

# ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

## – A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The region is the birthplace of western civilisation and occupation can be traced back 1.4million years. The Copper and Bronze Ages (4500 BC – 1200 BC) saw the development of fortified towns and villages. After occupation by the Pharaohs in the early third millennium the ‘Arabic Migration’ passed through this region c.1800BC. Later peoples from Crete (whom we know as Philistines and from whom the name Palestine also comes) arrived at the time when the ‘Children of Israel’ were occupying Samaria, the inland mountain region. In the C8<sup>th</sup> BC Assyria swept through the area which, in the C6<sup>th</sup> BC was conquered by the Babylonians. In turn, the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by Cyrus, King of Persia (538 BC). That Empire ended with the conquest of Alexander the Great in 330 BC after whose death in 323 BC the region was acquired by Ptolemy and became a battleground between him and the forces of the Seleucus IV Philopator, ruler of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire. In 200 BC his descendents overthrew the Ptolemies but were, in turn, forced out by the descendents of the Maccabees after their revolt in 167 BC. The Romans gained control of the area in the C 2<sup>nd</sup> AD which then passed to the Byzantine (Eastern Empire) in AD 324. Two hundred years later there was a short-lived Samaritan revolt and in AD 614 an invasion by the Persians. These events weakened Byzantine control and the Islamic invasion in AD 636 led to the surrender of Jerusalem to the Caliph Omar in AD 638.

Successive dynasties protected the region: Umayyad (661-750), Abbasid (750-974) and Fatimid (975-1171). But in 1009 the Caliph Hakim unleashed a violent persecution of Christians which led to the First Crusade in 1099 when the (Latin) Kingdom of Jerusalem was established. This lasted until its defeat by Saladin at the Battle of the Horns of Hattin in 1187. Further Crusades occurred and many Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims, were killed by the invading armies.

In 1250 the Mamalukes of Cairo toppled the Ayyubid dynasty of Saladin and in 1353 the Franciscans returned to Jerusalem. The Ottoman (Turkish) Empire took control in 1517 when Suleiman the Magnificent (1520 – 66) rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the First World, War Britain was given a Mandate to govern Palestine by the League of Nations. Control was turned over to the United Nations in 1947 and war broke out when the British withdrew in 1948, leaving Jordan in possession of the West Bank (of the River Jordan) and the Old City of Jerusalem. Israel became a sovereign State. In the war of 1967 Israel gained possession of all this territory, a move never recognised by the United Nations to this day.

## PLACES WE WILL ENCOUNTER

### TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>

#### **Tel Aviv**

Regarded as the capital of Israel by the UN, this modern city grew up from the old town of Jaffa. Occupied since 5000 BC it saw the arrival of cedar from Lebanon for the re-building of the Temple in Jerusalem under Uzziah (2 Chron. 2:16). It lost its importance after Herod the Great built the port of Caesarea but later regained its position and played a crucial role during the Crusades.

*The journey from Tel Aviv to Tiberias may take us along the Plain of Sharon, the coastal strip through which countless migrations and armies have passed. We turn into the 'Mountains of Samaria', probably passing Megiddo in the Carmel range. The site of many great battles (Jgs 1:27) it became the symbol for the battle to end all wars (Rev. 16:16). We enter the Galilee and stay at the Mount of the Beatitudes Guest House.*

### WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2<sup>ND</sup>

#### *Consider your Calling*

#### **Nazareth**

*Return to Tiberias visiting Cana, scene of Jesus first miracle, en route where there may be opportunity to renew marriage and partnership vows in the Wedding Church. In the evening we meet and Julie and John-Francis will be available.*

The evangelists do not agree as to where Mary and Joseph lived before the birth of Jesus. Matthew implies that it was Bethlehem (*Matthew 2*) but Luke says it was Nazareth (*Luke 2: 4-5*). We know that Joseph belonged to a Judean family, so Luke is probably correct in assuming Joseph and Mary had been born there.

