place to journey to and pray at its holy sites – and with Bethlehem a close second. The places associated with the life of Christ were revered by Christians already in the New Testament. In the Second Letter of Peter, the mountain where the Transfiguration of Christ took place – Mt. Tabor – is already called “the holy mountain” (1:18) because the Lord Jesus sanctified it by his Presence and the revelation of his glory.

For reasons that perhaps none of us can fathom, God chose *this* land to make Himself known to us, beginning with Abraham and ending with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the apostles. A visit to the Holy Land is to experience the geography of God’s revelation of Himself to the human race. The places which the New Testament refers to are still there; a great number of them can be positively identified and many of them are incorporated into places of worship. When we see the remains of the places where Jesus was born, proclaimed the Gospel, worked miracles, died and rose from the dead, we will be able to sense the importance of this sacred geography. In fact, so significant is this geography for the understanding of the Scriptures that a Roman Catholic Benedictine scholar and archaeologist, Father Bargil Pixner, calls the Holy Land itself a kind of “5th Gospel” that helps make the other four Gospels come alive.

Making a pilgrimage is **not** tourism. What kind of journey makes you a pilgrim and not just a tourist? Jim Forest, in his book *The Pilgrimage of Illness*, captures the difference between pilgrimage and tourism in this short anecdote about his wife's experience in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher: During one of their frequent visits to Jerusalem, "while standing in line to enter the tomb where Christ's body was laid after his crucifixion and in which he rose from the dead, Nancy found herself standing behind a married couple. Behind her was a group of Greek women in black, each woman holding as many candles as her hands could grasp. The man and the woman in front of her were trying to decide where they were: 'Is this where he was born?' the wife asked. 'No,' her husband answered, 'that was yesterday – Bethlehem.' They were inside the small tomb, took photos and left, still unclear as to where they had been. All the while, the Greek women were quietly weeping. When it was their turn, one by one, they knelt by the stone slab that for them marked the center of the cosmos, the exact spot where Christ, God incarnate, had risen from death. They lit their candles and then, leaving the tomb, blew them out. Now they had a precious gift for relatives and friends back home: candles that had been burned in the place of the resurrection. 'Today I stood on the borderline between tourism and pilgrimage,' Nancy told me that evening."

Pilgrimage always connects you to something larger than yourself. Pilgrimage connects you to those longings for God that come from the deepest places in the human heart. Fourth century Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem, as well as those of subsequent centuries, wanted to touch and kiss the stones that had once made contact with the Lord Jesus; it rooted their faith in history and put flesh and bone, blood and stone, to their faith. *This really happened*. This isn't a myth, a fairy tale about some never-never land. St. Gregory of Nyssa (338-395AD), the early Christian mystic and younger brother of St. Basil the Great, who made a pilgrimage in 380AD, wrote that the holy places of Jerusalem had "received the footprints of Life itself." God has left a trace of Himself in Palestine just as perfume lingers in a room after the wearer has left.

Later Celtic Christians in Ireland would speak of "thin places" – places where the world seems charged with God's Presence. Jim Forest writes: "It may be a spot known for a celebrated encounter with God, a place remembered for a key event in the life of Jesus, or a place linked with a great saint. What marks any thin place is the time-stopping awareness of God's Presence. While awareness of the Divine Presence – in reality, everywhere – is forced upon no one, in a thin place an awareness of the Holy often touches even the most skeptical and faith-resistant person. The walls of ancient churches seem to have been sponge-like in absorbing the prayers and tears of all who have come there. All that makes life opaque has slowly been worn away by so many pilgrims bringing their suffering, their longing, their prayers, their grief, their gratitude and their joy." We are going to the Holy Land to experience those churches and places so drenched by prayer and tears of suffering, grief, gratitude and joy.

The difference between a pilgrim and a tourist is a sense of reverence, that "fear of the Lord" that "is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10) and comes from the fact that our "principle motive" in making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land is to

deepen our sense of God's Presence in our lives, "to see and touch the places where the Word of God was en-fleshed," as St. Paulinus of Nola (363-431AD) once wrote, in order to bring that sense of his Presence home with us and live more faithfully as a result.

TUESDAY, MAY 17th – *Departure from LAX*

Most of us met at St. Paul's at 6:30AM in order to take a small bus to LAX together. We were scheduled to depart Los Angeles (LAX) at 10:25AM on Continental flight #16 but ended up leaving a little late, closer to 11AM and arriving in Newark at 7:30PM instead of the originally scheduled 6:50PM. Our departure from Newark at 10:50PM on Continental flight #90 was delayed by about 45 minutes; and so we arrived in Tel Aviv at about 5:30PM the next day, on Wednesday, May 18th.

ISRAEL

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18th, Day 1

We arrived at the Ben Gurion International Airport at about 5:30PM and were met by our guide and taken to the Hotel Metropolitan in the center of Tel Aviv. For those who were interested after such a long trip, the Hotel Metropolitan is within walking distance of the beach. We spent the night in Tel Aviv.



Tel Aviv, as a city, is only a little more than a century old and is the commercial – and some would say cultural – capital of Israel. A city with beautiful Mediterranean beaches, Tel Aviv itself has a population of roughly 480,000 – although the larger metropolitan area is home to some two and a half million residents and is the largest city in the modern state of Israel. It was named Tel Aviv by its early

residents in 1909, a name that combines something old with something new: *Tel* means an archaeological mound while *Aviv* is the Hebrew word for spring. It was in Tel Aviv that David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), the first prime minister of the modern state of Israel, proclaimed its independence. Today, Israel's largest, busiest and only international airport, just outside Tel Aviv, bears his name. Tel Aviv is only 37 miles north of Jerusalem but the contrast between the two cities couldn't be greater. If Jerusalem is ancient, holy and sacred, Tel Aviv is modern, chic and secular. Near Tel Aviv is the ancient port of Jaffa (also called Joppa in the New Testament), one of the oldest – if not **the** oldest - ports in the world. After Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, Jaffa was incorporated into the larger city of Tel Aviv and the city's official name became Tel Aviv-Jafo. In 2003, Tel Aviv-Jafo was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

THURSDAY, MAY 19th, Day 2

Today we visited the port and city of Old Jaffa, including the Russian Orthodox Convent of St. Peter, built over the family tomb of St. Tabitha whom he raised from the dead, took a short city-tour of Tel Aviv, and then drove to see the ruins of the old Byzantine Church at Emmaus (Latrun). We spent the night in Tel Aviv.

The Bible says that Jaffa was one of the cities given to the Hebrew tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:46) and that the "cedars of Lebanon" used for the construction of the First Temple by King Solomon, passed through Jaffa on their way to Jerusalem nearly 3,000 years ago (2 Chronicles 2:15). It was from Jaffa that the prophet Jonah set sail for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3) before being thrown overboard by his shipmates and swallowed up by the great sea beast. Did you know that we read the entire Old Testament Book of Jonah at the Liturgy on Great and Holy Saturday morning because the Lord Jesus spoke of the story of Jonah as a prophecy of his resurrection from the dead (Matthew 12:38-41)?

In the New Testament, it was in Jaffa/Joppa that St. Peter the Apostle raised Tabitha from the dead while staying at the house of Simon the Tanner (Acts 9:36-42); and later it was here that St. Peter had a vision in which God told him that in his preaching of the Gospel he was not to distinguish unclean from clean, Jews from Gentiles and that God "shows no favoritism, but accepts from every nation those who fear Him and does what is right" (Acts 10:10-16). We visited the Roman Catholic Church of St. Peter the Apostle that was built to commemorate this vision and Father Lionel, one of the Franciscan monks there, took us to see the "Crusader Chapel" on the monastery grounds, parts of which date back nearly 800 years. Finally, it was the apostle Peter, traveling from Jaffa/Joppa, who first shared the Gospel with Gentiles in Caesarea Maritima, in the home of Cornelius the centurion. Today, Caesarea Maritima is an archaeological site that is part of the national parks system of the state of Israel that we visited on Friday.

Reading the Bible:

Matthew 12:38-41 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Sign of Jonah

³⁸ Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹ He answered, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here."

Acts 9:36-42 (New International Version, ©2011)

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. ⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter

she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

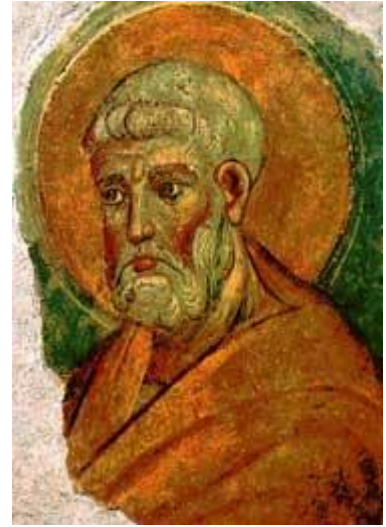


Acts 10:10-41 (New International Version, ©2011)

¹⁰ Peter became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." ¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has

made clean.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” ²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?” ²² The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.



Peter at the house of Cornelius the Centurion in Caesarea Maritima

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.” ²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” ³⁰ Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and

caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”

Emmaus

The town of Emmaus Nikopolis (City of Victory) was the later Roman name for a city associated with the Emmaus of the New Testament, where the Risen Jesus appeared to two of the disciples after his crucifixion (Luke 24:13-32). The name



Emmaus is probably derived from the Hebrew word “hammat,” which means “hot springs.” Emmaus is first mentioned in the Bible when the Jewish leader of the revolt against the Syrians and their Seleucid rulers, Judas Maccabeus (“maccabeus” is a title that means “the hammer”), defeated the army of Nicanor and Gorgias that was camped there *circa* 165BC (1 Maccabees 3:40).

According to Eusebius, the fourth century bishop of Caesarea Maritima, a historian and friend of the Emperor Constantine, the title Nikopolis was added to the name of Emmaus during the first quarter of the 3rd century AD; and it continued to bear this title until the conquest of Palestine by the forces of the Muslim

Rashidun Caliphate in 639AD. Like all of Palestine, Emmaus would later pass through the hands of the Crusaders (it was the last station of the Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem in June, 1099), the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain (during the period of the British Mandate, from 1923 until 1948) and Jordan before becoming part of the modern state of Israel.

Emmaus was important enough as a Christian center to have its own bishop and four bishops are known from the 4th through the 6th centuries and eleven Latin (Roman Catholic) Crusader bishops are known from the 11th century.

Among the ruins that are found at Emmaus is a 5th-7th century Greek Orthodox Church that was later restored by the Crusaders during the 12th century and includes a cross-shaped adult baptistery first discovered in 1884 (right).



Although it had become a major city in ancient times because of its association with the Risen Jesus, in the modern age, the site was associated with the small Palestinian Arab village of Imwas, which was located at the Latrun junction overlooking the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. In 1961, the village had only 1,995 inhabitants, virtually all of whom were Muslim. The village of Imwas was depopulated and then razed to the ground in 1967 because of

its strategic location following the Six Day Arab/Israeli War. The site today is located in modern day Israel inside Canada Park.

