

Day 7

After yesterday's heavy walking/step climbing, we had an easy day – starting later at 8:00. We would be spending time on Mt Zion so Todd led us in the most appropriate song, *We're Marching to Zion*. Laura Katherine led us in the Travelers' Prayer. Our shepherd for the day is Jim Witeck and Kathie Wilkinson is our chaplain.

I forgot to tell you about yesterday's shepherding! Moving a group of 52 through the Old City on a very crowded day was no easy task. All the shepherds for the trip divided the group into small groups of 8-10 people. Throughout the day, Rula would ask the shepherds to check their flocks to be sure no one was left behind as we moved from one location to another. The system worked exceedingly well, with one exception – and both the shepherd and the lost sheep shall remain nameless 😊 Fortunately, the tour guides know each other and another guide returned our lost sheep to Rula!

I have also been remiss not to mention the weather we have encountered. I really don't know what's happening in NC, but in Israel – the weather is FINE!!! Crystal blue skies, daytime temps in the 60 – 70s and nighttime 50s. And not one drop of rain – so far!!! It is beautiful.

Today is Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. The breakfast in our hotel was a big step down from previous days as work is limited on the Sabbath. Even the HVAC units in our rooms have a special setting for Sabbath so that any devout Jews can set it on Friday evening to prevent the system from working on the Sabbath. Because of worship requirements, there are very few cars on the road (Jews walk to their local synagogues), the stores and many of the tourist locations are much less crowded – at least until sundown later today.



We passed by the Old City Zion/King David's Gate. Remember, the wall was built by King Herod, 1,000 years AFTER King David – so David did not have anything to do with building this section of the wall. The gate has the second name of King David because it is close to the tomb of the kings where David is believed to have been buried. Around the gates are numerous bullet holes. This gate was breached by the Israeli army in the 1967 Six-Day War when Israel took back the city from the Muslim/Arabs.

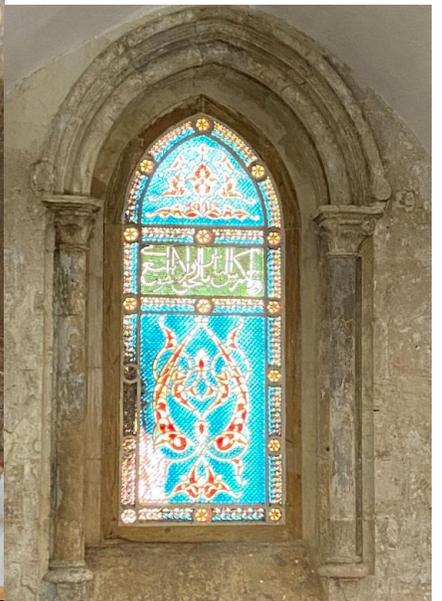


The graves of the engineers for the construction of the third wall in 1553 are located close to the Zion gate. The Turkish ruler was infuriated that the city walls were not extended far enough to include Mt Zion within its limits, which would have included what they believed was the grave of King David. As an outcome of his anger toward these two disappointing engineers, he ordered them to be killed.

Our first stop just outside the wall was in a building with a room on the top floor traditionally believed to be the Upper Room - where Christ celebrated his last supper with his disciples and where Pentecost occurred, giving birth to the church. There are three sites that propret to be the actual Upper Room site, but this one appears to be the most likely. The building was striped of all Christian symbols of the crusaders in the 12th century by conquering Muslims who turned the space into a mosque. Remnants of the Muslim period include stained glass windows and wall tiles done in Arabic.







In 1948, Israel regained ownership of the space and Christian worship is only allowed twice a year – on Good Friday and Pentecost. There are only two Christian symbols allowed in the space. A metal olive tree symbolizing peace between the three religions which has a base of wheat and grapes representing the eucharist. One of the pillar tops is surrounded by a mother pelican and her two chicks. A pelican located in a church also represents the eucharist. A mother pelican unable to feed her chicks will use her own beak to break open her chest wall and give her life's blood to save her children – as Jesus gave his body and blood when he died for us.



Kathie Wilkinson read the Upper Room story from John 13 of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. She pointed out that all the love and grace Jesus shared that last night included love and grace for Judas Iscariot – even though Jesus knew he was to betray him which would lead to his death. We are called to love as Jesus loved – even toward Judas and Peter who would deny him three times. The community of Christians is not always faithful. But we are called to remember the washing of feet, to serve as Jesus served, and to love one another.

Our next stop was at St. Peter in Gallicantu (the Latin word "gallicantu" means cock's-crow). This is believed to be the location of the palace of Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest who organized the plot to kill Jesus, and famously presided over the trial of Jesus. It is also the place where Jesus was held overnight in a pit until he could be taken to Pilot the next morning, and where Peter's triple denial took place.







A Byzantine shrine dedicated to Peter's repentance was erected on this spot in AD 457, but was destroyed in 1010. The chapel was rebuilt by Crusaders in 1102, but after the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, the church again fell into ruin and was not rebuilt until 1931. Today a golden rooster protrudes prominently from the sanctuary roof in honor of its biblical connection.





