

Getting to Know Our Devotional Writers...

(alphabetical order)



Natives of Knoxville, Tennessee, Chris and wife Sheila Alford have two children, Noah and Anna, and a beloved *bichon frisé*, Gemma. Chris is a husband, a father, a pastor, a musician, and a hoot.

The Alford family settled in Sacramento, California, in late 2004 and have been there since. Sheila works for a local police department and writes picture books and middle grade novels, Noah (27) lives and works in Napa, Anna (24) lives and works in Sacramento, and Gemma (4) is retired from doggy show business (true) and does no work whatsoever.

A ministry veteran of three decades and lead pastor of Epiclesis for nearly 15 years, Chris is known for a warm-hearted, personal, and pastoral approach to ministry, and for engaging preaching.

Teresa Gardner has long held a vision for seeing the arts restored for the glory of God and is the Director of Zion Center for Worship and the Arts (ZCWA)— a center for worship training through biblical study and technical artistic development based in Charlotte, North Carolina.



Israel plays an important role in Teresa's life and ZCWA's ministry. For a decade she served with the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem as Dance Company Manager for the annual Christian Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. Ongoing trips (over 50) to Israel provide worship and educational opportunities for others to learn with ZCWA of our Ancient-Future connection with the God of Israel and this land.

Carl Peters and wife Reneé have three sons: Daulton, Kendall, and Hayden. Having served churches in Michigan, Kentucky, Florida, and California, Carl is now pastor at Anchor Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky. As a proponent of the Ancient-Future principles so brilliantly articulated by mentor Dr. Robert Webber, Carl has given special attention to the central place of covenant renewal as a defining factor in scripturally-informed worship.



Carl has worked to implement a catechetical structure within a traditional Baptist setting. Utilizing Robert Webber's "Journey to Jesus" as a model, progress is being made using this four stage discipleship strategy, derived from the early church, as a regular part of church membership at Anchor.



Devotionals for Holy Land Pilgrims

Daily prayers, Scripture, and meditations for Israel, 2023

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Image, left: Pilgrim on the Via Dolorosa (detail). Photo credit: Gali Tabbon/AFP).

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About the cover photo:

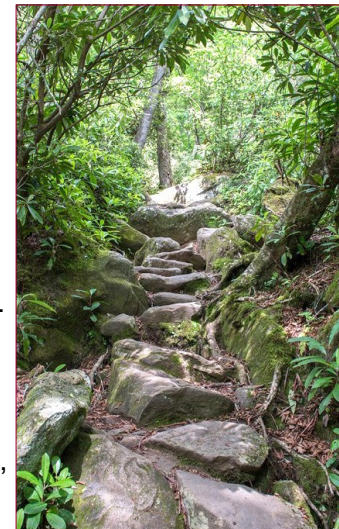
Followers of Christ have been making pilgrimages to Jerusalem for centuries. This photo shows some of the thousands of crosses cut and scratched into the walls of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre from countless pilgrims across the ages. Can you imagine hundreds of worshipers walking to the tomb of Christ by candlelight? Now you will join their footsteps as you make your own pilgrimage to some of the holiest sites in Christendom. Photo credit: Israel Hayom/Reuters, 4/4/2021.

Wednesday March 15

Going Downhill is Sometimes Harder. Luke 9:28-51.

When I was growing up, we visited the Great Smoky Mountains all the time—camping, picnics, and swimming. I remember the hikes most of all.

When you climb mountains, especially when the trails are gnarled with roots and rocks, going up is hard. But one of the ironies of hiking is that going downhill is sometimes harder. Why? You have to choose your steps more carefully. If you don't watch it, short steps can become longer, the pace quickens, and forward momentum can cause a spill. Falling downhill hurts more!



After Jesus and the disciples had that breathtaking experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Bible tells us what happened when they came down: Life and reality came rushing back in. Teaching, healing, (and opposition) resumed, they were confronted by a demon, and the disciples argued. And this: Jesus predicted his death and *yet still* set his face toward Jerusalem.

I want you to think about all these things as we, too, “come back down the mountain.” Pray for your fellow travelers. Take care not to let your steps become too wide or fast. Remember that the world is going to rush back in. Don't be surprised if confronted by the demonic. And set your face—beloved, this is the most important thing—set your face toward the will of the Father and be prepared to do whatever he asks, no matter the cost.

Going downhill is sometimes harder— and it requires more concentration and energy.

For Evening Prayer: What are some potential pitfalls you're looking out for on the trail back down the mountain? See also Psalm 18:30-36. C.A.