Slender evidence suggests that a Judæo-Christian community survived in Nazareth during the C2<sup>nd</sup> and C3<sup>rd</sup> AD. Early Byzantine pilgrims do not seem to have paid much attention to the place, although Egeria was shown a "big and very splendid cave". Various legends grew around it until the C7<sup>th</sup> AD when two large churches were in evidence. Tancred (1072 – 1112; a Norman leader of the First Crusade who later became Prince of Galilee and regent of the Principality of Antioch) built another above the cave but after the defeat of the Latin's, the site fell into decay. In 1620 the Franciscans were allowed to buy it back and they built a church there in 1730 which was demolished in 1955 to make way for the present basilica

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup> *S. Gregory the Great, Pp and Dr*

#### ***Living our Calling***

*After breakfast we visit the beautiful and tranquil church of the Beatitudes (Lectio Divina on the Beatitudes). We then continue to visit the sites associated with Jesus' life around the Sea of Galilee, driving to Mensa Christi (where Jesus appeared to his disciples after His resurrection); we celebrate the Eucharist on the shores of the lake at Tabgha beside the Church of the Loaves and Fishes. We continue to the ruins of Capernaum, Jesus' Galilean base. Lunch is at kibbutz Nof Ginnosar. We then sail*

*on the Sea of Galilee, returning to Beatitudes by mid-afternoon. In the evening, there will be a time of prayer and reflection.*

### **The Sea of Galilee: Capernaum**

Almost the permanent base for Jesus during his early Galilean ministry (*Matthew 9:1*) all that remains is what has been restored by archaeologists. Most important are the House of Peter and the ‘Gentile’ Synagogue. Dating back to C13<sup>th</sup> BC, its later history begins when Herod Antipas equipped it as a customs post between his territory and that of his brother, Philip. It was a poor place (its synagogue had to be built by a foreigner) and the home of the first disciples (*Mark 1: 21, 29*). Although Jesus’ ministry made little impact the Spanish nun, Egeria, noted (AD381-384) the presence of a (Byzantine) church.

### **Tabgha (Heptapegon)**

By the C4<sup>th</sup> AD Egeria notes there was a church here marking three episodes in the life of Jesus: the post-Resurrection appearance to Peter (*John 21*), the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes (*Mark 6: 30-44*) and the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*). Today there are three separate, modern churches marking these traditional sites.

## **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup>**

*The Passion begins*

### **Mount Tabor (*Har Tavor*)**

Rising above the Tavor valley west of the Jordan with views to the east of Mount Hermon, Nazareth to the west and the Valley of Jezreel to the south, from the dawn of history people have found contact with the unknown on this peak. It is first mentioned in the bible in connection with the defeat of King Jabin of Hazor at the hands of Deborah and Barak in 1125 BC (*Judges 4: 6*). Heterodox Jewish worship here was condemned by Hosea (*Hosea 5:1*); for Jeremiah it symbolised the might of Nebuchadnezzar (*Jeremiah 46:18*).

In AD 67 the Jews (under Josephus) who had taken refuge here were defeated by the Roman general, Placidus. As the site of the Transfiguration, the Roman historian Eusebius (d.340) hesitates between here and Mount Hermon whilst the *Pilgrim of Bordeaux* places it at the Mount of Olives. In 348 S. Cyril of Jerusalem decided on Tabor: by 570 there were three edifices on the summit but in 732 only one church is mentioned, dedicated to Jesus, Moses and Elijah. The Crusader general, Tancred, installed Benedictine monks here in 1099 and they resisted Saladin’s attack in 1183 when the Greek church of S. Elijah was destroyed. They left with the defeat of the Latin Kingdom. The Muslims built a fortress here between 1212 and 1214, the cause of the Fifth Crusade (1213 – 1221). The present Latin basilica was constructed in 1924.

