

# St. Joseph's Pilgrims – 2015

## Adult Pilgrimage to the Holy Land



February 23, 2015

## The Holy Land Pilgrims Leave Their Footprints behind at St. Joseph's



The pilgrims were commissioned at the conclusion of the Sunday liturgy for 1st Lent, with the words "As Jesus walked through Galilee, may You find Him as you travel there – everywhere, everywhere, you may go." Then, footprints with the name of each pilgrim were placed on the nave floor behind them as they departed.

**Tuesday – February 24**

## **West Palm Beach-Newark-Tel Aviv**

The pilgrims boarded the plane in West Palm Beach — amazingly awake and good spirited after an early morning.



A pleasant surprise was a goodbye visit with St. Joseph's Tamara Soares who happened to be working today as massage therapist at PBIA.





We arrived in Newark airport to find that it was so cold outside that even the birds decided to find a warmer bird bath inside the terminal by our gate.



**Tuesday – February 24**

## **At the gate in Newark Airport to Tel Aviv overnight**



Everything was on time. We had to grab a group photo when we could as boarding commenced shortly after the additional security checkpoint. Missing from the photo (but don't worry — on the airplane!) are Luann Langley, John & Mary Lou Eastham).

The flight had a one hour customs delay and to fix a minor mechanical issue with one of the passenger seats, but most of the time was made up in the air, and we arrived in Tel Aviv with only a short delay. It was an up-close personal encounter with a large group of Hasidic Jews who were very "active" on the flight. A few of the group were in Economy Plus, but the majority felt like they were in Economy Minus with the close proximity of the rows in front and behind. An intimate ecumenical experience.

**Wednesday – February 25**

## **Tel Aviv – Caesarea Maritima**

All arrived in Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport in good health — not exactly bright-eyed and bushy-tailed — maybe more like bushy-eyed and bright-tailed, but we all made it. After a bio break at a terminal bathroom, and then assigning each pilgrim a number (for counting off purposes during the trip) and a short prayer, we proceeded to immigration and baggage claim. All the luggage made it — thank you God!, and we proceeded through customs to meet our guide Rimon and our bus driver Faris.



Rimon is a Palestinian Christian (there are only approximately 8,000 of the nearly 1,000,000 inhabitants in Jerusalem). His family tree has a long history in the Holy Land, and he is one of the most experienced and respected guides in the country. He does a lot of certificate training for new Holy Land guides. Fr. Marty offered a prayer, and then, without any notes in hand, Rimon proceeded to share with us the history of all the places we passed as we drove from the airport west through the town of Tel-Aviv and then northward up the coast towards our first pilgrimage stop, Caesarea Maritima.

We watched a short movie and then Rimon led us on a tour of the area. Caesarea Maritima has an important place in Jewish history as well as Christianity. It was an important arrival port for trade ships from all over, and was built by Herod the Great with a large statue of the emperor to Caesar that would have been visible to all arriving ships. (Caesar had announced himself as God to be worshipped, and, as Rimon told us,

this was Herod's way of "sucking up" to the emperor.) This is the place under the governorship of Pontius Pilate, and is where Paul was imprisoned for two years. There are ruins of a Byzantine church that commemorates that spot. This is also the place where Peter baptized Cornelius as the first gentile Christian, as recorded in the book of Acts. Since this was the "official" beginning of the church under Peter recognizing that ALL are welcome — it truly is the "home" of Christianity for all of us. Rimon explained this after starting his talk by saying to us "Welcome Home." There are ruins of another Byzantine church here that commemorates the spot of Peter baptizing Cornelius.

We then boarded the bus and proceeded northward towards Mount Carmel. We stopped at a local restaurant for a wonderful salad buffet, with falafel sandwiches enjoyed by most on fresh pita bread. After lunch, we re-boarded the bus, and then experienced the challenge of trying to count off 1-30 to make sure everyone was present. (Oh boy, Fr. Marty has his hands full with this group!) After a final verification that 30 pilgrims were actually present, we continued to the Abbey at Mount Carmel, the place connected with the story of Elijah as recorded in 1 Kings 18-19. With Rimon's genuine charm, he was able to arrange for us to celebrate an opening Eucharist in the chapel there. (With so many on this pilgrimage who have participated in a Celtic pilgrimage before this, we included Sanctuary in our hymn list, since that is the traditional first hymn we sing in St. Margaret's Chapel on that pilgrimage.)

Leila read the story from 1 Kings connected with this spot, and Fr. Marty read the transfiguration Gospel to set the tone for our pilgrimage. Though the Gospel writers don't emphasize it, in order for the disciples to experience the mountaintop with Jesus, they had to be willing to hike up the mountain. These pilgrims have extended the energy to get to this point, so pray with them that they will be open to the mountaintop experience that God wants each of us to have. After a stunning rendition of Sunday's "Go Now in Peace" hymn (that would have made David Clyde Morse proud), we proceeded up to the viewing area overlooking the historic valley of Jezreel — the site overlooking the area where many Biblical battles had been fought.

