



In the Footprints
OF OUR **Faith**

A journey through the Holy Land,
by Jesús Gil and Eduardo Gil

Saxum
FOUNDATION

This publication may only be used for personal or educational purposes and not for public or commercial purposes.
This publication may not be distributed, sold or republished, fully or partially, without the express permission of the copyright holders.

The book (Spanish: *Huellas de nuestra fe*) can be found translated into various Western languages at: www.saxum.org

2nd edition – April 2017.

Artistic and literary rights reserved

© 2016 by Saxum International Foundation.

© 2016 by Jesús Gil & Eduardo Gil.

The authors have used the following sources:

- *The Navarre Bible*, in the Revised Standard Version and New Vulgate, Dublin: Four Courts Press – New York: Scepter Publishers, 2005–2010;
- Florentino Díez, *Guía de Tierra Santa*, Madrid: Verbo Divino, 1990;
- *Terra Sancta: Guardians of Salvation's Sources*, documentary produced by Antoniano Production (www.antoniano.it);
- www.custodia.org;
- www.biblewalks.com;
- www.seetheholyland.net;
- *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, 24 vols., Madrid: Rialp, 1971–1976;
- *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada hispano-americana*, 70 vols., Madrid–Barcelona–Bilbao: Hijos de J. Espasa, 1924.

Translation

© 2016 by Helena Scott & Gabriela Kustner.

They have used the *New American Bible, revised edition* translation; and the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.

Cover Photo

Aedicule of the Tomb of Jesus, in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre (Jerusalem).

© Marie-Armelle Beaulieu / Custodia Terræ Sanctæ.

Other images and graphics

© Their authors (photo courtesy figured together with image).

Design and layout: Jesús Gil.

ISBN: 9788894217506

Saxum International Foundation is a nonprofit organization registered in Italy (Via Torquato Taramelli n. 30, 00197 Roma; CF 97755970585) in accordance with legislation of the State of Italy. The Foundation is responsible for the global fundraising campaign for the construction and development of Saxum Conference Center and the Saxum Multimedia Center, and for the establishment of an endowment fund for the present and future needs of both. These initiatives aim to fulfill a dream of St. Josemaría, founder of Opus Dei: to help pilgrims from all over the world seek Christ, find Christ, and love Christ during their visit to the Holy Land.



Icon of Mary and Jesus inside the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem.

Contents

Introduction	9
1 Nazareth: Basilica of the Annunciation	12
The room in which the Blessed Virgin received tidings from the Angel Gabriel is venerated in Nazareth. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo celebrated Mass in this cave.	
2 Ein Karem: birthplace of John the Baptist	24
Tradition locates the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth in Ein Karem, a town about six kilometers outside the Old City.	
3 Bethlehem: the Basilica of the Nativity	38
In the town of Bethlehem, our Saviour came into the world. The grotto in which he was born is found in the crypt of the Basilica of the Nativity.	
4 Bethlehem: the Shepherds' Field	50
A sanctuary three kilometers from Bethlehem commemorates the place where the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds.	
5 The Temple of Jerusalem	58
After the birth of Jesus, and at the time of the purification of Mary, the Child was presented in the Temple.	
6 With the Family in Nazareth	74
The remains of the house where the Holy Family is believed to have lived are preserved in Nazareth, in the crypt of St. Joseph's Church.	
7 The Wedding Feast at Cana	84
In Cana, a small town near Nazareth, the Lord performed his first miracle, turning water into wine at Our Lady's request.	
8 Capernaum: the town of Jesus	94
Jesus resided for some time in this small community on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret, which was the center of his public ministry in Galilee.	
9 Tabgha: the Church of the Beatitudes	108
On a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, a sanctuary commemorates the place where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount.	



10 Tabgha: the Church of the Multiplication 122

In Tabgha, pilgrims venerate the rock upon which the Lord placed five loaves and two fish, with which he fed the multitudes.

11 Mount Tabor: Basilica of the Transfiguration 134

Tradition indicates that our Lord may have been transfigured on Mount Tabor, in the middle of the plain of Esdraelon.

12 Jerusalem: Church of the Pater Noster 146

In 326 AD, St. Helen had a basilica built over the grotto which was venerated as the place where Jesus taught the words of the *Our Father*.

13 Bethany: the Tomb of Lazarus 156

When Jesus went to Jerusalem, he often stayed at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany. Today pilgrims can visit the tomb of Lazarus, where he was buried before Our Lord raised him from the dead.

14 He saw the city and wept 170

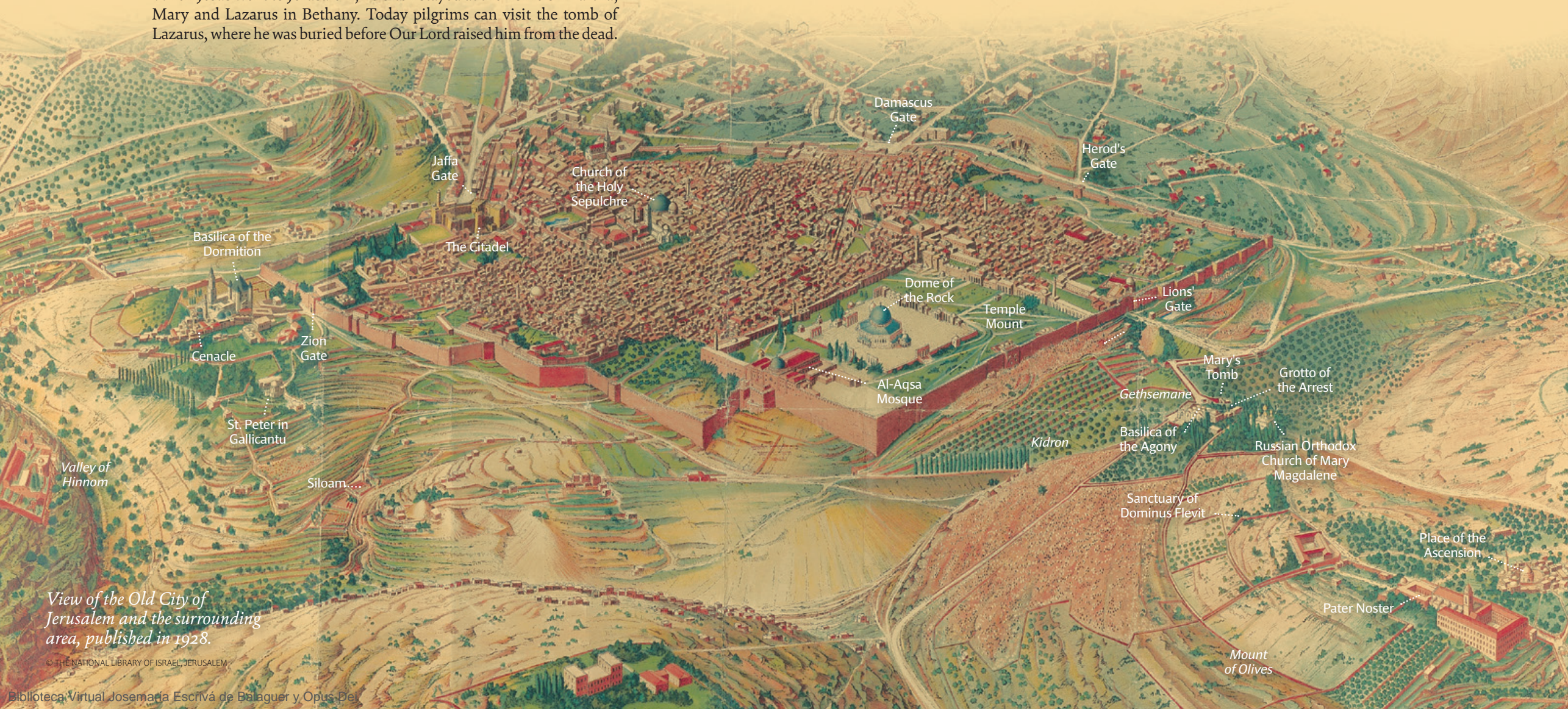
On the western side of the Mount of Olives, the Dominus Flevit church recalls the tears Christ shed for Jerusalem upon his triumphal entry into the city, a few days before his Passion.

15 Jerusalem: in the Upper Room 182

According to ancient tradition, the room of the Last Supper is located in a southwestern corner of the Old City, on a hill which has been called Zion since the Christian era.

16 Gethsemane: the Agony in the Garden 198

Tradition places the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley.



View of the Old City of Jerusalem and the surrounding area, published in 1928.

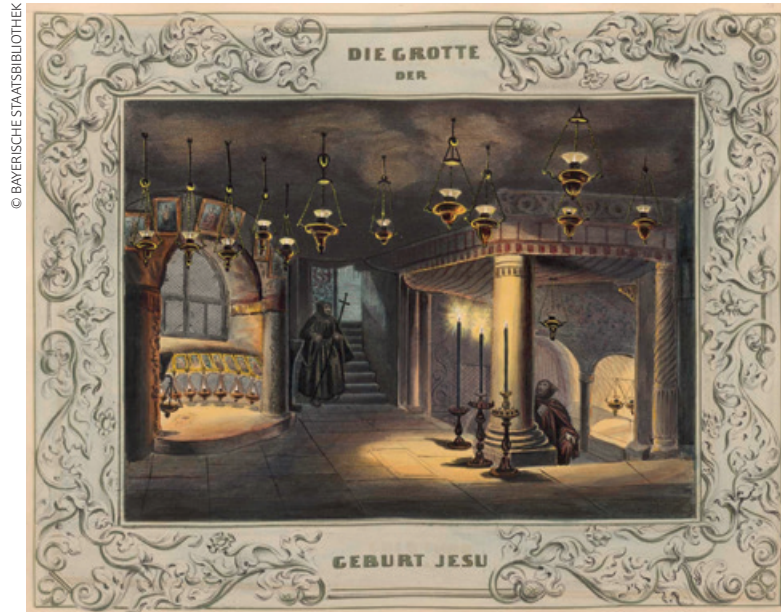
17	St. Peter in Gallicantu	214
	Not far from the Cenacle stands the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, over the spot which some traditions say to be the house of the high priest.	
18	Jerusalem: the Way of the Cross	228
	The fourteen Stations of the Cross commemorate the Carrying of the Cross from the praetorium to Calvary, the Crucifixion, and the interment of our Lord's body in the Sepulchre.	
19	Jerusalem: Calvary	248
	The last five Stations of the Cross are located inside the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.	
20	Jerusalem: the Holy Sepulchre	268
	The tomb in which the body of Jesus was laid, which he rose from on the third day, holds the place of honor in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.	
21	A village named Emmaus	286
	The risen Lord appeared that Sunday to two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Various places in the Holy Land might be identified as this village.	
22	Tabgha: Church of the Primacy of St. Peter	300
	On the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret, a church commemorates the appearance of Christ to the disciples after his Resurrection, the second miraculous catch of fish, and the confirmation of St. Peter's primacy in the Church.	
23	The Ascension	310
	The Gospels say that the Ascension took place on the summit of the Mount of Olives, on the road to Bethphage.	
24	The Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven	322
	In Jerusalem, two churches commemorate the mystery of the Assumption of the Virgin: the Basilica of the Dormition on Mount Zion, and the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, near Gethsemane.	
25	Mount Carmel: the Stella Maris sanctuary	334
	In 1994, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo began his pilgrimage to the Holy Land here. The Stella Maris sanctuary overlooks the Mediterranean and the city of Haifa, and is linked to the prophet Elijah and the birth of the Carmelite Order.	
	Index	346



Introduction

“As we call to mind the Word of God who became flesh in the womb of Mary of Nazareth, our heart now turns to the land where the mystery of our salvation was accomplished, and from which the word of God spread to the ends of the earth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word became flesh in a specific time and place, in a strip of land on the edges of the Roman Empire. The more we appreciate the universality and the uniqueness of Christ's person, the more we look with gratitude to that land where Jesus was born, where he lived and where he gave his life for us. The stones on which our Redeemer walked are still charged with his memory and continue to ‘cry out’ the Good News. For this reason, the Synod Fathers recalled the felicitous phrase which speaks of the Holy Land as ‘the Fifth Gospel’. [...]

“The Holy Land today remains a goal of pilgrimage for the Christian people, a place of prayer and penance, as was testified to in antiquity by authors like Saint Jerome. The more we turn our eyes and our hearts to the earthly Jerusalem, the more will our yearning be kindled for the heavenly Jerusalem, the true goal of every pilgrimage, along with our eager desire that the name of



Grotto of the Nativity of Jesus, by Heinrich von Mayr (1806–1871), who accompanied King Maximilian II of Bavaria in 1838 on a trip to the Middle East.

Jesus, the one name which brings salvation, may be acknowledged by all (cf. Acts 4:12).¹

These words from the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* are an appropriate introduction to this series of articles about the Holy Land, which began as a way to celebrate the Year of Faith opened by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2012, and closed by Pope Francis on November 23, 2013. The original texts appeared over those two years in *Crónica*, a monthly publication for the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, under the title “In the Footprints of Our Faith.”² Here we present a compilation of these articles, sponsored by the Saxum Foundation, with only minor changes.

We were inspired by St. Josemaria’s suggestion (repeated many times) to *immerse* ourselves in the Gospel, to take part personally in every scene in a way that our lives would never be the same after

reading the Word of God. This is why, in addition to recent historical and archaeological investigations, we draw primarily from the writings of those who can best guide us: the Fathers of the Church, who have passed on our Tradition; the Magisterium and the Liturgy of the Church; and, of course, the founder of Opus Dei. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo³ and Bishop Javier Echevarria,⁴ St. Josemaria’s first and second successors, were invaluable in helping us better understand his teachings.

St. Josemaria had always wanted to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and dreamed of starting various apostolic initiatives there which would help the Church. He was never able to fulfill this dream, but Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, his most faithful son who was united to him in everything, was able to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from March 14–22, 1994. On the morning of March 23rd, only a few hours after Blessed Alvaro’s return to Rome, God called him to Heaven, after he had celebrated his last Mass in the Church of the Cenacle. Keeping in mind the faithful of Opus Dei, its cooperators, and those with a devotion to Blessed Alvaro, there are references to his final days in the Holy Land scattered throughout the text. ■

1. Pope Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, no. 89.

2. To learn more about Opus Dei, visit: <http://www.opusdei.org>

3. To learn more about Bl. Alvaro del Portillo, the most faithful collaborator of St. Josemaria and his first successor, beatified on September 27, 2014, in Madrid, visit: <http://www.alvarodelportillo.org>

4. Since these articles were first written for the family of Opus Dei, its faithful and cooperators, there may be occasional references to St. Josemaria as *our Father* or *our Founder*; and to Blessed Alvaro del Portillo as *Blessed Alvaro* or, when Bishop Javier Echevarria speaks of him, as *the Father*. Some quotes have been taken from publications of the General Archive of the Prelature (AGP); quotations from St. Josemaria are identified in *italicized Bodoni typeface*.



Basilica of the Annunciation

Two thousand years ago, while Rome shone in splendor, many other cities existed on the shore of the Mediterranean that did not share the importance of the Empire's capital, but enjoyed prosperity and had played major roles in some of the most glorious events of history: Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Syracuse, Alexandria, Carthage... and in ancient Palestine, the holy city of Jerusalem and the flourishing cities of Caesarea and Jericho.

In contrast, Nazareth was a village entirely unknown to the vast majority of the world's inhabitants. A handful of poor homes, partially excavated into the rocky promontories in Lower Galilee, Nazareth had almost zero importance even within its own region. Sepphoris, where nearly all commercial activity of the area took place, was two hours away by foot, and had well-constructed buildings and Greek-speaking inhabitants who were involved in the Greco-Roman intellectual world. Nazareth, on the other hand, was inhabited by a small number of families who only spoke Aramaic, about a hundred in total. Most would have worked in agriculture and livestock, but there were also craftsmen like Joseph, who with his work ethic and talent had plenty of business amongst carpenters and blacksmiths.

In that village, in a remote corner of the earth, where no one would ever have thought of looking for someone who was going to change the course of history, the most incredible creature who ever lived was leading an absolutely ordinary life.¹

Hail Mary

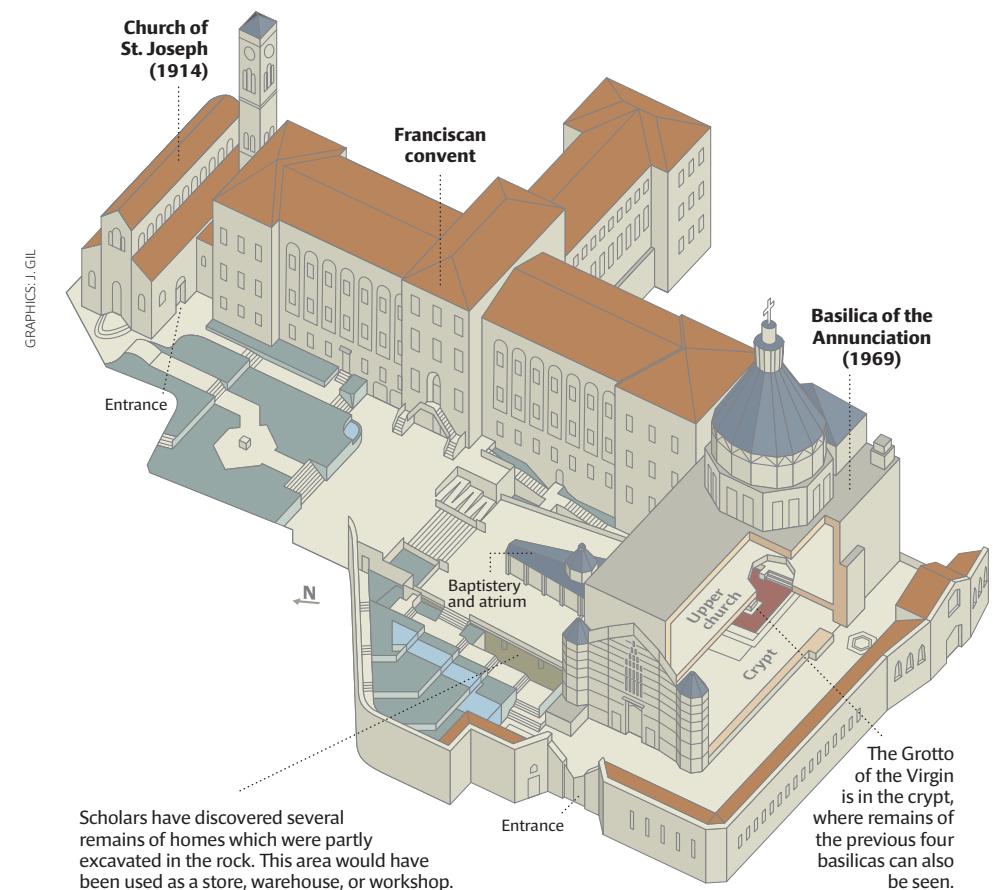
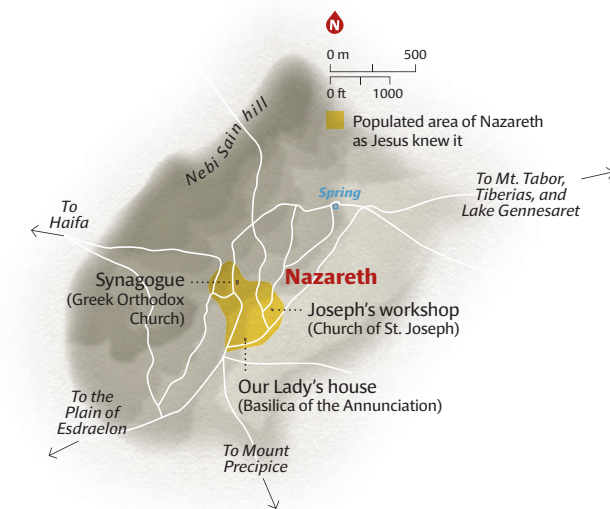
In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.² Very simply, St. Luke introduces the glorious moment in which our redemption began. We know very well what happens next: the greetings of the Archangel, Mary's surprise, and finally, her answer: *Ecce ancilla Domini; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*³

According to an ancient tradition passed on by some Fathers of the Church, some relatives of Jesus were still living in Nazareth in the 2nd century, and they had preserved both the room in which the Angel Gabriel visited Our Lady, and the house of the

1. We were inspired by the preaching of Fr. Francisco Varo Pineda, partially written down in a blog entry: <http://www.primeroscristianos.com/index.php/blogs/francisco-varo-pineda/item/1362-un-dia-en-la-vida-de-la-virgen;retreat,pro-manuscrito>.

2. Lk 1:26–27.

3. Lk 1:38.

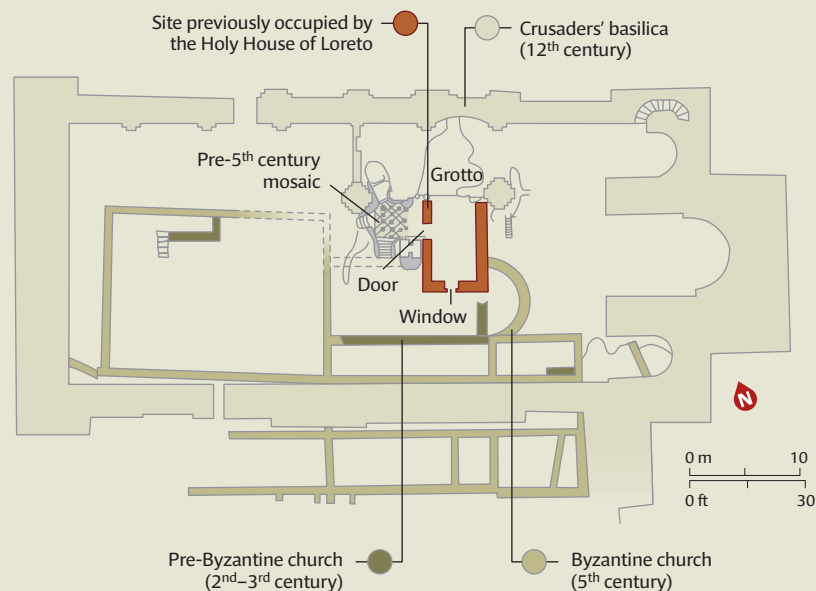




LEOBARD HINELAR

Crypt of the Basilica of the Annunciation

Mid-20th century archeological research in Nazareth confirmed that Christians have venerated the grotto of the Annunciation since the first centuries AD. They also unearthed the remains of three churches which were built before the transfer of the Holy House to Italy; these remains can be seen in the crypt of the present-day church.



GRAPHIC: J. GIL



The Holy House of Loreto. Above, in red, the inscription XE MAPIA (Hail Mary), found in Nazareth.



Holy Family. They had even preserved the well where Our Lady went to draw water, just as other women in the town. There are written testimonies of pilgrims who visited the house in Nazareth in the 4th century when it was already a place venerated by Christians, complete with an altar.

In the 5th century, a Byzantine church was built upon the site, which the Crusaders would find in ruins when they arrived at the end of the 11th century. The Norman knight Tancred, Prince of Galilee, ordered a new basilica to be constructed over the grotto, but the new building was again destroyed in the invasion of Sultan Baibars in 1263.

In 1620, an emir handed over of the ruins of the basilica and grotto to the Franciscans, and in 1730, they obtained permission from the Ottoman Sultan to build a new church there. The edifice was enlarged in 1877, and then completely demolished in 1955 to make way for the current basilica, which is the largest Christian shrine in the Middle East.

DANIEL WEBER / FLICKR



Basilica of the Annunciation from the front.

Before building the new basilica, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum undertook an archaeological investigation of the site, and among other things, they discovered a building used for worship which had Christian graffiti (signs of Christian devotion) on it, including an inscription in Greek, *XE ΜΑΡΙΑ* (Hail Mary), and one which mentions “the holy place of M.” Both the original building and the graffiti predate the 3rd century, and may correspond to the late 1st or early 2nd century.

These findings were supplemented by studies done in the Holy House of Loreto, Italy, between 1962 and 1965, which showed the house’s proportions to correspond to those of a building attached to the Grotto of Nazareth. Furthermore, it was found that the graffiti on the walls of the house preserved in Loreto were of the same style and age as those in Nazareth. These findings, together with existing written sources and archaeological remains, explain why

OPUS DEI INFORMATION OFFICE



LEOBARD HINFELAAR



Under the cupola, a large space opens over the Crypt and the Grotto of the Annunciation. On the left, Blessed Alvaro in the Basilica on March 15, 1994.

it is historically consistent that, both in the Basilica of Nazareth and in the sanctuary of Loreto, pilgrims can contemplate with gratitude the physical place where the Word was made flesh: *HIC VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST*.

I want it when You want it!

When Blessed Alvaro del Portillo went to pray and celebrate Mass at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth on March 15, 1994, he was overcome with emotion. Bishop Javier Echevarria remembered that, days afterwards, Bl. Alvaro was so happy that he had been able to “contemplate from up close the places where Christ, his great love, had been, had lived.”⁴

In Nazareth, Blessed Alvaro went first to pray in a church which has preserved a well that appears to date from the time of Mary. There he meditated once more upon something which had often fueled his prayer: how the Virgin, “as the most excellent created being, with all of the supernatural perfections anyone could imagine, had to fulfill all the small duties of a wife and a mother of a family. Everyday tasks of normal people — like us — which she did with

4. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 279 (AGP, library, P01).

real finesse, with real affection, thinking that with very down-to-earth work, she was honoring God and helping the people who depended on her work and her service.”⁵

Afterwards, they went to the Church of St. Joseph, where pilgrims venerate the house where the Holy Family lived during Jesus’ hidden life. There, Blessed Alvaro “recalled what our Founder taught us about St. Joseph. Our Father said he would have been a man with good, clear ideas about the world, who loved his work and worked with enthusiasm even when burdened with difficulty or sadness; this was a man whose faith did not waver when he witnessed mysteries beyond his comprehension.”⁶

From there, they walked to the Basilica of the Annunciation, where Blessed Alvaro was moved upon reading the inscription underneath the altar: *Verbum caro hic factum est*. Bishop Javier Echevarria remembers that, seeing those words, “he united himself once more to the intentions and the love and affection our Father had on August 15, 1951, when he went to consecrate the Work to the Most Sweet Heart of Mary, in the Holy House of Loreto, the traditional house of Our Lady. The inscription above the altar there reads: *Hic Verbum caro factum est*.”⁷

At that time, the basilica was closed to the public, so Blessed Alvaro was able to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in a recollected way. In his homily, he talked about the Christian view of suffering; a supernumerary of the Work, who had been diagnosed with cancer and would die shortly afterwards, was present and listening:

“It is always a great privilege to celebrate and attend Mass. But the Lord is so good that he wanted to leave these marks of his time on earth, of his coming to the world. Here, it seems that it’s easier to talk with God, thinking joyfully about the Love our Lord has for us, and the special privilege it is to celebrate Mass.

“In this cave, down there where the mark is, the Word became flesh. Almighty God, infinitely great, takes on human flesh. Where?

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 282.

7. Ibid.



During the Mass which Blessed Alvaro celebrated in the Grotto of the Annunciation.

In a home filled with poverty. And where was He born? In another cave, which with the passage of years is now many meters underground. The Lord has been there. The Lord was born there. Why? To give us life. He became mortal, living like that — and dying as He died — that we might live.

“The Lord allows us to suffer pain and sorrow. But that is his way of showing affection for us, of bringing us closer to Him. Today, contemplating that incredible scene which the Evangelists narrate, I understand better that when our Lord allows us to suffer, he gives us more of his Love afterwards, so that we will be more like Him.

“Here we are, some priests and faithful of Opus Dei who have come here to attend Mass, and we tell Him: Lord, thank you for

being so good! Thank you for deigning to come into the world, taking on flesh from that wonderful Maiden, the Virgin Mary! So that we could be saints, so that we could learn to struggle, so we could learn to say to you: Lord, I want what You want, I want it because You want it, I want it when You want it!

“My children: let’s pray on behalf of the whole Work. I also will unite myself to the intentions of each one of you.

“The Lord is very good. The Lord takes us down paths we cannot understand; but everything he sends or allows us to experience is always for our good and the good of those we love and who love us.

“Naturally, I pray first of all for the Work, for all the members of Opus Dei scattered around the world. For all those who are suffering and fighting interior battles and who need our Lord’s help. We can bring them this help through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jesus cannot deny his Mother anything. As the best of sons, how can he say no to Mary, the best of mothers? The Lord listens to Mary, who is also our Mother, since Christ left her to us as his inheritance before he died. Mary is our Mother and she always listens to us.

“Always be happy and at peace because we have a God in heaven who can work wonders, and a Mother in heaven who received all the love a Mother could possibly receive.

“Let’s pray for the Holy Father and for the universal Church, for the Catholic Church. Especially for the Pope, who sorely needs prayers. He has many enemies, but the Lord fills him with peace and joy. He doesn’t think about his enemies: he thinks about how little love for God there is. My children: how little love for God there is!

“It’s time to examine ourselves as well, to see if we are loving God as we ought. Let’s see if we can give something more to the Lord, who has the right to ask it and who is demanding it of us now, while offering us the grace to correspond. That’s how easy it is! And this way we can tell our Lord when the moment arrives: “Lord, I did everything I could, everything. And then You will welcome me, Lord, when the moment comes, like you welcomed the prodigal son of that good father.

“May we not be prodigal sons; may we be faithful, always, till death, which will come when God wants. God bless you.

“Let’s pray a Hail Mary to our Lady.”⁸

Faithful till death

Eight days later, the Lord chose to take Blessed Álvaro to Himself. He died as he had lived: with the peace which is possessed only by those who place everything in the hands of God. His funeral took place on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, in the Basilica of Sant’Eugenio in Rome: “We were all thinking about the Mass that the Father had celebrated in the Basilica of the Annunciation, in Nazareth, only ten days ago!” And about the last words of Blessed Alvaro from that homily: “May we be faithful, always, till death, which will come when God wants.” In honor of those words, the faithful of the Work gave the Prelate a tabernacle with the phrase *Semper fidelis* inscribed on the front, in honor of his 75th birthday in 2007. This tabernacle is destined for the Saxum Conference Center. That phrase neatly sums up the life of Blessed Alvaro, and sets a standard for each one of us to live our lives by. ■

8. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Homily, 15 March 1994, quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 283–285 (AGP, library, P01).

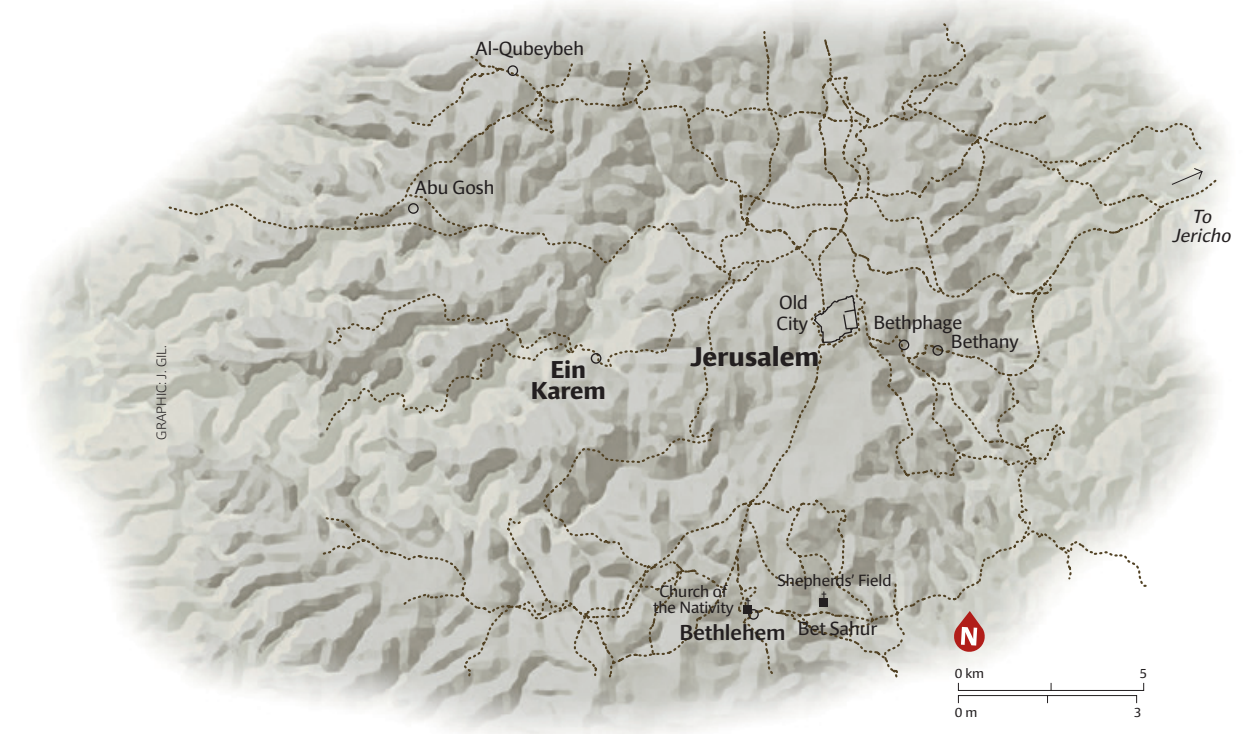
Ein Karem: birthplace of John the Baptist

Ein Karem is a little village about six kilometers west of the Old City, on the outskirts of present-day Jerusalem. Its buildings of light-colored stone seem to have put down roots in the leafy hillsides, where groves of pines and cypresses alternate with terraces of vines and olive-trees. It appears that in our Lord's time, this town was reserved for priests and Levites; its proximity to the Temple made it easy for them to get there to fulfill their priestly duties, when their turn came every six months. Zechariah and Elizabeth lived here, according to ancient traditions, and it was here Mary visited them after the Annunciation, when she set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah.¹ And three months later, when the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child,² John the Baptist was born in this village.

These events, as related by St. Luke, are commemorated by two churches: the Church of the Visitation, high up in the southern end of the town, past a spring which has supplied the townspeople with water as long as anyone can remember; and the Church of St.

1. Lk 1:39.

2. Lk 1:57.



John the Baptist, which is held to be that saint's birthplace. Both churches have been under the Custody of the Holy Land since the 17th century.

The Church of the Visitation

Mary entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said:

Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.³

3. Lk 1:40–45.

NICOLA E PINA / PANORAMIO



View of the village, including the steeple of the Church of St. John the Baptist, from the hill which leads to the Church of the Visitation.

To reach the Church of the Visitation, pilgrims must go up a steep path with carved steps, which boasts a panoramic view of Ein Karem and the surrounding area. At the top of the hill, the path turns through an artistic iron-wrought gateway into a long courtyard. On the left, a mosaic on one of the church walls depicts Our Lady's journey from Nazareth, riding on a donkey and surrounded by angels. Next to the door on the right is a sculpture of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth. Behind it stretches a wall covered with the script of many languages, all of them proclaiming Mary's hymn, the *Magnificat*:



The Church of the Visitation.

ALFONSO PUERTAS



ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM

The Church of the Visitation in Ein Karem from above. In the courtyard, a portico covers the entrance to the crypt; behind a sculpture which commemorates the meeting between Our Lady and Elizabeth, the Magnificat prayer can be read in over fifty languages. On the right, the nave of the church.



ALFONSO PUERTAS



ALFONSO PUERTAS

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.
He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.⁴

4. Lk 1:46–55.



ALONSO PUERTAS

Archaeological excavations show that Christian worship has existed on this spot since the Byzantine era. In addition, it seems that up until the arrival of the Crusaders, the place also commemorated an event which occurred after the Visitation, related by the *Protoevangelium of James*, an apocryphal gospel from the 2nd century: the flight of St. Elizabeth with John to save him from Herod's soldiers, who were killing male children in Bethlehem and its vicinity.⁵ The memory of this event is preserved in the crypt of the church, entered through the courtyard. It is a rectangular chapel with an ancient cave on the side, closed with a stone vault and containing a well that is supplied by a spring. On the right of the gallery, in a niche, rests the rock venerated as the hiding-place of the infant John the Baptist from the soldiers.

The Church of the Visitation, completed in 1940, is built over the crypt on which the Crusaders built a church in the 12th century. To enter, one ascends an outside stairway that starts in the courtyard and winds through an area of flowers. Inside the church, paintings and mosaics praise Mary throughout the ages: Mary as intercessor at the wedding feast of Cana; Mary as refuge of Chris-

5. Mt 2:16.

In the crypt, an apse stretches over the altar. The other apse, in the form of an excavated tunnel, ends in a well with a small fountain. In a niche stands the rock where, according to an ancient tradition, Elizabeth hid her son.



ALFRED DRIESSEN

tians, protecting the faithful with her mantle; the proclamation of her divine motherhood at the Council of Ephesus; the defense of the Immaculate Conception by Blessed Duns Scotus; and her intercession for Christians at the Battle of Lepanto.

The Church of St. John the Baptist

When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John."

But they answered her,

"There is no one among your relatives who has this name."

So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed.⁶

6. Lk 1:57-63.



The Church of St. John the Baptist is built on the traditional place of the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth, where St. John the Baptist was born. Like the Church of the Visitation, the church's outer walls are covered with the words of a hymn in countless languages, but this time it is the *Benedictus*, spoken by Zechariah on this spot:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.
He has raised up a horn for our salvation
within the house of David his servant,
even as he promised through the mouth
of his holy prophets from of old:
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us,
to show mercy to our fathers
and to be mindful of his holy covenant
and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father,
and to grant us that, rescued from the hand of enemies,
without fear we might worship him
in holiness and righteousness



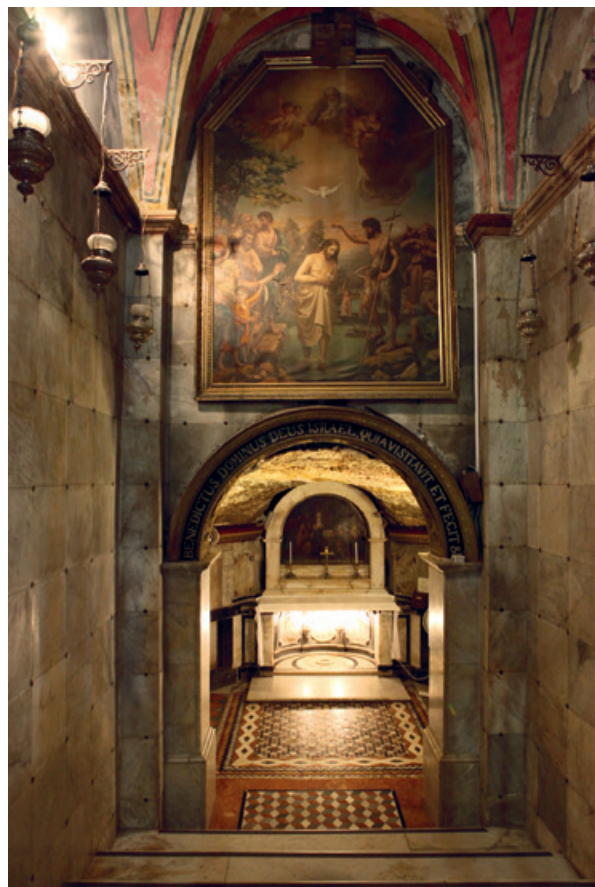
On the left, aerial view of the Church of St. John the Baptist. It is built on the place traditionally known as the house of Zachary and Elizabeth.

before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God
by which the daybreak from on high will visit us
to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.⁷

The present-day church has the same structure as the 12th century Crusaders' church, which attempted to preserve the structure of the former Byzantine church. Restorations were undertaken between the 17th and 20th centuries, which strengthened and adorned the structure, and allowed valuable archaeological investigations to be carried out. Today the domed church has a nave and two aisles,

7. Lk 1:68–79.



The interior of the church of St. John the Baptist is decorated with tiles from Manises (Spain), inlaid in the 19th century. At the end of the north aisle, a cave carved into the rock commemorates the birth of the Precursor.

with an excavated cave in the northern apse. This was undoubtedly part of a first-century Jewish home; according to tradition, this was the house of Zechariah. Beneath the altar, a Latin inscription proclaims that John the Baptist, our Lord's precursor, was born here: *Hic Præcursor Domini natus est.*

Blessed Alvaro in Ein Karem

During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Blessed Alvaro visited Ein Karem on March 20, 1994. In the morning, he had gone by car to see various houses and sites which could serve as future centers of the Work in Jerusalem; among other sites they visited was a possible place for a conference center in Ein Karem. Although that site did not work out in the



end, they little suspected that Saxum would be located only a few kilometers away to the northwest.

On the afternoon of March 20th, Blessed Alvaro went to the Church of the Visitation, where a Franciscan welcomed him personally. After stopping in the crypt, he went up to the church to pray with St. Luke's Gospel, which narrates the meeting between Our Lady and St. Elizabeth. When the visitation had ended, Blessed Alvaro took a member of the Work with him by the arm and joked that, although that man had assured him that there were only fifteen steps on the stairway to the basilica, Blessed Alvaro had counted forty-eight.

A mystery of joy

"The atmosphere that pervades the evangelical episode of the Visitation is joy: the mystery of the Visitation is a mystery of joy. John the Baptist exults with joy in the womb of St. Elizabeth; the latter, rejoicing in the gift of motherhood, bursts out into blessings of the Lord; Mary pours forth the 'Magnificat,' a hymn overflowing with Messianic joy. But what is the mysterious, hidden source of this joy? It is Jesus, whom Mary

has already conceived thanks to the Holy Spirit, and who is already beginning to defeat what is the root of fear, anguish and sadness: sin, the most humiliating slavery for man.”⁸

Our own and other people’s experiences prove that if we live selfishly, cutting ourselves off from God, we are sad. In contrast, being close to our Lord Jesus Christ is a source of joy, recognizing his presence in us and among us as a friend and a brother who is there with us and who gives us light in our desire to fulfill the will of God our Father. “Don’t be men and women of sadness,” said Pope Francis shortly after his election. “A Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born from having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst; it is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life’s journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable, and there are so many of them!”⁹

When discouragement threatens, either because of external factors or — as very often happens — because we realize our personal shortcomings, St. Josemaria’s advice can revive our faith: *Be simple. Open your heart. Look: as yet nothing has been lost. You can still go forward, and with more love, with more affection, with more strength.*

*Take refuge in your divine sonship: God is your most loving Father. In this lies your security, a haven where you can drop anchor no matter what is happening on the surface of the sea of life. And you will find joy, strength, optimism: victory!*¹⁰

Knowing that we are God’s children, with apostolic zeal, we will feel the need to infect others with our happiness, to give light to souls so that *many people will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life.*¹¹ *Every Christian has the duty to bring peace and joy*

8. St. John Paul II, Homily, 31 May 1979.

9. Pope Francis, Homily, 24 March 2013.

10. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 7th Station, no. 2.

11. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 1.

*to his own surroundings on earth. This cheerful crusade of manliness will move even shrivelled or rotten hearts, and raise them to God.*¹²

Blessed are you who believed,¹³ said St. Elizabeth to Our Lady, praising her faith. This faith manifested itself in a complete surrender to the will of God; and that is why she calls her blessed, happy. At the same time, Mary gives all the credit to God: **The Mighty One has done great things for me.**¹⁴ Her faith is measured by her immeasurable humility. If we want the Master to increase our faith, let us be humble, like Our Lady.

Looking on the immense panorama of souls who are awaiting us, and being struck by the wonderful and awesome responsibility before us, you may at times have asked yourself, as I have: “Can I contribute anything, when the task is so vast? I, who am so puny?”

It is then we have to open the Gospel and contemplate how Jesus cures the man born blind. He uses mud made from the dust of the earth and saliva. Yet this is the salve which brings light to those blind eyes!

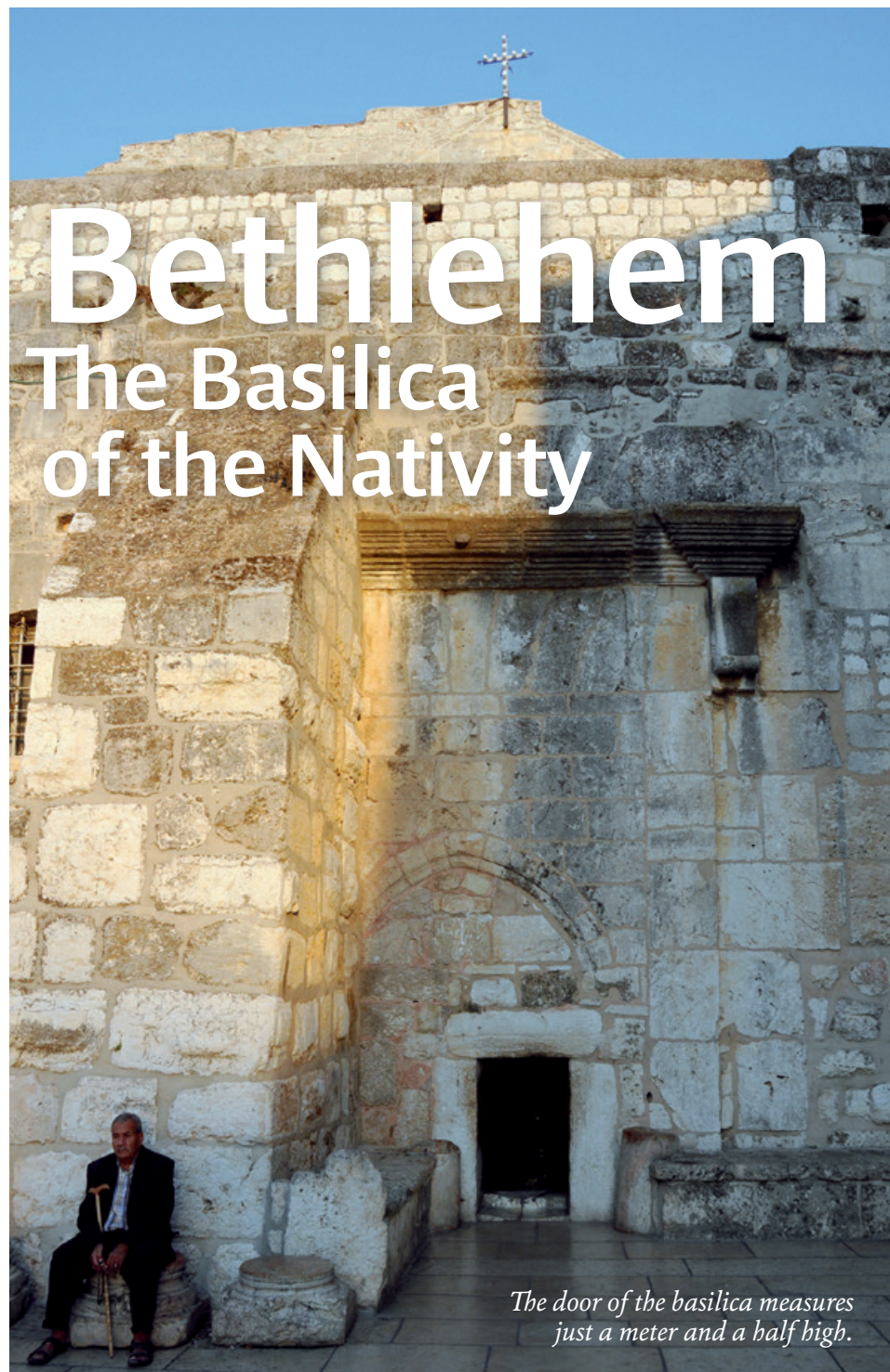
*That is what you and I are. Fully aware of our weaknesses and our worthlessness, but with the grace of God and our good will, we can be salve to give light and provide strength for others as well as for ourselves.*¹⁵ ■

12. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 92.

13. Lk 1:45.

14. Lk 1:49.

15. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 370.



LEOBARD HINELAAR

Bethlehem

The Basilica of the Nativity

The door of the basilica measures just a meter and a half high.



ALFRED DRIESSEN

In the Grotto of the Nativity, the place where Jesus was born is marked with a silver star.

At Christmas our thoughts turn to the different events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Son of God. As we contemplate the stable in Bethlehem [...], Mary, Joseph, and the child Jesus occupy a special place in our hearts.¹ It has been calculated that Bethlehem was founded by the Canaanites around the year 3000 BC. As early as 1350 BC, it is mentioned in some letters from the Egyptian governor of Palestine to the Pharaoh, after which it was conquered by the Philistines. In Sacred Scripture, the first mention of Bethlehem

1. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 22.

(which at that time was also called Ephrath, “the fertile one”) comes in the Book of Genesis, when it relates the death and burial of Rachel, the second wife of the Patriarch Jacob: Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).² Later on, when the land was divided up among the tribes of the Chosen People, Bethlehem was allotted to Judah, and became the birthplace of David, the shepherd-boy, the youngest son of a large family, who was chosen by God to be Israel’s second king. From then on, Bethlehem was linked to David’s dynasty, and the prophet Micah foretold that there, in that little town, the Messiah would be born:

But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah,
least among the clans of Judah,
From you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel;
Whose origin is from of old,
from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time
when she who is to give birth has borne,
Then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the children of Israel.

He shall take his place as shepherd
by the strength of the LORD,
by the majestic name of the LORD, his God;
And they shall dwell securely, for now his greatness
shall reach to the ends of the earth:
he shall be peace.³

Several elements in this passage connect to the prophecies of the Messiah made by Isaiah,⁴ and also with other texts in Scripture announcing a future descendent of David.⁵ Jewish tradition saw Micah’s words as a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah, as is apparent from several passages in the Talmud.⁶ St. John, too, in his Gospel, shows the opinion that prevailed among the Jews at the

2. Gen 35:19.

3. Mic 5:1–4.

4. Cf. Is 7:14; 9:5–6; and 11:1–4.

5. Cf. 2 Sam 7:12; 12–16; and Ps 89(88):3–4.

6. Cf. Pesachim 51:1 and Nedarim 39:2.

time of Jesus about where the Messiah was to come from: **Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?**⁷

But it is St. Matthew’s Gospel that explicitly quotes the prophecy of Micah, when Herod gathers the priests and scribes to ask them where the Messiah was to be born. In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.”⁸

At the beginning of the first century AD, Bethlehem was a village with not more than a thousand inhabitants: a small set of houses scattered along the side of a ridge and protected by a wall that was in a bad state of repair, or even mostly demolished, since it had been built nearly a thousand years earlier. Its inhabitants lived by agriculture and herding. They had good fields of wheat and barley in the broad plain at the foot of the ridge; perhaps these had given rise to the name Beth-Lechem, Hebrew for “House of Bread.” The fields nearest the desert were also pasture for flocks of sheep.

