

Holy Land Pilgrimage an Advent virtual journey

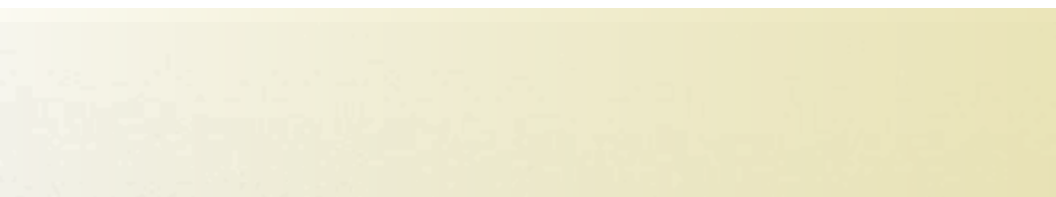


Hosted by



ST. MARTIN'S
IN-THE-FIELDS
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Welcome to your pilgrimage

We are so glad you are joining us on this journey. We pray that you find it a balm to your soul and a bolster to your faith.

This guidebook will help orient you as you embark on different legs of your journey. On the homepage of your app, you'll see a map with a line indicating how far you've gone, and how far you have left to go on your current leg of the journey. As you start a new leg, read the corresponding page of this Guidebook. This book is a bit like looking out of the windows of your tour bus. You'll catch a glimpse of the landscape of where we've arrived, you'll get a brief introduction, and you'll begin to understand it in relation to the scriptures.

At the top of each section of this Guide Book, you'll find references for the corresponding chapters in the Gospel of Luke, whose footsteps we are following. Read along with the scriptures as you journey. You can divide out the chapters of that leg of the journey over a set number of days and read a little each day. Or, you will also see corresponding scripture references every time you unlock a piece of content, and can read as you arrive at the different waypoints. This pilgrimage finds its shape and grounding in the Gospel. Reading along as you journey will help put you in the imagined shoes of those who ushered in the early days of our faith, and will immerse you in the sacred story.

In each section of this Guide Book, you will also find Guiding Questions. These are based in the scriptures and give you something to meditate on as you travel, whether you mull over them while walking or contemplate them as you pray or do other points-based tasks. Whether you journal through the questions, or ponder them in your heart, we hope that they anchor your journey.

Above all, we pray that you savor this pilgrimage. Go at your own pace – there is no set time for you to finish. We are grateful that you're joining us. Happy pilgrimage.



Ein Karem

Luke 1:1-79

“Mary... hurried to a city in the Judean highlands”

1:39

Ein Karem is a beautiful and prosperous community about four miles from Jerusalem, its terraced hills are covered with olive trees with their silver green foliage and some vineyards as well. Even in Jesus' time this verdant area served as a sort of bedroom community to Jerusalem with many of the priests who served in the Temple living there. John the Baptist was born into such a family; Zechariah served in the Temple, and his mother Elizabeth was the daughter and wife to priests. The family owned two homes in Ein Karem, one in the valley where they wintered, and a second high in the terraced hills where they summered, benefitting from the summer breezes. It was likely a privileged and comfortable childhood for John.

Beyond the early years of John's life, we know little of his upbringing. His parents were elderly when he was born; it seems unlikely they saw him grow to adulthood. In fact, scripture alludes to Zechariah's death in the Temple while John was an infant (Matthew 23:35). One can't help but wonder, how did John, a child born into affluent surroundings, emerge as the animal-skin-wearing, locust-eating prophet that he became?

Guiding Questions

Consider pivotal points in your own life journey. How have those experiences changed you, helped formed you into the person you are today?

As you navigated life transitions, both for the good, and also the harder ones such as illness, death of loved ones, unexpected losses, how did you sense God's presence in the midst of those times?

Looking back, how would you say you are different today than in your earlier life? What lessons have you learned that sustain you today? What role has your faith played in the course of your life?



Bethlehem

Luke 2:1-20

“He went up...to David’s city, called Bethlehem”

2:4

Bethlehem began as a small village perched on the small hills overlooking the desert to the east, six miles south of Jerusalem.

Bethlehem, which means “house of bread,” was a refueling station for travelers along the ancient “Way of the Patriarchs” that ran north to south from Shechem to Hebron. Fields of wheat surrounded early Bethlehem, allowing citizens to offer the hospitality of bread and other necessities for the journey.

