

VIA LUCIS



# Via Lucis

*The Life of Jesus  
in the Light of Easter*

Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle



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## *Foreword*

The pilgrimage to Jerusalem took place in 2011. It was a special journey for two reasons. First, our pilgrimage chaplain was no less than Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle. He was just appointed Archbishop of Manila at that time. This was in fact his first time in the Holy City. He regarded it therefore as God's wonderful way of preparing him for his new, albeit challenging assignment. It was a treat for us, his companions, to witness this modern-day apostle of Christ take in the sights and sounds of Jerusalem, the land where, two thousand years ago, his Master walked. Many times, Cardinal Tagle would be deeply and visibly moved as we traced the life of Christ through Jerusalem's historical sites. In turn, as these pages will bear out, he would give very moving reflections and sermons. As he was wont to do, as observers point out, he was speaking from his heart. Perhaps like his Lord.

The second reason is the theme that the Cardinal chose for the pilgrimage. There were three groups that journeyed with him that year. Logistically, handling these groups, which totaled to about 90 persons, was almost humanly impossible. Miraculously, however, in the land where once upon a time miracles were a regular spectacle, the group coalesced harmoniously around their shepherd. Many of them had already gone to Jerusalem before. But not around this theme. The usual pilgrimage highlighted the

*Via Crucis* or the Way of the Cross, which is the Lord's passion and death. The cardinal, however, wanted to take the theme of *Via Lucis* or the Way of Light. This would include Pope John Paul II's Mysteries of Light. But what the cardinal meant by his chosen theme was to approach the life of our Lord from the perspective of the resurrection. That is, a life suffused with light, hope, and joy. We are Easter people, he would always remind the faithful. We follow the Lord filled with the hope of the Easter morning.

And so we trekked, trod, and trudged through the Holy City, following the cardinal and his way of light. We felt blessed and graced. We only wished there were more of us to benefit from the deep and hope-filled reflections of the cardinal on our lives and struggles as followers of Christ. Through this book that wish is finally fulfilled.

—Fr. Emmanuel Alfonso, SJ  
Executive Director  
Jesuit Communications, Philippines



## *Editor's Note*

Texts in sans-serif font originally appeared in Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines. They are translated here but appear in a different font to indicate a change of voice.



# *Introduction*

Our guides have reminded us many times about the disposition that we need to have as spiritual pilgrims. Here in the Holy Land, while we cannot totally discount the touristic aspect of this pilgrimage, it is still good to be reminded that the spiritual and human renewal that is at the core of every pilgrimage should not be forgotten.

As we said in the orientation in Manila a few days ago, a pilgrimage to the Holy Sites, especially those associated with Jesus and the great men and women of our Judeo-Christian faith, is first of all an assurance to us that our faith is historically based. Our faith is not a product of human imagination and invention alone. The pilgrimage should affirm our faith, edify it, assure us that it is real, that it makes a difference in history. That's the first point to consider.

The second is, as we engage in the geographic tour, we should be mindful of our interior pilgrimage, the pilgrimage into our hearts. As we go to the holy places, let us be reminded of the events in our lives that may be very similar to the events in the lives of the Jewish people, the early Christians, Jesus, Mary, or Joseph. Their experiences are repeated in our lives. Knowing how they were able to respond in faith to the demands not only of God but also of the culture and the situations they had to face,

we may be inspired to grapple with our questions, our concerns, our needs, our family situations, as we join Jesus and these holy men and women.

Finally, let this pilgrimage also be a journey toward communion with each other and communion with many other people, those who are here in the Holy Land right now and those who are not with us. Let us bring the prayers, the concerns and needs, the hopes and joys, and the sorrows of our family members, our friends, our loved ones. We remember the sick, the abandoned, those who are struggling with meaning in life. Let us unite ourselves with our brothers and sisters who are still recovering from the effects of typhoons Pedring and Quiel, especially in Bulacan, Pampanga, and Nueva Ecija. We unite ourselves with our brothers and sisters in Eastern Turkey who have just experienced an earthquake that resulted in a great loss of lives; a good number of people are dead, missing, or injured. We also join our brothers and sisters in Thailand; Bangkok is now flooded. So we bring with us a heart that is big enough, like the heart of Christ, to have space, to find space for brothers and sisters who are in need of the grace of light, peace, and meaning.

With these reminders, we hope we can make this journey joyful yet prayerful. Let it be a moment to learn but also a moment to be led into an internal journey of faith and love.

# *Pilgrimage Schedule*

Day ONE	Nazareth
Day TWO	Mount Tabor
Day THREE	Cana
Day FOUR	Jordan
Day FIVE	Jericho
Day SIX	Jerusalem
Day SEVEN	Emmaus

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word.” Then  
the angel departed from her.

—Luke 1:38

# *Day One*

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## ANNUNCIATION

The account of the annunciation that we hear over and over again from St. Luke has now become concrete to us. We are here now, where it happened, in that place called Nazareth. This place invites us to deep silence. How we wish we could spend hours here with our eyes closed, with our minds filled with the Spirit, imagining that day when this humble lady, Mary, was visited by the angel.

