

A WEEK OF PRAYER IN

# *Jerusalem*

A TRAVELLER'S TALE

EXPERIENCING JERUSALEM IN THE  
'WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY' 2017

REV ANDY ROLAND

Author of 'Bible in Brief', 'Job for Public Performance'  
and 'Discovering Psalms as Prayer'

## **THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU IF**

- you have ever wondered what it would be like to visit Jerusalem;
- you would like to know more about the Christian churches in Jerusalem in all their amazing variety;
- you have visited Jerusalem and would like to compare notes;
- you are tired of newspaper headlines about Israel and the Palestinian Territories and would like to get a feel for ordinary life in Jerusalem;
- you are interested in the history of Jerusalem and how we got to be where we are, (the appendices aim to help in this);
- you want to hear some good news about how the Christian churches in Jerusalem are committing themselves to unity;
- you want to be constantly surprised and occasionally shocked;
- you are confused about the rights and wrongs of the situation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. I hope that after reading this book you will still be confused, but at a deeper level!



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A Week of Prayer in Jerusalem  
by Rev Andy Roland

Map of Jerusalem by Daniel Gould

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## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to all Israeli and Palestinian  
bridge-builders and peacemakers  
and to the "Living Stones"  
who maintain a Christian presence in the Holy Land

## **ANDY ROLAND**

Andy's interest in Israel was sparked by an article in the Observer newspaper in August 1963 which said anyone could volunteer to take part in a massive archaeological dig at Masada, Herod's fortress-palace by the Dead Sea. Andy went out for a fortnight, and has been back six times since, in 1976, 1990, 1996, 2012, 2015 and 2017.

Having a German Jewish father and a Christian mother, and having studied history at Oxford, his interest in the Holy Land came naturally. His Christian faith led equally naturally to study of the Bible, particularly the links between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He read theology at Durham University and in 1984 was ordained as deacon then priest in the Church of England. He spent 31 years in parishes in south London, and co-led a parish pilgrimage to Israel in 1996.

Since retiring in 2015 he has become engrossed in writing. In April 2017 he published "Bible in Brief", a six month exploration of the Bible with an accompanying website [www.bibleinbrief.org](http://www.bibleinbrief.org); "Discovering Psalms as Prayer", drawing on his experience in South India; and "The Book of Job for Public Performance", with a foreword by Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury. He is developing another book about his former parish in south London.

He has an innate curiosity which loves questions rather than quick answers and values journeying over arrival. Come and explore Jerusalem with him!

