

November, 2012



The Canticle

From The Dean...

In place of my usual article, I want to share the text from Fr. Rob Courtney's blog during the recent diocesan trip to the Holy Land. Visit www.ccnola.org to see the entire blog complete with pictures, audio and video clips. Entries begin on page 5.
-David+



ALL SAINTS' DAY ALL FAITHFUL DEPARTED & ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

All Saints' Day is Thursday, November 1.
Mass will be celebrated at 12:15 PM in the Chapel.

All Faithful Departed or All Souls' Day service
at 12:15 PM on Friday, November 2,
in the Chapel.

The names of our deceased loved ones will be read during
the prayers of the people.

All Saints' Sunday is November 4
Holy Baptism at the 10 o'clock service.
Daylight Savings Time Ends



Ingathering Sunday November 25

Completed 2013 pledge cards that have been returned to the office by November 25 will be presented at the altar during the 10 o'clock service that morning. Please return your card on or before that Sunday.

Prayerfully consider your gifts of time and talent for the coming year along with your financial commitment.

Thanksgiving Day Mass
Thursday, November 22 ~ Chapel 10 a.m.
No 12:15 p.m. service on Thursday.

The 12:15 p.m. Mass will be celebrated in the Chapel as scheduled on Friday.

The church office will be closed on Thursday & Friday, November 22 & 23.



THE
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH
WELCOMES YOU

LECTIONARY TEXTS
(Sunday Readings)

November 4

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

November 11

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17
Psalm 127
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

November 18

1 Samuel 1:4-20
1 Samuel 2:1-10 (as a Canticle) or
Psalm 16
Hebrews 10:11-25
Mark 13:1-8

November 25

2 Samuel 23:1-7
Psalm 132:1-13, (14-19)
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

Please pray the prayer printed below as you consider your commitment to Christ Church Cathedral in the coming year.

Stewards' Prayer

O God, You bless us, your faithful people, With all that we have and all that we are. We humbly accept the challenge to Share from our means rather than from our excess. We resolve to be generous with our time, talent, and treasure, giving in proportion to the gifts we have received. Help us, we pray, to live each day in a grateful spirit of peace and joy secure in the knowledge that we are striving to do your will. Amen

Pledge cards will be presented to God during worship on Christ the King Sunday, November 25.

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF LOUISIANA

The Right Reverend Morris K. Thompson, Jr., *Bishop*

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

The Very Reverend David A. duPlantier, *Dean*
The Reverend Steven M. Roberts, *Canon*
The Reverend William C. Morris, Jr., *Theologian in Residence*
The Reverend W. Gedge Gayle, Jr., *Priest Associate*
The Venerable Priscilla G. Maumus, *Deacon*
Ms. Laurie Bailey, *Director of Christian Formation & Communications*
Mr. Jarrett Follette, *Director of Music & Organist*
Ms. Linda Nelson, *Director of Advent House*
Mr. Chris Speed, *Parish Administrator*
Ms. Carol Butcher, *Executive Assistant to the Dean*
Ms. Suzette Follette, *Parish Secretary & Wedding Coordinator*
Mr. Charles Franklin, *Property Manager*
Mr. Avery Montgomery, *Sexton*
Ms. Sharon Henry, *Nursery Worker*
Ms. Karen Landry, *Nursery Worker*
Ms. Jeanette Gilmore-Burrell *Nursery Worker*

HONORARY CANONS NON-RESIDENTIARY

The Reverend S. Chad Jones
Mr. David R. Pitts
The Reverend E. Mark Stevenson

VESTRY

2013

Boyd Fink
Bill Forman
Mary Baldwin Kennedy (Senior Warden)

2015

Jim Buck
Dick Moreland
Lisa Sibal, Bill Soileau

2014

René Dupaquier
Earl Moreau
David O'Leary (Junior Warden)

2016

Chris Beary (Treasurer)
Sam Buckley (Secretary)
Julio Figueroa

Submissions for Cathedral Publications are always welcome.

The deadline for Canticle articles is the 10th of the month.

Items for the December issue are due November 10.

Please e-mail submissions to
lauriebailey@cccnola.org

Sunday bulletin and/or weekly e-blast announcements should be submitted **before noon on Tuesdays** to
lauriebailey@cccnola.org

THE BANNS OF MARRIAGE

I publish the Banns of Marriage between Allison Susen Leung an Charles Newblock McAlpin, Jr.

If any of you know just cause why they may not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are bidden to declare it.

- The Very Rev. David duPlantier, Dean

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

**2919 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70115**

504-895-6602

504-895-6662 (fax)

<http://cccnola.org>



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<http://cccnola.org/GIVING.htm>



Our first Laetare Gala was a great success, far surpassing our best hopes. We welcomed over 150 friends, including first-time guests to Christ Church, to celebrate fellowship, food, wine and art. More than 50 people and businesses donated a popular range of auction items. Our first Laetare Gala raised over \$5,000!

The Gala would not have been possible without everyone's support; this truly was a group effort. We would like to extend a special thank you to our fellow parishoners and friends who so generously volunteered and donated auction items, to the Cathedral staff and

clergy who provided so much support in the planning and set up, and to the many businesses who supported the Gala. It was a real pleasure to work with everyone and get the Laetare Gala started at the Cathedral. What a great way to start the fall!

With our warmest thanks and gratitude,
Donna Denton and Karyn Murphy, co-chairs

Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany). It is recommended that, as far as possible, Baptisms be reserved for these occasions or when a Bishop is present. (BCP, page 312)



Baptism Anniversaries

Susan Kartzke 11/1	Scott Smith 11/8
Matthew Kirkwood 11/1	Andy Jameson 11/14
Charles Leche 11/1	Molly O'Keefe 11/15
Landen Allbritton 11/2	Jake Allbritton 11/18
Cole Dodson 11/2	Holly Holley 11/19
Sam Backley IV 11/3	Wyatt Blankingship 11/21
Elizabeth Lewis 11/3	Pam Lanaux 11/22
Krysta Henry 11/4	Barbara Richmond 11/22
Isabella Landry 11/4	Spencer Shushan 11/25
Brianna Mueller 11/4	Amanda Figueroa 11/26
PJ Lewis Jr. 11/5	Harlan Bush 11/27
Gurbitta Pates 11/5	Harlan Bush Jr 11/27
Braylen Benoit 11/6	George Mentz 11/28
Leah LaBauve 11/6	Miss Caroline Nead 11/28
Aiden Wilson 11/7	

STUDYING THE GOSPELS

Study the Gospels with us at Advent House. Discussions will be appropriate to the season and the following Sunday.

Thursday, 6:00-7:00 P.M.

Facilitator: Dick Moreland 301-537-1065,
dickmoreland@aol.com

2012 Schedule

November 15 - Mark 13:1-8

November 29 - Luke 21:25-36

December 13 - Luke 3:7-18



We wish a very Happy Birthday to all those born this month. If your name isn't listed, we don't have your date of birth in our records.

Please call the church office and we'll be sure to wish you a Happy Birthday next year.

Lucy Arthur
Verna Barnett
Les Bradfield
Beth Buckley
Bob Carr
Drew Cooke
Erica Dodson
Bobette Dudley
Jimmy Faust
Bess Ferguson
Avery Fortenberry
Kenya Fredie



Carl Gaines
Alicia Heard
Sam Jameson
Caitlin Kirkwood
Jason Kirkwood
Katherine Lee
James Mangum
David O'Leary
Pricilla Oyekan
Amanda Schwaner
Jonathon Schwaner
Scott Smith

"Thomas Merton through a New Monk's Eyes"
Brother Ephrem Arcement of St. Joseph Abbey

Saturday, November 3, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Parker UMC

This opportunity to hear Brother Ephrem share his enthusiasm for both the life of a monk and the work of Thomas Merton is Not To Be Missed!

The cost is \$25 and includes lunch.

Make your check to Parker UMC, write "SCL workshop" on the memo line, and mail it to Parker UMC, 1130 Nashville Ave. NOLA 70115.

Register now and come join our growing community as we enroll together in a School for Contemplative Living.

William Thiele, spiritual director
The School for Contemplative Living
www.thescl.net 504-899-3431 william.thiele56@gmail.com

From the Theologian in Residence...