In the little village of Bethlehem, day followed after day in the monotonous rhythm of the agricultural seasons of the provinces, until the unprecedented event that would make it famous forever throughout the world. St. Luke tells the story as follows:

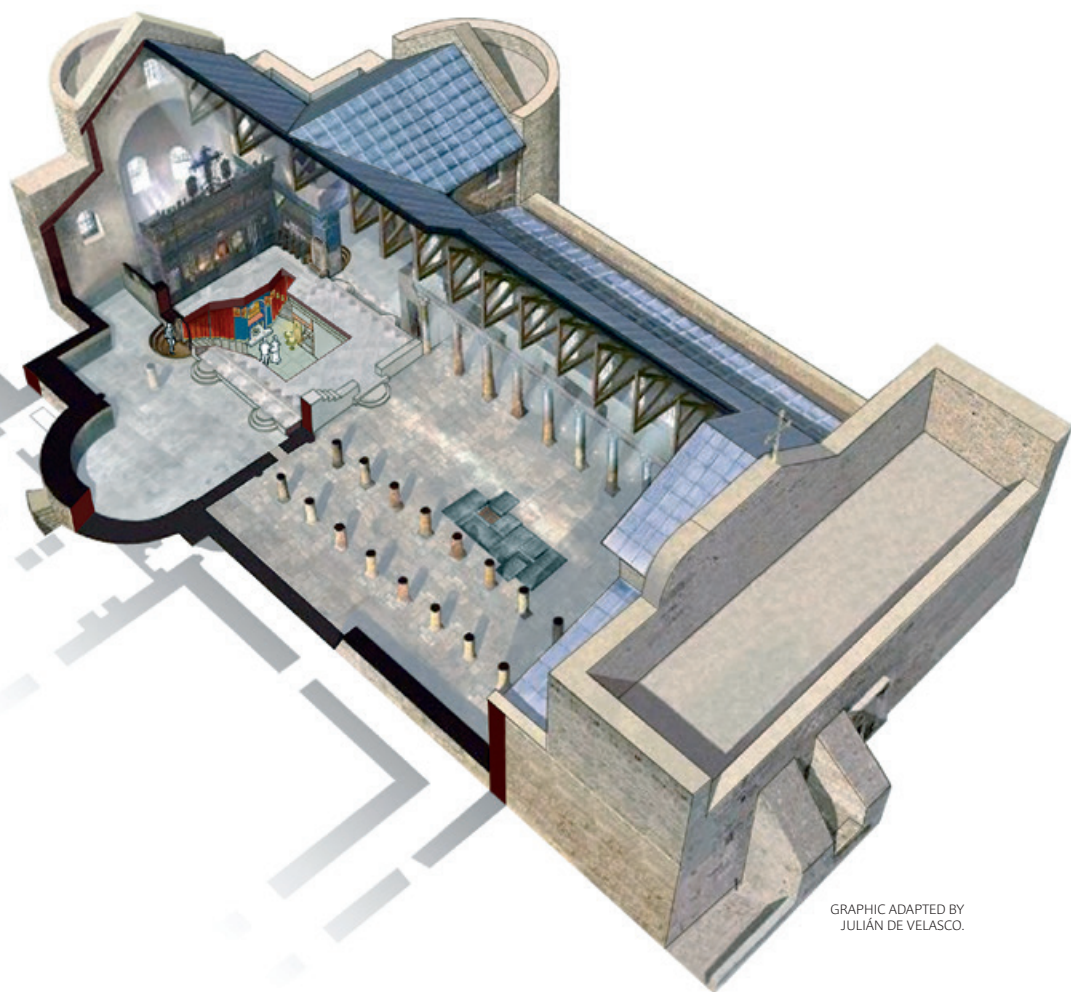
In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.⁹

About a hundred and fifty kilometers separated Nazareth from Bethlehem. The journey would have been especially hard for Mary in her condition.

7. Jn 7:42.

8. Mt 2:5–6.

9. Lk 2:1–5.



GRAPHIC ADAPTED BY
JULIÁN DE VELASCO.

DARKO TEPERT / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Grotto of the Nativity.

The houses of Bethlehem were modest ones, and as in other parts of Palestine, the villagers used natural caves as stores and stables, and dug more out of the side of the ridge. It was in one of these that Jesus was born.

And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him

in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.¹⁰

God's providence arranged things so that Jesus, the Word made flesh, the King of the World and the Lord of history, would be born in total poverty. He did not even have what a poor family could have lovingly prepared for the birth of their firstborn son. All he had was swaddling-clothes and a manger.

Moved by this question, I too now contemplate Jesus "lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12), in a place fit only for animals. Lord, where is your kingship, your crown, your sword, your scepter? They are his by right, but he does not want them. He reigns wrapped in swaddling clothes. Our king is unadorned. He comes to us as a defenseless little child. Can we help but recall the words of the Apostle: "He emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave" (Phil 2:7)?

Our Lord became man to teach us the Father's will. And this he is already doing as he lies there in the manger. Jesus Christ is seeking us — with a call which is a vocation to sanctity — so that we may carry out the redemption with him. Let us reflect on this first lesson of his. We are to co-redeem, by striving to triumph not over our neighbor, but over ourselves. Like Christ we need to empty ourselves, to consider ourselves as the servants of others, and so to bring them to God.

Where is the king? Could it be that Jesus wants to reign above all in men's hearts, in your heart? That is why he has become a child.¹¹

The grotto

Right from the start, our Lord's disciples and the first Christians were very much aware of Bethlehem's significance. Halfway through the second century AD, St. Justin, who was a native of Palestine, reported the memories that were being passed down from parents to children among Bethlehem's

10. Lk 2:6–7.

11. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 31.

inhabitants about the stable where Jesus was born.¹² In the first decades of the following century, Origen testified that the place where our Lord was born was perfectly well known locally, even among those who were not Christians. "In harmony with what the Gospels tell, people in Bethlehem show you the cave in which [Jesus] was born and, within the cave, the crib where he was laid, wrapped in swaddling-clothes. And what is shown in those places is famous even among those who do not belong to the faith; 'in this cave,' they tell you, 'was born the Jesus who is admired and adored by Christians.'"¹³

In the time of the Emperor Hadrian, the imperial authorities built pagan temples on various spots that were venerated by Christians, such as the Holy Sepulchre and Calvary, in the hopes of obliterating all traces of Christ's life on earth. "From the time of Hadrian until the reign of Constantine, for a period of about a hundred and eighty years, a statue of Jupiter was worshipped at the place of the Resurrection, and a marble statue of Venus was set by the Gentiles on the hill of the Cross. The authors of the persecution undoubtedly imagined that if the holy places were polluted by idols, it would destroy our faith in the Resurrection and the Cross."¹⁴

Something similar may have been done in Bethlehem: the place where Jesus was born became a sacred wood dedicated to the god Adonis. St. Cyril of Jerusalem saw the area which included the stable, covered with trees,¹⁵ and St. Jerome also refers ironically to the failed attempt to paganise this Christian memory: "Bethlehem, which now belongs to us, the most august place in the world, the place of which the Psalmist said 'Truth has sprung up from the earth,' (Ps 84:12), lay under the shadow of a wood of Tammuz, or Adonis, and Venus' paramour was mourned in the cave where many years ago Christ uttered his first cries."¹⁶

12. Cf. St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 78, 5.

13. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1, 51.

14. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 58 (*Ad Paulinum presbyterum*), 3.

15. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 12, 20: "Until a few years ago this place was occupied by a wood."

16. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 58 (*Ad Paulinum presbyterum*), 3.



Fragments of mosaics from the Byzantine era can still be seen in the walls and floors.

Based on this constant, unanimous tradition, the Emperor Constantine had a great basilica built over the stable. It was consecrated on 31 May 339, and one of those present at the ceremony was St. Helena, who had been the driving force behind the whole undertaking.

Not much remains of this first basilica, which was sacked and destroyed during the Samaritan Revolt of 529. When peace was restored Bethlehem was fortified, and the Emperor Justinian ordered a new basilica to be built, on the same site as the first one, but larger. This Basilica still stands today, having survived during the various invasions when the other Constantinian / Byzantine churches were destroyed. It is said that the Persians, who in the year 614 laid waste almost all the churches and monasteries in Palestine, decided to leave the Bethlehem basilica alone out of respect, because they found in it a mosaic representing the Three Kings dressed in Persian garb. The basilica also emerged almost unscathed from the Egyptian Caliph's invasion of the Holy Land in 1009, and from the many battles fought after the arrival of the crusaders in 1099.

After historical vicissitudes too numerous to mention, the custody of the stable and basilica was entrusted to the Franciscans in 1347. They continue to look after it to this day, although



Greek Orthodox, Syriacs and Armenians also have rights over this holy place.

From the square in front of the basilica the visitor has the impression of standing before a mediaeval fortress, because of the thick walls and buttresses, pierced by a few tiny windows. Entrance is through a door so small that only one person can go in at a time, and even then stooping and with difficulty. In his homily at Midnight Mass 2011, Benedict XVI referred to the access to this basilica:

“Today, anyone wishing to enter the Church of Jesus’ Nativity in Bethlehem will find that the doorway five and a half metres high, through which emperors and caliphs used to enter the building, is now largely walled up. Only a low opening of one and a half metres has remained. The intention was probably to pro-

vide the church with better protection from attack, but above all to prevent people from entering God's house on horseback. Anyone wishing to enter the place of Jesus' birth has to bend down. It seems to me that a deeper truth is revealed here, which should touch our hearts on this holy night: if we want to find the God who appeared as a child, then we must dismount from the high horse of our 'enlightened' reason. We must set aside our false certainties, our intellectual pride, which prevents us from recognizing God's closeness."¹⁷

The basilica is built in the shape of a Latin cross, with five aisles, and is 54 metres long. The four rows of pink marble columns provide harmony. In some places it is still possible to see the remains of the mosaics that covered the floor of Constantine's basilica, and the walls preserve fragments of more mosaics, dating from the time of the crusades.

But the center of this great church is the Grotto of the Nativity, which lies beneath the sanctuary. It takes the form of a very small chapel, with a little apse on the eastern side. The walls and ceiling have been blackened by the smoke of candles lit by generations of devout Christians. Beneath the altar, a silver star shows the place where Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. The accompanying inscription reads: *Hic de Virgine Maria Iesus Christus natus est*.

The manger where Mary laid the Baby after wrapping him in swaddling-bands is in a little chapel beside the Grotto. It is in fact just a hole in the rock, though today it is lined with marble and in the past was lined with silver. In front of it is the Altar of the Magi, with an altarpiece showing the scene of the Epiphany. Blessed Alvaro celebrated Mass there on March 19, 1994, and in his homily, he spoke about the extreme poverty in which Jesus was born:

"Our Lord could have come into the world for the redemption of the human race clothed in power and extraordinary majesty; but he chose to be born into incredible poverty. Seeing these places, one is amazed: there was absolutely nothing! Nothing more than a lot of love for God, and a lot of love for us! This is why Jesus decided to take on our flesh, and he didn't consider it a humiliation — He,

17. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 December 2011.

ENRIQUE BERMEJO / CTS



The Grotto of the Nativity. Blessed Alvaro celebrated Mass at the altar on the right on March 19, 1994.

who was God — giving up the appearance of God — which is something indescribable, which no one can explain — to make himself the same as us, except in sin (Cf. Phil 2:7; Heb 4:15). With the difference that He chose to die — and what a death! — death on the cross, a terrible death. That Child who was born in Bethlehem, was born to die for us."¹⁸ ■

18. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Homily, 19 March 1994, quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 342 (AGP, library, P01).

*Gloria in Excelsis Deo
Church, in Siyar
al-Ghanam.*

Bethlehem

The Shepherds' Field

Bethlehem and its surroundings lie amidst a gently undulating landscape. Terraces have been cut into the sloping sides of some of the ridges, and planted with olive-trees; the flattest parts of the valleys are divided into fields; and the parts of the ground that are too rocky for cultivation are dotted with different plants, shrubs and trees, including pines, cypresses, and many Mediterranean species of bush.

ALFRED ORLIESEN

This region is where David was shepherding his father's flocks when he was anointed by Samuel,¹ and, three generations earlier, his great-grandmother Ruth gleaned in the fields of wheat and barley behind Boaz's reapers.² Centuries later, when the time had come for the arrival of the Son of God on earth, this was where the birth of Jesus was first announced: In that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."³

Although the Gospel narrative does not pinpoint the exact place of the Angels' appearance to the shepherds, from the earliest times Christians located it in an area two or three kilometers east of Bethlehem, where the town of Beit Sahour ("the house of the night watch") stands today. St. Jerome mentions it,⁴ connecting it with the Biblical emplacement called Migdal Eder ("the tower of the flock"), where Jacob pitched his camp after the death of Rachel.⁵ In the Byzantine period, in the fourth or fifth century, a church was built there dedicated to the shepherds, the church in Jerusalem celebrated a feast of the Vigil of the Nativity, and a cave was held in special veneration there. There was also a monastery, but by the time the crusades arrived, nothing of all this remained except ruins.

Centuries later, in the modern era, two different spots in the Beit Sahour locality conserved the memory of the ancient traditions of the place. The first was known as Kanisat al-Ruwat, in the west of the zone, and is now practically a suburb of Bethlehem. It held the remains of a small Byzantine church. A Roman Catholic church was built there in 1951, dedicated to Our Lady of Fati-

1. Cf. 1 Sam 16:1–13.

2. Cf. Ru 2:1–17.

3. Lk 2:8–12.

4. Cf. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 108 (*Epitaphium Sanctæ Paulæ*), 10.

5. Cf. Gen 35:21.

LEOBARD HINELAAR



BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



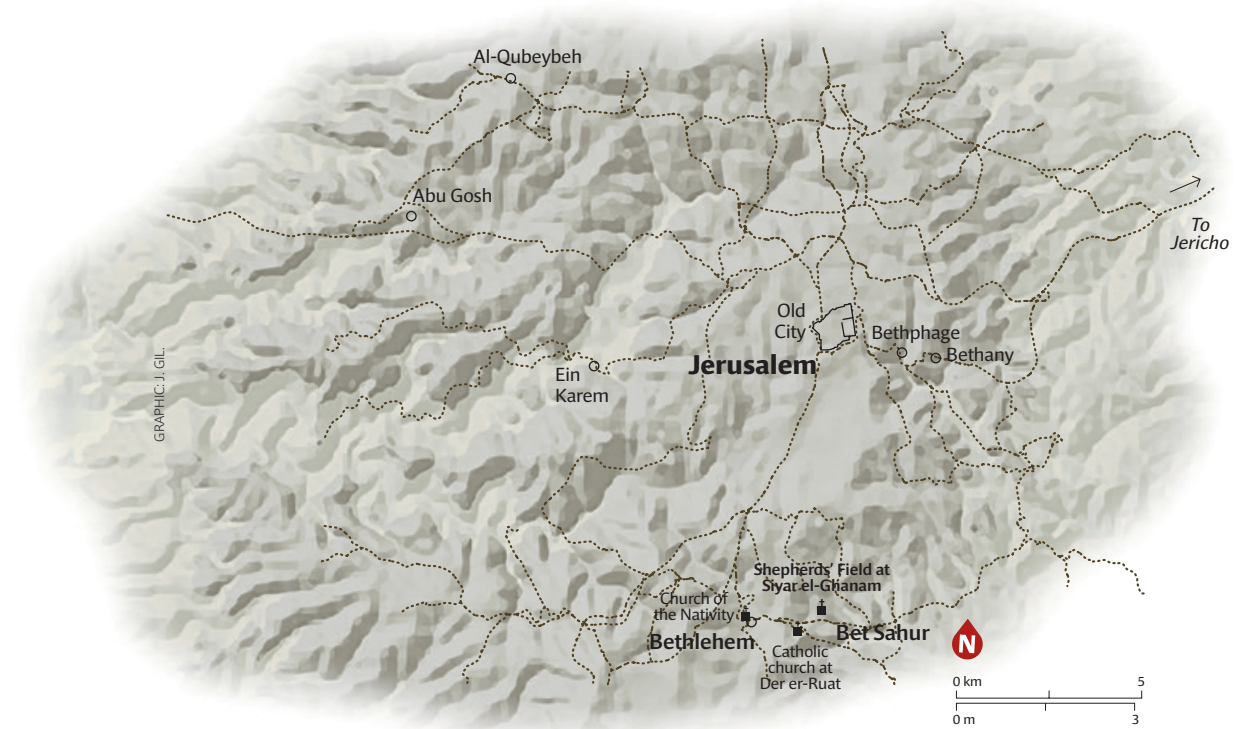
JAMIE LYNN ROSS / FLICKR



The apses are decorated with nativity scenes: the appearance of the Angels, the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem, and the adoration of the Child.

ma and St. Therese of Lisieux, and a Greek Orthodox church was built in 1972.

The second spot, about one kilometer to the north-east, was at Siyar al-Ghanam, “the shepherds’ field.” On a hillside abounding in natural caves, there was a piece of land containing ruins, which was acquired by the Franciscans in the nineteenth century. Excavations carried out in 1951 and 1952, continuing a partial excavation



in 1859, brought to light two monasteries which had been inhabited from the fourth to the eighth centuries. The church of the first had been demolished in the sixth century and another built on the same spot, though with its nave shifted slightly towards the east, which suggests a connection with a particular memory. The complex included plenty of farming-related constructions — presses, pools, silos, and cisterns — and the caves within it had been used for farming purposes. They had been used in this way in the times of Jesus, to judge by the pottery shards found in them dating from the time of Herod. There are also traces of a watchtower.

On a rock overlooking these ruins of the Shepherds’ Field, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land built, between 1953 and 1954, the church of Gloria in Excelsis Deo, commemorating the first announcement of Christ’s birth. The outside, with its decagonal shape and sloping walls, aims to recall a nomads’ tent. On the inside, the altar stands in the center; on the walls, in three apses, Gospel scenes are represented: the appearance of the Angels, the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem, and the adoration of the



The ten angels around the interior of the cupola.

Child. The stream of light entering through the glass of the cupola recalls the light that streamed down on the shepherds. The inside of the cupola is adorned with the figures of ten angels and the words of their song: *Gloria in altissimis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis* — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.⁶

On March 19, 1994, during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, St. Josemaría's first successor, visited Bethlehem. The most poignant point of this visit was the Mass he celebrated in the Cave of the Nativity. Before this, during the journey from Jerusalem that morning, he had begun his prayer in the car by reading St. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. He finished his prayer in the Shepherds' Field at Beit Sahour, where he also visited the venerated ruins.

Glory to God in the highest

The shepherds were listening to the message, surrounded by a dazzling light, when suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on

earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"⁷ Reflecting on this passage, Benedict XVI stressed a particular detail: "Christianity has always understood that the speech of the angels is actually song, in which all the glory of the great joy that they proclaim becomes tangibly present. And so, from that moment, the angels' song of praise has never gone silent."⁸

In a special way, the angels' song rings out down the centuries in the hymn of the *Gloria*, which was soon incorporated into the Church's liturgy. "From the second century some acclamations were added to the angels' words: 'We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your immense glory;' and later, other invocations: 'Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takes away the sin of the world...,' to form a harmonious hymn of praise that was originally sung at the Mass of Christmas and afterwards on all feast days. Inserted at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, the *Gloria* emphasizes the continuity that exists between the birth and the death of Christ, between Christmas and Easter, inseparable aspects of the one and the same mystery of salvation."⁹

When we say or sing the *Gloria* at Mass, on the days when it is included in the liturgy, it is our turn to think about these mysteries, to contemplate Jesus who became man in order to do the will of his Father, reveal the love he has for us, redeem us, and restore us to our vocation as God's children.¹⁰ If we unite ourselves sincerely to the angels' hymn, not only with our words but with our whole lives, we will be nurturing the desire to imitate Christ, to do God's will ourselves, and to give him glory.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will" (Lk 2:14). "And may the peace of Christ triumph in your hearts," writes the Apostle (Col 3:15). It is a peace that comes from knowing that our Father God loves us, and that we are made one with Christ. It results from

6. Lk 2:14.

7. Lk 2:13–14.

8. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: the Infancy Narratives*, New York: Image Books, 2012, p. 73.

9. Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 27 December 2006.

10. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 516–518.

LEOBARD HINELAAR



The remains of the monasteries in Siyar al-Ghanam. There are several natural caves which could have served as places to keep livestock in the time of Jesus. The largest has been converted into a chapel.

ANDREW DOWSETT / FLICKR



*being under the protection of the Virgin, our Lady, and assisted by St. Joseph. This is the great light that illuminates our lives. In the midst of difficulties and of our own personal failings, it encourages us to keep up our efforts.*¹¹

After hearing the joyful proclamation of the angels, the shepherds went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the

11. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 22.

message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.¹²

It is no wonder that the shepherds were in a hurry, because all of a sudden they had become witnesses to a historic moment. In our spiritual life and the apostolate, docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit requires that we seize opportunities when they present themselves; and this urgency, far from being presumptuous, is an expression of love: *When one works wholly and exclusively for the glory of God one does everything with naturalness, like someone who is in a hurry and will not be delayed by “making a great show of things”. In this way one does not lose the unique and incomparable company of the Lord.*¹³

The Gospel account of the events in Bethlehem and its surroundings ends with the joy of the shepherds: The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.¹⁴ But before this, St. Luke reveals a personal detail: Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.¹⁵ *Let us try to imitate her, talking to Our Lord, conversing like two people in love about everything that happens to us, even the most insignificant incidents. Nor should we forget that we have to weigh them, consider their value, and see them with the eyes of faith, in order to discover the Will of God.*¹⁶ ■

12. Lk 2:15–18.

13. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 555.

14. Lk 2:20.

15. Lk 2:19.

16. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 285.

The Temple of Jerusalem

When the time has come for the mother's purification, in accordance with the Law of Moses, the Child must be taken to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord.¹ For Christians, the Holy City of Jerusalem holds the most precious memories of our Savior's life on earth, because it was here that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. It was also the scene of his preaching and miracles, and of the intense hours leading up to his Passion — the hours when he instituted the *madness of Love* that is the Blessed Eucharist. In the same place — the Cenacle — was born the Church, which, gathered around Mary, received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

But the leading role played by Jerusalem in the history of salvation had begun long before, in the reign of King David, between

1. St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 4th Joyful Mystery.

1010 and 970 BC. Because of its geographical position, the city had been for centuries a Jebusite enclave which the Israelites who were taking over their Promised Land had been unable to overcome. Jerusalem occupied the crest of a series of hills arranged like ascending steps. In the south part of the highest area, still known today as Ophel or the City of David, stood the Jebusite stronghold; in the north part was Mount Moriah, which Jewish tradition believed to be the place of the sacrifice of Isaac.² The high ground, which stood an average of 760 meters above sea level, was girded by two deep rivers: the Kidron on the eastern side, separating the city from the Mount of Olives, and the Hinnom or Gehenna to the west and south. These two rivers joined a third, the Tyropoeon, which crossed the hills from north to south.

When David took Jerusalem he established himself in the stronghold and set about raising several buildings³ and at the same time made the city the capital of his kingdom. As well as that, he brought the Ark of the Covenant, which was the sign of God's presence among his people,⁴ and resolved to build a temple for it,⁵ thus making Jerusalem into the religious center of Israel. According to the Bible, his son Solomon began building the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, and consecrated it in the eleventh,⁶ i.e. around the year 960 BC. Although it is not possible to find archaeological evidence for all this because of the difficulties of excavating in that area, the building of the temple, and its splendour, are described in detail in Sacred Scripture.⁷

2. Cf. Gen 22:2; and 2 Chron 3:1.

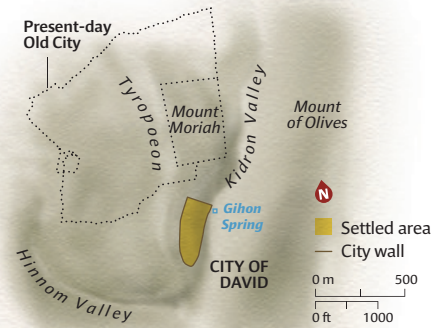
3. Cf. 2 Sam 5:6–12.

4. Cf. 2 Sam 6:1–23.

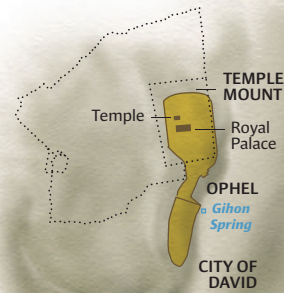
5. Cf. 2 Sam 7:1–7. Also 1 Chron 22:1–19; 28:1–21; and 29:1–9.

6. Cf. 1 Kings 6:37–38.

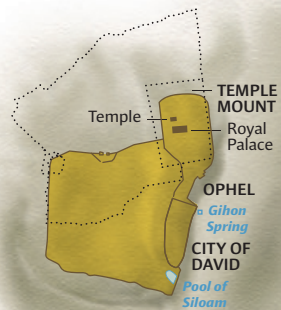
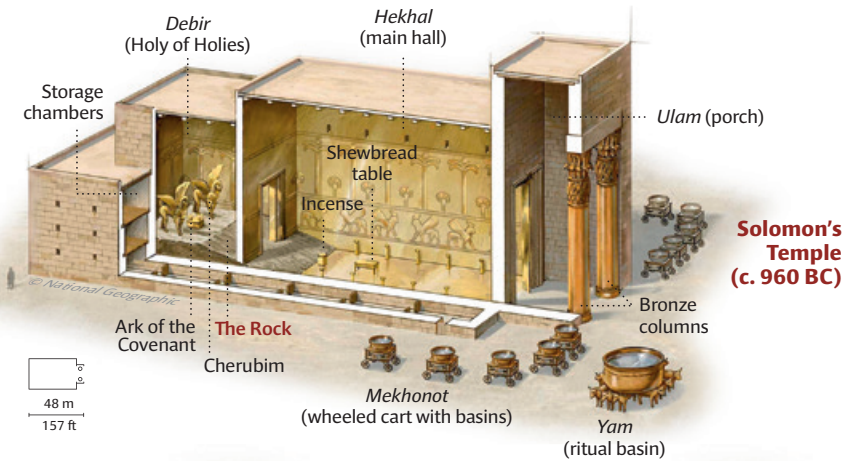
7. Cf. 1 Kings 5:15 – 6:36; 7:13 – 8:13; and 2 Chron 2:1 – 5:13.



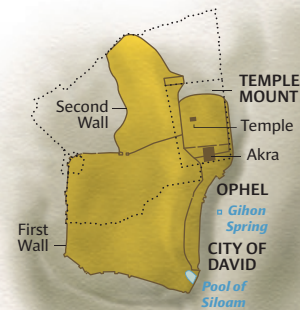
*Jerusalem of David's time
(c. 1010-970 BC)*



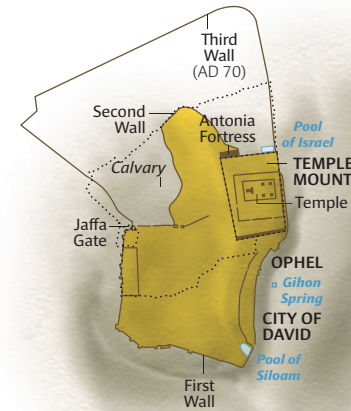
*Reign of Solomon
(c. 970-931 BC)*



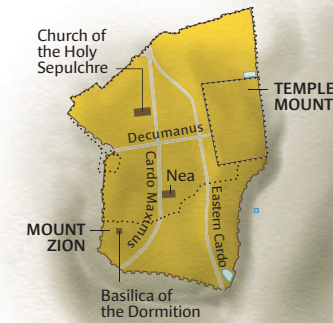
*Destruction of the Temple
(586 BC)*



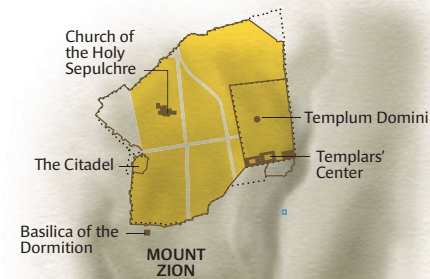
*Hasmonean Dynasty
(141-63 BC)*



*Destruction of the Second
Temple (AD 70)*



*Byzantium
(AD 313-638)*



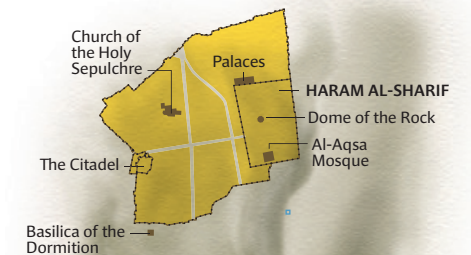
*Crusaders
(AD 1099-1187)*



*Hadrian's new city
(AD 135)*



*Muslim Conquest
(AD 638-1099)*



*Ottoman Empire
(AD 1516-1917)*



View of Jerusalem from the south in 1962; on the right, the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives.

The Temple was the place for meeting God through prayer and, mainly, through sacrifices; it was the symbol of God's protection over his people, where the Lord was always ready to listen to petitions and help those who came to him in their needs. This is what comes through in the words God spoke to Solomon:

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. [...] Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you walk before me, as David your father walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, 'There shall not fail you a man to rule Israel.' But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from the land which I have given you; and

this house, which I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And at this house, which is exalted, every one passing by will be astonished, and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?'"⁸

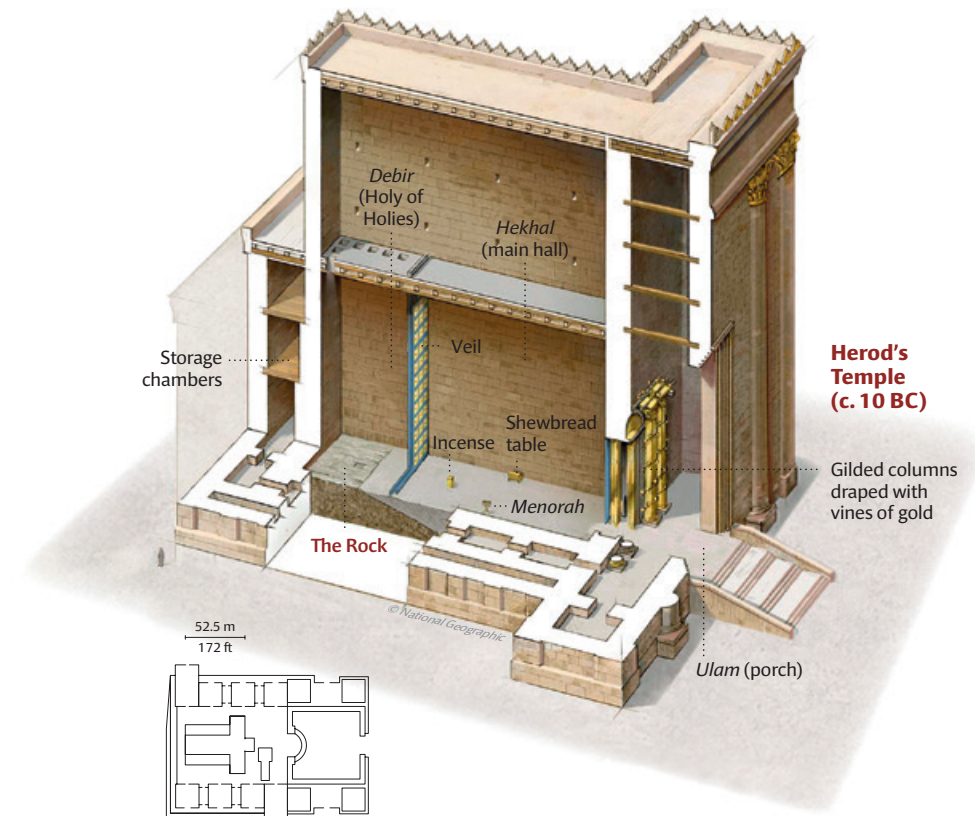
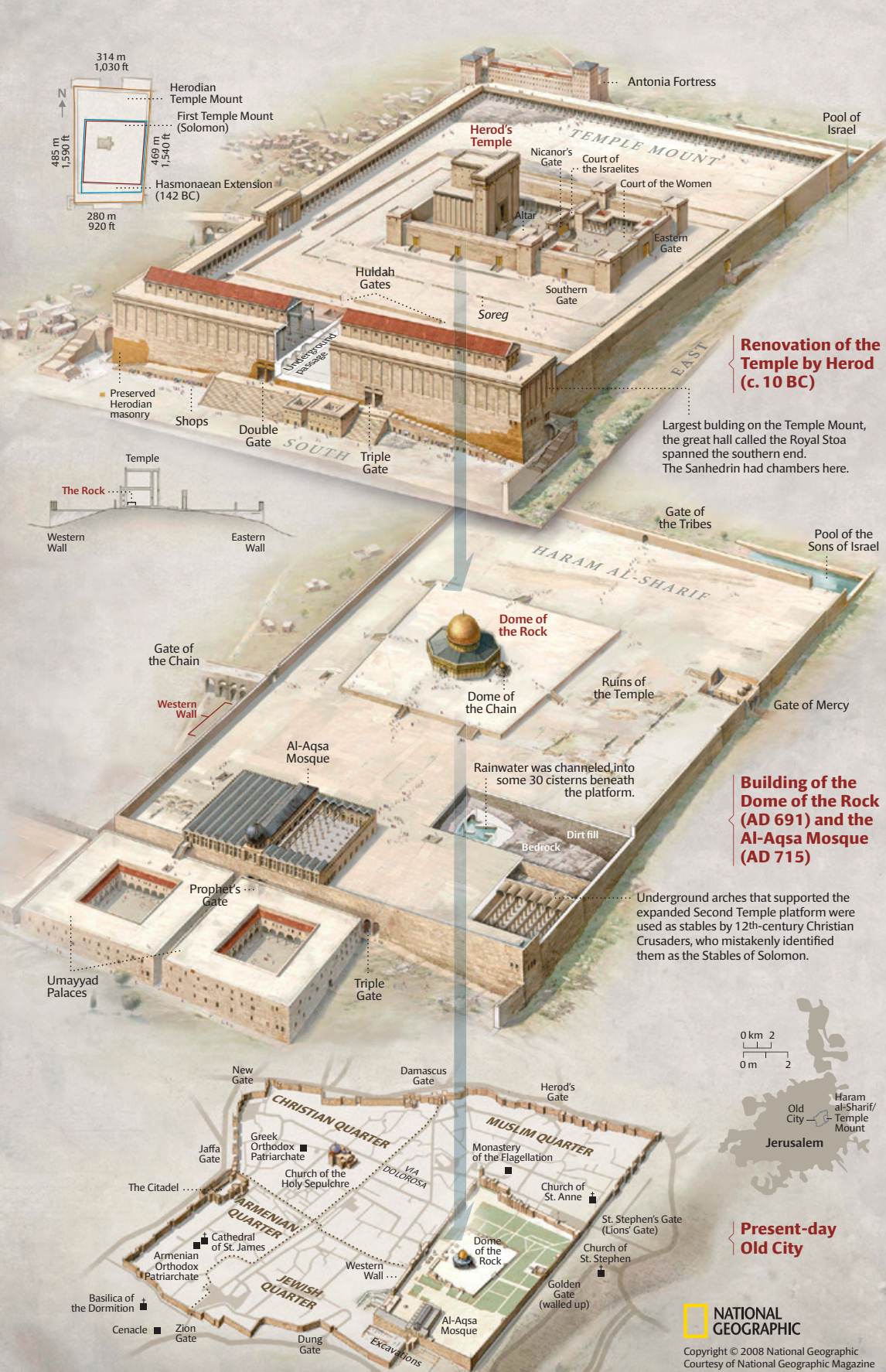
The history of the following centuries shows how these words were fulfilled. After Solomon's death the kingdom was split into two: the kingdom of Israel in the north, whose capital was in Samaria, and which was conquered by the Assyrians in the year 722 BC; and the kingdom of Judah in the south, whose capital was Jerusalem and which was captured by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC. His army finally destroyed the city, including the Temple, in 587 BC and most of the population of Jerusalem was deported to Babylon.

Before the destruction of Jerusalem God sent prophets who denounced the formalism of the Jews' worship, and their idolatry, and urged them to undergo a deep inner conversion. Afterwards, too, prophets recalled that God had made his presence in the Temple conditional on the people's faithfulness to the Covenant, and exhorted the Jews to keep up their hope in a restoration that would be final and lasting. In this way God inspired the people with a growing conviction that salvation would come through the faithfulness of a servant of the Lord who would take the sins of the whole people upon himself in obedience to God.

Not many years passed before the Israelites again experienced God's protection: in the year 539 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered Babylon and gave the Jews freedom to return to Jerusalem. On the site of the first Temple a second one was built, more modest in size, and dedicated in the year 515 BC. Israel's lack of political independence over the next two hundred years did not prevent them from developing their religious life intensely. This relative peace continued after the invasion by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, and also during the rule of the Egyptian Ptolemaic dynasty that succeeded him.

The situation changed in 200 BC, when Jerusalem was conquered by the Seleucids, a dynasty originating in Macedonia that

8. 2 Chron 7:12–21. Cf. 1 Kings 9:1–9.



had settled in Syria. Their efforts to impose hellenization on the Jewish people, culminating with the profanation of the Temple in 175 BC, provoked a rebellion. The success of the revolt by the Maccabees not only enabled them to restore the Temple in 167 BC, but brought their descendants, the Hasmoneans, to the throne of Judea.

In 63 BC Palestine fell to the Roman general Pompey, initiating a new era. Herod the Great had himself appointed king by Rome, which put an army at his disposal. In 37 BC, after strengthening his position with great brutality, he conquered Jerusalem and began to embellish it with new buildings. The most ambitious of all was the restoration and enlargement of the Temple, which was done from 20 BC onwards.



The steps of the Double Gate before restoration.

The Presentation of the Child Jesus

Our Lady and St. Joseph had been to Jerusalem on pilgrimage ever since they were children, and so they already knew the Temple when the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses and they took Jesus there to present him to the Lord.⁹ It took several hours, on foot or riding on a donkey, to cover the ten kilometers between Bethlehem and the Holy City. Perhaps they were impatient to fulfill a law whose real meaning few could have suspected: “the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple shows him as the First-born Son who belongs to the Lord.”¹⁰ In order to commemorate the people’s liberation from Egypt, the Law of Moses decreed that every first-born male was consecrated to God;¹¹ their parents had to redeem them with an offering consisting of a sum of silver equivalent to twenty days’ pay. The Law also laid down the purification of mothers after giving birth;¹² Mary Immaculate, ever-Virgin, chose to submit to this precept without protest, although in fact she was not bound by it.

9. Lk 2:22.

10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 529.

11. Cf. Ex 13:1–2 and 11–16.

12. Cf. Lev 12:2–8.

Artistic reconstruction of one of the underground passageways leading to the Temple.



The road from Bethlehem to Jerusalem follows the line of the hills gradually downwards. As they came close to the City they could see the Temple Mount standing against the horizon. Herod’s builders had doubled the area of the courtyards and built enormous containing walls — some of them four and a half meters thick — around them, leveling the sloping ground by filling it with earth or supporting it on a series of underground arches. In this way they had constructed a quadrangular platform whose sides measured 485 meters on the west, 314 on the north, 469 on the east and 280 on the south. In the center, surrounded by another wall, was the Temple itself: an imposing structure 50 meters high, covered in white stone and sheets of gold.

The road from Bethlehem led to the Jaffa Gate, on the western side of the city wall. From it a number of little streets ran in



almost straight lines up to the Temple. Pilgrims would enter from the south flank of the Temple Mount. At the foot of its walls were plentiful little shops or stalls where St. Joseph and Mary could buy the offering for the purification prescribed by the Law for poor peo-

On the left, a reconstruction of the Temple with the court of the women in the foreground. On the right, an eastern entrance to the Dome of the Rock, which some scholars identify as the semicircular staircase leading to the Gate of Nicanor.



ple: a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons. Climbing one of the broad stairways and going through the entrance known as the Double Gate, they reached the courtyards through some monumental underground passages.

These brought them first into the Courtyard of the Gentiles, the largest open space in the whole of this huge area. It was divided in two: one part was the enlargement decreed by Herod, and the other was the original courtyard, whose limits had been carefully observed. It was constantly humming with the voices of the crowds, since it was open to anyone who chose to go there, foreigners and Israelites, pilgrims and inhabitants of Jerusalem. To this hubbub was added the noise of the builders, who were still working on many parts that had yet to be completed.

St. Joseph and Mary did not linger there. Passing through the wall that divided the courtyard by the Huldah gates, and leaving behind the *soreg* — the balustrade around the part that Gentiles were forbidden to enter on pain of death — they finally arrived at the wall of the Temple, which was entered on the eastern side. Probably it was here, in the Courtyard of the Women, that the old man Simeon approached them. He had come there **led by the Spirit**,¹³ sure that he would see the Savior that day, and was looking

13. Lk 2:27.

for him among the crowd. “*Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram*” — *thy face, Lord, do I seek!* — as St. Josemaria would often repeat towards the end of his life, to express his desire for contemplation. *I cannot honestly deny that I’m moved by a desire to contemplate the face of Christ. “Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram.” I will seek your face, O Lord. I like to close my eyes and think how the time will come, whenever God wills, when I will be able to see him, “not as in a glass darkly... but face to face.”*¹⁴

Finally, Simeon recognized the Messiah in the Child, and he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples.”¹⁵

“This Gospel scene,” Pope Benedict XVI told us, “reveals the mystery of the Son of the Virgin, the consecrated One of the Father who came into the world to do his will faithfully (cf. Heb 10:5–7). Simeon identifies him [...] and announces with prophetic words his supreme offering to God and his final victory (cf. Lk 2:32–35). This is the meeting point of the two Testaments, Old and New. Jesus enters the ancient temple; he who is the new Temple of God: he comes to visit his people, thus bringing to fulfillment obedience to the Law and ushering in the last times of salvation.”¹⁶

Simeon blessed the young couple and said to Mary: Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.¹⁷ In the atmosphere of light and joy surrounding the arrival of the Redeemer, these words completed what God had made known to them so far: they showed that Jesus was born to offer a

14. St. Josemaria, speaking in a family gathering, 10 April 1974, quoted in Pilar Urbano, *The Man of Villa Tevere*, New York: Scepter, 2011, chapter 19, p. 357.

15. Lk 2:28–31.

16. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2 February 2011.

17. Lk 2:34–35.

perfect and unique sacrifice, the Sacrifice of the Cross.¹⁸ As for Mary, “her role in the history of salvation did not end in the mystery of the Incarnation but was completed in loving and sorrowful participation in the death and Resurrection of her Son. Bringing her Son to Jerusalem, the Virgin Mother offered him to God as a true Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.”¹⁹

Still astonished by Simeon’s words, and by the subsequent encounter with the prophetess Anna, St. Joseph and our Lady made their way to the Gate of Nicanor, between the Courtyard of the Women and the Courtyard of the Jews. They went up the fifteen steps of the semicircular stairway to present themselves before a priest, who received their offerings and blessed the young mother with a ritual sprinkling. This ceremony meant that the Son was ransomed and the Mother purified.

Just think, wrote St. Josemaria, contemplating the scene: *She — Mary Immaculate! — submits to the Law as if she were defiled.*

Through this example, foolish child, won’t you learn to obey the holy law of God regardless of any personal sacrifice?

Purification! You and I certainly do need purification.

*Atonement and, more than atonement, love. Love as a searing iron to cauterize our soul’s uncleanness, and as a fire to kindle with divine flames the wretchedness of our hearts.*²⁰

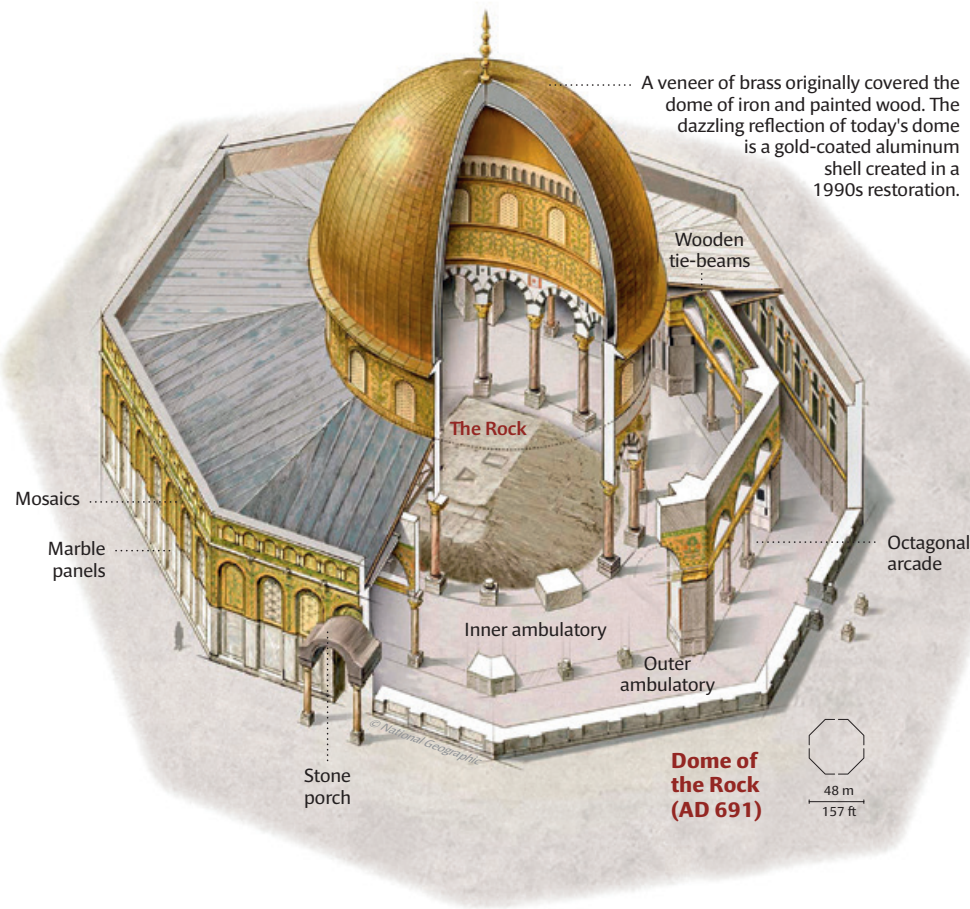
The Church sums up the different aspects of this mystery in the Collect prayer in today’s liturgy: “Almighty ever-living God, we humbly implore your majesty that, just as your Only Begotten Son was presented on this day in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so, by your grace, we may be presented to you with minds made pure.”²¹

18. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 529.

19. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Mass on the Feast of the Presentation, 2 February 2006.

20. St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 4th Joyful Mystery.

21. *Roman Missal*, Collect for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.



Not a single stone upon a stone remained

Jesus Christ prophesied that there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down of the Temple.²² His words were fulfilled in 70 AD, when the Temple was burnt down during the assault by the Roman legions. Fifty years later, after crushing a second rebellion and expelling all Jews from Jerusalem under pain of death, the Emperor Hadrian ordered a new city to be built on the ruins of the old one, naming it Aelia Capitolina. On the ruins of the Temple were raised monuments with statues of Jupiter and the Emperor himself.

22. Mt 24:2; cf. Mk 13:2; Lk 19:44 and 21:6.

In the fourth century AD, when Jerusalem became a Christian city, many churches and basilicas were built at the Holy Places. Nevertheless, the Temple Mount was left unrestored, although Jews were permitted access to it on one day a year to pray at the foot of the western wall, known today as the Wailing Wall.

The expansion of Islam, which reached Jerusalem in 638, six years after the death of Mohammed, changed everything. The first Muslim rulers concentrated on the Temple courtyards. Soon two mosques were built: in the center, on the spot which may formerly have been the site of the Holy of Holies, was the mosque called the Dome of the Rock, completed in 691, which still preserves its original structure; and to the south, where the Great Gate of Herod's Temple had stood, was the Al-Aqsa mosque, completed in 715, which has undergone major restructurings in the course of its history. From then on, except for the short-lived Crusaders' Kingdoms in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Muslims have always owned this area. They call it Haram al-Sharif — the Noble Sanctuary — and consider it the third holiest place of Islam, after Mecca and Medina.

A new worship

The Acts of the Apostles contain numerous testimonies of how the Twelve Apostles and the early Christians would go to the Temple to pray and bear witness about the Resurrection of Jesus to the people.²³ At the same time, they would gather in their houses for the breaking of the bread,²⁴ i.e. the celebration of the Eucharist. From the very beginning they were aware that “the era of the Temple is over. A new worship is being introduced, in a Temple not built by human hands. This Temple is his body, the Risen One, who gathers the people and unites them in the sacrament of his body and blood.”²⁵ ■

23. Cf. Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12.20–25.

24. Cf. Acts 2:42 and 2:46.

25. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. Holy Week: from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011, pp. 21–22.

With the Family in Nazareth

The town of Nazareth has about 70,000 inhabitants today, but in our Lord's times it was merely a little village of about a hundred people, most of whom worked on the land. The village was situated at the foot of a hill, surrounded by other spurs that formed a sort of natural amphitheatre.

Archaeologists have succeeded in ascertaining what houses were like two thousand years ago in this part of Galilee: many were built around hollows in the rock, with a simple structure added in front. Some had cellars, grain-stores, or cisterns for storing water, underneath. In any case, they were generally small dwelling-places, narrow and poorly-lit.

Several places in Nazareth preserve the memory of our Lord's presence. The main one is the Basilica of the Annunciation.¹ Other places connected with the Gospel are the Synagogue and the nearby Mount of the Precipice, which recall how some of Jesus' fellow-townsmen rejected him after they heard him preaching. There is also Mary's Well, where according to some traditions, Mary went

1. See pp. 12–23.

to draw water; the Tomb of the Just Man, where the holy Patriarch St. Joseph is traditionally held to have been buried; and the Church of St. Joseph, built over the remains of a house that centuries-old popular piety has identified with the house of the Holy Family.

