Walking with Jesus & Witnessing to Christ: A Pilgrimage of Faith to the Holy Land

10 days / 8 nights

Listen to the voice of Jesus as He questions our hearts: Who do YOU say that I am? We follow in His footsteps, from His birth in Bethlehem, through His ministry in Galilee. We carry the cross with Him up the Via Dolorosa and exalt in His resurrection at the Holy Sepulcher. We celebrate Mass each day in the places where He preached, performed miracles, died for our sins and rose for our salvation. We listen to the voices of Christian faithful struggling to live by His word and share in the hope for peace in the land He made holy.

Day 1 – Departure from the USA
Our pilgrimage adventure begins with an overnight flight to Tel Aviv.

Day 2 – Arrival in the Holy Land
But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, from you will come for me a future ruler of Israel whose origins go back to the distant past, to the days of old (Micah 5:2).

We arrive at Ben Gurion Airport and transfer to the town of David, Bethlehem, where our journey begins.

Day 3 – Bethlehem, Shepherd’s Field, Hebron
Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:10-11).

We travel to the Shepherds' Field to rejoice over the glad tidings of the birth of Jesus and remember the faith of Ruth who gathered grain nearby. We then return to Bethlehem to visit the 5th century Church of the Nativity and celebrate Mass in the Chapel of the Massacre of the Innocents. After a short walk through Manger Square to visit the Milk Grotto, we continue to Mamre, site of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 18) and then to Hebron. There we visit the 2000-year old Herodian building marking the Tomb of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives. We return to Bethlehem to shop for the famous olive wood and mother-of-pearl crafts that have been produced by the Christians of Bethlehem for centuries. This evening we will meet with a prominent member of the Palestinian Catholic community, to hear of the struggles of Christians to maintain their faith in difficult times.

Day 4 – Judean Desert, Jericho, Nazareth, Cana, Baptismal Site, Tiberias
The angel said to her, Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. 31 Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus (Luke 1:30-31).

This morning we drive via Bethany to the Judean Desert, where we will stop at Wadi Qelt for a short devotion by the road of the Good Samaritan. We descend to Jericho, the world's oldest city, climbing the ancient Tel to view the Mount of Temptation. We then drive north through the Jordan Valley, turning into the fertile Valley of Jezreel and climbing to Nazareth. After lunch, we celebrate Mass in the Church of the Annunciation and view the ruins of the ancient churches and the remains of the town of Nazareth of Jesus’ day. We continue to the Church of the Wedding at Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle, changing water into wine (John 2). Some couples may want to renew their marriage vows here! We conclude the day with a visit to the baptismal site on the Jordan River. Overnight in Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee for two nights.
Day 5 – Sea of Galilee, Mt. of Beatitudes, Tabgha, Capernaum, Caesarea, Philippi, Boat Ride

Seeing the crowds, He went onto the mountain. And when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He began to speak. This is what He taught them: How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs (Matthew 5:1-3).

We begin with morning Mass at the Mount of Beatitudes, reflecting on the challenges of Jesus' teachings. We then descend the hillside (twenty minutes by foot or by bus) to Tabgha (Heptapagon – Greek for seven springs), visiting the Church of Loaves and Fishes marking Jesus' miraculous feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44) as well as the Church of the Primacy of Peter (John 21). After lunch near the lakeshore (those who wish can savor “St. Peter's Fish” native to the Sea of Galilee), we continue north through the lush Upper Jordan Valley and the foothills of Mt. Hermon to the headwaters of the Jordan at Banias – Caesarea Philippi, where Peter acknowledged Jesus as Christ, son of the Living God (Matthew 16:13-28). We return south to the Sea of Galilee and board a wooden boat for Tiberias – sailing in the footsteps of Jesus!

Day 6 – Mount Tabor, Megiddo, Caesarea, Jerusalem

Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if You want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; He enjoys my favor. Listen to Him.' (Matthew 17:4-5).