Tuesday, March 14

Pilgrimage after the Pilgrimage. Luke 8:26-39.

It hardly seems possible that our long-awaited and anticipated journey is at an end.

Do you remember Egeria? We started our trip by looking at her story. You'll recall that she was the Spanish nun who traveled to 4th century Jerusalem on a spiritual pilgrimage.

I suggested there were at least three lessons we could learn from Egeria: That we should appreciate the *cost and effort* to make the trip; marvel at her *discipline* to write everything down; and consider how her journey was a *blessing to the world*.

Especially today I'm wondering how it was for her to return home. How did it go? Were her sister nuns glad to see her? Did they put her right back to work? Were some of them jealous of her journey, or maybe resentful of her miraculous stories from the road?

How in the *world* do you go back home after seeing miraculous things and tell people what God has done for you?

I think there's always a pilgrimage after a pilgrimage. And the second one is probably the hardest, and it's certainly the longest.

Truth is, we've got to return home. We might have to go right back to work, some folks may not be glad to see us, friends, family, or colleagues could be jealous, and a few might even be resentful of our miraculous stories from the road.

So, as we consider the pilgrimage after the pilgrimage— the one that takes us back home— let's determine to use what we've shared together as a blessing to the world. Let's speak a word in season, and in love, and use our trip to enhance the Kingdom.

For evening prayer: Will you ask the Lord to give you the time, words, and gentle spirit to share what you've experienced in the Holy Land with others? See also John 14:23-27. C.A.

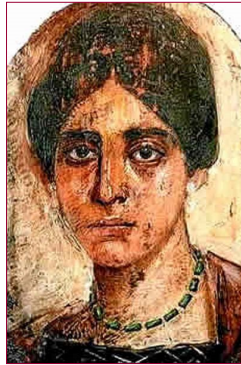


Image above: Image thought to be Egeria. Date unknown. Image credit unknown.

Overview: How to Use this Devotional Booklet

Christians have been making pilgrimages to the Holy Land since the early 4th century. In fact, much of what we know about early Christian worship in Jerusalem comes from the travel diary of a 4th century pilgrim, a woman named Egeria.



Now you and I are joining our brothers and sisters from across the ages in a spiritual pilgrimage to the Land of the Bible.

One of the most important things we can do as fellow travelers is to pray and worship together. That's what this booklet is for: To focus our hearts and minds so, at least for a few days, we can be as close spiritually as we are physically.

There are two main parts to this devotional: 1) Fixed prayer liturgies for both morning and evening; and 2) Specific Scripture and meditation for daily use.

Here's How it All Works:

Notice that this booklet begins a day before we depart and continues until two days after our return (begins on Feb. 28 and continues through March 15).

Step 1: Each day, once in the morning and then again at night, turn to the Liturgy for Morning (or Evening) Prayer (p. 3 or 5). Note that the basic morning and evening liturgies are the same each and every day. Go slowly. Clear your mind and be quiet for a bit before jumping in. Use your body in worship. For example, in this booklet the symbol “+++” indicates an ancient custom: making the sign of the cross. Consider trying it and see if it deepens your devotional experience.

Step 2: Next, you will be directed to skip ahead to the specific Scripture and meditations unique to each day (p. 7-ff). Read your daily Scripture(s) and meditation. Then after that, come right back to the Liturgy for Morning Prayer to finish. A brief evening meditation and Scripture references are found at the bottom of each daily page.

Pictured at the top of this page is a Jerusalem— or Pilgrim's— Cross often worn by travelers to the Holy Land. Each little cross within stands for the traditional five wounds of Christ (scourging, plucking of the beard, thorns, nails, and spear). I've attached one to this booklet as my pilgrimage gift to you!

Liturgies for Morning and Evening Prayer were taken from *Celtic Daily Prayer: Book Two: Farther Up and Farther In* (London: William Collins, 2015). Daily devotionals were written by Carl, Teresa, and me (bio sketches on p. 23).

A blessed and life-changing journey to you, fellow pilgrim! Pastor Chris

Anchor
Baptist
Church



This trip is sponsored jointly by Epiclesis Church of Sacramento, California, and Anchor Baptist Church of Lexington, Kentucky. Credit and extra special thanks for the overall organization and coordination of the trip goes to John Brown of The Obed Project, a non-profit organization from Charlotte, North Carolina.



Liturgy for Morning Prayer

+++ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening sentences

*One thing I have asked of the Lord,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life;
to behold the beauty of the Lord
and to seek Him in His temple.*

Who is it that you seek?