## WHAT OTHERS SAY

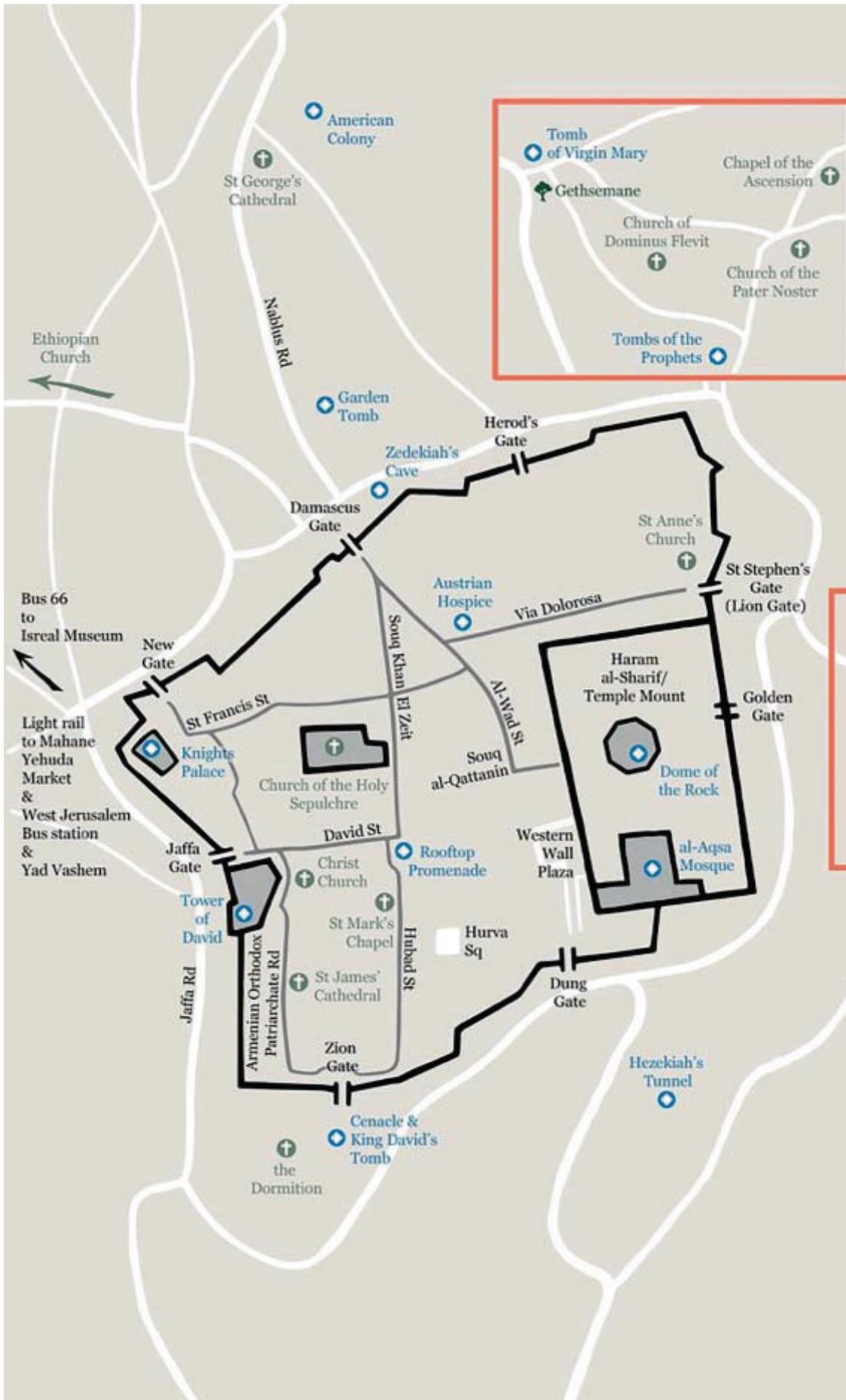
"The author of this fascinating book leads the reader into a multi-level experience of the Holy City. With the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity as entry point, Jerusalem's complex history, politics and global symbolic significance are opened up: it is an invitation to understand and empathise with Jerusalem dwellers - but also to journey as pilgrims with deeper understanding and commitment to a just peace."

*Mary Grey, Chair of Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust*

"Whether you have only thought of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem or have already visited this unique city and its various churches, this book provides a company of another traveller, who is fascinated by the diversity and complexity of life and history of Jerusalem.

"Through his easy to read travel diary, Andrew Roland gives us a colourful collage of ordinary and extraordinary encounters with Jerusalemites, places and events. Aware of conflicts and contrasts, as well as human interconnectedness, he joined with the different churches celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the city, from which they all trace their origins."

*Rev Eliza Zikmane, Lutheran minister, City of London*



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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Jerusalem!

The city with 3,000 years of history and the focus of three major faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

People often come as part of a pilgrim group. I like to go round places on my own. I may not see everything, but I do have my own unique experiences and encounters.

“A Week of Prayer in Jerusalem” is the travel diary of my week in Jerusalem when I came to take part in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I have now been to Jerusalem seven times in all, the last three during the Week of Prayer. In England we used to try to have just one unity service in the week. In Jerusalem they take it much more seriously, and there is a unity service at 5.00 every day, except on Thursday when it is 4.00. This visit followed on from two previous pilgrimages which I made with Living Stones. Living Stones Holy Land Trust aims to tell people about the situation of Christians in the Holy Land, and to support them where possible.

This time I wanted to put on record my experience of the Week of Prayer in Jerusalem and to re-acquaint myself with the city in all its religious, social and political complexity.

Come and explore Jerusalem with me. I hope that in consequence you will feel able to make your own journey there.