### **The Jordan Valley**

*Following the Jordan river southwards we pass through the New Testament region of **Decapolis** after which comes **Perea** (now in modern Jordan). We pass ancient **Pella** and **Succoth** to the left, and through the region of Samaria before arriving at **Jericho**, now part of the Palestinian (National) Authority.*

## **Jericho**

The lowest and oldest city on earth, pre-historic nomads settled at **Tel es-Sultan** near a powerful spring. The Tel was captured by Joshua c.1200 BC and it continued to be occupied until the Babylonian Exile (586 BC). After this the Persians made Jericho an administrative centre and Alexander the Great (336-323 BC) made it a private estate. Fortifications were built on **Gebel Quaruntul** (Mount of the Temptation) and opposite, at the entrance to **Wadi Qelt**. Herod the Great leased the oasis to Cleopatra and after her death Emperor Octavian (Julius Caesar Octavianus) handed it over to Herod who greatly extended the site.

The area was heavily populated in the Byzantine era when the Monastery of S. George in the Wadi Qelt was built. During the Middle Ages churches commemorating the Temptation of Christ were built on Gebel Quaruntul. After the departure of the Crusaders the area degenerated and only with the arrival of the British during the Mandate period did the city begin to grow again.

*Continue to Jerusalem. Six night stay at the Lutheran Hostel near Jaffa Gate.*

## **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup>**

### ***'Jerusalem, Jerusalem...'***

*We walk to the beautiful Crusader church of St Anne where we celebrate the Eucharist and then spend the morning devotionally following the Stations of the Cross along the Via Dolorosa through the lanes of the Old City to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. After lunch at Bulghourji restaurant in the Armenian Quarter, our coach will meet us and take us to the Mount of Olives for a panoramic view of the walled city. As we look across the Kidron Valley we see the Golden Gate, the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We visit the Pater Noster Church, Dominus Flevit Chapel, and the Church of All Nations. 'Terra Divine' in the evening.*

The Old City is divided into four neighbourhoods, which are named according to the ethnic affiliation of most of the people who live in them. These quarters form a rectangular grid, but they are not equal in size. The dividing lines are the street that runs from Damascus Gate to the Zion Gate — which divides the city into east and west — and the street leading from the Jaffa Gate to Lion's gate — which bifurcates the city north and south. Entering through the Jaffa Gate and traveling to David Street places the Christian Quarter on the left. On the right, as you continue down David Street, you'll enter the Armenian Quarter. To the left of Jews Street is the Muslim Quarter, and, to the right, is the Jewish Quarter.

## **JERUSALEM – A brief history**

### **BC**

- c. 1750 Abraham makes a mutual defence treaty with Melchizedek (*Genesis 14: 18-20 cf. Hebrews 7*)
- c. 1200 The Israelites are unable to occupy Jerusalem when they invade the land (*Judges 1: 21*)

- c. 1000 David captures the town (located on Mt. Zion) and makes it his capital (*2 Samuel 5:6ff*). Today the site is occupied by the Arab village of Silwan.
- c.950 Soloman expands the city to include Mt. Moriah where he builds the Temple (*1 Kings 5: 5-6*). Today this is the site of the Dome of the Rock and the El Aqsa Mosque.
- 587 Babylonians destroy the city, level the Temple and take the leaders into captivity until 537 when King Cyrus the Persian allows them to return (*2 Kings 25*).
- 537ff Some of the Jews return and build a modest Temple (*Haggai 1&2; Zechariah 8; Isaiah 62; Tobit 13: 9-18*).
- 167-164 The Persian, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, leader of the Hellenistic-Syrian kingdom (Selucid Empire) defiles the Temple, setting up a statue of himself (the ‘Abomination of Desolation). Judas Maccabeus leads a revolt, relighting the lamps in the Temple and thereby initiating the Feast of Hanukkah (*1 Maccabees 1-4; Daniel 9: 24-27*).