Part of God's family

The church we see today is about one hundred meters from the Basilica of the Annunciation. It was built in 1914, in neo-Roman style, on the ruins of previous structures: there had been a church there in the time of the Crusades (twelfth century) which the Muslims laid waste in the thirteenth century. When the Franciscans arrived in Nazareth around the year 1600, they found that according to local Christian tradition, the Church of St. Joseph (also known as the Church of the Nutrition, since it would have been the place where the Child Jesus was brought up) stood on the site of St. Joseph's workshop and the home of the Holy Family. Excavations carried out in 1908 brought to light the remains of a primitive Byzantine-style church dating from the fifth or sixth century, built on the spot where even today, in the crypt, may be seen some traces of a house dated by archaeologists to the first or second century AD: a cellar dug out of the rock, several store-rooms, cisterns for holding water, as well as what may have been a baptistery, reached by descending a flight of seven steps and containing some mosaics.

Although these findings are significant, they are not enough for archaeologists to state beyond doubt that this was the actual house of the Holy Family. More ancient sources are needed to verify it, as has been the case for other holy sites. Nevertheless, based on that ancient and venerable popular tradition, we can go to the crypt of the Church of St. Joseph with love and, guided by the hand of St. Josemaria, enter into the home in Nazareth where Jesus spent thirty years of his life on earth. We can begin by looking especially to Joseph, the patriarch of the Holy Family, who is *a master*



GASA EDITRICE BONECHI

What is known today as Mary's Well has supplied the inhabitants of Nazareth with water for centuries, so it is reasonable to assume Our Lady would have gone there often. The water flows to the well — pictured left — in a tunnel from the spring — pictured right — several dozens of meters away in the crypt of the Orthodox church of St. Gabriel. Below, the entrance to the Church of St. Joseph from the complex of the Basilica of the Annunciation.



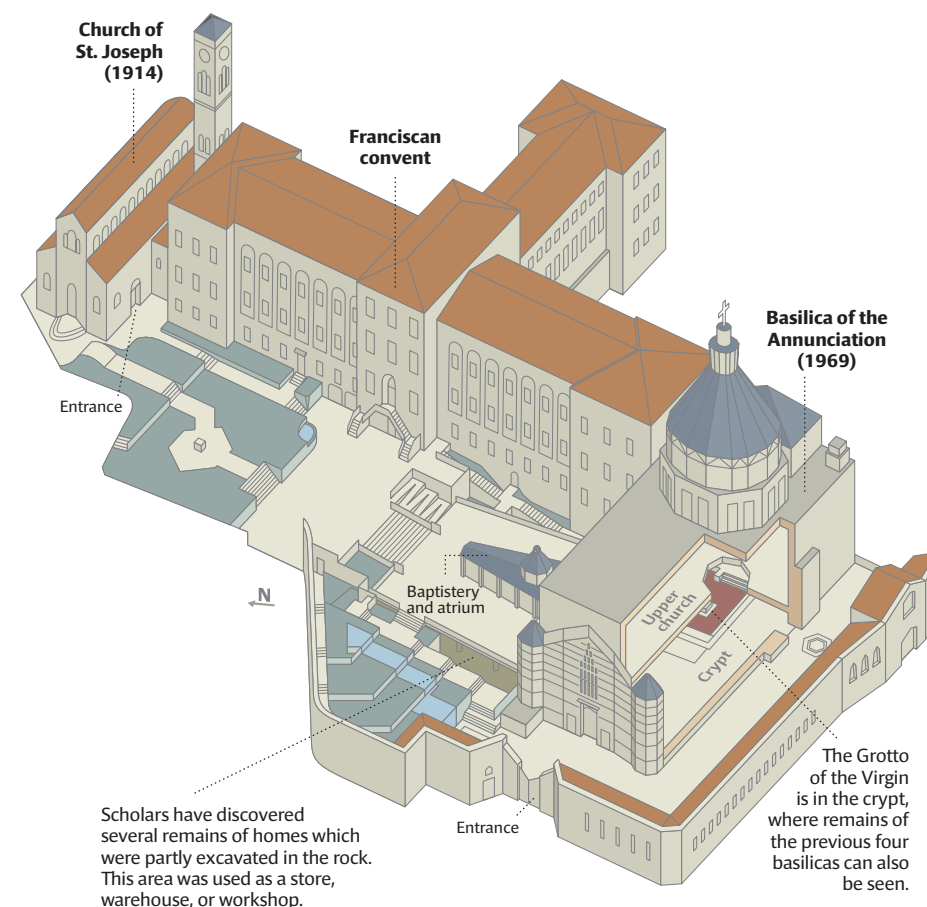
TOBY LEUNG / FLICKR

of the interior life — for he teaches us to know Jesus and share our life with him, and to realize that we are part of God's family.²

When Joseph woke from sleep he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, St. Matthew tells us.³ *St. Joseph's life was simple, but it was not easy. After considerable soul-searching, he learned that the son of Mary had*

2. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 39.

3. Mt 1:24.



GRAPHIC: J. GIL





ALONSO PUERTAS

Statue of St. Joseph in the complex of the Basilica of the Annunciation.

been conceived through the Holy Spirit. And this child, the Son of God, the descendant of David according to the flesh, was born in a cave. Angels celebrated his birth, and distinguished people from distant countries came to adore him. But the King of Judea wanted to kill him, and they had to

*flee. The Son of God was, it appeared, a defenseless child who would live in Egypt.*⁴

St. Joseph's fidelity comes up again and again in these scenes of the Gospel, as he carries out the divine commands without hesitation. *There are many good reasons to honor St. Joseph, and to learn from his life. He was a man of strong faith. He earned a living for his family — Jesus and Mary — with his own hard work. He guarded the purity of the Blessed Virgin, who was his Spouse. And he respected — he loved! — God's freedom, when God made his choice: not only his choice of Our Lady the Virgin as his Mother, but also his choice of St. Joseph as the Husband of Holy Mary.*⁵ Because of this choice, the founder of Opus Dei had no qualms about saying that, *after the Blessed Virgin, he is the most perfect creature that has come from the hands of God.*⁶

On earth and in heaven

Our Lady left the house of her parents, Sts. Joachim and Anne, and went to live in her husband's house, which was probably quite close, since the excavations carried out at Nazareth have shown that the houses in the village were about one hundred meters wide by a hundred and fifty long.

What was family life in Nazareth like? Their home would have been modest and humble because St. Joseph was a worker, *a craftsman from Galilee, just one man among many. What had life to offer to someone from a forgotten village like Nazareth? Nothing but work: work every day, with the same constant effort. And at the end of the day, a poor little house in which to rest and regain energy for the next day.*

But the name Joseph, in Hebrew, means "God will add." God adds unsuspected dimensions to the holy lives of those who do his will. He adds the one important dimension which

4. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 41.

5. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 552.

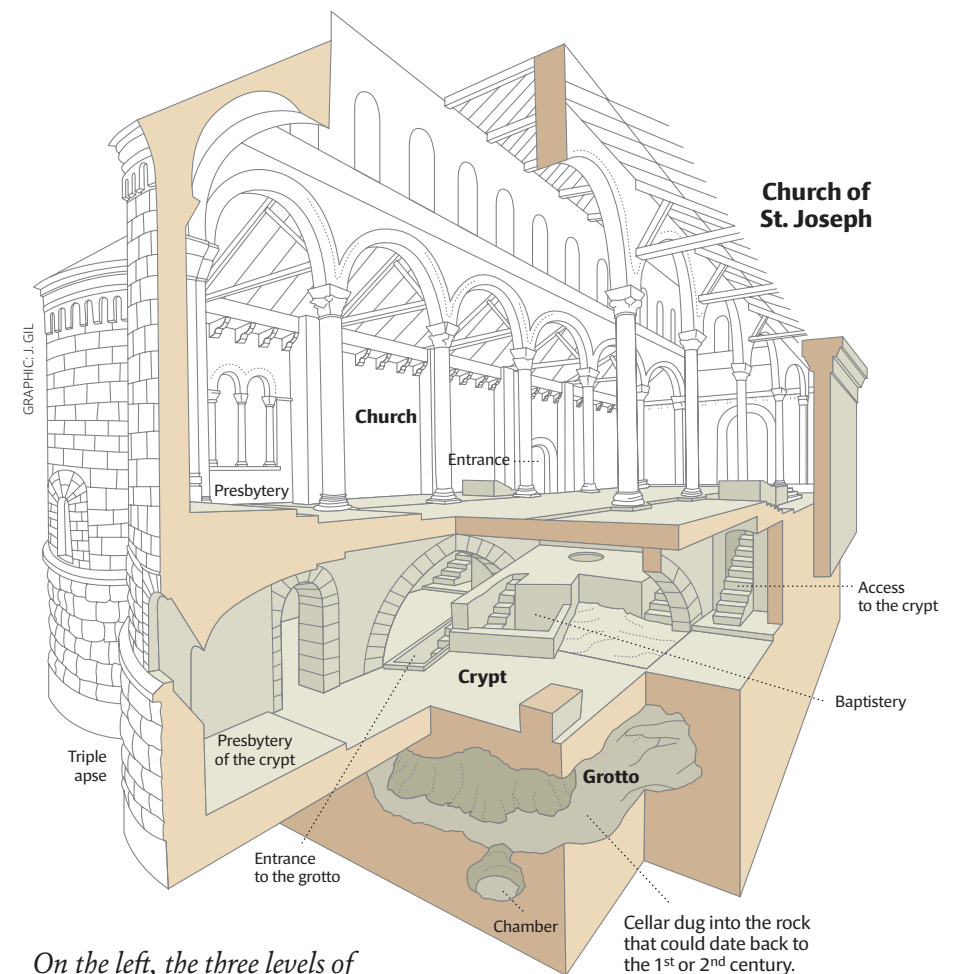
6. St. Josemaría, speaking in a family gathering, 23 May 1974; quoted in Salvador Bernal, *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, London–New York: Scepter, 1977, p. 87.



BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ORI / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

FRANCO MARZI



On the left, the three levels of the church of St. Joseph.

gives meaning to everything, the divine dimension. To the humble and holy life of Joseph he added — if I may put it this way — the lives of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus, Our Lord.⁷

In the home of the Holy Family in Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph sanctified their ordinary life, without doing anything spectacular or newsworthy. They led a life that was to all appearances

7. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 40.

the same as that of their neighbours, a life that was important not because of the material things they did, but because of the love that they put into these things, in perfect union with the Will of God the Father.

*The life of Jesus was, for St. Joseph, a recurring discovery of his own vocation... God gradually reveals his plans to him, and he tries to understand them. As with every soul who wishes to follow Jesus closely, he soon discovers that here is no laggard's pace, no room for the halfhearted. For God is not content with our achieving a certain level and staying there. He doesn't want us to rest on our laurels. God always asks more: his ways are not the ways of men. St. Joseph, more than anyone else before or since, learned from Jesus to be alert to recognize God's wonders, to have his mind and heart awake.*⁸

The founder of Opus Dei often said that we must live with our heads in heaven, but our feet firmly planted on the ground. In order to be contemplatives in ordinary life, he encouraged us to do our daily work as if we were with the Holy Family in the house of Nazareth, and to try to get to know Jesus, Mary, and Joseph better and better:

*Never stop trying to grow close to Christ's Mother and his father, St. Joseph, because then you'll have what He wants us to have: a contemplative life. That way, we'll be on earth and in Heaven at the same time, living our human life in a divine way.*⁹

To travel this path of contemplation in ordinary life, it will help to imagine ourselves in the home of Nazareth and how Joseph, Mary, and Jesus would have dealt with the daily tasks we face:

Rest assured that it is not difficult to convert work into a prayerful dialogue. As soon as you offer it up and then set to work, God is already listening and giving encouragement. We acquire the style of contemplative souls, in the

8. Ibid., no. 54.

9. St. Josemaria, Homily in São Paulo, 26 May 1974, from José Antonio Loarte (ed), *Por las sendas de la fe*, Madrid: Cristiandad, 2013, p. 138.

midst of our daily work! Because we become certain that he is watching us, while he asks us to conquer ourselves anew: a little sacrifice here, a smile there for someone who bothers us, beginning the least pleasant but most urgent job first, carefulness in little details of order, perseverance in the fulfillment of our duty when it would be so easy to abandon it, not leaving for tomorrow what should be finished today: and all this, to please him, our Father God! On your desk or in some inconspicuous place that nobody notices, you perhaps place your crucifix to awaken in you a contemplative spirit and to act as a textbook for your mind and soul where you learn the lessons of service.

*If you make up your mind to follow these ways of contemplation, in the midst of your ordinary work, without doing anything odd or withdrawing from the world, you will immediately feel that you are a friend of the Master, with the God-given task of opening up the divine ways of the earth to the whole of mankind.*¹⁰ ■

10. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 67.

The Wedding Feast at Cana

Let's take ourselves in our imagination to Cana, to discover yet another way in which Mary is privileged above all. Our Lady asks her Son to remedy the situation of that poor couple, who didn't have enough wine at their wedding feast. [...] And Jesus did what his Mother had suggested to him with all the authority of a mother.¹

St. John is the only evangelist to narrate Jesus' first miracle, which occurred in that celebration in Cana: at the request of Our Lady, he turned water into wine. This was, in fact, in the same town in which he would work his second miracle: the cure of an official's son, sick in Capernaum.² The Gospel account of the miracle at Cana is astonishingly simple, but no less nuanced for that.

There was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with wa-

1. St. Josemaría, Article "La Virgen del Pilar," from *Por las sendas de la fe*, pp. 168–170.

2. Cf. Jn 4:46–54.

Window of the oratory of Pentecost, in Villa Tevere, which portrays the miracle Jesus performed at the Wedding Feast at Cana.



PHOTO: OPUS DEI INFORMATION OFFICE. GRAPHIC: J. GIL.

ter.” And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.” So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.” This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.³

The oldest Christian accounts that present Cana of Galilee as a place of pilgrimage say that it is close to Nazareth: “not far from there we shall see Cana, where the water was turned into wine,”⁴ says St. Jerome in a letter written between 386 and 392 AD. And in a later letter he gives us to understand that the town was on the way towards the lake known as Lake Gennesaret or Tiberias: “At a good pace we went round Nazareth, the Saviour’s home town; Cana and Capernaum, witnesses of his miracles; Lake Tiberias, sanctified by the times our Lord crossed it; and the desert where several thousand people were fed on a few loaves of bread and with the scraps left over as many baskets were filled as there were tribes in Israel.”⁵

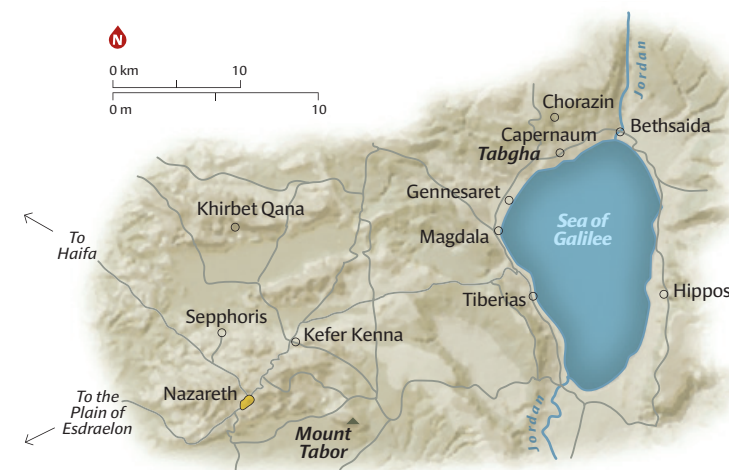
We have many testimonies about a church built by Christians in memory of that first miracle worked by Jesus; they also say that one or two of the water-jars were preserved, and that there was a spring in the town. One of the earliest proofs comes from the account by an anonymous sixth-century pilgrim who had set off from Sepphoris-Diocaesaria: “After three miles we arrived at Cana, where the Lord was present at the wedding, and we sat down in that very place, and there I unworthily carved the names of my parents. There are still two jars there, I filled one with water and poured wine from the other; I put the full one on my shoulders and placed it on the altar. Then we washed in the spring of blessings.”⁶

3. Jn 2:1–11.

4. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 46 (*Paulæ et Eustochiæ ad Marcellam*), 13.

5. *Ibid.*, 108 (*Epitaphium Sanctæ Paulæ*), 13.

6. *Itinerarium Antonini Piacentini*, 4 (CCL 175, 130).



Although the testimonies that have come down to us are undoubtedly valuable, they do not enable us to locate Cana with absolute certainty, because they could refer to either of two places that exist to the north of Nazareth: the ruins of Khirbet Qana, a village that has lain empty for seven centuries; and Kefer Kenna, now a town of seventeen thousand inhabitants, about a quarter of whom are Christians.

Khirbet Qana stood on the crest of a hill above the valley of Netufa, close to the road running from Acre to Lake Gennesaret. It was nine kilometers from Sepphoris and fourteen from Nazareth. Archaeological research has brought to light the remains of a little village that survived until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, where there is a grotto with traces of Christian worship from the Byzantine era and numerous cisterns dug out of the rock to store rainwater, since there were no springs in the area.

Kefer Kenna is six kilometers from Nazareth, on the road leading down to Tiberias. The settlement, supplied by a spring of water, dates from at least two centuries before Christ. It seems that in the sixteenth century its inhabitants — most of them Muslims — still preserved the tradition that this was where Jesus had worked his first miracle. Pilgrims found there an underground room, reached from the ruins of a church that had once stood above it which had reputedly been built by the Emperor Constantine and his mother St. Helena. In 1641 some Franciscans settled in the village and



Left, the hill of the settlement Khirbet Qana. Below left, the entrance to the cave where traces of Christian worship were found. Right, one of the cisterns.



opened negotiations aimed at the recovery of the ruins; this was not achieved until 1879. In 1880 a small church was built, and it was afterwards enlarged between 1897 and 1906. Additionally, in 1885 a chapel was built about a hundred meters away in honour of St. Bartholomew — Nathanael — who was a native of Cana.⁷

The shrine was restructured for the Jubilee of the year 2000, and before this was undertaken, archaeological research was carried out, completing the work of a previous dig in 1969. The excavations brought to light a mediaeval church and what might be a synagogue from the third or fourth century, built over the ruins of earlier dwelling-places dating from the first century. This synagogue had a courtyard with a mosaic pavement, and a portico with a large pool in the center, which forms the crypt of the current church; the columns and capitals of the portico were also re-used for the nave. In the northern apse a still older apse was discovered, containing a tomb from the fifth or sixth century. The type of tomb seems to indicate a Christian presence in the Byzantine era.

Like the historic testimonies, archaeological research has offered no conclusive proof for the exact location of Cana in Galilee, the place where Jesus turned water into wine.

⁷ Cf. Jn 21:2.



Do whatever He tells you

From ancient times, the richness and density of St. John's account of our Lord's first steps in his public life have nourished Christian reflection. Within a narrative whose deep theological content is outside the scope of this article, the miracle at Cana signals the beginning of the messianic signs, announces the time of Christ's glorification, and confirms the apostles' faith in him. Therefore, it is significant that St. John recorded the fact that our Lady was present and took an active part in the event. *Mary most holy, Mother of God, passes un-*

The Wedding Church in Kefer Kenna, completed in 1906.



noticed, just as one more among the women of her town.⁸ Mary, teacher of the sacrifice that is hidden and silent. See her, nearly always in the background, cooperating with her Son: she knows and remains silent.⁹ That is how humble she is: She's not to be seen amidst the palms of Jerusalem, nor — except that first one at Cana — at the hour of the great miracles. But she doesn't flee from the degradation of Golgotha: there she stands, "juxta crucem Iesu" — "by the cross of Jesus" — his Mother (Jn 19:25-27).¹⁰

8. St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 499.

9. Ibid., no. 509.

10. Ibid., no. 507.

In the middle of the wedding-feast, Mary noticed that the wine had run out and turned to Jesus to remedy the newlyweds' need. "The miracle of Cana," observed Benedict XVI, "seems at first sight to be out of step with the other signs that Jesus performs. What are we supposed to make of the fact that Jesus produces a huge surplus of wine — about 520 liters — for a private party?"¹¹ The Pope saw this as a sign of the greatness of the love we find at the heart of salvation history: "God lavishly spends himself for the lowly creature, man. [...] The superabundance of Cana is therefore a sign that God's feast with humanity, his self-giving for man, has begun."¹² In this way the setting of this episode, a wedding feast, becomes in its turn "the sign of another feast — that of the wedding of the Lamb where he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride."¹³

Our Lord's self-sacrifice for mankind had its *hour*, which had not yet come when he was at Cana. But Jesus brings it forward as a result of the Blessed Virgin Mary's intercession. "Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. *She puts herself 'in the middle', that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.* She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she 'has the right' to do so."¹⁴

Many authors have quite rightly pointed to the parallel between the miracle at Cana, where our Lady cares for those around her with motherly solicitude, and the moment of Calvary, where St. John receives her as mother of all mankind. Basing himself on this, St. Josemaria often used to call her *Mother of God and our Mother*, and suggested that we should behave towards her as her children. *Mary certainly wants us to invoke her, to approach her confidently, to appeal to her as our mother, asking her to "show that you are our mother." But she is a mother who anticipates our requests. Knowing our needs,*

11. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, p. 250.

12. Ibid.

13. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2618.

14. St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, no. 21.

*she comes quickly to our aid. If we recall that God's mercies come to us through the hands of our Lady, each of us can find many reasons for feeling that Mary is our mother in a very special way.*¹⁵

And at the same time, another essential feature of her motherhood is shown in the words she addresses to the servants: *Do whatever he tells you.*¹⁶

Without ceasing to be a mother, our Lady is able to get each of her children to face his own responsibilities. Mary always does the immense favor of bringing to the cross, of placing face to face with the example of the Son of God, those who come close to her and contemplate her life. It is in this confrontation that Christian life is decided. And here Mary intercedes for us so that our behavior may lead to a reconciliation of the younger brother — you and me — with the firstborn Son of the Father.

*Many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God have been preceded by an encounter with Mary. Our Lady has encouraged us to look for God, to desire to change, to lead a new life. And so the "Do whatever he tells you" has turned into real self-giving, into a Christian vocation, which from then on enlightens all our personal life.*¹⁷

Blessed Alvaro had this in mind when he went to pray at the Wedding Church at Cana on March 17, 1994: "Upon leaving," Bishop Javier Echevarria relates, "he told us what he had asked the Lord for: that all of us would follow the advice of the Virgin Mary: *do whatever he tells you*, that we may always do whatever He asks of us at any given moment."¹⁸ ■

15. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 140.

16. Jn 2:5.

17. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 149.

18. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 309 (AGP, library, P01).

Aerial view of the site of Capernaum from the east. Peter's house is to the south, and the Synagogue to the north. The Church of the Memorial of St. Peter had not yet been built on the remains of the ancient basilica.

Capernaum

The town of Jesus

PHOTO: STANISLAO LOFREDA / CTS, GRAPHIC: J. GIL



Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
toward the sea,
across the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles!
The people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region
and shadow of death
light has dawned.

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”¹

Capernaum seems to have been fairly insignificant in the history of Israel. The name means “town of Nahum,” which does not give much clue as to its origin, but it shows that it did not attain the status of a city. It

1. Mt 4:12–17.

is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament, which is not surprising: although there are traces of human habitation there going back to the thirteenth century BC, as a town it probably only dates from the Hasmonean period. Even so, St. Matthew links Capernaum to the fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy, with all justice, because apart from Jerusalem there is no other place that contains so many memories of our Lord's time on earth as this little town beside the Sea of Galilee.

All four Evangelists center Jesus' Galilean ministry on Capernaum. St. Matthew, in the passage quoted above, says that he settled there. Although it was so small, it was situated on the *Via Maris* or Sea Road that connected Damascus and Egypt, and was in a border zone between two districts ruled by sons of King Herod: Galilee, ruled by Herod Antipas, and the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, ruled by Philip. Its importance in its neighbourhood was shown by the fact that it had a customs-house and a detachment of Roman soldiers headed by a centurion. The particular centurion of our Lord's days has gone down in history, because Jesus was moved to praise his act of faith, which we repeat every time we go to Mass.

Some events which took place there in the early centuries give us a reasonable picture of the Capernaum where Jesus lived. At the beginning of the Arab period, in the seventh century, the town, which was Christian, went into decline. Two hundred years later it must have been completely deserted; the buildings collapsed, the area became a heap of ruins, and little by little these were buried. The same earth that hid the location of Capernaum and cast its remains into oblivion, preserved them almost intact until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the Custody of the Holy Land acquired the property and set in motion the first archaeological excavations.

Archaeologists, working at various stages between 1905 and 2003, were able to establish that Capernaum covered an area of about three hundred metres from east to west along the shore of Lake Gennesaret, and about two hundred from the shoreline inland, northwards. It must have been at its biggest in the Byzantine period, but even then had no more than one and a half thousand people. Its inhabitants led lives of hard work, without luxuries

of any kind, labouring at the region's resources: they grew wheat and produced olive oil; they harvested different kinds of fruit; and above all, they fished in the lake. The houses were built with the local basalt stone and a very poor kind of cement, and the roofs were of clay or turf supported by a framework of canes or branches, with no roof-tiles.

These rustic surroundings, this simple society mostly consisting of field workers and fishermen, were the setting for many of the events related in the Gospels. There was the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John while they were hard at work with their boats and nets;² the calling of Matthew, sitting at the customs-house and, straight afterwards, the banquet at his house with other publicans;³ the casting out of an evil spirit that had possessed a man;⁴ the cures of the centurion's servant,⁵ Peter's mother-in-law,⁶ the paralytic who was let down through the roof,⁷ the woman with the haemorrhage⁸ and the man with the withered hand;⁹ the raising to life of Jairus' daughter;¹⁰ the paying of the Temple tax with a coin found in a fish's mouth;¹¹ and the discourse about the Bread of Life in the synagogue.¹² The remains of Capernaum that survive today must undoubtedly include many of the sites where these events took place. However, we only have enough information to be sure about two of them: Peter's house, and the synagogue.

Peter's house

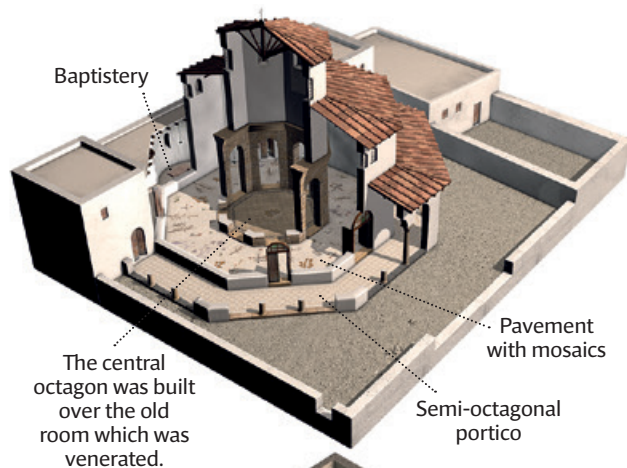
According to ancient traditions, at the end of the first century there was a small community of believers at Capernaum. Jewish sources called them *minim*, "heretics," because

2. Cf. Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20; Lk 5:1–11.
3. Cf. Mt 9:9–13; Mk 2:13–17; Lk 5:27–32.
4. Cf. Mk 1:21–28; Lk 4:31–37.
5. Cf. Mt 8:5–13; Lk 7:1–10.
6. Cf. Mt 8:14–15; Mk 1:29–31; Lk 4:38–39.
7. Cf. Mt 9:1–8; Mk 2:1–12; Lk 5:17–26.
8. Cf. Mt 9:20–22; Mk 5:25–34; Lk 8:43–48.
9. Cf. Mt 12:9–14; Mk 3:1–6; Lk 6:6–11.
10. Cf. Mt 9:18–26; Mk 5:21–43; Lk 8:40–56.
11. Cf. Mt 17:24–27.
12. Cf. Jn 6:24–59.

Models of the evolution of the house of Peter done by the Custody of the Holy Land.

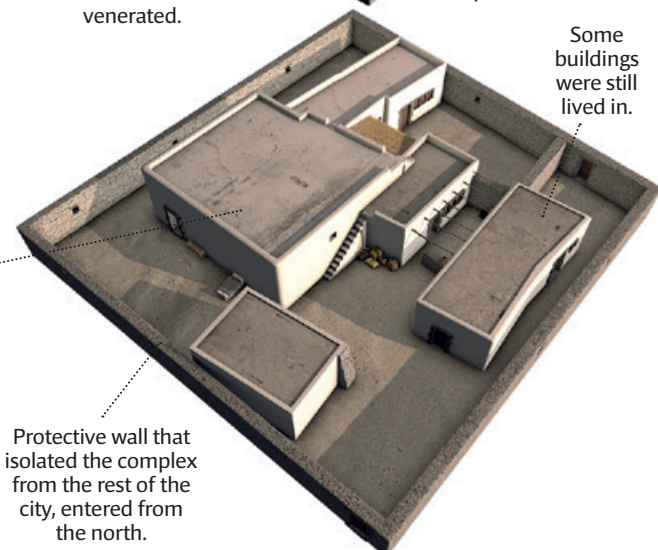
Late 5th century

All the rooms were demolished and buried to make way for the new octagonal basilica.



Second half of the 4th century

Expansion of the *domus ecclesia*, which was paved and decorated again. Christian graffiti was found on the remains of the walls.

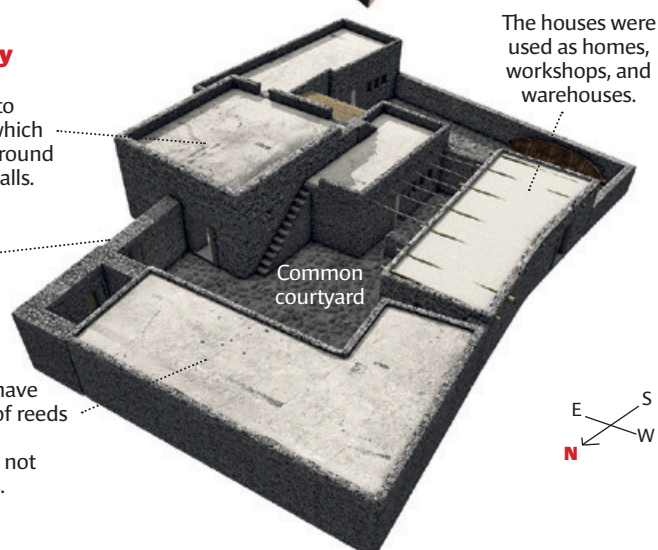


End of the 1st century

Room converted into *domus ecclesia*, in which they flattened the ground and plastered the walls.

Opposite the main entrance there was an uninhabited extension.

The covering must have been a latticework of reeds and earth, because archaeologists have not found tile remnants.



Present-day view from the northeast.

they had abandoned orthodox Judaism to adhere to Christianity. They must have preserved the memory of Peter's house, which with the passage of time became a place of worship. At the end of the fourth century, the pilgrim Egeria or Aetheria wrote, "In Capernaum the house of the Prince of the Apostles has been made into a church, whose walls are the same now as they were then. That is where the Lord cured the paralytic. Here too is the synagogue where the Lord cured a man possessed by a devil. The way in is up many stairs, and it is made of dressed stone."¹³ A second witness, dating from a century later, states: "We came to Capernaum, to the house of Blessed Peter, which is now a basilica."¹⁴

In confirmation of this, the Franciscans' first excavations brought to light an elegant late-fifth-century building structured in two concentric octagons, with another semi-octagon for the ambulatory. The floor consisted of a beautiful coloured mosaic with plant and animal figures. In 1968 the east-facing nave and a baptismal font were discovered, enabling the building to be identified as the Byzantine basilica.

13. *Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae*, II, 5, 2 (CCL 175, 98–99).

14. *Itinerarium Antonini Piacentini*, 7 (CCL 175, 132).



The Memorial of St. Peter is integrated with the ruins of Capernaum. Below, the remains of the house venerated as the house of Peter.



PHOTOS: DEREK WINTERBURN / FLICKR

Successive archaeological finds have confirmed the information obtained from other sources: this basilica was built on the ruins of a previous edifice, and the rubble contained plaster fragments with graffiti scratched into it from the third to fifth century. Beneath the central octagon was an eight-metre square room, whose earthen floor had been covered with at least six layers of whitewash at the end of the first century and with coloured paving before the fifth century. This room, which contained traces of having been a place of worship, would be the “house of the Prince of the Apostles” turned into a church, which Egeria visited.

Archaeologists have been able to establish with a fair degree of precision what this house was like. It was built halfway through the first century BC. It formed part of a collection of six rooms connected by an open-air courtyard, with a stairway and an earth oven for baking bread. The related families who lived there shared the use of this central space. There was a doorway from the street at the eastern side of the complex. The basalt doorstep still exists and the crossbeam shows the marks of the builders’ hands. It stood at the very end of the town, looking over an expanse of open ground to the east and the shoreline to the south.

On June 29, 1990, the Church of the Memorial of St. Peter was dedicated, built over the remains of the house and the Byzantine basilica. This is an octagonal church raised from the ground on great pillars, so that pilgrims may see the archaeological remains both from the outside of the church, entering underneath it, and from the inside, through a square opening in the center of the nave.

The Synagogue

The ruins of the synagogue were what most attracted researchers’ attention because of their artistic interest. The archaeologists Robinson, who visited the spot in 1838, and Wilson, who carried out a survey in 1866, spread the news of its existence. This drew less scrupulous individuals to it, and many of the remains of the synagogue would have been damaged or altogether lost had the Custody of the Holy Land not acquired the site of Capernaum in 1894.



ALEXANDER HOLBRECHT / FLECK

Opening in the center of the church showing the remains of St. Peter's house.

The synagogue stood at the very center of the little town, and its size is remarkable: the rectangular prayer-room measures 23 metres by 17, and has other rooms and courtyards around it. Unlike private houses, with their black basalt walls, it was built of square blocks of white limestone brought from quarries many kilometres away. Some of the blocks in the foundations weigh four tons. The grandiose designs of the synagogue's architects are also evident in the rich decoration and sculpturing of lintels, archivolts, cornices and capitals.

Although this is the most beautiful synagogue of all those discovered in Galilee, it is not the actual synagogue where Jesus preached and worked miracles, having been built, according to archaeological research, towards the end of the fourth century, with an atrium added on the eastern side halfway through the fifth century. However, this same research confirms that it was built on the remains of other buildings including the previous synagogue. The most notable of these remains is a large stone-paved floor dating from the first century, discovered beneath the central nave of the



STANISLAW LEE / CTS

prayer-room, showing that the new synagogue did indeed stand on the same spot as the old one.

Blessed Alvaro in Capernaum

One of the reasons Blessed Alvaro del Portillo decided to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1994 was his desire to pray for the Roman Pontiff there. During his visit to Capernaum on March 16th, Bishop Javier Echevarria remembers that:

“He was completely united to the Pope, thinking about him and his intentions, with an affection that was both human and supernatural. We were there in Capernaum looking at what tradition says was Peter's house, where the Lord cured Peter's mother-in-law. When we were visiting any holy site, Fr. Joaquin would read the part of the Gospel that corresponded to that place so that we

JERZY KRAJ / CTS



The synagogue from the south, where the main entrance was. The west wall rests on blocks of basalt stone which may be from the synagogue that Jesus knew, or from one built between that time and the fourth century. The courtyard on the east side was added in the fifth century.

could recall more vividly what happened there and — as our Father said — could put ourselves in the place of the characters who took part in those scenes.”

They also went to look at the ruins of the town’s synagogue. Afterwards, relates the current Prelate of Opus Dei, Blessed Alvaro wanted “to pray the Creed slowly, to unite himself with the Pope. And, as it seemed to him a perfectly ordinary and natural way to unite himself to the intentions of the Pope, we also prayed

to our Father [St. Josemaria] for the Successor of Peter and his intentions.”¹⁵

Jesus went about all the cities and villages

After moving to Capernaum Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.¹⁶ St. Peter, who witnessed these marvellous deeds, recalled them when he went to meet the centurion Cornelius and announced the good news to his household: You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching [...] throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.¹⁷

St. Josemaria saw one phrase from this speech as a perfect summary of Christ’s whole life. *I have often gone to look for a definition or a biography of Jesus in Scripture. And I have found it written by the Holy Spirit: “He went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). Every single day of Jesus Christ’s life on earth, from his birth until his death, can be summed up like that: he filled them all doing good.*¹⁸

15. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 298 (AGP, library, P01).

16. Mt 9:35.

17. Acts 10, 36–43.

18. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 16.

Although Jesus healed many people from their sicknesses and even brought a few of them back to life, we know that he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free mankind from the greatest slavery: sin. The miracles, exorcisms and cures that he worked are signs that he was sent by God the Father, and they show God's loving mastery of all history; they reveal that God's Kingdom was present right then in the person of Jesus Christ, leading up to the culminating moment of the Paschal Mystery.¹⁹ As Benedict XVI teaches, "The Cross is the 'throne' where he manifested his sublime kingship as God Love: by offering himself in expiation for the sin of the world, he defeated the 'ruler of this world' (Jn 12:31) and established the Kingdom of God once and for all. It is a Kingdom that will be fully revealed at the end of time, after the destruction of every enemy and last of all, death (cf. 1 Cor 15:25–26). The Son will then deliver the Kingdom to the Father and God will finally be 'everything to everyone' (1 Cor 15:28). The way to reach this goal is long and admits of no short cuts: indeed, every person must freely accept the truth of God's love. He is Love and Truth, and neither Love nor Truth are ever imposed: they come knocking at the doors of the heart and the mind and where they can enter they bring peace and joy."²⁰

In order to spread to the whole world the peace and joy of God's kingdom, *Christ should reign first and foremost in our soul. But how would we reply if he asked us: "How do you go about letting me reign in you?" I would reply that I need lots of his grace. Only that way can my every heartbeat and breath, my least intense look, my most ordinary word, my most basic feeling be transformed into a hosanna to Christ my king.*

If we are trying to have Christ as our king we must be consistent. We must start by giving him our heart. Not to do that and still talk about the kingdom of Christ would be completely hollow. There would be no real Christian substance in our behavior. We would be making an outward

19. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 541–550.

20. Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 26 November 2006.

show of a faith which simply did not exist. We would be misusing God's name to human advantage.

If Jesus' reign in my soul, in your soul, meant that he should find it a perfect dwelling place, then indeed would we have reason to despair. But "fear not, daughter of Sion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass' colt" (Jn 12:15). Don't you see? Jesus makes do with a poor animal for a throne. I don't know about you; but I am not humiliated to acknowledge that in the Lord's eyes I am a beast of burden: "I am like a donkey in your presence, but I am continually with you. You hold my right hand" (Ps 73:22–23), you take me by the bridle.

Try to remember what a donkey is like — now that so few of them are left. Not an old, stubborn, vicious one that would give you a kick when you least expected, but a young one with his ears up like antennae. He lives on a meager diet, is hardworking and has a quick, cheerful trot. There are hundreds of animals more beautiful, more deft and strong. But it was a donkey Christ chose when he presented himself to the people as king in response to their acclamation. For Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice. That is how he reigns in the soul.²¹ ■

21. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 181.



Tabgha

The Church of the Beatitudes

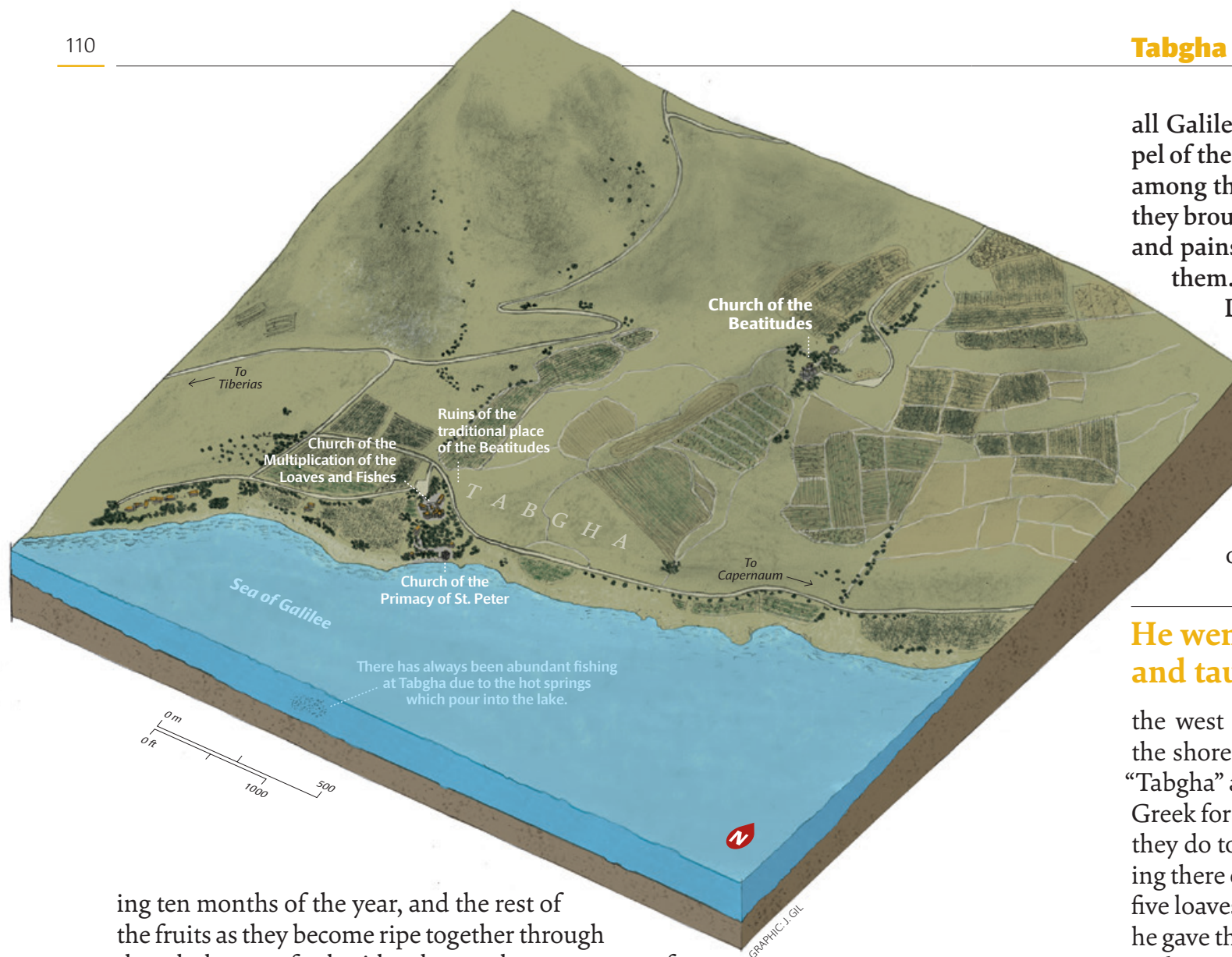
Few places in the Holy Land are so closely linked to the New Testament as Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberias. In other places, two thousand years of history have brought dramatic changes to the topography — churches, shrines and basilicas have been built, destroyed, rebuilt, enlarged or restored; many villages and towns have become large cities, while others have disappeared; roads both small and large, and motorways, have appeared... But while the surroundings of Lake Gennesaret have not escaped such changes altogether, the landscape remains almost unaltered; the contemplation of

the scene brings repose to the eyes and refreshes the spirit, filling the soul with an indescribable sense; the memory of Jesus and the echo of his words, which still seem to linger in the air, lift the traveller beyond the present moment.

However, the area has not always been so peaceful. When Jesus walked these paths, no fewer than ten towns stood around the lake, either on its shores or in the surrounding hills. There was a thriving business between them all, sustained by countless boat crossings. None of these bustling towns has survived to the present. Only the modern city called Tiberias recalls the Roman city of that name, which was founded at the beginning of the 1st century and situated further south. We can get some idea of the towns that Jesus knew, but only from their ruins.

The wealth of the region was due in the first place to the abundance of fish in the lake, which measures twenty-one kilometers from north to south and twelve kilometers at most in width, with an average depth of forty-five meters. Its waters come mainly from the River Jordan, plus some springs that flow close to its shores or even underwater in the lake itself. The commonest type of fish is the tilapia, also known as “St. Peter’s fish.”

The other main means of subsistence was agriculture. Lying 210 meters below sea-level, the area has warm winters and springs, with extremely high temperatures for much of the summer. The historian Flavius Josephus testified to the fertility of the region in the 1st century: “its soil is so fruitful that all sorts of crops can grow upon it, and the inhabitants accordingly plant every kind of tree there; for the air is so temperate that it agrees very well with many different species. Walnuts, which generally belong to a cooler climate, flourish there in abundance. There are palm trees also, which grow best in hot climates; and fig-trees and olives grow near them, which require more temperate air. It could be said that here nature herself takes pride in forcing those plants that are naturally enemies to one another, to agree together; it is a happy contention of the seasons, as if every one of them laid claim to this country; for it not only nourishes different sorts of autumnal fruit beyond men’s expectation, but preserves them a great while; it supplies men with the principal fruits, with grapes and figs continually, dur-



ing ten months of the year, and the rest of the fruits as they become ripe together through the whole year; for besides the good temperature of the air, it is also watered from a most fertile fountain. The people of the country call it Capharnaum. Some have thought it to be a branch of the Nile, because it produces the Coracin fish as well as that lake does which is near to Alexandria.”¹

The most notable traces of our Lord’s presence in this area are to be found on the north-west side of Lake Gennesaret, around Capernaum. At the beginning of his public life, Jesus went about

1. Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, book 3, chapter 10.

all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.² Our Lord had left Nazareth and was living in Capernaum,³ on the northwest shore of Lake Gennesaret, where some of the twelve Apostles or their relatives had houses. The multitudes that the Gospel speaks of came to that small fishing village to find Jesus, but also went after him in other places in the surrounding district.⁴ One of the most notable of these was Tabgha.

He went up on a mountain and taught them

Tabgha is a zone three kilometers to the west of Capernaum, extending a few hectares inland from the shore of the lake, to the surrounding hills. The Arabic name “Tabgha” appears to derive from the Byzantine name Heptapegon, Greek for “Seven Springs,” owing to the springs that flowed then as they do today. According to traditions kept alive by Christians living there ever since the time of Jesus, this was where he multiplied five loaves and two fishes to feed a vast multitude;⁵ it was here that he gave the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the Beatitudes;⁶ and it was here too that he appeared to his Apostles after the Resurrection, bringing about the second miraculous catch of fish and confirming St. Peter as Head of the Church.⁷ These three episodes in our Lord’s life took place within 100 meters of each other.

2. Mt 4:23–25.

3. Cf. Mt 4:13.

4. Cf. Mt 5:1 and 14:14; Mk 6:32–34; Lk 6:17–19; Jn 6:2–5.

5. Cf. Mt 14:13–21; Mk 6:32–44; Lk 9:12–17; Jn 6:1–15.

6. Cf. Mt 5:1–11; Lk 6:17–26.

7. Cf. Jn 21:1–23.



Photograph from the end of the 19th century showing the kind of boats formerly used on Lake Tiberias.

An account attributed to the pilgrim Egeria (or Aetheria), who visited Palestine in the 4th century, offers an eloquent testimony to the Christian memories of Tabgha. “Not far from Capharnaum may be seen the stone ledges on which the Lord sat down. There, near the sea, is an open space covered with grass and many palm trees, and near that same place seven springs with plentiful water flowing from each of them. In this place the Lord fed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes. The stone on which Jesus set the bread has been made into an altar. Past the walls of the church runs a roadway where Matthew had his tax-collector’s bench. Upon the nearby hill is the place where the Lord went up to pronounce the Beatitudes.”⁸

In this article, we will focus on the last site listed by Egeria — the hill where the Lord went up to pronounce the Beatitudes. Because of the nature of the terrain it is not surprising that our Lord should sometimes have chosen to withdraw there, alone or with his disciples. It would also have been a good place for crowds of

8. *Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae*, II, 5, 2–3 (CCL 175, 99).

several thousands of people to gather around him: parts of it were unpopulated, perhaps because of the difficulty of cultivating the thin layer of soil which soon gave place to rock; at the same time, springs watered the ground, so that there was plenty of grass, with palm trees providing shade. That part of the lake was especially rich in fish, since some warm currents attracted them there; and the slopes of the surrounding mountains rose up almost from the lakeside itself, forming a natural amphitheatre.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness that God has placed in man’s heart. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”⁹

According to the traditions handed down by local Christians who lived in Tabgha from the times of Jesus, he gave the Sermon on the Mount, a collection of teachings that began with the Beatitudes, close to the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes, on a nearby mountainside, where there was a hollow. About a hundred meters from that church, the remains of some buildings were excavated in 1935. They belonged to a church or monastery dating from the fourth or fifth century. The chapel, seven meters long by four meters wide, had been built by enlarging a small cave, and took in a second natural cave, which had been shaped into a

9. Mt 5:1–12. Cf. Lk 6:20–23.

GLEN ROBERTS / FLICKR



BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



The Church of the Beatitudes overlooks the whole of Lake Gennesaret. Its sanctuary is surrounded by an atrium, which filters light and protects against heat.

ITAMAR GRINBERG / ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM



square with masonry. The plastered walls were covered with ancient graffiti, and the floor was paved with mosaics.

The present Church of the Beatitudes was built between 1937 and 1938 following this same tradition, but in order to give a wider view over Lake Gennesaret, it was built on a site two hundred meters above the lake and about two kilometers from the remains of the former church.