We seek the Lord our God.

Do you seek Him with all your heart?

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Do you seek Him with all your soul?

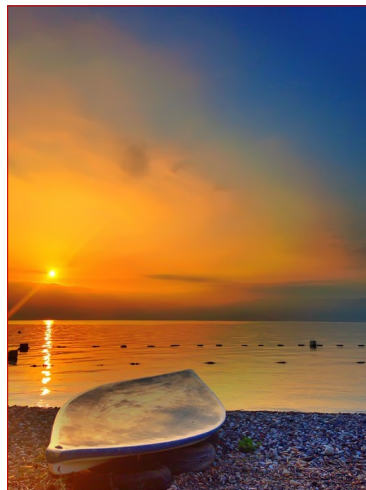
Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Do you seek Him with all your mind?

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Do you seek Him with all your strength?

Amen. Christ, have mercy.



Declaration of faith

To whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life,
and we have believed and have come to know
that You are the Holy One of God.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ,
King of endless glory!

Different Scripture and meditation for each day. (Go to pages 7-ff for your specific daily reading. Return right back here when you get down to the “Evening Prayer” section and save that part for tonight).

Praying for others

Use this time to pray daily for a specific trip participant, including our guide, and driver. (Tip: Use our trip’s pictorial directory).

Canticle

Christ, as a light
illumine and guide me.
Christ, as a shield

Monday, March 13

Our last day? Say it isn’t so!

What did you expect before you came?
And this: What do you expect now that you are preparing to return home?

We have received so much and it seems almost impossible to put into words, right? I encourage you to ask for grace and wisdom on how to share your experience. Two things I am pretty sure of: You will never be the same, and you will read God’s word with new vision.

I wrote in our trip booklet that though I’ve been 51 times, I still vividly remember my first journey to Israel and the overwhelming realization that all of those places we read about in the Bible are real places! No matter how many times I come, I’m certain that each and every trip will be different. And I know that each journey changes me.

What a gift and blessing to have experienced it with you!

The Lord brought us to Israel as his personal guests, and now he will take us home— but the One who reveals himself in the breaking of bread will continue to reveal. The God of Israel is with you always.

We will not say “goodbye,” but *le’itraot*, which means, “See you again.”

For evening prayer: Read 2 Sam 6:11; Luke 24:27-32. *Lord, as we treasure this pilgrimage in our hearts, may we be Your blessing and witness to those around us. May all that You have shared with us continue to transform our lives to know and love You more and be living witnesses of Your Good News. T.G.*

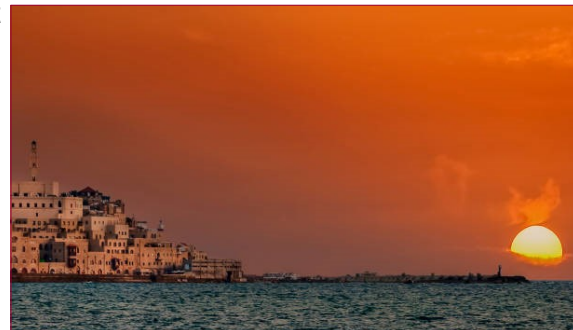


Image above: Sunset in Tel Aviv: Getty Images/gorsh13.

Sunday, March 12

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross: 1 Cor 15:1-8, 20-22.

Today we will visit the epicenter of Christ's Passion. As we pass through the great wooden doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, remember that Jesus said, "I Am the Door...." As we climb our way up, step by step, to



Calvary, remember that Jesus said, "I am the Way...." As we kneel at the altar and touch the place where Jesus' holy cross cracked the corrupted crust of creation, remember that Jesus' is the once-and-for-all sacrifice offered up on the hard altar of the old rugged cross. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world. And, as some traditions tell us, Adam is buried just below Calvary. The New Adam reverses the curse of the first Adam and restores paradise (Note: Be sure not to miss the cracked rock across from the steps).

Just a few feet away we will see the Edicule—the empty tomb of Jesus. It is here that Jesus' words echo through the centuries to us, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" If seeing is believing, then our belief will only be strengthened as we witness Jesus' conspicuous absence from that sacred sarcophagus. Christian pilgrims have long made their way to this place where Salvation History crescendos to a climax of eternal proportions.

For Evening Prayer: Phil 2:1-11, Luke 9:23, Gal 2:20.

Praise God for his steadfast love and grace. Thank Jesus for emptying himself, putting our needs ahead of his own, and being obedient to death on a cross. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you where you need to "empty yourself." Ask him to show you the "Way" of the cross—the way to be truly alive! C.P.