## THE TRAVELLERS

### ANDY ROLAND



I was born in 1945 and grew up in Coventry and Rugby. My father was secular German Jewish and my mother a Quaker Anglican. I studied history at Oxford University and after a short spell teaching went into personnel management. I was ordained in 1984 and served as priest in south London, 21 years in the parish of Hackbridge and Beddington Corner, and marrying in 2000. I have now visited Israel seven times.

1963 I worked as a volunteer for two weeks on the archaeological site of Masada, spending Christmas in West Jerusalem, then joining my parents for a visit to Galilee and Tel Aviv. At Masada the Israeli archaeologist in charge of our section constantly wore a red-checked Arab scarf; he had taken it from a Jordanian soldier he had killed in 1948. He also told me a story of the fight against the British Mandate pre-1948. A British officer had interrogated two young Jewish fighters so brutally that the girl died. So they sent him a book in the post. When he opened it, it blew his head off. In Jerusalem I met an old friend of my father's who worked to help Soviet Jews settle into the very different society of Israel. I said to him that I thought that modern Israelis had lost that wonderful Jewish sense of humour I had grown up with. He paused reflectively, then said, *"Yes, it's hard to have a sense of humour as a victorious military power."*

1975 I came on a pilgrimage organised by Imperial College chaplaincy, where I worked at the time. It included staying at various youth hostels and a schoolroom in Bethlehem. I met some human rights workers in Nazareth and learnt about some of the legal restrictions which faced Israeli Arabs. We celebrated Holy Week in Jerusalem, a wonderful experience.

1990 I visited Galilee with a friend from Tel Aviv I had first met at the church in Streatham where I had worked. A highlight was staying in the village of Ibillin, Galilee and meeting Fr. Elias Chacour. I spent some time in Jerusalem meeting some interesting people, including the "Women in Black". These are a group of women who spend one hour every Friday lunchtime standing in silence to protest against Israel's oppressive policy to Palestinians. No posters, or placards, simply an hour's silence. The abuse that got hurled at them had to be seen to be believed. I got on well with a Reform rabbi and said to him that I found the best books about Jesus were written by Jews, (I was thinking of Geza Vermes and others). "Yes", he replied, "*the New Testament*".

1996 I co-led a pilgrimage with Rev Selwyn Tillett from our adjoining churches in Beddington, South London. We went from Tel Aviv and Yafo to stay at a wonderful Anglican hospice in Nazareth, ending up in Jerusalem. While there, there was the first in a series of bomb attacks on "soft" Israeli targets, a cafe in Tel Aviv. We could see how everyone, Israeli soldiers and Palestinians alike, shared the same fear and dread.

2012 When the Separation Wall started being built, I felt I could not go back again. But Jo Simister was a member of my parish and Vice Chair of Living Stones, an organisation aiming to support Christians in Israel and the Palestinian territories. In 2012 Linda and I went with her on a "Living Stones" pilgrimage during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This gave equal exposure to the holy sites, including the place of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, as well as to Palestinian projects like the Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children, the Augusta Victoria Hospital and the Quaker school in Ramallah,

West Bank. Linda and I had a couple of days before and after in Jerusalem and Nazareth, and we also visited Masada, Herod's fortress-palace by the Dead Sea.

2015 I went on another Living Stones pilgrimage during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, this time visiting Hebron as well.

## JO SIMISTER



Jo was born in Walsall and drifted into teaching, particularly art and music, printing and pottery, gaining her qualification at the West Midlands College, part of Birmingham University. What she most enjoyed was maternity leave supply teaching children in hospital.

Jo's curiosity about the cultural background of the bible was aroused when the 'Bible Come to Life' exhibition came to her deanery in Tamworth. She helped with finding volunteers to wear the beautiful costumes for the tableaux each evening, and one thing stuck in her mind: that in order to understand Abraham you have to know Bedouin culture.

Shortly after, Jo became Deputy Warden of the Methodist International House in Bayswater in London, an experience which quickly removed any shyness around communicating in the simplest English - and was a baptism of fire in international relations as nearly all the one hundred students had to share rooms with strangers; *"The trick is to have a language or a faith in common"*.

