

Holy Land



The Holy Land

Purpose

To learn about where the Holy Land is; why it is sacred to four world faiths; and how a pilgrimage to the Holy Land can be so important to Christians.

Entrance of Pupils

A thought provoking slideshow introducing the theme of 'The Holy Land' for the pupils to enter assembly to (10 minutes)

Introduction

The Holy Land in the Middle East is probably the most sanctified place in the whole world. Incredibly in this one sacred space, the three religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) believe that God entered into a relationship with the human race.

Here lie the ruins of the world's oldest civilisations. Both in historical times and today, the strategic location, close to Africa, Asia and Europe, has made it a passing place between East and West - and therefore almost constantly fought over for many centuries including the present day.

It is a place where tension between Jews and Arabs is always present, and a place of extreme contrast in land types from fertile farmland to arid desert and yet the Holy City of Jerusalem is shared amongst faiths in an uneasy peace.

Pilgrims from 4 faiths (including the Baha'i faith founded in 1863 from Islam) have visited with the Bible as their tour guide, to spend time in this most Holy Region.

A visit to the Holy Land can prove absolutely life changing.



Where is the Holy Land?

Holy Land stretches from Egypt to Syria. The term Holy Land encompasses the places in the Middle East that are mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. It includes:

- ⇒ Israel and Palestine (which hold most of the sites sacred to Jews and Christians)
- ⇒ Western Jordan (where Moses glimpsed the Promised Land and Christ was baptised).
- ⇒ The Sinai Peninsula in Egypt (where Moses and the Israelites wandered for 40 years)
- ⇒ Southern Syria (where Elijah took refuge and St Paul was converted)



Israel is completely central to the Holy Land. It is the only Jewish state in the world and although it is only a small country by area (about the size of Wales), it carries the most huge importance for a number of religions.



Israel is surrounded by three much larger Muslim states and remains a disputed land. Past conquerors include the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Mamluks, Ottoman Turks and the British. For this reason, many sites have been destroyed and built over and the architecture is a vibrant and often confusing mix of previous conquerors.

Why is it Holy for Four World Faiths?

This is because the Holy Land is the land of the Bible - both the old and new testaments. All four faiths are grounded in the Old Testament and although Christianity is based on the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament, Islam (and Baha'i) recognise Jesus as one of their prophets and Judaism accepts that Jesus lived and worked throughout the area.

Christianity

For Christians, the Holy Land is where Jesus lived, proclaimed his Gospel, performed miracles, was crucified and rose from the dead. From early times, the followers of Jesus venerated places associated with him, foremost among them the cave at Bethlehem (where Jesus was born) and the Holy Sepulchre (where he died).



Judaism

The idea of a holy land became of great significance to both early Judaism however, the expression "holy land" occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless from Egypt to Syria, it was also the place where the patriarchs and prophets lived and were buried and is considered to be the land given to the Israelites by God - the Promised Land



The Western Wall, Jerusalem (Judaism)



Islam

For Muslims, honouring Jerusalem as a holy place goes back to Muhammad, who prayed facing Jerusalem before he was inspired to turn toward Mecca. He called Jerusalem “the Holy City”. Muslims believe Muhammad visited the rock of the Temple Mount during his night journey on the winged steed Al-Burak in 620.



Baha’i

Followers of the Bahá’í faith, have their holiest site in Haifa, Israel. The golden-domed Shrine of the Bab is set on a hillside of terraced gardens.



A Tour of the Holy Land for Christians

For many thousands of Christians who make a holy journey called a pilgrimage to the Holy Land each year, the Scriptures are never the same again. Stories that have been heard many times, suddenly become clearer and the reality of the times and places bring the stories and events to life. After visiting pilgrims hear the New Testament with a much better understanding.

Guides of the Holy Land will explain that there are three different types of site:

'A' sites have been historically proven to be the actual place where an event took place

'B' sites are very likely to have been set in the place but lack the evidence to fully establish this

'C' sites give examples of the type of place that may have been in the bible. For example, there are at least 3 areas which claim to be Emmaus.