FAREWELL, FAVORITE CLICHÉS

WELL, IT'S FINALLY HAPPENED. The number of Protestant Christians in America has dropped to 48%, ending the Protestant majority that we believe existed since the founding of the Republic.

IN ADDITION, the number of people designating themselves as "nones"--that is, without any religious affiliation--has risen sharply, especially among people between 18 and 22.

THE NONES may never have been formal members of any church, or they may be ex-members of mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Roman Catholic bodies.

THE STATISTICAL PICTURE is not crisp and simple. It is diverse and includes many different expressions of direction. Some of the trends it reflects have been growing for a long time.

*Fifty years ago, community life was often organized to support Christian practice. Most stores closed on Sundays. Sports leagues with Sunday games, and the NFL, did not exist. Sunday was set apart for worship, rest, and family--and there was not much else to do. Since then, Sunday has filled up with alternatives to church, while the social pressures that promote religious participation have diminished.

*The nineteen sixties privatized religion. It removed it from the list of appropriate public concerns on the grounds that faith and practice were radically individual acts. It downplayed the power of religion to bring people together, to generate peace, or to engender hatred and division. Ever since, the sixties' assumption that religion doesn't matter has been clashing with our observation that it may matter very much.

*Commercially, modern American marketing has compartmentalized our culture, so that each generation feels separate, characterized by different styles, different music, and, often different attitudes. Radical individualism has become a cultural cliché, especially its stress on discontinuity, rebellion, and self-discovery. The process of handing over the culture of family and church has become more difficult. There is more peer pressure and less shared intergenerational wisdom.

*Entrepreneurial pastors, particularly Roman Catholics and evangelicals, identified the church with a specific political agenda so intensely that those who disagreed often felt alienated.

SOME OF THE NONES are disinterested. They dropped out or have no experience of Christianity at all. Religion is not on their mental maps.

SOME OF THE NONES have specific objections to church policies, some in the areas of politics and ethics, some because what they perceive as institutional self-centeredness. Sexuality is a frequent concern. There is often a generational disconnect. For people under thirty, homosexuality and gay marriage are often non-issues. They see political crusading as negative and as expressive of ecclesiastical self-obsession. Many of them vote Democratic, but usually for secular rather than religious reasons.

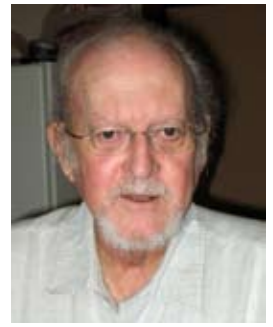
HOWEVER, THE NONES are not necessarily atheists or agnostics. Many have retained a degree of belief, and often engage in prayer and helping ministries, while avoiding worship. They respond when the church reaches out, but are turned off by the idea of the church as a chaplaincy. While baby boomers often want the church to look comfortably non-churchy, younger persons are often attracted to the transcendence of traditional liturgy, ceremonies, and music.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? A poll is a snapshot, not a prediction. The changes it speaks of have already happened. Do we see here the beginning of a European-style secularization? Perhaps, but many think not: Europeans are reacting to state churches, but American churches are voluntary institutions with very different dynamics. Culturally, America is still very religious, and the disaffiliated count has been high before, during the nineteen thirties.

THE CHURCHES seem to have gotten the message that they must do a better job of communicating the Gospel and the crucial relationship of faith and worship. For many of the nones, the missing piece is less faith than liturgical participation.

MORE BROADLY, the Pew Poll reflects a growing American disillusionment with institutions in general, stimulated in part by increased communication and more alternatives. A countervailing force to that is a growing conviction that we need to find each other again, in person, and not necessarily on the internet, because too many of our choices are being dictated by abstract and unaccountable communications, uncritically received. What will happen as we learn to handle modernity?

William Morris+



Visitors to the Cathedral are often surprised by our Coffee Hour. You can help us keep up our reputation for great hospitality by volunteering to host Coffee Hour one Sunday. Drinks are provided by the church and volunteers provide their choice of food. Host with a friend or two. If you have no time to shop and prepare food, financial donations are always gladly accepted. For additional information/volunteer, contact Kathy Boyd, 891-1360 or kboydaj@yahoo.com.

Recent Coffee Hour hosts: Pudney Pointer, Susan Carswell, Frances Beverly, Liz, Sara and Samantha Glidewell, Sarah and Liam Whalen, Travis Koerner, Les Bradfield, Sue Blankingship, Pam Lanaux, and Troy Buttone. Many thanks! There are numerous dates open beginning in mid-November. Please sign up today in Stuart Hall.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF OLD (*October 06, 2012*)

We've all made it safely to Jerusalem by the grace of God. Being here is, honestly, a little overwhelming at this point. Trying to encapsulate everything that we're seeing even in just a few hours here is difficult. What I can tell you is that Jerusalem is bustling, beautiful, dirty, and awe inspiring all at the same time. The dirtiness and crowdedness of the streets reminds me a little bit of the French Quarter if it had more of the sacred and less of the profane.

I made friends with the man in the seat next to me on the plane from Philly. His name is Yossi, he lives in Tel Aviv, and was traveling home from the US for Oracle computer convention. Yossi is ethnically Jewish, though he was very clear to let me know he was not religiously so. I explained to him that I was on a Christian pilgrimage. "You know," he said, "even though I'm not a religious person, there is something about those religious sites. I don't know if all those things really happened there or not. Or, if so, if they really hold the meaning people attach to them. But there's something about it that is . . . sacred. You can feel it. You have to go and feel it."

I asked him what it was like to live in a part of the world that has such an ancient history. He said, "Everything, even in Tel Aviv, is either very new or very old." Tel Aviv is the biblical Jaffa. He went on to say, "It's not like in the US. You think that your historic sites are very old, but they're only a couple of hundred years old. Jaffa. Jerusalem. Those places are 3,000 plus years old. It's a different kind of old. You'll see."

Our guide is Iyad Qumri, a good friend of Dean duPlantier, and, we learned today, an official Canon in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles for whom he has done many tours. Iyad got us off the bus near the Damascus Gate of the Old City. This ornate version of the gate was built in the 16th century, but the original gate here was built by Herod in the early first century. That's definitely a different kind of old. Here you see Iyad telling the group a little about this gate that we will see more closely in the coming days. There were a lot of merchants outside the gates today. Iyad explained that normally this is illegal. Since it's the Sabbath, however, the municipality does not function because no one works. The merchants are able to set up and sell their goods because no one will chase them off or arrest them. Our hotel is right near the Damascus Gate and Herod's Gate, so the bus let us out here so we could walk a little and get a feel for the neighborhood.

As we walked I was really struck by the beauty of the Muslim call to prayer by the muezzin, the person who chants the call, from one of the nearby minarets. Not long after that, the sun set and the Sabbath ended. Then the fireworks began as the Jews are celebrating Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths which commemorate the Israelites 40 years in the wilderness. All this as cars are speeding by, horns are honking, people are having a picnic by the Old City wall. The city is bustling with religious devotion and activity of all kinds.

After dinner several of us went up to the roof to take in the view. Here you see Fr. John Miller and his wife Celine gazing up towards the Mount of Olives to the East of the City, the Dome of the Rock straight ahead.

We've only been here a few hours and already we've seen and learned so much. What do the days ahead have in store for us?

Here is one of the collects that our group wrote together in preparation for this trip that I hope you'll pray with us on this pilgrimage: Holy and life-giving Spirit, who inspires the people of God in all times and places: allow us to surrender ourselves and trust in your grace, that our pilgrim community may fully experience your presence as we journey through the Holy Land of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Father lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God's blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

HOLY TRINITY, ONE ALLAH (*October 07, 2012*)

We began our day together with Morning Prayer and an introductory talk from our guide, Iyad Qumri. "Allah is not just what Muslims call God," Iyad told us. "I am Arab. I am Palestinian. I am Christian. I speak Arabic. 'God' in Arabic is Allah! So, when you go to mass this morning at St. George's Cathedral, you will hear everyone speaking Arabic praising Allah." And, indeed, it was so. The Eucharist at St. George's was said in both Arabic and English. The people's responses were said in the two different languages simultaneously. It reminded me of what it must have sounded like on the day of Pentecost: all were speaking in their own language about God's deeds of power.