In 1986, she said, *"I'd quite like to go to the Holy Land"*, and a friend said, *"Choose what you want to do, and I'll share a room with you."*

A group of seven went on a two week cultural trip starting in Jordan and travelling to Nablus, Nazareth, Bethlehem, East Jerusalem, Ein Gedi, Eilat, St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, and back via Aqaba and Petra. It changed the direction of her life. She now wanted to work in Palestine but 'as a worker who happens to be Christian, not as a Christian'. It took nine months, but in the end, through the Quaker Middle East Placement Programme she started work at the Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children on the Mount of Olives. Mrs Majaj the Director had just started a school there as well, and Jo was her first PA.

As Jo's two-year placement came to end, Save the Children Fund's Middle East Regional Advisor asked if she would work with Lesley, who was busy setting up a degree course in physiotherapy at Bethlehem University, to help with admin and overseeing the scholarships for the students - and eventually teaching some courses on disability awareness and course planning.

Jo returned to the UK in 1997 and I first met her when she moved to my parish. She had joined Living Stones and was helping with their administration. She had known of it before, when living in Jerusalem, and been impressed with the founder, theologian Revd Dr Michael Prior. In 2012 she and Lesley led the first Living Stones pilgrimage to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and they hope it will be able to continue every year.

## LESLEY DAWSON



Lesley qualified as a physiotherapist in 1963, and worked at Bradford, Bethlehem and Brighton, ending up with a PhD in Education. She headed up a team setting up a degree course for physiotherapists at Bethlehem University in 1988, funded by Save The Children Fund. She came intending to stay four years and actually stayed eleven. This included three months in Gaza as an Educational Consultant. When the Intifada started in December 1987, Israel closed all schools and universities in the West Bank and Gaza, so for the first few years the teaching took place in the Notre Dame Teaching Centre in Jerusalem.

After 1999 she lived at Eastbourne and taught at the University of Brighton, retiring in 2007. She still carries out programme evaluations abroad. She joined Living Stones in 2000 and has gone back with Living Stones for the last five years, keeping contact with former students.

## SATURDAY 21st JANUARY

### ARRIVAL

Jo, Lesley and I met up without difficulty at Luton, flying by Easyjet. Security checks and flight were uneventful. I sat next to a young Jewish couple from Highgate, north London, Jake and Charlotte, who were going out partly as holiday at the father's house at Herzliya 50 metres from the beach. (You need some serious money to have that). He was also meeting up with his brother in Tel Aviv about a charity their family had set up to help homeless people in Tel Aviv. There is homelessness there as in any other big city. I asked if the settlements on the West Bank were a way of helping Israel's housing crisis. They said no, the settlements are more strategic and political. Most homelessness was caused by families splitting up, typically young people from ultra-religious families, especially if they were gay. Gay people and secular Israelis often fly over to Cyprus to get married. (This was what two friends of mine had done). They also commented on how the Jerusalem municipality was not good at providing basic services to the Muslim and Christian quarters of East Jerusalem, such as water and rubbish collection.



As we came into Israeli air space we could see the sharp line between the lights of Tel Aviv and the dark of the Mediterranean. We landed at Ben Gurion airport and went through to departure without incident. The airport

was named after the first Prime Minister of Israel in 1973. David ben Gurion, 1886-1973, was Prime Minister 1948-1954 and 1955-1963. I remember that when I first landed there

in 1963, it was called Lod airport, after the Israeli name for Lydda, a Palestinian village whose inhabitants were forced into the refugee camps of Gaza in 1948. It had been the place where St Peter prayed for a paralysed man called Aeneas, (Acts 9.32-35). It was also the birthplace of St George, a Christian soldier who was martyred under the persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in 303. He is the patron saint of Portugal, Catalonia, Romania, and of course England. The airport lies on the outskirts of the city of Lod, which has about 70,000 inhabitants, just over 1,000 being Arabs who are still there after the remainder had been expelled.