## AD

- 1-33 Vision of Zechariah (*Luke 1:15*); Presentation of Jesus (*Luke 2:22*); Jesus instructs the teachers in the Temple (*Luke 2:41*). Jesus enters Jerusalem, cleanses the Temple, preaches and predicts the fall of the city (*Luke 19:28 - 21:38*)
- 33 Jesus condemned to death and crucified on Golgotha.
- c. 40-44 Herod Agrippa builds ‘Third Wall’ which encloses Golgotha, previously outside the city.
- 70 Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans.
- 132 Second Jewish Revlot led by self-styled messiah, Simon bar-Cochba, put down, city levelled and new Roman City of Aelia Capitolina built. Jews forbidden to enter on pain of death.
- 326 The (Byzantine) Empress Helena persuades her son, Constantine, to construct Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
- 614 Persian invasion under Khosru II destroyed almost all the Christian shrines in Jerusalem and Palestine including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Justinian’s Nea Church and other buildings erected by the Empress Eudokia.
- 638 City falls to the Umayyad Arabs (Muslims). It retains its Roman name until the tenth century, when it was changed to the Arabic al-Quds (the Holy).
- 688 Dome of the Rock begun near the area formerly occupied by Herod’s Temple and close by the Wailing Wall, the last remnant of Solomon’s temple. Jewish tradition held this to be the place of Abraham’s intended sacrifice of Isaac. Islamic tradition points to the sacred rock as the place from which Muhammad began his

Ascent to Heaven to receive Allah's (God in Arabic) final revelation. In building the Dome of the Rock, the earliest Arab rulers of Palestine expressed their reverence for Jerusalem, city of the prophets from Abraham and Moses to Jesus, culminating with Muhammad, "the seal of the prophets." The Dome of the Rock is the oldest existing Islamic monument in the world and, for most, still the greatest.

- 1009 The sixth Fatimid Caliph, Hakim, orders destruction of churches.  
1099 City taken during the First Crusade (1096-1099). Crusaders establish the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem which lasts almost one hundred years.  
1187 City falls to Saladin (1137?-1193), Muslim warrior and Ayyubid sultan of Egypt after the Battle of Hattin (July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1187)  
1250 Egypt captured by the Turkish Mamluke's.  
1517 Ottoman Turks conquer Palestine and Jerusalem incorporated in the dominions of the Ottoman Empire until expelled by the League of Nations for siding with the Germans in World War I.  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> cent. Jewish immigration into Palestine increases.  
1918 Britain rules under League of Nations Mandate. Consequent increase in Jewish immigration.  
1947 UN Resolution 181 calls for partitioning of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. Britain tells UN it is terminating Mandate no later than August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948.  
1948 Israel declares independence on May 14<sup>th</sup> followed by first Arab invasion. Old City becomes part of Jordan.  
1967 Six Days War during which Israel captures Jerusalem.

### **The Via Dolorosa**

The Via Dolorosa pilgrimage been followed since early Christianity, beginning as soon as it became safe to do so after Constantine legalized the religion (mid-4thC). Originally, Byzantine pilgrims followed a similar path to the one taken today, but did not stop along the way. Over the centuries, the route has changed several times. By the 8thC, the route had changed: beginning at the Garden of Gethsemane, pilgrims headed south to Mount Zion then doubled back around the Temple Mount to the Holy Sepulchre. The Middle Ages saw two rival routes, based on a split in the Latin Church: those with churches to the west went westward and those with churches in the east went eastward.

From the 14th to 16th centuries, pilgrims followed the Franciscan route, which began at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and included eight stations. Around this time, the tradition of 14 Stations of the Cross was developing in Europe. To avoid disappointing European pilgrims, the difference was made up with the addition of six more stations.

Today, the main route of the Via Dolorosa is that of the early Byzantine pilgrims, with 14 stations along the way. For most pilgrims the exact location of each event along the Via Dolorosa is of little importance; the pilgrimage has great meaning due to its proximity to the original events and the reflection upon them along the way.