Image above: Edicule of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

overshadow me.
Christ under me;
Christ over me;
Christ beside me
on my left and my right.
This day be within and without me,
lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;
in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.
This day be within and without me,
lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.
Christ as a light;
Christ as a shield;
Christ beside me
on my left and my right.

Blessing

*May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,
wherever He may send you.
May He guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm.
May He bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders He has shown you.
May He bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.*

+++ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Image, above. Sunrise, Jerusalem. Previous page, Sunrise, Sea of Galilee. Photo credits unknown.

Liturgy for Evening Prayer

+++ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening sentences

*My soul waits for the Lord
more than those
who watch for the morning,
more than those
who watch for the morning.*

Out of the depths I have cried to You.

O Lord, hear my voice.

With my whole heart I praise You.

O Lord, hear my voice.

If you, Lord, should mark iniquities:

Who could stand? Who could stand?



I will wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in His word do I hope.

Expressions of faith

Lord, You have always given
bread for the coming day;
and though I am poor,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given
peace for the coming day;
and though of anxious heart,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked
the road for the coming day;
and though it may be hidden,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always spoken
when time was ripe;
and though you be silent now,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always given
strength for the coming day;
and though I am weak,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept
me safe in trials;
and now, tried as I am,
today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened
this darkness of mine;
and though the night is here,
today I believe.

Saturday, March 11

In A.D. 70, Titus and his Roman soldiers decimated Jerusalem. Rome's Tenth Legion left the city in ruins, including the Temple. When Hadrian arrived to quash the second Jewish revolt in 130 A.D., Jerusalem was still in a state of destruction with at least one notable exception: Saint Epiphanius wrote that the city was completely ruined, "except for a few houses and the little church of God on the spot where the disciples went to the upper room."

What made the "upper room" so special that it would be preserved? Consider that this was where Jesus shared the Passover with his disciples. This is the place where the *Todah* offering and the Passover Feast converged to become the Eucharist—the sign of the New Covenant. Here Jesus transformed the memorial of the first Exodus into the remembrance meal of the new and greater "Exodus...he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." In this holy hall, Jesus offered his followers "the true bread come down from heaven..." Jesus held out a cup to his potential "bride" and bid them drink, which would ratify the covenant with them! Later that night he would speak in terms of betrothal: "I am going to prepare a place for you...and I will come again...that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus told his disciples to go and "do this." That is exactly what they did as they went into the world preaching the word and keeping the Feast.

It was also in an "upper room," though perhaps not the same one, where 120 followers of Jesus, the disciples, and Mary waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. Traditionally, the Apostle Peter preached here and thousands were saved. As we enter the "upper room," consider the significance of this place in God's story. Though the architecture has changed through the centuries, the profound meaning remains!

For evening prayer: Read Luke 22:7-23 and Acts 1:12-14, 2:1-4. Meditate on the Father's good gifts given through his Son and Holy Spirit. Give thanks that Jesus offers himself to us through the Eucharist. Finally, consider how we might obey as Mary and Jesus' followers did in waiting for the Spirit and then going forth to preach the Gospel. C.P.

Friday, March 10

Remember. Psalm 103:1-5.

“Remember” is a key word in Scripture. We are told repeatedly to remember what God has done and to give thanks.

The Jewish people know how important it is to remember; therefore there is *Yad Vashem*, the Holocaust memorial we witnessed on Wednesday. And, as we walk through ancient Jerusalem to the Western (Wailing) Wall today, we will be in the midst of hundreds of Jewish men, women, and children who are following the command “to remember” as they faithfully pray and give thanks to the Holy One of Israel.



Surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the Old City without, and even within, in the midst of several church traditions, and other pilgrims and tourists, we focus to remember the salvific acts of our Savior. It was no less busy 2,000 years ago, and Jesus is no less present in the hustle and bustle of our own busyness. But we must remember and recognize that the Lord who overcame death is now with us always, even to the end of the age. As millions of pilgrims throughout the ages have walked through and worshiped in this very spot, let us join in the victorious proclamation of the ages: He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This evening is Shabbat: *Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy* (Exod 20:8-11). Two candles are lit, one to remember and the other to observe (do, act, accomplish). May we each live out what our Savior has done for us, as those who remember and observe.

For evening prayer: As we remember and observe the Sabbath, may we recall all that the One who is our Sabbath Rest, has done for us in this very place and be thankful. John 19:16-42; 20:1-18. T.G.