We then boarded the bus for the 45-minute trip to our hotel in Nazareth. (This time the group was able to successfully count to 30.) Check-in was smooth, and after a short social gathering, the group gathered for a wonderful buffet dinner at 7:00pm. Most were in bed by 8:30pm to rest after the longest (and best) day ever...

**Thursday – February 26**

## **Galilee – Capernaum – Tabgha – Mt. Beatitudes – Golan Heights**

After finally laying supine in a real bed overnight, the pilgrims awoke and straggled down to breakfast in small groups. Some even had the energy to hit the gym when it opened at 6:30am. After we remembered how to count to 30 again, the bus departed our Nazareth hotel for the sea of Galilee, where we boarded our boat. It was a gloriously beautiful, warm, sunny day, and the water was as calm as could be.

The boat captains turned off the motors in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, and in with the locations of so much of Jesus' ministry visible at the shoreline that surrounded us, we sang "Lord, When You Came to the Seashore," to begin our celebration of Eucharist together on the boat.



We did some imaginative meditation, reflecting on two of the stories of Jesus' life connected with our location: the storm at Sea from Matthew 8 and Peter's walking on water in Matthew 14. At the conclusion of our Eucharist, the boat crew cranked up the speakers that played a rhythmic gospel recording of "O Happy Day," and there was dancing and rejoicing amongst the group exchanging the Peace.









Once we returned to shore, Rimón arranged for the group to visit the museum that houses a first century boat that was discovered, preserved, and relocated in a beautiful indoor display. While there is no evidence that this was the boat that Jesus and the disciples used, carbon dating proves that it was the type and size of fishing boat that was used at that time.



The next stop was at Tabgha, where there is a Franciscan Church that commemorates the spot of the miraculous feeding of the multitudes by Jesus. Rimón gave some fascinating history about the church, which preserves some beautiful early Christian church mosaic tiles in the floor. We had some time for some quiet reflection and prayer here before we moved on.

After Tabgha, we moved on to a delicious lunch at the YMCA youth hostel, which is the place Fr. Marty has stayed in before "back in the day." There is now a wonderful patio restaurant added that overlooks the Sea of Galilee, and with the windows open on this gorgeous day, the group feasted on local vegetables and dips with pita bread before the main course. Most had the local specialty — St. Peter's fish. Fresh dates were served

for dessert, and we had a good laugh when it was said to Chris Pedic, "Wait till we tell husband Tony that you had a juicy date on the pilgrimage..."



The post-lunch stop was at the Mountain of the Beatitudes, where the group was given time to explore the Basilica church and the surrounding gardens and area. The private time for walking and meditating was welcomed by all, and then we moved on to the Church of Peter's Primacy. This is the spot historically connected with the stories of Jesus saying to Peter, "on this rock I will build my church."



It is also traditionally associated with the resurrection appearance of Jesus at the end of John's Gospel, where the three-fold denial of Peter is replaced with the three-fold affirmation of "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."







Next, we moved on to the town of Capernaum, where we centered on the events recorded in Mark 2, where Jesus preaches in the Jewish synagogue, and then goes the short distance to the house of Peter, where he cures Peter's mother-in-law.



There is a beautiful church that has been constructed over the top of the archeological site where Peter's house was discovered.





After Rimón's informative lecture, the group was given some quiet moments to explore and pray.

The last stop of the day was a beautiful short walk on a nature trail to view the caves in the mountainside that are the beginning of the "Jesus Walk" to Cana. It was in one of these caves that lived Simon the Zealot, whom Jesus called to be one of the disciples.



Traffic near Nazareth was blocked, so we moved back our social hour and dinner a bit. After a wonderful buffet together, everyone went back to their rooms to retire and reflect on the incredible day together in Galilee.

**One thought on "Thursday – February 26 – Galilee – Capernaum – Tabgha – Mt. Beatitudes – Golan Heights"**



1. **John Carpenter** says:

**March 2, 2015 at 1:53 am**

I am very much enjoying all the photographs and anecdotes and historical information. A big thank you to whomever is going to all that effort!

**Friday – February 27**

## **Megiddo – Mount Tabor – Nazareth – Cana**

There is a saying about our Christian journey that we should begin with the end in mind. Perhaps today's microcosm pilgrimage experience reflected that macrocosmic reality. Because of our busy schedule of pilgrimage visits, we started early. We boarded the bus at 8am, and departed for our first stop at Megiddo. Most people will recognize it by its more well-known name of Armageddon, most often associated with the end of time. Thus, we truly began with the end in mind. This is the town that has been destroyed and rebuilt in history 25 different times. It is the place mentioned in Revelation 16, where it is referred to as the location where the final battle will take place. Because of the multitudinous levels of civilizations who built here, the layers of archeological digs provide a literal library of insight into the history of the people who lived here.