It is an octagonal church surmounted by a round cupola, and surrounded by a broad colonnaded portal that offers protection from the heat and glare of the sun. The local black basalt, white

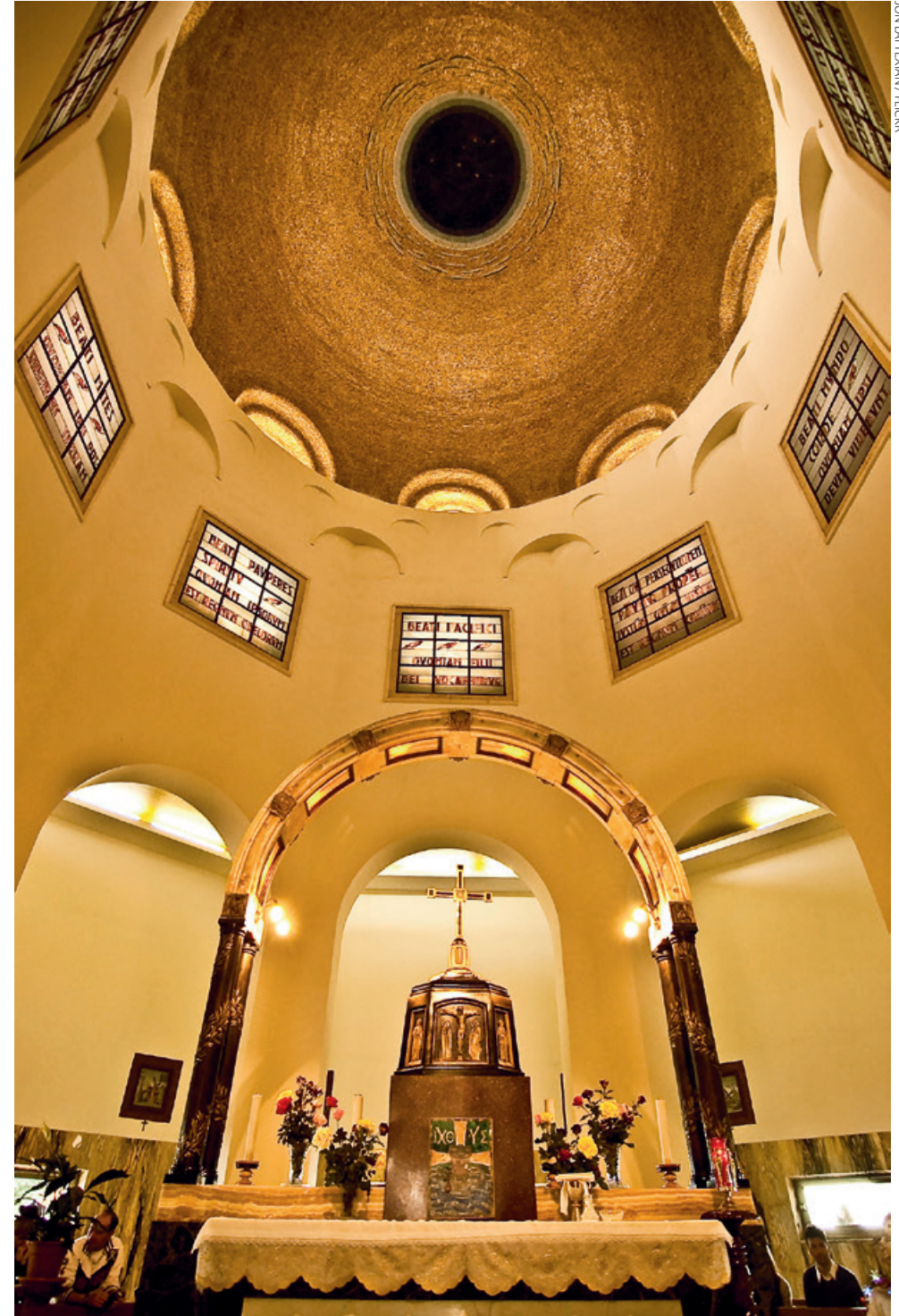


A lush garden adds to the peaceful atmosphere of the Church of the Beatitudes. Inside the church — pictured right— the altar and tabernacle are located in the center, beneath the dome.

stone from Nazareth, and Roman travertine marble, together form a harmonious pattern and make the building stand out among the surrounding vegetation. The interior of the church is designed with clean, simple lines: the altar stands in the center, under an alabaster arch, and behind it the tabernacle is raised on a pedestal of porphyry and decorated with scenes from the Passion of our Lord, in gilded bronze on a base of lapis lazuli. The eight windows under the dome are of stained glass bearing the words of the Beatitudes, and above them the dome reflects the light in tones of gold.

Living according to the Beatitudes

“The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. They take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham. The Beatitudes fulfill the promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of a territory, but



to the Kingdom of heaven.”¹⁰ Reflecting on this fact, Benedict XVI underlined the difference between Moses and Jesus, between Sinai, the rocky mass in the desert, and the Mount of the Beatitudes: “Anyone who has been there and gazed with the eyes of his soul on the wide prospect of the waters of the lake, the sky and the sun, the trees and the meadows, the flowers and the sound of birdsong, can never forget the wonderful atmosphere of peace and the beauty of creation.”¹¹

The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness that God has placed in man’s heart. They announce blessings and rewards, but they are at the same time paradoxical promises, especially the ones that talk about poverty, sufferings, injustice and persecutions.¹² “The standards of the world are turned upside down as soon as things are seen in the right perspective, which is to say, in terms of God’s values, so different from those of the world. It is precisely those who are poor in worldly terms, those thought of as lost souls, who are the truly fortunate ones, the blessed, who have every reason to rejoice and exult in the midst of their sufferings.”¹³

The Beatitudes should not be understood as though the rejoicing they proclaim will be achieved only in the next world. St. Josemaria taught this clearly, putting his readers on their guard against the dangers of developing a *victim complex*:

Sacrifice, sacrifice! It is true that to follow Jesus Christ is to carry the Cross — He has said so. But I don’t like to hear souls who love Our Lord speak so much about crosses and renunciations, because where there is Love, it is a willing sacrifice — though it remains hard — and the cross is the Holy Cross.

A soul which knows how to love and give itself in this way, is filled with peace and joy. Therefore, why insist on

10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1716.

11. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, p. 67.

12. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1717–1718.

13. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, p. 71.

“sacrifice”, as if you were seeking consolation, if Christ’s Cross — which is your life — makes you happy?”¹⁴

The Beatitudes shine a light on the attitudes and actions that characterize Christian life, and express what it means to be a disciple of Christ, called to share in his Passion and Resurrection.¹⁵ “The Beatitudes [...] apply to the disciple because they were first paradigmatically lived by Christ himself. [...] The Beatitudes present a sort of veiled interior biography of Jesus, a kind of portrait of his figure. He who has no place to lay his head (cf. Mt 8:20) is truly poor; he who can say, ‘Come to me [...] for I am meek and lowly in heart’ (cf. Mt 11:28–29) is truly meek; he is the one who is pure of heart and so unceasingly beholds God. He is the peacemaker, he is the one who suffers for God’s sake. The Beatitudes display the mystery of Christ himself, and they call us into communion with him.”¹⁶

To respond to this call from God to share in his own blessedness, Jesus himself is the way we must follow.

We have to learn from him, from Jesus who is our only model. If you want to go forward without stumbling or wandering off the path, then all you have to do is walk the road he walked, placing your feet in his footprints and entering into his humble and patient Heart, there to drink from the wellsprings of his commandments and of his love. In a word, you must identify yourself with Jesus Christ and try to become really and truly another Christ among your fellow men. [...]

Reflect on the example that Christ gave us, from the crib in Bethlehem to his throne on Calvary. Think of his self-denial and of all he went through: hunger, thirst, weariness, heat, tiredness, ill-treatment, misunderstandings, tears... But at the same time think of his joy in being able to save the whole of mankind. And now I would like you to engrave

14. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 249.

15. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1717.

16. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, p. 74.



On March 16, 1994, Blessed Alvaro visited and celebrated Mass in the Church of the Beatitudes.

deeply in your mind and upon your heart — so that you can meditate on it often and draw your own practical conclusions — the summary St. Paul made to the Ephesians when he invited them to follow resolutely in Our Lord’s footsteps: “Be imitators of God, as very dear children, and walk in love, as Christ has loved us and delivered himself up for us, a sacrifice breathing out fragrance as he offered it to God” (Eph 5:1–2).

*Jesus gave himself up for us in a holocaust of love. What about you, who are a disciple of Christ? You, a favored son of God; you, who have been ransomed at the price of the Cross; you too should be ready to deny yourself.*¹⁷

17. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, nos. 128–129.

In his Sermon on the Mount, after the Beatitudes, Jesus compares believers to the salt of the earth and the light of the world. St. John Chrysostom brings out the connection between the two passages as follows: “Those who are meek, modest, merciful and just, do not keep these virtues for their own profit alone, but pour them out like clear torrents for the benefit of others. In the same way, the clean of heart and the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted in the cause of truth, also give their lives as a gift to all.”¹⁸

Those who follow Christ, find joy; and naturally, seek to spread it. *The Master passes very close to us, again and again. He looks at us... And if you look at him, if you listen to him, if you don’t reject him, He will teach you how to give a supernatural meaning to everything you do... Then you too, wherever you may be, will sow consolation and peace and joy.*¹⁹

Blessed Alvaro in Tabgha

Blessed Alvaro stopped by the Church of the Beatitudes on March 16, 1994, and celebrated his second Mass in the Holy Land there. The Franciscan monks who were watching over the sanctuary made sure that other pilgrims or tourists did not go into the area around the main altar, and Blessed Alvaro was able to celebrate Mass without interruption and in a recollected way.

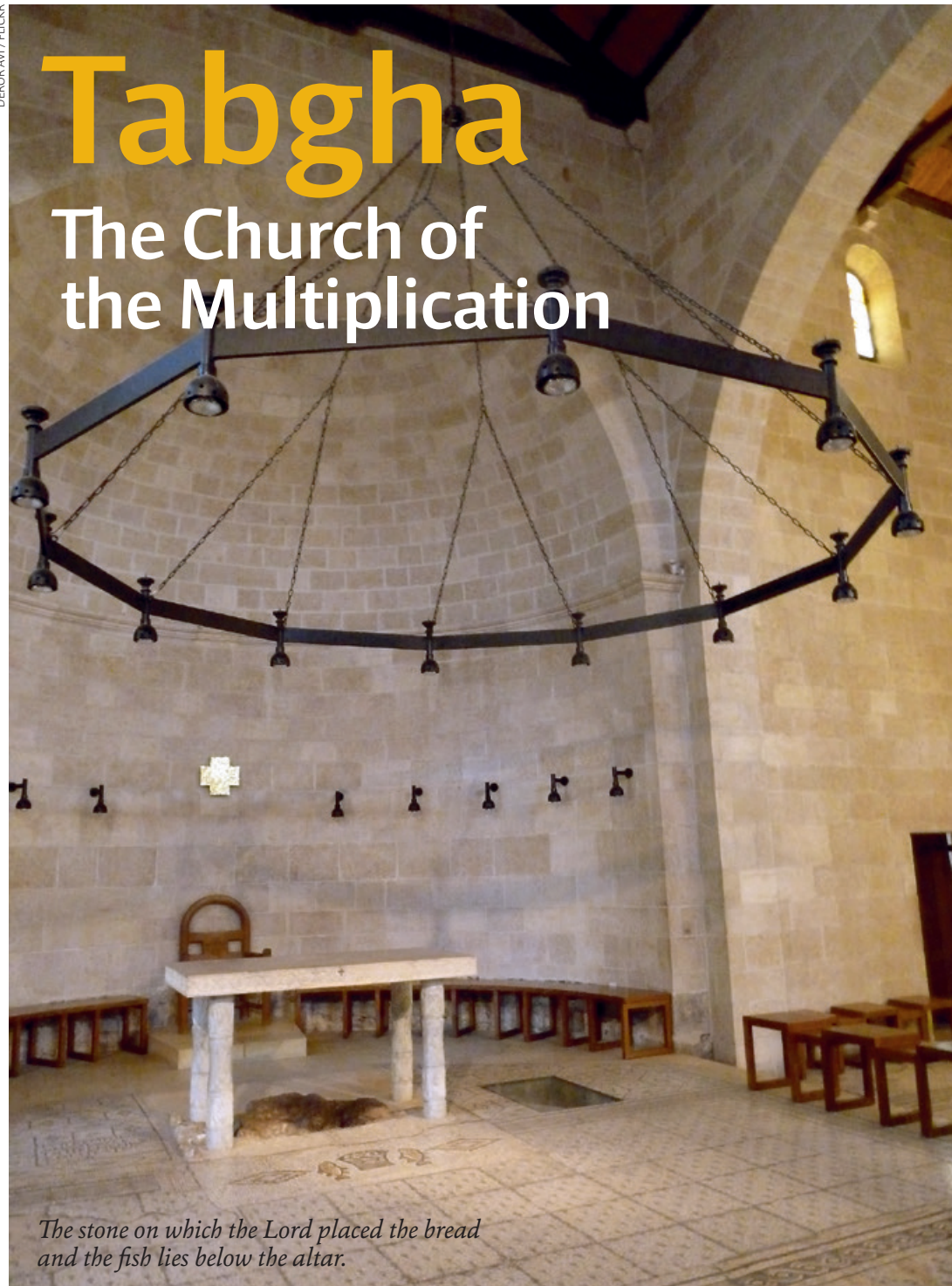
“At the end of Mass,” Bishop Javier Echevarria remembered, “he told us that he had asked that all Christians, especially his daughters and sons in Opus Dei, might live their lives entirely according to the way Christ laid out in the Beatitudes.”²⁰ ■

18. St. John Chrysostom, *In Matthæum homiliae*, 15, 7.

19. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 8th Station, no. 4.

20. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 103 and 106 (AGP, library, P01).

DERORANI / FLICKR



*The stone on which the Lord placed the bread
and the fish lies below the altar.*

In the Holy Land, Tabgha is the name of a district about three kilometers from Capernaum, extending inland from the shores of Lake Gennesaret. More specifically, it denotes a small part of this district: the place where our Lord multiplied five loaves and two fishes into enough to feed a crowd of five thousand men.

Of the four accounts of this miracle given in the Gospel, the details given in St. Mark's enable it to be located close to Capernaum, close to the lake-shore, in an uninhabited area where there was plenty of grass:

The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them,

"Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while."

For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. Now many saw them going, and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them. As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said,

"This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late; send them away, to go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat."

But he answered them,

"You give them something to eat."

And they said to him,

"Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?"

And he said to them,

"How many loaves have you? Go and see."

And when they had found out, they said,

"Five, and two fish."

Then he commanded them all to sit down by companies upon the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by



SIMONE BALDINI / FLICKR

fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.¹

1. Mk 6:30–44. Cf. Mt 14:13–21; Lk 9:10–17; and Jn 6:1–15. St. Matthew (15:32–39) and St. Mark (8:1–10) also narrate the second miraculous multiplication.



LEONARD HINELAAR

Left: The cloistered square which leads into the Church of the Multiplication, with an olive-tree in the centre. Above: The interior. It was built along the lines of the 5th century Byzantine basilica, much of whose floor mosaic has been preserved.

From the start, the early Christians identified Tabgha as the place where this miracle had been worked, just as they recalled that here was the mountain where Jesus had pronounced the Beatitudes, and the part of the lake-shore where he had appeared after rising from the dead, when he brought about the second miraculous catch of fish. In the case of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, they venerated the exact rock on which the loaves and fishes had been placed by our Lord. The pilgrim Aetheria or Egeria, who travelled throughout the Holy Land in the fourth century, has left us a very valuable testimony about the existence of a church on that spot: “Not far away from there (Capernaum) are some stone steps where the Lord stood. And in the same place by the sea is a grassy field with plenty of hay and many palm trees. By them are seven springs, each flowing strongly. And this is the field where the Lord

fed the people with the five loaves and two fishes. In fact the stone on which the Lord placed the bread has now been made into an altar. People who go there take away small pieces of the stone to bring them prosperity, and they are very effective. Past the walls of this church goes the public highway on which the Apostle Matthew had his place of custom. Near there on a mountain is a cave to which the Saviour climbed and spoke the Beatitudes.”²

Judging from information given in later accounts, a church commemorating the multiplication of the loaves and fishes already existed in the sixth century. However, it must have suffered the effects of the Persian invasions in 614 or the Arabic invasions in 638, because Arculf, at the end of the seventh century, found nothing but some bare ruins.³ The church was not rebuilt, and even the memory of where it had stood faded, and was confused with the site of the Church of the Beatitudes. This state of abandonment lasted until the nineteenth century, when the land was acquired by the German Association of the Holy Land. Thereafter the first archaeological excavations were carried out, in 1911, and completed with other studies in 1932, 1935 and 1969.

These works revealed the existence of two churches: a smaller one dating from the middle of the fourth century, which must have been the one seen by Egeria; and another larger one, with a central nave and two aisles, built in the second half of the fifth century. But above all the archaeological work confirmed the accuracy of the tradition that had been handed down, by bringing to light the remains of the altar, the venerable rock which showed that numerous fragments had been removed from it, and a mosaic of a basket of loaves flanked by two fishes.

The remnants of those two early churches can be seen today in the modern church, completed in 1982, which forms part of a Benedictine monastery. The basilica is built on the lines of the fifth-century Byzantine church, whose T-shaped structure it reproduces. It has the same central nave and two aisles, separated by thick columns and semicircular arches, with a transept, and an apse in the

2. *Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae*, II, 5, 2–3 (CCL 175, 99).

3. Cf. Adamnani, *De Locis Sanctis II*, 23 (CCL 175, 218).

The detail on the sides of the transept show a clear influence from the Nile river valley with its representation of flora and fauna: flamingos, herons, otters, cormorants, swans, ducks...



BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



STEVEN CONGER / FLICKR

central nave. In the sanctuary, beneath the altar, stands the rock described by Egeria. When the second church was built in the fifth century, the rock was moved a few meters from its original position and set in the place where there would normally be relics. In front of this rock, on the mosaic floor, is the representation of the fishes and the basket of loaves, as a sign ratifying the local tradi-

tion. It may date from the fifth or sixth century. With its simple lines and the warm colour of the mosaic tesserae, it is powerfully evocative; anyone who has read the Gospel instantly grasps the event that it recalls.

There are other remains of great archaeological and artistic value. To the right of the altar, the remnants of the fourth-century church may be seen, protected by glass. The lowest stones of some of the walls rest on the Byzantine structure of basalt stone. In the floor a large part of the original mosaic flooring is preserved, with a geometric design in the aisles and nave, and richly figured in the two halves of the transept, showing various kinds of birds and plants found around Lake Gennesaret. On the evidence of an inscription found near the altar, this mosaic design, with its clear influences from the Nile valley, is attributed to Martyrios, an Egyptian monk who became Patriarch of Jerusalem from 478 to 486.

The mystery of the Eucharist

The mosaic of the loaves and fishes in front of the altar shows only four loaves. The intention of the designer cannot be known for certain, but the Benedictines in charge of the shrine give a theological explanation to pilgrims today: the missing fifth loaf is to be found on the altar, during Holy Mass: it is the Eucharist. Indeed, Christian faith has always seen the gift of the Blessed Sacrament as prefigured in the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes.⁴

This link is shown especially clearly in the Gospel of St. John, who completes the account of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes with the story of what happened next. The narrative takes up the whole of the sixth chapter. After feeding the crowd with the five loaves and two fishes, the disciples went on board a boat and headed for Capernaum. Halfway across the lake, when the rough waters were making the crossing difficult and dangerous, our Lord came to them, walking on the water. The next day, the crowds came in search of Jesus and found him in the synagogue at Capernaum, where he greeted them with these words:

4. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1335.

Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal.⁵

So begins the discourse about the Bread of Life, in which our Lord reveals the mystery of the Eucharist. It is so rich that it is considered “the sum and summary of our Faith.”⁶ “The sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman.”⁷

In the Mass, the holy Sacrifice of the Altar, *an offering of infinite value, which perpetuates the work of the redemption in us*,⁸ Jesus our Lord comes to meet us, becoming really, truly, substantially present: his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity.⁹

The God of our faith is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men — their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving Father who now leads us gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

*This is the source of the joy we feel on Holy Thursday — the realization that the Creator has loved his creatures to such an extent. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as though all the other proofs of his mercy were insufficient, institutes the Eucharist so that he can always be close to us. We can only understand up to a point that he does so because Love moves him, who needs nothing, not to want to be separated from us.*¹⁰

5. Jn 6:26–27.

6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1327.

7. Pope Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 22 February 2007, no. 1.

8. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 86.

9. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1373–1374.

10. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 84.



The Lord never stops seeking out each and every one of us, he accompanies us on our way and, out of the greatness of his mercy, he made himself food to divinize us:

Jesus has remained within the Eucharist for love... of you.

He remained, knowing how men would treat him... and how you would treat him.

*He has remained so that you could eat him, so that you could visit him and tell him what's happening to you; and so that you could talk to him as you pray beside the tabernacle, and as you receive him sacramentally; and so that you could fall in love more and more each day, and make other souls, many souls, follow the same path.*¹¹

Praying next to the lake

During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Blessed Alvaro visited Tabgha on March 16, 1994. First, he went to pray in the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and

11. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 887.

Near the Church of the Multiplication on the morning of March 16, 1994. On the right, one of the flowers that Blessed Alvaro wanted to take as a souvenir.



Fishes, and as many others had done before him, he venerated the rock where our Lord is said to have placed the bread and fish. “He wanted us to touch the rock with our crucifixes and our rosaries,” Bishop Javier Echevarria remembered. “But that wasn’t enough for him, and he wanted to put his pectoral cross onto the rock as well. In fact, he wanted everything he was carrying to touch the places which our Lord had sanctified by his presence — where He had taught and performed miracles.”¹²

Afterwards, he went to the church of the Primacy of St. Peter, where, once again, he put his rosary and his crucifix onto the *Mensa Christi*. Next, he made his way to the Church of the Beatitudes, where he celebrated Mass, and then to Capernaum. In the afternoon, the plan was to pray on the Lake of Gennesaret on a boat, which, after persistent questioning, was the only desire Blessed Alvaro had expressed. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, it was not possible for them to go out on the lake that afternoon, and instead they contented themselves with looking for somewhere on the lakeshore they could pray.

12. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 292 (AGP, library, P01).

DORMITION ABBEY



Blessed Alvaro prayed in the area of the sanctuary closest to the lake. There was an outdoor chapel there, which in 1994 had a different roof than the one seen in the recent photo. Blessed Alvaro sat beyond the enclosure, to the right of the altar, on the trunk that is seen behind the tree. At the time, the water came up to only a few meters away. Today, the lake level has dropped and the shore is quite far away.



“The place we found was quite close to the Church of the Multiplication of the loaves and fishes,” continues the Prelate of Opus Dei. “We prayed there on the shore, in an open area which had some eucalyptus trunks with rocks in front of them.”¹³

It was a physical strain for Blessed Alvaro to walk there and back, but he did not hesitate to agree to the plan.

“He told me we could pick some flowers from that site in remembrance,” relates Bishop Echevarria. “Before that, he told me what he had been praying about. He had meditated on the scene of the miraculous catch of fish, when the Lord told Peter: *Duc in altum!* He prayed that all his daughters and sons might follow the example of our Father, to always live this *duc in altum*, striking out into the deep and setting sail on the seas of this world in our ordinary life, in our professional life; and afterwards, he prayed that we may have an abundant catch of fish, and be men and women who are deeply apostolic and eager to win new apostles.

“Afterwards, he thought about something he had talked about many times before: how the Lord said to the apostles, after the miraculous catch of fish: now you will be fishers of men; and they left everything and followed Jesus. The Father was referring to the *relictis omnibus*: knowing how to leave everything we have behind, in one go, letting go of the small idols we have built in our life, and generously offering our lives to the Lord.

“This is what the Father thought about in his prayer, and he also prayed for many vocations to come, and for the perseverance of those of us in Opus Dei, that we be faithful and loyal without looking for compensation.”¹⁴ ■

13. Ibid., p. 299.

14. Ibid., pp. 299–301.

The Basilica of the Transfiguration, completed in 1924. The design of the façade and the interior was modelled on churches in upper Syria.



DEREK WINTERBURN / FLICKR

Mount Tabor

Basilica of the Transfiguration

From the earliest times the fertile Esdraelon plain in Galilee has been criss-crossed by paths and caravan trails. Travellers coming down from Mesopotamia and Syria, after following the shoreline of Lake Gennesaret, struck westwards across the plain towards the Mediterranean and so on to Egypt. Those coming from the south, from Mount Hebron, following the route from Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Samaria, travelled northwards, passing close to Nazareth. The solitary peak of Mount Tabor towers over the plain.

If Mount Tabor were part of a range of hills it would attract no particular attention, standing as it does just 558 metres above sea-level. But it is a single isolated peak, whose conical shape suggests that it could be volcanic, though in fact it is not. It stands over 300 metres higher than the surrounding land and this makes it singularly imposing. It is also noticeable for the vegetation growing up its sides: holm-oaks, wild plants, and in spring, lilies of different kinds. From its top, a broad level space where cypress-trees grow in abundance, a beautiful panorama opens to view. Because of this, Mount Tabor became a place of worship for the Canaanites, who worshipped their idols on the hill-tops. It also made a good site for

military fortifications, as a watch-tower over the area. Traces of human presence on Tabor go back seventy thousand years.

According to the Old Testament it was at Mount Tabor that Deborah gathered ten thousand Israelites in secret, commanded by Barak, who put Sisera's army to flight.¹ The Midianites and Amalekites killed Gideon's brothers there.² After the Promised Land had been won, Mount Tabor marked the boundary between the tribes of Zebulun, Issachar and Nephthali,³ who held it to be a sacred place and offered sacrifices on its summit.⁴ The prophet Hosea denounced this worship because it was not just schismatic but actually idolatrous.⁵ Finally, the fame of Tabor is shown by the fact that it is used as an image in Old Testament literature. The psalmist speaks of Tabor and Hermon together as symbolizing all the hills of the earth.⁶ Jeremiah compares Tabor to the way Nebuchadnezzar loomed over his enemies.⁷

Although Mount Tabor is not named in the New Testament, it was identified very early on as the place of our Lord's Transfiguration. He took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus,

"Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" — not knowing what he said.⁸

1. Cf. Judges 4:4–24.

2. Cf. Judges 8:18–19.

3. Cf. Joshua 19:10–34.

4. Cf. Deut 33:19.

5. Cf. Hos 5:1.

6. Cf. Ps 89[88]:13.

7. Cf. Jer 46:18–26.

8. Lk 9:28–33. Cf. Mt 17:1–4; Mk 9:2–5.



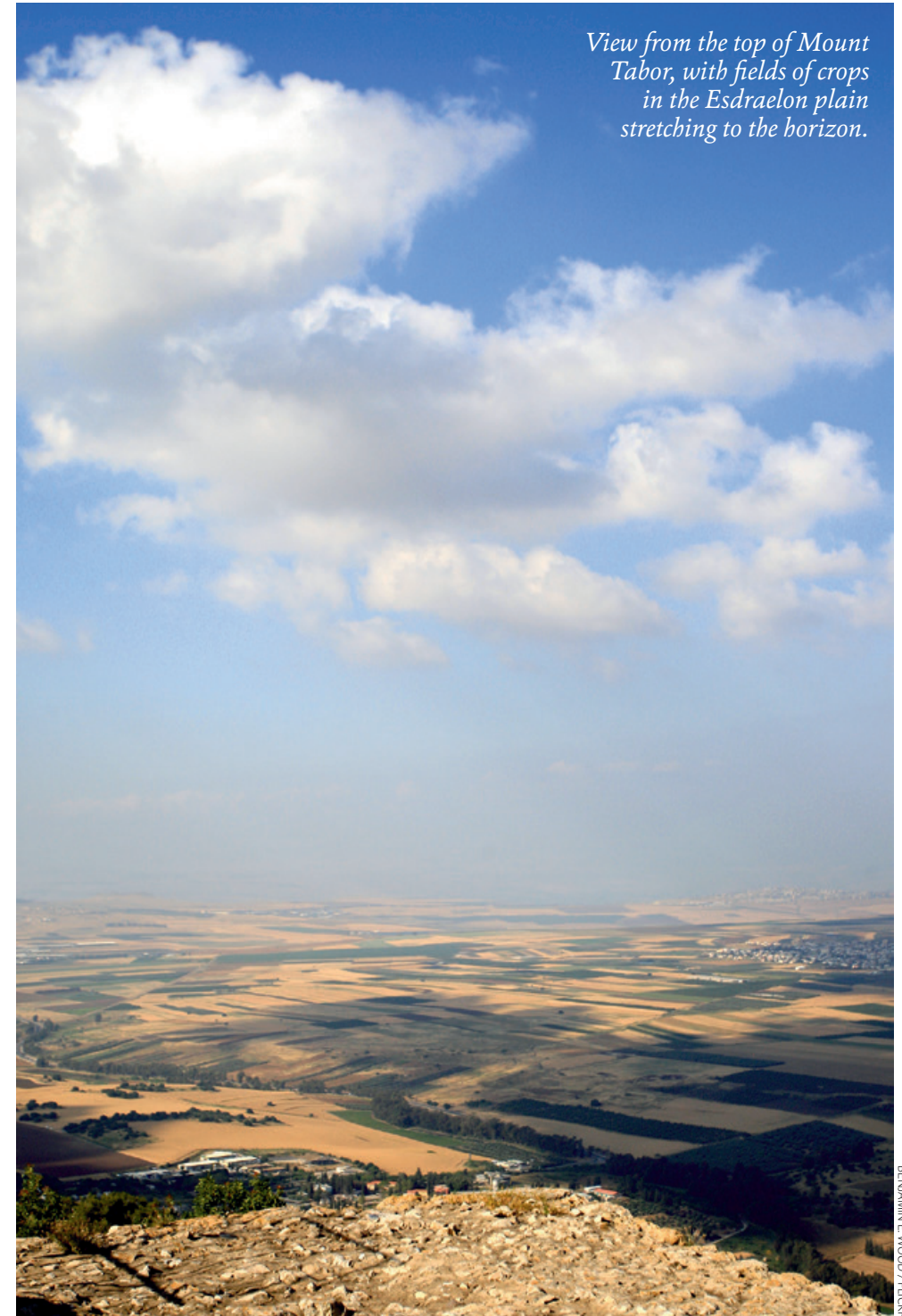


Archaeological excavations at Tabor have shown that there was a fourth- or fifth-century church there (which some ancient sources say was built by St. Helena) which had been constructed on the remains of a Canaanite place of worship. Later on, the testimonies of some sixth- and seventh-century pilgrims speak of three basilicas — in memory of the three booths that St. Peter had proposed to make — and large numbers of monks living there. In confirmation of these reports, a mosaic floor has been found dating from that time, and in 553 the Council of Constantinople established a bishopric of Tabor. During the Muslim domination this monastic or hermit community dwindled away, and in 808 AD the churches were looked after by eighteen religious whose bishop was Theophanes.

From 1101 onwards, until the end of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, a Benedictine religious community lived on Mount Tabor. They restored the church and built a large monastery, protected by a fortified wall. However, this was not sufficient to defend them against the Saracens, who overran the abbey and turned it into a fortress in 1211–1212. Although Christians were allowed to return a little later and take possession of the site, their basilica was again destroyed in 1263 by the soldiers of Sultan Baibars.

Mount Tabor was deserted until the arrival of the Franciscans in 1631. They took charge of the property from then on, though not

View from the top of Mount Tabor, with fields of crops in the Esdraelon plain stretching to the horizon.



without difficulties; they studied and strengthened what was left of the buildings, but it took another three centuries before a new basilica could be built. It was completed in 1924.

The present-day basilica

Today pilgrims can climb Mount Tabor following a winding road which was made at the beginning of the twentieth century to enable building materials to be carried up to the new basilica. As they reach the top they come to the Gate of the Wind, or Bab el-Hawa in Arabic, a remnant of the 13th century Arab fortress, whose walls surrounded the whole flat space of the summit. On the north side stands the Greek Orthodox area and on the south is the Catholic part, looked after by the Custody of the Holy Land.

From the Gate of the Wind, a long avenue lined with cypress-trees leads to the Basilica of the Transfiguration and the Franciscan monastery. In front of the church the ruins of the twelfth-century Benedictine monastery may be seen, as well as traces of the Saracen fortress. Indeed, the fortress was built on the foundations of the Crusaders-era basilica, as is the present church, which was built on the plan of the preceding one.

The façade, with its great arch between two towers and its triangular gables, welcomes visitors with an invitation to lift up their souls. This sensation intensifies as they go through the bronze gates: the central nave, separated from the side aisles by great semi-circular arches, becomes a stairway carved out of the rock which goes down to the crypt, and high above it stands the sanctuary, with an apse behind it with a mosaic of the Transfiguration against a gold background. The mystery of the scene is heightened by the special quality of the light, which enters through windows in the façade, the walls of the central nave, and the apse of the crypt.

The plan of the basilica followed the lines of the previous churches on that spot. By the door, the two towers were built over some chapels with mediaeval apses, now dedicated to the memory of Moses and Elijah; and in the crypt, although the original vault from the Crusades era was later covered with a mosaic, the altar is

the original one and parts of the original masonry are still visible in the walls. In addition, a small grotto was recently discovered to the north of the church, under the spot which had been identified as the refectory of the mediaeval monastery. On its walls were some Greek inscriptions, and symbols including crosses, possibly traces of the Byzantine monks who once lived on Mount Tabor.

And he was transfigured before them

At the Transfiguration, Jesus showed his glory as God, and thus confirmed St. Peter's recent confession of faith: **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**⁹ In this way he also strengthened the Apostles' faith in advance, to face his coming Passion and Death,¹⁰ which he had already begun to announce to them.¹¹ The presence of Moses and Elijah is highly significant: both of them "had seen God's glory on the Mountain; the Law and the Prophets had announced the Messiah's sufferings."¹² The Evangelists also tell that as Peter was still speaking, proposing to make three booths, **a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said,**

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."¹³

Commenting on this passage, some Fathers of the Church underline the difference between the representatives of the Old Testament — Moses and Elijah — and Christ: "They are my servants, this is my Son. [...] I love them, but this is my Beloved: therefore, listen to him. [...] Moses and Elijah spoke of the Christ, but they are servants like you; this is the Lord, listen to him."¹⁴

For Pope Benedict XVI, "This one command brings the theophany to its conclusion and sums up its deepest meaning. The dis-

9. Mt 16:16. Cf. Mk 8:29; and Lk 9:20.

10. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 555 and 568.

11. Cf. Mt 16:21; Mk 8:31; and Lk 9:22.

12. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 555.

13. Mt 17:5. Cf. Mk 9:7; and Lk 9:34–35.

14. St. Jerome, *Commentary on St. Mark's Gospel*, 6.

ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM



Panoramic view over the plain of Esdraelon and, in the distance, the valley of the Jordan River. On the left are the monastery and the Greek Orthodox Church, built in the 19th century on ruins from the Crusader period. On the top of the mountain, the Basilica of the Transfiguration, facing east, and the Franciscan monastery are visible. The “Door of the Wind” is outside the photograph. On the right, the nave of the church, descending to the crypt, above which is the sanctuary. The Transfiguration of the Lord is depicted in the apse.

J. GIL



ciples must accompany Jesus back down the mountain and learn ever anew to ‘listen to him.’”¹⁵

Led by the hand of St. Josemaria, we can see that this command, addressed to the disciples, also applies to every faithful Christian. *Meditate one by one on the scenes depicting our Lord’s life*

15. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, p. 316.

*and teachings. Consider especially the counsels and warnings with which he prepared the handful of men who were to become his Apostles, his messengers from one end of the earth to the other.*¹⁶ If we want to hear what Christ said, to find out what he taught, what he said and did, we have the Gospels.¹⁷

16. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 172.

17. Cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, nos. 18–19.

They give us what the Apostles preached after Christ's Ascension, telling us the truth about Jesus and making him present to us. *Do you want to learn from Christ and follow the example of his life? Open the Holy Gospels and listen to God in dialogue with men — with you.*¹⁸

This dialogue requires, in the first place, listening attentively and meditatively: *It's not enough to have a general idea of the spirit of Jesus' life; we have to learn the details of his life and, through them, his attitudes. [...] When you love someone, you want to know all about his life and character, so as to become like him. That is why we have to meditate on the life of Jesus, from his birth in a stable right up to his death and resurrection. In the early years of my life as a priest, I used to give people presents of copies of the Gospel and books about the life of Jesus. For we do need to know it well, to have it in our heart and mind, so that at any time, without any book, we can close our eyes and contemplate his life, watching it like a movie. In this way the words and actions of Our Lord will come to mind in all the different circumstances of our life.*¹⁹

But dialogue also means that, after listening, we need to respond, because *it is not a matter of just thinking about Jesus, of recalling some scenes of his life. We must be completely involved and play a part in his life. We should follow him as closely as Mary his Mother did, as closely as the first twelve, the holy women, the crowds that pressed about him. If we do this without holding back, Christ's words will enter deep into our soul and will really change us.*²⁰

And together with following Christ and becoming one with him, we will feel the need to unite our will to his desire to save all souls, and we will be set on fire with zeal for apostolate: *I advised you to read the New Testament and to enter into each scene and take part in it, as one more of the characters.*

18. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 322.

19. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 107.

20. Ibid.

*The minutes you spend in this way each day enable you to incarnate the Gospel, reflected in your life, and help others to reflect it.*²¹

Blessed Alvaro on Mt. Tabor

March 17, 1994 found

Blessed Alvaro celebrating Mass in the chapel of Moses inside the Basilica of the Transfiguration during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Shortly afterwards, marveling at the height of Mt. Tabor, Blessed Alvaro asked those with him:

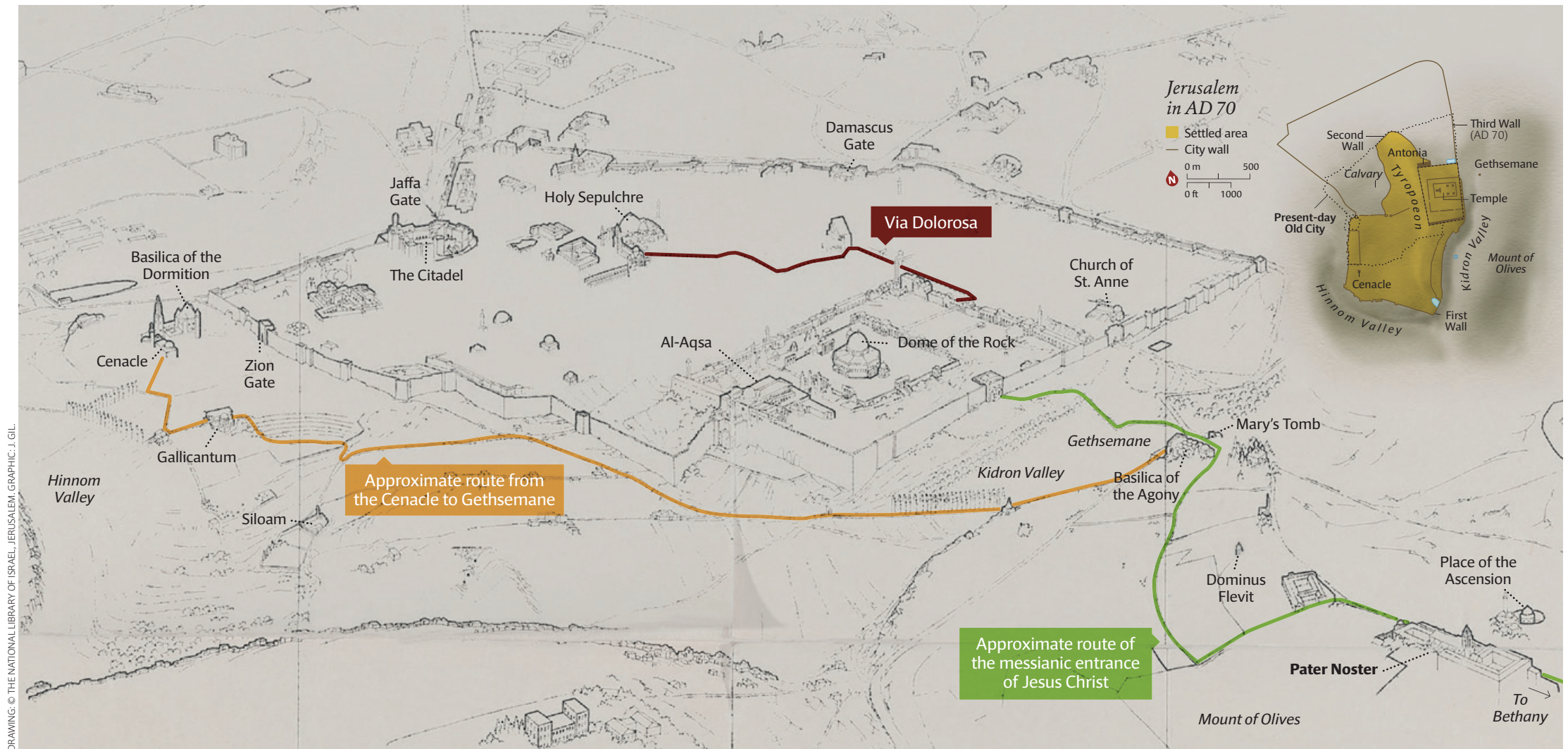
“Why did the Lord choose to transfigure himself in a place that was so far from where he lived and required a strenuous physical effort over a long trail?” Bishop Javier Echevarria said that Blessed Alvaro answered himself, saying “that it was probably so that we could see with our own eyes that to reach God, we also have to put in a human effort that is physical sometimes.”²²

As we read the Gospel and try to meditate on it in our prayer, let us ask the Holy Spirit for light, to come to the aid of our efforts. We can repeat the words of St. Josemaria: *Lord, we are ready to heed whatever you want to tell us. Speak to us: we are attentive to your voice. May your words enkindle our will so that we launch out fervently to obey you.*²³ ■

21. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 672.

22. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 117 and 120 (AGP, library, P01).

23. St. Josemaria, notes taken from his preaching, 25 July 1937, quoted in *Holy Rosary*, 4th Luminous Mystery.



Jerusalem

Church of the Pater Noster

In the Gospel we can relive the scene in which Jesus retires to pray and his disciples are nearby, probably watching him. When Jesus has finished, one of them boldly asks him: “‘Lord, teach us how to pray, as John did for his disciples.’ And he told them, ‘When you pray, you are to say, Father, hallowed be thy name’” (Lk 11:1–2).¹

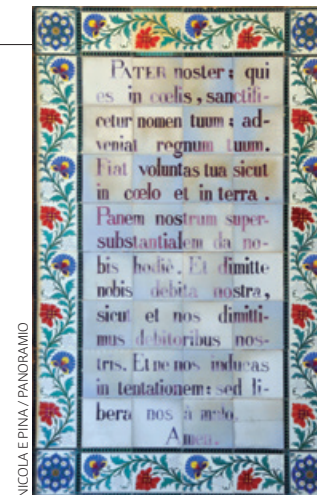
1. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 145.



Contemplate this fact slowly: the disciples had the opportunity of talking to Jesus and in their conversations with him the Lord taught them by his words, and deeds, how they should pray. And he taught them this amazing truth of God's mercy: that we are God's children and that we can address him as a child addresses his Father.²

During his three years of public life Jesus travelled around Palestine and the neighbouring districts, announcing God's Kingdom. The Evangelists explained in detail where some of the events in his itinerant preaching took place, such as the synagogues of Nazareth and Capernaum, the Well of Sychar, the porticoes of the Temple, and the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus at Bethany. The exact locations of other events, however, have been preserved only

2. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 71.



Today, there is a garden in the place of the naves of the former Byzantine basilica. The walls surrounding the whole shrine are covered in ceramic panels, on which the Our Father is written in more than seventy languages.



in local traditions handed down through the generations of Christians in the Holy Land. This is the case of the teaching of the Our Father, which St. Matthew includes in the Sermon on the Mount, while St. Luke presents it as being given in a certain place³ as our Lord went up to Jerusalem.

There is a cave beside the road leading from Bethany and Bethphage to Jerusalem which has been venerated from ancient times. It is at the top of the Mount of Olives, very close to the place where the Ascension is commemorated. According to tradition, Jesus, with his Apostles, frequently withdrew to this cave with his Apostles, and spent time instructing them on many mysteries, including his prophecies about the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem. Here, too, he gave them the prayer of the

3. Lk 11:1.

MATTES / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



A staircase to the Pater Noster grotto. Only part of the cave has been restored.

Our Father. This tradition was strong enough for St. Helena to decide to build a basilica on this spot in 326. It was called the Basilica of Eleona — the name of the locality — and it had three naves, as well as a large atrium with four porticoes at the entrance. The cave itself formed the crypt under the sanctuary. Some decades later, and just a few metres away, the church known as *Imbomon* was built around the rock from which our Lord was believed to have ascended to Heaven.

The pilgrim Egeria or Aetheria, describing various ceremonies held there at the end of the fourth century, wrote that on Tuesday in Holy Week “all proceed [...] to the church, which is on the mount Eleona. And when they have arrived at that church the bishop en-



PHOTOS ALFONSO PUERTAS

ters the cave where the Lord was wont to teach His disciples, and after receiving the book of the Gospel, he stands and himself reads the words of the Lord which are written in the Gospel according to Matthew, where He says: 'Take heed that no man deceive you.' And the bishop reads through the whole of that discourse."⁴

The tradition that this was the place of the Our Father was confirmed by later witnesses and has been maintained unbroken to this day. Of the ancient buildings and mediaeval restorations, nothing but ruins remain. In 1872, during the Ottoman period, a French Carmelite community was established on this site, and they built the present church and the priory next to it. After the First World War, in 1920, building work began on a new basilica to be raised over the cave, dedicated to the Sacred Heart. However, after demolishing one wing of the priory and working on the original crypt the building works were interrupted, and have not been resumed.

Entrance to the church of the Eleona is on the Bethphage road. On the right is a flourishing garden, on the spot where the portico of the Byzantine basilica once stood. On the left, a flight of steps leads down to the priory of the Discalced Carmelites, with the church behind it. In the center, beneath the sanctuary of the unfinished basilica, lies the grotto of the Our Father. It is a small space, with a double entrance, reminiscent of the Basilica of the Nativity, dating from the time of the Crusades. It has two sections, one of which has been restored, and the other, at the back, still in a state of ruins. In this back section some graves were found that could date back to the first centuries of the Christian era.

The walls surrounding the whole shrine are covered in ceramic panels with the Our Father written on them in more than seventy languages. As we know, the traditional form of this prayer is taken from our Lord's teaching as reported by St. Matthew: **In praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:**

4. *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 33, 1–2 (CCL 175, 78).

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."⁵

The Christian's primary prayer

The Our Father is the main prayer of every Christian. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting Tertullian, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, calls it the summary of the whole Gospel, which contains and includes all our petitions, and the most perfect of prayers.⁶ It has traditionally been called the Lord's Prayer since it comes to us from our Lord: Jesus, as Teacher, gives us the words he has received from his Father; and at the same time, as our Model, he reveals to us how to pray for our needs.⁷

The Our Father was taken as the basis for all prayer from the very beginnings of the Church. It was said in the place of other traditional Jewish prayers, it was incorporated into the liturgy, and it became a necessary part of catechetical instruction in preparation for the Sacraments. In the course of the centuries the great masters of the spiritual life have composed commentaries on this prayer, unpacking the theological riches it contains. St. Teresa of Avila wrote: "In so few words, all contemplation and all perfection is contained, so that it seems that we need to study no other book, but only this one. Because here our Lord has taught us the whole method of prayer and high contemplation, from the beginnings of mental prayer, to the prayer of quiet and the prayer of union. If I may so express it, a great book of prayer could be constructed on such a truthful foundation."⁸

To say the Our Father fruitfully we should recall that: "Jesus does not give us a formula to repeat mechanically. As in every vo-

5. Mt 6:7–13.

6. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2761–2763.

7. Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 2765.

8. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, Valladolid ms, 37, 1.

cal prayer, it is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God to pray to their Father. Jesus not only gives us the words of our filial prayer; at the same time he gives us the Spirit by whom these words become in us 'spirit and life' (Jn 6:63). Even more, the proof and possibility of our filial prayer is that the Father 'sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, *Abba! Father!*' (Gal 4:6)."⁹

One way of increasing our awareness of our divine filiation — the fact that God is our Father — is to make the Our Father the subject of our conversation with God. St. Josemaria did this from time to time. Concerning some of the things that took place in his spiritual life around 1930, he wrote:

I had the custom, not infrequently, when I was young, of not using any book for my meditation. I used to recite the words of the Our Father, one by one, savouring them, and I used to dwell particularly on the consideration that God was Pater, my Father, which made me feel that I was a brother of Jesus Christ and brother to all men.

*I just couldn't get over it, astonished to contemplate the fact that I was a son of God! After each time of reflection I found my faith firmer, my hope more secure, my love more ardent. And, given that I was a child of God, there was born in my soul the necessity of being a very small child, a needy child. This was the origin of living a life of childhood in my interior life for as long as I could — for as long as I can; and this is what I have always recommended to my children, while leaving them free.*¹⁰

It's not difficult to put this advice of the founder of Opus Dei into practice, and it's even easier if we begin by asking Our Lord to enlighten us and show us how.

Let's start: *Our Father*. And we stop to think in particular about divine filiation. *God is a Father — your Father! — full of warmth and infinite love. Call him Father frequently and*

9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2766.

10. St. Josemaria, letter dated 8 December 1949, no. 41, quoted in Spanish in *Santo Rosario*, edición crítico-histórica, pp. XVI–XVII.

*tell him, when you are alone, that you love him, that you love him very much, and that you feel proud and strong because you are his son.*¹¹

Our Father, we begin again, and we realize that he is our Father, everyone's Father, and that's why we are all brothers and sisters: *Before the Lord there is no difference of nation, race, class, state... Each one of us has been born in Christ to be a new creature, a son of God. We are all brothers, and we have to behave fraternally towards one another.*¹²

Who art in heaven... and we remember that he is also in the tabernacle, and in our soul when it is in a state of grace... *Lord, you make us share in the miracle of the Eucharist. We beg you not to hide away. Live with us. May we see you, may we touch you, may we feel you. May we want to be beside you all the time, and have you as the King of our lives and of our work.*¹³ ■

11. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 331.

12. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 317.

13. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 542.

