

## Scripture I Corinthians 12:3b -13

As I mentioned last week, this week is going to be the conclusion of our series of meditations that take us to different places in the Holy Land. This passage of Scripture we have shared tells us about how the Holy Spirit works through our hearts and our minds and our hands. My prayer for us all in the coming week is that we, as the disciples did, on the first day of Pentecost, will wait for the Spirit's leading, and the Spirit's wisdom and the Spirit's blessing. Whether we are reflecting on the holy places of our faith, or serving in such a way as to lift up our brothers and sisters in the Lord when they are alone, in need or fearful, may the Holy Spirit of our Lord's living sacrifice, and his risen presence empower us to carry his light by the way we worship, the way we serve, the way we witness, the way we love and the way we live our lives.

We start our journey today in a place just outside of Bethlehem called The Shepherd's Field. This place commemorates the angel visiting the shepherds in the field and proclaiming to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be for all people."

As you enter the chapel, there is beautiful art work that is all about the angel's visit to the shepherds. Just a few paces from this chapel, there is a cave. The shepherds would have used this cave for protection against the heat of the day, and the rain, or cool of the night. I mentioned to those who gathered in this cave that it might well give them an idea about what the nativity cave would have looked like at the time of Jesus birth. The nativity cave is protected from all the traffic of visitors so it doesn't look that much like a cave, as you will see.



Now we are outside the Church of the Nativity. This church is in the heart of the oldest part of Bethlehem. It was built in 329 A.D. There has been a congregation continuously worshipping there ever since. The main entrance to the church is a door only 4 feet high so that everyone who enters has to bow in humility. When our group entered, the church was undergoing major renovations as you can see. When the church is cleared from all the construction, you can see the worship area in the front of the church where the altar, or pulpit would be. That is directly over the site where Jesus was born. In the foreground of the picture you can see a trap door in the floor that reveals the original floor of the church in 329 A.D. This church was originally a Byzantine and this sort of mosaic floor was typical. If you go up to the front of the church by the altar area and then go either to the left or the right, you will come to a stairway that leads to a place called the "Nativity Grotto." This is the cave where Jesus was born. When we entered, we sang "Silent Night" which was very meaningful. There is a place in the room that

sort of looks like a fireplace. In the center of that area is a star on the floor. This is said to be the very place where Jesus was born. You can worship and pray here and you can reach your hand down through the hole in the star and touch the floor of the cave. To the right and down a couple of stairs, there is the place that is said to be where the manger was, and a place that commemorates the visits of the shepherds and the wisemen.



The next tour stop is about four miles south of Bethlehem. It is the area where the story about Ruth and Boaz took place. The picture shows the remains of a threshing floor, perhaps the one mentioned in the Biblical account, Ruth 3:6.



The next place we are going to visit is a place called Herodium. Herodium is a place where the remains of another one of King Herod's fortresses is. King Herod built this defensive fortress from the ground up. When you get to the top, you see that the defensive quarters are set into the mountain top. There are four grand pillars. Between the pillars there was everything that King Herod needed to defend himself from any threat, or perceived threat. There was also everything that the king needed to live a life of luxury for as long as he wanted to. The fortress is built so that all the rain water that falls drains into a huge cistern below the living quarters so there was always plenty of water at Herodium. From the top, you can see below to the east, the remains a huge swimming pool, and living and working quarters for all the people it took to make the king happy at Herodium. In the east side of the mountain fortress it has been discovered that King Herod is buried there, and so you can see the monument recently built to mark his tomb. As you leave, you can see a huge stack of ammunition for King Herod's catapult.



Next, we are going to visit a huge valley about half way between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It is called the Valley of Elah and is the site of the battle between David and Goliath.



At a site about 12 miles west of Jerusalem is a place called Ein Karem. There we are visiting the Church of Saint John the Baptist. This is said to be built over the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, John's parents. So, it is said to be the birth place of John the Baptist. There is an ancient home at the lower level of the church believed to be Zechariah's home, and a place in the home marking the place of John's birth. Also, in the church, is an area commemorating Mary's visit to Elizabeth, while both were expecting.



Now we are traveling across an international border from Israel to Jordan. Our first stop is Mt. Nebo. Mt. Nebo is the place where Moses gave his farewell address to the people of his community that had traveled for 40 years in the wilderness. Joshua and his army went from here into Canaan. From Mt. Nebo, they would have gone down the Mountain and about ten miles across the plains of Moab, to the Jordan River where God parted the river to allow Joshua and his army to cross and make ready to attack Jericho which was only about a mile and a half from the place where they crossed the Jordan. The area of Moab is also the place where Moses is said to have been buried. And, this area of Moab was the place where Naomi and Ruth lived

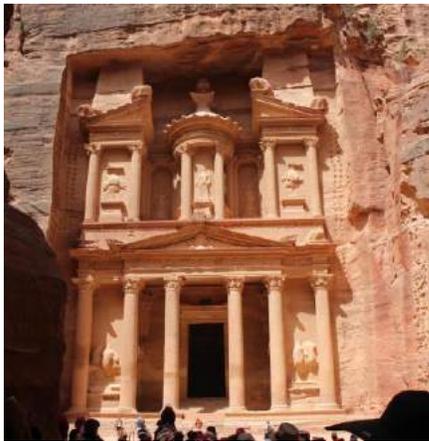
before, they parted, and headed toward their new home about 4 miles south of Bethlehem. Back on the top of Mount Nebo, there is a building that houses the remains of four ancient Byzantine churches, all of them commemorating Moses on the top of Mount Nebo, and all with beautiful mosaic floors as was typical of the Byzantine era.