## **Gethsemane**

According to the Synoptics, having eaten the Paschal meal somewhere in the city, Jesus went with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden (**Gethsemane**) on the Mount of Olives. On his way there, Jesus would have passed the Tombs of the Prophets. The church, built in 1924, is located on the traditional site where Jesus prayed and covers the “elegant church” (Egeria) built between 379 and 384 AD on the site where the pre-Constantinian Christian community commemorated the Prayer of Christ.

It was destroyed by an earthquake c. 745 AD. The Crusaders built a church there but this was abandoned in 1345.

## **Church of the Holy Sepulchre**

The early Christian community of Jerusalem appears to have held liturgical celebrations at Christ's tomb from the time of the resurrection until the city was taken by the Romans in 66 AD. Less than a century later, in 135 AD, Emperor Hadrian filled in the quarry to provide a level foundation for a temple to Aphrodite. The site remained buried beneath the pagan temple until Emperor Constantine the Great converted to Christianity in 312 AD. He soon showed an interest in the holy places associated with his new faith, and commissioned numerous churches to be built throughout the Holy Land. The most important of these, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, was begun in 326 AD. Constantine's builders dug away the hillside to leave the rock-hewn tomb of Christ isolated and with enough room to build a church around it. They also cleared away Hadrian's temple and the material with which an old quarry had been filled to provide the temple's foundations. In the process, according to contemporary Christian historians, the Rock of Golgotha was found. In the course of the excavations, Constantine's mother St. Helena is said to have discovered the True Cross near the tomb. This is a relatively early legend, but was unknown by Eusebius, the historian and contemporary of Constantine. The legend says St. Helena actually discovered three crosses - those of the two thieves and that of Christ. To discern the one belonging to Christ, a sick man was brought to each cross and he was miraculously healed by one of them. The Constantinian church was much larger than the one that stands today, but had a simpler layout. It consisted of an atrium, a covered basilica, an open courtyard with the stone of Golgotha in the southeast corner, and the tomb of Christ, enshrined in a small, circular edifice. The tomb of Christ was not completed until 384 AD, well after the dedication of the church, because of the immense labor involved in cutting away the rock cliff in order to isolate the tomb. This building was severely damaged by fire in 614 AD when the Persians invaded Jerusalem. They also captured the True Cross, but in 630, Emperor Heraclius marched triumphantly into Jerusalem and restored the True Cross to the rebuilt Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In 638, the Christians were forced to surrender Jerusalem to Muslim control under caliph Omar. In a remarkable gesture for the time, Omar refused to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, saying, "If I had prayed in the church it would have been lost to you, for the Believers [Muslims] would have taken it saying: Omar prayed here." This act of generosity would have unfortunate consequences, however.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre continued to function as a Christian church under the protection of Omar and the early Muslim rulers, but this changed on October 18, 1009, when the "mad" Fatimid caliph, Hakim, brutally and systematically destroyed the great church. Ironically, if Omar had turned the church into a mosque, Hakim would have left it alone. But instead, Hakim had wrecking crews knock over the walls and attack the tomb of Christ with picks and hammers, stopping only when the debris covered the remains. The east and west walls were completely destroyed, but the north and south walls were likely protected by the rubble from further damage.

The Christian community of Jerusalem could not afford repairs, but in 1048 Emperor Constantine Monomachos provided money for reconstruction, subject to stringent conditions imposed by the caliphate. The funds were not adequate to completely repair the original church, however, and a large part of it had to be abandoned. The atrium and the basilica were completely lost; only the courtyard and the rotunda remained. The latter was made into a church by the insertion of a large apse into the facade. This was the church to which the knights of the First Crusade arrived to sing their *Te Deum* after capturing Jerusalem on July 15, 1099. The Crusader chief Godfrey of Bouillon, who became the first king of Jerusalem, declared himself *Advocatus Sancti Sepulchri*, "Defender of the Holy Sepulchre." The Crusaders were slow to renovate the church, only beginning to make modifications in the Romanesque style in 1112. They first built a monastery where the Constantinian basilica used to be, having first excavated the Crypt of St. Helena. In 1119 the shrine of Christ's tomb was replaced. The Constantinian courtyard was covered with a Romanesque church (dedicated in 1149), which was connected to the rotunda by a great arched opening resulting from the demolition of the 11th-century apse. A bell tower was added in 1170.