Although many a Christmas pageant might illustrate otherwise, a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth might reveal a surprisingly hospitable innkeeper on that fateful night. Consider a crowded city, overwhelmed with people arriving to be counted in the census, an overflowing inn, a heavily pregnant woman who has traveled 90 miles on a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem (probably 5-6 days). With little to no privacy in the inn, the cave which housed the animals



behind the inn was warm, private, and fairly quiet (barring “moos” and “baas”). Seeing Mary’s condition, the innkeeper may have been trying to do Mary a favor. Rather than sending the Holy Couple out into the night to seek lodging elsewhere, he led them to the cave, the humble setting for the birth of our Messiah.

Today, the site of Jesus’ birth is surrounded by the Church of the Nativity, built by Emperor Constantine (at the urging of his mother, Helena) in the fourth century. Renovated by Justinian in the sixth century, this church is the longest continuously used church in the world.

The original church featured large doors allowing entrance, but these doors were blocked during the Crusades when crusading soldiers entered the church on horseback, causing significant damage that remains visible today. A tiny side entrance was added on the Western side during the Turkish Period in the Middle Ages, which continues to provide access even today. Anyone taller than about 5’4” must duck to enter, providing “perhaps an



appropriate entrance point for a church commemorating a great act of humility.” In fact, this door is referred to as the “Door of Humility.”

One enters an elegant but elaborately decorated sanctuary

with columns lining the middle aisle, extravagant mosaics on the floors and walls, stunning crystal and gold chandeliers. The extravagant inner decor overwhelms the senses until one lines up to enter the Cave of the Nativity, one floor below the chancel. Well-worn stone steps lead into a small stone-lined room with a stone bench lining three walls, looking toward a small alcove lined with marble, lit by oil burning lanterns and a 14-point golden star affixed to the floor. It is here that pilgrims stand, kneel, kiss, leave gifts for the Christ Child.

Today, this World Heritage Site is located in the West Bank, in an area populated by Muslims, who consider the church a national treasure and one of their most visited tourist sites. In 2010, the Palestinian Authority announced a multimillion-dollar restoration plan, partially funded by Palestinians and conducted by a team of Palestinian and international experts. Today Bethlehem continues to be a place of hospitality and welcome, despite some of the political realities of this time. Perhaps there’s a message for all of us in that.



Guiding Questions

Bethlehem has a long history of hospitality to the traveler, the pilgrim. Mary and Joseph benefited from this hospitality, as have millions of others, both before and since the birth of Jesus. Knowing this hospitality as part of our own faith history, are there ways we might engage in deeper and more meaningful hospitality ourselves?

Humility is a core component in a life of faith. The location of Jesus' birth is a powerful reminder of just how God was willing to humble Himself to come into our midst, but humility, humbleness, is not greatly valued in our society. How might we live more humbly while retaining the great spiritual strength we witness in Jesus?

Recognizing these messages from this place of Jesus' birth, how might I be different when I awake on Christmas morning?



Jerusalem

Luke 2:20-21

**“they brought
Jesus up to
Jerusalem to be
presented..”**

2:22

Jerusalem: Ninety miles due south of Nazareth, a city of ancient whispers, the three religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, conflict, controversy, and the holiness of God. Today Jerusalem is both old and new with bustling traffic and heavily armed soldiers on the ancient streets where Jesus, David, Solomon, Abraham and Rachel may have walked. Jerusalem is not a city that soothes the soul, but rather challenges it instead. As one walks toward the Old City of Jerusalem where three major religions have holy sites (Jews, the Temple



Mount; Muslims, the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque; and Christians, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), one is likely to hear the sound of fast-moving traffic, the Muslim call to worship from the minarets that tower over city streets, and the church bells reminding one of the time. Today over 900,000 people live in Jerusalem, about 75% Jewish, 18% Muslim and 2% Christian. Entering one of the ancient gates into the Old City, one steps back in time to open air markets, narrow alleys, stone walls lining the streets,



behind which are shops and homes and restaurants. The Old City is divided into quadrants: Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian, and pilgrims wander from one section to the next without hindrance. Subtle signs indicate location: a shift in the language on printed signs, the nature of goods in shops, the garb of those walking the streets.