A fascinating point for the pilgrims were the many "feeding troughs" made of stone that were used as mangers in Jesus' day. It is much more likely that the traditional manger for Jesus was more accurately something like this stone variety:



At Megiddo, there is a famous system of tunnels that provided a hidden access to the spring of water outside the walls of the city. The tunnels have been fully excavated, and lucky for this pilgrim group, the access to the tunnels was opened following the winter rains today as we arrived. Thus, the pilgrims were able to hike down to the level of



spring, walk through the tunnel, see the spring, and then come up the other side. It was a fascinating adventure for all that surpassed any Disney fast pass ride.





Next, we continued on to Mount Tabor, which is the traditionally revered site of the Transfiguration of Jesus. The arrangements there require for us to employ separate vans to ascend to the top of the mountain, where there are separate chapels that commemorate Moses and Elijah, just as Peter wanted to build separate shrines for each in the Gospel story.





The main basilica church is much bigger, and after Rimón lectured on the significance of each of the chapels, there was a little free time for us to explore and to meditate, after which we went to the overlook point to see the panoramic view.



When it was time for departure from Mount Tabor on this beautiful warm and sunny day, Bob Lees commented that "This is so nice, I could stay up here all day." There was laughter when the realization hit that he had almost quoted Peter verbatim at the Transfiguration.

We proceeded on to Nazareth, where, after a delicious sandwich break for lunch of Shawarma or Falafel sandwich served at a Christian restaurant by Maron, we continued our walk up the block to the Church of the Annunciation.







Rimon arranged for the group to have a private time with Eduardo, one of the lead guides at the museum, who opened up just for our group to see a 1st century excavated house from Nazareth that would be very similar to the house in which Mary would have been living at the time that the angel Gabriel appeared to her.



The most startling revelation to the pilgrims here is that the "no room at the inn" is actually a mistranslation. The reality is that there was no room in the front room of the house (where people slept), so that the baby had to be born in the back room of the house, where the domestic animals were kept.

Also, we were able to see the original carved stone with the graffiti inscription in the museum that gives clear evidence that the church nearby is the spot where Mary lived at the time of the Annunciation.



The pilgrims then had a little free time for prayer and/or exploration to see the basilica church built around the actual house of Mary, prior to our return to the bus for our trip to Cana.





Some opted to then head towards St. Joseph's Church, which was a short walk away from the Annunciation Church. Upon arrival at St. Joseph's, we saw some beautiful bronze sculptures depicting St. Joseph.



We were equally surprised to find a very recognizable usher welcoming people to St. Joseph's Church:



At Cana, we were able to utilize the chapel of Divine Mercy to conduct our Eucharist and renewal of marriage vows, at which Charlotte and Bob Lees celebrated 45 years of marriage, Mary Lou and John Eastham celebrated 35 years of marriage, and Dee and Marty Zlatic celebrated 22 years. After the Eucharist, we paused for a group photo with the “newly married couples” in front of the main church prior to our return to the hotel for our last night dinner in Nazareth.



At our final social gathering and dinner in Nazareth, there were toasts, stories, and laughter shared, prior to a wonderful blessing prayer by Bobbie Smith to lead us into our Sabbath dinner in the hotel. The salad buffet was endless, and since our departure tomorrow is even earlier than today, everyone retired early to pack and to sleep. We will depart Nazareth tomorrow at 7:45am for our Jerusalem hotel tomorrow, via Jericho and Bethlehem.

Please be advised special love (LLL) is sent from the spouses to those husbands who are not able to be here with their wives. We toasted you tonight and remembered you all with fondness.

**Saturday – February 28**

## **Nazareth – Jordan Baptismal Site – Jericho – Bethlehem**

The group checked out of the Nazareth hotel after an early Sabbath breakfast for some, and we departed at 8:00am for the extended bus ride to Jericho from Nazareth. We arrived at the ancient site of the excavations at Jericho, and we climbed up to the top of the Tel where Rimon gave us the historical perspective of the area, from ancient times to the most recent excavations at this most ancient city.



The location of the mount of Jesus' temptation could be seen in the distance.



Following the visit to Jericho, there was an opportunity for a little “touristy” diversion, when all who desired had the opportunity for a short camel ride (*see photos below at the end of this post*).

We reboarded the bus and headed towards the site of Jesus’ Baptism at the Jordan River, but there was heavy cross-traffic at one point that slowed us down!