Image above: Prayer at the Western Wall. Photo credit unknown.

Evening prayer, Scripture, and meditation for each day. (See pages 7-ff. Look for “Evening Prayer” at the bottom. Return right back here when you get to the end of the page).

Praying for others

Use this time to pray daily for a specific trip participant, including our guide, and driver. (Tip: Use our trip’s pictorial directory).

Canticle

*In the shadow of Your wings
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.*

The Lord is my light, my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the refuge of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

*In the shadow of Your wings
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.*

One thing I ask of the Lord,
one thing I seek;
to dwell in the presence of my God,
to gaze on Your holy place.

*In the shadow of Your wings
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.*

I believe I shall see the goodness
of the Lord in the land of the living.
O wait for the Lord!
Have courage and wait,
wait for the Lord.

*In the shadow of Your wings
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.*

Blessing

*See that ye be at peace among yourselves, my children,
and love one another.
Follow the example of the wise and good
and God will comfort you and help you,
both in this world
and in the world which is to come.*

+++ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Image, previous page, Shofar at sunset. Photo credit: Huffington Post.

Tuesday, February 28

Content in the Journey. Philippians 2:1-4; 4:8-9, 11-13.

Ready for a confession? I used to hate to travel. Or at least the process: Packing, making arrangements for the house and dog, getting to the airport, the mass of humanity, the crowded airplane seats— all of it combined to make travel a drudgery.



And then I changed my mind; or, actually, mind and heart. That's what the Greek word *metanoia* (meta-NOY-uh) means: a transformative change of heart and mind.

Paul says that we should imitate Christ's humility, look to the interest of others, rejoice, and be content whatever the circumstances. Goodness, gracious, I can't do that on my own!

But with a God-given *metanoia*, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me:

When traffic to the airport is clogged, I will rejoice.

When folks in line are unkind, I will look for Christ at work.

When the flight is delayed, I will scour the landscape to see something pure and lovely.

And when I finally reach my destination, I will be content, for I will have remembered that so much about the Christian life has to do with the journey.

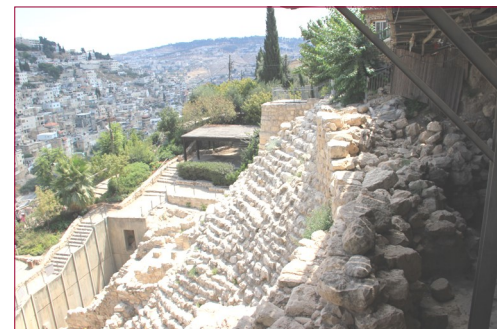
Today as you prepare for our Holy Land pilgrimage, and as you think about the process of traveling, ask the Lord to give you eyes to see where he is at work— no matter what the circumstances.

For Evening Prayer: Part of Paul's secret for being content, and one of the ways God causes a true *metanoia* in us, has to do with the practice of changing our focus. Check out this biblical list of things to focus on when circumstances seem less than ideal... and be at peace: See Philippians 4:4-7. C.A.

Thursday, March 9

I Was Blind but Now I See. John 9.

The saying associated with The City of David is "Where it all began!" Called the birthplace of Jerusalem with its over 3,000 year-old history, the amazing biblical history of this area continues, almost daily, to be revealed— from David's capture of the Canaanite city, to his palace, to the miraculously-constructed Tunnel of Hezekiah, to the Pilgrimage Road that leads up to the Temple Mount, and to the Pool of Siloam where Jesus healed the blind man "so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).



We all love David— the man after God's own heart— don't we? We are thankful for the psalms and instructions for praise and worship, so many of those took place right here. As for the newly-discovered Pilgrimage Road— what a wonderful reminder that every step in our lives can be a step upwards to God's Holy Mountain and a step closer to Him.

Then John records that Jesus "spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the [blind] man's eyes. 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing." The man simply obeyed. He did what Jesus said to do, and he experienced God. He later told the Pharisees, "...One thing I do know: I was blind and behold, now I see." Isn't that how it is with us? When we obey, we always come into a deeper relationship with our Lord, and a greater understanding of who he is. May we also be faithful witnesses of what he has done for us.

For Evening Prayer: What has Jesus told you to do? What has the Lord opened your eyes to on this trip? And how are you going to share it? So that the works of God may be displayed through you.

LORD, help us to see, and then be sent to go and tell! T.G.

Image above: City of David. Photo credit unknown.

Wednesday, March 8

From Mountain, to Madness, to Manger. Isaiah 2:2-3; Psalm 130; Micah 5:2-5.