We first start hearing about this city in Genesis 14, (around 2000 BCE) when Abram, conquering warrior, is greeted by Mechizedek, Canaanite king (and high priest) of Salem, bringing Abram bread and wine, and this blessing: “Blessed be Abram by the High God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and blessed be The High God, who handed your enemies over to you.” Salem, a derivative of the word “Shalom,” translates as “wholeness,” “integrity” and “peace.” The city would be known later as Jerusalem, through a series of language shifts over time. Early on the city was known as Uru Shalim, “uru” meaning “city” in Sumerian. The diplomatic language of the day, Akkadian, referred to Salem as “Uru Shalimim,” meaning “city of peace.” Finally, Hebrew, which has no “J” sound in its language, would refer to the city as “Yerushalim,” and we come to the name we know today as Jerusalem. (Just a little tidbit, in case you wondered!)

Other key dates in Jerusalem's history:

1000 BCE	David makes Jerusalem his capital.
960 BCE	Solomon, David's son, builds the huge Temple in the north of David's city, representing 20% of city acreage.
597 BCE	Babylonians besiege the city, Jeremiah's prophetic ministry documents this time.
587/6 BCE	Destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon; king and many city leaders taken into exile in Babylon.
537/8 BCE	King Cyrus of Persia releases some of those taken captive a generation earlier; they begin returning to Jerusalem.
515 BCE	Rebuilding of Temple on smaller scale
450 BCE	More exiles return, city walls rebuilt, Nehemiah as project manager.
63 BCE	Jerusalem under Roman rule
41-44 CE	Herod Agrippa expands boundaries of city, major reconstruction of Temple, refurbishment of city.
70 CE	Romans destroy Temple, burn city, pull down southern walls of city.
135 CE	Emperor Hadrian destroys entire city; rebuilds as a Roman city called Aelia Capitolina.
638 CE	Muslims invade.
1099 CE	Crusades
1187 CE	Crusades end in defeat of Muslim control.
1517-1917 CE	Ottoman occupation of Jerusalem.
1537-42 CE	Suleiman the Magnificent builds the 'Old City' walls, including the still-used Damascus Gate.
1948 CE	Declaration of State of Israel with East Jerusalem in Jordanian control.
1967 CE	Six Day War, bringing all of Jerusalem under Israeli control.

Guiding Questions

The story of Abram is one of a man always on the move, coming to a city that, in its way, is always on the move as well, forced to change and adapt to the circumstances of the day. If you think about it, nearly every character in the Bible stays on the move. Genesis 12:1 reveals a God who urges us to be on the move when he tells Abram, “Leave your country, your family, and your father’s home for a land that I will show you.” How might God be urging you into moving toward something new, and as yet unknown? What are the signs before you?

Jerusalem is a city of conflict and challenge, and at the same time, powerful holiness. The Old City is, in some ways, a metaphor, surrounded as it is by many thousands of graves just outside its walls. In death, we as Christians recognize the possibility of new life. In conflict and challenge, perhaps we can recognize new opportunities and ways forward. What is God calling you to let die in your life so that new life might emerge? This might be as simple as releasing a bad habit or as big as making a significant life change. As you ponder this, name some of the deeply holy places in your life today...your relationships, your work, your prayer life, maybe your church community. Holy places are life-giving, so think about what gives you greater life, energy, enthusiasm, joy.





Jordan River

Luke 3:1-22

“Jesus returned from the Jordan River...”