As we left the airport we saw an impressive sculpture by Salvador Dali of the menorah, the seven-branched candlestick that was central to the worship of the Temple in Jerusalem. The arch of Titus in Rome shows the menorah being carried by the victorious Roman troops after the crushing of the Jewish revolt in 68 C.E. The feast of Hanukkah in December commemorates

the miracle of the lighting of the Menorah after the Maccabees had defeated the Seleucid kingdom based in Persia, and had re-consecrated the Temple after the king's attempt to eradicate the Jewish faith in 168 B.C. You can read about it in some Bibles which include later books written in Greek, called the Apocrypha. The story is in 1 Maccabees 4.36-59.

We were picked up in a car by Bassam, a Christian Palestinian and an old friend of Jo and Lesley. His surname means the old eastern function of "dragoman", a mixture of interpreter, guide and fixer, very appropriate. He brought us to our hotel, the Knight's Palace, inside the walls of the Old City in the Roman Catholic district, the Latin Patriarchate. The rooms were clean and basic, with electric air conditioning which also provided heating - essential in Jerusalem in January. The floors are



stone, as always in a hot climate, but in January they are very chilly. When Linda and I came in 2012 we could not get the heater to work and spent the coldest night of our lives! So don't forget slippers and a hot water bottle!

We arrived too late for food, but Bassam arranged for us to walk a couple of hundred yards to the Gloria Hotel, who fed us very well indeed. Palestinian hotel meals all follow the same self-service pattern - soup, a splendid salad selection, a main meat course and some sweet pastry or fruit. It also had a better bar than the Knight's Palace. Lesley asked if the two hotels were owned by same company. "Owned by the same family", Bassam replied laconically.



## SUNDAY 22nd JANUARY

### A CHRISTIAN SABBATH

Breakfast was a buffet style including cereals, porridge, salads, cold meats and a hot dish like scrambled eggs. Tea and coffee was served by the staff in small cups, very small compared with the mugs I use at home. But the waiters were always quick to refill my cup. Note: If you are a vegetarian, be prepared to eat lots of hummus and omelettes.



About 8.30 I wandered down to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, down St Francis Street, up Christian Quarter Road, then slipped down St Helena Street to the square in front of the fairly unimpressive entrance to

the holiest church in Christendom. Many Western Christians find Holy Sepulchre hard to take. It is dark, and usually full of scaffolding and pilgrims of every continent doing their own thing, lighting candles, kissing stones, taking flash photos. The various ancient churches are jealous of their own bits of territory. Indeed the only way that the



keys of the church could be handled peacefully is by a Muslim family. But over the years I have found it a very special place, more like a small town with a variety of chapels than a neat well-organised Anglican cathedral.

## **CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE A BRIEF HISTORY**

The history is complicated. Early on, Jewish Christians venerated the place where Jesus died and the nearby rock-tomb which was the site of this resurrection. When the Emperor Hadrian razed the city after the revolt of Bar-Kochba in 132-136 AD, he deliberately created a new pagan city in which Jews were not allowed. The tradition is that he built a shrine and temple to Venus over the empty tomb and Golgotha. After Christianity became a legal religion in 316 and received imperial favour, the temple was demolished and a splendid new church built with a kind of plaza incorporating both the rocky column of Calvary and the rock tomb of Jesus. It was begun in 326 and completed nine years later. It was damaged during the Persian invasion of 614 but repaired when the Byzantines recaptured it. However, in 638 the Arab armies, inspired by their Muslim faith, captured Jerusalem along with Palestine, Syria and in 640 Egypt.

The Patriarch, who had sent the holy relics to Constantinople for safe keeping, invited Caliph Omar to pray in the church, but the Caliph refused, saying that if he did so, his followers might want to turn the church into a mosque. For the first 100 years there was no attempt at converting the local population to Islam. Thereafter conversions happened, though in 1200 there was still a Christian majority in Egypt. In 1922 73,000 or 10.8% of Palestinians were Christian; in 1946 the figure was about 9%. Now it is only 1%. Life under Islam was reasonably tolerant as second-class citizens, except in the middle years of Caliph al-Hakim of Egypt. He reigned from 996 (at the age of 11) till 1021. In 1009 he started a campaign against churches and synagogues during which he had Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulchre destroyed, chipping away at the rock which contained the tomb of Jesus until the site was levelled. He came to believe that he was the Mahdi, the prophesied redeemer of Islam. He started withdrawing for nights of meditation. One night in 1021 he rode out and nothing was

ever seen of him again, apart from his donkey and a blood-stained coat. The Druze community, centred round Lebanon, Syria and Israel, are a Muslim sect who believe that Hakim did not die but will return one day.