St. George's was built in the 1890s. The college located at St. George's is the Continuing Education Center for the Anglican Communion. The Very Rev. Hosam Naoum, Dean of the Cathedral, welcomed Bishop Thompson, Dean duPlantier, and our group during the announcements. The celebrant and preacher was The Rt. Rev. Suheil Duwani, the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. Bishop Duwani preached on gratitude. He said that the gratitude we have for our blessings, even in hardship, leads us to be a blessing for others in hardship, particularly the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed.

Following the Eucharist we went to coffee hour (Episcopalians do those in the Middle East, too!), in a lovely outdoor garden, and had the privilege of visiting with Bishop Duwani. He is particularly concerned about peace and reconciliation in the region. The service leaflet we used sums up what he had to say:

"Two conflicts in Lebanon, two Intifadas, two Gulf Wars, and the ongoing stalemate of the 'peace process' remind us all of the elusive nature of peace. Christians continue to be a moderating influence promoting a just resolution for a lasting peace for the

benefit of all of God's people - Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. At the present time, Bishop Suheil Dawani sees education for all the young people of our region, including 7,000 students in the schools of the Diocese, as a key to the future. Our schools are educating the next generation of peace-makers even as our hospitals are healing the wounds of the present generation. Your prayers and generous financial support are most welcome and appreciated."

The Bishop talked about St. Luke's Hospital in Nablus as a principal witness to the Diocesan mission. You can learn more about that mission by watching this video. Pictured above are Bishop Thompson, Bishop Duwani, and The Rt. Rev. Hope Morgan Ward, United Methodist Church, North Carolina Conference in Raleigh, NC, who also happened to be visiting.

As a side note, as we were exploring the Cathedral nave following the mass, we were looking at the cushions which had been embroidered and sent to St. George's by churches from all over the Anglican Communion. Lo and behold we found a cushion that was made by St. Paul's Episcopal Church, New Orleans, right near where some of us had been sitting. Pictured here with the find are Lori Lavelle and Margie Christian from St. Paul's.

We left the Cathedral for lunch in the West Bank town of Taybeh (pronounced Tie-bay), a town known in the Bible as Ephraim. See John 11:53-54 for some context from the life of Jesus. Taybeh means "tasty" or "delicious" in Arabic. Here you see the group sitting down for a wonderful lunch complete with probably the best hummus ever, and Taybeh Beer, the local beer from the local brewery. That's the town of Taybeh that you see through the windows in the background.

In Taybeh itself we visited the ruins of the church of St. George's. This church was built in the Byzantium period (4th or 5th century). We got to see a baptistry there that still stands. It was amazing to think of all the many thousands of Christians who were probably made in the waters of that font so long ago whose baptismal faith we carry on.

Just down from the ruins was the annual Oktoberfest sponsored by Taybeh Beer. We got to enjoy an Italian rock band who sounded a little like Green Day, and to shop at the bazaar where there were local crafts, local olive oil, and local honey. Here you can see that Bishop Thompson is rocking out to the band. I learned during the set that the Bishop plays the drums. Alas, I was not able to arrange a jam session for him with the band.

Late afternoon we returned to our hotel where we heard a lecture on Islam from our guest speaker, Firas Amad. Firas is a Muslim educated at Chapel Hill, NC who specializes in the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and who now teaches here in Jerusalem. It was enlightening for the whole group, and helped us to put away some misconceptions about Islam. Did you know, for instance, that Jesus (known as Issa in Arabic) is mentioned almost as many times in the Qur'an as Mohammed? And that while Muslims believe Mohammed was the final prophet, the Qur'an teaches that Issa is God's favorite prophet? Later in the week we will hear an Israeli perspective with another guest speaker.

Finally, after a long, long day, we ended with a dinner at the American Colony Hotel. What a lovely room and a wonderful dinner! The American Colony is the oldest continuous American presence in Jerusalem and started with Anna and Horatio Spafford. The Spaffords were leaders of a fundamentalist sect of Christians who moved to Jerusalem in hopes of finding healing after the loss of their four daughters, and who hoped to be present in the Holy Land for Jesus' imminent return. Their reputation for service to people of all faiths in this region is legendary. Their home when they lived here in the early 20th century is now the hotel. Their legacy continues with the Spafford Children's Center which ministers to needy people of all faiths. Dean duPlantier is on the board of the Spafford Center, and we will be visiting there tomorrow.

There is so much more I could say, but Iyad wants us ready to leave at 6:59 am. It's 11:11 pm right now. Tomorrow we enter the Old City and visit the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock. In the afternoon it's into the Judean desert where Jesus was tempted for 40 days. He'll only have one afternoon to get a shot at us.

Pray with us today: Holy and Gracious Father, who instructs us in your ways and invites us to follow them: Open the eyes of our faith that, as we experience your Holy Land, walls of fear and intolerance will fall, and your glorious peace will fill our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God's blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

SEEK YE FIRST (*October 08, 2012*)

Today was wonderful, but a little rough on everyone. The jet lag has really set in. We did a lot, but we are all really, really tired. Today's blog post will be short.

We started the day at the Western Wall. You may remember that for the Jewish people it is Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles. The wall was particularly crowded today. Before I left Trinity in Morgan City I had everyone write prayer requests on a piece of paper. To all who wrote on that paper I was able to pray at the Western Wall today, and to place that paper in between some of the stones. I prayed that God would hear all of your prayers.

I was somewhat taken aback by the experience at the wall. One because, well, it's the Western Wall - how could it not be a powerful experience. Two because of all the loud prayers and singing particularly because of the festival. The wall is segregated by men and women, and on the men's side the men were dancing, singing, praying, and carrying around huge, ornate Torah scrolls in procession. The women's side looked to be much more subdued. What really threw me off, however, was the line of Israeli soldiers praying at the wall while holding M16s with grenade launchers. I couldn't help but be struck by the dichotomy of peaceful, joyous prayer alongside weapons of war.

Following the wall we went up onto Haram esh-Sharif, or the Temple Mount. We were able to view the magnificently beauti-

ful Dome of the Rock and el-Aksa Mosque. Entrance for Jews and Christians has been prohibited since the second Intifada which began after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon entered the Temple Mount with a couple of hundred riot police in September of 2000. Though we wished we could have gone inside, the Dome especially is an architectural marvel. And it's over 1,400 years old.

Next we visited the healing pools of Bethesda or Bethzatha that are described in John 5 when Jesus heals a man there. Right next to it is the church of St. Anne built in 1138 AD. Byzantine tradition held that this was the home of the Virgin Mary and her parents, though they probably lived in Sepphoris. As our guide, Iyad, said today, "Remember that in the Holy Land holy sites tend to move around." St. Anne's is a beautiful church. Inside quiet is requested unless people wish to pray aloud or sing hymns. The acoustics are so wonderful it made us sound almost like a professional choir! Almost being the key word. We sang "Seek Ye First" and I was able to record it for you to enjoy. [Click here to listen to it.](#)

I promised this would be a short blog, so I'll give you the abbreviated version of the rest of the day. Following this visit we were off to lunch (is it possible to get tired of hummus?), then visited the Israeli museum where we saw the Dead Sea Scrolls. The afternoon wrapped up with a visit to Mt. Scopus to the East of the city where we overlooked the Judean desert of the temptation and the land of Moab. We will be back there to visit the Mount of Temptation in a few days. Tomorrow we make the journey to Bethlehem for an early morning mass at the Church of the Holy Nativity.

That's all for now. But please, do pray with and for us: Guide us, Lord Jesus, as we walk on the rocky soil of your earthly home; help us to leave behind our prejudices and recognize that You travel with us in every step we take; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God's blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

LIFE AND DEATH, JOY AND PAIN (*October 09, 2012*)

Today was a mix of joyful experiences and painful ones; experiences of life and of death.

The day started out very joyfully indeed as we were up very early and headed to Bethlehem. Most of the time when people visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem they experience huge crowds. But, because we have the best guide in the Middle East, Iyad, we arrived there early enough to be the first and only ones there. We entered the church by the low door which has both a practical and theological purpose (as many liturgical things do). Practically it was made short ca. 16th century to keep people from bringing animals into the church. Theologically, one has to humbly bow to enter, an appropriate posture for venerating the place where it is tradition that "the Word became flesh."