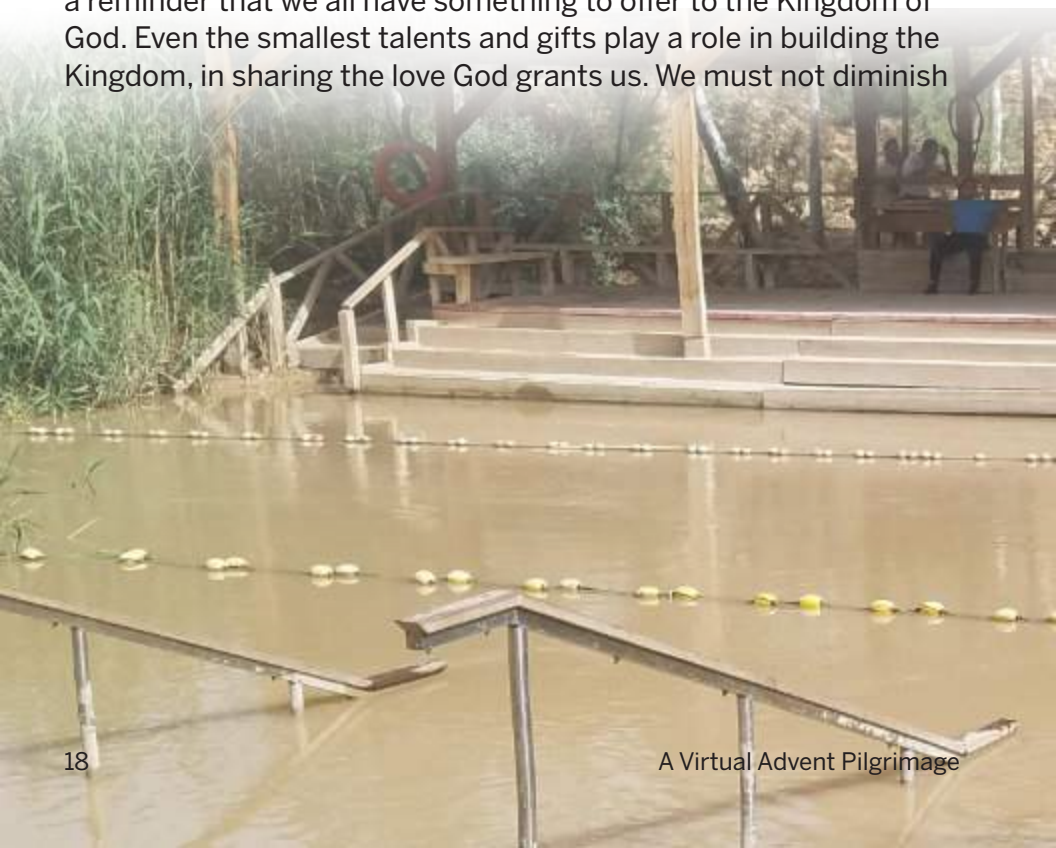
4:1

Given its history in both the Old and New Testaments, one might expect the Jordan River to be grand, overwhelming and majestic, perhaps a bit like our Mississippi River. If that is the expectation, the Jordan will disappoint. The River Jordan originates from the melting snows in the 10,000-foot peaks of Mount Hermon, in the northern-most point of Israel and traverses over 200 miles south. It is a narrow, winding unimpressive body of brownish water, creating a narrow border between Syria and Lebanon, continuing through Northern Israel to the Sea of Galilee. From there, the river continues South, dividing Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank to the west from Jordan to the east before emptying and terminating in the Dead Sea. The silence of this place is only broken by the sound of the wind rustling through the grasses along the riverbanks.

The site pilgrims visit along the Jordan is confronting. Driving through desert to arrive, one is first greeted by chain-link fences to the side with signs warning visitors to beware of landmines which still litter the landscape. Arriving at the river itself, one might find a sense of peace in the quiet, in the holiness of this place of to our own stories, until one glances across the river to see armed Jordanian soldiers protecting the border. From the comfort of our homes and churches, one might fail to see the complexities and challenges of life in this place, both today and in years past.

The River Jordan is not what one expects. Unimpressive, unattractive, the River Jordan plays a significant role in the story of God and God's people. The river provides life and abundance as it flows south, filling the Sea of Galilee, watering the lands of northern Israel. It is only when the river terminates in the Dead Sea that its purpose seems to end with no outlets to keep moving.

This river holds messages for our lives. First, its very smallness is a reminder that we all have something to offer to the Kingdom of God. Even the smallest talents and gifts play a role in building the Kingdom, in sharing the love God grants us. We must not diminish





our gifts or fail to use those given us, or we might find ourselves like the river terminated with nowhere to go at the Dead Sea.

Lives changed at the River Jordan, turned toward God and were given new purpose and meaning. Moses, Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, Jesus, thousands of those baptized in this place.



Guiding Questions

This river holds messages for our lives. Its very smallness is a reminder that we all have something to offer in the Kingdom of God. Even the smallest talents and gifts play a role in building the Kingdom, in sharing the love God grants us. Consider your gifts, no matter how small, no matter how insignificant they seem to you, and how they might be used to bring new life into the world around you...and new life to you as well.

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist at the Jordan, a sign and marker of a new life and ministry. What are some ways that your baptism changed your life?