Reading the Bible

Luke 24:13-32 (New International Version, ©2011)

On the Road to Emmaus

¹³ Now that same day, two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"



FRIDAY, MAY 20th, Day 3

Today we visited Caesarea Maritima, an archaeological site and part of the national parks system of modern Israel, where St. Peter began spreading the Christian faith to the Gentiles as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (*read the excerpt above*). We saw the ruins of the seaside palace of Herod, the theatre and hippodrome, as well as the Pontius Pilate Inscription. We also visited Tel Megiddo, more famously known as Armageddon. We spent the night in Tiberias at the Rimonim Mineral Hotel overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

Caesarea Maritima



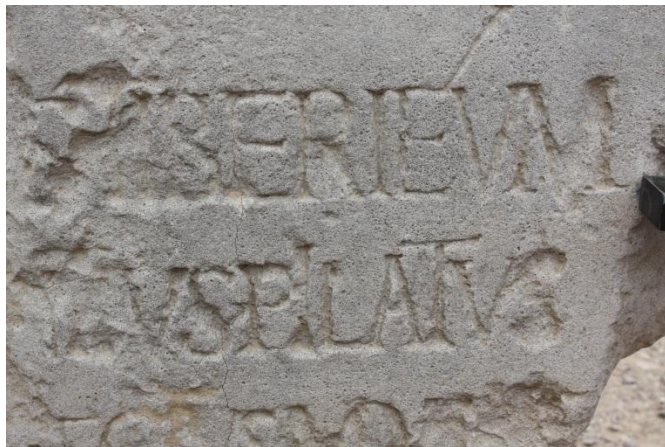
Standing in the ruins of Herod's palace

Caesarea Maritima was a city and harbor built by King Herod the Great (74-4BC) over a period of 12 years, from roughly 25BC to 13BC and became the ancient Roman capital of the province of Palestine. Caesarea "by the Sea" was built over some 164 acres and included palaces, temples, a theatre, a marketplace and even a hippodrome for chariot races. Named for Herod's patron, the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus, who ruled the empire from 27BC until his death in 14AD, the city rapidly grew to a population estimated by some scholars to be 100,000 – larger

than that of Jerusalem at the time. Until the construction of Caesarea Maritima, the entire coastline of Israel had only one natural harbor—at Haifa—but Herod did not let nature stop him from building what the ancient Jewish historian Josephus (37-100AD) describes as an even larger harbor than that of Athens at Piraeus. The harbor Herod built at Caesarea Maritima was the first artificial harbor in the world.

In addition to the Apostle Peter, the Book of Acts records that Caesarea Maritima was also visited by St. Paul: when his life was in danger as a result of his preaching Christ in Jerusalem, to which he had returned following his conversion, some of “the brethren brought him down to Caesarea,” and from there “sent him out to Tarsus,” his native city (Acts 9:26-30). During his missionary journeys St. Paul embarked and disembarked here a number of times and at the conclusion of his third and last missionary journey, he stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:7-8), one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:5). After St. Paul returned to Jerusalem and was arrested for causing a small riot by preaching Christ in the Temple precincts, he was – as a Roman citizen – sent to the capital of the province, and spent two years (probably 58-60AD) as a prisoner in Caesarea Maritima (Acts 22:1-26:32) before being shipped on to Rome for trial where he would ultimately be martyred for the faith there during the first “official” persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire during the reign of the emperor Nero *circa* 64AD.

The Pontius Pilate Inscription



As the capitol of the province of Palestine, the Roman *procurator* had his *praetorium* (headquarters) in Caesarea from 6AD until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, precisely that period of time that embraces the life of Christ and the earliest Church. It was from Caesarea Maritime that Pontius Pilate, the Roman *prefect*, and the military forces under his command, moved to Jerusalem as a show of force to keep the peace during the great Jewish

festivals like Passover and there encountered Christ. Pontius Pilate, one of the most infamous men in history, is a household name some 2000 years later because of this encounter with Christ and his role in the events of Good Friday (Luke 23:1-25; Mark 15:1-15; John 18:28-19:16; Matthew 27:1-26). The first archaeological artifact relating to Pontius Pilate was discovered in 1961 when a block of stone, now called the Pilate Stone, was found in Herod’s theatre at Caesarea Maritima bearing a damaged dedication to the Roman Emperor Tiberius. The inscription reads: “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius.” The Pilate Stone confirms that Pilate was indeed the *prefect* of Judea and is currently housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. A replica of the stone may still be seen at Caesarea Maritima near the ruins of Herod’s Palace.

Reading the Bible

Mark 15:1-15 (New International Version, ©2011)

Jesus Before Pilate

¹ Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. ² "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied. ³ The chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." ⁵ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. ⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. ¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. ¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted. ¹⁴ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" ¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Armageddon

Tel Megiddo is a hill in modern Israel near the kibbutz of Meggido. This area is perhaps more famously known by its Greek name, Armageddon, a word used only once in the entire New Testament, in the Book of Revelation (16:16). Among some modern American Protestant fundamentalist groups, it is said that Christ will return to earth and defeat the Antichrist, who is Satan personified, in "the battle of Armageddon." This completely erroneous understanding of the Bible has been popularized in the United States over the last two decades by the *Left Behind* series of 16 novels written by the Rev. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins from 1995 through 2007 that have sold over 65 million copies and produced a string of relatively unsuccessful movies.

Mount Megiddo is a Tel or hill made up of 26 layers of the ruins of ancient forts and cities built on this site dating back as far as 7,000BC because of its strategic location overlooking the Valley of Jezreel from the west and, in ancient times, it guarded the main road that connected ancient Egypt with Mesopotamia. The last settlement was destroyed in 586BC by the Babylonians who conquered Palestine and destroyed Jerusalem and the First Temple that had been built by King Solomon some 400 years before, *circa* 956BC. Uninhabited since the Babylonian conquest of Israel more than 2500 years ago, it has preserved the ruins of all the towns and cities pre-dating 586BC without newer settlements disturbing them. Because of the

archaeological importance of the area it has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Megiddo is mentioned twelve times in the Old Testament: Joshua 12:21 and 17:11; Judges 1:27 and 5:19; 1 Kings 4:12 and 9:15; 2 Kings 9:27 and 23:29-30; 1 Chronicles 7:29; 2 Chronicles 35:22; and Zechariah 12:11. Ten of these references refer to the ancient city of Megiddo and two references, "the plain of Megiddo."

Megiddo has been the site of battles in the past, the two most famous ones being the Battle of Megiddo is 1457BC between the forces of the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III and the Canaanite king of Kadesh, as recorded in hieroglyphic writings on the Hall of Annals in the Temple of Amon-Re at Luxor in Egypt; and in 609BC, when the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II wanted to halt the advance of the Babylonian forces of Nebuchanezzar II. This required Egyptian forces to pass through the Kingdom of Judah and when King Josiah refused to give his permission, Necho II and his army defeated the forces of King Josiah, who was killed in the battle by an Egyptian archer (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-35).

The one reference to "Armageddon" in the New Testament is found in the Book of Revelation 16:16 and simply says: "Then the spirits brought the kings together in the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." In the symbolism of the Book of Revelation, this is the place where the forces of evil will assemble for a final battle and the judgment of the world.

SATURDAY, May 21st, Day 4

This morning we left Tel Aviv, traveling to Galilee, and explored Nazareth, the town in which the Lord Jesus grew up. We visited Mary's Well and the Greek Orthodox Church of the Archangel Gabriel, as well as the Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation, the largest Roman Catholic Church in the Middle East and the site of an important ecumenical meeting between Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964, the first such meeting between a pope and a patriarch in more than 500 years. We visited Cana, the site of the Lord Jesus' first miracle or "sign" of changing water into wine. In the afternoon, we visited the Mount of the Beatitudes that overlooks the Sea of Galilee and is the site of the Lord Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We also visited the Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles, situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum. We spent the night in Tiberias at the Rimonim Mineral Hotel.

Galilee

In the first century AD, Palestine was divided into three provinces – Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Galilee was the northernmost region of Palestine at the time of Christ. The name Galilee comes from the Hebrew *galil*, which means region or district. The Lord Jesus grew up in Nazareth before moving to Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee for his public ministry of preaching, healing and teaching. The prophet Isaiah referred to it as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1) and the Jews who lived there had a reputation for faithlessness to the covenant with Israel because of the area's association with Hellenistic and Roman culture and Roman

and Greek cities like Tiberias and Sepphoris. Josephus (37-100AD), the Jewish historian who became the governor of the region for Rome in 66AD, records that there were 204 villages and towns in Galilee; he also comments on the richness of the soil and that most people lived in villages and worked the land. It is clear that many of Christ's parables, like the parables of the sower (Mark 4:1-20; Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 8:1-15) and the tenant farmers (Mark 12:1-12; Matthew 21:28-46; Luke 20:9-19), are set in this rural environment and were easily understood by the people who gathered to hear His teaching.

The Sea of Galilee



Fishing on the Sea of Galilee was a vital source of employment for many; the first disciples – Peter, James and John – were fishermen before meeting the Lord Jesus. The Sea of Galilee is about 11 miles long at its longest point, 7 miles wide at its widest and about 32 miles in circumference. This body of water is also called the Sea or Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), taken from the Hebrew word for “harp,” because it was felt to be shaped like a harp. It was also called the Sea of Tiberias (John

6:1; 21:1), named for the Roman Emperor Tiberias (42BC-37AD), who ruled the Empire during the public ministry of Jesus. Josephus wrote that it “is filled with sweet water and many kinds of fish.” It was along the shores of the Sea of Galilee that the Lord Jesus called a handful of fishermen to be His first disciples (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11); it was the Sea of Galilee whose waves He calmed (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:34-51; Luke 8:22-25) and it was upon the waters of the Sea of Galilee that He walked (Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21).

Nazareth

About 16 miles from the Sea of Galilee is the town where the Lord Jesus spent his childhood: Nazareth, the town of St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. At the time of Christ, Nazareth was a small and unimportant village with only about 500 inhabitants who were engaged primarily in agriculture and would have been quite poor. Nazareth is the site of the Archangel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin Mary that she had “found favor with God and will conceive and bear in her womb a son; and he will be named Jesus and be called the Son of the Most High God. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child that will be born of you will be holy and be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:26-38). This event, so central to the Christian faith and the history of

the world, occurred in this tiny and insignificant 1st century Jewish village and is celebrated as one of the 12 great feasts in the life of the Church each year on March 25th.

Today the population of Nazareth is almost exclusively Palestinian and it is the largest Arab city within Israel. It is even called "the Arab capital of Israel." Although Nazareth was primarily Christian in the 1950's, all of that has now changed as demographics in Israel continue to shift, increasingly making Christians a minority. Of the approximately 70,000 people living in Nazareth today, some 70% are Muslims and only 30% are Palestinian Christians of various kinds: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Maronite and Melkite Eastern Catholics, with tiny groups of Protestants added to the mix.

The Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation, consecrated in 1969, is the largest Christian church in the Middle East and was built over the remains of an ancient Byzantine church from the 4th century and a Crusader church from the early 12th century. It enshrines a small ancient cave dwelling or grotto, identified as the home of the Virgin Mary. Roman Catholics think this is the site of the Annunciation. The much smaller Greek Orthodox Church of the Archangel Gabriel is built over some springs near a site called Mary's Well. Based on an additional piece of information from the 2nd century document known as the *Proto-evangelium of James* that Mary was getting water when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her, Orthodox Christians think that this is the site of the Annunciation. A 3rd century Byzantine church was built on this spot that was destroyed in the mid-7th century during the Muslim conquest of Palestine. It was rebuilt by the Crusaders in the 12th century, but destroyed again by the Muslims after the defeat of the Crusaders in 1263AD. The current church dates from 1767 and was built atop the ruins of the Crusader church. The Crusader's stones around the spring, located in the crypt of the church, have been left intact.

Cana in Galilee



The Gospel of John tells us that the first of Christ's miracles or, more accurately, His signs, was done at a wedding that took place in Cana (John 2:1-12), a passage of Scripture that is read at every Orthodox Christian wedding service. Today Cana is a town with a population of about 17,500 residents, mostly Muslim, located about 5 miles northeast of Nazareth, and its modern name in Arabic is *Kafr Kanna*. It is also in Cana that the Lord Jesus was asked to heal the son of a royal official (John 4:46-54); and it is recorded that Nathaniel, one of the 12 Apostles, was from Cana (John 21:2). A church was built here by St. Helen, the mother of Constantine, in the 4th

century. In addition to the Franciscan Wedding Church that was consecrated in 1883, there is also a smaller Greek Orthodox Church dedicated to St. George that was built in 1886. Both churches contain large stone jars used to collect water that are similar to those that would have been used at the time of Christ.

During our visit to the St. George Church, Father Steve prayed over the four couples who came on the pilgrimage, blessing their marriages, each couple drinking from a shared cup of wine in remembrance of Christ's first miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana He attended nearly 2,000 years ago.

Reading the Bible

John 2: 1-12 (New International Version, ©2011)

Jesus Changes Water into Wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee

¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants: "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

The Mount of the Beatitudes – the Setting for the Sermon on the Mount

In his book, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*, Jim Forest writes: "In English the first verses of the Sermon on the Mount are called "the Beatitudes." The traditional phrase in Russian is "the Commandments of Blessedness." We have to ask ourselves, before going any further, what words like "blessed" and "beatitude" mean. Beatitude comes from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning happy, fortunate or blissful. While most English Bibles use "blessed," some modern translations prefer "happy": "How happy are the poor of spirit..." reads one translation. But Rabbi Steven Schwarzschild once told me: "'Happy' isn't good enough. The biblical translator who uses such a word should change jobs, maybe write TV comedies with nice, happy endings. The problem is that, if you decide you don't like 'blessed,' there isn't a single word in English which can take its place. You might use a phrase like 'on the right track' or 'going in the right direction.' Sin means being off the

track, missing the target. Being 'blessed' means you aren't lost — you're on the path the Creator intends you to be on. But what you recognize as a blessing may look like an affliction to an outsider. Exchanging 'blessed' for 'happy' trivializes the biblical word. You might as well sum up the Bible with a slogan like, 'Have a nice day.'" Therefore, "happy" in some respects makes for an unhappy translation. Its root is *hap*, the Middle English word for "luck."

But what about the word "blessed"? This was the word chosen by the translators of the King James Bible in the seventeenth century. "Blessed" meant someone or something consecrated to or belonging to God. All four of the Gospels were first written in Greek. It is the Greek word *makarios* which is used throughout the Beatitudes. In Christian use, *makarios* came increasingly to mean sharing in the life of God, the ultimate joy, a happiness without the fault lines of happenstance running through it. There is no higher gift. We are not simply capable of an abstract awareness that God exists or of studying God as an astronomer might study the night sky, all the while knowing the stars are unbridgeable distances away, that their light may be centuries old by the time it reaches our eyes and that the objects which produced the light may no longer exist. The blessing extended to us is participation in the communion of the Holy Trinity, sharing in God's immortality, and being blessed with qualities which seem humanly impossible."



*The Roman Catholic Church on the Mount of the Beatitudes,
the site of the Sermon on the Mount, built in 1939 by the Franciscan Sisters*

Reading the Scriptures

Matthew 5: 1-12 (New International Version, ©2011)

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount: the Beatitudes

¹ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."



The Church of the Holy Apostles on the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum

SUNDAY, May 22nd, Day 5

Today was another full day: this morning we celebrated Liturgy in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity at the Orthodox monastery atop Mt. Tabor, the site of the Transfiguration of Christ, with Father Steve serving the Liturgy and Father Michael chanting. Afterwards, we visited the archaeological site at Capernaum seeing the Apostle Peter's house and the very visible remains of the 4th century "white" synagogue built over the 1st century synagogue in which Christ preached, taught and healed. We took a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, as did the Lord Jesus and his disciples nearly 2,000 years ago. And finally, we went to the Jordan River at Yardenit, where those who wished had the opportunity of renewing their baptismal vows to Christ in the waters of the Jordan River, the river in which Christ was baptized by St. John the Baptist before the beginning of his public ministry. We again spent the night in Tiberias at the Rimonim Mineral Hotel.

Mount Tabor, the site of the Transfiguration of Christ



Approaching Mount Tabor

Orthodox Christians celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mt. Tabor on August 6th every year and it is considered one of the 12 great festivals of the Church's worship. The first Christian Church built on Mt. Tabor was erected in the middle of the 4th century to mark the place where Christ was revealed as the incarnate glory of God to his disciples Peter, James and John. Two more churches were added during the 5th century so that by the 6th century, three churches stood at the top of the mountain, corresponding to the three tents that the apostle Peter had proposed to construct. Monasteries were also established to maintain the site and be of service to the Christian pilgrims who visited. However, after the Crusaders had been driven from the Holy Land in the 13th century, the Muslim Sultan of Damascus, Malik el-Adil (1145-1218AD), ordered all of the Christian buildings atop Mt. Tabor to be demolished. It was only in the mid-19th century, after 600 years, that Christians were once again allowed to return to Mt. Tabor.

Today, on the southern part of the mountaintop, is the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration built in 1911 that is part of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of the Prophet Elijah that was built in 1862. On the northern section stands a Roman Catholic Franciscan Monastery and Church of the Transfiguration built in 1924 but which reflects the architectural plan of the earlier 12th century Crusader and 7th century Byzantine churches.

Reading the Bible

Matthew 17:1-9 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Transfiguration of Christ on Mt. Tabor

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three tents—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Capernaum

Capernaum, which means "the town of Nahum," was the fishing village some 680 feet below sea level where the Lord Jesus is said to have preached more sermons and performed more miracles than any other place. Established in the 2nd century BC, at the time of Christ scholars estimate it had a population of perhaps 1500 residents that included a detachment of Roman soldiers under the command of a centurion (Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13). Capernaum is where the Lord Jesus first began to preach after being tempted by Satan in the desert (Matthew 1:12-17); where he called Levi (or Matthew the evangelist) from His tax-collector's booth (Mark 2:13-17; Matthew 9:9); where He healed a centurion's servant without even seeing him (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), cured Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-30); healed the paralytic who was lowered through the roof (Mark 2:1-12); and many others who were brought to Him (Matthew 8:16-17). And it was Capernaum that Jesus had set out from when He calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:23-27).

However, the Lord Jesus was harsh with His adopted home when it proved to be unrepentant despite His preaching and many miracles there. "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the heavens? No, you will go down to the depths of Hades. If

the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that on the Day of Judgment, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you" (Matthew 11:23-24).

Following the Muslim conquest of Palestine in the middle of the 7th century, Capernaum seems to drop off the map. A once prosperous Roman town and a site of pilgrimage, a 13th century pilgrim visiting the area recorded that "the once renowned town of Capernaum is at present just despicable; it numbers only seven houses of poor fishermen." Today, there is no town: only a Franciscan monastery and the nearby Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles built in 1934, noted for its red domes.

Archaeological work at Capernaum came under the control of the Franciscans at the end of the 19th century. They have now excavated Capernaum for more than a century and have made amazing discoveries. The remains of the "white" synagogue that are visible today date back to the late 4th or early 5th centuries, but there is also archaeological evidence of an earlier building beneath these ruins that dates back to the 1st century and is thought by virtually all scholars to be the synagogue where Jesus taught (Luke 4:31-44) and healed, where He referred to Himself as the Bread of Life and taught the



meaning of the Eucharist (John 6:48-59), cured the paralyzed man and forgave his sins (Matthew 9:2-8) and healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14) – all of which stirred up controversy with the scribes and the Pharisees. Further excavations in 1968 have revealed the house of St. Peter the Apostle (and his brother Andrew), the place that the Lord Jesus called home during his ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:29-2:1). In 1990, the Franciscans built a church on the site called the Church of the House of St. Peter which has been constructed on pylons so as not to obscure or prevent the ongoing archaeological work.

The Lord Jesus in Capernaum

Reading the Scriptures

Matthew 4:12-17 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Lord Jesus Begins to Preach

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ **Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—** ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." ¹⁷

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Mark 1:21-22 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Lord Jesus teaching in the Synagogue at Capernaum

*²¹ They went to **Capernaum**, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*

John 6: 35, 48-59 (New International Version, ©2011)

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

*⁵³ Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ **He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.***



Looking into the archeological remains of the house of St. Peter that lie beneath the Franciscan Church of St. Peter in Capernaum

MONDAY, May 23rd, Day 6

This morning we visited the site of Jacob's Well in Sychar, in what is today called Nablus in Arabic (the ancient Greek city of Neapolis) in Samaria, the site made famous in the Gospel of John (4:1-26) as the place where the Lord Jesus encounters St. Photine, the Samaritan woman He meets and asks to draw water for Him from the well. Today, this is part of the territory controlled by the Palestinian Authority and the population in the area is predominantly Muslim. Then, on the way to Jericho, we visited the traditional Baptismal Site of Christ on the Jordan River at Qasr-al-Yahud and Father Michael renewed his baptismal vows there. We visited Jericho, taking a cable car to the top of the Mount of Temptation where Christ was tempted by the Devil and visited the monastery of St. George carved into the side of the mountain; and we drove past the site of Zacchaeus's sycamore tree (Luke 19:1-10). At the end of the day, we went to Jerusalem and spent the night at the Ramada Jerusalem.

Reading the Scriptures

John 4: 1-30; 39-42 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Lord Jesus talks with a Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well

¹ Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— ² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are

right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."



²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am He. ²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him. ³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers. ⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

*Father Justin, a monk from Greece, standing beside Jacob's Well
beneath the altar of the Church of St. Photine, the Samaritan woman, in Nablus*

Jericho

Jericho is today a city located near the Jordan River and has a population of some 20,000 people. Jericho's name derives from an ancient Canaanite word that means "fragrant." It is only 10 miles north of the Dead Sea and being situated 846 feet below sea level has the distinction of being the lowest permanently inhabited site

on earth. Archaeologists have unearthed the remains of more than 20 successive settlements at Jericho, the first of which dates back more than 11,000 years ago, making it the oldest continuously inhabited city in all of human history. However, Jericho is probably most famous as the first Canaanite city conquered by Joshua, the successor of Moses (Joshua 6:1-27). But Jericho is also associated with the Lord Jesus' healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52; Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43); His encounter with Zacchaeus, the tax collector who lived in Jericho (Luke 19:1-10); and the parable He told about the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37).