We arrived at the border between Palestine and Jordan, and walked down to the Jordan River to the baptism site. There we conducted a renewal of Baptismal vows service, having been reminded that this is the place where both the people of Israel crossed over the Jordan — having made the decision to go to Jericho, as well as the point of where Jesus made his decision to accept his mission and be baptized by John the Baptizer. At the conclusion of our service, we were sprinkled with water from the Jordan, and sang “We are God’s Work of Art.” After a group photo, we concluded with our sung version of “Wade in the Water,” and then moved on towards Bethlehem.





Our wonderful acolyte master Sherry Thomas also noticed that the olive branch used as an aspergillum holy water sprinkler could be our newest processional cross.



After a wonderful sandwich lunch at a local Christian restaurant in Bethlehem, we visited a Christian religious goods and souvenir shop before proceeding on to Shepherd's Field. There, in a cave chapel near the location where the shepherds lived who heard the voice of the angel calling them to follow the star to the manger, we celebrated a Christmas Eucharist. It didn't take long for everyone to get into the Christmas mood as we sang the appropriate Christmas hymns that mentioned the shepherds. Fr. Marty had purchased a wooden chalice and paten to commemorate this pilgrimage, and we used it for the first time at this Eucharist, which included an extended peace while we waited for Ramon to save the day by hunting down some Eucharistic bread from the nearby Franciscan monk.





We then proceeded to the Church of the Nativity, where we visited the site of Jesus' birth. The church is currently under renovation, so there is a lot of scaffolding up in the nave and transepts of the church.



However, the stairs down to the site of the birth and the manger was a meaningful visit for all.



Before the church closed for the day, we were able to see the ancient surviving mosaic floor that has been uncovered beneath the nave of the current church. The designs in the tiles are amazingly Celtic



On our way to the hotel, we stopped at a local Bethlehem restaurant run by a Christian family for a delicious dinner with salads and grilled meats.



We then proceeded back past the Palestine border guards to Jerusalem, where we checked in to the Leonardo Hotel. Most went to bed after the rooms had been sorted out in preparation for our visit to St. George's Anglican Cathedral tomorrow for the Sunday services and lunch.

We will attempt to Skype with the congregation during the 9:30am service announcements tomorrow, depending on the Wi-Fi reliability. It will be around 10:10am Florida time, which will be 5:10pm in Jerusalem.

And now in closing, here is proof of our camel riders for the doubters back home:











**Sunday – March 1**

## **Jerusalem – St. George's Cathedral**



Surprised by the huge brunch feast the hotel provided, most pilgrims took full advantage prior to our assembling in the Jerusalem hotel lobby at 9am for the short walk to St. George's Cathedral. It is literally across the street from us.



The original plan was to attend both the Arabic and English services, but since the 9:30am service turned out to be a combined Arabic and English service, we opted to participate fully in it, enjoy the coffee hour and meet some of the locals, and then move on for a short walking tour led by Rimón prior to returning for lunch.

The service was done in both languages for the most part, with some of the more common elements recited in one's language of choice at the same time. One of the priests on staff at the Cathedral preached in both languages, and delivered an eloquent sermon on the need for us not to consider ourselves as God's chosen people, but to live as people who choose God. There was a mixture of organ hymns from the Church of England hymnal, as well as some Taizé chants we all knew during Communion.

It was extremely cold inside the church. There were approximately 125 people worshipping there. There was another pilgrim group present who were from Durham

Cathedral in the UK, and we asked them to send greetings back to our friend Lillian there from our previous Celtic pilgrimage visits to Durham.



Rimon walked the group down to Damascus Gate, and there gave some historical information, as well as describing the options the group would have for their free exploring time after lunch.



He is very careful to find out what is going on in the city that particular day before he recommends what area of the city that the pilgrims should visit. Today the climate is peaceful both in weather and politics, so most of the group plans on venturing into the Old City or New City after lunch, after they received instructions from Rimon on where to go and where not to go. The pilgrims gathered in the garden courtyard back at St. George's as the lunch was prepared.





St. George's served a wonderful buffet lunch, and afterwards the pilgrims ended up forming small groups who were venturing out into varying areas of the city for their free time. It is uncertain how many will actually make it back in time for the Skype session with St. Joseph's, but since this is their only free time on the entire pilgrimage, Fr. Marty left them free to decide whether or not they would come back to the hotel for the Skype session.

Twenty of the pilgrims attended the Skype with St. Joseph's during the 9:30am service, and there were many stories and laughter shared before and after the session regarding the exploits experienced by each of the groups that had ventured into the Old and New City of Jerusalem. (It's something about "how many Episcopalians does it take to buy a tram ticket," but you can get the rest of the story from those who were there.) After a social time and dinner, everyone made their way to their rooms to bed, as we embark on a full day of pilgrimage tomorrow at 8:30am.