Notes

The Wilderness

Luke 4:1-13

**“...and Jesus
was led
into the
wilderness.”**

4:1

“The Wilderness” is a stretch of desert east of Jerusalem that descends to the Dead Sea. The eastern side of the Mount of Olives drops off dramatically, plunging into a sparsely vegetated desert with pale chalky hills, narrow twisting canyons, and dotted with occasional oases. Rainfall is rare and the landscape is harsh so nothing is grown here, although in the springtime many shepherds will still graze their sheep on the limited plant life. Historically, thieves, rebels, and ascetics would make their home in the wilderness. The wilderness is where the ancient Israelites forged their new identity with God. It was a place for escape and refuge for Elijah and David when their lives were threatened, and it is where the prophet Isaiah calls the people to build a highway for God. It is here where John the Baptist began his ministry.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, men and women went out into the Judean desert to form some of the earliest monasteries, including the Monastery of Jesus' Temptation, one of the few that still exists.

While the landscape now features the outlines of monastery buildings carved into the white cliffs, both still in use and in ruins, by and large the Judean

wilderness is still remarkably barren and quiet. It is a close and stark contrast to the bustle and height of Jerusalem, and reminds us to listen to the voice of God in silence as monks and nuns did for centuries ahead of us in this place.

Within the Wilderness, towering over the northwest of Jericho, is the Mountain of Temptation. It is traditionally held as the mountain where Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights before his temptations, though scripture does not specify where in the wilderness he stayed. Halfway up the mountain is the Monastery of Jesus' Temptation. In the early centuries, monks and ascetics made their homes in these caves, and over time built the walls necessary for community life. You can get to the monastery by either walking up a very narrow and steep footpath, or by taking the "new" cable car. From the mountain you can see the entire Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and the mountains of Moab and Gilead.



Guiding Questions

For thousands of years, people have used silence as a way to connect to God and center themselves in the life of prayer and faith. Silence can be a blessing, but it can also at times feature intrusive thoughts which might make it uncomfortable. What is your relationship with silence? When are you silent during a normal day? What does silence reveal about your soul?

Luke 4:1 says that after his baptism, Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. When have you been called into wilderness places? Were they literal physical wildernesses? Were they spiritual wildernesses?

Jesus is tempted by the devil for 40 days while he is in the wilderness. Luke 4:13 says that, after the devil finished tempting him, the devil departed until the next opportunity. We are not told in the gospel what the other opportunities might have been, but we can assume that there were other opportunities. Temptations to sin and draw away from God happen to all of us throughout our lives. What temptations have followed you around? What girds you against them? How do you turn back to God after you have given in?





Nazareth

Luke 4-6

**“Jesus went
to Nazareth
where he had
been raised.”**

4:16

Today there are two Nazareths, an Upper Nazareth with a largely Jewish population, and Lower Nazareth, a mostly Palestinian community, predominantly Muslim, with some Christians. Nazareth, with a population of 77,000, is no small town as it was in Jesus' day with a population of around 100. Below the bustling streets of Lower Nazareth between the Church of the Annunciation and the Sisters of Nazareth convent and guesthouse lie the archeological remains of a first century village with remnants of stone homes, narrow streets, even burial caves. It was here, 90 miles north of Jerusalem, in this tiny village tucked away from the eyes of the world, that Jesus grew into adulthood.

A beautiful Jewish prayer reads as follows:

“Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among the miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness and exclaim in wonder: ‘How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it!’” (Gates of Prayer, 1975).

Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among the miracles. Nazareth, a tiny town, watched the young Jesus “grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:51-52). Even knowing this, when Jesus returned from his time in the desert and revealed the miracle of his identity, those who knew him best couldn’t see who he really was. Rather than welcoming him, they turned on him and ran him out of town. They walked sightless among the miracle who was in their midst.



Guiding Questions

We all walk sightless among the miracles in our lives. What are some of the miracles in your life? As the Rev. Susan Prinz pondered this meditation on her morning walk, she startled a Great Blue Heron into flight. As he circled her, she was reminded of how the Great Blue always seemed to appear when most needed, encouraging and guiding her path. A miracle? Perhaps. Definitely an affirmation of God's guiding presence in her life. What are some of those daily miracles that lead you in God's path?

Life is made up of big miracles and small ones. What are some of the big miracles in your life? Are there people in your life who are miracles? Have you healed from a life-threatening illness? Did a door open that led you in a life-affirming direction? As you walk, look back over the miracles that have blessed your life.