Below the church are caves, including the Cave of the Nativity. We were privileged to celebrate the Eucharist - and to receive communion from the Roman Catholic priest - in this cave. Tradition holds that this is the cave where Jesus was born. It was probably not a stable, of course, but a cave-home with a side room for the animals. The animals were fed from a manger, or feeding trough. On the way into the Cave of the Nativity pilgrims can bend down and touch a hole in the marble which is the alleged spot of where Jesus was born. To then stand in the cave and hear the mass in Italian and to receive communion in this holy spot was incredible.

It turns out that some of the other people celebrating with us were none other than the members of the band we saw in Taybeh at the Oktoberfest just two days before. Apparently, one can only get the honor of receiving the Eucharist in such a special place if s/he is clergy, in a rock band, or if s/he knows Iyad! Iyad knows all the right people in all the right places. He speaks often of his "cousins." He has them in every place we go. "Tomorrow we will go to such-and-such and place, and do such-and-such because the guy there is my cousin." Today we had falafel at his "cousin's" restaurant. And some of us got to ride his cousin's camel! Pictured is Gerry Brown showing off her new camel-riding skills. We're glad we have our own cousins in Jerusalem now because of our cousin, Iyad.

Here is a picture of all the women of our group with their head scarves. Modesty is important in this culture. The women wore these when we visited the Dome of the Rock yesterday, which actually made some of the men ask if we were a Muslim group. The Muslims we encountered appreciated it, and one our women pilgrims commented that she was touched by the group's willingness to show respect for the beliefs of others. It was a value she learned as a child, and this was a way of living out that value. Today, the women wore their head-coverings again out of respect for the Orthodox Christians who share the Church of the Holy Nativity with the Roman Catholics.

That's a sampling of the joy of today, but there was also pain. Bethlehem is on the West Bank, and it is surrounded by the separation wall that has been erected by Israel as a security measure. The wall is a sad fact of life for Palestinians in the West Bank, as are many of the security checkpoints where people are notoriously harassed and regularly turned away from entering Israel to see their friends and loved ones. The wall keeps people separated from one another in more ways than one. One of our pilgrims, Regina Matthews from Trinity, New Orleans, commented, "The most moving moment for me in Bethlehem today was our visit to the wall - erected by Israel but not in line with the Oslo Accords. Many Israeli settlements have been constructed on the West Bank beyond the established Green Line. The Wall is a living monument to the grief of the Palestinians, who are no longer allowed in Jerusalem except by scarce waiver cards and hours-long waits."

Bishop Thompson led us in a prayer for peace after we heard this reading from Ephesians 2 while we stood by the wall: "So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth,—called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from

the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

This evening we heard a lecture from Ophir Yarden, Professor of Jewish Studies at Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center. Rabbi Yarden offered us an Israeli perspective on these issues, and did a good job of helping us understand them a little better, though some said that for them the waters only got muddier. What we are learning here is that there is certainly a need for security, and the Israeli people have a right to protect themselves. The ways in which this security is handled, however, is problematic and raises many questions. It obviously causes pain and difficulty, and does not lessen but rather increases tensions. It is undeniably a difficult situation, and one which deserves our thoughtful attention and investigation. We are learning that there is nothing simple about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Neither side is all right, nor all wrong. It is important for us as Christians to live as witnesses to the Prince of Peace amidst such conflicts and to advocate for security for Israelis, justice for Palestinians, and peace and reconciliation for both.

After experiencing this painful part of the trip at the wall we departed Bethlehem and visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. As the Church of the Nativity is traditionally the site of Jesus’ birth, Holy Sepulcher is the traditional (and possibly historically correct) site of Jesus crucifixion and burial. We had a quick visit here, and will return for more extensive devotion on our last day when we walk the Way of the Cross that concludes there. It is a strange, enormous, cluttered, yet oddly beautiful church controlled by seven different Christian denominations - Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrians, Coptics, Ethiopians - who are always fighting over everything, sometimes quite literally coming to blows. And none of them holds the keys to the church. It is actually overseen by a Muslim family and has been for centuries. Pictured here is a tomb in the caverns below the church that is much like the one Jesus would have been buried in.

This city specializes in pain and conflict, yet is also filled with joy and life. Welcome to the land where Jesus lived and died. We mustn’t forget that it’s also where he was resurrected, which means that with God anything is possible - especially new life and reconciliation.

Tomorrow we’re off to Galilee. There is some disagreement as to whether there will actually be Internet access at the place we’re staying. If you don’t hear from me for three nights you’ll know that we don’t. Hope to talk to you tomorrow! For now, let us pray:

Blessed are you, O God, ruler of the universe, whose glorious presence is heralded by the very stones of this Holy Land: Guard us and comfort us amidst the unfamiliarity and tensions of this place of pilgrimage; that we may know more fully through our experiences of you here the things that make for peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

God’s blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

YALLA (*October 10, 2012*)

When someone in our group of pilgrims says “yalla,” you yalla. Especially if Iyad says yalla. Yalla is an Arabic word that means “hurry up,” or “come on,” or “let’s go.” Yalla is definitely the word of the day for several reasons I think.

One is that today we yalla-ed to Nazareth in the Galilee region of northern Israel. It is about an hour and a half from Jerusalem by bus, six days on foot if you’re a pregnant virgin going to visit your cousin. We are staying at the Sisters of Nazareth, a retreat house for pilgrims in the heart of the city, and we will be here for three days exploring the sites in this area. The Sisters of Nazareth is a convent, but also became a retreat house when more and more pilgrims came knocking on the sisters’ door looking for a place to stay while in town.

Another reason that yalla is the word of the day is that, ironically, we’re less hurried today. I’ll soon tell you about what we did this morning, but this afternoon we were done early. I think everyone was grateful for the down time. Many of our pilgrims took the break to explore downtown Nazareth, to sit down at the local cafe for a cup of coffee and pleasant conversation, or, like two pilgrims, to get their hair done.

Most importantly, yalla is the word of the day because everyone in the group is now saying it to one another in a loving way. It’s one of those kind of inside jokes that is usually annoying to people who are not in the group, the kind of thing you bring home from Camp Hardtner that you and your friends think is great but makes everyone else look at you with puzzlement. I, for instance, was very excited when Iyad and Dean duPlantier made a quick side stop while our driver, Mohammed, took us a little further to the next stop. When it was time to get off the bus, I got to say the magic word: yalla! Everyone chuckled, of course. “How long have you been waiting to get to do that, Rob?” My big chance had come. I seized the opportunity with gusto!

But, it’s not just me. All the kids are doing it. Anytime there’s an excuse to say it, everyone’s saying it. Yalla this, yalla that. It’s one of those little things that shows community is forming.

It also shows our affection for Iyad, pictured here. As I’ve mentioned before, Iyad is the best guide in the Middle East, but he’s also more than that. It’s clear he’s a loving person and a good leader, and we all trust him. Another of Iyad’s sayings reveals the heart of his personality. He’s always very clear in how he instructs us on what’s coming, or how to behave at a site, or whatever. So clear as almost to be mildly stern. “Hey, people! Are you listening! Pay attention!” But he always ends his no-nonsense instructions meant to wrangle us with a slight pause, a broad smile, and the words, “Did I tell you today that I love you?” The mood immediately

lightens, we all laugh, and we all want nothing more than to do exactly what Iyad has asked of us. That simple question is one we could probably all remember to ask more often, especially those of us who are leaders. Yalla is cool, “Did I tell you today that I love you” is the phrase I hope I take home with me to the people I love and lead.

But enough of that. Yalla. The morning started with this view.

Bishop Thompson commented to me later, “It never occurred to me before to think of the desert as beautiful. But this is.” I couldn’t agree more. That’s the Judean desert where Jesus was driven by the Spirit after John baptized him in the Jordan River, which is to your back when you’re taking in the above view. It is a barren, but beautiful place. It is in this wilderness that Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, and it is where he was tempted by Satan. We said Morning Prayer together at this overlook, and then were sent off for brief silent meditation (interrupted by the moaning and groaning of a nearby Bedouin’s camel). Can you imagine spending over a month in this desert without food with nothing else to do but pray? It’s no wonder that Jesus was tempted while he was there!