**Monday – March 2**

## **Jerusalem – Mount of Olives – Gethsemane – Hezekiah's Tunnel – Pool of Siloam**

We departed at 8:30am to travel by bus to The Mount of Olives area, where our first stop was at the location revered as the site of the Chapel of the Ascension, as described in Acts 1: 1-11. It is a Christian and Muslim holy site now believed to mark the place where Jesus ascended into heaven. In the small round church/mosque is a stone imprinted with what some claim to be the very footprints of Jesus.



(Gail Drane did not start dating Telly Savalas on this pilgrimage, but our guide Rimon took her by the arm to help her sore knees find stability as we walked this morning.)



Following this, we made a short walk to Pater Noster Church (Latin for “Our Father”), that has contains ceramic artwork with the Lord’s Prayer printed in 180 different languages.



(While the Gospels are clear that Jesus’ teaching of the prayer took place in Galilee, nevertheless this is the site dedicated to the prayer itself.) We gathered in a prayer circle here, and together sang Malotte’s version of the Lord’s Prayer together. (David Clyde Morse would be proud...)



We then continued our walk down the valley towards the church of Dominus Flevit (Latin for "the Lord wept"). The church itself is made in the shape of a teardrop because here, Jesus, while walking toward the city of Jerusalem, became overwhelmed by the beauty of the second temple, and predicting its future destruction, weeps openly, as recorded in Luke 19. We celebrated Eucharist here at an outdoor chapel while we overlooked the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount across the valley.







Next, we continued our walk, roughly following the direction of the Palm Sunday procession down the hill. However, rather than continuing across to Jerusalem, we stopped at the Garden of Gethsemane, where we visited the church dedicated to the Agony of the Garden. The olive trees there have been scientifically proven to date back to the time of Jesus.



There is a beautiful church there (called "Church of All Nations") where a Polish pilgrimage group was singing hymns led by a guitar playing nun that added to the beautiful of our meditative stop.



It was now 12:30pm, and the group was spiritually full but physically a bit drained after this incredible morning. We boarded the bus, and traveled back into Palestine past the border guards to have lunch at Ruth's Restaurant, run by a Palestinian Christian family there. After a short stop (ha!) at the adjoining souvenir shop, we continued on back towards Jerusalem, to visit Hezekiah's Tunnel — an underground tunnel used to divert water from a spring outside the city walls to inside the city walls, so that the city could be under siege and they would have a source of fresh water without the attackers ever knowing it. There have been a lot of excavations done in the area leading to the tunnel, which we toured as we walked the gradual descent to the tunnel entrance. *(This was originally on the itinerary for Friday, but because we had additional time this afternoon, and to give the group a more leisurely Friday morning, we changed it to today.)*



We could view the area up to our left where Jesus had wept over Jerusalem, and below us the valley where they would have marched Jesus on his way to his trial.

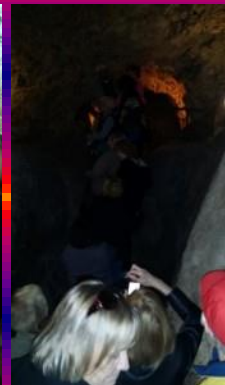


At the entrance to the tunnel, Rimón explained how there are actually two tunnels, one higher than the other. The higher one actually has water running through it, and a Disney-like sign indicated that it would not be over Rochelle's head.





The tunnel below is a dry tunnel, and given the cold weather and the attire of the group, we began the descent to walk through the dry tunnel.





Once we reached the bottom, we were able to actually see where the spring still has water rushing through it.



A short walk from the exit from Hezekiah's Tunnel brought us to the Pool of Siloam. We had a slight delay with another "traffic jam" that everyone stopped to photograph before continuing on.



Once we arrived, we read the account of Jesus healing the blind man in John 9, where he tells the man to "go wash in the pool of Siloam." An amazing recent discovery here, due to a road collapsing, was the series of steps that led all the way down from the city to the pool of Siloam. They have excavated this entire series of steps, and we walked on the very steps that date back to Jesus' time.



These would have been the steps that the healed blind man would have walked to get to the pool of Siloam. By this time it was after 5:00pm, so Faris our bus driver did some fancy maneuvering through some narrow side streets, and got us back to our hotel.

We had a social gathering scheduled before dinner, and our party was crashed by a Cuban refugee and his wife!





(Our Bishop Leo Frade had arrived one day before his own pilgrimage group, along with his wife Diana and our travel agent Bob Bell.)