*The Church of St. Lazarus,
built in 1954, in the shape
of a mausoleum.*



MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS

Bethany

The Tomb of Lazarus

The Gospels tell us that Jesus had no place to rest his head, but they also tell us that he had many good, close friends, eager to have him stay in their homes.¹

Outstanding among those friends were Martha, Mary and Lazarus, three siblings who lived in Bethany. Although we do not know how they first met our Lord, we know that he and they were very close, that they loved each other and showed their love in deeds both great and small. How could anyone fail to be moved on recalling Martha's dialogue with Jesus as she complained about her sister?

A woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said,

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

1. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 108.



But the Lord answered her,

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.”²

Bethany was on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, three kilometres from Jerusalem. Together with Bethphage, nearby, it was the last resting-place for those travelling to Jerusalem from Jericho. In ancient times it was no more than a village, though not completely unknown: in Scripture it is mentioned under the name “Ananiah,” among the places repopulated by Benjaminites after the return from Babylon.³ The prefix “Beth-,” meaning “house of,” will have been added later, after which the name evolved into its familiar form, “Bethany.”

2. Lk 10, 38–42.

3. Cf. Neh 11:32.

Bethany in the early 20th century, taken from the north: to the left, the ruins of Christian basilicas; in the center, the mosque built over the tomb of Lazarus, with a prominent minaret; and to the right, the ruins of a tower from the Crusader period.



Bethany today seen from the northwest. In the front, the Crusader tower and the dome of an Orthodox church; in the east, the mosque and the Catholic church.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus must often have offered our Lord hospitality in their home. In particular, during the days leading up to the Passion, from Palm Sunday to Jesus' arrest. During that week, since Bethany was so close to Jerusalem, he must have gone back and forth between the two every day (the road is now blocked), over the Mount of Olives. At night he would recoup his energy in the company of his friends and disciples. At one point, Mary was the main character in an event of which our Lord said, **wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.**⁴ This took place, not in their house, but

4. Mk 14:9; cf. Mt 26:13.



The façade of the church is decorated with mosaics.

in the house of one of their neighbours, Simon, known as “Simon the leper.”

There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said,

“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it.

Jesus said, “Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”⁵

Bethany is famous not only because our Lord stayed there on several occasions, but especially because of the amazing miracle he worked there: the raising of Lazarus. From the earliest times of Christianity the tomb of Jesus’ friend Lazarus was a focus of devotion, and in the fourth century a shrine was built there. The Byzantine name for the place, “to Lazarion,” was at the root of the Arabic name for Bethany, Al-Azariya or Al-Eizariya. All traces of the house itself, however, have disappeared.

Archaeological excavations have revealed some of the features of the Byzantine shrine. Modelled on other churches of those times such as the Holy Sepulchre, it was made up of a basilica on the eastern side, the monument over the place that was venerated on the western side, and a courtyard between the two. The basilica had a central nave and two lateral aisles, separated by pillars with Corinthian capitals, and paved with rich mosaics. It appears to have been destroyed by an earthquake. At the end of the fifth century or beginning of the sixth, another church was built, using part of the foundations of the original one, but shifting the whole structure of the church towards the east. This church survived until the time of the Crusades, when it was restored and embellished. Also in the twelfth century, a new basilica was built over the tomb of Lazarus, which, being a cave dug out of the rock, now became a crypt. Additionally, on the initiative of Queen Melisande, an abbey of Benedictine nuns was founded there.

This complex of buildings changed between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when a mosque was built in the area of the courtyard and tomb, and Christian pilgrims were generally prevented from entering. Between 1566 and 1575, the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land managed to gain access to the tomb of Lazarus, but they had to open up a new way to it by digging a passage of steps down from the outer perimeter of the zone. This tunnel is still used today, although the site continues to be owned by Muslims.

5. Jn 12:2–8; cf. Mt 26:6–13 and Mk 14:3–9.



NICOLAE PINA / PANORAMIO



LIDIAN STREDELLA / CTS

The dome creates a strong contrast between light and darkness. On the left, above the chancel, a mosaic portrays Jesus meeting Mary and Martha before the resurrection of Lazarus.

On the eastern side, on the remains of the Byzantine basilicas, the Custody built the present church in 1954. It takes the form of a mausoleum, with its outline in the shape of a Greek cross, and an octagonal cupola surmounted by a dome. Each of the arms of the cross is adorned with a rounded mosaic, representing the most significant Gospel scenes connected with Bethany: the dialogue between Martha and Jesus; the two sisters receiving him after the death of Lazarus; the raising of Lazarus; and the dinner in the house of Simon. The construction of the church produces a striking contrast between the semi-darkness of the church and the light that floods the cupola, symbolizing death and hope of resurrection.

Blessed Alvaro was in Bethany on Sunday, March 20, 1994. He prayed in the morning in the Sanctuary of St. Lazarus, and he also was able to see the tomb from the outside.

I am the Resurrection and the Life

“Jesus is the Son who from all eternity receives life from the Father (cf. Jn 5:26), and who has come among men to make them sharers in this gift: ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10:10).”⁶

God wants us to share in his life of blessedness. He is close to us, he helps us to seek him, to learn about him, and to love him, but at the same time he wants our free response, he wants us to welcome his call.⁷ The Gospel account of the raising of Lazarus contains many elements that can stir up our faith and move us to beg our Lord for the most valuable thing he can grant us: the grace of a new conversion for ourselves, and for our families, relatives and friends.

*Have you seen the affection and the confidence with which Christ’s friends treat him? In a completely natural way the sisters of Lazarus “blame” Jesus for being away: “We told you! If only you’d been here!” Speak to him with calm confidence: “Teach me to treat you with the loving friendliness of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and as the first Twelve treated you, even though at first they followed you perhaps for not very supernatural reasons.”*⁸

In Bethany we can see Christ’s love and affection, which reveals the infinite love of God the Father for every human being; and we can also see that Martha and Mary had faith that Christ could cure their brother:

Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

6. St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, 25 March 1995, no. 29

7. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1–3.

8. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 495.

But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.”

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.⁹

Our Lord knew what was going to happen, but he wanted to test the two women’s faith, show his power over death, and prepare his disciples for his own resurrection by raising Lazarus from the dead. And so he allowed Lazarus to die before he set out for Bethany.

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.¹⁰

9. Jn 11:2–6.

10. Jn 11:17–30.



The entrance to the tomb of Lazarus is located in the east-west street which passes the mosque and church. Twenty-four steps lead to a hallway where, through a narrow opening in the floor, more steps give access to the burial chamber.

With the same trust as Martha when she reproached Jesus for his absence, Mary also addressed her lament to him, but expressed her faith not only in words but in a sign of adoration:

Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, “Where have you laid him?”

They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”



Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me."

When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."¹¹

St. Josemaria used this story, and other stories in the Gospel like it, to make us realize that in order to have a deep and real friendship with Jesus, we can never give up:

When you have fallen or when you find yourself overwhelmed by the weight of your wretchedness, repeat with a firm hope: Lord, see how ill I am; come and heal me, Lord, you who died on the Cross for love of me.

*Be full of confidence. Keep on calling out to his most loving Heart. He will cure you, as he cured the lepers we read about in the Gospel.*¹²

In our friendly, confiding conversation with Jesus, we will also need to persevere in petition.

We should not be depressed by our falls, not even by serious falls, if we go to God in the sacrament of penance contrite and resolved to improve. A Christian is not a neurotic collector of good behavior reports. Jesus Christ Our Lord was moved as much by Peter's repentance after his fall as by John's innocence and faithfulness. Jesus understands

11. Jn 11:32-44.

12. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 213.

*our weakness and draws us to himself on an inclined plane. He wants us to make an effort to climb a little each day. He seeks us out, just as he did the disciples of Emmaus, whom he went out to meet. He sought Thomas, showed himself to him and made him touch with his fingers the open wounds in his hands and side. Jesus Christ is always waiting for us to return to him; he knows our weakness.*¹³ ■

13. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 75.



ALFONSO PUERTAS

The roof of the Dominus Flevit church is meant to represent a tear. A large window in the apse looks out over the Old City of Jerusalem, from which the Dome of the Rock, the cupola of the Holy Sepulchre, and the tower of the Franciscan convent of St. Savior — the seat of the Custody of the Holy Land — are all visible.

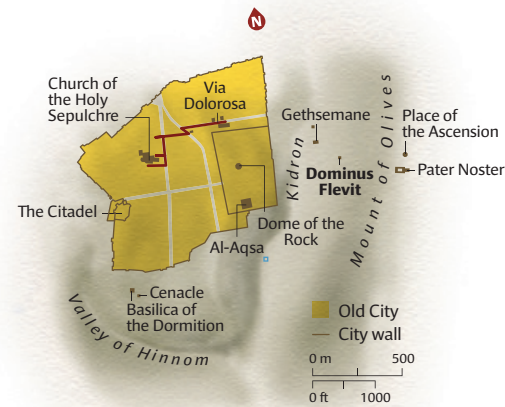


LEOBARD HINELAR

He saw the city and wept

The Passion of Jesus is an inexhaustible source of life. Sometimes we renew the joyous impulse that took Our Lord to Jerusalem. Other times, the pain of the agony which ended on Calvary... Or the glory of his triumph over death and sin. But always, the love — joyful, sorrowful, glorious — of the Heart of Jesus Christ.¹

1. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 14th Station, no. 3.



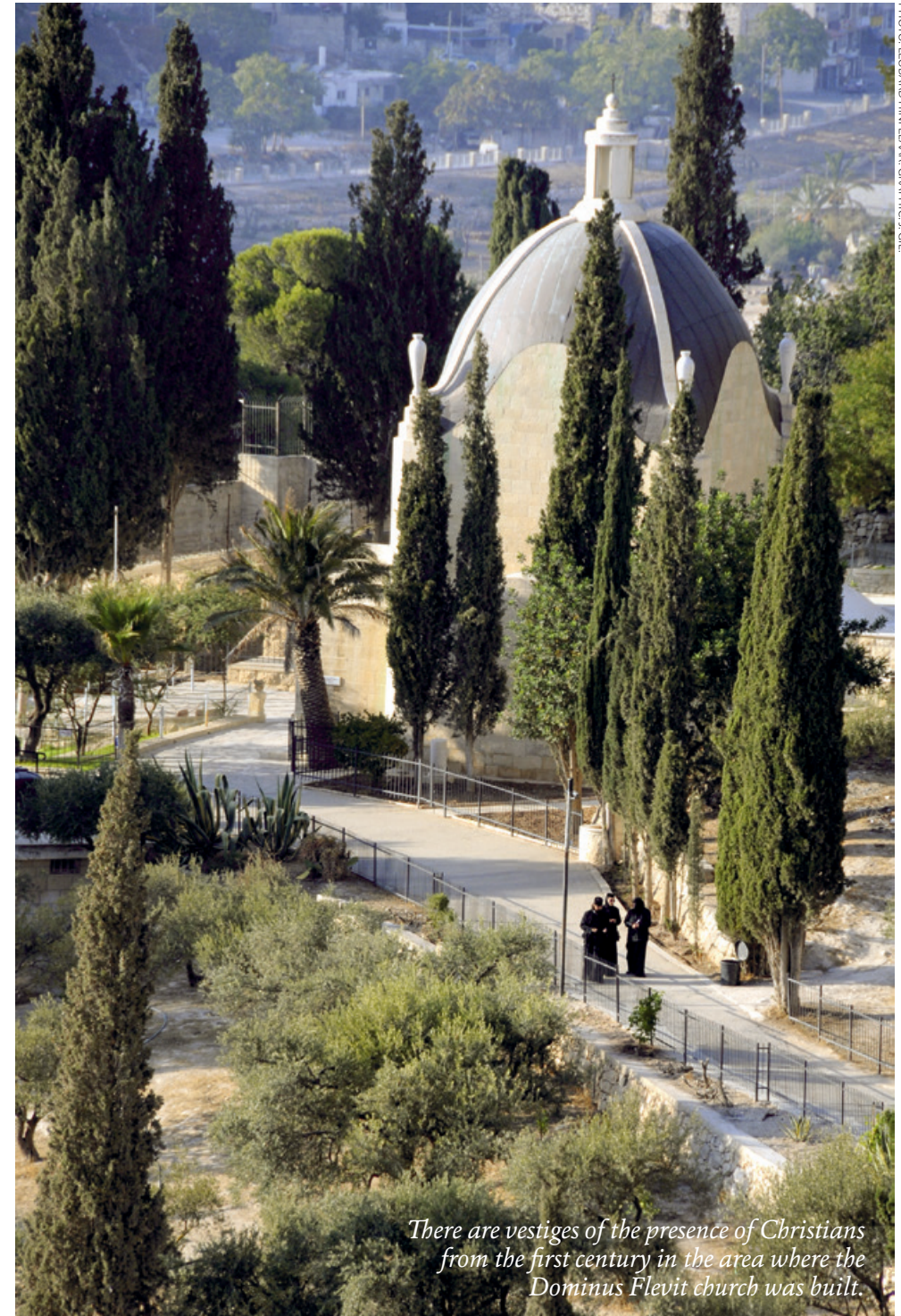
Present-day Jerusalem

We contemplate Jesus' infinite love from the very first instants of the Paschal mystery, when he was getting ready to make his Messianic entrance into Jerusalem, the City of David, along the road from Bethany and Bethphage. The Evangelists relate how he sent two of his disciples into a nearby village, and they brought a donkey and mounted our Lord on it. And as he was coming down the side of the Mount of Olives, among the multitude all praising God, when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying,

“Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.”²

Our Lord's lament over Jerusalem is commemorated in the church of Dominus Flevit (Latin for “the Lord wept”), which stands on the east side of the Mount of Olives. It is a small church built by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land in 1955, on land belonging to the Benedictine nuns whose convent stands at the top of the

2. Lk 19:41–44.



There are vestiges of the presence of Christians from the first century in the area where the Dominus Flevit church was built.



WHISINGBONE / FLICKR

Around the dome, four reliefs represent scenes of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. On the front of the altar is the image of a hen sheltering her chicks.



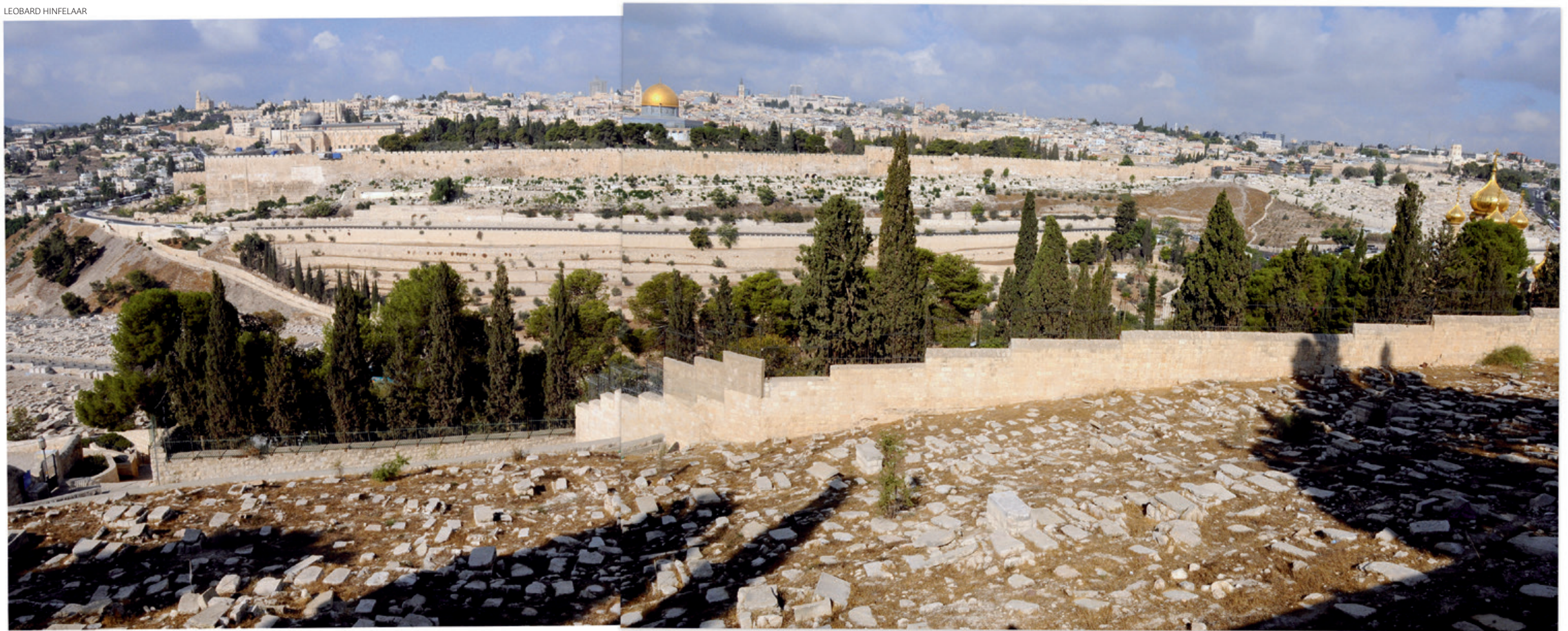
ALONSO PUERTAS

hill. Although the exact spot of the event is not known for certain, various locations having been used to commemorate it over the centuries, the site of the present church preserves traces of Christian presence dating back to the first centuries. Archaeological excavations conducted between 1953 and 1955 revealed a necropolis with a hundred tombs, ranging from the Bronze Age down to the Roman, Herodian and Byzantine periods, and the remains of a chapel and monastery which can be dated to the seventh century by their mosaic floorings.

The church of Dominus Flevit is reached by a steep road leading from Gethsemane to the top of the Mount of Olives. Most of the hillside, which was known as Valley of Jehoshaphat in biblical times,³ is occupied by Jewish cemeteries. A path lined with cypresses, olive-trees and palm-trees leads from the entrance of the Franciscan property to the church. Outside, items discovered in the archaeological excavations are on display. The plan of the church is in the form of a Greek cross, and it is surmounted by a dome with pointed arches. It faces west and has a large window at the side of

3. Cf. J1 4:2 and 12.

LEOBARD HINFELAAR



the apse, with a view over the Holy City. It offers pilgrims the same panorama Jesus would have seen as he came down the road from Bethphage. On the walls are four relief carvings of scenes connected with Christ's entry into Jerusalem as Messiah. A mosaic picture of a hen with her chickens on the front of the altar recalls another of our Lord's laments:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and

you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."⁴

The view of the old part of Jerusalem from the edge of the property is magnificent, especially in the early morning, when the sun's rays light up the stone of the buildings. Immediately below is the Kidron brook which separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Ol-

4. Mt 23:37–39; cf. Lk 13:34–35.

ives; on the eastern slope lie the Jewish cemeteries, and on the western slope, next to the wall, the Muslim ones; opposite is the courtyard of the former temple, now the plateau of the mosques, with the golden Dome of the Rock in the middle and the Al-Aqsa on the left; behind them, the domes of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre and, a little further away on the right, the tall tower of St. Saviour's Monastery, where the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land is based; to the south of the wall are the archaeological excavations at Ophel and the ancient site of the City of David; further along, among trees, is the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu; and far away, on the line of the horizon, the Basilica and Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition, on Mount Zion.

During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1994, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo prayed in the Dominus Flevit Church in the morning of March 18, after celebrating Mass in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

Our Lord's lament

"Jesus' entry into Jerusalem manifests the coming of the kingdom that the Messiah-King, welcomed into his city by children and the humble of heart, is going to accomplish by the Passover of his Death and Resurrection."⁵

The crowd of Jesus' disciples seeing the prophecies fulfilled and thinking that the Kingdom was about to appear before their eyes, accompanied Jesus with rejoicing. "Crowds, celebrating, praise, blessing, peace: joy fills the air. Jesus has awakened great hopes, especially in the hearts of the simple, the humble, the poor, the forgotten, those who do not matter in the eyes of the world. He understands human sufferings, he has shown the face of God's mercy, and he has bent down to heal body and soul. This is Jesus. This is his heart which looks to all of us, to our sicknesses, to our sins. The love of Jesus is great. And thus he enters Jerusalem, with this love, and looks at us. It is a beautiful scene, full of light — the light of the love of Jesus, the love of his heart — of joy, of celebration."⁶

5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 570.

6. Pope Francis, Palm Sunday Homily, 24 March 2013.



LEONARD HINELAAR

Various 1st and 2nd century tombs with ossuaries that have Christian inscriptions have been found in the ancient necropolis.



ALFONSO PUERTAS

At the same time, this rejoicing is disturbed by our Lord's lament. The way he came to the Holy City riding on a donkey colt was like a final appeal to the people. Zachary, in his prayer *Benedictus*, had spoken of the time when through the tender mercy of our God, the dawning sun will visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.⁷ But Jerusalem, which had witnessed so many signs and miracles worked by our Lord, could not recognize that he was the Messiah and the Saviour. In *The Way of the Cross* St. Josemaria wrote of the terrible contrast between Jesus' giving and men's rejection:

He came to save the world, and his own denied him before Pilate.

He showed us the path to goodness, and they drag him along the way to Calvary.

He gave example in everything he did, and they prefer a thief convicted of murder.

He was born to forgive, and — without cause — they condemn him to the gallows.

He came along the paths of peace, and they declare war on him.

He was the Light, and they hand him over to the powers of darkness.

He brought Love, and they repay him with hatred.

He came to be King, and they crown him with thorns.

He became a slave to free us from sin, and they nail him to the Cross.

He took flesh to give us Life, and we reward him with death.⁸

The realization that Jesus is still visiting his people today, that he is our Saviour, that he teaches us through the preaching of the Church, that he gives us his forgiveness and grace in the Sacraments, should impel each of us to look at the way we respond.

7. Lk 1:78–79.

8. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 13th Station, no. 1.

Do you want to know how to thank Our Lord for all he has done for us?... With love! There is no other way. Love is with love repaid. But the real proof of affection is given by sacrifice. So, take courage!: deny yourself and take up his Cross. Then you will be sure you are returning him love for Love.⁹ ■

9. Ibid., 5th Station, no. 1.

Jerusalem: in the Upper Room

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.¹ These solemn words of St. John, which are so familiar to us, take us straight into the intimate gathering in the Upper Room, or Cenacle.

Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?² the disciples had asked. Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder, “The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?” And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.³

1. Jn 13:1.

2. Mk 14:12.

3. Mk 14:13–15.



MAURO GOTTARDO / CTS

The room of the Cenacle retains its Gothic architecture which was restored in the 14th century. The construction along the wall on the left and the small dome above the stairs are from the Muslim era.

We know the events that took place after this, during our Lord's Last Supper with his disciples: the institution of the Blessed Eucharist and the ordination of the Apostles as priests of the New Covenant; the argument between them over who was the greatest; the prophecy of Judas' betrayal, of the disciples' desertion and of Peter's denials; the teaching of the New Commandment and the washing of the disciples' feet; the farewell discourse, and Jesus' priestly prayer. The Cenacle would deserve to be venerated simply because of what happened within its walls on that evening; but as well as all this, the risen Lord twice appeared to the Apostles who had locked themselves in there for fear of the Jews.⁴ The second time our Lord appeared Thomas made up for his refusal to believe, with an act of faith in Jesus' divinity: **My Lord and my God!**⁵ The Acts of the Apostles also tell us that the new-born Church met in the Cenacle, the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.⁶ In that room, on the day of Pentecost, they received the Holy Spirit, who impelled them to go out and preach the Good News.

The Evangelists give no details of where exactly this Upper Room was, but tradition places it in the south-west corner of Jerusalem, on a hill that was given the name Zion only in the Christian era. Zion had originally been the name of the Jebusite fortress conquered by King David; afterwards, of the Temple Mount, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept; and later, in the Psalms and Prophetic Books of the Bible, of the whole city and its inhabitants. After the Babylonian Exile, the name "Zion" took on an eschatological and messianic significance: the place from which our salvation would come. Taking up this spiritual meaning, when the Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, the early Christian community gave the name Zion to the hill

4. Cf. Jn 20, 19–29.

5. Jn 20, 28.

6. Acts 1:13–14.

where the Cenacle was located, because of its connection with the birth of the Church.

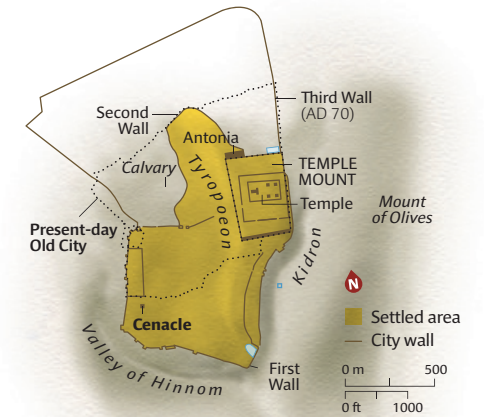
We have a witness to this tradition in St. Epiphanius of Salamis, who lived at the end of the fourth century. He was a monk in Palestine and a Bishop in Cyprus. He relates that the Emperor Hadrian, when he journeyed to the East in the year 138, "saw the entire city [Jerusalem] levelled to the ground, and the Temple of God ruined, except for a few houses and for the small church of God, which stood where the Disciples, who returned after the Saviour ascended from the Mount of Olives, went up to the upper chamber. For there it was built, that is in the part of 'Zion' that escaped the devastation; and [there were] parts of houses around 'Zion' itself and seven synagogues, which stood alone in 'Zion' merely as huts, of which one survived to the time of Maximonas the Bishop and the Emperor Constantine."⁷

This corroborates other testimonies from the fourth century, such as that passed on by Eusebius of Caesarea, who lists twenty-nine Bishops of the See of Zion from the time of the Apostles until his own lifetime; the "Pilgrim of Bordeaux," who saw the last of the seven synagogues; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who refers to the upper church which recalled the descent of the Holy Spirit; and the pilgrim Egeria or Aetheria, who describes a liturgy that was celebrated there to commemorate the appearances of the risen Lord.

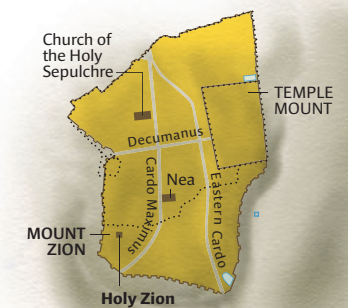
From various historical, liturgical and archaeological sources, we learn that during the second half of the fourth century the little church was replaced by a great basilica called Holy Zion, and considered the mother of all churches. As well as the Cenacle, this basilica included the site of the Dormition of our Lady, which tradition locates in a house nearby; it also held the pillar of the Scourging and the relics of St. Stephen, and on December 26 a commemoration was held there of King David and of St. James, first Bishop of Jerusalem. Little is known of the layout of this basilica; it was burned down by the Persians in the seventh century, restored later on, and destroyed again by the Arabs.

7. St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *On Weights and Measures*, 14.

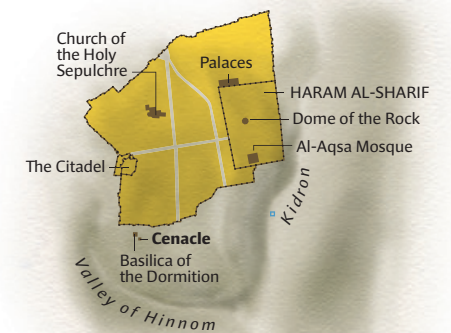
PHOTO: ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM. GRAPHICS: J. GIL



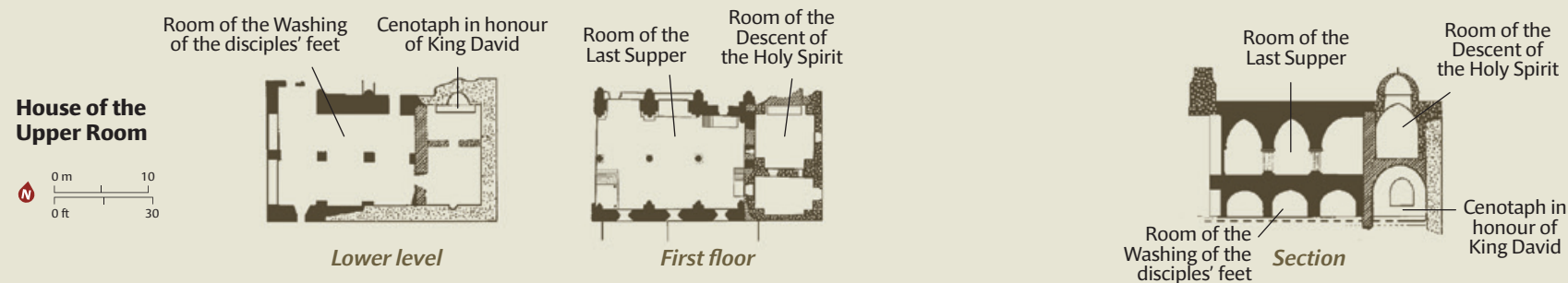
Destruction of the Second Temple (AD 70)



Byzantium (AD 313-638)



Ottoman Empire (AD 1516-1917)





SHAYAMAMSTVALOV / FLICKR

The cenotaph in honor of King David. Usually covered with a carpet, it stands in a room divided into two zones, one for men and one for women.

When the crusaders reached the Holy Land in the twelfth century, they rebuilt the basilica and named it Our Lady of Mount Zion. In the south nave of the basilica was the Cenacle, which still had two storeys, each divided into two chapels: those on the upper storey were dedicated to the institution of the Blessed Eucharist and the Descent of the Holy Spirit; those on the lower, to the Washing of the Feet and the appearances of the risen Christ. On this level, too, was a cenotaph (a funeral monument not containing the body of the deceased person) in honour of King David. After Jerusalem was re-conquered by Saladin in 1187 the basilica was not harmed, and pilgrimages and worship were still allowed. However, this situation did not last long; in 1244, the basilica was finally demolished, leaving only the Cenacle, whose remnants survive to this day.

The Gothic room that stands on the site today dates back to the fourteenth century, built by the Franciscans who gained ownership of the site in 1342. Seven years previously, the friars had taken charge of the shrine and had built a friary on the south side of it. In 1342 the Custody of the Holy Land was constituted by a papal bull, and they were granted guardianship of the Holy Sep-

MAURO GOTTARDO / CTS



View of the entrance to the Cenacle from the stairs of the hall of Pentecost. Below, two signs of Christianity: a decorated capital with the Eucharistic symbol of the pelican, and a keystone with a sculpted lamb.



ILDA LADEIRA / FLICKR



ALFRED DRIESSEN



MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS

JASON HARMAN / FLICKR



ALFRED DRIESSEN

On the upper left, the room which commemorates the Descent of the Holy Spirit, open only a few days a year to the public, including on Pentecost. In the lower left photo, taken from the main entrance, the staircase and door which lead to this room are visible. The photo above shows part of the cloisters of the 14th century Franciscan friary; the three windows of the Cenacle can be seen on the first-floor level.

ulchre and the Cenacle by the King of Naples, who had acquired them in his turn from the Sultan of Egypt. Not without difficulty, the Franciscans lived in Zion for more than two centuries, until they were expelled by the Turkish authorities in 1551. Before that, in 1524, the Cenacle had been taken from them and turned into a mosque by the Muslims, who argued that it was the burial-place of King David, whom they venerated as a prophet. This situation continued until 1948, when it passed into the hands of the State of Israel, which still administers the site.

The Cenacle is reached via a neighbouring building, through an enclosed stairway and across an open-air terrace. The Cenacle itself is about 15 meters by 10 meters, almost empty of adornments or furnishings. Several pilasters in the walls and two central columns topped by re-used ancient capitals, support a vaulted ceiling. The ceiling bosses still show ancient relief carvings of animals; the



OPUS DEI INFORMATION OFFICE

Blessed Alvaro, Bishop Javier Echevarria, and Msgr. Joaquín Alonso in the Church of the Cenacle on March 22, 1994.

clearest is that of a lamb. Some additions are obvious, such as the construction put up in 1920 for Islamic prayer, which blocks one of the three windows, or a Turkish-era baldachin over the stairs leading to the lower level; it is supported by a slender pillar whose capital is clearly Christian, since it bears the Eucharistic motif of the pelican feeding her young. The left wall preserves some traces of the Byzantine era. Through a stairway and a door, pilgrims

may go up to the little room where the Descent of the Holy Spirit is commemorated. On the side opposite the entrance is a doorway to another terrace, which in turn leads to a flat roof overlooking the cloister of the fourteenth-century Franciscan friary.

At present, worship is not permitted in the Cenacle. The only exceptions have been Saint Pope John Paul II, who was granted the privilege of celebrating Holy Mass in the room on March 23, 2000, and Pope Francis, who did the same on May 26, 2014. When Pope Benedict XVI travelled to Jerusalem in May 2009, he said the *Regina cœli* there with the Ordinaries of the Holy Land. Many Jews go to pray at the cenotaph on the lower level, which is venerated as the tomb of King David.

There is still a Christian presence on Mount Zion, in the Basilica of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, which includes a Benedictine abbey, and in the Convent of St. Francis. The Basilica of the Dormition was built in 1910 on a site acquired by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany; the high, narrow dome of the Basilica can be seen from many parts of the city. The Franciscan convent, founded in 1936, contains the *Cenacolino* or Church of the Cenacle, which is the Catholic church closest to the Upper Room itself.

It was in this church that Blessed Alvaro celebrated the last Mass of his life on the morning of March 22, 1994. That day, the first successor of St. Josemaria was deeply recollected in prayer, and Bishop Javier Echevarria remembers:

“I was struck by the extraordinary reverence with which he vested for Mass: he was focused, but also seemed deeply moved. He kissed his pectoral cross very earnestly before he put the chasuble on. Then he picked up and put on his skullcap with deep devotion before going out.”⁸

Only a few members of the Work attended the Mass, but Bishop Echevarria stated that “he celebrated that Mass with everyone in mind.” He continued:

“He was clearly thinking about the institution of the Eucharist and the institution of the priesthood, because he celebrated the

8. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, p. 391 (AGP, library, P01).

Mass with a deep piety. You could also see that he was tired, physically worn out, though maybe it was also due to the emotion of being in that place.

“I can assure you that he lived those moments intensely, deeply in love with Our Lord. He also thought about how the Apostles sat together with the Virgin Mary in the Cenacle, and how it was from there that Peter went out to preach to the world after the coming of the Holy Spirit.”⁹

The institution of the Eucharist

*Let us now consider the Master and his disciples gathered together in the intimacy of the Upper Room. The time of his Passion is drawing close and he is surrounded by those he loves. The fire in the Heart of Christ bursts into flame in a way no words can express.*¹⁰ He had been longing ardently for the arrival of this Passover,¹¹ the most important of the yearly Jewish feasts, when they re-lived their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It was linked to another celebration, that of the Unleavened Bread, in memory of the bread baked without leaven that the people had eaten during their hasty flight. Although the main ceremony of the celebrations consisted of a family meal, it was one with strong religious overtones: it “was a remembrance of the past, but at the same time a prophetic remembrance, the proclamation of a deliverance yet to come.”¹²

During this celebration, the key moment was the Passover narrative, the *Pesach Haggadah*. It began with a question put to the father by the youngest in the family:

“What makes this night different from all other nights?”

This gave rise to the narration of the escape from Egypt. The head of the family spoke in the first person, to symbolize the fact that they were not only recalling these events but that they became

9. Ibid., pp. 391–392.

10. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 222.

11. Cf. Lk 22:15.

12. Pope Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 10.

present in the ritual. At the end, the great song of praise was sung, comprising Psalms 113 and 114, and the *Haggadah* cup of wine was drunk. Then the meal was blessed, beginning with the unleavened bread. The person who presided took it and gave a little to each of the others, with the meat of the lamb.

Once the meal had been eaten, the dishes were removed and everyone washed their hands, to continue the ceremony. The solemn conclusion began with the cup of blessings, a cup containing wine mixed with water. Before drinking it the person presiding rose to his feet and recited a long prayer of thanksgiving.

On celebrating the Last Supper with his Apostles in the context of the Passover meal, Jesus transformed the Jewish Passover and gave it “its definitive meaning. Jesus’ passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.”¹³ *When Our Lord instituted the Eucharist during the last supper, night had already fallen. [...] The world had fallen into darkness, for the old rites, the old signs of God’s infinite mercy to mankind, were going to be brought to fulfillment. The way was opening to a new dawn — the new pasch. The Eucharist was instituted during that night, preparing in advance for the morning of the resurrection.*¹⁴

In the intimate family gathering in the Cenacle, Jesus did something surprising, totally unheard of. Taking bread, he gave thanks, broke it and said:

“This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”¹⁵

His words expressed the radical newness of this Passover meal with respect to all those that had gone before. When he passed the unleavened bread to his Apostles, he did not give them mere bread, but a different reality: **this is my Body**. “In the broken bread,

13. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1340.

14. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 155.

15. Lk 22:19.

the Lord distributes himself. [...] Giving thanks and praise, Jesus transforms the bread, he no longer gives earthly bread, but communion with himself.”¹⁶ And at the same time as he instituted the Eucharist, he gave his Apostles the power to perpetuate it, through the priesthood.

With the chalice too, Jesus did something quite unique: And likewise with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”¹⁷

Considering this mystery, St. John Paul II asked, “What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes ‘to the end’ (cf. Jn 13:1), a love which knows no measure. This aspect of the universal charity of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is based on the words of the Saviour himself. In instituting it, he did not merely say: ‘This is my body’, ‘this is my blood’, but went on to add: ‘which is given for you’, ‘which is poured out for you’ (Lk 22:19–20). Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed its sacrificial meaning and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all.”¹⁸

Benedict XVI, speaking to the Ordinaries of the Holy Land in the very place of the Last Supper, taught: “In the Upper Room the mystery of grace and salvation, of which we are recipients and also heralds and ministers, can be expressed only in terms of love.”¹⁹ This is the Love of God, who loved us first and has remained really present in the Blessed Eucharist; and our love in response, which leads us to give ourselves generously to God and other people.

I cannot see how anyone could live as a Christian and not feel the need for the constant friendship of Jesus in the word and in the bread, in prayer and in the Eucharist. And I easily understand the ways in which successive generations of faithful have expressed their love for the Eucharist,

16. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass in *Cena Domini*, 9 April 2009.

17. Lk 22:20.

18. St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 April 2003, nos. 11–12.

19. Pope Benedict XVI, *Regina caeli* with the Ordinaries of the Holy Land, 12 May 2009.

both with public devotions making profession of the faith and with silent, simple practices in the peace of a church or the intimacy of their hearts.

The important thing is that we should love the Mass and make it the center of our day. If we attend Mass well, surely we are likely to think about Our Lord during the rest of the day, wanting to be always in his presence, ready to work as he worked and love as he loved. And so we learn to thank Our Lord for his kindness in not limiting his presence to the time of the sacrifice of the altar. He has decided to stay with us in the host which is reserved in the tabernacle.

*For me the tabernacle has always been a Bethany, a quiet and pleasant place where Christ resides. A place where we can tell him about our worries, our sufferings, our desires, our joys, with the same sort of simplicity and naturalness as Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. That is why I rejoice when I come across a church — even if I can only see the silhouette in the distance — as I make my way through the streets of an unfamiliar town or city; it’s another tabernacle, another opportunity for the soul to escape and join in intention Our Lord in the Sacrament.*²⁰ ■

20. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 154.



Gethsemane

The Agony in the Garden

When God's appointed time comes to save mankind from the slavery of sin, we contemplate Jesus Christ in Gethsemane, suffering in agony to the point of sweating blood (cf. Lk 22:44). He spontaneously and unconditionally accepts the sacrifice which the Father is asking of him.¹

1. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 25.

The rock where, according to tradition, our Lord lay prostrate in prayer, in the center of the Basilica of the Agony. The central apse depicts the Agony in the Garden.



The Gospel accounts have told us where Jesus went after the Last Supper: He went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives,² on the other side of the Kidron brook,³ and with his Apostles, came to the place called Gethsemane.⁴ It was a garden or orchard where there was an oil-press (this is the meaning of the name Gethsemane), and it was outside the city walls of Jerusalem, to the east of the city, on the way to Bethany.

This particular place must have been well known, because Jesus often met his disciples there.⁵ It is not surprising that the first Christians preserved the memory of where these transcendent events in the history of our salvation had taken place. In the Garden of Olives, seeing the imminence of his Passion, soon to be set in motion by Judas' betrayal, Jesus our Lord warned us of the need to pray: He said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them,

"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch."

And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said,

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt."⁶

His crushing sorrow was so great that there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling upon the ground.⁷ Christ's prayer is in contrast with the Apostles' behaviour. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow. And he said to them,

2. Lk 22:39.

3. Jn 18:1.

4. Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32.

5. Jn 18:2.

6. Mk 14:32–36.

7. Lk 22:43–44.

"Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."⁸

Jesus went back to his companions three times, and each time he found them heavy with sleep. The last time, it was too late: "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs.⁹ With a kiss he betrayed our Lord, who was arrested, while the disciples abandoned him and fled.

We know from the pilgrim Egeria that in the second half of the fourth century a liturgical ceremony was celebrated on Holy Thursday "in the place where the Lord prayed," and that there was "a beautiful church" there.¹⁰ The faithful came into the church, prayed, sang hymns and listened to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' agony in the garden. Then they went in procession to another part of Gethsemane where our Lord's Arrest was recalled.¹¹

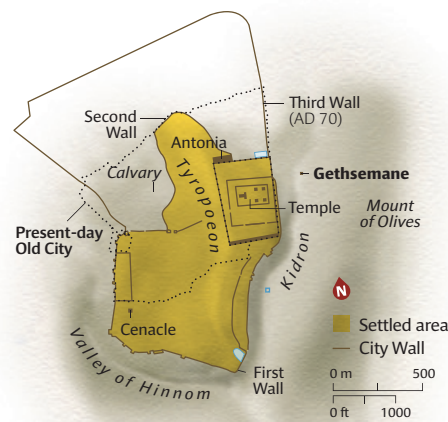
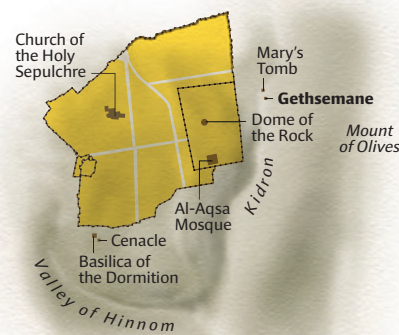
Following this tradition, and other equally ancient ones, today three places are venerated as being connected with the events of that night: the rock where our Lord prayed; a garden that has eight olive-trees that could be at least a thousand years old, as well as younger ones; and a grotto reputed to be the place of the Arrest. The three locations are barely a dozen yards apart, at the lowest part of the Mount of Olives, almost at the bottom of the Kidron valley, surrounded by picturesque scenery: this brook, like most of the *wadis* of Palestine, is a dry valley for most of the year, filled only by the winter rains. The lower slopes of the mountain, unlike the top, are sparsely inhabited, because much of the land has been used for cemeteries. There are plentiful olive-trees, usually on terraced land, and also cypresses along the roadways.

8. Ibid., 45–46.

9. Mk 14:41–43.

10. *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 36, 1 (CCL 175, 79).

11. Cf. Ibid., 2–3 (CCL 175, 79–80).

*Jerusalem in AD 70**Present-day Old City*

The Basilica of the Agony

The rock on which tradition relates that our Lord fell to pray is located within the Basilica of the Agony, or the Church of All Nations. It was given this second name because sixteen countries collaborated in building it between 1922 and 1924. It follows the plan of a Byzantine-era church of which little more than the foundations survived, because it was destroyed by fire, possibly before the seventh century. It was about 25 by 16 yards in size, had a nave and two side-aisles, with three apses, and mosaic designs on the floors. Some fragments of the mosaics sur-

DIEGO DELSO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



The Basilica of Agony is also called the Church of All Nations because the cost of its construction was taken on by 16 countries. On the right, the mosaics of the cupolas suggest a starry sky seen through the branches of the trees.

vive, now protected by glass. When the modern church was built, traces were found of a mediaeval church too. It was built in the times of the Crusades on the same spot as the original basilica, but was larger and faced the southwest, suggesting that the builders did not know about the older church. This one was abandoned after the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin.

From the Kidron valley one sees the wide atrium of the front of the Basilica, with its three arches supported by clusters of pillars and pilasters. Above the arches is a mosaic representing Christ as Mediator between God and man. On sunny days the brilliant exterior forms a strong contrast with the dim light inside: the light enters through windows of violet-coloured glass, and its quiet tones recall Jesus' hours of agony, and dispose pilgrims for silence, recollection and contemplation. The ceiling's twelve domes, supported in the center of the church by six slim pillars, reinforce this sensation by their mosaics representing a dark, starry sky.

In the sanctuary, in front of the altar, the piece of rock, venerated as the place of our Lord's agony, rises above the level of the rest

BENJAMIN E. WOOD / FLICKR



of the floor. It is surrounded by a railing designed to represent the crown of thorns. Behind it, in the central apse, is a mosaic showing Jesus' agony in the garden; the mosaics in the side apses represent the betrayal by Judas and the Arrest.

The Garden of Olives

The ground on which the Basilica is built has belonged to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land since the mid-17th century. When it was acquired, its most striking feature, apart from the mediaeval and Byzantine ruins, was the flower garden: an uncultivated area surrounded by a wall, where eight olive-trees were growing which local tradition claimed



The eight most ancient olive trees of Gethsemane may date back to the first millennium. On the left, a branch Blessed Alvaro brought as a souvenir, which is preserved in Villa Tevere. On the next page, Blessed Alvaro leans over to kiss the rock on which, according to tradition, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane.



to date back to the time of Christ. While the Franciscans waited for the right time to rebuild the church, they protected these ancient olive-trees, which were undoubtedly linked to local Christian tradition, so that these trees have survived to the present day.

They are impressively old in appearance. Botanists who have studied them disagree on their age; some maintain they were planted in the eleventh century, all being grafts from the same branch; and others say that their immense girth could date them back to the first millennium. However old they are, they are worth preserving in memory of those silent witnesses of Jesus and the last night of his life on earth.

ALFRED DRIESSEN



The Grotto of the Arrest

The site of the Basilica of the Agony and the Garden of Gethsemane also includes a Franciscan monastery. Outside the enclosure, several yards to the north, is the Grotto of the Arrest, which also belongs to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. It is reached via a narrow passage starting from the entrance courtyard of the Assumption of the Virgin. (This shrine of Mary will be the subject of a separate article, together with the Basilica of the Dormition on Mount Zion. For the time being it is enough to note that according to some traditions, our Lady's body was taken there from the area of the Cenacle before her Assumption. The church is shared by the Greek, Armenian, Syrian and Coptic communities.)

Views of the passageway leading from the courtyard of Mary's Tomb to the Grotto of the Arrest or of the Apostles, show below. There is evidence that Christian worship has continued uninterruptedly here through the centuries.



ELIAM GIL / FLICKR



ENRIQUE BERNEDO / CTS

The Grotto of the Arrest is about 19 yards long by 10 yards wide. Some archaeological traces suggest that it was used as a temporary living-space or a storage space by the owner of the garden. It is believed that eight of the Apostles rested here on the night of Jesus' arrest. After the hours of his agony and prayer in the garden, when our Lord saw Judas approaching, he is said to have come here with the other three Apostles to warn them what was about to happen. Therefore it would be from this part of Gethsemane that he went out to meet the soldiers.

Many graffiti, scratched or carved by pilgrims in different languages on the plaster of the walls and ceiling, witness to almost uninterrupted veneration in this place. In the fourth century, the cave or grotto was already being used as a chapel, and its floor had been decorated with mosaics. From the fifth to the seventh centuries, it was the site of Christian burials. In the times of the Crusades, it was adorned with frescoes. Starting in the fourteenth century the Franciscans obtained the rights to hold certain acts of worship there, and finally they obtained ownership of it. A restoration project carried out in 1956 brought to light the original structure, with a wine-press and a cistern; above the grotto, in the same enclosure, the remains of an ancient olive-press were also found.

Blessed Alvaro in Gethsemane

Blessed Alvaro was in Gethsemane on the afternoon of March 18, 1994, and prayed for half an hour there in the basilica. While there, he was given some olive branches from the garden, at which he expressed his deep thanks, and he thought to send one to John Paul II for Palm Sunday, which Bishop Javier Echevarria did on that day on his behalf, since Blessed Alvaro was already in Heaven by Palm Sunday of that year. In addition, Bishop Echevarria explained, "he wanted to touch the rock of the Agony with his pectoral cross, his crucifix, and his rosary. The Lord chose a very uncomfortable place to spend that night in prayer: a rough, jagged stone which he knelt on for hours and hours, and after the exertion of that long day which had included the Last Supper. We owe the Lord our gratitude for this physical manifestation of his love for us. Praying for several hours on his



knees on that rock would not have been easy at all. We were lucky enough to do the afternoon mental prayer there.”¹²

Not my will but thine be done

There are so many Gospel scenes where Jesus talks to his Father that we cannot stop to consider them all. But I do feel we must pause to consider the intense hours preceding his Passion and Death, when Christ prepares himself to carry out the Sacrifice that will bring us back once more to God's Love. In the intimacy of the Upper Room, the Heart of Jesus overflows with love; he turns to the Father in prayer, announces the coming of the Holy Spirit, and encourages his disciples to maintain the fervor of their charity and their faith.

Our Redeemer's mood of fervent recollection continues in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he perceives that his Passion is about to begin, with all its humiliation and suffering close at hand, the harsh Cross on which criminals are hanged and which he has longed for so ardently. "Father, if it pleases thee, take away this chalice from before me"

12. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 332 and 335 (AGP, library, P01).

(Lk 22:42). *And immediately he adds, “Yet not my will but thine be done.”*¹³

If we are aware that we are God’s children, that our Christian vocation involves following the Master’s steps, our contemplation of his prayer and agony in the Garden of Olives should lead us to dialogue with God the Father. “When Jesus prays he is already teaching us how to pray.”¹⁴ And as well as being our model, he summons us to pray, just like Peter, James and John, when he took them with him and begged them to keep watch with him: *“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And Peter fell asleep. And the other apostles. And you, little friend, fell asleep... and I too was another sleepy-headed Peter.*¹⁵

There are no excuses for letting ourselves fall asleep. “We can all pray. To be more precise, we must all pray, because we have come into this world to love God, praise him, and serve him, and then, in the next world (because our life here is a temporary stay) to be happy with him for ever. And what is praying? It is simply talking with God, by means of vocal prayers or in meditation. Talking with God to learn from him, consists of looking at him, telling him about our lives — our work, joys, sufferings, tiredness, reactions, temptations. If we listen to him, we will hear him suggesting, ‘Leave that; be more friendly; work better; serve others; don’t think badly of anyone; speak sincerely and politely...’”¹⁶

Benedict XVI, in an audience in which he spoke about Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, said that we Christians, if we seek to get steadily closer to God, have the capacity to bring heaven to this earth. “‘Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ (Mt 6:10). In other words we recognize that there is a will of God with us and for us, a will of God for our life that must become every day, increasingly, the reference of our willing and of our being; we recognize moreover that ‘heaven’ is where God’s will is done and where the ‘earth’ becomes ‘heaven’, a place where love, goodness, truth and

13. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 240.