So much occurred at this site and archeological finds have confirmed the house was build with extra large store rooms, designed as befitting a high priest.



The dry water cistern was also uncovered which served as the pit into which Jesus was bound and lower overnight by a rope around his waist. The restoration of the house is incredible and we were allowed to climb down into the cistern. About 45 of us were able to fit inside – it was a dark, dismal, grim, and distressing place. The only natural light came from the opening through which Jesus was lowered.





Kathie read Psalm 88. Verses 1 – 4 are “O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit”. We were encouraged to pray for those who are in prison, the oppressed, the ill, the addicted, all those who suffer. Todd led us in singing “We Are Standing on Holy Ground” while standing in the very place Jesus stood as a condemned man.

Talking with several who were in the cistern, this was one of the most emotional sessions we have had so far. The place lends itself to a feeling of desperation, of despair, loneliness, and pain. Some have had family members who have been in prison and the fear and longings experienced in prison were felt. One said it was the first time she truly felt she experienced the presence of Jesus.

For me, I could not stop thinking about the depth of Christ’s love for us to willing go through that torture. Music has always been the trigger for my emotions, and they were too raw for me to sing along with Todd. I am so grateful for those moments in the cistern.

Leaving the inside of the church, we moved outside to the terrace. This is the spot where Peter denied Jesus – 3 times before the cock crowed. The statue commemorates the accusation by the woman who questioned his accent.

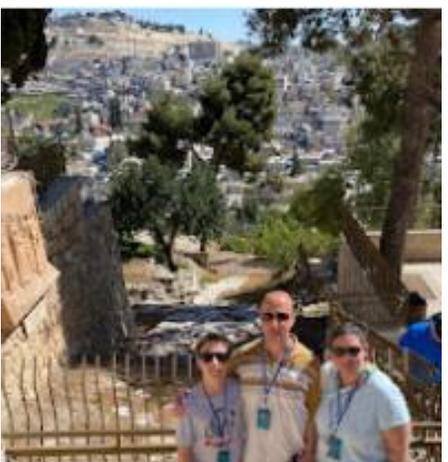


Jesus was brought by soldiers to the palace of Caiaphas from the Garden of Gethsemane where Judas had betrayed him. The photos below show the pathway he walked is downhill from the Garden (see in the distance – Mt of Olives on top of the hill - where we were yesterday!), across the valley, and back up a hill to the palace.

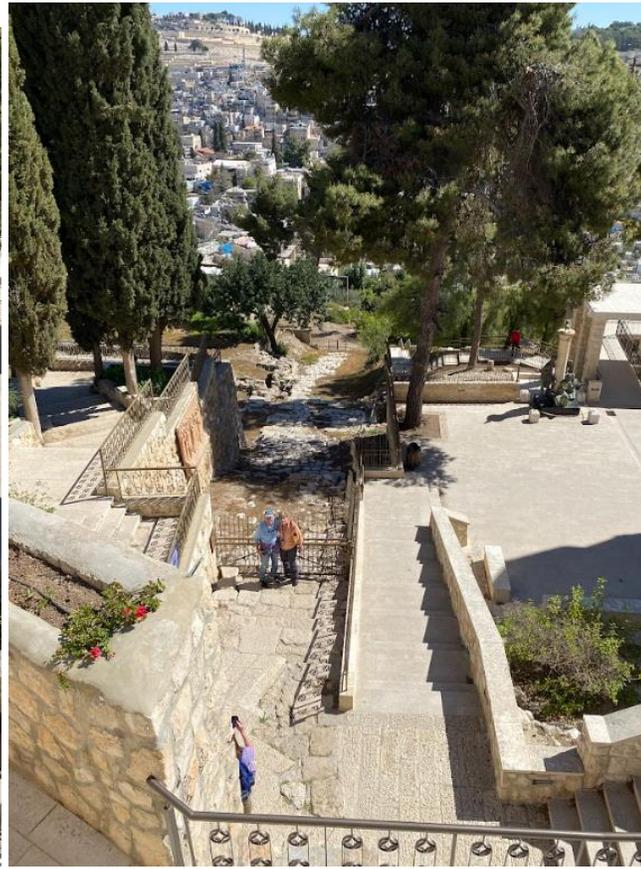
Those stone steps are still intact from 2,000 years ago and up until a few ago you were able to walk the length of the trail. Due to souvenir gatherers, all but the top 5 steps are now enclosed in iron fencing. We were able to stand/walk on those five, knowing absolutely we were walking in the exact footsteps of Jesus.











We left St. Peter's headed to the Israeli Museum. Along the way, we passed a site that is purported to be the tomb of King David. It is disputed – there are two other sites that also claim to be the burial site. Regardless of the truth, it is a beautifully constructed building dating to the 4th century.



On the way, Rula shared more interesting facts about her country.

In May 2018, the US embassy was moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This was/is a very controversial move because the area is still considered by many to be occupied territory – Israel having gained control in the 1967 Six-Day War. All government and parliament buildings are in Jerusalem, but all other country’s embassies are in Tel Aviv.