One way to document the miracles, large and small, is a gratitude journal. Consider starting one and note the gifts of your days in it. The best way to see the miracles in our lives is to look for them.



Capernaum

Luke 7-9

“Jesus went down to the city of Capernaum...”

4:31

Capernaum sits on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. Behind Capernaum are gentle hills, reminding one of scripture stories where Jesus would retreat to these hills for rest, solace, and prayer, Sabbath time. On the far side of the Sea of Galilee, one sees steep hills, which sometimes serve to funnel winds straight to the sea. We know the stories of Jesus calming the waters of this sea. Seeing the geography explains just how the waters could easily become dangerous. And one also sees the waters become so placid they look like a piece of satin, inviting us to try walking on water in our own lives. Off in the distance, behind the high hills is the country of Syria, reminding one of just how close the countries of the Middle East are to one another.

Walking down to the Capernaum beach, where the water laps gently on the shore, looking down reveals tiny conch shells littering the beach, hundreds, no, thousands of shells no larger than a baby's fingernail. Such perfection of nature in the tiniest imaginable incarnation seems miraculous.

In many ways Capernaum is a place of miracles, of being strengthened for the lives we live through Sabbath practices of rest and retreat, by paying attention to the smallest things, and appreciating the beauty all around us.

Guiding Questions

After leaving Nazareth, Jesus made Capernaum his headquarters, and to some degree his home. His ministry in this region was demanding and exhausting, and we know that he took time for retreat and rest in the hills behind Capernaum. Jesus practiced Sabbath time in those quiet hills, which prepared him for the demands of his life. Do you practice Sabbath time, too; time to rest and relax; to be alone for a bit?

What are some of your Sabbath practices that replenish your energy and optimism?

Mt. Tabor

Luke 9:28-36

**“...[they]
went up on a
mountain
to pray.”**

9:28

Scripture does not tell us what the high place is that Jesus and his disciples visit to pray before he is transfigured, but early Christian traditions named Mount Tabor as the likely site in Galilee. The mountain rises dramatically from the Jezreel Valley south of the Galilean hills. It is round and symmetrical with a broad flat top from which you can see all of Galilee.

In Luke 9, Peter, John, and James stay awake just long enough to see two men speaking with Jesus. Jesus' appearance is changed and they realize the two men are none other than Elijah and Moses. They overhear the men speaking about Jesus' departure from this earth and his task as Messiah, which would be completed in Jerusalem. Speechless, lacking for anything else to say about this terrifying and awe-inspiring event, Peter says, "Lord it is good that we should be here. Let us build three shrines for each of you." Before Peter can finish speaking, a cloud descends



and God's voice booms from within the cloud. Peter's suggestion to build shrines is not answered by Jesus, but they leave the mountain before Peter could begin assembling them. We get the idea from Luke's tone that it was a bad idea since "Peter didn't know what he was saying."

Nevertheless, building shrines is exactly what we did in the subsequent centuries. In the 4th century, a huge basilica was built on the top of the mountain, which is expanded and still there today. In the 6th century, a pilgrim's journal reports that there were three churches on the top of the mountain, dedicated to Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. The mountain still has ruins from shrines and churches built by Crusaders in the 13th century which were destroyed after they were defeated. It remained deserted for nearly 400 years until a group of Franciscans negotiated permission to settle there. Today, the Franciscans and a group of Greek Orthodox split the site into two separate churches. The Franciscan church features three peaks on the roof to represent the three tents which Peter desired to build.



Guiding Questions

To reach the top of the steep mountain, you travel on a road full of sharp hairpin turns. When has your faith taken a hairpin turn, and where did it take you?

Peter is speechless about the incredible things he witnessed -- to see two heavenly saints come and deliver a message, to see his friend Jesus transformed before his eyes, and to be surrounded by the thick cloud of God and hear God's voice. It's a lot to take in. Out of his awe and lack of anything else to do, he thinks to build a structure by which to remember the moment. Perhaps if he built a structure to mark the moment, he could revisit it and remember that what he saw truly happened and was not a dream.

Centuries later, people continued to be overwhelmed and speechless by God's incarnation on earth and all that we saw from Jesus while he was here with us. They marked it with churches and shrines all over the Holy Land, including on Mount Tabor. What ways do you mark your faith, and what tokens do you hold on to that remind you it is all real and true?

How have you been transformed by this pilgrimage? Where are you going from here?





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