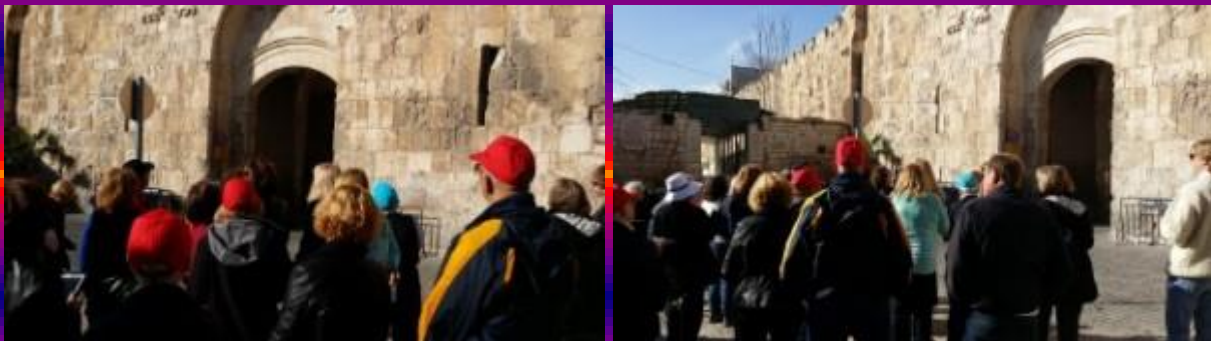
Everyone adjourned to bed shortly after dinner, because tomorrow is an early departure to get to the Via Dolorosa before the crowds.

**Tuesday – March 3**

## **Old City – Via Dolorosa – Temple Area – Christian Shrines**

The title theme for this day could be “Wow,” or alternatively, “There are bodies in the elevator but the tomb is empty,” as we were scheduled to start our most jam-packed pilgrimage day with a 7:30am departure, but the elevator in which were Fr. Marty & John Eastham got stuck, and no one was answering the alarm bell (no phone inside Israeli elevators. You know the old joke, so this priest and a lawyer walk into this elevator...) So Fr. Marty had to use his cell phone to call the 1-800 number on the inside of the elevator, and of course they put him on hold with (what else?) — elevator music playing. Then, they asked if we could wait a few minutes, to which John sarcastically replied, “No, if you can’t get us out of here in a minute, we’re both leaving!” (At least John had a priest for the Last Rites and Marty had a lawyer to take care of his will.)

In the end, and about a 20 minute delay, they were finally out of the elevator and we departed. We stopped outside the city gate for some preliminary information given by Rimón.



Then we walked up a block to our first stop — the Pool of Bethesda, in the area surrounding the Church of St. Anne, which is the legendary location of Mary’s birth. (Historically, this is not possible since it was not an area that was a likely home for Mary’s parents in that day.) However, the Pool of Bethesda has been archeologically shown to be true, and this is the spot where Jesus healed the paralyzed man (“pick up your mat and walk”) as recorded in John 5. At this location, we read the story in John’s Gospel, and then conducted our own healing service that was meaningful for all.





From here, it was just a short walk to the beginning of the Via Dolorosa, where we began our meditative walk to pray the Stations of the Cross. Because it was now getting close to mid-morning, there was pedestrian traffic on the narrow streets, with many of the shops opening. There was just enough “commotion” to give us the feel of what it would have been like when Jesus marched on that first Good Friday through the same streets. Even though there was much noise and activity around us, it seemed that everyone was very focused as we sang Taize chants moving from station to station.







Especially timely and meaningful was encountering this poster at Station 9 that remembered the Christians recently martyred for their faith in Syria.



Station 9, Jesus falls a third time, is just outside the Coptic Church. Given this recent horrible event, the collect we prayed here was most appropriate, "grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ."



Upon our arrival at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (the location of Calvary and the Empty Tomb), we completed our Stations of the Cross devotions before entering the Church, where we first visited the location of the rock of Calvary where Jesus was crucified. There is a hole underneath the altar where one is able to reach down and touch the rock that commemorates the spot of Jesus' cross. After everyone had an opportunity for private devotion, we gathered in a circle and added a prayer together for all those who had made it possible for us to be here today – from those who made this pilgrimage possible, to those who were the first to introduce us in our lives to Jesus Christ.







Then, we went down the stairs and queued up to enter the chapel where the Empty Tomb is located. Once we each reached the front of the line, we crouched down to enter the small space, where we each venerated the slab of stone right above where the empty tomb of the resurrected Jesus is.



The reality of what we had seen and where we had walked and prayed throughout this morning began to hit the pilgrims as we left the church and walked into the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem. We stopped at a Jewish bakery for a sandwich and drink before we continued on.

After lunch, we visited the museum built above and around the ruins of a house (called the Cardo, or Burnt House) discovered in recent times that was destroyed in the raids of 70 AD. There was an informative movie that told the story of the Jewish people who were slaughtered at this time. We discovered a chariot for two of our adored Queens to ride down to their theatre seats as the crowds waved to them.