One of the temptations, you’ll remember, was that the Devil took Jesus up on a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said it could all be his if Jesus would bow down and worship him. Tradition of the area believes that this may be the view Jesus was shown:

This valley (remember the Judean desert pictured above is roughly behind you here) looks out over the town of Jericho, which is where we drove next. The River Jordan is between here and the mountains you see in the hazy horizon, beyond which is the country of Jordan. This view is seen from the Jebel Quruntul Greek Orthodox monastery on the traditional Mount of Temptation. We took cable cars from Jericho up the mountain, and then hiked up quite a staircase to the entrance. There was lots of huffing and puffing on such a hot day.

As I prayed while taking in this view and said the Confession of Sin, I could hear a rooster crowing from somewhere nearby. Now, back in Jerusalem I noticed late one night that there was a rooster crowing at about 1:00 am. What came to my mind immediately that night was Jesus telling Peter that he would deny his master three times before the cock crowed. But the rooster that night kept on crowing. And crowing. And crowing. I wondered if Jesus had perhaps really said, “Before the cock crows you will deny me three times. After the cock crows the twentieth time you’ll know I’m just rubbing it in!” Since here on the Mount of Temptation, in the middle of the day, we were hearing the cock crow again, and again, and again, I couldn’t help but wonder: was there this much rooster crowing going on in Jesus’ day? If so, was his point perhaps that in our all too human nature we find ways every day, all the time, to deny Christ over, and over, and over again? That if you think you won’t deny Christ the next time, much like Louisiana weather, just wait five minutes and you’ll surely hear the rooster again? Maybe we need all those continuous rooster crows to remind us that we have not reached perfection, and are always in need of repentance and forgiveness.

Then again, lest we beat our sinful selves up too much, Jesus would probably ease our stress by saying something to us like, “Have I told you today that I love you?”

This afternoon we saw the Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation, the largest basilica in the Holy Land, and the traditional site of the angel Gabriel’s appearance to her. Tomorrow we hike up a foot path to the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation to the site where Mary would have gone to draw water for her family. Then we go over to Sepphoris where Joseph may have lived and worked.

As a final note, remember the story of our trip a few days ago to Taybeh? Where we went to the Oktoberfest? Fr. Fred Devall from St. Martin’s in Metarie sent me a Facebook message about an NPR story on Taybeh and the festival. You can listen to it here. The story is a very accurate picture of what we experienced that day, and what we are experiencing and learning about Palestinians and the Palestinian territories. And, no, the band featured is not the one we saw.

Please keep us in your prayers as our pilgrimage continues. And remember to tell someone that you love them. Let us pray: Holy and life-giving Spirit, who inspires the people of God in all times and places: allow us to surrender ourselves and trust in your grace, that our pilgrim community may fully experience your presence as we journey through the Holy Land of our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Father lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God’s blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

LIVING STONES (*October 11, 2012*)

Did you know that Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, was probably not a carpenter? Which means Jesus was probably not a carpenter, either. It’s true. Joseph, the Bible teaches us, was a tekton, a Greek word that can mean carpenter, but it’s really someone who is a craftsman or artisan of some kind. If you walk around the Holy Land you start to notice quickly that there’s not a whole lot of wood. There are olive trees, and some nice, tall cedars, but there are relatively few trees compared with what most of us are used to in the U.S. A shortage of trees would certainly mean a shortage of work for carpenters around Nazareth.

It is most likely that Joseph worked with stone as a tekton. If that’s true, then Herod Antipas’s decision in 3 BC to rebuild the then Galilean capitol of Zippori (now known as Sepphoris) would have meant a lot of work for tektons from nearby Nazareth. Joseph probably commuted to work in Sepphoris, and so it’s probable that Jesus would have visited that place with his father. The Bible never tells us that Jesus went to Sepphoris, but he does use the word “hypocrite” which is the same word that means “actor.” It’s a word people in Sepphoris would have known and used frequently because of the Roman theater there, which we got to see. Sepphoris is also said to have been the birthplace of Jesus’ mother, Mary, and of her mother, Anne, though there’s no way of knowing that for sure.

This is some of what we learned when we visited the excavated ruins at Sepphoris today. There, we got to walk on a stone Byzantine road, probably around 1,600 years old. In this picture you can still see ruts in the stone from wagons or chariots. We saw beautiful and intricate preserved mosaics from the same era, and even a mikvah, a pool for Jewish ritual baths (something of an antecedent to our Christian baptism), that was from the first century, around the time of Jesus. It was a fascinating morning of seeing many, many old stones.

It was very interesting to see all of these stones, and to look from Sepphoris back towards Nazareth, a spectacular view as you can see below, but . . .

We all seemed really to come alive later when we met Fr. Fuad Dagher, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Shefa'Amr. Fr. Fuad is one of this place's living stones.

Fr. Fuad and the people of St. Paul's are very concerned about ecumenical and inter-faith ministry. They have built relationships with people of all faiths, and even have shared Eucharistic services with local Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox churches, not something that is formally allowed by those communions. But the local clergy and people do it anyway. "We believe that we are one in Christ," says Fr. Fuad, "without having to give up our unique identities." St. Paul's also works, especially with young people, in creating dialogue between Christians, Muslims, Jews, and the Druze community (a religion that has its roots in Islam) in Shefa'Amr. Fr. Fuad said they are trying to create "a new culture of acceptance and readiness to learn about the other while respecting each other's beliefs." It is with their young people, through programs like Kids for Peace, that they believe this work is most important.

St. Paul's also does a great deal of ministry with young couples and families. "They are the present and future of the Church," Fr. Fuad says. There are only 1.5 million Christians in Israel. Many are leaving the area. Fr. Fuad hopes to create a sense of belonging to the land and to this place for young Arab couples and families. "We [Arabs] are here," he says, "because God wanted us to be here."

It concerns Fr. Fuad that many people believe that all Arab Christians are converts from Islam. "I am an Arab, Palestinian, Christian, Israeli," he says. "We Arabs were there at the very first Pentecost! Over 620 years before the Prophet Mohammed we were practicing our Christian faith and worshipping Allah . . . We were the first followers of Christ, the first to carry the faith and cause of Christ." It also concerns him that people from elsewhere believe that all Palestinians are terrorists because of the media. "We are civilized, peaceful, Christian brothers and sisters," he says.

Fr. Fuad is not the only one who has shared this concern. Mrs. Lynn Lantz is an Episcopalian from Church of the Good Shepherd in Lookout Mountain, TN, and a volunteer with the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. She joined our group a couple of days ago, and will be leaving us this weekend. She is going to Ramallah to volunteer at the Arab Evangelical Episcopal School there. She told me that the last time she visited, a bright teenage Palestinian boy asked her with real hurt, "Do all Americans think we're terrorists?" I also met a man in Jericho, a shop owner at one of our stops. Many of his family members live in the United States, but he has chosen to stay at home and run his business. He raised the same concern. It hurt him to think that everyone in America believes that Palestinians are terrorists. He hoped that people in America would know that the vast majority of Palestinians are concerned about about living their lives and caring for their families, about living in peace.

This was clearly Fr. Fuad's primary concern, the cause of peace in Jerusalem and Israel for Jews and Palestinians, Muslims and Christians—all people of all faiths and all ethnic backgrounds. When asked what one thing he would want us pilgrims to share with people back home, he reminded us that we would see a lot of places and things on our pilgrimage, many stones like we saw this morning. "But we here say we do not live in the Holy Land, we live in the land of the Holy One who makes us holy. What matters most," he says, "are the living stones of the land, the people, who have carried on the faith. We need your support and prayer. We need you to wake up and to realize that you have sisters and brothers in this part of the world. It is time to stand in support and solidarity with your brothers and sisters here. The making of peace is what is in our hearts . . . The role of making peace should not be left only to politicians. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' Not the peace talkers, but the peace makers."