Reading the Scriptures

Mark 10:46-52 (New International Version, ©2011)

Blind Bartimaeus Receives his Sight near Jericho

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." ⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

The Mount of Temptation

The Mount of Temptation, where the Lord Jesus was tempted by the Devil after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13), is generally identified as Mount Quarantania, a limestone peak rising about 1200 feet and located about 7 miles west of Jericho. The mountain, which from early Christian times has been called the Mount of Temptation, was referred to as "*Mons Quarantana*" in Latin by the Crusaders in the first half of the 12th century, from *quaranta* meaning forty, the number of days in the Gospel accounts of Christ's fasting in preparation for the beginning of his public ministry. We took a cable-car to the summit and visited the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Temptation that is built in an almost gravity-defying manner along the side of the mountain.



Reading the Scriptures

Luke 4:1-13 (New International Version)

Jesus is tested in the Wilderness

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"



⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to." ⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

The Jordan River

The Jordan River flows down from the snows of Mount Hermon in the north into the Sea of Galilee, ultimately emptying out into the Dead Sea, a journey of 156 miles. The word "Jordan" ultimately comes from the ancient Hebrew word meaning "descent." Today, as much as 80% of the Jordan is diverted for agricultural and other purposes, supplying nearly half of the fresh water for the entire country of Israel; in 2007, Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) named the Jordan River one of the world's 100 most endangered ecological sites, due in part to lack of cooperation between Israel and neighboring Arab states. The Jordan River is also the eastern border of the modern state of Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan, which takes its name from the river.

In ancient biblical history, the Jordan River is the scene of several miracles, the first taking place when the Jordan, near Jericho, was miraculously crossed by the



Israelites carrying the Ark of the Covenant during the time of Joshua (Joshua 3:14-17). Later the Jordan was crossed by the prophets Elijah and Elisha miraculously on dry ground (2 Kings 2:7-17). Elisha performed two other miracles at the Jordan: he healed Naaman, the commander of the army of the King of Aram, by having him bathe in its waters, and he made the axe head of one of the "children of the prophets" float, by throwing a piece of wood into the water (2 Kings 5:1-19; 6:1-6). The Jordan was also crossed by Judas Maccabeus and his brother Jonathan Maccabaeus during their

war with the Nabataeans (1 Maccabees 5:24) and a little later the Jordan was the scene of the battle between Jonathan and Bacchides, in which the latter was defeated (1 Maccabees 9:42-49).

Even more importantly, the Jordan River was also the site of the ministry of St. John the Baptist and the Gospels all state that John the Baptist preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" in preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the Day of Judgment (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:5; Luke 3:3; John 1:28). This is recounted as having taken place at "Bethany on the other side of the Jordan" (John 1:28). The Lord Jesus came to be baptized by him there (Matthew 3:13; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21, 4:1), an event celebrated liturgically in the life of the Church on January 6th, the feast of Theophany – the Manifestation of God. The Jordan River is also where John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29-36). The Gospels also speak a couple of times about Jesus crossing the Jordan during his ministry (Matthew 19:1; Mark 10:1), and of people crossing the

Jordan to come hear Him preach and be healed of their diseases (Matthew 4:25; Mark 3:7-8). Later, when some of His enemies in Jerusalem sought to arrest him on the charge of blasphemy, Jesus took refuge at the River Jordan near the place John had first begun baptizing people (John 10:39-40).

Reading the Scriptures

Matthew 3: 1-6; 13-17 (New International Version)

¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



TUESDAY, May 24th, Day 7

This was a full and exhausting day: in the morning we visited the Mount of Olives, the site of some of the most important events in the life of Christ. We visited the Russian Orthodox Church and Monastery of St. Mary Magdalene that houses the relics of St. Elizabeth the New Martyr, who was executed for her faith during the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. We walked down to the Garden of Gethsemane where Christ prayed and was arrested by the Temple guards. We visited the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, from which we believe she was bodily assumed into heaven like the Old Testament prophet Elijah. We also visited the Orthodox "Prison of Christ", the *Praetorium* with *Lithostrotos*, and walked along parts of the *Via Dolorosa* (The Way of Sorrows) to the Church of the Resurrection (or the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as Roman Catholics call it).

The Mount of Olives

A thickly wooded hillside in Jesus' day, the Mount of Olives runs parallel to the east side of Jerusalem, just a short distance from the city. According to the Old Testament prophet Zechariah (14:4) God would arrive there at his coming to liberate Jerusalem. The Mount would split and the time of salvation would be inaugurated and all of Israel's enemies would be defeated. So the Mount of Olives, in the Jewish tradition, became an eschatological symbol. The entry of Christ into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives heightened its Messianic significance in the minds and hearts of the people who greeted Him. And, ultimately, His ascension into heaven from the Mount of Olives stresses the Messianic significance of His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.



Jerusalem as seen from the Mount of Olives



*An Icon and Photograph of St. Elizabeth, the New Martyr of Russia
(Canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1992)*

The Russian Orthodox Church of St. Mary Magdalene was built on the Mount of Olives near the Garden of Gethsemane in 1885 by Tsar Alexander III in memory of his mother and its 7 gilded onion domes, so typical of Russian church architecture, form a striking contrast to the surrounding cypress and olive trees. Buried in this church are the relics of two saints who were martyred in 1918 during the Russian Revolution: the Grand Duchess Elizabeth (1864-1918) and her fellow nun, Barbara Yakovlena.

St. Elizabeth the New Martyr was the daughter of Grand Duke Louis IV of Hesse and Princess Alice of England, a daughter of Queen Victoria. She was also the elder sister of Alexandra Fyodorovna, the last empress of Russia. In the winter of 1878, diphtheria swept through the Hesse royal household, killing both Elizabeth's youngest sister and her mother, Princess Alice. Elizabeth was not in Hesse at the time and was the only member of the family not affected by this outbreak. Orphaned at the age of 14, she was partly brought up by her grandmother, Queen Victoria of England. Having had an English mother and then living in England after her mother's death, she and her sister Alexandra were very comfortable speaking English and, interestingly, most of the letters exchanged between Tsar Nicholas, the Tsarina Alexandra and Grand Duchess Elizabeth were written in English.

In June, 1884 Elizabeth married the Grand Duke Sergei of Russia, the fifth son of Tsar Alexander II. A convert to Orthodoxy from Lutheranism, she was received into the Church by the sacrament of chrismation on the Saturday of Lazarus in 1891 and during that Holy Week received the body and blood of Christ with her husband for the first time. Tragically, her husband was assassinated in 1905 by a bomb placed under his carriage. Following the death of her husband, Elizabeth became a nun, giving away her jewelry and many of her most precious possessions and using the proceeds to establish the Martha and Mary Convent, an order of nuns who

would serve the poor, the sick and the suffering of Moscow. As an Orthodox nun and part of the Russian imperial family she was executed by the Bolsheviks in 1918.

Also buried here is Prince Alice of Greece and Denmark (1885-1969), the niece of St. Elizabeth, and the rescuer of a Jewish family during the Nazi occupation of Greece. Living in Athens during the Second World War, she sheltered a Jewish widow, Rachel Cohen, and two of her children who were trying to avoid deportation to the Nazi death camps, thus saving their lives. For this, she is remembered at Yad Vashem as one of the Righteous among the Nations. Widowed in 1944, she remained in Greece after the War and died in Buckingham Palace in 1969, where she had been invited to live by her son and daughter-in-law, Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth II, following the military coup of the Junta in 1967.

The Garden of Gethsemane



The Garden of Gethsemani today

The Garden of Gethsemane, located on the western slope of the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley, has both a Roman Catholic and an Orthodox Church. The Roman Catholic Church of All Nations, also called the Basilica of the Agony of Christ, was consecrated in 1924 but preserves the black marble outline of a 4th century church. In front of the altar of this church is a large rock on which, according to tradition, Christ prayed on the night He was betrayed by Judas and arrested. According to Luke 22: 43-44, Jesus' anguish in Gethsemane was so deep

and painful that "his sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground." The word Gethsemane comes from the Hebrew "Gat Shemen" and means "olive press." The olive trees that can still be seen in Gethsemane are particularly evocative and some are more than 900 years old.

Reading the Bible

Matthew 26: 36-56 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Lord Jesus arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives

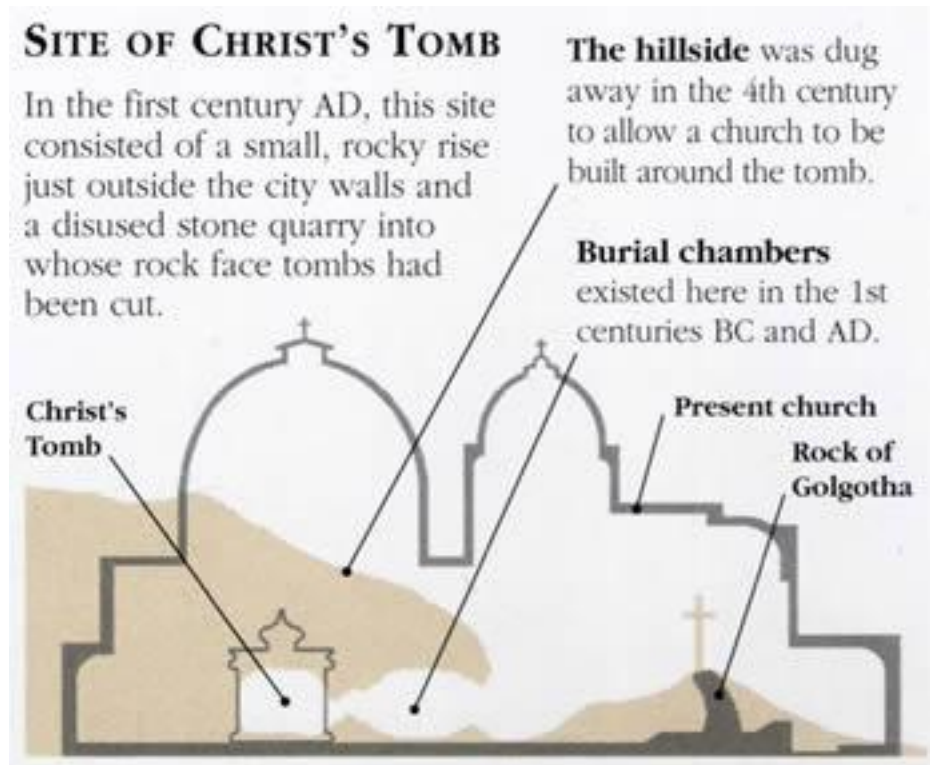
³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." ⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. ⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. ⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Jesus Arrested

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

⁵¹ With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" ⁵⁵ In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