The Knesset, Israel’s parliament, is comprised of 120 members. 89% are Jewish, 18% are Arab, and 2% are Orthodox Jews.

Because today is the Jewish Sabbath, we saw many men walking while wearing traditional head coverings and reading the Torah. The shawl is called a tallit and covers the head and shoulders to symbolize being “under the tent of God”.

We arrived at the Israeli Museum and Rula led us on an orienting walk around the most amazing display. A 22,000 sq ft model replicates Jerusalem as it existed during the second temple [Jesus’s time] period. It was commissioned in 1966 by a father in memory of his son who was killed in the 1948 war. Originally constructed on the grounds of Jerusalem's Holyland Hotel, the model was moved and is now a permanent feature of the museum's 20-acre campus.





The most prized artifacts of the museum are the Dead Sea Scrolls which are housed in the Shrine of the Book. These are the oldest biblical manuscripts in the world, discovered in 1947–56 in 11 caves in and around Qumran. The white water feature on the terrace is designed to look like the top of a clay water vessel in which the scrolls were stored for over 1,500 years.



The Shrine was constructed in 1965 and funded by the family who purchased the scrolls as a gift to the State of Israel.

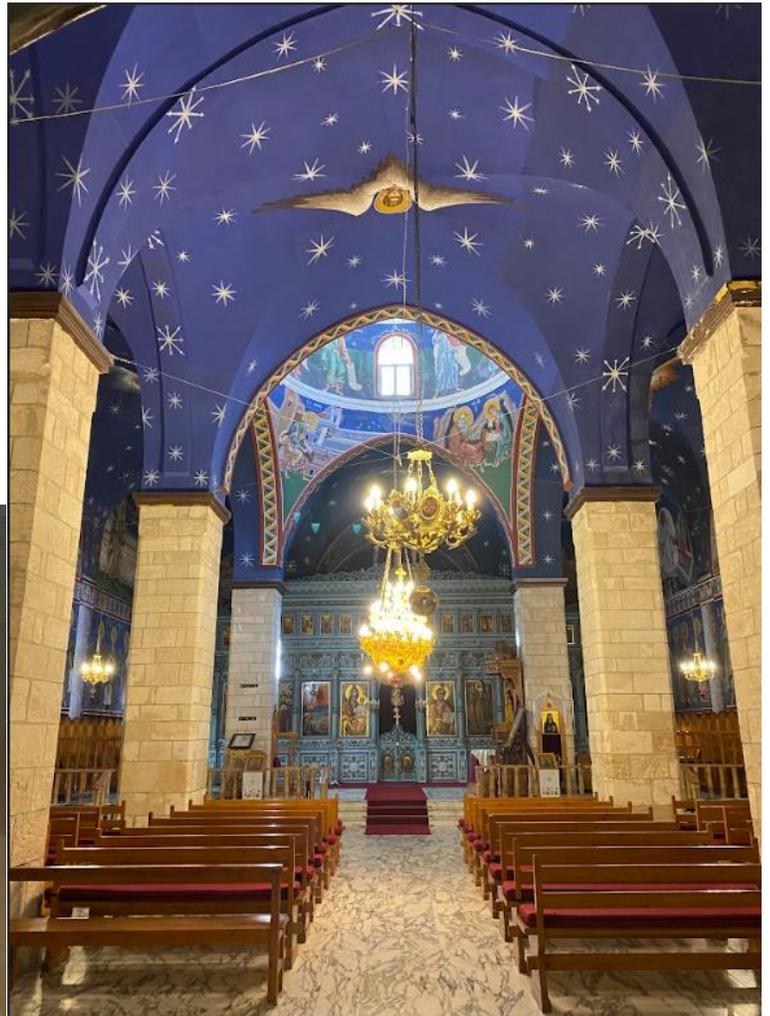
Below is one small facsimile of one of the scrolls. They were written by the Essenes, a group of Jewish men who devoted their lives to writing/copying and preserving sacred texts in first century BC and AD. The scrolls contain almost the entire Old Testament Bible, except for the book of Ester, written on parchment and papyrus scrolls. The originals are no longer on display as light and moisture cause them to deteriorate.



The art work around the museum campus is outstanding – it's placement reminds me of the work we are continuing to acquire around the NC Museum of Arts.



After an hour of self-touring, we left the museum and headed to lunch at an interesting restaurant which is attached to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Prophet Elias. Originally constructed in the 4th century, Christian tradition holds that Elijah rested here after fleeing the vengeance of Jezebel. The pictures of the art inside the chapel do not do justice to the beauty of the work.



Returning to the hotel for an afternoon of down time, about half of our group disembarked at the Joppa Gate to the Old City. They just didn't get enough marketplace, shopping, history, and shrine time yesterday! Some adventurous souls attempted to walk the entire wall, only to find it is not a complete trail so there was a lot of up and down stairs to get to the next section!

We all reconnected for dinner tonight at the hotel for an early evening because.....tomorrow is a very long day!

We will visit Masada, Jericho, travel to the Dead Sea for some swimming/floating time at the beach – and a ride on a beast of burden is in store! So much more yet to be experienced!