He then sang a song with us that you can listen to by clicking [here](#). If we keep recording all these songs we're going to have to put out an album! Let the fighting amongst the record labels begin. In case you have trouble understanding the lyrics, here they are:

Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem
Ten measures of beauty God gave to the world,
Nine to Jerusalem, one to the rest
Ten measures of sorrow God gave to the world
Nine to Jerusalem, one to the rest.
So pray for the peace, Pray for the peace,
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.
There can be no peace for the Jews
until there's peace for the Palestinians too.
You can't greet your friends with the word shalom
if you can't greet them with salaam.
So pray for the peace, Pray for the peace,
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Amen.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU! (*October 12, 2012*)

Our day ended with a rendition of “Happy Birthday to You” that fell far short of the previously displayed vocal talents of our pilgrim group. We sound better in ancient churches. You know, the way most of us sound better in the shower. It’s all acoustics. Anyway, it’s Rita Carlson’s birthday. Rita is one of our pilgrims from Christ Church Cathedral, New Orleans, and it was a joy to have her with us for what I’m sure must have been one of the coolest birthdays ever. And we really appreciated the cake thanks to Iyad’s cousins on the kitchen staff here at the Sisters of Nazareth. Happy birthday, Rita!

What a great day to have a birthday. If you think about it, our whole group got to celebrate a birthday today. All Christians have two birthdays. There’s the day we were born into this world, and then there’s the day we were born into Christ and into Christ’s Body, the Church, through baptism. This morning we all celebrated our baptismal birthdays by renewing our baptismal vows on the banks of the River Jordan. The Jordan is not a very wide river. We were at its widest point, and I can tell you there are bayous in South Louisiana that are wider. And it’s not the cleanest of rivers. But, hey, it was the River Jordan!

We stopped at the roadside and Iyad grabbed a bundle of olive branches which made for a nice implement for asperges. We renewed our baptismal vows, were sprinkled by the branches with water from the Jordan, and the Bishop anointed us all and gave us his blessing. People grabbed stones to take home with them, some waded out into the water, and some filled up water bottles to bring back to our churches’ baptismal fountains or loved ones. For me, it was one of the best moments of the pilgrimage.

We then made our way to the Sea of Galilee, which is really more of a lake than a sea. It is beautiful though. Our first stop by the Lake, er, “Sea,” was the Church of the Sermon on the Mount. And it was as beautiful as you might have imagined reading the scriptures. Check out this view! It looks like depictions of the Sermon on the Mount many of us have seen in paintings.

The view of the Sea is gorgeous, and the landscaping of the church certainly adds to the picturesque vision. But Jesus probably didn’t preach the sermon there, and I don’t recall any of the disciples being landscapers. The actual site may have been down a little ways at another “mount” which is less of a mountain and more of a hill. Like Iyad says, “The writers of the Bible liked to exaggerate a little. The lake is a sea, the mountain is a hill.” Jesus probably preached from a cave not far from where we took a rest at a little outdoor chapel under a tree. Dean duPlantier led us in a reflection of our time together here, and then we marched down to the street where the Dean read the Beatitudes to us from the cave where Jesus may have preached that famous sermon. It was a lot easier to understand how the acoustics of such a cave could have helped Jesus project his voice without a sound system to hundreds or thousands of people on a hillside listening to him preach.

After visiting a couple of other churches in the area we got to ride on a “Jesus Boat” and to hear some readings on the Sea of Galilee. We even received our own certificates, suitable for framing, of course, proving that we’d sailed on the Sea of Galilee. The Jesus Boat was a little cheesy, but it was fun, and the view was gorgeous. It was a wonderful end to an all around wonderful day for a birthday.

The standout activity was definitely (at least for me) the Renewal of Baptismal Vows. My actual baptismal birthday is on August 19. Do you know when yours is? Your church should have it on record. If not, it might take a little research through church or family, but it most likely can be found. Read over the Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 304-5) and reflect on what it means to renew those vows periodically during the liturgical year. What does it mean to you to be baptized? Romans 6:1-11 might provide you some food for thought in this area.

Tonight is our last night with the sisters. Last night while we were here we were treated to something very special by Iyad. It’s not something that everyone gets to see. It was so cool that I’m going to try to do an extra post dedicated to the surprise tomorrow so you can share in it with us. It was one of the most special things we’ve done here, and something I won’t soon forget.

Please keep us in your prayers as we head to the Dead Sea tomorrow to get a look at the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, and to do a little floating in those salty waters.

Let us pray: Holy and life-giving Spirit, who inspires the people of God in all times and places: allow us to surrender ourselves and trust in your grace, that our pilgrim community may fully experience your presence as we journey through the Holy Land of our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Father lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

HIGHS AND LOWS (*October 13, 2012*)

Today was just fun. Really fun! We made our way up to a high mountain, Mt. Tabor (1,800 ft. above sea-level, and a spectacular view as you can see below), and then down to the lowest point on the surface of the earth, the Dead Sea (over 400 ft. below sea-level).

One of my favorite stories in scripture is the story of the Transfiguration, and so this is one of the sites I was looking forward to seeing. The story goes to the heart of who we are as Christians, not because it’s a “mountaintop experience,” but because of what happens before and after it. In his wonderful book that I recommended in an earlier post *The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage Today* Tom (N.T.) Wright explains:

“The importance of spiritual mountaintop experiences lies not in themselves but in what God teaches us through them, and what God prepares us for, and commissions us for, through them. It is of the utmost significance that, in all three synoptic Gospels, the transfiguration occurs immediately after Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem and to suffer, and has challenged his disciples to take up the cross and follow him. Spiritual experiences, great moments of illumination and transformation, are never given simply so

that we may enjoy them for their own sake. . . . The gift is given within a context of vocation, and to strengthen us for that vocation” (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 76).

After Jesus comes down the mountain he begins making the trek to Jerusalem, ministering to those he encounters along the way.

After meeting so many wonderful people here in this diverse place—Jews, Christians, Muslims—it has become clearer in my heart the need to remember that the end of our Christian vocation is people. I don’t just mean my vocational ministry as a priest—for me that is certainly the case. We all have the same vocation as Christians that we carry out in many and varied ways, the vocation described in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP pp. 304-5). The mountaintop is wonderful, but its purpose is to strengthen us for the work of ministry with other people.

How appropriate that as we came down Mt. Tabor we were making our way back from Galilee and setting our faces toward Jerusalem.

Along the way we stopped at Qumran at the northwest corner of the Dead Sea, the location where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. We learned about the Essenes, the community of people from whom, some scholars believe, John the Baptist may have come. They were a sect of Judaism who separated themselves from the world in order to live out their Jewish heritage more purely. They believed they were “sons of light” and all others were evil “sons of darkness,” even the priests and scribes in Jerusalem. They lived in the mountains of Wadi Qumran to dedicate themselves to prayer and study to wait for the day of resurrection when the sons of darkness would finally be defeated. They made many copies of what we know as the Old Testament, particularly the Torah, the Books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. The remains of these many copies that were found in 1947 are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. We got to see a copy of the Isaiah scroll at the Israeli Museum just a few days ago.

Then it was down just a little ways to the Dead Sea. I almost didn’t go in because I knew this wasn’t going to be a typical swim, and I’m not that much of a beach person. But, I figured I might never get another chance. I’m so glad that I did it. [*There follows commentary on pictures of Dean duPlantier and others at the Dead Sea.*]

Tomorrow is Sunday, and it’s off to Zababdeh for Holy Eucharist at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church, and lunch cooked for us by the parishioners there. Then we will visit the Greek Orthodox monastery built over Jacob’s Well from which Jesus drank as he visited with the Samaritan woman. We will tour the monastery and drink from that same well.

Keep us in your prayers. You remain in ours.