The three primary custodians of the church, first appointed when Crusaders held Jerusalem, are the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Apostolic and Roman Catholic churches. In the 19th century, the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox acquired lesser responsibilities, which include shrines and other structures within and around the building. An agreement regulates times and places of worship for each Church. Subsequent centuries were not altogether kind to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It suffered from damage, desecration, and neglect, and attempts at repair (a significant renovation was conducted by the Franciscans in 1555) often did more damage than good. In recent times, a fire (1808) and an earthquake (1927) did extensive damage. Not until 1959 did the three major communities (Latins, Greeks, Armenians) agree on a major renovation plan. The guiding principle was that only elements incapable of fulfilling their structural function would be replaced. Local masons were trained to trim stone in the style of the 11th century for the rotunda, and in the 12th-century style for the church.

The church's chaotic history is evident in what visitors see today. Byzantine, medieval, Crusader, and modern elements mix in an odd mish-mash of styles, and each governing Christian community has decorated its shrines in its own distinctive way.

The means whereby many different communities co-exist is known as the **Status Quo**, a collection of historical traditions and influences, of rules and laws, which establish the relations, activities, and movements that are carried out in those parts of the church where ownership is shared by different Christian denominations. For centuries, the different communities lived side by side under Islamic domination, despite their profound differences in dogma, ritual and language. In the first half of the 19th C, the alliance between Turkey and Russia had direct consequences on the question of the Holy Places, and in 1852 the Sultan promulgated the *Status Quo nunc*, freezing the conditions existing at the moment of the agreement. The *Status Quo* was confirmed as a legal instrument and continues to the present day as the sole frame of reference for resolving litigations and disputes.

Two Muslim families have the privilege of guarding the door of the church, which is opened according to a schedule agreed to by the three largest religious communities.

### **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup> (23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)**

***'This is my body, given for you'***

*Optional: Early morning visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; Eucharist at St George's Cathedral (11am). Lunch: Jerusalem Hotel.*

### **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup>**

***'And we have seen His glory'***

*After visiting the Church of S. Peter in Gallicantu, we cross into Palestinian territory to visit Bethlehem. We celebrate Mass in the Shepherds' Fields with time to shop in the olive wood co-operative. Lunch will be at the Bethlehem Rehab Centre in Beit Jala. In the afternoon we see Manger Square and visit the Basilica and Grotto of the Nativity and St Jerome's Caves. There will be time for reflection and meditation.*

### **Bethlehem**

First mentioned in the C14<sup>th</sup> BC, the town was the birthplace of **David** (*I Samuel 16*) whose Ephraim family had lived there for generations (*Ruth 1-4*). When **Saul's** jealousy forced him to become an outlaw, David led an attack on the Philistines (*I Samuel 23: 5*) who, in reprisal, put a garrison there (*2 Samuel 23: 14*). Its fortifications were improved by David's grandson, **Rehoboam** (928-911 BC) to protect the eastern flank of his kingdom (*2 Chronicles 11: 6*).

Two centuries later the town had sunk into an insignificant village but one intimately linked to messianic hopes (*Micah 5: 1*). Archaeology has shown that the C10<sup>th</sup> – C8<sup>th</sup> BC town was located around the Church of the Nativity and the caves beneath it were in use in that period. Presumably those who returned from the Exile in the C6<sup>th</sup> BC (*Ezra 2: 21*) lived on this site.