The Church of the Resurrection/The Holy Sepulcher (Tomb)

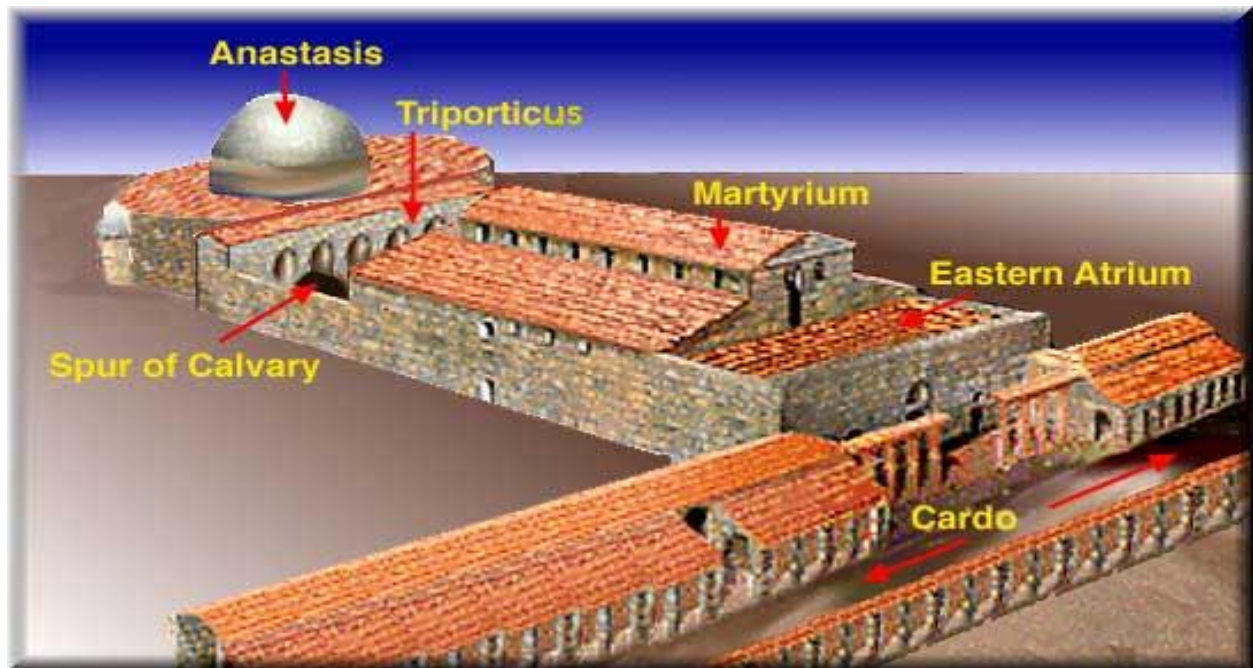


The Church of the Resurrection (or Sepulcher, the Latin word for tomb)

The Church of the Resurrection is the holiest Christian Church in the world and contains Golgotha, the site of the crucifixion of Christ, as well as the tomb in which he was buried and from which He rose from the dead. Today the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has primary custody of this holy site together with the Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches. In the 19th century, three other ancient churches acquired limited "rights" to the custody of certain shrines and other minor structures in and around the Holy Sepulcher: the Coptic, Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox Churches. The status, rights and privileges of all these Christian communities are protected by the Status Quo of the Holy Places issued by the Ottoman Empire in 1852 and ratified by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.

The first Church on this site was built by the Emperor Constantine and consecrated on September 13, 335 – a day that is still celebrated on the Orthodox liturgical calendar. In 325, Constantine called the 1st Ecumenical Council, a meeting of bishops from all parts of the empire, to settle the Arian controversy. Among those who attended was Macarius, the Bishop of *Aelia Capitolina* – as Jerusalem was still called following the devastation of the city by the Romans in 135AD. The emperor's mother Helen, a convert to Christianity, was 80 years old at the time; but taken with the bishop's tale of the sad neglect of the sites hallowed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus she left to visit the Holy Land with her son's blessings, authority and funds – the first recorded and perhaps most important of all Christian

pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Constantine decided to build a magnificent shrine over the site where, according to longstanding historical tradition, the Lord Jesus was crucified, buried and rose from the dead. At the time, the site was occupied by a 2nd century Roman temple built by the emperor Hadrian. Constantine had the Roman temple cleared away and a series of rock-cut tombs was discovered, one of which was identified as that of Joseph of Arimathea in which had laid the body of the crucified Christ. The sloping bedrock was cut away around this tomb, leaving a free-standing shell over which the Church of the Resurrection was constructed, incorporating Golgotha.



*The first Church of the Resurrection built by the Emperor Constantine
and consecrated on September 13, 335AD*

Egeria, a well-to-do Spanish nun who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Mount Sinai in 381-384AD, wrote the following description of Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulcher: "The decorations are too marvelous for words. All you can see is gold, jewels and silk...You simply cannot imagine the number and sheer weight of the candles, tapers, lamps and everything else they use for the services...They are beyond description, and so is the magnificent building itself. It was built by Constantine and...was decorated with gold, mosaic, and precious marble, as much as his empire could provide."

Although it survived for more than 600 years, little of Constantine's original Church has survived to the present. The Persians captured the city of Jerusalem in 614AD and set the building on fire. Partially rebuilt later in the 7th century after the Christian Roman emperor Heraclius had recaptured the city, it was further damaged by an earthquake in 808AD and then destroyed in 1009 by the Muslim caliph of Egypt, al-Hakim. Within a few years al-Hakim relented of his attacks against

Christians, urged on by his mother, Maria - a Christian whose brother Orestes had been the Patriarch of Jerusalem. By 1014, according to one chronicle, Maria "began to rebuild with well-dressed squared stones the Temple of Christ destroyed by her son's order." There was more rebuilding done in the 11th century, financed by the Christian emperors in Constantinople, but most of the present building is the result of 12th-century reconstruction work undertaken by the Crusaders as well as later renovations made after several centuries during which the church had fallen into disrepair. The present building encompasses only half the area of the original Byzantine church, and only the current Rotunda replicates the approximate shape and design of the 4th-century original. Earthquakes in 1808 and 1927 did extensive damage to the overall structure of the building. The most recent work of restoration and preservation began in 1959 and is ongoing. Repair work on the Rotunda dome above the Tomb of Christ was completed in 1997. Today, the Church of the Resurrection is in better shape than it has been in 500 years.

The Church of the Resurrection is the only Christian Church in the world where 1st century AD Herodian, 2nd century Hadrianic, 4th century Constantinian, 11th century Byzantine, 12th century Crusader, 19th century Neo-Byzantine and 20th century modern masonry are visible in one place. It is also the only Church in the world where six of the most ancient Christian Churches worship side by side: the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox Churches.



The Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, also known as the Church of Zion and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, is an autocephalous or self-governing Orthodox Church within the broader communion of worldwide Orthodox Christianity. Headed by the current Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III (*left*), the Church of Jerusalem is regarded by all Orthodox Christians as the mother church of Christianity. As recorded in the Scriptures, all Christians believe that it was in Jerusalem that the Church was established on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-41) and that the Good News of the resurrection of Christ began to spread outward from Jerusalem. At the 4th Ecumenical Council held in Chalcedon (modern Turkey) in 451AD, Jerusalem was raised to the status of a Patriarchate on the same level as Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem celebrates its liturgy on the ancient Roman Julian calendar that is now thirteen days behind the modern Western (Gregorian) calendar. The number of Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land today is estimated at only about 500,000 people. The majority are Palestinians and Jordanians, but now, with the collapse of Communism and the fall of the Iron Curtain, there are also many Russians, Romanians, and Georgians. The Church's bishops and higher clergy are primarily from Greece. The headquarters of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem is near the Church of the Resurrection (or Sepulcher).



Reading the Bible

Luke 24:1-12 (New International Version)

Jesus Has Risen

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Mark 16:1-8 (New International Version)

Jesus Has Risen

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

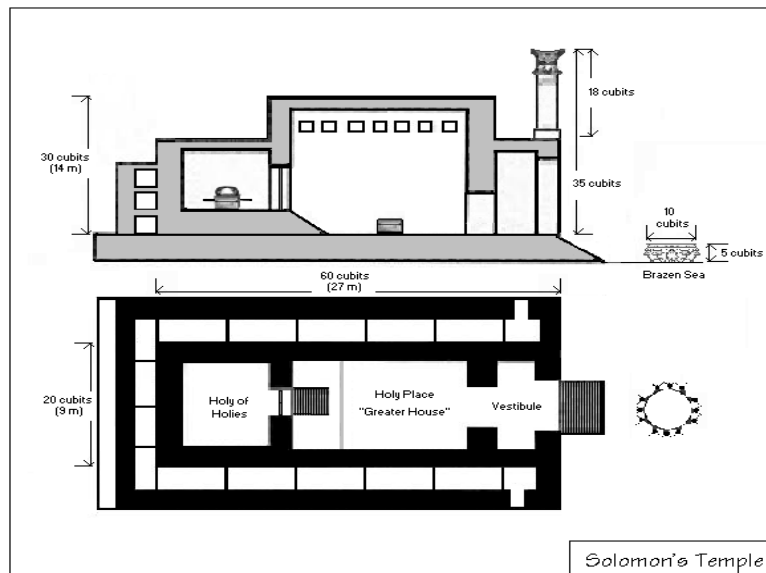
⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

WEDNESDAY, May 25th, Day 8

This morning we visited the Western Wall and then ascended the Temple Mount, which is also known in the Bible as Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac, and saw the Dome of the Rock, called the Noble Sanctuary by Muslims. Jews and Christians and all other non-Muslims are currently not permitted to enter the Dome of the Rock. This is perhaps the most contentious piece of real estate on earth. In the afternoon we visited Bethlehem, which is today under the Palestinian Authority, and saw the Church of the Nativity as well as the Shepherd's Fields. We spent the night back in Jerusalem.

The Temple in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock

The site of the Temple was first established some 3,000 years ago, when King David moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem. In 2 Samuel 7, God refuses to allow David to build the Temple in Jerusalem but promises that David's son, the heir to his throne, will do so. Solomon's great First Temple was built *circa* 957BC next to his palace in a compound on what is now called the Temple Mount by the Jewish people. Its construction is described in 1 Kings 6, where it is said to have been a rectangular stone building that was divided into three sections: the portico or vestibule, the main sanctuary or Holy Place and the inner sanctuary which was called the Holy of Holies. The Temple was richly decorated, with a carved cedar wood lining on its walls and floor (the famous "cedars of Lebanon" provided by King Hiram of Tyre in exchange for oil and wheat), overlaid with gold and with decorative carvings on the doors and doorposts. From the 10th through the 6th centuries BC, this building was the heart of Judaism and provided a permanent dwelling place for the Ark of the Covenant that contained the stone tablets on which the 10 Commandments were written.