We then continued our incredible day by walking down to the Western Wall, where everyone was given the opportunity to walk up to the Wailing Wall after our group photo.



Next, we continued on to the Jerusalem Archeological Park, where there is a comprehensive excavation and display of a Herodian palace that was discovered in recent times. A movie explained very completely how the average Jew would experience a visit to the Temple Mount to offer a sacrifice – everything from the tax they had to pay to the animals they would purchase for sacrifice.



This was a huge palace, as the model below gives an indication. They even had bathtubs, bathrooms, and a wine cellar where they stored the imported wines. (There was money to be made by taxing those who had to come to visit the temple.)





Also in the park was the area where the original steps leading up to the location of Mount Moriah, where Abraham brought his son Isaac to sacrifice. These steps are where people gathered around the temple. This is where Jesus would have been many times. This is where Peter in the book of Acts baptized 3,000 on Pentecost day.



A real treasure find in recent times in this area is the pinnacle stone from the top corner of the temple, which had an inscription on it indicating that this is the stone from whence the shofar trumpet was blown at ceremonial times. When the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, this would have been the first stone cast down to the ground, since it was the highest point on the corner of the temple. This, therefore, is the actual pinnacle of the temple — the place where one of the temptations of Jesus took place.







Following this, the group reboarded the bus after our full day of walking, and we continued on to St. Peter in Gallicantu, where we visited the site of Jesus' initial scourging and imprisonment by Caiphas. It is also the same dungeon where the apostle John and

Peter were imprisoned (Acts 5). The church itself is called Gallicantu (which means "cock crow"), because it commemorates the 3-fold denial of Jesus by Peter before the cock crowed.

Our final stop of the day was just across the road from here, at the Upper Room location of the Last Supper. It is amazing that such a sacred Christian site has been historically under Moslem or Jewish control. Groups are not allowed to celebrate Eucharist here, and after Rimón led the group in a blessing prayer for Fr. Marty (as is traditionally done for church leaders in this spot), we began to sing "I Am the Bread of Life," until the Jewish guard came in to tell us to keep it down. (We finished the last verse back on the bus.)



Everyone came back to the bus on our way home saying how tiring, yet totally incredible, this day had been. After a short social time and dinner back at the hotel, all went up to bed to crash. Tomorrow, we get to sleep in a bit, as we will depart the hotel at 9:00am.

**Wednesday – March 4**

## **Bethany – Lunch with Palestinian Christians – Ein Karem – Church of the Visitation**

For the first time on our pilgrimage, we awoke to a cloudy and rainy morning. Due to the rain, we rearranged the schedule a bit, and we traveled first to Bethany, to visit the Church of St. Lazarus, which commemorates the location of the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. (Bethany was the home of Martha and Mary – and Lazarus, and was also the home of Simon the Leper, in whose house Jesus was dining when the woman anointed Jesus' feet with oil.) The sun had peaked out shortly after we drove away from the hotel, and it continued to come in and out periodically throughout the day.







Our guide Rimón explained how the Christian population of this town has been driven out to such a point that it is a very small minority. We were able to celebrate the Eucharist here in what is known as the Crusader chapel. The acoustics were beautiful, and so we sang "Lord of the Dance" to start and "I am the Bread of Life" to end, and this time there were no interruptions by a Jewish guard.







After our Bethany visit, we moved on back to Bethlehem, where we divided up into groups of 6, and then were carried by vans and cars to the homes of 5 different Palestinian families for lunch and conversation. This was an enlightening experience for all the groups, and gave everyone insight into the struggles of Palestinian Christians living in very challenging circumstances.





After lunch we drove to Ein Karem, known as the birthplace of John the Baptizer, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Here we listened to the story as recorded in Luke 1, and then joined in reading Zechariah's Canticle. Some free time was given for visiting the church and silent reflection.









Our final pilgrimage site today was the Church of the Visitation, which is up the hill from the Church commemorating John the Baptizer's birth. This was a steep climb, but all of the pilgrims marched up the hill together to this peaceful and beautiful spot that commemorates Mary's trip to her cousin Elizabeth, where both of them are with child. We read the story from Luke 1, and then joined in reciting the Magnificat together. After that, time was given for our own visitation and prayer.







**Thursday – March 5**

## **Qumran – Masada – Dead Sea**

We departed early at 8am for the long drive south and down to Masada. It was a beautiful sunny and warm day as we traveled past Bethany where we visited yesterday, and continued down south along the western coast of the Dead Sea down to Masada. We watched a short movie before jamming into the cable car for the fast ride up to the top. Rimmon walked us around the palace area and gave us information about the palace buildings and the later structures built by the Jews as well as the monks who built a church here later.









A key feature for survival at such a remote protected fortress was the availability of water, which was achieved through a system of cisterns through the fortress.