Restoration of the church began straightaway but proceeded slowly. Twenty years later the Byzantine emperor provided funds for some rebuilding, but a large part was abandoned. After the brutal capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099, the new Frankish regime rebuilt the church and the rotunda around the tomb. The Knights Templar built round churches in Europe as a reminder of the church in Jerusalem. You can see examples in the Temple Church in London and in the Round Church in Cambridge. After the defeat of the Crusaders by Salah-ed-Din (Saladin) in 1189 one of the main entrances was walled up, and the keys of the church, with responsibility for opening and closing the church, was given to a local Muslim family, the Nusseibehs, who have been responsible every since. This was because the various churches who had chapels in the Church, (Franciscans and Orthodox of various nationalities), could not agree among themselves how it should be done. Little change happened until a disastrous fire in 1808, and then an earthquake in 1927 caused extensive damage. The disagreements between the various churches meant that repairs did not get under way until 1959. I have always known the church to be covered in scaffolding until 2014, when it was finally clear as a result of UNESCO funding.



## VISITING THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

When I entered the church, I made a circuit anti-clockwise and saw at once that the scaffolding was back. Walking behind it at the east end I discovered a small chapel which was used by the Syrian Orthodox Church, the chapel of St Nicodemus. There is a small doorway here which leads to a number of first century rock tombs - clearly the site of some sort of cemetery.



(I have had a soft spot for the Syrian Orthodox church ever since I started using part of their morning prayer service in my prayers after visiting a Christian Ashram in south India in 1983. My book "Discovering Psalms as Prayer" tells the story). I said

my own Syrian Orthodox morning prayers, in English, while the preparatory prayers before the liturgy were being said by a priest, and an elderly woman. The liturgy started when a surprisingly young bishop arrived. I could understand nothing so I left after a bit to witness the end of a Coptic service held in a kind of plastic tent beneath the scaffolding surrounding the Chapel of the Resurrection. In the main nave of the church the Greek Orthodox service was just beginning. In a small side space with an altar I saw a Greek Orthodox priest standing motionless for over half an hour, while he read the morning prayers from his service book. Chapels continue down into the bowels of the earth - actually an old Roman cistern, where Constantine's wife





Helena discovered the true cross buried. She actually discovered three crosses, but reckoned that the only one that got people healed was the Real Thing. Pilgrims used to bite fragments off while kissing it devoutly till not much was left. Erasmus in the sixteenth century said that there were enough pieces of the true cross in churches in Europe to build a ship! However, it is a mysterious space with an atmosphere that makes prayer almost imperative. I then went to

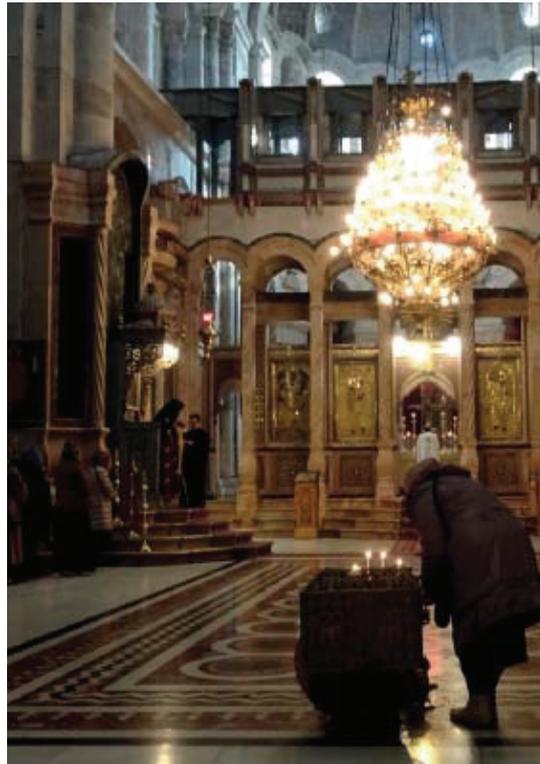
the Chapel of Calvary, the actual spot, probably, where Jesus was crucified.