In the Beginning

The Church of the Nativity - Bethlehem

Jesus was born in Bethlehem as Joseph and Mary had had to make the journey from their home in Nazareth to register for the census. This was a difficult journey of about 90 miles on foot and would have taken between 4 and 7 days with a heavily pregnant Mary. Visit the cave where Jesus was born.



The Shepherds' Fields - Outside Bethlehem

Standing near to Bethlehem is the site of the Shepherds' Fields—the place where the shepherds were blinded by the light of the Angel Gabriel. It is a place of beauty and peacefulness.



Life and Work

Jesus worked and travelled around the villages in the north of Israel with many events happening on or near the 'Sea' of Galilee.

Mensa Christi

The tiny church at Mensa Christi marks the Calling of the Disciples.



Capernaum



The ruins at Capernaum show the village where over a third of Jesus' miracles were performed. It lies on Lake Galilee and a replica fishing boat takes pilgrims out onto the water to experience the calm and beauty of the 'sea' in a very similar way to that of the times of Jesus.



Mount Tabor and Mount of the Beatitudes

Both areas remind us of how hilly and often barren the land is. On Mount Tabor, Moses was given the 10 commandments and on the Mount of the Beatitudes we remember the 'Sermon on the Mount' and the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.



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Page 8

The Church of the Annunciation

This is spectacular for a more modern reason. Every country has contributed an original image of Our Lady from their own tradition.



River Jordan

As we move from Nazareth down the country towards Jerusalem, we pass by the River Jordan where Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist



.....and near to the Dead Sea, famous for being both the lowest place on earth and so salty that you float!



Mount of Temptation

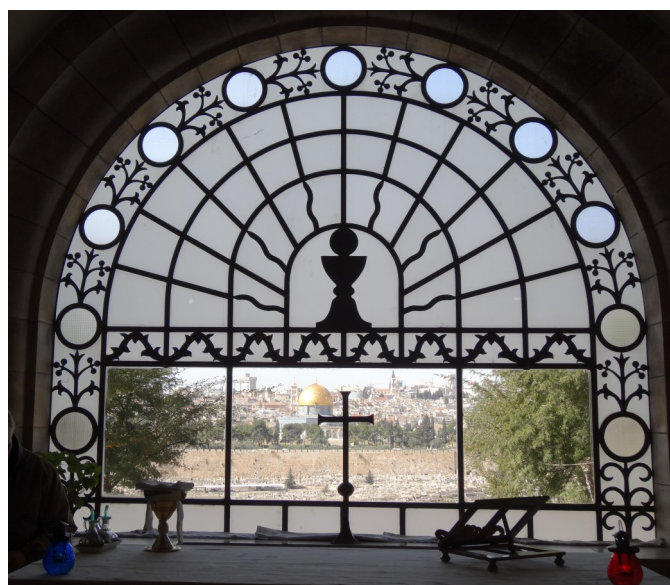
We travel past the Mount of Temptation where Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights. This is the place where the bible tells us he was tempted by the Devil.



Death and Resurrection

And so we come a full circle and reach Jerusalem, the scene of Holy Week, the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Church of Dominus Flavit (Jesus wept) overlooks the great city of Jerusalem.



The Last Supper

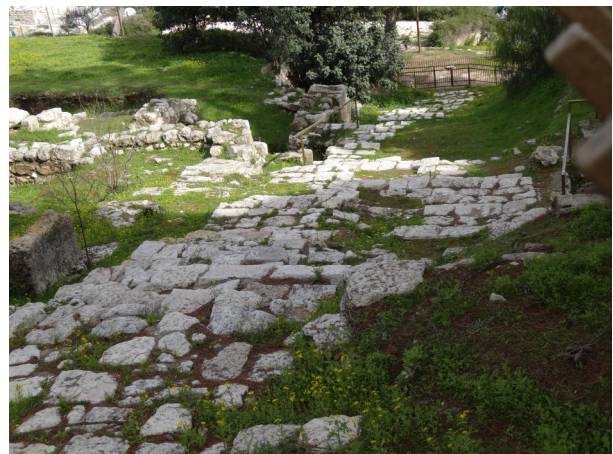
Visit the Upper Room, said to be the place of the Last Supper.



The Betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane by Judas

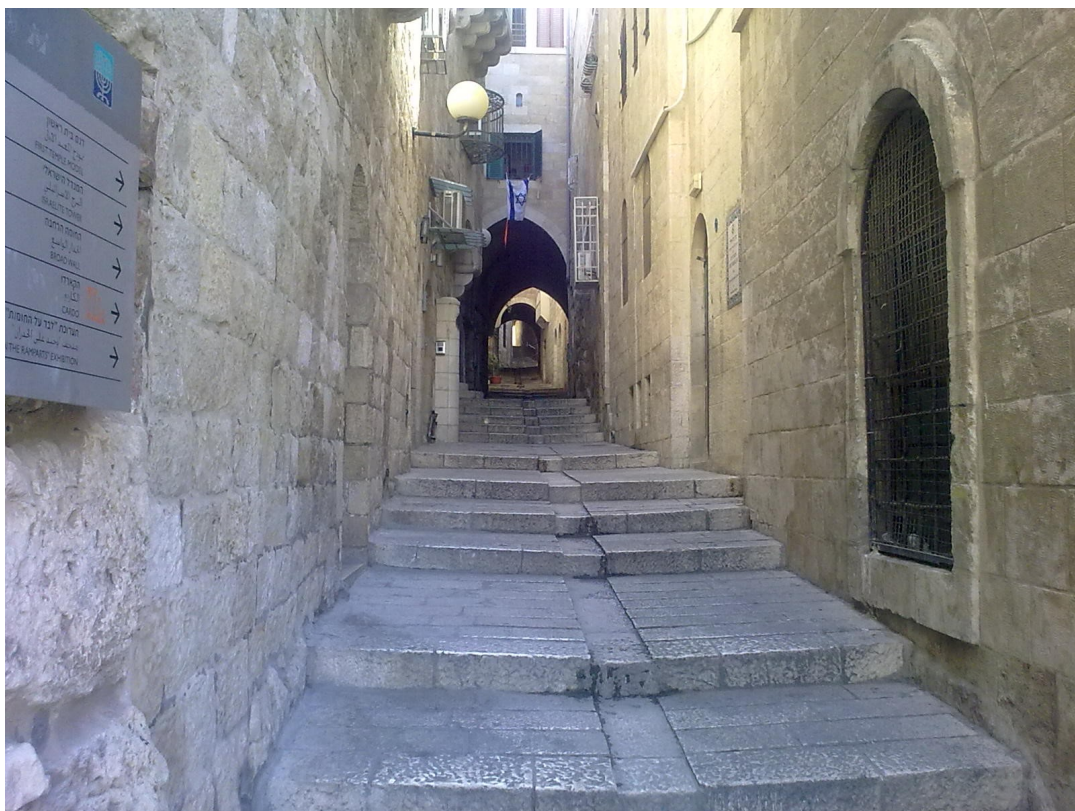
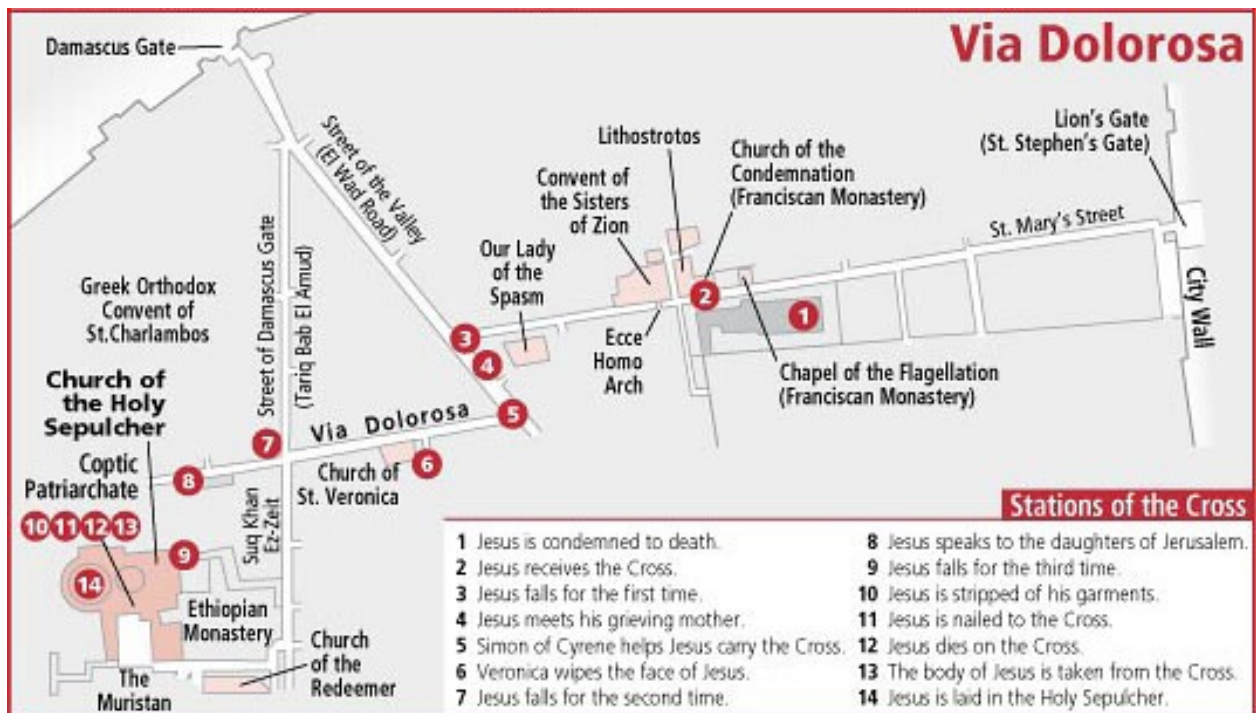