The most protected area of Masada was the place where Herod had his private residence. The model display showed how ornate the building was, even though Herod never retreated to Masada.





After the cable car ride back down, we continued on back up along the western shore of the Dead Sea to the NW corner, where there is the site of Qumran, the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Because it was now after noon, we first went in to the kibbutz restaurant for lunch. This is where Pat Lyren and Joan Fox hosted their Foyer Group, and as a result set the world record for having their group travel the greatest distance from St. Joseph's to have a foyer gathering.



After the lunch, we gathered to see some of the area where the Essene Community who created the scrolls lived, and we could see up on the hills the caves where the scrolls were discovered. (We will see the actual Dead Sea Scrolls in the Israel Museum tomorrow.)





Next, we drove down to the shore of the Dead Sea, where everyone had the opportunity to put their feet in the water, or to take the full plunge and float around. There were lots of laughter and also lots of mud.







After swimming, we drove into Jericho where we celebrated Eucharist at the Church of the Good Shepherd. Since it was in this area that Zaccheus climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, we used the account as found in Luke for our Gospel Reading.



We finished another great day with a visit to a ceramics factory on the way home. Rimón had called ahead and asked the store owner to arrange for the bakery to bring buy a special middle Eastern dessert for us all to try, which is called Knefe. It was incredibly good, and it was still warm as it had been made by the bakery and delivered to the store just in time for our arrival.



After the ride back to the hotel, we delayed our gathering and dinner until 7:30pm, and after a celebratory gathering, we all went up to bed to get ready to pack for our departure tomorrow.

Copy and paste the link below to read this article from This Week in Palestine, published Wednesday, which features our friend and pilgrim leader Rimón: <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/limelight/rimon-makhlouf/>

**Friday – March 6**

## **St. George's Cathedral – Emmaus – Airport**

Rimon gave the group the morning free to pack and prepare for the long day and night ahead. All the bags were ready to go at noon, as well as the pilgrims. We loaded the luggage onto the bus, then walked across the street to St. George's Anglican Cathedral for our closing Eucharist.

We listened to and reflected on the story of the Road to Emmaus in preparation for our trip to Emmaus this afternoon.



At the closing blessing, we all made a prayer circle to pray for our guide Rimon and his ministry in the Holy Land.



Our first bus stop was scheduled to be the Israel Museum, but they closed early for the Feast of Purim, so we had to readjust. We went to see the viewpoint from the highest peak in the area, where there is a place revered as the burial place of Samuel, though Rimon gave convincing arguments why the place could not be the real burial place of Samuel. Regardless, the panoramic view from the place is unmatched, and there is both synagogue and a mosque there. There are also the remains of what used to be a church, and Rimon talked the guard into opening up for us to see the church.







Then we drove to Emmaus and entered the beautiful monastery and church there. We had a short time to enjoy the beautiful church and grounds. There is an ancient spring here that we saw in the crypt. It would be a place where pilgrims travelling to and from Jerusalem would stop because of the water access. It is also a place where notorious robberies and ransoms took place when the Franciscans would be transporting funds raised to help the Holy Land.





Then we visited another church and convent known originally as Kyriat Yearim, built on the area where the Ark of the Covenant had been kept for twenty years in Old Testament history (1 Samuel 5; 2 Samuel 6). The church there is known as Notre Dame Arche D'Alliance. It has a large sculpture on the top of the church with Mary holding up the child Jesus, who is elevating the Eucharistic host.





Next, we did a final stop for people to take photos overlooking the city of Jerusalem up by Hebrew University.



And then we moved on to our farewell dinner at a local restaurant where we toasted each other, Romin, and our driver Faris. Romin showed us a hard copy of the magazine in which he is featured this month.





Following dinner, we made it to the airport, and after the various security checks, we all made it to the gate on time. Our flight departed on time at 11: 10pm, arriving in Newark the following morning (Saturday) at 4:20am. (We see snow all around as the sun rises, though the skies are clear. The temperature is a crisp 11 degrees.) Then, after customs and immigration in Newark, we transferred to our flight to West Palm Beach, which departs Newark at 8:16am and arrives into West Palm Beach at 11:23am. We stopped along the way and did a prayer circle to send off our new St. Joseph's friend Joan from Alabama who had been with us on the pilgrimage. I am sure we will see her at St. Joseph's sometime in the near future. We will call those who are picking up passengers once we have the luggage at PBI.

Thanks to all who volunteered to drive the pilgrims' home from West Palm Beach airport on Saturday. **It looks like everyone is covered, as long as Charley Goodrich and Gary Matthews can still pick up. If that is the case, then we do not need Larry Ciancolo, Bob LeNeve, Dennis Paul, or Tad Knutsen to pick up.**