Today is our first full day on the Mountain of the Lord. This is the place where Abraham bound Isaac. This is the place where David established his capital city and brought up the Ark of the Covenant. This is the place where Solomon built the Temple. And this is the very mountain where Jesus, the Lamb of God, became the once-and-for-all sacrifice, reversing the curse of Adam and paying our ransom. Today we will celebrate with countless pilgrims who have come before us as we sing “songs of ascent,” going through the gates of God’s Holy City. We will also commiserate with our Hebrew friends as we enter the hallowed halls of Yad Vashem—the Holocaust Museum. Our tears will turn to dancing as we wind our way to Bethlehem, the city of bread, and the very place where the Son of God became the Son of man, and the Son of man became the Bread of Life!

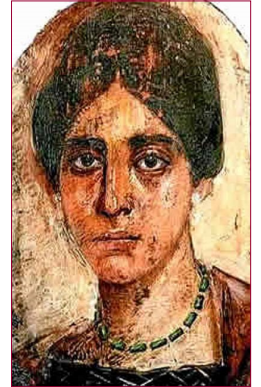
This will be a day of contrasts. Entering Jerusalem is a mountain-top experience. Seeing the horrors of Yad Vashem demonstrates man’s madness and desperate need for a Savior. Bethlehem will remind us that God the Son emptied himself and, in humility entered our mess, knitting God’s divine nature to man’s fallen nature. He lowered himself to us, so that we could be raised to God. He became what we are so that we might become like he is! Embrace the contrasts and look to Christ on the mountain of the Lord in the anguish of senseless slaughter and in a humble cattle stall.

For Evening Prayer: Hebrews 12:1-2. As you fix your eyes on Jesus, ask the Lord to help you process the highs and lows of this day. Praise God for allowing you to come to his holy mountain. Cry out with the psalmist and with Rachel in the loss of so many of Israel’s sons and daughters. Offer up a *Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Christe Eleison* for your sins and for the sins of the world. Then, give thanks for the Incarnation of Jesus who offers us reconciliation, peace and rest. C.P.

Wednesday, March 1

Pilgrimage. Psalm 84.

There once was a woman, a Spanish nun named Egeria (ee-JEER-ee-uh), who traveled to Jerusalem on a spiritual pilgrimage. That alone might not sound impressive, but that it happened in about 380 A.D. makes it a big achievement. Pilgrimages were few and difficult in the very early church, but the Roman legalization of Christianity in 313 A.D. resulted in growing numbers of travelers headed to the Holy Land.



By the time Egeria came to Jerusalem, the city had come back from years of ruin and neglect to become a significant world center of Christian worship. What did she find there? Lots of worship, prayer, singing, and Scripture reading. How do we know? She made a detailed account of her trip (during Easter, no less) and reported back all that she saw and did to her sisters at home in Spain. I encourage you to read her wonderful travelogue.

There are some lessons we can learn from Egeria, especially on this first day of our pilgrimage to the Holy Land:

First, we should appreciate the *cost and effort* to make the trip. Egeria’s journey was long, hard, and likely expensive, and yet she ultimately made it in order to worship. Why are *you* going?

Next, pause to think about the *discipline* she must have had to write down everything she saw, heard, and did. Is there a discipline that God might be calling you to observe during our trip?

Finally, consider how Egeria’s journey has been a monumental *blessing to the world*. She didn’t leave her experiences behind: They changed her and she took them back home. What are *you* planning to take home with you?

For Evening Prayer: What are some obstacles that might keep you from being an “Egeria” on this pilgrimage? See also Deuteronomy 31:7-8. C.A.

Image above: Image thought to be Egeria. Date unknown. Image credit unknown.

Thursday, March 2

Swollen Feet and Clean Clothes. Neh 9:21; Ps 30:4-5, 11-12.

We started planning our exodus to the Holy Land over two years ago. For various reasons, we had to reimagine, reschedule, and reignite our vision for this adventure.

After months of praying, planning, paying, and packing, the day finally arrived for us to mount up with wings like eagles and fly east. For some of us, the flight was excruciating, taking up the better part of a day. We are probably “worn slap out.”



But, let's gain some perspective here: The Children of Israel were on a journey to the Promised Land for 40 years! Just like we have been sustained through this arduous 24-hour ordeal, God sustained them in the wilderness through those four decades and they lacked nothing. While we may be weary and worn after many hours confined in a metal tube, those on the first Exodus must have been exhausted from their lugubrious languishing in the dusty desert. Nehemiah tells us that despite their long travail, their clothes didn't wear out and their feet didn't swell.