14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2607.

15. St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 1st Sorrowful Mystery.

16. Bishop Javier Echevarria, *Gethsemani: en oración con Jesucristo*, Madrid: Planeta, 2005, p. 12.

divine beauty are present, only if, on earth, God’s will is done. In Jesus’ prayer to the Father on that terrible and marvellous night in Gethsemane, the ‘earth’ became ‘heaven’; the ‘earth’ of his human will, shaken by fear and anguish, was taken up by his divine will in such a way that God’s will was done on earth. And this is also important in our own prayers: we must learn to entrust ourselves more to divine Providence, to ask God for the strength to come out of ourselves to renew our ‘yes’ to him, to say to him ‘thy will be done’, so as to conform our will to his.”¹⁷

*Jesus, alone and sad, suffers and soaks the earth with his blood. Kneeling on the hard ground, he perseveres in prayer... He weeps for you... and for me. The weight of the sins of men overwhelms him.*¹⁸

Turn to Our Lady and ask her — as a token of her love for you — for the gift of contrition. Ask that you may be sorry, with the sorrow of Love, for all your sins, and for the sins of all men and women throughout the ages.

And with that same disposition, be bold enough to add: “Mother, my life, my hope, lead me by the hand. And if there is anything in me which is displeasing to my Father God, grant that I may see it, so that, between the two of us, we may uproot it.”

*Do not be afraid to continue, saying to her: “O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary, pray for me, that by fulfilling the most lovable Will of your Son, I may be worthy to obtain and enjoy what Our Lord Jesus has promised.”*¹⁹ ■

17. Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 1 February 2012.

18. St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 1st Sorrowful Mystery.

19. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 161.

St. Peter in Gallicantu

The band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.¹

All four Evangelists describe the interrogation of Jesus by the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. It took place in the house of Caiaphas.² Two exceptional witnesses managed to get as far as this point, for Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus there. This other disciple was known to the High Priest and went into the court with Jesus. Peter, however, stayed outside at the door. Then the other disciple went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door and brought Peter in.³

1. Jn 18:12–14.

2. Cf. Mt 26:57.

3. Jn 18:15–16.

Outside the church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, a sculpture recreates the denial of the prince of the apostles.



LEOBARD HINTELAAR



During the trial there was a strong contrast between the behaviour of Jesus and Peter. Confronted with unjust accusations, unfounded charges, false witness and insults, Jesus kept silent. Then, when the time came for him to proclaim the truth, he spoke calmly. Peter, terrified by the servants, denied having anything to do with Jesus. I do not know him;⁴ I do not know what you are saying;⁵ I do not know this man.⁶

And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows

4. Lk 22:58.

5. Mt 26:70.

6. Mk 14:71.

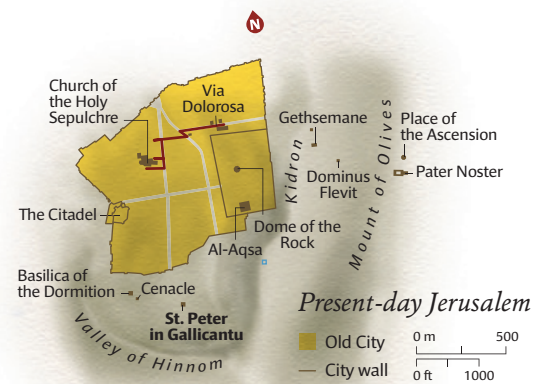
St. Peter in Gallicantu is located on the eastern slope of Mount Zion. Outside, protected by a roof, is a model of Jerusalem in Byzantine times.



today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.⁷

The part of Jerusalem where this episode took place was on the eastern slope of Mount Zion, not far from the Cenacle (the room of the Last Supper). In the time of Jesus this was a residential district, looking over the Kidron and Hinnom valleys. Scholars offer two or more possible locations for the house of Caiaphas within this district, but archaeological excavations incline slightly in favour of the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu. This church stands on a site

7. Lk 22:60–62.



which has belonged to the Augustinians of the Assumption since the nineteenth century. Excavations carried out from 1888 to 1909 and from 1992 to 2002 brought to light the remains of a house dating to the Herodian era with mills, cisterns and cellars. A further find was a finely-carved stone lintel, with an inscription indicating where to deposit sin-offerings, and collections of weights and measures as used in the Temple. This house had later been venerated by Christians, who built a church over it in the fifth century; some pieces of mosaic flooring still survive. The center of the basilica was a deep cistern, which must originally have been a ritual Jewish bath.

There is a sixth-century text which probably refers to that shrine: "From Golgotha it is 200 paces to holy Zion, the mother of all churches, because it was founded by our Lord Christ and His apostles. It was the house of St. Mark the Evangelist. From holy Zion to the house of Caiaphas, now the Church of S. Peter, it is 50 paces more or less."⁸

The Byzantine building suffered the same fate as many other churches in the Holy Land: destroyed by the Persians in the seventh century, it was afterwards rebuilt, and then this second building was demolished in the eleventh century. The crusaders built a

8. Theodosius, *On the Topography of the Holy Land*, 7 (CCL 175, 118).





third basilica there in the twelfth century; this was pulled down in its turn, and later a small chapel was built on the spot, which finally disappeared in the fourteenth century. The remnants of these successive stages remained buried until 1887 when the Assumptionists took charge of the site.



In the upper chapel, the altarpiece portrays the high priest's interrogation of our Lord. Above, the intermediate oratory dedicated to St. Peter; from left to right: his denial, bitter tears, and finally, Christ's confirmation of his primacy.

The present church was consecrated in 1931, and completely renovated in 1997. It has two levels and a crypt. The upper chapel, covered with a dome decorated with mosaics and stained-glass windows, commemorates the trial of Jesus; the mid-level chapel, in which the rocky ground appears through the flooring at some points, commemorates St. Peter's denials, his tears of repentance, and his meeting with the risen Lord at the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus confirmed him in his mission. The lower level or crypt includes several caves whose use down through the centuries cannot be ascertained with any certainty, and the cistern venerated since the Byzantine era which is known as the "Sacred Pit."

This pit was part of the original house, and was a focus of attention for Christians from the earliest times. The original entrance to the pit was by a stairway and a double door, and shows that it was used for Jewish ceremonial washing. At some point it was deepened and turned into a cistern, and a circular opening was made in the roof. The signs added by the faithful — three



ALFONSO PUERTAS



ANTON_17 / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

crosses carved into the wall of the pit, the outline of a praying figure, and another seven crosses painted on the walls — show that in the fifth century this was believed to be the prison cell where Jesus awaited the dawning of Good Friday. In continuity with this tradition, pilgrims today meditate on the sufferings of Christ in this same place, following the words of the psalm:

Thou hast put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
Thy wrath lies heavy upon me,
and thou dost overwhelm me with all thy waves.
Thou hast caused my companions to shun me;
thou hast made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call upon thee, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to thee.⁹

Outside the church other archaeological discoveries may be seen, including in particular a street composed of steps going up the hillside. This connected the wealthy upper part of the city with the poorer parts that lay along the Kidron brook, around the points where water was available: the Spring of Gihon and the Pool of Siloam. The street must already have existed in our Lord's time, though its steps may not have been of stone at that time. He prob-

9. Ps 88[87]:6–9.

To the right, the cistern revered as the deep pit where Jesus would have awaited the dawn of Good Friday. It has a double door which indicates it was previously used for ablutions of the Jews. In the vault there is a hole in which three crosses had been engraved during the Byzantine era, and on the walls, the remains of several painted crosses were found.



ALFONSO PUERTAS

ably walked up and down it plenty of times, and in particular on the night of Holy Thursday, first with the Apostles on the way from the Cenacle to Gethsemane, and afterwards dragged along by those who had arrested him in the Garden of Olives and were taking him to the High Priest's house.

In the courtyard of the church, pilgrims can also study a large-scale model of Jerusalem in the Byzantine era. It includes detailed models of the seven churches built between the fourth and sixth centuries: the Holy Sepulchre; Holy Zion, which covered the churches of the Dormition and the Cenacle; Mary of the Probatic Pool, which is more or less on the same spot as St. Anne's Church



Next to the church, a street runs along the hillside. Jesus could have walked on this road on the night of Holy Thursday.



today; St. John the Baptist, built on the site of Herod's palace and where the citadel now stands; Siloam, over the pool; Holy Mary, also known as *Nea*, the New Church, which has also since disappeared; and St. Peter.

During his visit to the Holy Land in 1994, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo prayed in St. Peter in Gallicantu on the evening of March 21, the day before he returned to Rome.

He went out and began to weep bitterly

When the cock crowed, the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept



bitterly.¹⁰ Only St. Luke records Jesus' act of mercy: *The Lord converted Peter, who had denied him three times, without even a reproach, with a look full of Love.*

*Jesus looks at us with those same eyes, after we have fallen. May we also be able to say to him, as Peter did: "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you", and amend our lives.*¹¹

St. Ambrose, referring to this passage, explained: "Those whom Jesus looks at, weep. The first time Peter denied him, he did not weep: this was because our Lord had not looked at him. He denied him a second time: he did not weep, because our Lord

10. Lk 22:60–62.

11. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 964.

had still not looked at him. He denied him for the third time: Jesus looked at him, and he wept very bitterly. [...] Peter wept, and wept bitterly; he wept so that with his tears he might wash away his sin. You too, if you want to obtain forgiveness, should wash your fault with your tears: that very moment, Christ looks at you. If it happens that you fall into sin, he who is with you as a witness in the very depth of your being, looks at you, to make you remember and confess your fall.”¹²

Although mortal sin destroys charity in our hearts and separates us from God,¹³ our Lord’s mercy does not abandon us: conversion is always possible. “I invite all Christians,” the Pope exhorts us, “everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. [...] Whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: ‘Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.’ How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.”¹⁴

As we fight this battle, which will last until the day we die, we cannot exclude the possibility that enemies both within and without may attack with violent force. And, as if this burden were not enough, you may at times be assailed by the memory of your own past errors, which may have been very many. I tell you now, in God’s name: don’t despair. Should this happen (it need not happen; nor will it usually happen), then turn it into another motive for uniting yourself more closely to Our Lord, for he has chosen you as his child and he will not abandon you. He has

12. St. Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, 10, 89–90.

13. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1855.

14. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, no. 3.

allowed that trial to befall you so that you may love him the more and may discover even more clearly his constant protection and Love. [...]

*Forward, no matter what happens! Cling tightly to Our Lord’s hand and remember that God does not lose battles. If you should stray from him for any reason, react with the humility that will lead you to begin again and again; to play the role of the prodigal son every day, and even repeatedly during the twenty-four hours of the same day; to correct your contrite heart in Confession, which is a real miracle of God’s Love. In this wonderful Sacrament Our Lord cleanses your soul and fills you with joy and strength to prevent you from giving up the fight, and to help you keep returning to God unwearied, when everything seems black. In addition, the Mother of God, who is also our Mother, watches over you with motherly care, guiding your every step.*¹⁵

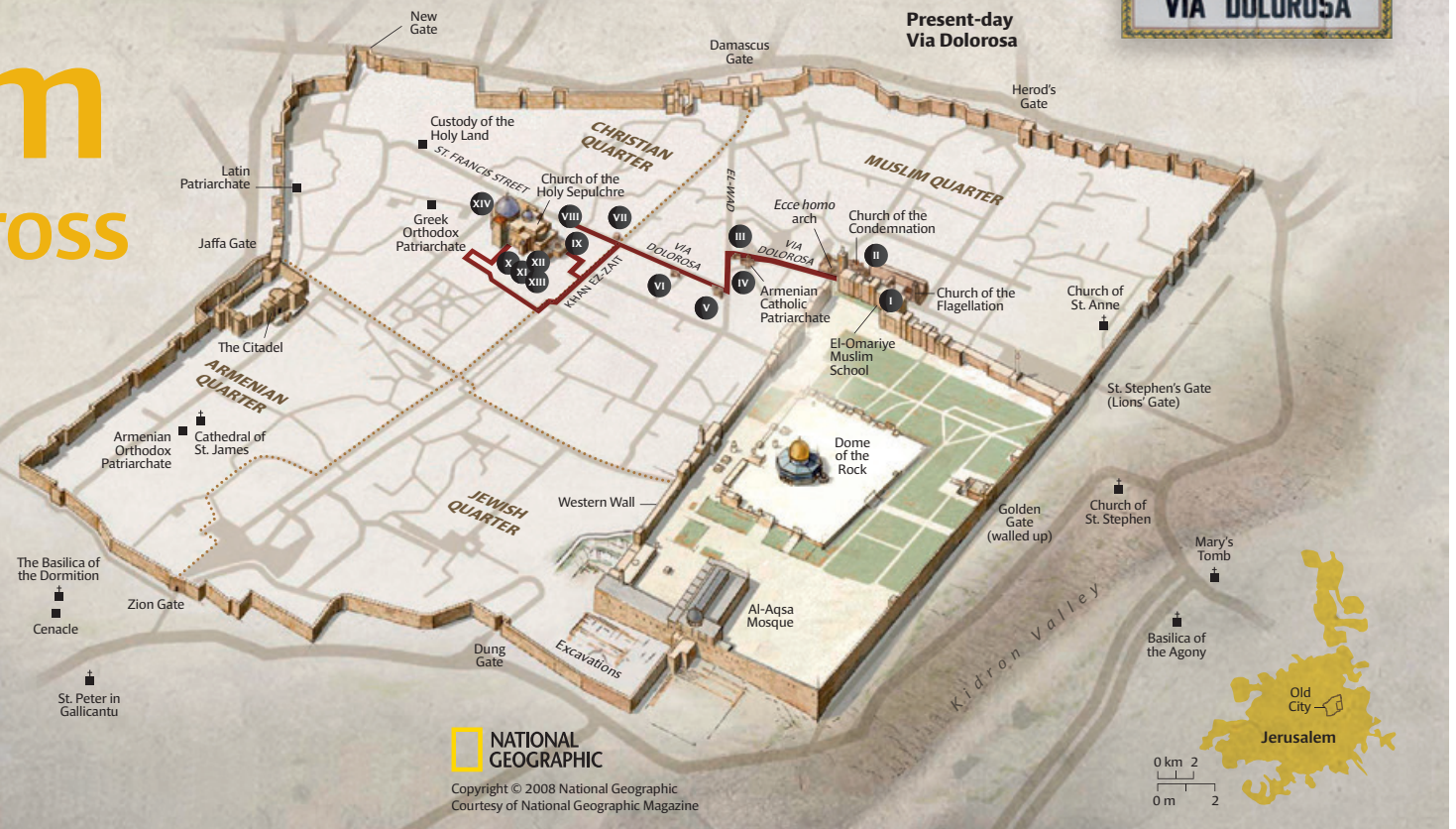
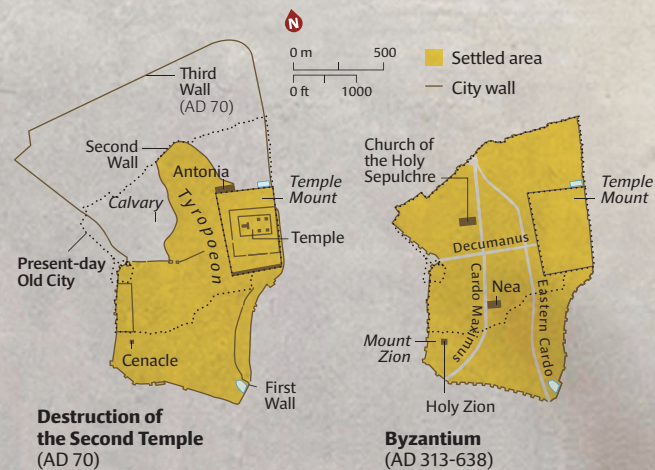
The Evangelists do not tell us whether St. John remained in the house of Caiaphas or went out after St. Peter; nor do we know where they each went afterwards. But we find St. John later standing at the foot of the Cross, with our Lady. *Before, by yourself, you couldn’t. Now, you’ve turned to our Lady, and with her help, how easy it is!*¹⁶ ■

15. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 214.

16. St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 513.

Jerusalem

The Way of the Cross



Do you want to accompany Jesus closely, very closely?... Open the Holy Gospel and read the Passion of Our Lord. But don't just read it: live it. There is a big difference. To read is to recall something that happened in the past; to live is to find oneself present at an event that is happening here and now, to be someone taking part in those scenes.¹ Down through the centuries, that is how the saints, and many thousands of Christians with them, have contemplated the redemptive death of Jesus on the Cross and his Resurrection: the Paschal mystery, which is at the heart of our faith.² With the passage of time the faithful's meditation on those events has de-

1. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 9th Station, no. 3.

2. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 571.

On Good Friday, the Christian faithful of Jerusalem — mostly Arab Christians — carry a wooden cross in a procession along the Via Dolorosa.



veloped into various devotional practices, foremost among which is the Stations of the Cross.

The purpose of following the Stations of the Cross is to contemplate, with a spirit of contrition and compassion, the last and most painful part of our Lord's sufferings, accompanying him spiritually along the path he trod, carrying the Cross, from the praetorium to Calvary, and there, from his nailing to the Cross until his burial.

The practice of the Stations of the Cross is based on veneration of the Holy Places, where instead of trying to imagine the scenes of the Passion, they were physically before one's eyes. A pious legend contained in *De Transitu Mariæ*, an apocryphal Syriac text from the fifth century, tells that the Blessed Virgin Mary walked daily along the route where her Son had suffered and shed his Blood.³ St. Jerome transmits to us the account of the pilgrimage to Palestine made by the noble St. Paula between the years 385 and 386. In Jerusalem, "she visited all the places with such fervour and intensity that if she had not urgently wanted to see the rest she could never have torn herself away from the first. Prostrate before the cross, she adored the Lord as though she could see him hanging on it. She entered the Sepulchre of the Anastasis (Resurrection) and kissed the stone which the Angel had rolled away from it. Out of faith, she kissed the actual place where our Lord had lain, like a thirsty person who has reached water at last. What tears she shed there, what wails of sorrow she gave, the whole of Jerusalem can witness, as can the Lord himself to whom she prayed."⁴

We also know quite a lot of details about some liturgical ceremonies held in Jerusalem at that time, thanks to the pilgrim Egeria (or Aetheria), who traveled to the Holy Land at the end of the fourth century. Many of these ceremonies consisted of reading the Gospel accounts relating to each place, praying one or more Psalms, and singing hymns. In addition, describing the sacred ceremonies on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she says that the faithful went in procession from the Mount of Olives to Calvary: "They go towards the city on foot, with hymns, and arrive at the gate at the time when

3. Cf. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, II, col. 2577.

4. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 108 (*Epistolum sanctæ Paulæ*), 9.

it is just light enough to distinguish between one man and another; then, in the city, all without exception, great and small, rich and poor, are present; nobody fails to take part in the vigil, especially on that day, until dawn. Thus the Bishop is accompanied from Gethsemane to the gate, and from there, crossing the whole city, to the Cross."⁵

According to later accounts, it seems that the path Jesus followed through the streets of Jerusalem was defined little by little, while at the same time the "stations" were determined, in other words the spots where the faithful paused to contemplate each episode of the Passion. The Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the Franciscans from the fourteenth century onwards contributed greatly to fixing these traditions. Accordingly, by the sixteenth century the route followed in the Holy City was the same as the one taken today, known as the Via Dolorosa ("Sorrowful Way," or "Path of Sorrows"), with its fourteen stations.

From those times on, outside Jerusalem, the custom spread of setting up the Stations of the Cross so that the faithful could think about the scenes and events just like the pilgrims who actually went to the Holy Land. The custom was propagated first in Spain by the Dominican Blessed Alvaro of Cordoba, and from there it was taken to Sardinia and then to the rest of Europe. Among those who spread this devotion, St. Leonard of Port Maurice stands out. Between 1731 and 1751, in the course of some missions in Italy, he set up more than 570 examples of a "Way of the Cross" and when Benedict XIV set up the Stations of the Cross in the Colosseum on 27 December 1750, he was the preacher at the ceremony. The Roman Pontiffs have also encouraged this devout practice by granting indulgences to those who do the Stations of the Cross.

The contemplation of our Lord's sufferings induces repentance for our sins and moves us to atonement and reparation. Reliving these scenes on the Via Dolorosa itself can help set our souls still more on fire with God's love, because of the immediacy of the experience. It is true that we cannot know whether the Via Dolorosa we follow in Jerusalem today reproduces the exact route taken by our Lord, because Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, and the cur-

5. *Itinerarium Egeriæ*, 36, 3 (CCL 175, 80).



A dark, circular metallic plate indicates each Station. The First is located on the outside of the Islamic School of El-Omariye. The procession organized by the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land begins in that school's courtyard. On the way out, one sees the Second Station only a few meters away on the right side of the street (next page). The arch of Ecce homo is also visible in the background.



rent street-plan dates roughly from the Roman rebuilding of the city in the time of the Emperor Hadrian in the year 135. Entire accuracy would require archaeological research at the level of the city in the first half of the first century, and even then, many questions would still remain unanswered. Setting aside this necessary uncertainty, the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem is the supreme “Stations of the Cross,” followed by Christians for centuries. As for the events depicted in the fourteen Stations, most of them are taken straight from the Gospel, and others have come down to us through devout Christian tradition. We can follow them hand-in-hand with St. Josemaria, who meditated on them with extraordinary intensity.

The 1st Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Every Friday, at three in the afternoon, there is a procession down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. It is led by the Custody of the Holy Land or a representative, accompanied by large numbers of pilgrims, of the faithful living in



Jerusalem, and Franciscan friars. The starting point is the terrace of the El-Omariye Islamic School, situated in the northwest corner of the Temple courtyard. In the first century, it was here that the Antonia Fortress stood, where the Roman garrison was quartered; it is traditionally considered to be the praetorium where Jesus was judged by the governor Pontius Pilate.

Sentence is about to be passed. Mockingly, Pilate says: “Ecce rex vester!” Behold your king! (Jn 19:14). Infuriated, the chief priests reply: “We have no king but Caesar” (Jn 19:15).

Lord, where are your friends? Your subjects, where are they? They have left you. This running away has been going on for twenty centuries... We, all of us, flee from the Cross, from your Holy Cross.

Blood, anguish, loneliness and an insatiable hunger for souls... these are the courtiers around your royal throne.⁶

6. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 1st station, no. 4.



The façade — left — and interior — right — of the Church of the Flagellation, which is next to the Second Station.

The 2nd Station: Jesus takes up his Cross

Leaving the school and crossing the Via Dolorosa, we come to the Franciscan Monastery of the Flagellation. It is a complex of buildings around a large cloister, with the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum at the front and a church on each side: on the right, the Church of the Flagellation, rebuilt in 1927 on the ruins of an earlier 12-century church; and on the left, the Church of the Condemnation, which was built in 1903. On the outer wall of this church, facing the street, is the sign of the Second Station. And he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called Calvary, the place of a skull, which is called Golgotha in Hebrew.⁷

As if it were a festival, they have prepared an escort, a long procession. The judges want to savour their victory with a slow and pitiless torture.

7. Jn 19:17.

*Jesus is not to meet a quick death... He is given time in which to prolong the identification of his pain and love with the most lovable Will of the Father.*⁸

A little further on, the Via Dolorosa is crossed by a semi-circular arch, which carries a passage over the road. It is popularly known as the Ecce Homo arch, to recall the place where Pilate showed Jesus to the crowd after the scourging at the pillar and the crowning with thorns. In fact, it is the central span of a triumphal arch, whose northern gateway is preserved inside the Convent of Our Lady of Sion: it takes the place of an altar-piece in the Ecce Homo Basilica, completed in the 19th century. Just as people imagined that the arch belonged to the Antonia Fortress, several stone slabs in the same area are supposed to be those of the place called Lithostrotos;⁹ especially the ones to be seen in the Church of the Condemnation and the Convent of Our Lady of Sion. Both the arch and the stone slabs are in fact of Roman origin, but they date to a slightly later period, in the time of the Emperor Hadrian.

As one reaches this point, following the Via Dolorosa, one cannot help thinking of how much Christ had already suffered even before taking up his Cross. *Pilate, wanting to please the people, had released Barabbas to them and ordered Jesus to be scourged.*

Bound to the pillar. Covered with wounds.

The blows of the lash sound upon his torn flesh, upon his undefiled flesh, which suffers for your sinful flesh. More blows. More fury. Still more... It is the last extreme of human cruelty.

*Finally, exhausted, they untie Jesus. And the body of Christ yields to pain and falls limp, broken and half-dead.*¹⁰

Then, they lead my Lord to the courtyard of the palace, and there call together the whole troop (Mk 15:16). The brutal soldiers strip his most pure body. They drape a dirty

8. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 2nd Station, no. 2.

9. Jn 19:13.

10. St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 2nd Sorrowful Mystery.

The Ecce Homo arch spans the Via Dolorosa and is actually the central span of a triumphal arch. The northern part of the arch serves as the altarpiece of the church of the Ecce Homo convent.



BENJAMIN E. WOOD / FLICKR



ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM

ALFRED DRIESSEN



At the Third Station there is a chapel of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate. The scene is portrayed both on the altarpiece and on the lintel outside. There is also a church at the Fourth Station.



J. PANIELLO

purple rag about Jesus. They place a reed, as a scepter, in his right hand.

The crown of thorns, driven in by blows, makes him a mock king... Ave, Rex Iudeorum: "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mk 15:18). And with their blows they wound his head. And they strike him... and they spit on him.

Crowned with thorns and clothed in rags of purple, Jesus is shown to the Jewish crowd. Ecce Homo: "here is the man!"¹¹

Our heart shudders when it contemplates the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord become an open wound. [...]

Look at Jesus. Each laceration is a reproach; each lash of the whip, a reason for sorrow for your offences and mine.¹²

The 3rd Station: Jesus falls the first time

The Via Dolorosa continues, sloping slightly downwards, to cross a road leading in from the Damascus Gate. It is called El-Wad, ("The Valley"), or the Tyropoeon Valley. Turning to the left, almost on the corner, is a small chapel belonging to the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate, with the Third Station.

The worn-out body of Jesus staggers now beneath the huge cross. His most loving heart can barely summon up another breath of life for his poor wounded limbs.

To his right and left, Our Lord sees the multitude moving around like sheep without a shepherd. He could call them one by one by their names — by our names. There they are, those who were fed at the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, those who were cured of their ailments, those he taught by the lakeside, on the mountain and in the porticoes of the Temple.

11. Ibid., 3rd Sorrowful Mystery.

12. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 1st Station, no. 5.



Chapel of the Fifth Station, which belongs to the Franciscans.

A sharp pain pierces the soul of Jesus; Our Lord falls to the ground, exhausted.

*You and I can say nothing: now we know why the cross of Jesus weighs so much. We weep over our wretched failings and also for the terrible ingratitude of the human heart. From the depths of our soul there comes an act of real contrition, which lifts us up from the prostration of sin. Jesus has fallen that we might get up: once and for all.*¹³

The 4th Station: Jesus meets his Blessed Mother

Going a few yards further we reach the fourth station, where there is a church, also belonging to the Armenians, in whose crypt there is perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Our Lady did not desert her Son during his Passion; we will see her again after this, on Golgotha.

13. Ibid., 3rd Station.

No sooner has Jesus risen from his first fall than he meets his Blessed Mother, standing by the wayside where he is passing.

With immense love Mary looks at Jesus, and Jesus at his mother. Their eyes meet, and each heart pours into the other its own deep sorrow. [...] In the dark loneliness of the Passion, Our Lady offers her son a comforting balm of tenderness, of union, of faithfulness; a “yes” to the divine will.

*Hand in hand with Mary, you and I also want to console Jesus, by accepting always and in everything the will of his Father, of our Father.*¹⁴

The 5th Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry the Cross

Immediately after this we leave El-Wad street and turn right to take up the Via Dolorosa again. This part of it is very characteristic of the Old City: narrow, steep, with steps every few yards, and many arches connecting the buildings on each side of the street. Just at the beginning of it, on the left, there is a chapel which has belonged to the Franciscans since the thirteenth century, where the Fifth Station of the Cross is recalled: And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.¹⁵

In the whole context of the Passion, this help does not add up to very much. But, for Jesus, a smile, a word, a gesture or a little bit of love is enough for him to pour out his grace bountifully on the soul of his friend. [...]

At times the cross appears without our looking for it: It is Christ who is seeking us out. And if by chance, before this unexpected cross which, perhaps, is therefore more difficult to understand, your heart were to show repugnance... don't give it consolations. And, filled with a noble compas-

14. Ibid., 4th Station.

15. Mk 15:21.



Altarpiece of the Fifth Station. On the right, the Sixth Station, marked by a column fragment embedded in the wall, next to the door of the chapel that commemorates Veronica's magnanimous gesture.

sion, when it asks for them, say to it slowly, as one speaking in confidence: "Heart: heart on the cross! Heart on the cross!"¹⁶

The 6th Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

We know little about this woman. A tradition based on apocryphal writings says that she was the same as the woman with the haemorrhage whom Jesus cured at Capernaum, and that her name was Berenice, which in Latin is Veronica. In the Middle Ages her house was reputed to be here, at about the mid-point of the Via Dolorosa. On this spot there stands today a small chapel whose door gives directly onto the street, with a Greek Catholic church above it.

16. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 5th Station.



A woman, Veronica by name, makes her way through the crowd, with a white linen cloth folded in her hands, and with this she reverently wipes the face of Jesus. Our Lord leaves the impression of his holy Face on the three parts of the veil.

The beloved face of Jesus, which had smiled upon children and was transfigured with glory on Mount Tabor, is now, as it were, concealed by suffering. But this suffering is our purification; the sweat and the blood which disfigure and tarnish his features, serve to cleanse us.

Lord, help me decide to tear off, through penance, this pitiful mask that I have fashioned with my wretched doings... Then, and only then, by following the path of contemplation and atonement, will my life begin to copy faithfully the features of your life. I will find myself becoming more and more like you.

We will be other Christs, Christ himself, ipse Christus.¹⁷

17. Ibid., 6th Station.

Below, the chapel of the Seventh Station, which belongs to the Custody of the Holy Land. On the right, there is a round stone below the sign of the Eighth Station, small in size, with a cross and an inscription that reads: Jesus Christ conquers.



The 7th Station: Jesus falls a second time

At the end of the upward slope, the Via Dolorosa joins the Khan ez-Zait, or oil market, a bustling souk (street lined with market stalls) running down from the Damascus Gate. It divides the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City, and is on the site of the ancient Cardo Maximus or main street of Jerusalem in Roman and Byzantine times. The Seventh Station of the Cross is at the crossroads, where there is a small chapel belonging to the Franciscans.

Jesus is brought down by the weight of the Cross... We, by the attraction of the things of this world.

He prefers to fall rather than let go of the Cross. That is how Christ heals the lack of love that causes us to fall.¹⁸

The 8th Station: Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem

Just a few yards on from the place of his second fall, along St. Francis' street which runs up westwards and is a prolongation of the Via Dolorosa, we come to the Eighth Station of the Cross.

Among the people watching Our Lord as he passes by are a number of women who, unable to restrain their compassion, break into tears. [...] But Our Lord [...] invites them to weep for sins, which are the cause of the Passion and which will draw down the rigor of divine justice:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children... For if they do these things to the green wood, what shall be done to the dry?" (Lk 23:28, 31).

Your sins, my sins, the sins of all men, rise up. All the evil we have done and the good that we have neglected to do. The desolate panorama of the countless crimes and iniquities which we would have committed, if he, Jesus had not strengthened us with the light of his most loving glance.

How little a life is for making atonement!¹⁹

The 9th Station: Jesus falls the third time

In former times there may have been a more direct way to the Ninth Station of the Cross, but today one has to retrace one's steps to the souk, follow it southwards for a few yards, and then take some steps that open off the right side

18. Ibid., 7th Station, no. 1.

19. Ibid., 8th Station.

of the street. At the end of an alleyway a pillar marks the place of Jesus' third fall. It is set on a corner, between a gateway leading to the courtyard of the Ethiopian Monastery and the door of the Coptic Church of St. Anthony.

*Our Lord falls for the third time, on the slope leading up to Calvary, with only forty of fifty paces between him and the summit. Jesus can no longer stay on his feet: his strength has failed him, and he lies on the ground in utter exhaustion.*²⁰

Now you realize how much you have made Jesus suffer, and you are filled with sorrow. How easy it is to ask his pardon and weep for your past betrayals! Such is your longing for atonement that you cannot contain it in your breast!

*Fine. But don't forget that the spirit of penance consists mainly in the fulfillment of the duty of each moment, however costly it may be.*²¹

The place that recalls our Lord's third fall is just a few yards from the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. The last five Stations of the Via Dolorosa are inside this Basilica. To get there, one can either go back to the souk again and go along a few streets to the small square in front of its main entrance, on the south side; this is the normal route for the Friday processions. Or one can take a short cut across the courtyard of the Ethiopian Monastery, which is situated on top of some of the Basilica's lower chapels, and go down through the building, which has a direct exit onto the square, next to the site of Calvary. We will be visiting it to meditate on the next scenes of our Lord's Passion, in the next article. ■

20. Ibid., 9th Station.

21. Ibid., 9th Station, no. 5.

The Ninth Station is located at the bottom of an alley between the Coptic church of St. Anthony and the entrance to the terrace of the Ethiopian monastery. Below, the two domes of the Holy Sepulchre, plus a small one in the foreground of the chapel of St. Helena, located in the crypt of the basilica.



LEONARD HINEELAR

MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS





The domes of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the midst of Jerusalem's Old City.

Jerusalem

Calvary

The Ninth Station of the Via Dolorosa left us very close to Calvary. So far we have been following Jesus as he carries his Cross, along the route traced out by tradition and popular Christian piety. Now we come to the actual place that is at the center of our faith, and that we can consider as the most sacred spot in the Holy Land: the place where Jesus “was crucified, died and was buried,” and where “on the third day he rose again from the dead.”¹

Not more than a few dozen metres separate Calvary and our Lord's tomb. The whole zone is now included within the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, also known to Orthodox Christians as the Basilica of the Resurrection. To the pilgrim's eyes its architecture seems remarkable, even chaotic. On the outside it is formed

of several different structures added on to or built on top of one another. Notable among these are a truncated bell-tower and, rising over the jumble of buildings and terraces, two domes, one larger than the other, which are a recognisable feature of the skyline of Jerusalem. The interior of the basilica is a complex of altars and

1. Apostles' Creed.



From the paved courtyard at the front of the basilica, one sees the truncated bell tower; the doors, one open and the other boarded up; and the chapel of the Franks attached to the facade. Immediately after the entrance to the basilica, to the right of the door, is a steep staircase leading to Calvary.



chapels, big and small, walled and open, set at different levels with connecting stairways between them.

This surprising appearance is the result of the basilica's eventful history. Perhaps nowhere else in the world has passed through so many buildings, demolitions, reconstructions, fires, earthquakes, and restorations. To this is added the fact that ownership of the basilica is shared by the Catholic Church (represented by the Franciscans who have formed the Custody of the Holy Land since 1342), and the Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, Syrian and Ethiopian Churches, all enjoying different rights over it.

The Place of the Skull or Calvary

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was taken out and led to the place called Golgotha, which means "the place of the Skull."² There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.³ This place was near the city,⁴ in other words, outside the city walls. In the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid.⁵ When Christ died, as it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.⁶

Archaeological digs have uncovered other tombs dating from the same era close to Calvary; these can be reached from the basilica. This confirms that at that time, the whole area lay outside Jerusalem, since Jewish law forbade burials within its walls. Some scholars have also identified the area as an abandoned quarry, whose highest point was Golgotha; this would match several early testimonies which describe it as rocky ground with many fragments of stone. To sum up, although the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre today is almost at the center of the Old City, we should picture

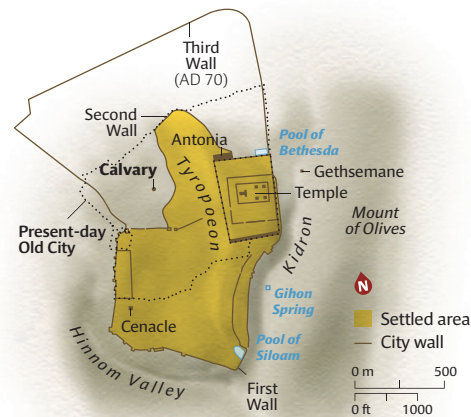
2. Mk 15:22. Cf. Mt 27:33; Lk 23:33; and Jn 19:17.

3. Jn 19:18.

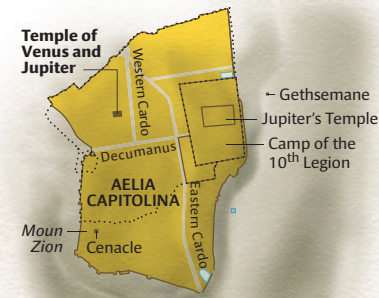
4. Jn 19:20.

5. Jn 19:41.

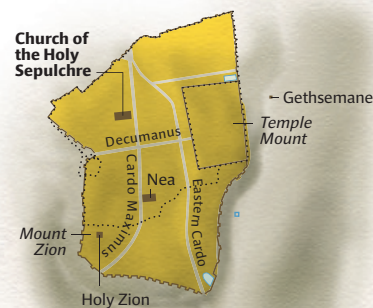
6. Jn 19:42.



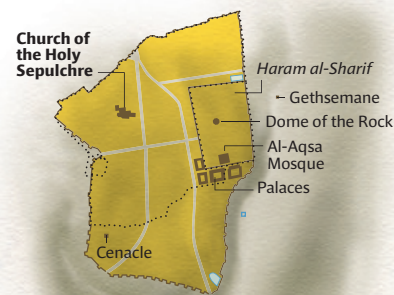
Destruction of the Second Temple (AD 70)



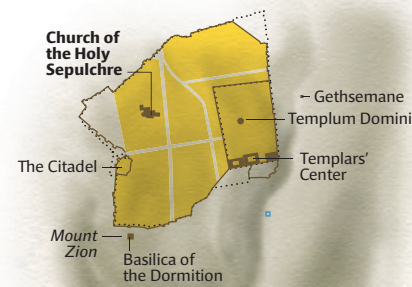
Hadrian's new city (AD 135)



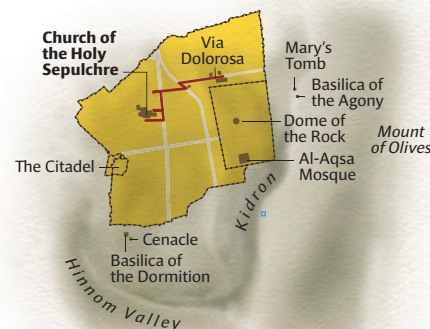
Byzantium (AD 313-638)



Muslim Conquest (AD 638-1099)



Crusaders (AD 1099-1187)



Present-day Old City

GRAPHIC: J. GIL

the place of the Crucifixion as on the outskirts, within sight of the City walls and a busy roadway, set on a rocky outcrop rising several metres from the ground among other smaller crags, with walled gardens and tombs.

The early Christians in Jerusalem preserved the memory of the location carefully, so that it was not lost despite the difficulties. In the year 135, having suppressed the second Jewish rebellion against Rome, the Emperor Hadrian ordered what remained of the city to be demolished and a new one, Aelia Capitolina, built over its ruins. The area of Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre, included in the new city, was levelled over with earth and a pagan temple was built there. In the year 395, St. Jerome, quoting an earlier tradition, wrote: "From the time of Hadrian until the reign of Constantine, for the space of about a hundred and eighty years, at the place of the Resurrection worship was given to a statue of Jupiter, and on the hill of the Cross stood a marble statue of Venus, set there by the Gentiles. The authors of the persecution surely imagined that by polluting the holy places with their idols, they would destroy our faith in the Resurrection and the Cross."⁷

The very building that hid Golgotha from Christian veneration served to preserve it until the fourth century. In 325 AD, Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, asked for and obtained the Emperor Constantine's permission to pull down the pagan temples that had been built over the Holy Places. Once the Tomb of Jesus and Calvary had been uncovered, a magnificent project was set in hand. The Emperor wrote to Macarius: "It will be well, therefore, for your sagacity to make such arrangements and provision of all things needful for the work, that not only the church itself as a whole may surpass all others whatsoever in beauty, but that the details of the building may be of such a kind that the fairest structures in any city of the empire may be excelled by it."⁸

Documentary sources and archaeological research (especially in the twentieth century) show that the Constantinian basilica was in three parts, arranged side by side from west to east. These were:

7. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 58 (*Ad Paulinum presbyterum*), 3.

8. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 3, 31.

a circular mausoleum with the Tomb in the center, called the Anastasis or Resurrection; a quadrangle with porticoes on three sides, open to the sky, where the rock of Calvary was; and a church for the celebration of the Eucharist, with a central nave, four aisles, and an atrium, known as the Martyrion or Testimony. The basilica was dedicated in 336 AD. Very little remains of this ancient splendour: it was damaged by the Persians in 614 and restored by the monk Modestus; it then suffered further damage from earthquakes and fires until it was finally destroyed in the year 1009 on the orders of the caliph Al-Hakim. The present basilica owes its form to the restoration by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Monomachos in the eleventh century; the work of the twelfth-century Crusaders; and further subsequent transformations.

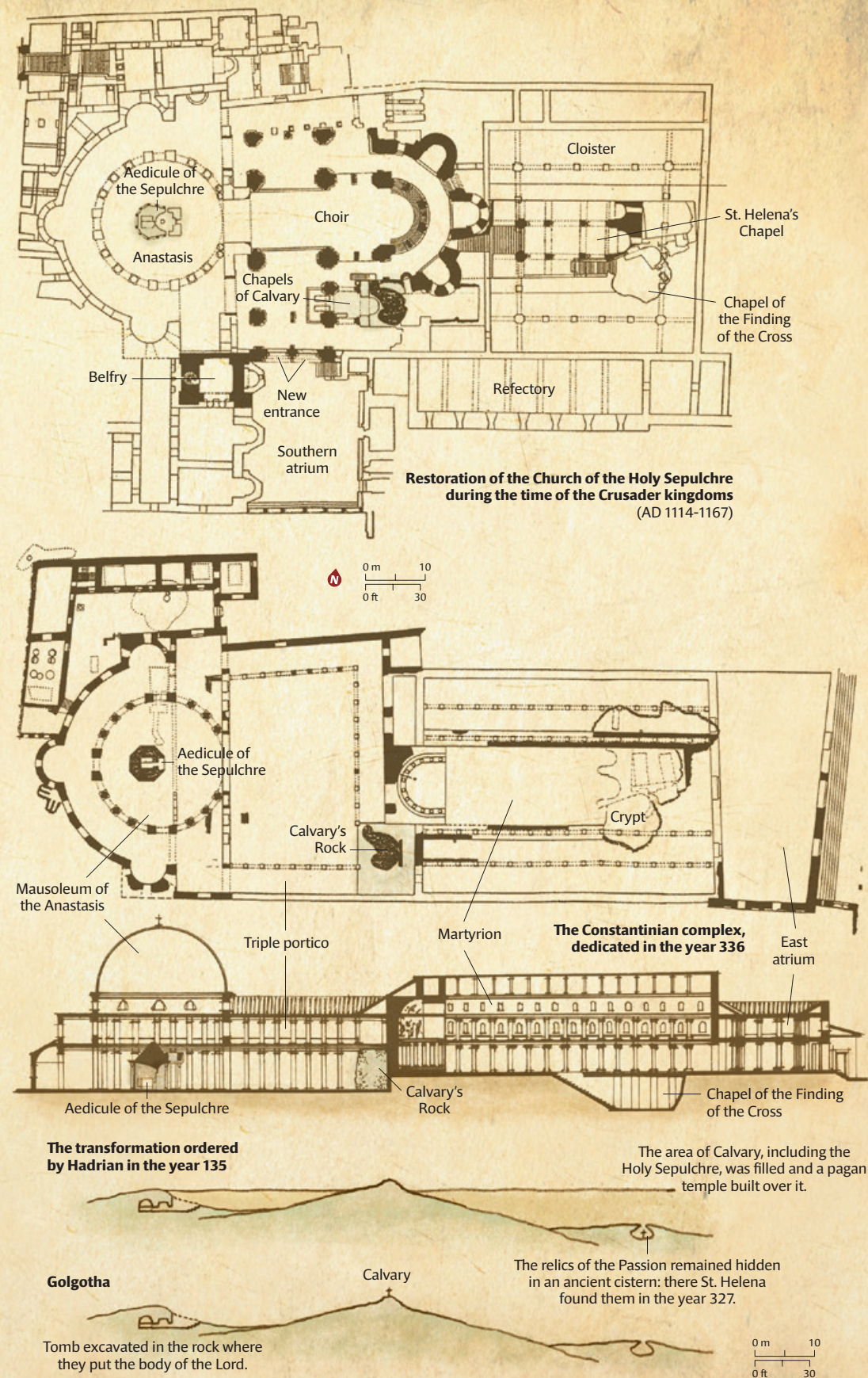
We can now complete our journey along the Via Dolorosa, which broke off at the end of the previous article. We started off hand-in-hand with St. Josemaria, in a mood of contemplation: *In our meditation, the Passion of Christ comes out of its cold historical frame and stops being a pious consideration, presenting itself before our eyes, as terrible, brutal, savage, bloody... yet full of Love.*⁹

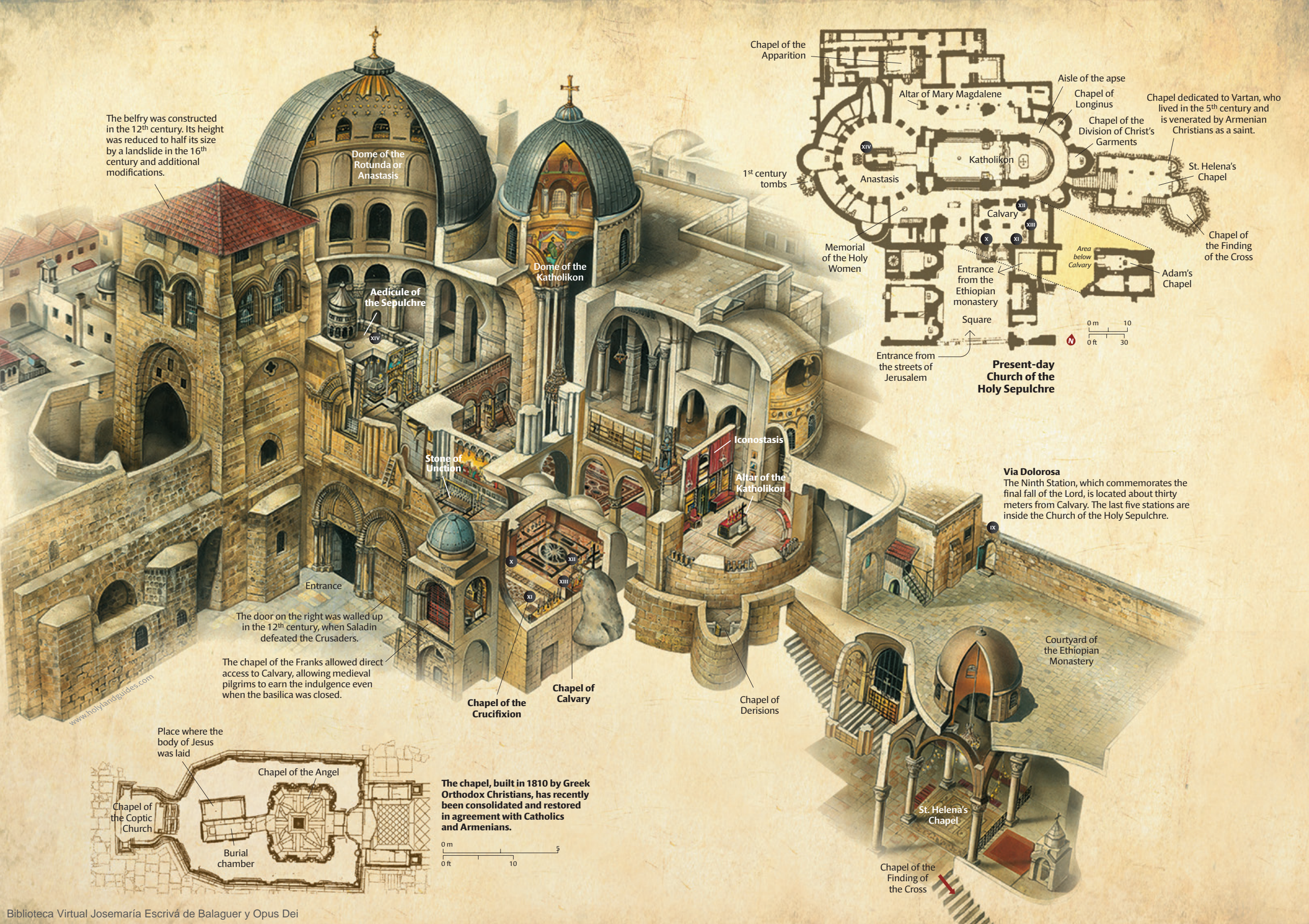
The 10th Station of the Cross: Jesus is stripped of his garments

On entering the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, two very steep stone steps immediately on the right lead up to the chapels of Golgotha, the place of execution. These are about five metres above the ground level of the basilica. On arriving at this point pilgrims usually pause to contemplate the Tenth Station.

When Our Lord arrives at Calvary, he is given some wine to drink mixed with gall, as a narcotic to lessen in some way the pain of the crucifixion. But Jesus, after tasting it to show his gratitude for that kind service, he has not wanted to drink (cf. Mt 27:34). He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of love.

9. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 993.





The belfry was constructed in the 12th century. Its height was reduced to half its size by a landslide in the 16th century and additional modifications.

Dome of the Rotunda or Anastasis

Aedicule of the Sepulchre

Dome of the Katholikon

Entrance

The door on the right was walled up in the 12th century, when Saladin defeated the Crusaders.

The chapel of the Franks allowed direct access to Calvary, allowing medieval pilgrims to earn the indulgence even when the basilica was closed.

Stone of Unction

Iconostasis

Altar of the Katholikon

Chapel of the Crucifixion

Chapel of Calvary

Chapel of Derisions

Courtyard of the Ethiopian Monastery

St. Helena's Chapel

Chapel of the Finding of the Cross

Chapel of the Apparition

Altar of Mary Magdalene

Aisle of the apse

Chapel of Longinus

Chapel dedicated to Vartan, who lived in the 5th century and is venerated by Armenian Christians as a saint.

Chapel of the Division of Christ's Garments

St. Helena's Chapel

Chapel of the Finding of the Cross

Adam's Chapel

Memorial of the Holy Women

Entrance from the Ethiopian monastery

Square

Entrance from the streets of Jerusalem

Present-day Church of the Holy Sepulchre

0 m 10
0 ft 30

Via Dolorosa

The Ninth Station, which commemorates the final fall of the Lord, is located about thirty meters from Calvary. The last five stations are inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Place where the body of Jesus was laid

Chapel of the Angel

Chapel of the Coptic Church

Burial chamber

The chapel, built in 1810 by Greek Orthodox Christians, has recently been consolidated and restored in agreement with Catholics and Armenians.

0 m 5
0 ft 10



The Tenth Station of the Cross, a few meters before the Chapel of the Crucifixion.

Then the soldiers strip Christ of his garments [...] and divide them into four parts. But the cloak is without seam, so they say:

“It would be better not to tear it, but let us cast lots for it to see whose it shall be” (Jn 19:24). [...]

Despoiled, stripped, left in the most absolute poverty, our Lord is left with nothing, save the wood of the cross.

For us to reach God, Christ is the way; but Christ is on the cross, and to climb up to the cross we must have our heart free, not tied to earthly things.¹⁰

10. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 10th Station.

The 11th Station: Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Only a few steps separate the Tenth Station and the Eleventh, which is commemorated by an altar surmounted by a mosaic showing the Crucifixion. The chapel belongs to the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land.

By now they have fastened Jesus to the wooden cross. The executioners have ruthlessly carried out the sentence. Our Lord, with infinite meekness, has let them have their way.

It was not necessary for him to undergo so much torment. [...] But he wanted to suffer all this for you and for me. And we, are we not going to respond?

Very likely there will be times, when alone in front of a crucifix, you find tears coming to your eyes. Don't try to hold them back... But try to ensure that those tears give rise to a resolution.¹¹

The 12th Station: Jesus dies on the cross

To the left of the Chapel of the Crucifixion is the Chapel of Calvary, which belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church. It is constructed on the venerated rock which may be seen through a glass covering. Below, a circular piece of silver surrounds the hole in which the cross was set.

On the uppermost part of the cross, the reason for the sentence is written: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (Jn 19:19). And all who pass by insult him and jeer at him. “If he is the king of Israel, let him come down here and now from the cross” (Mt 27:42).

One of the thieves comes to his defense: “This man has done no evil...” (Lk 23:41).

Then, turning to Jesus, he makes a humble request, full of faith: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Lk 23:42).

11. Ibid., 11th Station, no. 1.

MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS



“Truly, I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43).

At the foot of the cross stands his mother, Mary, with other holy women. Jesus looks at her; then he looks at the disciple whom he loves, and he says to his mother: “Woman, behold thy son.” Then he says to the disciple: “Behold thy mother” (Jn 19:26–27).

ALFRED DRIESSEN



LEOBARD HINFELAAR



To the left of the Chapel of the Crucifixion is the Chapel of Calvary, corresponding to the Twelfth Station of the Cross. Below the altar of the Chapel of Calvary, a silver circle designates the place where the Cross stood.

The sun’s light is extinguished, and the earth is left in darkness. It is close to three o’clock, when Jesus cries out: “Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? That is: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46).

Then, knowing that all things are about to be accomplished, that the scriptures may be fulfilled, he says: “I am thirsty” (Jn 19:28).

The soldiers soak a sponge in vinegar and, placing it on a reed of hyssop, put it to his mouth. Jesus sips the vinegar, and exclaims: “It is accomplished!” (Jn 19:30).

The veil of the temple is rent, and the earth trembles, when the Lord cries out in a loud voice: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

And he expires.

Love sacrifice; it is a fountain of interior life. Love the Cross, which is an altar of sacrifice. Love pain, until you drink, as Christ did, the very dregs of the chalice.¹²

In the part of the visible rock on the right, one can see a fissure attributed to the earthquake that occurred upon Christ’s death: But

12. Ibid., 12th Station.

MARIE-ARIELLE BEAULIEU / CTS



The chapel of Adam beneath Calvary. The rock of Golgotha is visible through the windows.

Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split.¹³ The cleft in the rock is also visible in a chapel directly below, dedicated to Adam. According to a pious tradition which Origen references in the 3rd century, there lay the tomb of the first man; as the earth opened up, the blood of Our Lord made its way to his remains, making him the first redeemed man. This legend inspired the custom of putting a skull at the foot of the Cross in Christian iconography.

13. Mt 27:50–51.

STANISLAW LEE / CTS



The 13th Station: Jesus is laid in the arms of his Blessed Mother

This scene is commemorated between the Chapel of the Crucifixion and the Chapel of Calvary, at an altar dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows.

Mary stands by the cross, engulfed in grief. And John is beside her. But it is getting late, and the Jews press for Our Lord to be removed from there.

Having obtained from Pilate the permission required by Roman law for the burial of condemned prisoners, there comes to Calvary “a councillor named Joseph, a good and upright man, a native of Arimathea. He has not consented to their counsel and their doings, but is himself one of those waiting for the kingdom of God” (Lk 23:50–51). With him, too, comes Nicodemus, “the same man who earlier visited Jesus by night; he brings with him a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds in weight” (Jn 19:39).

These men are not known publicly as disciples of the Master. They were not present at the great miracles, nor

did they accompany him on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But now, when things have turned bad, when the others have fled, they are not afraid to stand up for their Lord.

Between the two of them they take down the body of Jesus and place it in the arms of his most holy mother.¹⁴

Let us meditate on Our Lord, wounded from head to foot out of love for us. [...] At the sight of Christ bruised and broken — just a lifeless body taken down from the cross and given to his Mother — at the sight of Jesus destroyed in this way, we might have thought he had failed utterly. Where are the crowds that once followed him, where is the kingdom he foretold? [...]

Take a look now at Calvary. Jesus has died and there is as yet no sign of his glorious triumph. It is a good time to examine how much we really want to live as Christians, to be holy. Here is our chance to react against our weaknesses with an act of faith. We can trust in God and resolve to put love into the things we do each day. The experience of sin should lead us to sorrow. We should make a more mature and deeper decision to be faithful and truly identify ourselves with Christ, persevering, no matter what it costs, in the priestly mission that he has given every single one of his disciples. That mission should spur us on to be the salt and light of the world.¹⁵

If you want to be faithful, be very Marian. Our Mother, from the time of the Angel's message, until her agony at the foot of the cross, had no other heart, no other life, but that of Jesus.¹⁶ Say to her: Mother of mine — yours, because you are hers on many counts — may your love bind me to your Son's cross: may I not lack the faith, nor the courage, nor the daring, to carry out the will of our Jesus.¹⁷

14. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 13th Station.

15. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 95–96.

16. St. Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 13th Station, no. 4.

17. St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 497.

The Thirteenth Station is between the chapels of the Crucifixion and of Calvary, in front of an image of Our Lady of Sorrows.



ALFRED ORESEN

The 14th Station: Jesus is laid in the Tomb

Coming down from Calvary and returning to the atrium of the basilica, we find the Stone of Unc-tion, which is especially venerated by Orthodox Christians. It is a reddish stone with white streaks running through it, and it commemorates the care given to the Body of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

With them I too will go up to the foot of the Cross; I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love...; I will unnail it, with my reparation and mortifications...; I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life, and I will bury it in the liv-

ing rock of my breast, where no one can tear it away from me, and there, Lord, take your rest!

*Were the whole world to abandon you and to scorn you... serviam! — I will serve you, Lord.*¹⁸

Continuing west, we reach the Rotunda or Anastasis: a circular monument topped by a dome, at the center of which stands the chapel of the Tomb of our Lord.

Very near Calvary, in an orchard, Joseph of Arimathea had had a new tomb made, cut out of the rock. Since it is the eve of the solemn Pasch of the Jews, Jesus is laid there. Then Joseph, “rolling a great stone, closes the grave door and goes away” (Mt 27:60).

Jesus came into the world with nothing. So, too, with nothing — not even the place where he rests — he has left us.

The mother of Our Lord — my mother — and the women who have followed the Master from Galilee, after taking careful note of everything, also take their leave. Night falls.

Now it is all over. The work of our redemption has been accomplished. We are now children of God, because Jesus has died for us and his death has ransomed us.

“Empti enim estis pretio magno!” (1 Cor 6:20). You and I have been bought at a great price.

We must bring into our life, to make them our own, the life and death of Christ. We must die through mortification and penance, so that Christ may live in us through love. And then follow in the footsteps of Christ, with a zeal to co-redeem all mankind.

*We must give our life for others. That is the only way to live the life of Jesus Christ and to become one and the same thing with him.*¹⁹ ■

18. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 14th Station, no. 1.

19. Ibid., 14th Station.

The Stone of Uncion commemorates the care Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took of our Lord's body. Below, Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land hold a Lenten procession in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, with the entrance to the Anastasis visible in the back.



PHOTOS: MARIE-ARMELLE BEAUNEU / CTS

Jerusalem

The Holy Sepulchre

As evening drew on, because it was the day before the Sabbath, a man called Joseph came.¹ He was a rich man from Arimathea,² a good and just man, a member of the Sanhedrim, who did not agree with their decision and their deeds.³ He was a disciple of Jesus, albeit in secret, for fear of the Jews.⁴ He went daringly to Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead, and, calling the centurion asked him if it was true. When this was confirmed by the centurion, Pilate said Joseph could take the body.⁵

Nicodemus, who had earlier visited Jesus by night, went too, bringing with him a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds, or over thirty kilos. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths, with the spices, in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden was a new sepulchre in which no-one had yet been buried.⁶ Joseph had had it dug from the rock.⁷ As it was the eve of the Jewish Passover and the sep-

1. Mk 15:42–43.

2. Mt 27:57.

3. Lk 23:50–51.

4. Jn 19:38.

5. Mk 15:43–45.

6. Jn 19:39–41.

7. Mt 27:60.

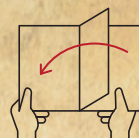


MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS

The tomb of our Lord is enclosed within a chapel in the center of the Anastasis.

Calvary and the tomb of Jesus

Archaeological research has identified the area as a former quarry, abandoned in or before the 1st century. Calvary was at the highest point of the quarry. After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for permission to bury his body. He owned a tomb nearby, dug out of the rock. Since it was outside the city, this area was used for burials.



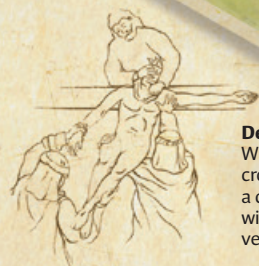
On the next page, the Aedicule of the Sepulchre today.



St. Helena found some relics of the Passion in an old cistern, around AD 327.

Special witnesses

Mary Magdalene and the other women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee watched as the body was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb. At dawn on Sunday, they were also witnesses of Jesus' Resurrection.



Descent

When they un-nailed Jesus' body from the cross, they must have wrapped his head in a cloth. Jewish law forbade any contact with the blood of the dead. That cloth is venerated as the Shroud of Oviedo today.



The two chambers correspond to the two rooms in the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre.

Burial chamber

After a few years, the remains of the deceased were transferred to ossuaries, so that the burial niches could be reused.



Preparation of the body

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus' body in a piece of linen cloth, now venerated as the Shroud of Turin, securing it with bands tied crosswise. They anointed the corpse with a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

Tomb of Jesus

The tomb had been dug out of the rock, either completely or by shaping out an existing cave or hollow in the old quarry.

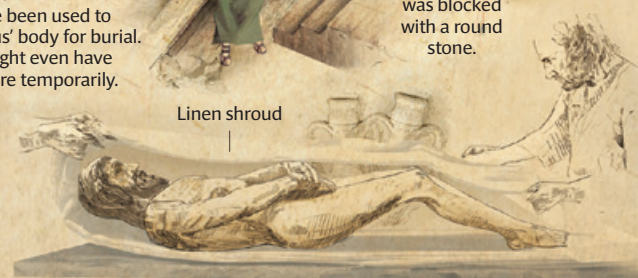
Arcosolium

Antechamber

It could have been used to prepare Jesus' body for burial. The body might even have been left there temporarily.

The entrance was blocked with a round stone.

Linen shroud



In the foreground, the Stone of Unction. In the back, a small baldachin (canopy) marks the place where the holy women witnessed the descent and burial of our Lord.



BENJAMIN E. WOOD / FLICKR

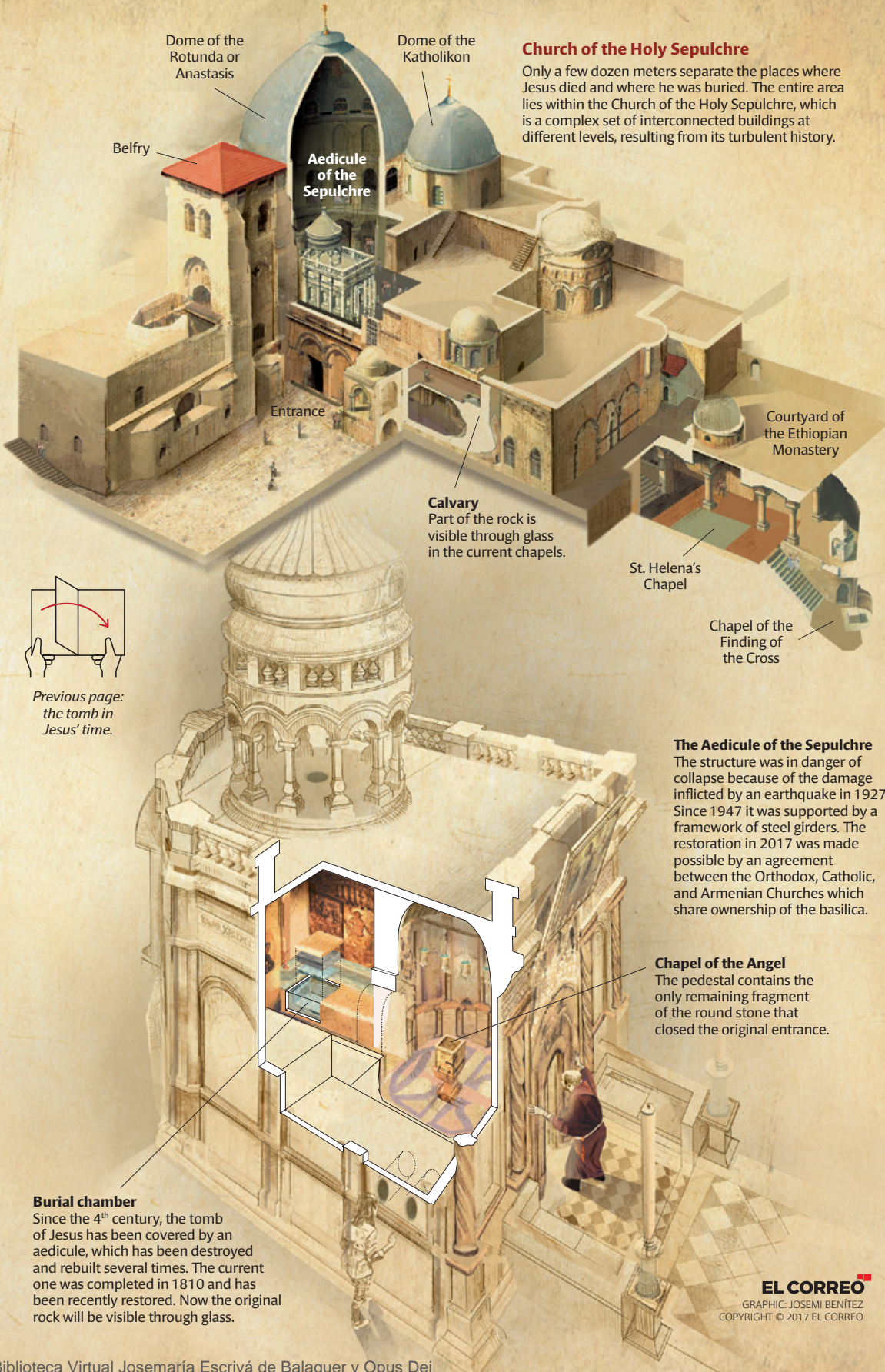
ulchre was nearby, they laid the body of Jesus there.⁸ Then they rolled a great stone to cover the entrance to the tomb, and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary,⁹ the women who had come with him from Galilee, saw the sepulchre and how his body was laid there. They went back and prepared spices and ointments. And on the Sabbath they rested, in accordance with the commandment.¹⁰

On entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre pilgrims find themselves in a small space enclosed by walls, the ambulatory or

8. Jn 19:42.

9. Mt 27:60–61.

10. Lk 23:55–56.



atrium. Their eyes are drawn to what is known as the Stone of Unc-tion or Anointing, flanked by tall candlesticks and adorned with a row of hanging votive lamps. This stone slab, standing some centi-meters above floor-level, at the foot of Calvary, is a reminder of the devout care lavished on the body of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus after they had taken it down from the Cross.

Going forward a little to the west, we find a small monument: a circular marble slab set into the floor, covered with a baldachin. According to tradition, this marks the spot from which the Holy Women watched the deposition and burial of our Lord. On go-ing through a space between two massive pillars we reach the Rotunda or Anastasis, the mausoleum that the Emperor Con-stantine ordered to be built around the tomb of Jesus. This is found in the center, at the level of the floor of the basilica, en-closed by a chapel.

The whole area, including part of the sepulchre itself, has been considerably altered by the various structures built there, but scrip-tural and archaeological evidence gives us a fair idea of what the place was like in the first century AD. Golgotha was part of a dis-used quarry. The tomb had been dug out of the rock face of the quarry, and had a low opening on the east side — this was the opening which was closed by rolling a great stone against it. The entrance was so low that people may have had to enter on their knees. A short little passage led to a vestibule which led in turn to the actual burial chamber. There the body of the Lord was placed, hurriedly, on a shelf carved out of the rock on the north side, as the Sabbath was about to begin.¹¹

The empty tomb

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another,

“Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?”

11. Lk 23:54.

And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed.

And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.”¹²

We are familiar with the Gospel accounts of the appearances of the risen Lord: to Mary Magdalene, the disciples at Emmaus, the Eleven gathered in the Upper Room, to Peter and the other Apostles at the Sea of Galilee... They were prepared for these meetings, which enabled them to bear testimony to the truth of the Resurrection, by the discovery of the empty tomb. “Its discovery by the disciples was the first step toward recognizing the very fact of the Resurrection. [...] The disciple ‘whom Jesus loved’ (Jn 20:2) affirmed that when he entered the empty tomb and discovered ‘the linen cloths lying there’ (Jn 20:6), ‘he saw and believed’ (Jn 20:8). This suggests that he realized from the empty tomb’s condition that the absence of Jesus’ body could not have been of human doing and that Jesus had not simply returned to earthly life as had been the case with Lazarus”.¹³

For the first Christians, the empty tomb was an essential sign. We can imagine their veneration, astonishment and joy as they came to see it. They were followed by succeeding generations of the faithful, so that the memory of the place preserved, even when the Emperor Hadrian had Jerusalem demolished in the first half of the second century. That tradition thrills through the account by Eusebius of Caesarea of the works overseen by the Emperor Constantine in 325 AD and the discovery of Jesus’ tomb. “But as soon as the original surface of the ground, beneath the covering of earth, appeared, immediately, and contrary to all expectation, the venerable and hollowed monument of our Saviour’s resurrection was discovered. Then indeed did this most holy cave present a faithful

12. Mk 16:1–7.

13. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 640.

MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS



In the antechamber, within a pedestal, is a fragment of stone which was used to close the tomb.

similitude of his return to life, in that, after lying buried in darkness, it again emerged to light, and afforded to all who came to witness the sight, a clear and visible proof of the wonders of which that spot had once been the scene, a testimony to the resurrection of the Saviour clearer than any voice could give.”¹⁴

Constantine’s architects isolated the area of the tomb of Jesus and carved away the surrounding rock, so that just the sepulchre itself was left within a cube of stone. This was enclosed within a marble chapel now called the Aedicule, which in its turn stands at the center of a circular mausoleum known as the Anastasis (Resurrection), surmounted by a great dome with an opening at the top.

14. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 3, 28.

MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS



The place where the body of the Lord was laid and from which he rose on the third day is on the northern wall of the burial chamber, covered by marble slabs.

OPUS DEI INFORMATION OFFICE

On March 17, 1994, Blessed Alvaro arrived in Jerusalem and immediately wanted to visit the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. He prayed at Calvary, on the right, and inside the tomb of the Lord — left — where he knelt for several minutes.

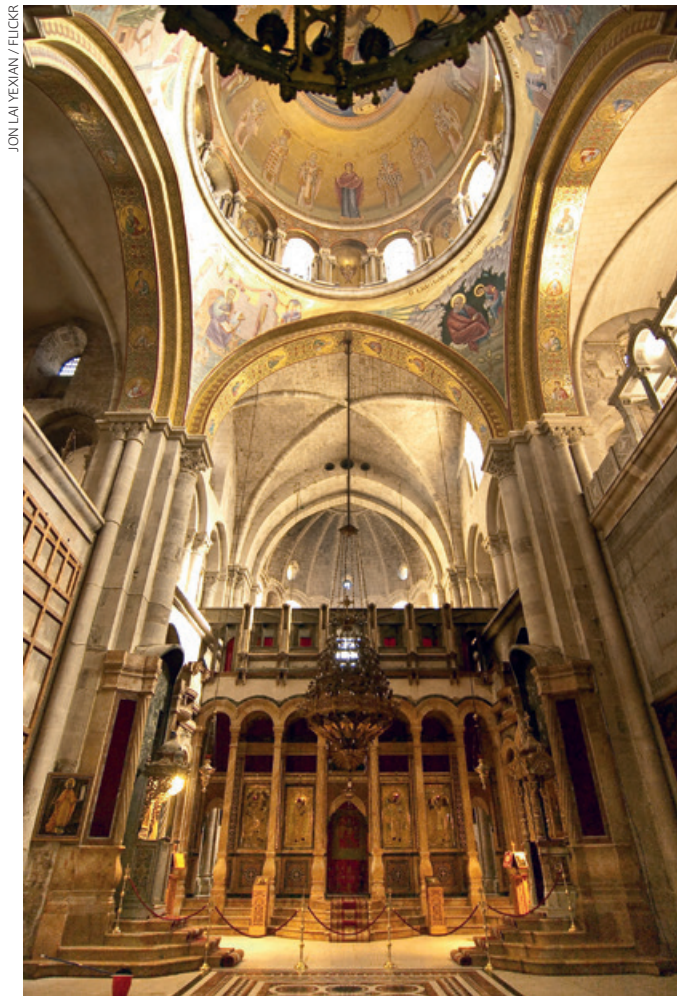


OPUS DEI INFORMATION OFFICE

Although the same structure is there today, few elements remain of the original building.

The chapel, built in 1810 by Greek Orthodox Christians, has recently been consolidated and restored in agreement with Catholics and Armenians. Over the flat roof of the Aedicule is a small muscovite cupola supported by four pillars; the front wall is adorned with candle-holders and oil-lamps; and on the side walls, many inscriptions in Greek invite all peoples to praise the risen Christ. The altar at the back wall, which belongs to the Coptic Christians, dates from the twelfth century.

The interior consists of a chamber and an inner chamber, connected by a low, narrow opening. The first chamber is three and a half meters long by four meters wide, and reproduces the original vault that was removed in Constantine's time. It is called the Chapel of the Angel in memory of the angel who appeared to the Holy Women, sitting upon the great stone that had closed the tomb entrance, and announced the Resurrection to them. Part of that stone is preserved in the middle of the chapel. Until the destruction of the basilica in 1009 on the orders of Al-Hakim, the whole stone was preserved. Al-Hakim's men also attempted to destroy the inner chamber, which corresponds exactly to the tomb of Jesus, and the damage was almost irreparable. The niche where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid the body of Christ is on the right, parallel to the wall, covered with marble slabs. There, "on the third



The Katholikon is covered by a large dome, which is crowned on the outside by a cross.

day he rose again from the dead.”¹⁵ Pilgrims enter this small space with very understandable devotion; Holy Mass is celebrated here at a fixed time every day.

Outside the Rotunda, in the complex built in the times of the Crusades on the ruins of Constantine’s basilica, there are other chapels. The main one is the chapel of Calvary (the Twelfth Station of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa). On the north side, belonging to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, is the altar of Mary Magda-

15. Apostles’ Creed.

lene and the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, which is dedicated to the apparition of the risen Jesus to his Mother and preserves a fragment of the pillar of the Scourging. In the center of the church, occupying the former choir of the clergy and open only in the direction of the Rotunda, is the structure known as the Katholikon: this is a large space belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church. Behind this, there are the Chapel of the Derision (of Christ crucified); the Chapel of the Division of Christ’s Garments; and the Chapel of Longinus — the centurion who pierced the side of the dead Christ with a spear. At a lower level is the Armenian Chapel of St. Helena; the Armenian Chapel of St. Vartan, which includes a graffito scratched by a second-century pilgrim; and the Chapel of the Finding of the Holy Cross.

Each space in the church is worthy of note, but it would take too long to describe them all in detail. However, the crypt deserves special mention, because according to tradition it was where the Cross of Christ was rediscovered by St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, who journeyed to Jerusalem shortly before she died, in approximately 327 AD. St. Ambrose tells the story in words of great poetic force. “Helena arrived and began to visit the holy places, and the Spirit inspired her to seek out the wood of the Cross. She turned her steps to Calvary, and there she said: ‘Here is the battleground, but where is the victor’s trophy? I seek for the banner of salvation and do not find it. Do I sit on a throne, while the Cross of the Lord is buried in the dust? Am I surrounded by gold, and the triumph of Christ by rubble? [...] I see that you have done everything possible, O devil, to bury the sword by which you were brought to naught. But Isaac cleared the wells that had been blocked up by foreign invaders, and would not allow the water to remain hidden. Let the ruins give way, then, so that life may appear; let the sword flash forth by which the real Goliath was beheaded. [...] What have you achieved, devil, by hiding the wood, save to be defeated once again? You were defeated by Mary, who bore the conqueror; without losing her virginity she gave birth to him who conquered you by being crucified and subjugated you by dying. Today too you will be defeated, so that a woman will lay bare your tricks. She, the holy Mother of God, bore our Lord in her womb; I

shall seek out his Cross. She showed that he had been born; I shall show that he has risen from the dead.’”¹⁶

The story goes on to tell how three crosses were discovered at the bottom of an ancient water-tank, which was transformed into what is now the Chapel of the Finding of the Cross. The Cross of Christ was recognized by the remains of the *titulus*, the notice that Pilate had ordered to be placed on the Cross; a fragment of this is preserved in the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Rome. Some nails were also found; one of these was wrought into the iron crown of the Holy Roman Emperors, now in Monza, Italy; a second is venerated in the *Duomo* of Milan, and a third is preserved in Rome.

Blessed Alvaro in the Holy Sepulchre

During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1994, Blessed Alvaro arrived in Jerusalem on March 17th. As soon as he could, he went to the Holy Sepulchre.

“Although it was difficult for him to walk those cobbled streets and stairways,” Bishop Javier Echevarria recalled afterwards, “he didn’t mind at all because he was thinking that soon he would reach the place where Our Lord gave himself for us totally — as our Father used to say — up to the very last breath of his life and the very last drop of his blood. He was very happy, very happy. We went along slowly, so as not to tire him, but you could tell he was eager to arrive.”

As soon as he entered the basilica, Blessed Alvaro went to the Stone of the Anointing and, “kneeling down, kissed the stone several times, and pressed his head to it with great devotion.” Then he went with those who were with him to the Sepulchre, and while they were waiting their turn to enter, “he started to pray. From that moment on he wasn’t quite with us, because he was contemplating all that Our Lord had been capable of doing for each one of us.” Once inside, “he went down on his knees and stayed there a long while, with his hands, arms, and head resting on the slab of stone.

16. St. Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii*, 43–44.



From the ambulatory, a staircase descends to the crypt; on the walls, numerous crosses testify to the veneration of the pilgrims. On the right, the chapel of St. Helena, belonging to Armenian Christians; from there, another staircase leads to a lower level and the Chapel of the Finding of the Cross.



PHOTOS: J. PANIELLO



A few meters from the Anastasis, an altar commemorates the Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalene. On the morning of March 18, Blessed Alvaro concelebrated Mass at this altar.



It was very hard to leave that place because he was so absorbed in his prayer, in God. We were there for quite some time, until they told us we had to go, since there were other people waiting to go in. He lit two candles and placed them in a sandy receptacle, praying for the apostolic work of his daughters and sons.”

Afterwards, they ascended the steep staircase to Calvary. Blessed Alvaro “went up the stairs with visible fatigue,” the Prelate of Opus Dei remembers, “but there as well, as soon as he reached the top, he knelt and laid his head on the spot where the Holy Cross had stood. We spent some more time praying there, until closing time.”¹⁷

The next day, March 18th, Blessed Alvaro returned to the basilica and celebrated Mass on the altar which commemorates the apparition of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene. Bishop Javier Echevarria recalls that Blessed Alvaro “remarked afterwards that during the Mass, he had thought of something our Father said, about how Mary Magdalene wept because she didn’t know how to live without *her Jesus*. Our Father said: *without God, we’re no good*. He remembered that phrase and added that he understood Mary Magdalene’s love perfectly, how nothing could be right without *her Jesus*, how of course she would have been heartbroken.”¹⁸

Christ is alive

There are many places in the Holy Land which preserve the record of our Lord’s life on earth and these places have been rightly venerated down through the centuries. However, none can compare with the Holy Sepulchre, the very place where the central event of our faith took place. As St. Paul told the faithful at Corinth very early on, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.¹⁹

“Christ is alive.” This is the great truth which fills our faith with meaning. Jesus, who died on the cross, has risen. He has triumphed over death; he has overcome sorrow, anguish and the power of darkness. [...] He is not

17. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 315–316 (AGP, library, P01).

18. Ibid., p. 323.

19. 1 Cor 15:14.

someone who has gone, someone who existed for a time and then passed on, leaving us a wonderful example and a great memory.

*No, Christ is alive. Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does not abandon his own.*²⁰

Pope Benedict XVI reminded us frequently and in different ways that faith does not originate in an ethical decision or a great idea; nor are believers simply called to pass on knowledge. “The Christian faith, as we know, is not born from the acceptance of a doctrine but from an encounter with a Person, with Christ, dead and Risen. In our daily lives, dear friends, there are so many opportunities to proclaim this faith of ours to others simply and with conviction, so that from our encounter their faith can grow. And it is more urgent than ever that the men and women of our age know and encounter Jesus, and, also thanks to our example, allow themselves to be won over by him.”²¹

Through his incarnation, through his work at Nazareth and his preaching and miracles in the land of Judea and Galilee, through his death on the cross, and through his resurrection, Christ is the center of the universe, the first-born and Lord of all creation.

Our task as Christians is to proclaim this kingship of Christ, announcing it through what we say and do. Our Lord wants men and women of his own in all walks of life. Some he calls away from society, asking them to give up involvement in the world, so that they remind the rest of us by their example that God exists. To others he entrusts the priestly ministry. But he wants the vast majority to stay right where they are, in all earthly occupations in which they work: the factory, the laboratory, the farm, the trades, the streets of the big cities and the trails of the mountains. [...] Every Christian should make Christ present among men. He ought to act in such a way that those who know

20. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 102.

21. Pope Benedict XVI, *Regina cæli*, Easter Monday, 9 April 2007.

*him sense “the fragrance of Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 2:15). People should be able to recognize the Master in his disciples.*²²

Soon after becoming Pope, at Easter, Pope Francis talked about the mission that falls to each of the baptized: “Christ has fully triumphed over evil once and for all, but it is up to us, to the people of every epoch, to welcome this victory into our life and into the actual situations of history and society. For this reason it seems to me important to emphasize what we ask God today in the liturgy. ‘O God, who give constant increase to your Church by new offspring, grant that your servants may hold fast in their lives to the Sacrament they have received in faith’ (Collect, Monday within the Octave of Easter).

“It is true, yes, Baptism that makes us children of God and the Eucharist that unites us to Christ must become life, that is, they must be expressed in attitudes, behaviour, gestures and decisions. The grace contained in the Sacraments of Easter is an enormous potential for the renewal of our personal existence, of family life, of social relations. However everything passes through the human heart: if I let myself be touched by the grace of the risen Christ, if I let him change me in that aspect of mine which is not good, which can hurt me and others, I allow the victory of Christ to be affirmed in my life, to broaden its beneficial action. This is the power of grace! Without grace we can do nothing. Without grace we can do nothing! And with the grace of Baptism and of Eucharistic Communion I can become an instrument of God’s mercy, of that beautiful mercy of God.”²³ ■

22. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 105.

23. Pope Francis, *Regina cæli*, Easter Monday, 1 April 2013.

A village named Emmaus

He has risen! Jesus has risen: he is not in the tomb. Life has overcome death.¹ Christ's resurrection in the early hours of Sunday morning is a fact that the Gospels state clearly and firmly. The first testimonies to the fact of the empty tomb were offered by the holy women and the Apostles Peter and John; the Gospels then different appearances of the risen Jesus. One that held a special meaning for St. Josemaria was Christ's appearance to the disciples at Emmaus, described in moving detail by St. Luke: *How it can also be applied to the special way of being in the Work of God!*²

1. St. Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*, 1st Glorious Mystery.

2. St. Josemaria, 29 March 1932, from *Intimate Notes*, no. 675, quoted in *The Way*: A critical-historical edition prepared by Pedro Rodriguez, London – New York: Scepter – Scepter Publishers, 2009, no. 917.

We know how the account begins. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.³

From the details provided by St. Luke it might seem simple to locate the village that Cleophas and the other disciple were walking to. However, unlike many places in the Holy Land, the passage of time, and historical events, have changed things so much that several different places might be the Emmaus of the Gospel. Some are more probable, both on the basis of scholarly research and because they are still places of pilgrimage today.

The first possible site is a town to the west of Jerusalem which is given the name of Emmaus in the Old Testament. In the year 165 BC, the Seleucid army of Nicanor and Gorgias, encamped in this locality, suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Jewish rebellion led by Judas Maccabeus.⁴ A fortress was also built there in the same period,⁵ some traces of which still remain today. Its strategic position — on the road between the port of Jaffa and Jerusalem, where the plain ends and the central mountains of Palestine begin — impelled the Romans to make it into a major administrative center, halfway through the first century before Christ. However, in reprisal for an attack on a Roman cohort it was burned and razed to the ground in 4 BC. It must have been rebuilt by the years 66–67 AD, because the historians Flavius Josephus and Pliny include it in lists of the main towns of the area, and Vespasian conquered it in his campaign to suppress the Jewish revolt. It was then renamed Nicopolis, “Victory City,” and this name was confirmed when it was awarded the title of a Roman city in the year 223.

3. Lk 24:13–16.

4. Cf. 1 Mac 3:38 – 4:25.

5. Cf. 1 Mac 9:50.



Railway line between
Tel Aviv and Jerusalem

Emmaus-Nicopolis

Trappist
monastery
of Latrun

Sanctuary of
Emmaus
al-Qubeybeh

Kiryat Yearim road: ancient
route to Jaffa, which passed
through Emmaus-Nicopolis

Jaxum

In the 12th century, some thought
Emmaus might have been located
in Abu Ghosh, but this was never
fully accepted. There is a church
of the Crusaders here.

Highway linking Tel Aviv and Jerusalem,
which partly follows the route of a 2nd
century Roman road but is steeper
and more direct

TO JERUSALEM

0 kilometers1

0 miles1

0 stadiums10

Tel AvivJerusalem

ISRAEL

N



0 kilometers1

0 miles1

0 stadia10

Tel Aviv

Jerusalem

ISRAEL

Sanctuary of
Emmaus
al-Qubeybeh

TO EMMANUS-NICOPOLIS

Kiryat Yearim road: ancient
route to Jaffa, which passed
through Emmaus-Nicopolis

Saxum

In the 12th century, some thought
Emmaus might have been located
in Abu Ghosh, but this was never
fully accepted. There is a church
of the Crusaders here.

Highway linking Tel Aviv and Jerusalem,
which partly follows the route of a 2nd
century Roman road but is steeper
and more direct

Some Christians in the Holy Land began
the custom of doing a pilgrimage to
Emmaus from Jerusalem on Easter
Monday, following various traditions.

Jerusalem

Area that was populated
in the time of Christ



Excavations at Emmaus-Nicopolis have discovered the foundations of a Byzantine basilica — on the left — and part of the walls of another church built by the Crusaders. Below, the apse of the Crusader church.



The oldest witnesses identifying Emmaus-Nicopolis with the Emmaus of the Gospel date from the third century AD: Eusebius of Caesarea, in the *Onomasticon*, a list of Biblical places drawn up around 295 AD, maintains that “Emmaus, from which issued Cleophas, who is mentioned in St. Luke’s gospel, is today called Nicopolis, an important city of Palestine.” And St. Jerome, as well as confirming this theory when he translated Eusebius into Latin, also tells us that in 386 he made a pilgrimage to “Nicopolis, formerly



called Emmaus, where our Lord, recognized in the breaking of the bread, consecrated the house of Cleophas as a church.”⁶

During the Byzantine period, between the fourth and seventh centuries, Emmaus-Nicopolis must have had a substantial Christian population, because it was an episcopal see. In 638 AD the Arabs invaded Palestine and conquered the city, which was then renamed Amwas. Although it is said to have been evacuated two years later because of a plague, it continued to be the main city in the area during the time of Islamic rule. In June 1099 it was the last

6. St. Jerome, *Letters*, 108 (*Epitaphium Sanctæ Paulæ*), 8.



Excavations at Emmaus-al-Qubeybeh have revealed the remains of a medieval village. On the right, the church, built in 1902.

bastion taken by the Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem, and in the twelfth century, during the Christian kingdoms, a Christian church was built on the ruins of a Byzantine-era basilica.

Until that period the tradition that identified Nicopolis with the place where the risen Jesus showed himself to the two disciples had been maintained, in spite of the discrepancy with St. Luke's account, which stated that Emmaus was sixty stadia (about seven miles) from Jerusalem. Nicopolis is one hundred and sixty stadia, in other words, a difference of over 18 miles. Although scholars advanced various hypotheses to explain it, the identification of Nicopolis with the Emmaus of the gospel was weakened, its church was deserted after the Crusaders left, and Christians disappeared from the city until the end of the nineteenth century. On the initiative of St. Mariam of Bethlehem, a Carmelite nun, the land containing the ruins of the church was bought in 1878 and pilgrimages there began once more. Archaeological excavations carried out in 1880 and 1924, and those currently under way, have uncovered traces of two Byzantine basilicas and a medieval church, the Crusaders' church, built with stones taken from the ruins of the two basilicas.

Another place that might be the Emmaus of the Gospel is the little village of Al-Qubeybeh, which stands on an ancient Roman fort called Castellum Emmaus, exactly sixty stadia north of Jerusalem. The Franciscans who arrived there in 1355 discovered some local traditions that gave grounds for identifying it with Cleophas'



home town. The first excavations, at the end of the eighteenth century, brought to light the remains of a Crusaders' basilica which had incorporated a previous structure, and also revealed traces of a medieval village. In 1902 a neo-Romanic church was built, incorporating what remained of the previous church, and stands there to this day.

At Easter 2008 Pope Benedict XVI referred to the fact that the Emmaus spoken of in the Gospel has not yet been definitely identified. "There are various hypotheses, and this in itself is suggestive, because

PHOTOS: C. RICO



it means we can think that Emmaus really represents everywhere: the road to Emmaus is the road of every Christian, even of every man and woman. The risen Jesus becomes our traveling companion to rekindle the fire of faith and hope in our hearts, and to break the bread of eternal life.”⁷

They recognized him at the breaking of the bread

*There were two disciples on their way to Emmaus. They were walking along at a normal pace, like so many other travellers on that road. And there, without any fuss, Jesus appeared to them, and walks with them, his conversation helping to alleviate their tiredness. I can well imagine the scene, just as dusk was falling. A gentle breeze was blowing. All around were fields ripe with wheat, and venerable olive trees, their branches shimmering in the soft glowing light.*⁸

7. Pope Benedict XVI, *Regina cæli*, 6 April 2008.

8. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 313.



Our Lord’s presence must have inspired them with great trust, because with just a couple of sentences, he had them pouring out their hearts to him. *Christ understands their sorrow; he sees into their heart and communicates to them some of the life he carries within himself.*⁹ Their hopes that Jesus would set Israel free had ended at the Crucifixion. When they left Jerusalem they knew that his body was no longer in the tomb, and that the women said they had been told of his Resurrection by angels; but they did not believe it.¹⁰ They were sad and their faith was wavering.

Then Jesus said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.¹¹

What a conversation that must have been! But *the journey ends when they reach the village. The two disciples who, without realizing it, have been deeply stirred by the words and love shown by God made Man, are sorry to see him leaving. For Jesus “made as if to go on further” (Lc 24:28).*¹² However, *the two disciples stopped him and practically forced him to stay with them.*¹³ They begged him, Stay

9. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 105.

10. Cf. Lk 24:17–24.

11. Lk 24:25–27.

12. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 314.

13. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 105.

with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.¹⁴ Jesus stayed, and when he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?”¹⁵

Referring to this passage, St. Josemaria also applied it to the apostolate of those Christians who, in the middle of the world, are called to make Christ present in every sphere where they themselves live and work.¹⁶

“Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the way?”

*If you are an apostle, these words of the disciples of Emmaus should rise spontaneously to the lips of your professional companions when they meet you along the ways of their lives.*¹⁷

Our Lord chose to appear to Cleophas and his companion in an ordinary way, like just another traveler, without their recognizing him straight away. This is like the thirty years of his hidden life.

His hidden years are not without significance, nor were they simply a preparation for the years which were to come after — those of his public life. Since 1928 I have understood clearly that God wants Our Lord’s whole life to be an example for Christians. I saw this with special reference to his hidden life, the years he spent working side by side with ordinary men. Our Lord wants many people to ratify their vocation during years of quiet, unspectacular living. Obeying God’s will always means leaving our selfishness behind, but there is no reason why it should entail cutting ourselves off from the normal life of ordinary men who share the same status, work and social position as we.

14. Lk 24:29.

15. Lk 24:30–32.

16. Cf. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 105.

17. St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 917.

*I dream — and the dream has come true — of multitudes of God’s children, sanctifying themselves as ordinary citizens, sharing the ambitions and endeavors of their colleagues and friends. I want to shout to them about this divine truth: if you are there in the middle of ordinary life, it doesn’t mean Christ has forgotten about you or hasn’t called you. He has invited you to stay among the activities and concerns of the world. He wants you to know that your human vocation, your profession, your talents, are not omitted from his divine plans. He has sanctified them and made them a most acceptable offering to his Father.*¹⁸

The reaction of the disciples at Emmaus, who got up there and then and returned to Jerusalem,¹⁹ is a lesson for all of us.

Our eyes are opened, as were those of Cleophas and his companion, when Christ breaks the bread; and, though he vanishes once more from sight, we too will find strength to start out once more — though night is falling — to tell the others about him, because so much joy cannot be kept in one heart alone.

*The road to Emmaus: our God has filled this name with sweetness. Now the entire world has become an Emmaus, for the Lord has opened up all the divine paths of the earth.*²⁰ ■

18. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 20.

19. Cf. Lk 24:33.

20. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 314.

Tabgha

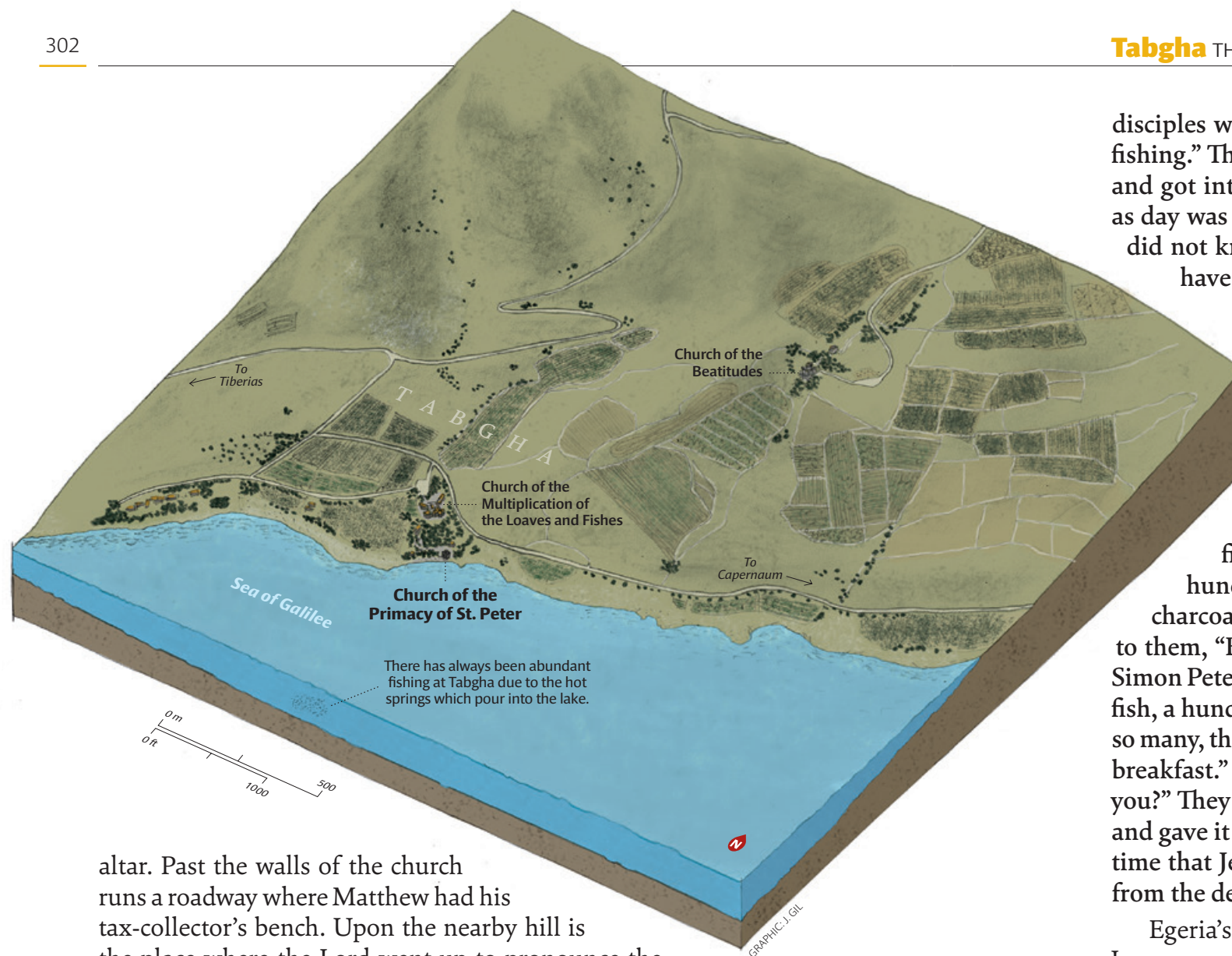
The Church of the Primacy of St. Peter

If the water level in the Sea of Galilee is high, the Church of the Primacy is immediately on the banks. If low, the rocky bed appears.

PHOTO: BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. GRAPHIC: J. GIL.

In previous articles we have read an account attributed to the pilgrim Egeria (or Aetheria), who visited Palestine in the 4th century. It offers an eloquent testimony to the Christian memories of Tabgha. “Not far from Capharnaum may be seen the stone ledges on which the Lord sat down. There, near the sea, is an open space covered with grass and many palm trees, and near that same place seven springs with plentiful water flowing from each of them. In this place the Lord fed a multitude with five loaves and two fishes. The stone on which Jesus set the bread has been made into an





altar. Past the walls of the church runs a roadway where Matthew had his tax-collector's bench. Upon the nearby hill is the place where the Lord went up to pronounce the Beatitudes."¹

We can now look at the first of the places listed by Egeria, "the stone ledges on which the Lord sat down." This tradition refers to the place from which the risen Jesus told the Apostles in the boat to cast the net out to the right, as narrated at the end of St. John's Gospel. Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his

disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead."²

Egeria's account mentions a church on the lake shore where Jesus appeared, and a late text dating from the 10th or 11th century attributes to the Empress St. Helena the building of a church dedicated to the Apostles, on the spot where the Lord ate breakfast with them. Some documents, going back to the 9th century, call it *Mensa Domini*, *Tabula Domini*, the Church of the Twelve Thrones, or the Church of the Charcoal Fire, names all recalling that meal. From a medieval account we also know that the church was dedicated specifically to the Prince of the Apostles: "At the foot of the

1. *Appendix ad Itinerarium Egeriae*, II, 5, 2–3 (CCL 175, 99).

2. Jn 21:2–14.

BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Along the rocky steps, there are six stones in the shape of hearts; probably they were the column bases supporting the atrium of some church.

On the south side, some stone steps where, according to tradition, Jesus told those in the boat to cast their net on the right.