God’s blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

EATING AND DRINKING WITH SAMARITANS (*October 14, 2012*)

“The gospel is genuinely good news. It is real, active, and living through us in our lives.” That’s the message preached this morning by Fr. Nael Abu Rahmoun, Rector of St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in the West Bank town of Zababdeh. He and Bishop Thompson concelebrated the Eucharist together. Our guide, Iyad, took us to Zababdeh for Eucharist and lunch with Fr. Nael and the people of St. Matthew’s. We were blessed to have that experience again of singing, praying, and sharing Christ’s Body and Blood with our Palestinian Arab Christian brothers and sisters in both English and Arabic. Fr. Nael reminded us, “Today we met for the first time, but we are already connected by one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”

Fr. Nael shared with us the difficulties that many Arab Palestinian Christians face. “Religion does not matter,” he told us. “All Arab Palestinians are treated the same [whether Christian, Muslim, or otherwise].” He pointed out that for us pilgrims it has been relatively easy to move about in the Holy Land. We did have to go through a check point when we passed the separation wall that morning, but with no problems. The only way Arab Palestinian Christians can get into Israel proper is with permits that are difficult to obtain. That means many who would like to celebrate the high holy days at the high holy places in Jerusalem are rarely, if ever, able to do so. Part of St. Matthew’s ministry is to help people obtain permits when they need them, and to provide pastoral care when they cannot. Despite their situation, Fr. Nael described Palestinians as people of hope. He said that he and the people of his church and their community in Zababdeh hope for a better situation, for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

The population of Zababdeh is 60% Christian, and in fact the Palestinian Authority says that towns which are majority Christian must have a Christian mayor. Though it is a majority Christian town, the attendance was low this morning because the olive harvest has just started. Many people were working in the olive groves. But we made fast friends with the people who were present. Here you see (l-r) Connie Schneider (St. James, Baton Rouge), Lynn Lantz (Good Shepherd, Lookout Mountain, TN) holding baby Rimas, Lori Lavelle (St. Paul’s, New Orleans), Rimas’s mother Katy and brother Fahed, and Carol Sears (All Saints, River Ridge). Katy asked us to pray for her husband, George, who has been ill and was unable to be with them today.

And, of course, what unites people faster than Facebook? Here are Claire, Mary Catherine (obscured), Claiborne, and Caroline Beary (Christ Church Cathedral) with some of the young people from St. Matthews—all of them exchanged Facebook information.

Fr. Nael is seen here showing us around the Penman Clinic, named for a former Archbishop of Melbourne, Australia, who was instrumental in the clinic’s founding and funding. The Penman Clinic provides medical care for people of all faiths from the surrounding towns and Zababdeh. It is a feeder clinic for St. Luke’s Hospital in Nablus, a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Healthcare, you’ll remember from a previous post, is one of the Diocese’s primary ministries. Visitors to the clinic who do not have health insurance (and most people in the area do not) pay a minimal fee of just a few dollars. Among the services they provide

are dentistry, women's health, and other general medical needs. Fr. Nael and the people of St. Matthew's hope to expand the Penman Clinic soon to include surgical and maternity facilities.

One of the church's other ministries is a new library. There are books for children and adults. The facilities are also used to provide computer classes in an adjoining computer lab, and language classes in Arabic, English, Hebrew, and Italian.

After the tour and some explanation of St. Matthew's programs and ministries, we adjourned to the Parish Hall for a home-cooked traditional meal that may have been the best thing we've had since our arrival. The hospitality of the people of St. Matthew's is second-to-none. It was a wonderful time.

When we departed Zababdeh (a two-hour drive back to Jerusalem) we stopped at Jacob's Well at the Greek Orthodox monastery on the edge of Nablus. This is the site where Jesus met the Samaritan woman and asked her for a drink of water (John 4). Jews and Samaritans did not get along at all. And they still don't. Zababdeh is also in Samaria, and it was a reminder to us that Jesus had been here, and in reaching out to the Samaritan woman he had reached out to the local people of this area, as well as one thought of as "other."

It was a blessing today to drink water from the same well as Jesus, and to drink in the living water of our Lord through communion and fellowship with more of this land's living stones. Tomorrow we do the Palm Sunday walk down the Mount of Olives. It will be our second-to-last day on this pilgrimage. As always, keep us in your prayers. You are in ours, and in those of brothers and sisters in Samaria.

God's blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

BEGINNING OF THE LAST DAYS (*October 15, 2012*)

Today, as we begin to conclude our pilgrimage of walking in the steps of Jesus, we did the Palm Sunday walk down the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem. This follows the route Jesus probably took when he rode on the donkey into the city. We started at Bethphage (or its probable location near the top of the Mount of Olives) where Jesus had the disciples fetch him the donkey. We sang "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" as is suitable for beginning a Palm Sunday walk. It was a steep walk down the hill, and as we were descending we encountered these mounted Israeli police officers coming up. Our second stop was at Dominus Flevit (the Lord wept), a church shaped like a tear drop. The panoramic view of Jerusalem from there was incredible:

We made our final stop on the walk at the Garden of Gethsemane and the Church of All Nations, a beautiful church that is always dimly lit to give the appearance of twilight no matter the time of day. In the garden are olive trees that are so old that they may be from the time of Jesus. Their roots certainly are that old. Since it is time for the olive harvest there were people in the garden shaking the trees and gathering the olives. A family can support themselves in this part of the world with about six olive trees. There are dozens of olive trees in this garden and their produce supports the monks who run the church here.

We learned a little about olives, olive trees, and olive oil on this trip. Did you know that green olives and black olives come from the same tree? If you want black olives you simply let them ripen longer. We also learned that people harvest the olives simply by shaking the trees. People on ladders shake the branches that are higher, and pick what does not fall. Finally, you've seen at the store that you can get virgin olive oil, right? And extra virgin olive oil? And extra extra virgin olive oil? Evidently there is absolutely no difference. Olive oil is olive oil. By virgin what is meant is the very first oil out of the olives from the press. But it's all olive oil, and there's really no difference in taste or quality. It's all marketing.

Our final stop (it was a short day with our only free afternoon) was just outside the Old City (the spot would have been inside the walls in Jesus' time) at St. Peter in Gallicantu ("crowing rooster"). Below this church is the dungeon where Jesus was likely kept while awaiting trial by the Sanhedrin. Our entire group was able to go down into the dungeon together. We also saw a spot in this prison where prisoners were flogged. There are basins on the floor of the flogging area where salted water or vinegar were kept to pour on the open wounds of those being punished. Back at Dominus Flevit we saw the kind of tree from which the crown of thorns was probably fashioned. The thorns are about two or three inches long, and look quite fearsome.

A lot of times people focus on the pain Jesus endured at his torture and crucifixion. The movie *The Passion of the Christ* is fixated on it, for example. What struck me in seeing the basins for the salt water and vinegar, and the tree of thorns, was not so much the pain Jesus surely experienced, but rather the cruelty and pain of which we human beings are capable. We are awfully cruel to each other, in thought, word, and deed. There's a line I'm reminded of from the movie *Contact* where it is said (I'm paraphrasing), "Human beings are an interesting race. You are capable of such beautiful dreams, and such horrible nightmares." These beautiful places that we saw this morning, places of architectural and artistic wonder produced by human hands, are the same places where acts of cruelty and murder took place. And not just acts carried out on Jesus, but on all the children of Abraham who have lived here for centuries. Jerusalem is a city that has a long, terrible history of bloodshed. Is it any wonder Jesus wept over it? Is it any wonder that we need a Savior?

Tomorrow, as we walk the Via Dolorosa ("The Way of Sorrows," the Stations of the Cross) on our final day of pilgrimage, we will pray these words at the second station. They are from John Peterson's *A Walk in Jerusalem: The Way of the Cross*.

Let us pray:

For all police officers, prison officers, and those required to carry out death sentences and corporal punishment;

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

For those who mock and torment others and for those who are mocked and tormented; for all victims of violence and those

who commit violence against others; for those who live under military rule or occupation;

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

For ourselves; when we mock, insult, or hurt others; when we ourselves are hurt or put down; that any suffering we may have to endure may be fruitful for ourselves and for others as was Christ's suffering; and that we may be preserved from indifference to the sufferings of others;

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

Amen.

In this world that is full of so many hurts, and particularly in this Holy Land that is so torn by strife, we desperately need those prayers.

We had a gathering tonight at Iyad and his wife Simone's home in Jericho. We all tried to fast a little today in preparation for the feast. All week we have had prayer partners for whom we were to buy small gifts—kind of like "Secret Santa." Tonight we revealed our prayer partners and exchanged gifts. It was a wonderful time.

While we were there, Iyad showed us a short film that actually won an Oscar in 2006 called *West Bank Story*. Here's the first song from that film:

This may or may not be funny to you, and two weeks ago it would only have been mildly funny to me and others in our group. After two weeks here it's hilarious. It's amazing what perspective will do. And it's also amazing how humor can speak volumes of truth on both sides of an issue, and can help people blow off steam. If you're interested in the whole film (it's only about 20 minutes or so) you can get it here from Amazon.com.

Tomorrow it's up at 4:45 am. Yes, you read that right: 4:45 am. The Via Dolorosa starts at 5:45 am. Following, we head to Emmaus for our final Eucharist together. Then, to the airport. Our pilgrimage will be over.