Reluctantly, we must take leave of the Sea of Galilee, ascending to Mount Tabor. Transferring to taxis for the narrow ascent, we arrive at the top for a breathtaking view over the Valley of Jezreel, Galilee, Gilead and Samaria. After identifying the battleground of the Old Testament heroines Deborah and Jael (Judges 4-5), we enter the Church of the Transfiguration for Mass. As we reflect in silence before the altar, perhaps we too may hear Jesus, Moses and Elijah in deep conversation (Matthew 17:1-13). Next, we cross the Valley of Jezreel to the ancient Har-Megiddo or Armageddon. This afternoon, we continue through the narrow pass to the Mediterranean Sea at Caesarea, visiting the aqueduct, the ancient Herodian harbor, the remains of the seaside palace of Pontius Pilate and the theater. With the conversion of Cornelius by St. Paul (Acts 10), this impressive Roman city became the beachhead of the Christian mission to the Gentiles. We then continue through the Sharon Plain and ascend to the Holy City of Jerusalem. As we catch our first glimpse of the city from Mount Scopus, your guide will welcome you with a short ceremony of bread and salt (Genesis 14).

Day 7 – Mount of Olives, Dominus Flevit, Wailing Wall, Temple Mount, Bethesda Pools, Temple Tunnels

A song of Ascents of David: I rejoiced that they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of Yahweh.' At last our feet are standing at Your gates, Jerusalem! (Psalm 122:1-2)

We begin with the birds' eye view of the Old City from the Mount of Olives, descending the traditional Palm Sunday Road, to the Church of Dominus Flevit (Luke 19) for Mass. As we gaze out on the magnificent walls and domes, we reflect on Jesus' weeping over the city that has yet to know peace. We continue to the Western (Wailing) Wall, remnant of the Temple in which Jesus preached and a sacred place of prayer for Jews from all over the world. We continue to the Temple Mount, viewing the Muslim Dome of the Rock, built on the site of the Holy of Holies of the Temple, and the Mosque of El Aqsa. We then visit the Crusader Church of St. Anne and the Pools of Bethesda, where Jesus healed the man paralyzed for 38 years (John 5). This evening we have a special treat.
Day 8 – Gethsemane, Cenacle, Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, Model of Second Temple Jerusalem, Shrine of the Book, Ein Karem

Then He withdrew from them, about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed. 'Father,' He said, 'if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine' (Luke 21:41-42)

We begin with a visit to the Garden of Gethsemane (Aramaic for 'oil press'), meditating on the sorrow of Jesus the night preceding his judgment – 'father let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but thy will be done' (Luke 21) We will marvel at the gnarled ancient olive trees and meditate in the somber Church of the Agony. We drive to Mount Zion to visit the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, where Jesus may have been questioned before the High Priest Caiaphas, and visit the Upper Room, traditional site of the Last Supper. Crossing the New City of West Jerusalem, we view a 1:50 scale model of the City of Jerusalem of Jesus' Day and the Shrine of the Book, where the Dead Sea Scrolls are displayed. Here you can see an original copy of the Book of Isaiah dating from a century before Jesus was born! We conclude at the pastoral village of Ein Karem, traditional birthplace of John the Baptist. Late afternoon Mass will be held in the tranquil Church of the Visitation where the Virgin Mary met her kinswoman Elizabeth. In the cloister, you will see beautiful ceramic tiles inscribed with Elizabeth's praise of God, the Benedictus, in over fifty languages! This evening we will hear from a peace activist on the current situation in the Holy Land and the prospects for peace in the future.

Day 9 – Via Dolorosa, Holy Sepulcher, Free Time in the Old City

"He has risen!" (Mark 16:6)

We rise early to proceed up the Via Dolorosa. As we make our way past the 14 stations of the cross, we reflect on Christ's suffering and sacrifice, and the gift of his blood. We enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, proceeding to the Hill of Golgotha, the Chapel of the Skull of Adam, and the empty Tomb. In the chapel alongside the tomb, we conclude our pilgrimage with the celebration of Christ's resurrection. He is risen indeed! The rest of the afternoon is free for shopping, individual sightseeing or relaxation.

Day 10 – Emmaus, Departure for the USA

Now while He was with them at table, He took the bread and said the blessing; then He broke it and handed it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; but He had vanished from their sight. 32 Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' (Luke 24:32)

This morning, we leave the hotel for the airport and the flight home to the USA. Flight hours permitting, we will stop at Emmaus to celebrate Mass at the site of the post-resurrection revelation of Jesus to his disciples (Luke 24). We return home enriched with the blessings of pilgrimage and ready to share our faith experiences with family and friends.

Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.' (Matthew 28:19-20)