



Chris's traveling companion, *Andrew Starr*, also in *Pre-Theology I at St. Charles Seminary*, acted as "official photographer" for their trip. He was able to capture many of the splendid sights and sanctuaries. Andrew wrote, "Our travels first took us throughout northern Israel to Caesarea Maritima, the Roman military and civilian capitol of Judea during the time of Jesus, as well as to Nazareth, the site of the Annunciation and the boyhood home of Jesus, Tiberius, the Roman city on the Sea of Galilee, and to Capernaum,

the city in which Jesus lived during his public ministry. After our time in the Galilee, we turned south, following the banks of the River Jordan toward Jerusalem and its many Biblical sites. In Jerusalem, we walked the Way of the Cross, toured the Upper Room in which Jesus celebrated the first Eucharist, prayed an hour at the Garden of Gethsemane, and visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the church commemorating the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We spent time at Emmaus and Ein Karem, the town just outside of Jerusalem where Mary visited Elizabeth at the Visitation. We also visited three Biblical cities that are near Jerusalem but today are located in the West Bank: Bethlehem, the site of Jesus' birth, Jericho, very possibly the world's oldest city, and Bethany, the town in which Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

"Our time in the Holy Land undoubtedly changed our understanding of the Gospels. No longer will the places of scripture be simply names on a page but instead physical locations that come alive with the sites and sounds of each place. It is our hope that all can one day travel to the Holy Land to experience, as we did, the tremendous opportunity to walk the very ground our Lord walked some two thousand years ago."

2nd Theologian Luke Dundon, who is studying in Rome, summed up the trip he made this past Christmas by writing that he "felt very tangibly how 'human' my Lord was and is in the ministry He began on the Sea of Galilee, which has spread all over the world. How 'humble' a life He led in Capernaum, yet preaching the mysteries of the kingdom of God, most especially the mercy of God, our Lord's most identifiable trait and foundational characteristic passed onto the ministry of His Church, a Mystical Body that bestows forgiveness. I actually felt like I grew in friendship with Him, spending time in prayer and silence, walking along the rocky shoreline and meditating upon the manifold miracles and ministries He performed in those very spots, as the fishermen mended their nets...."



He continued, "I could go on forever about each experience...but I must zero in on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. In the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is Calvary Hill, which you climb up to by a narrow staircase, and find yourself surrounded by Eastern Orthodox ornamentation. The 'altar of the death' has a hole below it that pilgrims can come up to and venerate, which I did for the first time on St. Stephen's Day, Dec. 26th. After doing so, I went over to a corner (basically a small room, as the Church has built itself around the hill) and prayed there...and realized how blessed I was to be in the place where Jesus had shown me more love than anyone else ever could.

Jeb Donelan, also one of our seminarians in Theology II studying in Rome, traveled in the same group as Luke. He recalls that, “For me the Holy Land was truly a chance to encounter Jesus in His humanity. I remember thinking numerous times of how much the land reminded me of places I had visited in the United States and sometimes even Virginia. For me the most exciting and spiritual rich places were Jerusalem and Bethlehem. I remember when we entered Jerusalem on the highway we all recited Psalm 122 together as the bus ascended the mountains to Mount Zion! It was one of the most moving moments of the trip. There was only silence on the bus as we contemplated "Our feet within your gate, O Jerusalem". Despite the car horns and the cars zooming by there was a sense that we were truly in the house of the Lord! I cannot fully capture that precious moment in words except that we knew we had not come here by our own willing it but that God had called us all here.



“Bethlehem as well was a particular place of grace. Here more than anywhere else the human, created, earthy aspect of the land and city was so apparent. And yet I think that was what made it so beautiful. The Church of the Nativity would be nothing but an old, run-down Church if it did house the spot where the God-man entered our world. There were no spectacular icons, or beautiful tile floors but there were hundreds of pilgrims who came just to touch the spot where our Lord took His first breath. As well, the front of the Church and Nativity Square was nothing spectacular except

that God had truly blessed us that day. It was a beautiful sunny day and we stood there looking at this old run-down Church in this poor city, God shouted out through the rays of the sun that He was well pleased with what man had constructed to glorify Him. In our poverty, our small efforts, in this small town God came down to us to show us how precious we are to Him. Again human words cannot capture the full beauty here.”