This First Temple was completely destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC when they sacked Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish people. When the Jews began returning from exile in 538BC, they immediately began the reconstruction of the Temple along the lines of the Temple of Solomon. However, the beauty and grandeur of the First Temple was recaptured again by the Second Temple only under Herod the Great. Hated by the Jewish people as a puppet-king of their Roman oppressors, he tried to earn their loyalty by starting a complete renovation of the Temple precincts



in 20BC. This would have been the Temple known and visited by the Lord Jesus. Herod had walls made out of enormous stone blocks to mark off and protect the area of the Temple Mount. About 10% of the western retaining wall still survives and is called the Wailing Wall or, more simply, the Western Wall. This is all that remains of the Temple after having been destroyed twice by the Romans – first, in 70AD by Titus and later in 135AD by Hadrian - and it is the most sacred site within Judaism.

A model of Herod's 1st century AD Temple from the Israel Museum

The Dome of the Rock that currently stands on the Temple Mount is a Muslim shrine built over the spot where the ancient Jewish Temple once stood. The Temple Mount is called Haram esh-Sharif – the Noble Sanctuary – by Muslims. The Dome of the Rock, which dominates the skyline of Jerusalem as seen from the Mount of Olives, is not actually a mosque but a Muslim shrine. Like the Ka'ba in Mecca, it is built over a sacred stone. This stone is believed to be the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven during his Night Journey to heaven (Quran 17). Jews also revere this stone as marking the place where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac.

Construction on the Dome of the Rock was begun in 688AD by the Muslim caliph al-Malik and completed in 691AD. The architectural form of a rotunda was foreign to 7th century Islam. The Dome of the Rock was clearly intended to rival the many domes of the Christian Churches of its time in Jerusalem. Scholars have noted that the architects of the Dome of the Rock used the measurements of the main dome above the Tomb of Christ of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The diameter of the Dome of the Rock is 20.20m and its height 20.48m, while the diameter of the central Dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is 20.90m and its height 21.05m. The Dome of the Rock is constructed in the shape of a Byzantine (Orthodox)

Christian *martyrium*, a structure intended for the housing and veneration of the relics of saints, and is an excellent example of what scholars call “middle Byzantine” art.

The Dome of the Rock is the oldest Muslim monument still standing today. In 1955, an extensive program of renovation of the Dome of the Rock was begun by the government of Jordan, with funds supplied by a number of Arab governments and Turkey. The work included replacement of large numbers of tiles dating back to the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, which had become dislodged by heavy rain. In 1965, as part of this restoration, the lead dome from its original construction in 691AD was



covered with a durable aluminum and bronze alloy made in Italy that replaced the lead exterior. The restoration was completed in August 1964. In 1993, the striking golden dome covering one currently sees was refurbished, following a donation of \$8.2 million by King Hussein of Jordan, who sold one of his houses in London to fund the 80 kilograms of gold required.

In deference to local Muslim authorities, Israel leaves the administration of the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary entirely to Muslim officials. Israeli border police provide security in the area in cooperation with Arab police. Father Steve was refused entrance to the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary because when asked to empty his pockets he was carrying a cross. Crosses atop the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary are forbidden by Muslim officials. The interior inscriptions along the octagonal arcade inside the Dome of the Rock are anti-Christian in character, condemning Christians for believing that Jesus is the Son of God and one of the Holy Trinity.

In addition, Israel's Chief Rabbinate has banned Jews from visiting the Temple Mount because somewhere on the hill is the site of the ancient Temple's Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary, where only the High Priest was allowed to enter once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Why should Christians be interested in the Temple Mount? According to the New Testament, Herod's Temple in Jerusalem played a significant role throughout the life of the Lord Jesus who was often to be found in the Temple precincts, particularly during the latter years of His public ministry. After His birth, Jesus was dedicated to God at the Temple by St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary in accordance

with the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22-28), an event that forms the basis for the 40-day blessing of infants still done in the life of the Church to this day. When He was a 12 year old boy, He impressed the Jewish teachers who sat in the Temple courts with His knowledge of the Scriptures (Luke 2:41-52). Following His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, Jesus was tempted by Satan to jump off the top of the Temple to prove his status as the Word, Wisdom and Son of God (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-19; Luke 4:1-13); and He angrily overturned tables of moneychangers during the "cleansing of the Temple" recorded in all four of the Gospels (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:14). For Christians, standing on the Temple Mount – even if it is today dominated by a Muslim shrine – is standing close to Jesus.

Reading the Bible

Luke 2:41-52 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Boy Jesus at the Temple

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the Temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." ⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Bethlehem

Crossing borders and once again entering Palestinian territory, we spent the afternoon in and near Bethlehem, the town of Christ's birth, only five miles from Jerusalem – and yet, in many ways, it seemed a world away. In ancient times, Bethlehem was a small and politically insignificant village. The first mention of Bethlehem in the Bible occurs in connection with the burial of Rachel by her husband, the Old Testament patriarch Jacob, after her death in giving birth to their son, Benjamin (Genesis 35:19). Her tomb, which is considered the third holiest site in Judaism, may still be seen on the outskirts of Bethlehem to this day and in 2010,

more than 100,000 Israelis – and not a few Christians – made pilgrimages there. Later, the Scriptures record that Ruth moved to her mother-in-law Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19) and married a local landowner named Boaz (Ruth 1-4); her great-grandson was King David, who was born in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 17:12) and was anointed the second King of Israel there by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13) 3,000 years ago. The religious importance of Bethlehem at the time of Christ was due to the prophet Micah (c.742-c.701BC), who connected it symbolically with a future rule of peace under a royal deliverer who would come from the line of King David (Micah 5:1-4). Christians believe that this ancient prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 2:1-7).

Today Bethlehem is a Palestinian city with a population of a little more than 30,000 people - hardly the "little town" sung of in the Christmas carol. Yet, its population has significantly shifted demographically: as little as 25 years ago, Catholic and Orthodox Christians made up more than 80% of the population of Bethlehem and Muslims only about 20%. Today those numbers are reversed, as much of the Palestinian Christian population has felt caught in the conflict between the Israeli government and Palestinian Muslims. Between 2000 and 2005, during the violence of the Second Intifada (Palestinian Uprising), yet another 10% of the Christian population of Bethlehem emigrated. There are now more Palestinian Christians from Bethlehem living in the suburbs of Detroit than live in Bethlehem.

The celebration of Christmas in Bethlehem takes place on three different dates: Roman Catholics and the many Protestant denominations celebrate on December 25th; Greek, Russian, Coptic, Syrian and other Orthodox Christians, using the old Julian calendar, celebrate on January 7th; and the Armenian Orthodox celebrate 11 days later, on January 18th.

The Church of the Nativity and the Shepherd's Fields

The Church of the Nativity is the oldest standing Church in the Holy Land. It was built and consecrated around 339AD by the emperor Constantine to mark the site where Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. The original Church, built at the direction of Constantine's mother Helen, was octagonal in shape, typical of Roman/Byzantine memorial churches. Unfortunately, it was mostly destroyed some 200 years later—probably during the Samaritan rebellion in 529AD—though parts of the original mosaic floor remain and can still be seen to this day. Soon afterwards, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian rebuilt the Church in a bigger, grander fashion—and it is largely this structure that remains today. In 614AD, the Persians, who razed many other churches in the Holy Land during their wars with Byzantium, spared the Church of the Nativity, supposedly out of respect for a mosaic of the Magi worshipping the Lord Jesus in which they are shown wearing Persian attire. Sacred to Christians and even Muslims, the fortress-like basilica with the tiny entranceway that is called the Door of Humility is one of the oldest continuously operating Churches in the world, having survived—some would say miraculously—various invasions, regime changes, fires, earthquakes and, most recently, the 2002 siege of Bethlehem, when armed Palestinians hid in the church from Israeli forces for weeks.



The interior of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

The Grotto of the Nativity, a rectangular cavern beneath the Greek Orthodox altar of the Church, is the Church of the Nativity's focal point. Entered by a flight of steps by the side of the altar, this is the cave that has been honored as the site of Christ's birth since at least the 2nd century. A silver star in the floor marks the very spot where Christ is believed to have been born. The star's Latin inscription reads, "Here of the Virgin Mary Jesus Christ was born." The floor is paved in marble, and 15 lamps hang above the star: six belong to the Greek Orthodox, five to the Armenian Orthodox and four to the Roman Catholics.

The Greek Orthodox site of the Shepherds' Fields is at Kanisat al-Ruwat in the middle of fields one and a quarter miles southeast of Bethlehem. The ruins at al-Ruwat include a cave that has been used as a church since the 4th century, of which the barrel-vaulted roof (5th century) still survives. The church at al-Ruwat served the Orthodox community from the 5th century to 1955. It is the only 5th-century church outside Jerusalem to survive intact. Above it a chapel was built, and this was in turn replaced by a larger church, which was then destroyed in 614 during the Persian conquest of the region. The church and a monastery were rebuilt in the 7th century and survived until the 10th century. Today, a new large church has been built, the 4th-century lower church has been restored, and the remains of the upper church and monastery have been preserved.

Reading the Bible

Matthew 2:1-6 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Magi Visit the Messiah

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet (Micah) has written: ⁶ ""But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.""

Luke 2:1-7 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Birth of Jesus

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² This was the first census that took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.



The Star marking the place where Christ was born in the Grotto of the Nativity

THURSDAY, May 26th, Day 9

Today we visited the Israel Museum in the morning, seeing the Shrine of the Book that houses the Dead Sea Scrolls and also, just outside the Shrine of the Book, the large scale model of Jerusalem at the time of Christ. Then, in the late morning, we went to Yad Vashem – the Holocaust Museum – a very sobering experience, to say the least. We began at the tree planted in memory of St. Maria Skobtsova of Paris, who is commemorated here as one of the “Righteous among the Nations,” for her work in saving the lives of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust in WWII Paris. We walked through the Children’s Shrine, built to commemorate the 1.5 million children murdered during the Holocaust. We ended our day in the late afternoon to return to our hotel and rest in preparation to attend the midnight Orthodox Liturgy on the Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Resurrection.

The Israel Museum, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Holocaust Museum

The Israel Museum was founded in 1965 as Israel's national museum. It is situated on a hill in Jerusalem, near the Knesset, the Israeli Supreme Court and Hebrew University. The Israel Museum constructed a special site for exhibiting the Dead Sea Scrolls called the Shrine of the Book. Strict atmospheric conditions are observed there to minimize any possible damage to the scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that they often provide the most ancient text that we currently have of some of the most important books of the Old Testament. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the books of Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms are found most frequently. These three books are also the Old Testament books most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Because of the antiquity of the Scrolls, predating any other manuscripts we



have of the Old Testament in Hebrew by 1,000 years, they can sometimes be used to clarify difficulties or ambiguities in the text of the Bible. For example: among the 150 Psalms (the Greek word for “songs”) gathered together in the Book of Psalms, there is a particular type of Psalm known as an acrostic. An acrostic Psalm is one in which each succeeding verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In English terms, this would mean that the first verse begins with an “a”, the second with a “b”, the third with a “c” and so on. Psalm 145 is an acrostic Psalm in Hebrew. Verse by verse it follows the letters of the Hebrew alphabet until verse 14 which should have started with the Hebrew letter equivalent to “n”. But the first part of the verse is actually missing and in Hebrew verse 14 actually starts with the next letter of the alphabet, equivalent to the English letter “s”. This missing verse in Hebrew had survived in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament

made by the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt around 250BC. Because the New Testament was originally written in Greek and not in Hebrew, it is this translation that is cited by the writers of the New Testament like St. Matthew, St. Luke and St. Paul and has remained the primary text of the Old Testament for our Church to this day. Thus it had been known for centuries by Biblical scholars that something was missing in the Hebrew text of Psalm 145 that the Septuagint had filled in. The question was: had the translators simply made something up to complete the acrostic or were they translating from a Hebrew manuscript, now lost, that had the complete verse? The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls solved this mystery. In one of the copies of the Book of Psalms from Qumran, the complete verse appears, proving that it was originally known in Hebrew and that the Greek translators of the Septuagint worked from a Hebrew manuscript that contained the complete text of Psalm 145. This verse has now been included in modern English translations, including the evangelical Protestant *New International Version* as: "The LORD is faithful in all His promises and loving towards all He has made."