I'm not quite sure if I will have time or Internet access tomorrow, but there will be at least one more post to this blog in the next couple of days. Keep us in your prayers as we travel home. We'll see you soon.

God's blessings, *Fr. Rob+*

THE FINAL WORD . . . ? (October 16, 2012)

This morning we walked the Via Dolorosa alone, as a group. We ended back in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher where we all touched Calvary, the point at the top of the church where it is thought that Jesus was crucified. The final station was in a side chapel at the bottom of the church with an empty, first-century tomb. The actual tomb in which Jesus is thought to have been buried is in the center of the church inside an edicule. I had never realized that the point of crucifixion and the tomb where Jesus was buried were so close to each other. This means that Jesus was probably looking down at his tomb as he hung there on the cross. As we ended the "Way of Sorrows," some of us stuck around to receive communion at the mass going on inside the edicule. As is typical of going on a pilgrimage with Iyad, we went at a time when there were few tourists, and got to experience things in a way most groups do not.

This gives me an opportunity to end by sharing with you an experience not afforded to many.

One night when we were in Nazareth, Iyad told us he had a special surprise. He led us down in small groups to an underground excavation inside the Sisters of Nazareth Convent. The Sisters of Nazareth started their ministry in France. There was a need in Nazareth to help the deaf and the blind among the local people, so an invitation was sent to the Sisters to come and help. They came to Nazareth in 1854 and bought the property we were staying in, and began their ministry as a school for the deaf and the blind. In 1884 a man was cleaning one of the rooms upstairs and found a loose stone. As he tried to fix it the stone fell into an empty space. What they found below was incredible and they called in archeologists to excavate. They found coins, oil lamps, mosaics, many beautiful things dating back before Jesus' time, perhaps as far back as 1,800 BC during Abraham's time. Though it was apparently occupied as far back as Abraham's time, Nazareth is never mentioned in the Bible until the Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. That's why Nathaniel asked about Jesus the Messiah, "Can anything good come from Nazareth? A nothing town of no importance?"

One of the things they found below the convent was a script by Bishop Arculf from the year 670. It reads, "The city of Nazareth . . . is like Capernaum, unwallled. It is situated on a mountain, yet it has large houses built of stones, and also two very large churches, one of these, in the middle of the city, is built upon two vaults with pilasters, on the spot where there once stood the house in which our Lord, the Savior, was brought up. This church, supported upon two eminences and, as has been said, two intervening arches, has, underneath, between both eminences, a very clear fountain or spring, frequented by all the citizens who draw water from it, and to the church above the water is raised in small vessels by means of wheels."

The convent is in the middle of the city. There is a small well found below with what looks like holes for ropes and a pulley where water could be drawn up in small vessels. Also here is a first century home, a grotto or cave, a cistern, and a tomb. Could this be the home where Jesus grew up? No writer or pilgrim, including Egeria, a much earlier Spanish pilgrim from whom historians have learned much, ever mention such a church. Only this script from Arculf. No inscriptions have yet been found, and the archeological work has been slow. The Sisters are very careful about whom they let down there, and archeologists are only allowed in once a year for about two weeks. They have come to trust Iyad, so he is allowed to bring his groups down. We were allowed to touch nothing. But we were allowed to take pictures.

This first picture is from the inside of what might have been Jesus' boyhood home, the home of Mary and Joseph. You are

looking at the front door. The lower part of the wall and the steps into the doorway are first century—those are the steps Jesus would have walked into his home on. The wall on the left side is Byzantine, fourth or fifth century. The arch above the door is Crusader period, eleventh or twelfth century. Jesus and his family would not have lived in a house, but in a cave like this, below ground. They are cooler, and easy to expand because all you have to do to add a room is just scrape away more of the soft stone and dirt.

Inside the house if found this hole and this block. This is the top entrance of a tomb. The block on the left sealed the opening that is now covered for safety. When the Sisters removed the stone the smell of incense wafted up from below, so they knew this was an actual burial site. It is speculated that this may be the tomb of Joseph, Jesus' earthly father.

And this is a wonderful example of a first century tomb exactly like the one that Jesus would have been buried in, a better example even than one at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. There is a similar tomb there, but it is not as pristine as this one, nor does it have a perfect stone like this one which has been rolled away. To give you some perspective on the size, you have to squat to get into the door. The stone is only about three feet in diameter. The body would have been placed in one of the spaces you see within. After the body was decomposed a couple of years later, the bones would have been removed and placed in an ossuary, a box.

Also found in this house was this trough for animals. Its proper name is a manger. Because of the kind of nativity scenes we see today, people often imagine that a manger is a barn-like structure, and that Jesus was swaddled up and placed in a nice little wooden crib-like piece. As I pointed out in an earlier post, there is not a lot of wood in the Holy Land. Most things were made of stone. In Bethlehem, Jesus would have been placed in a manger like this one that was typically kept for use in a side room where the animals stayed at night and ate their food. This particular manger is in really good shape, as you can see. Every one I've ever seen in pictures has been broken in one place or another.

Adjoining this small home is this grotto. This is a domo ecclesia, a first-century house church. Eucharist would have been celebrated here by the earliest of Christians who obviously venerated this site for one reason or another. Next to it is a cistern for drawing water. The altar area you see is not first century, but was added so that the Sisters could celebrate Eucharist down here from time to time, which they do.

Pictured here are small basins on one side of the church that were probably used for baptisms. This was undoubtedly one of the most incredible sites we saw during our time here. And there was definitely something about the place, a mysterious and sacred quality. What else will be found here as careful study is done in the years to come? Who knows, but it's certainly fun to speculate. We felt so blessed and thankful to Iyad and the sisters for allowing us to see this.

I thought it was good to have this be the last post so you could see the tomb. Look at that picture above once more. There is something important to notice about it. Do you see it? The tomb is empty. This was one of my biggest take-aways from this pilgrimage. We came here to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and at the end of it all we were reminded again that he is not here. He is risen! I leave you with words from the final station of John Peterson's *A Walk in Jerusalem* that we ended in that similar tomb at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher this morning.

L: People of God, why do you seek the living among the dead?

R: *Because we are afraid, we are uncertain, we are uncomfortable here, and we have doubts about this man.*

L: Do not be afraid, for he has risen from the dead, he has broken through the tomb, he has come back to life, and he is here among us now. People of God, why do you seek the living among the dead?

R: *Because we feel guilty, we feel lonely, and we feel lost, for we deserted this man.*

L: Do not carry your guilt any longer, for he has taken the guilt himself, he has buried it in his grave, he has lifted it to his cross, and he is here among us now. People of God why do you seek the living among the dead?

R: *Because our wounds are deep, we have torn away from that man, we have broken with him, and with our brothers and sisters.*

L: Do not dwell on your wounds for he has risen to heal you, he has risen to forgive you, he has risen to change you all, and bind us all together now. People of God, he is not here; he is risen.

R: *Yes, he is risen!*

L: He is risen!

R: *And he is here!*

L: Alleluia!

R: *Alleluia!*

L: He is risen!

R: *And he is here!*

He is everywhere, and because of that every place and every person is holy.

God's blessings, Fr. Rob+

Visit www.ccnola.org to see the complete blog with all its wonderful pictures or scan this QR code with your smart phone. Entries are posted in reverse order so start on page 2 with the "Welcome" and "Underway" posts to read the entries in chronological order.



The Canticle

November, 2012



GARDENING GROUP NEWS

We need your help to spruce up the grounds around the Cathedral on November 3rd at 9:00am. Bring your tools of choice. We will be trimming the hedges and reshaping trees around Advent house. Refreshing the flower beds with fall plants and mulch. Weeding where needed and lots more. Hope to see you there! Bring a friend if you like.



Time Change Sunday, November 4

Set your clocks BACK on Saturday night,




Youth & Young Adults are invited to **BOWLING WITH THE BISHOP** Saturday, November 10th Rock N Bowl Lanes 3016 S. Carrollton Ave. New Orleans, LA 70118 7-9:30 pm \$10 per person Food, bowling and fellowship with Bishop Thompson!



Save the Date
Lessons & Carols
Sunday, December 9
4 o'clock in the afternoon

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