Today is the day we set our feet down in the Promised Land. As we regain our bearings, let's sing praises to the Lord and give thanks, for though we may have felt like crying on the way here, joy comes in the morning! Our cramped quarters and lack of leg-room will soon turn into dancing. We have loosed our seatbelts, and the Lord has wrapped us up in gladness. And I pray that your feet won't swell and that you have enough clean clothes! Look around...you made it! Welcome to the Promised Land... welcome home!

For Evening Prayer: Read the passages for today a second time and ask yourself, “How has God sustained me through this first day in the Holy Land. How has my mourning turned into dancing?” Offer Him praise and thanks for his provision and protection. Ask God to fill us with joy and to open our hearts to receive the many gifts awaiting us. C.P.

Tuesday, March 7

Crossing Over— Stones of Remembrance. Joshua 4:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-10.

On our long circuitous journey today, we will make at least two significant stops: the Jordan River Baptismal Site and Qumran.

Have you ever thought what it would be like without the Bible? Or, not knowing if it is the same as it was thousands of years ago? Qumran and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls helps us with that. There were faithful scribes who diligently recorded, others who diligently guarded, and others who faithfully passed on the word of God. May we be like all three of these.



You may have noticed that Israel is filled with rocks and stones. God has a lot to say about them. Did you know that stones are witnesses? (Josh 24:26-27). I have often wondered what they have witnessed of God's Presence in this land. They “speak” of his Story.

But, so do you. Paul says, “You, also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). Your life, too, is a witness that speaks of his Story.

On our way, we'll visit where the twelve tribes *crossed over* into the Promised Land. And God told Joshua to mark it with stones as a witness for future generations.

Is it not amazing that this is also the area where Jesus was baptized by John? Through our own baptism into Jesus Christ we, too, *cross over* from death into life and into God's promises. What are the promises that God has waiting for you to walk in?

For Evening Prayer: Joshua 1:9 Psalm 102:14. What are some events in your life that are stones of remembrance for future generations? What promises has God spoken to you? As we move forward, hear God's words to Joshua and to us: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Josh 1:9). Lord, we will follow. T.G.

Image above: The famous Cave 4Q at Qumran. Photo credit unknown.

Monday, March 6

Heights and Depths, Deliverance, and Healing. John 1:12,14; 3:16.

From the heights of Mount Arbel to the depths of the Sea of Galilee, from one side of the lake at Magdala to the other side at Kursi, I am reminded of the Apostle Paul's prayer for us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Today we will experience many places where Jesus ministered to a wide variety of people.



Mount Arbel is the highest mountain around the Sea of Galilee and provides a spectacular view. Also called "The Cliffs of Arbel," it has a rich history (what doesn't in Israel?), and dug into its slopes are caves used as hideouts by the Jews who fought against the Greeks and Romans. Though not verified, some think this may be the mountain from which Jesus issued the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20).

God's unfailing love is seen in the site at Magdala. Amongst rich archeological discoveries, perhaps its greatest association is the testimony of a woman's changed life who became a devoted follower of Jesus.

As we travel to the other side of the Lake (7 x 13 miles long), we enter into what was a Gentile region, considered immoral and unclean, and come to Kursi where Jesus delivered and healed two demon-possessed men. After calming the sea, Jesus calmed those he met who were tormented and in bondage. The love of God knows no boundaries. We have the rest of the day to reflect on the wondrous love and salvation of The Word made flesh who tabernacled amongst us and whose Spirit now lives within us.

For Evening Prayer: Lord, whoever believed and received you was changed. Please change whatever needs to be changed in me. Thank you for Your Great Love! T.G.

Image above: Sea of Galilee. Photo credit unknown.

Friday, March 3

A Day of Firsts, Miracles, and Rest. Acts 10; 1 Kings 18; John 2:1-22; Matthew 2:23.

On our first full day in Israel our first stop will be Caesarea Maritima. It's known by many for Herod's stupendous architectural accomplishments, but is more importantly known as the area where the first recorded Gentile convert to Christianity took place. The Roman centurion Cornelius believed, the Holy Spirit fell, and God made it clear to Peter and the world that Jesus is Lord and Savior for all! Christianity held a strong presence here as a place of learning in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, connected to both Origen and Eusebius—a good place to consider being "grafted in" (Romans 11).