The scale model of Jerusalem with the Temple Mount in the foreground at the Israel Museum

Another important exhibit at the Israel Museum is the 1:50 outdoor scale model of Jerusalem at the time of the Lord Jesus. The model measures 21,520 square feet and was originally commissioned in 1966 by Hans Kroch in memory of his son who was killed in 1948 during the Israeli War of Independence. The model was designed by the Israeli historian and geographer Michael Avi Yonah.

Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, was established in 1953 as the world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust. The phrase "Righteous among the Nations" is an honorary title used by the State of Israel to describe those non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from extermination by the Nazis during the Second World War. Since 1963, a commission always headed by a justice of the Supreme Court of Israel has been charged with the duty of awarding this honorary title to those Gentiles who qualify. The commission is guided in its work by certain criteria and meticulously studies all documentation, including evidence by survivors and other eyewitnesses; evaluates the historical circumstances and the element of risk to the rescuer; and then decides if the case accords with the criteria necessary to receive the title. As of January 1, 2011, there were 23,788 men and women from 45 countries who have been recognized as Righteous among the Nations by the State of Israel, representing over 10,000 authenticated rescue stories.

One of the stories of the "Righteous among the Nations" told here at Yad Vashem is that of St. Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945), an unconventional Russian Orthodox nun who lived in Nazi occupied Paris during WWII. St. Maria made a rented house in Paris her "convent." It was a place with an open door for refugees, the poor, the sick, the hungry and needy. The chaplain of her unusual convent was Father Dimitri Klepinin (1904-1944). St. Maria had no illusions about the Nazi threat following the fall of Paris on June 14, 1940. It represented a "new paganism" bringing in its wake disasters, upheavals, persecutions and wars. It was evil unveiled, the "contaminator of all springs and wells." The so-called "master race" was "led by a madman who needs a straightjacket and should be placed in a cork-lined room so that his bestial wailing will not disturb the world at large."



Early in 1942, their registration now underway, Jews began to knock on the door of St. Maria's convent at Rue de Lormel, asking Father Dimitri if he would issue baptismal certificates to them. The answer was always yes. The names of those "baptized" were also duly recorded in his parish register in case there was any cross-checking by the police or Gestapo, as indeed did happen. In July, 1942 came the mass arrest of 12,884 Jews and about 7,000 of them – two thirds being children – were taken to the Velodrome d'Hiver, a stadium for bicycle races where they were held for five days before being shipped off to Auschwitz.

Because of her nun's habit, German soldiers allowed her to work in the stadium for three days and during that time – with the assistance of some garbage collectors –

she was able to smuggle some of the children out in trash cans. The house at Rue de Lourmel was bursting with people, many of them Jews. "It is amazing," Mother Maria remarked, "that the Germans haven't pounced on us yet." In the same period, she said if anyone came looking for Jews, she would show them an icon of the Mother of God. Early in 1943 she and Father Dimitri were indeed arrested, the convent closed, and they were shipped off to concentration camps. Father Dimitri was sent to a camp named Dora and died there sometime in the early months of 1944. St. Maria, prisoner #19263, was sent by train in a sealed cattle car to the Ravensbruck camp in Germany, where she lived another two years. On the 30th of March, Mother Maria was selected for the gas chambers — Good Friday on the Orthodox liturgical calendar. She entered the gas chambers and eternal life the following day — Great and Holy Saturday, 1945. The shellfire of the approaching Red Army could be heard in the distance. In 2004, at the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Paris, both Mother Maria Skobtsova and Father Dimitri Klepinin were canonized as saints. The Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople established July 20th as the day of their remembrance.

FRIDAY, May 27th, Day 10

We left our hotel at about 11PM and went by bus to the Old City, and from there walked to the Church of the Resurrection. We had been told that the Liturgy would begin at Midnight, but the door to the courtyard of the Church wasn't opened until 12:15AM. *Orthros* — Morning Prayer — began at about 12:45AM and lasted for a little more than an hour. Then Liturgy began. Father Michael writes: "A unique aspect of celebrating Divine Liturgy in the Tomb of Christ is that since it is a cave and its entrance faces east, it is the only Orthodox Church in the world in which the main celebrant faces the people as he stands at the altar. There is not much room inside the Tomb. There were 12 priests and one deacon serving that night and we just barely fit. Most of the clergy participating were monks of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher, but aside from Father Steve and I who were Americans, there were also priests from Russia, France and Germany." Liturgy finished at about 4AM and then we returned to our hotel to rest after venerating Golgotha (*right*) and the Tomb of Christ one last time.

After getting a few hours of sleep we were picked up by our tour bus at 1PM and



visited two monasteries in Jerusalem: the Monastery of the Holy Cross and the Monastery of St. Simeon the Elder.

The fortress-like Monastery of the Holy Cross is located not far from the Israel Museum and the Knesset, but in ancient times this was actually a somewhat remote and secluded site. Originally built during the 5th century, it was



The main Church at the Monastery of the Holy Cross

fortified and expanded by the emperor Justinian in the 6th century as part of his larger building program in the Holy Land that included the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of the Nativity. The monastery was destroyed during the Persian conquest (614AD) and then partially rebuilt, but in the late 8th century Muslim Arabs slaughtered all the monks living there. It was rebuilt again in the 11th century by a monk from Georgia named Prochorus of Shavsheti and became a center of Georgian culture in the Holy Land. At the end of the 17th century, the monastery came under the control of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the monastic Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher. This monastery is named for the Holy Cross because it is believed that the tree from which the Cross of Christ was made came from this spot and behind the main church is a chapel with an altar over the spot where the tree grew.

We also visited the Monastery of St. Simeon the Elder, also called in our liturgical tradition Simeon the God-receiver because he held the infant Christ in his arms as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 2:25-35. Built in the 1880's over the site where tradition says St. Simeon's house and tomb were, this monastery is today set in a quiet Jerusalem neighborhood. But there were a number of icons that had bullet holes in them from the 1948 Israeli War of Independence and a battle for the monastery that was fought then because of its strategic location on a hilltop.

SATURDAY, May 28th, Day 11

This was a long and intense day of travel in which we left Jerusalem – and Israel – and headed for Egypt. Traveling along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (the setting of the parable of the Good Samaritan told by the Lord Jesus in Luke 10:25-37), we stopped at the Good Samaritan Inn, a small museum of Jewish and Christian antiquities on the outskirts of the city and then drove down to the Dead Sea where we visited Qumran, the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. We continued on our way to Eilat by the Red Sea, where we crossed the border into Egypt.

The Good Samaritan Inn and Museum

The Good Samaritan Inn and Museum was opened in 2009 on the site of a hostel for travelers along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho dating from the Roman period in the 1st century. The museum focuses on both Jewish and Christian mosaic floors in synagogues and churches that have been collected from archaeological sites across the West Bank and Gaza, areas where there are travel limitations due to security. There are also the remains of a 6th century Christian Church here that has recently been covered with a wooden roof that follows the architecture of the ancient roof, making a wonderful outdoor pavilion. We sang “Christ is Risen” and read the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the outlines of the old church.



The Greek mosaic *above and to the left*, from an ancient church in the Biblical town of Shiloh, dates from 380-420AD and reads: “Lord Jesus Christ, help your servant.”

Reading the Bible

Luke 10:25-27 (New International Version, ©2011)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* ²⁶ *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”* ²⁷ *He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all*

your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

²⁹ *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

³⁰ *In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

³⁶ *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Qumran is today an Israeli National Park and an archaeological site in the West Bank. It is located on a dry desert plateau about a mile inland from the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, about 10 miles south of Jericho. The ancient settlement at Qumran was constructed sometime around 150BC or a little later, and was occupied most of the time until it was finally destroyed by the Romans in 68AD - or shortly after - during the First Jewish-Roman War. Qumran is famous as the settlement nearest to the caves in the sheer desert cliffs in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947 when a Bedouin shepherd, who was looking for a stray goat, discovered several large clay pots containing seven ancient parchment scrolls on the floor of what is now called Cave #4 above Wadi Qumran. The scrolls came into the hands of dealers in antiquities who offered them to scholars. The first scholar to recognize their antiquity was Eleazar Sukenik, who succeeded in acquiring three of them for Hebrew University. Once scholars had determined that these manuscripts were at least 2,000 years old, the search for more such manuscripts in the caves around Qumran began in earnest. A group of scholars



under the leadership of the French Roman Catholic priest and Biblical scholar Roland de Vaux began to search and excavate the cave where the first scrolls were



found, as well as some 40 other caves in its vicinity. Nearly 900 ancient scrolls, including the oldest complete text of the Book of Isaiah, and thousands of fragments of ancient texts were found in 11 caves. In some caves the manuscripts were carefully placed in covered cylindrical jars, whereas in other ones they appear to have been dumped in haste. In the cave that yielded the greatest number of documents, the storage conditions were the worst, and the

manuscripts had disintegrated into tens of thousands of fragments, which had to be slowly pieced together with the utmost patience and care. Mostly written on parchment (animal skins), with some on papyrus (an early form of paper), these ancient texts were meticulously gathered, carefully unrolled or pieced together, and published. It took 20 years (1947-1967) for scholars to bring together the various texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Because the Scrolls were written between 250BC and 68AD, they offer an invaluable source for understanding the beliefs, community life, and use of the Old Testament by one group of Jews, probably the Essenes, who were contemporaries of Lord Jesus and whose main settlement was not far from Jericho, a town that He visited and where He healed two blind beggars (Matthew 20:29-34).

In addition to the caves in the area, the settlement at Qumran was also first extensively excavated by Father de Vaux and a team of archaeologists from 1953 to 1956. Excavations still continue. Cisterns for gathering water, Jewish ritual baths, and cemeteries have been found, along with a dining hall and/or assembly room and a scriptorium for the copying and producing of manuscripts, as well as pottery kilns and a tower, all of which we saw.