**Mary and Joseph** were natives of Bethlehem, probably only moving to Nazareth because of the insecurity generated by the Herodian dynasty (*Matthew 2*). Their long residence in the Galilee gave Luke the impression that they had always lived there and had to find a reason which would place them in Bethlehem at the moment of the birth of Jesus (*Luke 2: 1-7*). He mistakenly invoked the census of Quirinius, but this took

place in AD 6. The gospels make no mention of a cave, yet in C2<sup>nd</sup> AD S. Justin Martyr and the *Protoevangelium of James* speak of a cave in which Jesus was born. Many of the present older houses in the area are built in front of caves. St. Jerome in AD 395 wrote that the church here had been built on a grove sacred to the god Thammuz (Adonis) whose cult flourished after Hadrian expelled the Jews from Jerusalem. The commemoration of his mystical death in a cave may have been motivated by a desire to interfere with the veneration of Christians. Such early recording of the sacredness of this site gives validity to it being the actual place of Jesus' birth. The Empress Helena dedicated the first basilica here on 31<sup>st</sup> May 339 and some parts of this church remain. In 384 St. Jerome took up residence and made Jerusalem a great monastic centre. Here he also made a translation of the Old and New Testaments (the Vulgate). The church was rebuilt by Justinian in AD 529 and is the one which exists today. The Persians invaders (614) spared the building because of the representation of the Magi dressed in Persian attire, on the façade. In 1009 the Muslims prevented the application of the Caliph, Hakim's decree to destroy all churches because they were allowed to worship in the south transept. Crusader kings were crowned there and it was renovated by the Franks and Byzantines between 1165-9 although the Ottoman Turks looted the area in 1517. Despite an earthquake in 1834 and fire in 1869, the church survives.

### **TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>: *The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary***

*A free day in Jerusalem or an OPTIONAL day trip walking in the desert with time to relax by the Dead Sea. We drive into the Judean wilderness and walk through the stunning Wadi Qelt to St George's desert monastery. We then drive to Kalia Kibbutz Hotel by the Dead Sea for lunch and an opportunity to float in the sea's therapeutic waters (towels provided). On return to Jerusalem we will see Qumran, the site of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the evening there will be an opportunity for Terra Divine.*

### **Wadi Qelt and S. George's Monastery**

St. George's Monastery began in the fourth century with a few monks who sought the desert experiences of the prophets, and settled around a cave where they believed Elijah was fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:5-6). This Greek Orthodox monastery was built in the late 5th century AD by John of Thebes. He became a hermit and moved from Egypt to Syria-Palaestina in 480 AD. The monastery was named St. George after the most famous monk who lived at the site – Gorgias of Coziba. Destroyed in 614 AD by the Persians, the monastery was more or less abandoned after the Persians swept through the valley and massacred the fourteen monks who dwelt there. The Crusaders made some attempts at restoration in 1179. However, it fell into disuse after their expulsion. In 1878, a Greek monk, Kalinikos, settled here and restored the monastery, finishing it in 1901. The traditions attached to the monastery include a visit by Elijah en route to the Sinai Peninsula, and St. Joachim, whose wife Anne was infertile, weeping here when an angel announced to him the news of Mary's conception. The bones and skulls of the martyred monks killed by the Persians in 614 AD can still be seen today in the monastery chapel.

## **Masada**

All information about this site comes from Josephus' (first-century Romano-Jewish historian) *Jewish War*. First fortified by Herod the Great who placed his family there after the Parthian (Persian) invasion c. 50 BC. He later relieved the garrison and realised the value of Masada as a last refuge should the Jews turn against him. In the summer of AD 66 Jewish rebels (called Sicarii) took it by a trick. They occupied the site with brutality towards their fellow Jews but caused no problem for the Romans. However, the Roman governor, Flavius Silva, turned his attention there, probably in the winter of AD 73, and tradition tells us that the defenders eventually committed suicide rather than be captured (AD 74). Masada was occupied by Byzantine monks in the C4<sup>th</sup> – C5<sup>th</sup> who constructed a church here.