It consists of two elaborate chapels, both quite small. The first one you come to is owned by the Franciscans with lots of paintings and candles.



It commemorates the moment when Jesus was stripped of his clothes. The second, the Greek Orthodox one, full of chandeliers and candles, centres on the altar over the hole in the bare rock where the cross stood, pilgrims taking it in turns to kneel down and kiss the rough stone. There was a group of pilgrims from Ethiopia, dressed in white, praying and taking photos with their laptops, and I did the same with my small camera. Then down steep steps to ground level where there was a surprisingly short queue to enter the Chapel of the Resurrection.

A small doorway is guarded by two attendants who make sure that people do not stay too long in the chapel. It was upsetting to see a woman being hurried out of the chapel quite roughly with the attendants saying, "*Quickly, quickly!*" You duck down beneath a low stone arch and come into a tiny vestibule, where you wait to take your turn in the actual tomb itself, a small oblong space with a 6 foot marble slab marking where the body of Jesus would have lain. There is just room for three people to kneel side by side and just enough time to say the Lord's Prayer. On one of my previous visits I got a tap on the shoulder to indicate that my time was up, and as I left the attendant said, "*God is outside as well,*" to which I thought, "*That's true.*"



Opposite the tomb is the main body of the church. A Greek Orthodox service was about to start. The wealth of new decoration contrasts with the down-at-heel look of other parts. But there is a problem. The Greek Orthodox keep a tight hold on many of the religious sites, and bishops and priests are almost exclusively Greek, not Palestinian. Other churches are led by local Palestinian clergy. It is one of the strengths of the Uniate Churches, i.e Orthodox churches in communion with Rome.

I made my way to the Ethiopian monastery. This is one of the oddest corners of Jerusalem. In the early 20th century the Ethiopian Church became independent from the Coptic, Egyptian church. As a result the Ethiopian monks were kicked out of the Coptic Monastery, not very Christian, and made their home in the ruined Crusader cloisters on the actual roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was originally shared

between the Ethiopians and the Copts, but in 1970, while the Coptic monks were away celebrating Easter, the Ethiopians changed the locks! Also not very Christian.

This was my route: Out into the courtyard and up to Christian Quarter Road; turning right down Aqabat al Khanqah St. There I met a rubbish collection truck which is not



only narrow enough to get through the souks, but actually goes up and down steps! Then right at the crossroads down Souk Khan al-Zeit and after a few yards I turned right up some wide steps by a juice stand turning left, right and right. In front is the entrance to the Coptic Church, Just in front are two doorways. The one on the right

leads to an ancient cistern. The one on the left leads to the Ethiopian monastery.



I first discovered this in 1986. It was a quiet, peaceful square, with some of the monks' washing hanging out to dry. The dome in the middle of the courtyard is directly over the chapel of St Helena, where stairs go down into the bowels of the earth. I tried to speak to a thin elderly monk who was selling

icons. He knew no English, but he did sell me a beautiful small icon of Christ the suffering King, and it has been a treasured possession of mine ever since.



It now seems to have become a standard part of pilgrim tours, I am sure to the dismay of the Ethiopian monks who still live there, and now keep themselves very much behind their green shuttered doors and windows. This time my visit coincided with that of a large pilgrim group from Kerala. Kerala is in the south-west of India and has the largest Christian presence of all Indian states, about 25%. Christianity has been in Kerala at least

since the 4th century. There are several stone reliefs of the Syrian Orthodox life-giving cross from the 7th-8th centuries. Tradition has it that the first missionary was St Thomas (Doubting Thomas) who was martyred near Chennai/Madras and is buried on a hill outside that city.

We all went through a narrow door through a dusty chapel and down some narrow stairs to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. I was struck by the portrayal of the Trinity in the chapel: God, not as an old man in the sky, but as three old men in the sky. Not quite my understanding.

(I wrote a blog "God in 3D" for my website bibleinbrief.org, in which I try to explain what the Trinity means).