Mount St. Mary's seminarian Thomas Cavanaugh, who is in Pre-Theology II, went to the Holy Land before entering seminary two years ago. He recalls that “It was one of the most amazing weeks of my life to walk where our Lord walked. I spent most of my time in Jerusalem, though I did take a few day trips, first to Bethany and then to Bethlehem. In a way, nothing was how I expected it to be or had imagined it in my mind. It was so small, you can walk all the way around what would have been ancient Jerusalem in about 3 or 4 hours easily. Everything that you had hoped to see in its original state had a huge church or mosque or temple; and they didn't necessarily correspond to the religion that had the most history; for example, the Upper Room is a mosque, though you can tell it had formerly been a church.” The way that Tom decided to travel was not with any tour group, but rather as a solitary pilgrim. “I took only one small back pack, sandals, my breviary, my bible and my rosary. And every sight that I went to I just opened my bible and meditated on the event from the Gospels that happened there. I hope to go back again and again throughout my life to delve deeper and deeper into the mystery of the incarnation.



Deacon Robert Wagner, who is in his last year of formation at the North American College in Rome, made a group retreat pilgrimage to the Holy Land over Christmas in 2006. He highlights two ways that trip helped shape his spiritual life: “The first is that I will never read Scripture, especially the Gospels, the same way again after walking on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, visiting the hill

where Christ preached the Beatitudes, seeing the place of His birth in Bethlehem and the hill of Calvary where He offered His life on the Cross for our salvation. I now have images in my mind that help flesh out the passages of the Gospel when I read and meditate upon them.



“The second is that seeing the smallness of the place where Jesus and the Apostles lived allowed me to glimpse the power of the Gospel message and mission! The Apostles were mostly limited to the area of Galilee and Jerusalem. Yet when one ponders how these men were charged with the task of baptizing and preaching the Gospel message of salvation for all to the ends of the earth, they took it to heart, traveling throughout the civilized world to fulfill that mission. Living in Rome, I am surrounded by the influence of St. Peter, the first Pope and leader of the Christian community. His simple life was extended

beyond his dreams when he was given the task to be the Rock of the Church, and he ended preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem and Rome before he was crucified upside-down on the Vatican Hill, almost 1500 miles from the village where he had lived as a fisherman in Capernaum. In his mission he offered all he had to do the will of God, and fearlessly carried out that task without reservation. As a deacon in formation for the priesthood, I have fears of how I am to fulfill the mission of bringing Christ to the people of God with my limitations and weaknesses. However, to see how the Holy Spirit took these simple, fallen men from the hills of Galilee to the ends of the earth, preaching and healing and bringing the hope of salvation to all, I see my work is the work of God and not my own. I can prepare and pray, and then offer all to Him that His will be done, just as the Apostles did two thousand years ago, and have confidence that He will use me as He wills, offering me the grace I need along the way.”

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LENTEN REFLECTION

“May every family and Christian community use well this time of Lent, therefore, in order to cast aside all that distracts the spirit and grow in whatever nourishes the soul, moving it to love of God and neighbor. I am thinking especially of a greater commitment to prayer, lectio divina, recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and active participation in the Eucharist, especially the Holy Sunday Mass. With this interior disposition, let us enter the penitential spirit of Lent. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Causa nostrae laetitiae, accompany and support us in the effort to free our heart from slavery to sin, making it evermore a ‘living tabernacle of God.’ ”

Pope Benedict XVI—2009 Message for Lent

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MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH AND MOTHER OF VOCATIONS, PRAY FOR US!

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