## **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9<sup>TH</sup>**

*'Did not our hearts burn within us'*

*We drive to West Jerusalem and the village of Ein Karem where we celebrate the Eucharist and lunch at the Sisters of Sion convent. We spend time visiting the Church of John the Baptist and the Church of the Visitation. We visit the Crusader church at Abu Gosh (a possible site of Emmaus) for a quiet afternoon concluding with Vespers before returning to Jerusalem. In the evening there will be a social gathering.*

## **Ein Karem**

Tradition places the birth of John the Baptist in the picturesque village of Ein Karem 7.5km south-west of Jerusalem. Luke's Gospel tells of the circumstances of John's birth (1:5-24, 39-66). The angel Gabriel appeared to the elderly priest Zechariah while he was serving in the Temple and told him that his wife Elizabeth was to bear a son. Zechariah was sceptical, so he was struck dumb and remained so until the baby John was born. In the meantime, Gabriel also appeared to the teenage Virgin Mary in Nazareth, telling her that she was to become the mother of Jesus. As proof, he revealed that Mary's elderly cousin Elizabeth was already six months' pregnant. Mary then "went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country", a distance of about 120km, "where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb." (Lk. 1:39-41)

### *Two sites for two houses*

The two main sites in the "Judean town" of Ein Karem are linked to the understanding that Zechariah and Elizabeth had two houses in Ein Karem (also known as Ain Karim, Ain Karem, 'Ayn Karim and En Kerem).

Their usual residence was in the valley. But a cooler summer house, high on a hillside, allowed them to escape the heat and humidity. The summer house is believed to be where the pregnant Elizabeth "remained in seclusion for five months" (Luke 1:24) and where Mary visited her. The house in the valley is where John the Baptist was born. Here, also, old Zechariah finally regained his power of speech after his son was born, when he obediently wrote on a writing tablet that the baby's name was to be John.

## **Abu Ghosh**

The village of Abu Gosh was first settled over 6,000 years ago. In the biblical period, it was known as Kiryat Ye'arim, and was a ceremonial centre where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. In the Byzantine era (some 1,500 years ago), Kiryat Ye'arim became a holy place and a church was built in the village. During the Crusader Period (about 1,000 years ago), the village was ascribed as the place where Jesus revealed himself after his resurrection – that is, Emmaus – and the Benedictine Monastery was built. The monastery is one of the most beautiful buildings preserved from the Crusader Period. The Church of Notre Dame de l'Arche d'Alliance (Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant) is located at the highest point in the village, facing the impressive scenery of the Jerusalem Hills. This church was built in 1924 on the remains of an ancient Byzantine church. A large statue of the Virgin Mary was placed in the courtyard of the church, and is visible from every direction in the complex. Nuns live in the church, which also has several guest rooms. The present village was built in the Ottoman period by the Abu Gosh family, whose descendants represent the majority of the residents of the place (some 5,500 people).

## **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup>**

***'He has gone before you'***

*In the morning we will have a time for shared reflection on our experience of encountering the Lord through the Land, followed by our farewell Eucharist in the chapel at Ecce Homo. Depart around lunch time for Ben Gurion Airport. EL AL flight LY317 departs at 17.15 and arrives back at London Heathrow Airport at 20.45. Lunch is not included today.*

### **Morning: Final Assessment**

- What have I valued about the pilgrimage?
- What could have been improved?
- What have I learnt?
- Have I been changed?
- Is there a step I want to take? What help will I need? Where will I find it?

### **Free time in Jerusalem (No lunch)**

*Sources used in compiling this booklet include:*

*Wikipedia; <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/>; Go Israel; Sacred Destinations; seetheholyland.net;*