Elijah, true vs. false prophets, true vs. false worship, and God's fire from heaven is our next stop at Mt. Carmel. God always shows himself strong on behalf of his true worshipers. Providing a breathtaking view of The Valley of Armageddon, we are given much to ponder atop this glorious mountain.

On to Cana of Galilee where Jesus' first miracle occurred at a wedding, and "his glory was manifested." May we, too, heed Jesus' mother's words as wise servants and do whatever he says for us to do.

Next for us comes a glimpse of Nazareth—the place of the Annunciation—Jesus' childhood home where he proclaimed that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is 61:1-2), was rejected, and miraculously escaped a murderous mob. Then we're on to Tiberius and the Sea of Galilee where for several days we will focus on where much of Jesus' earthly ministry took place. Yes, we will walk where Jesus walked. Shortly after we arrive, Shabbat will begin.

For Evening Prayer: May we enter into and abide in the miraculous, every present, rest that Jesus gives. And, may our ears, eyes, and hearts be open to the ministry and miracles he still does today. T.G.

Saturday, March 4

Today we take a boat tour on the Sea of Galilee and spend time on the Mount of the Beatitudes. Central to Jesus' work was the fulfilling and updating of the Old Covenant and the calling of a new priesthood to carry on his ministry. Both goals were advanced at the places we will experience today.

Capernaum was utilized by Jesus as the base of operations for his ministry in the Galilee. It was on this sea that Jesus called four fishermen to be disciples, walked on water, calmed a storm, preached from a boat, and began the advance of the Gospel. It was on these shores that Jesus began his teaching ministry, healed the sick, fed thousands with five loaves and two fish, and where he preached the "Sermon on the Mount."

As Jesus climbed the mountain to teach, it is hard to miss the connection to Moses climbing Mount Sinai to receive God's commandments and return to proclaim them to the people. Unlike Moses, Jesus doesn't leave the people below; rather, he brings the disciples up on the mountain with him (Matt 5:1). As Jesus sits down to teach, a sign of rabbinical authority, he proceeds to teach eight "laws" for living a blessed life. As you'll see today, the chapel at the top of the Mount of Beatitudes has eight sides corresponding to these teachings.

What Jesus taught that day was quite radical and counter-cultural. While the people longed for a new Moses to lead an Exodus back to a renewal of God's people, Jesus' message of love and humility would be perfectly enacted at the cross, from which he would lead a new Exodus to a greater Promised Land. Philipians 2 reveals that the way to exaltation is through humility and self-sacrifice. This message echoed across that mountainside, rose like a storm on the Sea of Galilee, and spread throughout the land. Thanks be to God!

For Evening Prayer: Read Matthew 5:1-11. Reflect on each of the "Beatitudes." How might these new "laws" have been received by those on the mountainside? How well do we embody them today? What adjustments do we need to make? C.P.

Sunday, March 5

"Who do you say that I am?" Jesus' question comes into focus today as we visit Caesarea Philippi. Matthew 16 tells us that Jesus came to this district with his disciples. In an exchange with the Twelve, particularly with Peter, Jesus' identity was revealed. First, Jesus asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They said that some think he is John, Elijah, Jeremiah, or other prophets. Then Jesus turned the question around on them.

Caesarea Philippi was known as a main water source for the Jordan River. It was also a place of pagan worship. The Cave of Pan and the Gate of Hermes were here. Statues of idols were placed in niches cut from the rock and are still visible today. Jeroboam, Israel's first king, led the northern kingdom into idol worship near Caesarea Philippi. How interesting that Jesus would establish his identity at a place so identified with idols and evil.

Jesus may have been standing near the mountainous rock that soared above the Cave of Pan when he questioned his disciples.

Peter would be the one to answer Jesus' question: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus, praises Peter, not for his ingenuity, but for receiving that revelation from the Father. Then, he says, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church." Standing near a rock upon which pagan worship was associated, Jesus reveals God's plans for the establishment of true worship. While the Greek rendering of this passage has caused disagreement about Jesus' meaning, the Aramaic clarifies: Jesus says, "You are Cephas (rock), and upon this *cephas* (rock) I will build my church." Peter was then given the "keys to the kingdom" and rabbinical authority of "binding and loosing."

What an amazing setting for Jesus' identity to be revealed. In Acts 2 we see Jesus' prophecy being fulfilled as Peter preaches at Pentecost, thousands are saved, and the Church is born.

For Evening Prayer: Read Matthew 16:13-20 and Isaiah 22:15-22. Meditate on the revelation of Jesus' identity. How does Jesus' message at Caesarea Philippi remain poignant in our day? How does it apply to us? C.P.