Walk in the steps of Jesus as He was led away from Gethsemane into Jerusalem by the Roman guards



Via Dolorosa - The Way of the Cross

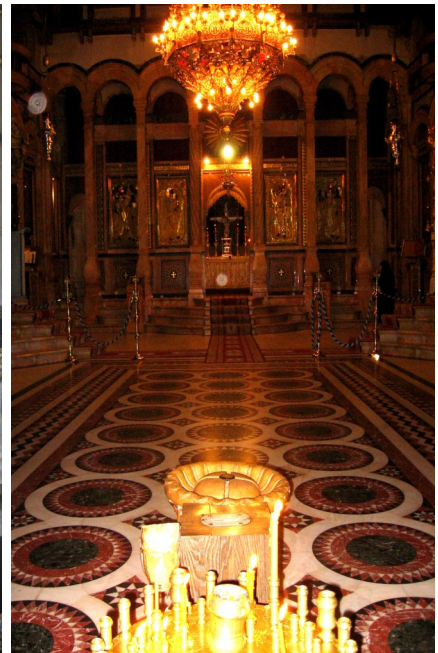
Wander through the souk following the route Jesus took carrying the cross to His death on Calvary.



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Finally reach the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built on the very place that Jesus died and where He was laid in the tomb to rise again on Easter Sunday.

This church has segments belonging to different Christian denominations including Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic along with the Coptic, Syriac and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. Therefore it is a place of great holiness and many styles.



**The Holy Land - a fascinating mix of religion; culture;
history and politics**