EGYPT

Father Michael writes: "We arrived at the Israeli/Egyptian border at Taba in the late afternoon and went through the necessary passport control and security checks of both countries. We said goodbye to our Israeli guide and driver and met up with

their Egyptian counterparts.” We drove about three hours through Egypt along the Red Sea and across the Sinai Desert, arriving at St. Catherine’s Monastery after 9PM at night, several hours later than hoped. We checked into the Monastery hostel and were given dinner. Definitely a long day of travel. Most of us went immediately to bed after dinner as we had to rise to attend the Sunday morning Liturgy well before 6AM.

SUNDAY, May 29th, Day 12

This morning we all woke up early and attended both the *Orthros* (Morning Prayer) and Divine Liturgy being celebrated in the main Church of the monastery. Interestingly enough, one of the older monks chanting at *Orthros* is one who has appeared in numerous films about St. Catherine’s Monastery. Father Michael writes: “Father Steve assisted with chanting during *Orthros*. After the Liturgy, an older monk spoke to the group about the history of the monastery in Greek with Father Steve and Martha translating. When we asked his name, he responded: “I am just an old man from the Sinai.” The hand and skull of St. Catherine were brought out for us to venerate and each of us were given rings, a traditional gift for pilgrims to the monastery. Father Steve and I were allowed into a small chapel behind the main altar where the holy table is set up over the original location of the Burning Bush. All who enter this chapel are required to remove their shoes as God commanded Moses to remove his sandals when he stood before the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:5). This chapel is part of the original church that was built by St. Helen after her pilgrimage to the Sinai. We then visited the monastery’s museum of icons ancient texts and other church items, seeing many icons that had appeared at the Getty Museum exhibit a few years back and others that did not, including the famous icon of Christ with one side of His face showing mercy and the other, judgment.”

Mount Sinai/St. Catherine’s Monastery



The Sinai Peninsula is scorching hot in the summer, cold in the winter and always a parched land – a desolate place, a true desert. It was here that Moses was first told to take off his shoes for he stood on holy ground and encountered God the one, true and living God in a bush that was aflame but didn’t burn (Exodus 3:1-5). It was through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula that the ancient Israelite people

wandered for 40 years, being led by Moses out of Egypt to Palestine, the Promised

Land, as described in the Book of Exodus. It was here, on Mt. Sinai, "where the glory of the Lord had settled" (Exodus 24:16), that Moses received the 10 Commandments. The covenant between God and the people of ancient Israel was established at Mt. Sinai and that place is therefore sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Reading the Bible

Exodus 20: 1-21 (New International Version)

The Ten Commandments

¹ And God spoke all these words: ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ "You shall not murder. ¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ "You shall not steal. ¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. ¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." ²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." ²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

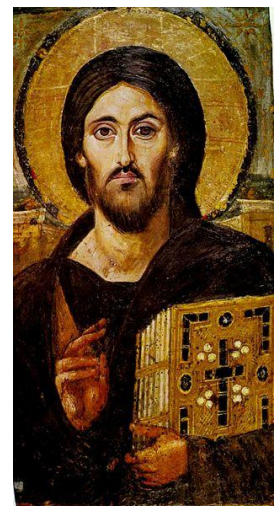
An 11th century icon of Moses receiving the Law
from St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai





*The 6th century mosaic icon of the Transfiguration of Christ
in the apse of the main church (katholikon) of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai*

Christians have been coming to this remote, harsh and isolated place since at least the second century AD to practice the monastic life. It became a place of Christian pilgrimage in the 4th century AD and a church was first built to enclose the burning bush on the orders of St. Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great, who was also responsible for the construction of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the first Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. One of the oldest continually functioning Christian monasteries in the world, the monastery/fortress, as we see it today, was built by the Roman emperor Justinian some 175 years later, sometime between the years 548 and 565AD. The patronal feast of St. Catherine's Monastery is the Transfiguration of Christ and there is a magnificent 6th century mosaic depicting this event in the life of Christ in the apse of the main church (*see above*). It is considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of Christian art. In addition, St. Catherine's houses some of the most ancient icons in the world, a number of them in encaustic, a wax medium, and are simply irreplaceable, like the icon of *Christ Pantokrator* done sometime during the 7th century AD (*right*). The monastery also contains the relics of St. Catherine, the young Christian girl who was executed for her faith in Alexandria, Egypt in 305AD during the reign of the Roman Emperor Maximian (305-315AD). The monastery library preserves the second largest collection of early codices and manuscripts in the world, and is outnumbered only by the Vatican Library in Rome. Its particular strength lies



in Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Hebrew, Georgian, Syriac and old Udi texts. The *Codex Sinaiticus*, one of the oldest and most complete texts of the Bible, dating from the early 4th century, was taken from the monastery in the 19th century and is today housed in the British Library in London. It is also the only Christian monastery in the world that contains a mosque on its grounds (probably built in the 10th century AD to appease Muslim authorities) and has, on display, a charter of freedom granted to the monastery in 628AD by Mohammed himself, promising the monks his protection and the freedom to practice their Christian faith.

St. Catherine's Monastery, the nearby monastery at Raithu and a handful of monastic dependencies, constitute the smallest autonomous Orthodox Church in the world, headed by the Archbishop of Sinai – who is also the abbot of St. Catherine's – elected by the monks of the monastery and consecrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Father Michael writes: "After lunch at St. Catherine's Monastery, we visited the Monastery of St. Moses at Paran, a community of women located about 45 minutes from St. Catherine's. We were the first visitors to their monastery in six months, since the uprising began in Egypt. They have two small chapels there, one rebuilt recently, but including elements from the original 4th century church. It had a low iconostasis as was typical of that era. The second chapel was of more contemporary Greek design with marble flooring and a carved wood *iconostasis*."



*With Sister Nektaria at the Monastery of St. Moses the Prophet
in Paran (Numbers 10:12; Deuteronomy 1:1)*

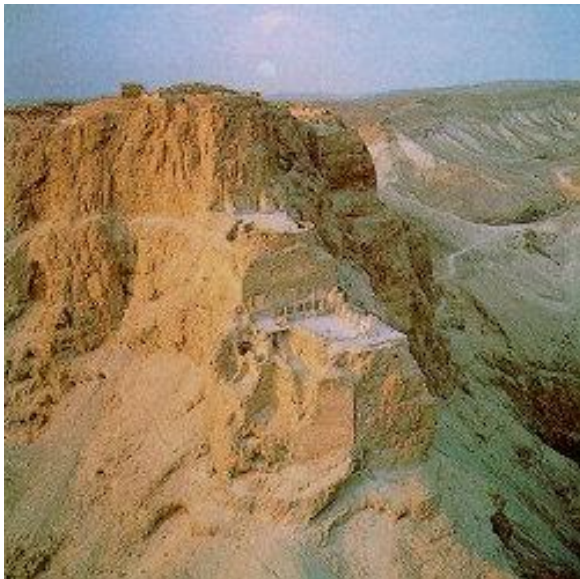
Return to ISRAEL and the UNITED STATES

MONDAY, May 30th, Day 13

After a restful night at the Marriott Taba Resort on the Red Sea, we crossed the border into Israel and went to see Masada. From Masada we drove to a spot on the Dead Sea where many of the group took the opportunity to swim – or better, float – in the Dead Sea. We had dinner at a kibbutz of Messianic Jews near Jerusalem and from there were taken to Tel Aviv and the Ben Gurion Airport to begin our long journey back to the States.

Masada

Today a part of the Israeli National Park system, Masada is the name for a site of ancient palaces and fortifications built by King Herod the Great as a refuge,



probably between 37 and 31BC, atop an isolated rock plateau some 1,400 feet high on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert overlooking the Dead Sea. However, Masada is best known today for the violence that occurred there in the first century AD. In the final days of the First Jewish-Roman War, a siege of Masada by the Tenth Legion of the Roman army led to the mass suicide of the Jewish rebels and their families who had made Masada their last stand. For this reason, Masada is the most popular destination of Jewish tourists visiting Israel and has become one of Israel's greatest political symbols, a symbol of the Jewish people's determination to be free in their own land.

After completing their training, all Israeli soldiers take an oath there: "Masada shall not fall again."

Following the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70AD the remaining rebels and their families fled the city and went to the fortress of Masada. There, they held out against the Romans for three long, brutal years. Once it became apparent that the Tenth Legion's siege ramp, battering rams and catapults would soon succeed in breaching Masada's walls, Eleazar ben Yair, the rebel leader, decided that all 960 of the Jewish defenders should commit suicide. According to Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian from whom we have learned so much about 1st century Israel, two women and five children managed to hide themselves during the mass suicide and it was from one of these women that Josephus received an account of Eleazar ben Yair's last speech and included parts of it in his first book, *The Jewish War*.

"Since we long ago resolved," Eleazar began, "never to be servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God Himself, Who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time has now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice. We were the very first that revolted against Rome, and we are the last that still fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God has granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom." He concluded: "Let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted slavery, and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually." Eleazar also ordered that all the Jews' possessions except food be destroyed, for "the food will be a testimony when we are dead that we were not subdued for want of necessities; but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death to slavery." After this oration the men killed their wives and children and then each other.

The site of Masada was discovered in 1842, but archaeological excavations did not begin in earnest until the early 1960's. Herod's palace and fortress, a synagogue and even the remains of a small Byzantine church from a 7th century Orthodox monastery have all been discovered atop Masada.

The Dead Sea

The Dead Sea is a large salt lake, similar to the Great Salt Lake in Utah, that borders Jordan to the east; and Israel and the West Bank to the west. To get there, we took the world's lowest road – Highway 90 – which is some 1,200 feet below sea level. The Dead Sea is about 42 miles long and 11 miles wide at its widest point. It lies in the Jordan Rift Valley, and its main tributary – the main source of its waters - is the Jordan River. There are no outlet streams. The surface and shores of the Dead Sea are nearly 1,400 feet below sea level, the lowest elevation on the surface of the Earth. The Dead Sea is 1,200 feet deep, making it the deepest hyper-saline lake in the world. With levels of more than 30% salinity, it is also one of the world's saltiest bodies of water, more than eight times saltier than the ocean and twice as salty as Utah's Great Salt Lake. This high level of salinity makes for a harsh environment in which fish, aquatic plants and other types of marine life cannot flourish - hence its name, the Dead Sea - although miniscule quantities of bacteria and microbial fungi can be found. This high salt content is also what enables people to effortlessly float in the buoyant waters of the Dead Sea.

People have long used the salt and minerals of the Dead Sea to produce cosmetics and its mud has been said to be restorative since the times of Herod the Great, more than 2,000 years ago. Today the Dead Sea is also being "mined" by Israel and Jordan to produce millions of tons of potash for fertilizer, magnesium, sodium chloride and bromine each year. This, together with the diversion of water from the Jordan River to serve the further development of agriculture and industry in the region, are causing the Dead Sea to begin drying up. Some environmental scientists have predicted that unless serious changes are made, the Dead Sea could dry up by as early as 2050.



*The Stone of Anointing
at the entrance to the Church of the Resurrection
that marks the place where the Lord Jesus' body was anointed
in preparation for his burial*



*Golgotha – The Place of the Skull
where the Lord Jesus was crucified*