About 10 miles east of Mount Nebo is a town called Madaba. In Madaba is a church call St. George's Church. Inside that church, on the floor, there is an ancient mosaic that has accurately helped researchers locate many of the holy sites in Israel and Jordan.



Next, we travel way south to a place called Petra. The Biblical significance of Petra is that Moses and his company are known to have passed through this area. Tradition has it that Moses struck a rock with his staff and water came forth. And also, Moses' brother Aaron died in this area. The impressive tombs and homes that we visited were from the efforts of a community of people that lived here many years after Moses' time. Those responsible for the beautiful structures of Petra lived here in approximately 200 B.C. They lived here for a couple of hundred years and then pretty much died off, and this place was forgotten for about 1800 years which is why it is so well preserved. After a mile walk through a beautiful canyon, you come to the Treasury, which is the tomb of one of the kings. It is also in the movie, "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade." There are many other impressive structures including a theater and a place called, "The Tomb of the Royals." If you are very adventurous, you will follow the path to a place called the Monastery. It is a huge tomb carved out of about half of a mountain. The people in the picture give you perspective.



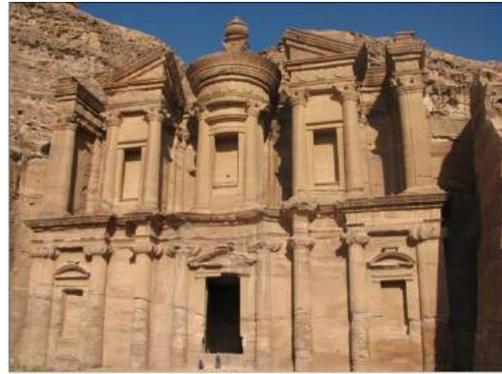
Treasury



Theater

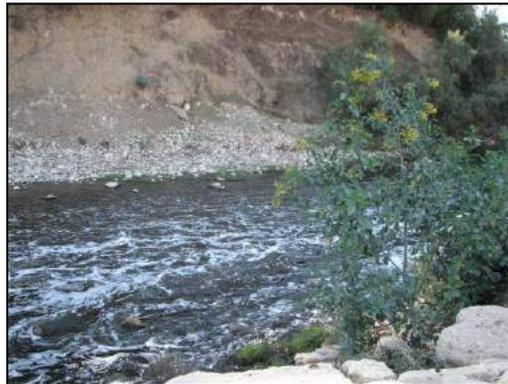


Tomb of the Royals



Monastery

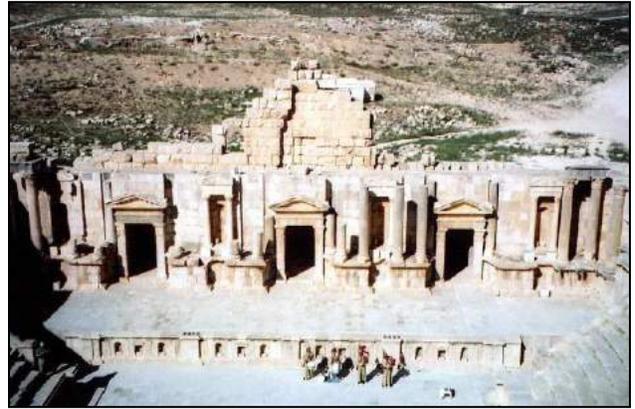
We next went to a place called Jerash. Jerash is about 3 or four hours north of Petra, and about 40 minutes northwest of Amman, Jordan. As we traveled to Jerash, we crossed over the Jabbok River. Somewhere along the Jabbok River, Jacob wrestled with God as accounted in Genesis 32.



Jerash a one of the cities of the Decapolis. It is one most well preserved Roman era cities. It gives us an example of the cities Jesus preached to. The ruins of Jerash show the large amount of Greek influence on the Roman Empire, and it is very impressive to see. The first thing that you see is a huge arched gate called, "The Arch of Hadrian." Demonstrating the Greek influence are the horse racing track, two Pagan Temples to the Greek gods of Zeus and Artemis. And the oval market place in the center of the city to encourage a free exchange of religious ideas, philosophical ideas, and to exchange goods. After you enter the huge gate named after the Roman emperor Hadrian, you come to the horse racing track. To the left and up hill are the Temple of Zeus and the theater which holds about 3500 people and is still quite functional even almost 200 years later. Straight ahead from the arch and the horse track is the Oval market. There is a main street off the oval to the right. This street is not that different from our streets. There are intersections, curbs, potholes, and even wear marks from the chariots that traveled this rode so long ago. The taller the building and the Roman pillars in front of it, the more important it is. At a main intersection off of this road, you turn left and go up 49 stairs to the temple of Artemis. That temple is said to be modeled after the temple in Jerusalem. The

temple of Zeus and Artemis are only 2 or three blocks apart, so this gives you a picture of the obstacles that Jesus faced as He was preaching a monotheistic God. If you circle back toward the entrance, you can get a closer look at the size and impressive character of the theater. A person can talk from the stage in a fairly normal voice and be heard clearly from the cheap seats, way on top. There were bag pipers there when I was there and that was very impressive.





I hope you have enjoyed sharing this pictures and thoughts shared with them. I know that some have seen them. Sorry for being repetitive, but I know some have not seen them. Next week, we will begin series walking along with Abraham on his journey. I hope that that will be meaningful.