

From Fr. Michael

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight*

Each year at this time, my mind goes to Bethlehem, a city I've visited more times than I can remember. I can see the Shepherd's Field outside of town where Luke tells us an angel appeared to a frightened group of bedouins and told them, "Today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord."

I can picture the Basilica of the Nativity where pilgrims descend into a grotto to kneel before an altar and touch a silver star inscribed with these words: "*Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est,*" "Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary."

I can envision the town of Nazareth where the angel Gabriel announced this impending birth and where the Holy Family lived for so many "hidden years." I can picture Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus made his home during the years of his ministry. I can see the village of Cana which was home to Saint Bartholomew and where Jesus performed his first miracle. I can picture the Mount of Beatitudes where he preached, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..." I can envision the commanding view from atop Mount Tabor where Jesus was transfigured before his disciples.

I can imagine myself once again retracing the events of Holy Week in Jerusalem: the tomb of Jesus' friend, Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead, the "Palm Sunday Road" by which he entered the city, the Temple Mount which he cleansed of money changers, the Upper Room of the Last Supper on Mount Zion, the agony of Jesus praying among the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, the prison where he was held under the house of Caiaphas, the Roman Praetorium where Jesus was judged, the Way of the Cross that he walked to Calvary, and the tomb where he was laid to rest and then triumphantly rose three days later. I can picture the road to Emmaus where Jesus appeared to his disciples following his resurrection, and the Mount of Olives from which he ascended to be with his Father in heaven.

All of these places come flooding back to me, and the Scriptures come alive. Anyone who has been on pilgrimage to the Holy Land will tell you: there is no better way to grow in appreciation of the Scriptures and of Jesus than to visit the lands that he walked. It is truly a life-changing experience. A few weeks ago, a participant from my last pilgrimage (2009) said to me, "I'd go back again tomorrow. When are you going to go again, Father?"

I'm pleased to announce that I will be leading another pilgrimage to the Holy Land October 15-25, 2012.

For those of you who have never been, I can tell you there is no better way to experience this place than to go with fellow parishioners whom you know and with whom you are accustomed to praying. We read the Scriptures at each site and we celebrate Mass daily. For those of you who have been before, you may want to consider going again. This trip will be different from previous pilgrimages in several ways, including:

- We will fly into Amman and will travel to Mount Nebo on the east side of the Jordan River. From here we will view the Promised Land as Moses did before entering it.
- We will renew our baptismal promises at the more traditional southern site along the Jordan River in the desert of Judea.
- We will spend a night in Jericho, the oldest city in the world, and 1000 feet below sea level.

For those who choose, we will also offer an optional three-day extension to Istanbul. This city, formerly known as Constantinople, was the historical center of Christian Byzantium and is still the home of Hagia Sophia, the most significant church in Christendom for 1000 years.

If you'd like to know more, you can find brochures at the Information Desk, you can call Magi Travel at (952) 949-0065, or give me a call at the parish office after I return from vacation on January 18. I will also hold an information night on March 6 (watch for more details).

It's the trip that every Christian should do at least once in a lifetime. I hope you'll join us!