BERTHOLD WERNER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



The rock where, according to tradition, the risen Lord ate breakfast with his disciples, inside the church.

hill is the Church of St. Peter, very beautiful but derelict,” said the Anglo-Saxon pilgrim Saewulf in 1102.³ After various vicissitudes, the church was finally destroyed in 1263. The present one was built by the Franciscans in 1933 on the foundations of the ancient cha-

3. Saewulfus, *Relatio de peregrinatione ad Hierosolymam et Terram Sanctam*.

pel, and is called the Church of the Primacy of St. Peter to mark the place where Jesus confirmed Simon Peter as the supreme shepherd of his Church. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”⁴

Archaeological excavations in 1969 confirmed that under the Church of the Primacy of St. Peter lie the remains of two older churches. One, dating from the end of the 4th century, still has some fragments of white-plastered walls; the second, built of basalt a hundred years later, can be recognized in the perimeter walls. Both churches were centered on a rock which the pilgrims called *Mensa Christi* or “The Table of Christ,” which is still venerated today before the altar, as the place where Jesus breakfasted with his Apostles. The stone ledges referred to by Egeria can be seen outside, to the south of the chapel, protected by a verge.

The Confirmation of Peter's Primacy

St. Leo the Great, who was Pope from 440 to 461 AD, wrote a commentary on the dialogue between Jesus and Peter that we have just considered. He stressed the fact that Peter's care was directed especially to his successors. “In Peter is fortified the strength of all, and in such a way is the help of divine grace ordained, that the firmness granted to Peter through Christ is given to the other Apostles through Peter. Therefore after the Resurrection, the Lord, to make manifest the threefold confession of eternal love, after having given the blessed Apostle Peter the keys of the kingdom, in a way filled with mystery, says three

4. Jn 21:15–17.



A Franciscan watching over the church invited Blessed Alvaro to bless the people there with the stole used by Pope Paul VI.

times: feed my sheep. He does this unhesitatingly now, and the devout shepherd commands that the commandment of the Lord shall be fulfilled, confirming us with exhortations and praying for us unceasingly, that we may not be overcome by any temptation. If he shows this care out of his devotion towards the whole of the people of God, and everywhere, as we must believe, how much more will he not deign to grant his help to us, who were directly instructed by him, who are close to his final resting-place, where his holy body lies?”⁵

At the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI also talked about the mission of watching over the Church that our Lord entrusted to Peter and his successors, and begged the faithful three times over to pray for him and his ministry. “One of the basic characteristics of a shepherd must be to love the people en-

5. St. Leo the Great, Homily on the Feast of St. Peter the Apostle.

trusted to him, even as he loves Christ whom he serves. ‘Feed my sheep’, says Christ to Peter, and now, at this moment, he says it to me as well. Feeding means loving, and loving also means being ready to suffer. Loving means giving the sheep what is truly good, the nourishment of God’s truth, of God’s word, the nourishment of his presence, which he gives us in the Blessed Sacrament. My dear friends — at this moment I can only say: pray for me, that I may learn to love the Lord more and more. Pray for me, that I may learn to love his flock more and more — in other words, you, the holy Church, each one of you and all of you together. Pray for me, that I may not flee for fear of the wolves. Let us pray for one another, that the Lord will carry us and that we will learn to carry one another.”⁶

Blessed Alvaro was in the church of the Primacy on March 16, 1994. He prayed for the Pope, and in fact, something unexpected happened which gave him another opportunity to unite himself to the Pope and his intentions. Bishop Javier Echevarria related:

“When we entered the Church of the Primacy, the Franciscan friars, who had warmly welcomed us wherever we went, were delighted to see the Father. They told us: here we have the custom of letting bishops use the stole which Blessed Pope Paul VI used on his journey in 1964, to give a blessing to the faithful. The Father was very happy because a good son of the Church rejoices whenever he can unite himself to Peter, the Pope. We have a duty to love the Pope deeply.

“The Father was delighted to wear the stole which was a memento and a relic of Blessed Paul VI as he blessed those who were present. But we didn’t expect what happened next: suddenly a group of Italians arrived, and seeing what the Father had just done, they exclaimed: We want a blessing too! The Father put the stole on again, gave them the blessing, and asked them for prayers.”⁷

St. Josemaria has passed down to us his conviction that, *after God and the most Holy Virgin, our Mother, the Holy Fa-*

6. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at the solemn inauguration of his pontificate, 24 April 2005.

7. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 294–295 (AGP, library, P01).

*ther comes next in the hierarchy of love and authority.*⁸ On February 14, 1975, during his last general get-together in Venezuela, he expressed the same idea in as many words, in response to a woman’s question:

“Father, how can we show our love and fidelity to the Pope right now?”

That’s a very good question, my daughter! he responded. *The Pope is the Vicar of Christ, the Pope is Peter, the Pope is God’s representative on earth. As Christians, our love has to be: Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph, the Pope! The Pope above all. [...] On earth, he forms, so to speak, one single love with Christ, our Blessed Lady the Mother of Christ, St. Joseph. [...] So I’ve answered your question. Love the Pope!*

The people there burst into applause, and the founder of Opus Dei applauded with them, saying:

Yes, for the Pope, for the Pope.

At which point the applause became deafening.⁹ ■

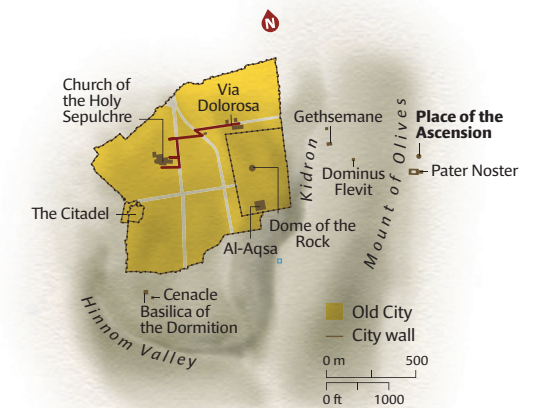
8. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 135.

9. St. Josemaria, notes from a get-together, 14 February 1975, as quoted in the video entitled *St Josemaria Escriva talks about love for the Pope* (<https://youtu.be/FD7DBEnpOrI>).

PHOTO: ALASTAR O CLAONAIN / FLICKR. GRAPHIC: J. GIL

The place of the Ascension is within an octagonal compound, with a chapel at its center.

The place of the Ascension



Present-day Jerusalem

Jesus Christ our Lord accomplished the work of redeeming mankind principally by the Paschal mystery of his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension.¹ Here we will look at the last of these three events, marking the end of his life on earth. *Many things have happened since Our Lord was born in Bethlehem. We have seen him in the manger, worshipped by the shepherds and the Magi; we have contemplated those long years of unpretentious work in Nazareth; we have gone with him all through the land of Palestine, as he preached the kingdom*

1. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1067.

of God to men and went about doing good to all. And later on, during the days of his passion, we have suffered on seeing him accused and ill-treated and crucified.

Then, sorrow gave way to the joy and light of the resurrection. What a clear and firm foundation for our faith! But perhaps, like the Apostles in those days, we are still weak, and on the day of the ascension we ask Christ: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?” (Act 1:6). Is it now that we can expect all our perplexity and all our weakness to vanish forever?

Our Lord answers by going up to heaven.²

The biblical accounts of this event, which is affirmed in the Creed, are very concise. St. Mark describes several appearances by the risen Christ to his disciples, and then adds: the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.³ St. Luke, both in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, provides some details of the scene: He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him.⁴ As they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said,

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

They returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.⁵

In harmony with this information, tradition situates the Ascension at the top of the central hill of the group called the Mount of Olives, just over a kilometer from the city in the direction of Bethphage and Bethany. In the second half of the fourth century a church was built on this 800-meter-high hill. According to several

2. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 117.

3. Mk 16:19.

4. Lk 24:50–52.

5. Acts 1:10–12.



A gap in the flooring reveals the rock from which Jesus ascended into heaven, according to tradition.

PHOTOS: ALFRED DRIESSEN



MATTES / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

sources the project was initiated by a noblewoman named Poimonia who had travelled to the Holy Land from Constantinople. The church was known as *Imbomon*. Egeria relates how the faithful of Jerusalem would gather at this spot for some ceremonies in Holy Week and at Pentecost.



STANISLAO LEE / CTS

The only part of columns which remain from the restoration done by the Crusaders in the 12th century are the capitals. Outside there are two stone altars used by the Armenian and Greek Orthodox Churches; Catholics, however, celebrate Mass inside the building, on a portable altar.

Like the Holy Sepulchre and other places of worship in Palestine, the *Imbomon* was severely damaged during the Persian invasion in 614 AD, and afterwards restored by a monk named Modestus. Bishop Arculf, who visited it in around 670, left a valuable description. He described it as a round church with three inner porticoes and a round chapel in the center, not roofed but open to the sky, to evoke the scene of the Ascension for pilgrims. On the eastern side of the space was an altar, protected by a small cover, and in the middle of it a rock which was venerated by the faithful as the last place on which our Lord's feet had stood on earth; they descried the imprint of his footprints in the contours of the rock.⁶

6. Cf. Adamnano, *De locis sanctis*, 1, 23 (CCL 175, 199–200).



Diagram attributed to Bishop Arculf, who visited the Church of the Ascension around the year 670 AD.

The shrine was rebuilt during the time of the Crusades, when part of it was turned into a convent of Canons Regular of St. Augustine. In the thirteenth century the Muslims pulled down all the buildings again except for the central chapel (which remains standing today) and built a mosque on the site. Although the site is owned by a *waqf* or Islamic religious institute, on the solemnity of the Ascension Holy Mass is allowed to be celebrated there. The right to do so was granted to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land by the Ottoman authorities.

The chapel stands at the center of an octagonal space, surrounded by a wall which still contains the bases of pillars dating back to the time of the Crusades. According to archaeologists, the site of the small church, which is also octagonal in shape, is slightly different from the site of the Byzantine or Constantinopolitan church. Be that as it may, it has the same function, which is to preserve the memory of the footprints of Jesus and his Ascension into heaven. The exterior of the church is adorned with arches and pilasters, beautifully crowned with finely-carved capitals dating back to the twelfth century. Later on an octagonal drum and stone dome were added, and the spaces between the pillars were filled in with stone walls. Inside the church a hole in the flooring, framed by four pieces of marble, reveals the venerable piece of rock.

The definitive entrance

The mystery of the Ascension involves a historical event and a salvation event. As a historical fact, “Christ’s Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’ humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).”⁷

When contemplating the scene of the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, St. Josemaria often stressed the fact of having to say goodbye to our Lord. *Like the Apostles, we remain partly perplexed and partly saddened at his departure. It is not easy, in fact, to get accustomed to the physical absence of Jesus. I am moved when I think that, in an excess of love, he has remained with us, even when he has gone away. He has gone to heaven and, at the same time, he gives himself to us as our nourishment in the sacred host. Still, we miss his human speech, his way of acting, of looking, of smiling, of doing good. [...] It has always seemed logical to me that the most holy humanity of Christ should ascend to the glory of the Father. The ascension has always made me very happy. But I think that the sadness that is particular to the day of the ascension is also a proof of the love that we feel for Jesus Christ, Our Lord. He is God made man, perfect man, with flesh like ours, with blood like ours in his veins. Yet he leaves us and goes up to heaven. How can we help but miss his presence?*⁸

As a salvation event, the risen Christ’s entry into heaven shows us our own final destiny. “Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father’s glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.”⁹ Pope Francis, a few weeks after being elected, helped us to reflect on the meaning of the Ascension and its consequences for Christian life. He took as his starting-point Jesus’ last pilgrimage

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 665.

8. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 117.

9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 666.

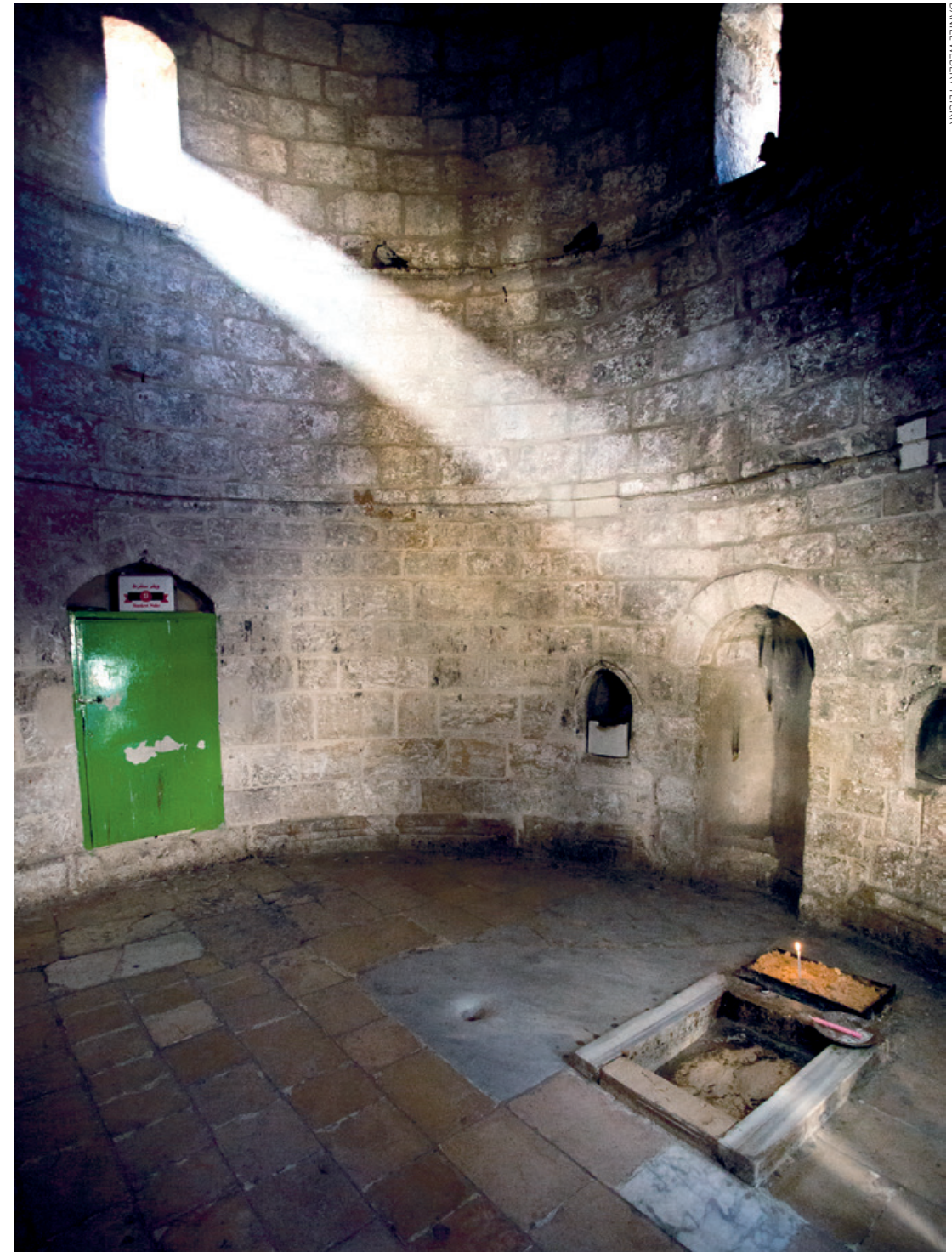


MATTES / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The dome was added in the Islamic period; originally, the chapel was open to the sky to evoke the Ascension.

to Jerusalem, when he knows that his Passion is at hand. “While he was ‘going up’ to the Holy City, where his own ‘exodus’ from this life was to occur, Jesus already saw the destination, heaven, but he knew well that the way which would lead him to the glory of the Father passed through the Cross, through obedience to the divine design of love for mankind. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that: ‘The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven’ (no. 662). We too should be clear in our Christian life that entering the glory of God demands daily fidelity to his will, even when it requires sacrifice and sometimes means we have to change our plans.”¹⁰ Referring to these words, the prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarria, remarked, “Let us never forget, my daughters and sons, that there is no Christianity without the Cross, no true love with-

10. Pope Francis, General Audience, 17 April 2013.



DANIEL WEBER / FLICKR

out sacrifice, and let us try to conform our daily life to this joyful reality, because it means following in the footsteps of the Master.”¹¹

In the same audience, the Pope also drew a lesson from the site our Lord chose for his departure. “The Ascension of Jesus actually happened on the Mount of Olives, close to the place where he had withdrawn to pray before the Passion in order to remain in deep union with the Father: once again we see that prayer gives us the grace to be faithful to God’s plan.”¹²

*Jesus has gone up to heaven, as we have seen. But a Christian can deal with him, in prayer and in the Eucharist, as the twelve Apostles dealt with him. The Christian can come to burn with an apostolic fervor that will lead him to serve, to redeem with Christ, to sow peace and joy wherever he goes.*¹³

St. Luke states that after our Lord left them, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem with great joy.¹⁴ This reaction can only be explained by their faith and trust: they had understood that even though they would not see Jesus again in this life, “Jesus stays with them for ever, he does not abandon them and in the glory of the Father supports them, guides them and intercedes for them.”¹⁵

“Mission impossible: No other expression can summarize the command given to a small group of people on the Mount of Olives, early one spring morning at the dawn of the Christian era: ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). Christ’s last words had all the appearance of insanity. Neither rich nor learned nor influential, how were those simple people from this lost corner of the Roman empire supposed to carry to the whole world the message of a recently executed man?

11. Bishop Javier Echevarria, letter dated 1 May 2013.

12. Pope Francis, General Audience, 17 April 2013.

13. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 120.

14. Lk 24:52.

15. Pope Francis, General Audience, 17 April 2013.

“Within the span of three hundred years, a large part of the Roman world had converted to the Christian way of life. The doctrine of the Crucified had conquered the persecutions of the powerful, the contempt of the learned, and the hedonist’s resistance to moral demands. Christianity is today the world’s greatest spiritual force. Only God’s grace can explain it. But his grace has worked through men and women who lived up to the mission they received.”¹⁶

Grace worked through the apostles because they devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus.¹⁷ ■

16. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, *Catholic Familyland*, Issue XXVII, pp. 11–14, 1998.

17. Acts 1:14.

The Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven

“**M**ary has been taken up to heaven by God in body and soul, and the angels rejoice” (*Antiphon, vespers, feast of the Assumption*). Joy overtakes both angels and men. Why is it that we feel today this intimate delight, with our heart brimming over, with our soul full of peace? Because we are celebrating the glorification of our mother, and it is only natural that we her children rejoice in a special way upon seeing how the most Blessed Trinity honors her. [...] Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Greater than she no one but God.¹

Faith in this consoling truth leads us to proclaim that “Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death.”²

1. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 171.

2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 966.

This is the kernel of the Church’s teaching on the final mysteries of our Lady’s life on earth. Sharing in Christ’s victory, she too has conquered death and now triumphs in the glory of heaven with her whole being, body and soul. The liturgy presents this truth for our contemplation every year on the solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady, August 15; and the memorial of the Queenship of Mary celebrated on August 22 recalls that from the moment she was taken up into heaven, she began to rule over all creation together with her divine Son Jesus, as Queen and Mother.

We know very few details our Lady’s last years on earth. Between the Ascension and Pentecost, Sacred Scripture tells us that she was in the Upper Room or Cenacle.³ Afterwards, she would probably have stayed with St. John, to whose filial care she had been entrusted.⁴ Scripture does not tell us when or where her Assumption took place. Some very ancient sources say it was in Jerusalem; others, more recent, in Ephesus.

Among the traditions of the Holy City, Jerusalem, are some apocryphal writings generically known as *Transitus Virginis* (“the passing of the Virgin”) or *Dormitio Mariæ* (“the falling-asleep of Mary”). The latter title represents the notion that the end of our Lady’s life was like a sweet dream. These writings tell that, when the Virgin Mary left this world, the Apostles gathered around her bed and our Lord himself came down from heaven, amidst myriad angels, and took his Mother’s soul; then the disciples placed her body in a tomb and three days later our Lord returned and took her body to reunite it with her soul in paradise. The authors of such writings speak of two different places: the house where her soul left her body, and the tomb from which her body was assumed into heaven.

We find echoes of these testimonies in the teachings of several of the Fathers of the Church. St. John Damascene, who died in Jerusalem halfway through the eighth century, gives an account of the Assumption of our Lady into heaven that follows the apocryphal writings, and situates the events in the Upper Room and the

3. Cf. Acts 1:13–14.

4. Cf. Jn 19:25–27.



Garden of Olives. The Virgin's body, he says, "was prepared for burial and carried out of Mount Zion, set on the glorious shoulders of the Apostles, and borne, together with her casket, to the heavenly temple. But before this it was led through the city like a beautiful bride, adorned with the matchless splendor of the Spirit; and thus it was taken in procession to the holy Garden of Gethsemane, with angels before it and behind it and covering it with their wings, together with the whole of the Church."⁵

5. St. John Damascene, *Homilia II in Dormitionem Beatæ Mariæ Virginis*, 12.

In the Holy City of Jerusalem two churches preserve the memory of these mysteries today: the Basilica of the Dormition of Mary on Mount Zion, a few meters from the Church of the Cenacle; and the Basilica of the Tomb of Mary, in Gethsemane, near the olive-grove where Jesus prayed on the night of Holy Thursday.

The Basilica of the Dormition

Chapter 15 on pages 182 to 197 described Mount Zion, the hill on the southwest edge of Jerusalem, which was given the name "Mount Zion" in the Chris-



The Basilica of the Dormition, and the Benedictine abbey next to it. From Zion Gate, a street leads to the Cenacle — on the left — and to the Dormition — on the right. The church is circular and has a mosaic of the Virgin with the Child Jesus decorating its apse.



tian era. There, in the Upper Room, the early Church was born; and there, in the second half of the fourth century, a basilica was built which was called Holy Zion and was considered to be the mother of all churches. As well as the Cenacle, the basilica included the place of the “transit of our Lady,” which tradition said took place in a house within the zone. The basilica underwent several destructions and restorations in the following centuries, until only the Cenacle itself remained standing. However, the link between this place and the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary was never forgotten, and in 1910 the German Emperor Wilhelm II obtained land on Mount Zion, and a Benedictine abbey was built there, with a basilica next to it dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin.

The basilica is constructed, in German Romanic style with Byzantine features, on two levels. The upper floor holds the main church, which is round in shape and crowned by a great dome adorned with mosaics. Around this are set six side-chapels and, on the eastern side, a vaulted apse for the sanctuary, with a half-dome which is also set with a great mosaic. On the lower floor, one's eyes are drawn to the center of the crypt, where there is a figure of the Blessed Virgin, lying as though asleep, surmounted by a little cu-

MARIE-ARMELLE BEAULIEU / CTS



The figure of the Dormition of the Virgin, with several chapels around it, including a Blessed Sacrament chapel.

pola supported by pillars. The shrine is surrounded by several chapels, the gifts of different countries or associations.

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo visited the Basilica of the Dormition on March 22, 1994, the last day of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He spent some time in the morning there praying intensely as he prepared to celebrate Mass in the Church of the Cenacle in the nearby Franciscan Monastery.

The Basilica of the Tomb of Mary

The Basilica of the Tomb of Mary stands in the channel cut by the Kidron Brook in Gethsemane, a few dozen meters to the north of the Basilica of the Agony in the Garden. It

is also called the Church of the Assumption by the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox, who share the property, and by the Assyrians, Copts and Ethiopians, who hold certain rights over it.

Two flights of stairs lead down to the venerable tomb: the first, from the street to a lower-level courtyard which serves as the entrance to the church and also leads to the site of the Lord's Arrest; and the second, within the building, from the doorway of the church to the nave. The reason for the church lying at such a low level is that the Kidron riverbed has risen over the course of the centuries, and also, the building which survives today is the equivalent of the crypt of the early basilica, which may have been built in the fourth or fifth century.

A flood in 1972 necessitated radical restoration work, and while this was in progress archaeological excavations were also carried out. These excavations, together with historical sources, suggest that the tomb where, according to tradition, our Lady's body was laid, was part of a first-century burial site. It had been carved out of the rock and included three different zones. When it was decided to build a basilica to enclose the tomb of the Blessed Virgin, the Byzantine architects adopted a method similar to that employed for the Holy Sepulchre: they cut away all the surrounding rock, removing the other two zones, replaced the roof by a strong supporting dome, and built the church over it.

As happened with other Christian sites in the Holy Land, the invasions which occurred during the first millennium meant that by the time the Crusaders arrived in the eleventh century, this basilica was in a poor state. A community of Benedictine monks from Cluny was established there in 1101, and restoration work began on the basilica. The entrance to the crypt was opened and the stairway extended; two chapels were built on either side of the stairway; the tomb of the Virgin was embellished with a marble cupola and pillars; the upper part of the church was rebuilt, and a monastery was built alongside it, with accommodation for pilgrims and a hospital. A few decades later, after Jerusalem was re-taken by Saladin, the church was again destroyed, and all that was left was the crypt, the front wall and the stairway between them, with its two chapels: that is what makes up the present church.



The entrance to the Tomb of the Virgin is located several meters below street level. The facade retains elements of the restoration carried out by the Crusaders in the 12th century. A long stairway leads from the entrance to the nave of the church, flanked by two chapels.

Body and soul

“The mystery of Mary’s Assumption body and soul is fully inscribed in the resurrection of Christ. The Mother’s humanity is ‘attracted’ by the Son in his own passage from death to life. Once and for all, Jesus entered into eternal life with all the humanity he had drawn from Mary; and she, the Mother, who followed him faithfully throughout her life, followed him with her heart, and entered with him into eternal life which we also call heaven, paradise, the Father’s house.”⁶ At the same time, “the Assumption is a reality that touches us too, for it points us in a luminous way toward our destiny, that of humanity and of history. In

6. Pope Francis, Homily, 15 August 2013.



Mary, indeed, we contemplate that reality of glory to which each one of us and the entire Church is called.”⁷

Our Lady, a full participant in the work of our salvation, follows in the footsteps of her Son: the poverty of Bethlehem, the everyday work of a hidden life in Nazareth, the manifestation of his divinity in Cana of Galilee, the tortures of his passion, the divine sacrifice on the cross, the eternal blessedness of paradise.

All of this affects us directly, because this supernatural itinerary is the way we are to follow. Mary shows us that we can walk this path with confidence. She has preceded us on the way of imitating Christ; her glorification is the firm hope of our own salvation. For these reasons we call her “our hope, cause of our joy.”

We can never lose hope of becoming holy, of accepting the invitations of God, of persevering until the very end. God, who has begun in us the work of our sanctification, will bring it to completion (cf. Phil 1:6).⁸

7. Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 15 August 2012.

8. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 176.



In the center of the basilica, a small chapel covers the tomb where, according to tradition, the Apostles placed the Virgin's body before the Assumption. The burial-place was carved out of the rock, and has a shelf cut into the wall where the body was placed.

This hope, which is a gift from God, does not exempt us from fighting; we cannot be merely passive. On the contrary: faith and our own experience show us that Christian life has to go by way of the Cross to achieve glory; and that faithfulness consists of continually beginning and then beginning again. *Beginning again? Yes. Every time you make an act of contrition — and you should make many every day — you begin again, because you offer a new love to God.*⁹

We are wayfarers on this earth, merely passing through, and we will never lack pain, sacrifice, hardship... but we will also never lack joy.

We could think perhaps that this optimism is excessive. Are we not well acquainted with our shortcomings and failures? We are no strangers to suffering, tiredness, ingratitude, even hate. If we Christians are made of the same stuff as other men, how can we shake off the retinue of misery that constantly accompanies our human nature?

It would be naive to ignore the suffering and discouragement, the sadness and loneliness that meet us relentlessly as we go through life. But our faith has taught us with absolute certainty to see that life's disagreeable side is not due to blind fate, that the destiny of the creature is not to rid

9. St. Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 384.



PHOTOS: SVETLANA GRECHINA / FLICKR

*himself of his desires for happiness. Faith teaches us that everything around and in us is impregnated with divine purpose, that all things echo the call beckoning us to the house of our Father.*¹⁰

Let us go to the Blessed Virgin Mary and confidently ask her to increase our hope. *Most Sweet Heart of Mary, prepare a safe way. Guide our steps on earth with strength and security. Become for us the path we are to follow, since you in your love know the way, a sure shortcut, to the love of Jesus Christ.*¹¹ ■

10. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 177.

11. Ibid., no. 178.

Mount Carmel

The Stella Maris sanctuary

Our Lord traveled through many towns and villages of Palestine during the three years of his public life, announcing the Kingdom of God. He exercised his ministry mainly around Lake Gennesaret, in Jerusalem, and journeying between those two points, from north to south and from south to north again, along the road that followed the course of the River Jordan, or through Samaria. The evangelists also tell us that on one occasion he retired beyond the borders of Galilee, to the region of Tyre and Sidon, which was in ancient Phoenicia and is now Lebanon.¹ However, we do not know whether he also went as far as the Mediterranean coast, where the people were mostly Gentiles. It is there that Mount Carmel stands, especially linked to the memory of Elijah and Elisha (Elias and Eliseus), two great Old Testament prophets; and, in the Christian centuries, to the birth of the Carmelite Order.

Mount Carmel is a limestone mountain range stretching from the heights of Samaria to the Mediterranean, ending in a prom-

1. Cf. Mt 15:21 and Mk 7:24.

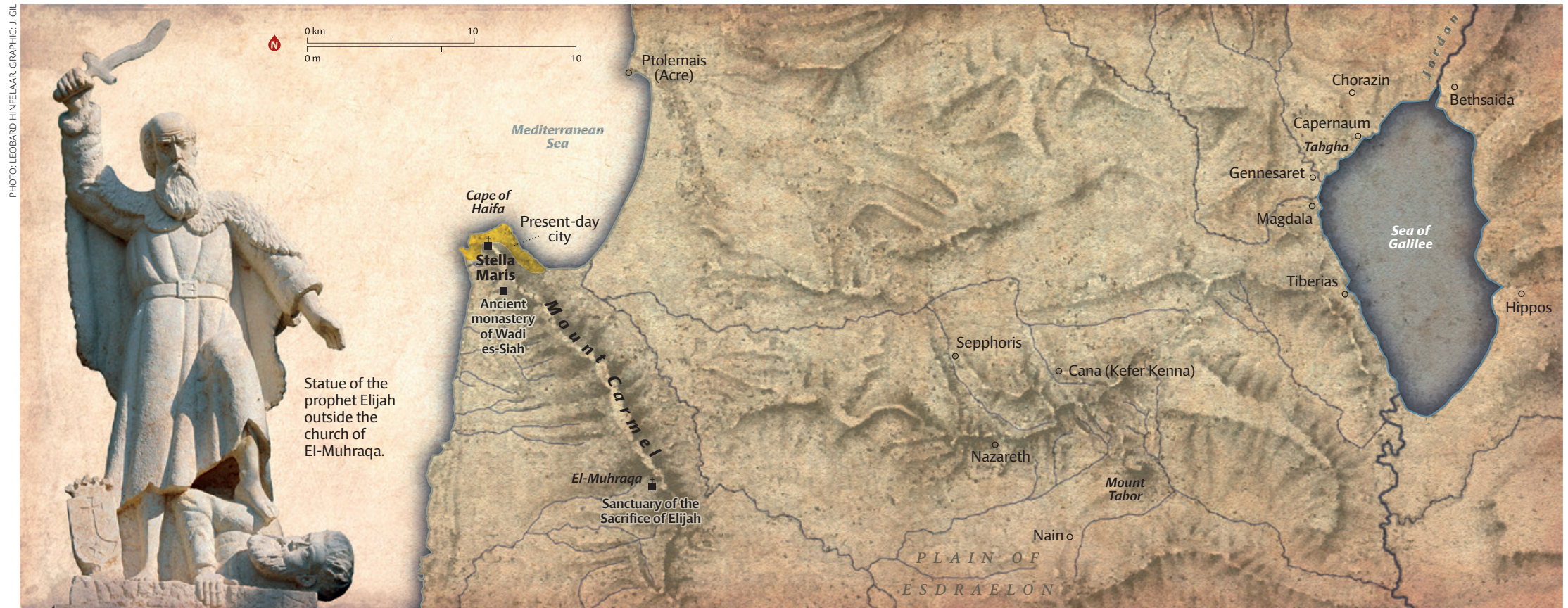
ontory above the city of Haifa. It is about twenty-five kilometers long and between ten and fifteen kilometers wide, with an average height of 500 meters. Its name is derived from the word *kerem*, meaning beautiful orchard, vineyard or garden. This is true: the mountain range is the source of plentiful springs of water, so that its flanks and gorges are covered in rich, varied vegetation characteristic of the Mediterranean area: laurels, myrtles, holm-oaks, tamarinds, cedars, pines, carob trees, and mastic trees. The region has always been proverbial for its fruitfulness, and in several of the books of the Old Testament it figures as a symbol of Israel's prosperity, or else of its misfortune: **The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.**² There are many caves on Carmel — over a thousand — especially on the west part, with narrow openings but large interiors.

The history of Mount Carmel is closely linked to the Prophet Elijah or Elias, who lived in the ninth century before Christ. According to traditions referred to by the Holy Fathers and ancient authors, several places preserved the memory of his presence: a cave on the northern slope, above Haifa, in which Elijah and afterwards Elisha lived; near that, the place where he gathered his disciples, which Christians named "The School of Prophets," and in Arabic also El Hader or Hadar; and not far away, towards the west, a spring known as "Elijah's Spring," which he is supposed to have brought forth from the rock; and, in the southeast of the range, the peak called El-Muhraka and the Kishon River, where he confronted the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Through Elijah's prayer, God sent fire down from Heaven and so the people abandoned their idolatry, as told in the First Book of Kings.³

It was in these areas, which have been venerated from the dawn of Christianity, and in which churches were built in honour of Elijah, that the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, or Carmelite Order, was born. Its origins go back to the second half of the twelfth century, when St. Berthold, originally from France, gath-

2. Amos 1:2. Cf. Is 33:9 and 35:2; Jer 50, 19; and Nahum 1:4.

3. Cf. 1 Kings 18:19–40.



ered around him several hermits who had been living on the northern parts of Mount Carmel overlooking Haifa. There they built a church and a little later on, around the year 1200, another on the western slope, at Wadi es-Siah. In the early years of the thirteenth century St. Brocard, who succeeded Berthold as prior, requested the official approval of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, together with a Rule for their religious life of solitude, asceticism and contemplation: this is the Carmelite Rule, also known as the Rule of our Saviour, which continues to this day. For various reasons papal approval was not received until the year 1226. After that point, because of the uncertain situation of Christians in the Middle East, some Carmelite friars returned to their countries of origin in Europe, where they set up new monasteries. This exodus proved to be providen-

The monastery and church of Stella Maris, at the northernmost part of Mount Carmel, today.





tial for the survival and spread of the Carmelite Order, because in 1291 the armies of Egypt conquered Acre and Haifa, burned the churches on Mount Carmel and killed the friars.

Space does not permit a full account of the history of the Carmelite order here. Regarding what is related to the Holy Land, it is enough to say that, except for a brief period in the seventeenth century, the Carmelites were not able to re-establish themselves on Mount Carmel until the early nineteenth century. Between 1827 and 1836, the current monastery and church of Stella Maris were built on the north point of Mount Carmel, above a cave that commemorates the presence of the prophet Elijah. The name Stella Maris (“Star of the Sea”) recalls that just as the little cloud seen by Elijah’s servant brought the rain that would restore fruitfulness to the land of Israel after the time of the false prophets,⁴ so too the Blessed Virgin Mary

4. Cf. 1 Kings 18:44.

Statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, situated over a cave which commemorates the presence of the prophet Elijah on Mt. Carmel.



PHOTOS: WWW.BIBLEWALKS.COM



brought Christ, through whom the grace of God is poured out on the whole of the earth. The buildings, on three levels, form a rectangular complex seventy meters long by thirty-six wide. To the north there is a magnificent view of the Haifa Bay, and on clear days one can make out Acre by following the line of the coast. The entrance to the church is on the west side; the central space is octagonal in shape and is covered by a dome decorated with scenes of Elijah and other prophets, the Holy Family, the Evangelists, and some Carmelite saints. The paintings were created in 1928. The marble covering the interior of the church was completed in 1931. The focus of attention is drawn to the sanctuary: behind the altar, in a niche, stands a statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and below it is the cave in which, according to tradition, Elijah lived. This is a space of roughly three by five meters, separated from the nave of the church by two porphyry pillars and some steps; within it there is an altar and a statue of the prophet.

The Carmelite church of the Sacrifice of Elijah. On the left, view from the top of El-Muhraqa.



Blessed Álvaro visited the sanctuary of Stella Maris on the morning of March 15, 1994 (he had only arrived in the Holy Land the night before, spending the night in Tel Aviv). It was a brief stop on his way to Galilee. “He went into the church,” Bishop Javier Echevarria relates, “and out of his spirit of penance, he knelt down on the stone instead of on a kneeler. There, in front of the Blessed Sacrament and the statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, he prayed for almost a quarter of an hour as he prepared himself for visiting the holy places.”⁵

5. Bishop Javier Echevarria, as quoted in *Crónica*, 1994, pp. 274–275 (AGP, library, P01).

In addition to Stella Maris, the Carmelite Order has another church, on the southern tip of Mount Carmel at el-Muhraqa, known as the Church of the Sacrifice of Elijah. It commemorates the episode of the prophets of Baal referred to above. However, only ruins remain today of the ancient monastery founded at Wadi es-Siah (today Nahal Siakh).

The Scapular

Down through the centuries the Carmelite Order has given countless treasures to Christianity: one need only think of the exemplary lives and teachings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, or St. Theresa of Lisieux, all three proclaimed as Doctors of the Church. Among other treasures is the custom of the Carmelite scapular, which St. Josemaria adopted and passed on to others. *Wear on your breast the holy scapular of Carmel. There are many excellent Marian devotions, but few are as deep-rooted among the faithful and so richly blessed by the Popes. Besides, how motherly is the Sabbatine privilege!*⁶

The scapular bestows two privileges on those who wear it with devotion: help to persevere in faith and good works to the moment of death, and deliverance from the sufferings of purgatory. The beginnings of this devotion date back to 1251, during a particularly difficult time for the Carmelite Order which was then taking its first steps in Europe. According to an ancient written account in the *Catalogue of Carmelite Saints*, which forms the basis for it, St. Simon (later identified as St. Simon Stock, English Prior General) appealed persistently to our Lady in the following prayer:

Flos Carmeli / Flower of Carmel
vitis florigera / flowering vine
splendor cœli / splendor of Heaven
Virgo puerpera / Virgin and Mother
singularis / unsurpassed
Mater mitis / mild Mother
sed viri nescia / untouched by man
Carmelitis / to the Carmelites

6. St. Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 500.



Remains of the monastery of Wadi es-Siah dating back to the 12th and 17th centuries.

da privilegia / grant privileges
Stella Maris / Star of the Sea

In response to his prayer, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him holding a scapular in her hand, and said to him, “This is a privilege for you and yours; whoever is wearing it when he dies will be saved.” Or, according to a fuller version, “Whoever is wearing it when he dies, will not suffer the eternal fire, he will be saved.” By that time the scapular was part of the religious habit, though it was originally a type of apron used by servants and workmen. It consisted of a long strip of cloth with a hole for the head, worn over the tunic and hanging down in front and behind.

The second prerogative, known as the “Sabbatine privilege,” holds that someone who dies in a state of grace and wearing the Carmelite scapular will be released from Purgatory on the first Saturday after his or her death. It derives from a medieval tradition. In 1613 a decree from the Apostolic See stated that the Christian people may devoutly believe in the help of the Blessed Virgin for the souls of Carmelite friars and members of Carmelite confraternities who died in a state of grace, who wore the scapular, who lived

chastely in accordance with their state in life, and who prayed the Little Office or, if they were illiterate, who kept the fasts and abstinences prescribed by the Church; and that our Lady will come to their aid especially on Saturday, the day that the Church dedicates to the Mother of God. In other words, the Sabbatine privilege is based on a basic Christian teaching: that of our Lady's motherly care to ensure that her children who are expiating their guilt in Purgatory will attain the glory of Heaven as soon as possible, through her intercession.

As the Carmelite Order spread, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thanks to several reforms, its confraternities also spread. They attracted many faithful who, without embracing the religious life, shared in the devotion to our Lady of Carmelite spirituality. Such people manifested their devotion by wearing the Carmelite scapular, which was gradually modified and simplified until it took the form of two small squares of cloth joined by ribbons, worn around the neck.

The Apostolic See has frequently encouraged this custom, attaching indulgences to it and specifying certain pious practices for its use. These include the ceremony of imposition of the scapular, which the individual need only receive once and which can be conducted by any priest; the blessing of a new scapular to replace a worn-out one; and the possibility of wearing a scapular medal of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, instead of the cloth scapular.

Some years ago, for the celebration of the 750th anniversary of the giving of the scapular by our Lady to St. Simon Stock, Pope St. John Paul II, who had worn the scapular ever since he was young, summarized its religious value as follows. "Therefore two truths are evoked by the sign of the Scapular: on the one hand, the constant protection of the Blessed Virgin, not only on life's journey, but also at the moment of passing into the fullness of eternal glory; on the other, the awareness that devotion to her cannot be limited to prayers and tributes in her honour on certain occasions, but must become a 'habit', that is, a permanent orientation of one's own Christian conduct, woven of prayer and interior life, through frequent reception of the sacraments and the concrete practice of the

spiritual and corporal works of mercy. In this way the Scapular becomes a sign of the 'covenant' and reciprocal communion between Mary and the faithful: indeed, it concretely translates the gift of his Mother, which Jesus gave on the Cross to John and, through him, to all of us, and the entrustment of the beloved Apostle and of us to her, who became our spiritual Mother."⁷

These ideas are reflected in the words of the celebrant for the blessing of the Scapular: "O God, look with mercy on these your servants, who receive this scapular for the praise of the Blessed Trinity and in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and grant that they may be conformed to the image of Christ your Son, and so, with the assistance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they may come to the heavenly home wearing the nuptial garment."⁸

When St. Josemaria spoke of our conversation with God he would often encourage us to become like little children, and recognize that we always need the help of grace. And he taught us to follow that path hand-in-hand with our Blessed Lady:

*Because Mary is our mother, devotion to her teaches us to be authentic sons: to love truly, without limit; to be simple, without the complications which come from selfishly thinking only about ourselves; to be happy, knowing that nothing can destroy our hope. "The beginning of the way, at the end of which you will find yourself completely carried away by love for Jesus, is a trusting love for Mary." I wrote that many years ago, in the introduction to a short book on the rosary, and since then I have often experienced the truth of those words. I am not going to complete that thought here with all sorts of reasons. I invite you to discover it for yourself, showing your love for Mary, opening your heart to her, confiding to her your joys and sorrows, asking her to help you recognize and follow Jesus.*⁹ ■

7. St. John Paul II, Message to the Carmelite Family, 25 March 2001.

8. *De benedictionibus*, no. 1218.

9. St. Josemaria, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 143.

Index



Joyful mysteries

The Annunciation | 12
Visitation | 24
Birth of Christ | 38, 50
The Presentation | 58
Finding of Jesus | 58

Luminous mysteries

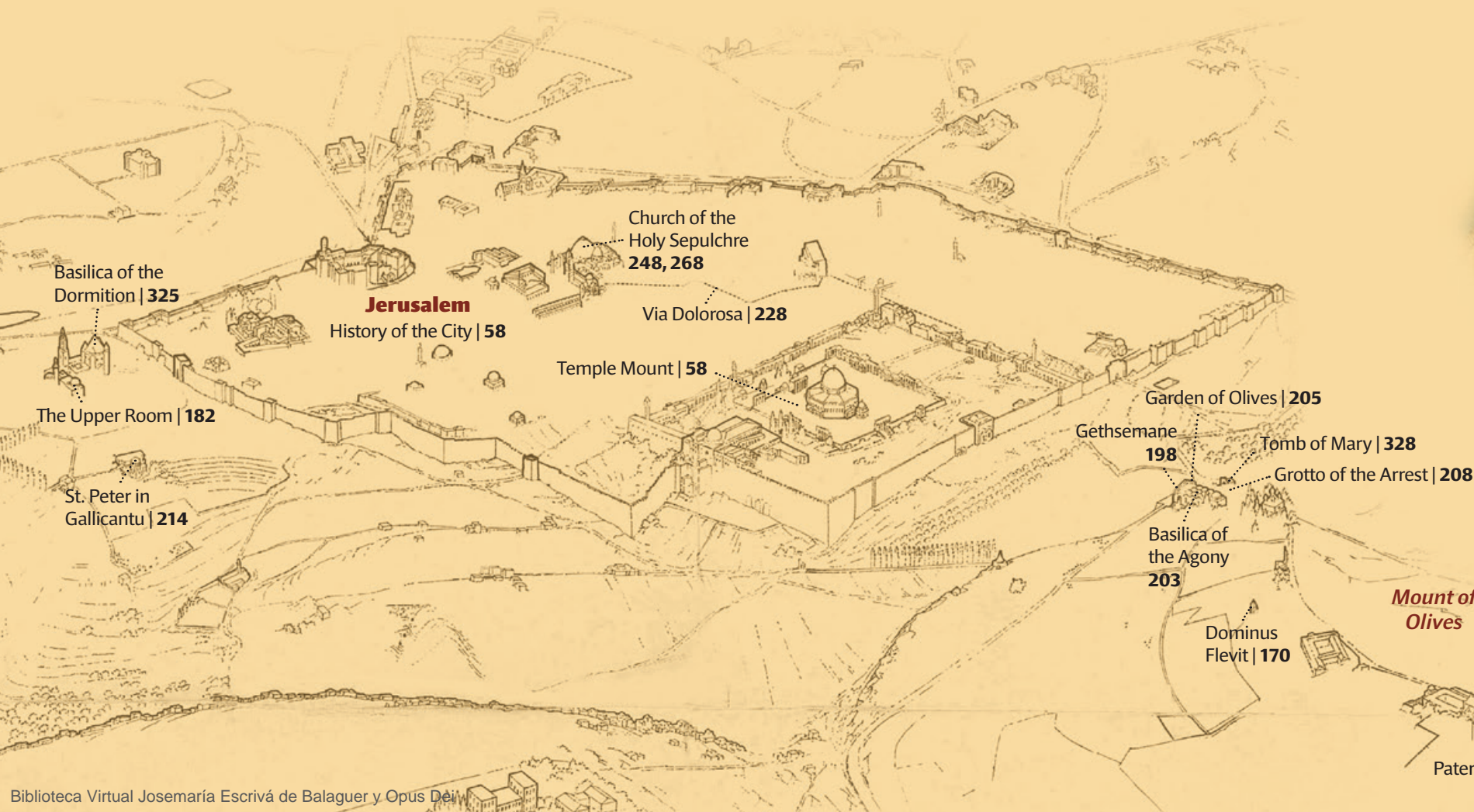
The Baptism of our Lord
The wedding feast at Cana | 84
The proclamation of the Kingdom of God | 94, 108
The Transfiguration of our Lord | 134
The institution of the Eucharist | 182

Sorrowful mysteries

Agony in the garden | 198
Scouring at the pillar | 236
Crowning with thorns | 239
Jesus carries his cross | 228
The Crucifixion | 248

Glorious mysteries

Resurrection of our Lord
268, 286, 300
The Ascension | 310
Descent of the Holy Ghost | 184, 190
The Assumption | 322
Coronation of Mary | 323



Capernaum

The town of Jesus | 94
Peter's house | 97
Synagogue | 101

Tabgha

Church of the Beatitudes | 108
Church of the Multiplication | 122
Church of the Primacy of St. Peter | 300

Haifa

Churches on Mount Carmel | 334

Cana

Wedding Church | 87

Mount Tabor

Basilica of the Transfiguration | 134

Nazareth

Basilica of the Annunciation | 12
Church of St. Joseph | 74

Emmaus

Church at Emmaus Al-Qubeybeh | 294
Archaeological site of Emmaus-Nicopolis | 287

Jerusalem

Ein Karem

Church of the Visitation | 25
Church of St. John the Baptist | 31

Bethany

Church of St. Lazarus | 156

Bethlehem

Basilica of the Nativity | 38
The Shepherds' Field | 50

Jerusalem

History of the City | 58

Church of the Holy Sepulchre
248, 268

Via Dolorosa | 228

Temple Mount | 58

Garden of Olives | 205

Gethsemane
198

Tomb of Mary | 328

Grotto of the Arrest | 208

Basilica of the Agony
203

Dominus Flevit | 170

Mount of Olives

Place of the Ascension | 310

Pater Noster | 146

Index

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo's trip to the Holy Land in March 1994

Monday March 14

- Arrival and overnight stay in Tel Aviv | **341**

Tuesday March 15

- Haifa: Stella Maris Monastery | **341**
- Nazareth: Church of St. Joseph and the Virgin's Well | **19**
- Mass in the Basilica of the Annunciation | **19**

Wednesday March 16

- Tabgha: Church of the Multiplication | **130**
- Tabgha: Church of the Primacy of Peter | **308**
- Mass in the Basilica of the Beatitudes | **121**
- Capernaum: St. Peter's house and synagogue | **103**
- Prayer by Lake Genesaret | **130**

Thursday March 17

- Church of the Wedding Feast at Cana | **93**
- Mass on Mt. Tabor, in the Chapel of Moses | **145**
- Stop in Jericho
- Arrival in Jerusalem and prayer in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre | **276, 277, 280**

Friday March 18

- Mass at the Altar of Mary Magdalene, Church of the Holy Sepulchre | **282**
- Church of Dominus Flevit | **178**
- Prayer in Gethsemane | **206, 210**

Saturday March 19

- Prayer in the Church of the Shepherds' Field | **54**
- Mass in the Basilica of the Nativity | **48**

Sunday March 20

- Bethany: Tomb of Lazarus and Church of St. Lazarus | **164**
- Ein Karem | **34**
- Prayer in the Church of the Visitation | **35**
- Church of St. John the Baptist

Monday March 21

- Prayer in the Church of St. Anne
- Pool of Bethesda
- Prayer in the Church of the Flagellation, Ecce Homo Convent and Via Dolorosa
- St. Peter in Gallicantu | **224**

Tuesday March 22

- Prayer in Dormition Abbey | **328**
- Cenacle or Upper Room
- Mass in the Church of the Cenacle | **192**
- Return to Rome from Tel Aviv Airport | **11**