According to St. Paul, at the designated time called “the fullness of time,” God sent His Son, born of a woman by the power of the Holy Spirit. The designated time. The fullness of time. What makes time full? Time becomes full when there is an eruption of love. Time is perfectly completed when the hour brims with the fullness of love. It happened here in this quiet place, the fullness of history when the fullness of God’s love was manifested in the descending of His Son. The Word would be spoken as flesh. There is nothing more to say. God would give all, God would say all, all

\* Homily at the Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth.

of his love would be spoken. It was spoken here. There is nothing left for God. He gave His begotten Son and time was fulfilled.

But here also we see the fullness of love in Mary, in her capacity to receive God's full love, and in full love also to say, "I am the handmaid of the Lord." The love of God was met by the full love of Mary in this exchange of love that made the Word truly flesh. In the power of the Spirit, eternity and history have met right here. We are in a sacred place because it is filled with love, divine love, human love. Let us therefore recall our deep experiences of love, our annunciations that made us tremble like Mary, that also made us capable of loving here. I ask the married people: Ladies, when you were being wooed, that was like an annunciation: Were you tickled pink? And you guys, when your loved one accepted your proposal, that was also annunciation. It is just the same with us priests, I don't know why, but you felt you are being called. Those are moments of annunciation, God's love coming to us, enabling us to respond in love.

We bring to our prayer those people who are questioning God's love; those who consider God distant, not coming to them, not sending angels as bearers of Good News, and those whose hearts are hardened. May they learn the ways of Mary, how to open their hearts to the mystery of love. And may they discover that in our respective fullness of time, God meets us in love. May we all meet God in love.

### ***Prayer: St. Joseph***

Let us entrust one another to the loving care of St. Joseph the Worker. We pray in a special way for priests and seminarians. The house of Joseph in Nazareth was considered the first seminary, where Jesus was formed

\* Exhortation at St. Joseph's Church, Nazareth.



in obedience to God, in working for the kingdom of God. And from that home, he was sent on mission.

Saint Joseph is also the person to whom we should pray if we want a happy death. With his help, we pray for those who are preparing to face death—the terminally ill, those who are in precarious situations. And we pray for ourselves for truly every day we are a step closer to death. May we find death as the fulfillment of life, life in God, life in God’s presence. Amen.

## TRANSFIGURATION

In the tradition of the Jewish people, the mountain is not just a geographic spot. It is not merely about the place. It is associated with the presence of the divine. That’s why mountains are privileged places for prayer, for an encounter with God. In biblical times, God usually revealed his love, his identity, on a mountain.

The transfiguration of Jesus, according to tradition, happened on this mountain, Mount Tabor, and this episode in the life of Christ is quite significant not only for Christ but also for the disciples, for us who follow in the steps of Jesus Christ. Jesus had just openly talked to the disciples about his coming passion and death. He talked about a dark moment they should prepare for. He would be handed over to the chief priest, the leaders of the temple. He would be accused and he would be put to death.

\*Talk at the Church of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor.

Put yourselves in the place of the disciples. Say you are Peter, Andrew, John, or James, and you left everything to follow Jesus. You left father, boats, nets, your whole life to follow Jesus. Then one day he tells you that the one you are following will be condemned as a criminal. How would you feel? A part of you will say, “*God forbid! No! This is not true. Tell us that you are joking. Tell us that this is just a product of your nightmare. Maybe you need to talk it over with a psychiatrist. Maybe you just lost some calories. Wake up, Jesus!*” But it instilled fear and a bit of disappointment in the disciples.

After that moment of disclosure, with Jesus telling his close friends the truth about himself, which caused fear and doubt among them, he brought his three closest friends—Peter, James, and John—to this mountain. Now we are not only three but almost a hundred, and Jesus brought us here. We are his friends. On this mountain, he was transfigured before his friends’ very eyes. It was a moment of revelation.

According to the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus’ appearance changed, and his clothing became dazzling white, light, glory, *Via Lucis*, the way of the light. We have just taken the path to light, but remember the one who appears glorious is the one who will one day be arrested, humiliated, and killed. But who is this person? Who is this Jesus that his friends followed? Is he a maverick? Is he adventurous? Is he one of those who want to make a living out of preaching? Is he a crazy spiritual guru who wants to have a following and to have his name and fame spread by his friends? Who is this? I’m sure the disciples entertained these questions. Who is this man that we are following? At one moment he talks about death, another moment he becomes glorious. Who is he? And he talks with Moses and Elijah—Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah the great prophet. The law and the prophets, the summary of the Scriptures. What we call the Old Testament is personified in these two. Now they are talking to Jesus. What are they talking about?

That's the reason we chose St. Luke. Of all the gospels, it is only St. Luke who tells us what the three were talking about. They were talking about the exodus of Jesus, what he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Jesus was right, after all. He was not fooling his disciples when he said that he would be arrested and killed in Jerusalem. Moses and Elijah were talking about the same thing. They were talking about the dark night of death. Look at this mystery. They were talking about the dark night of death as Jesus was bathed in glorious light, and this happened when Jesus was praying, when he was in deep communion with God. When you are in prayer, your countenance changes. When you are in deep communion with God, your face, your person exudes light. That was the experience of the apostles with Jesus in deep prayer, after realizing that he was going to face his death.

And then from the cloud came a voice. Who is this Jesus? "This is my beloved Son." Now you know who he is, the one who will die is my beloved Son, the one who will go through his exodus in Jerusalem is my Son. And the voice said, "Listen to Him." He's telling you the truth and the body that you see bathed in light is the same body that will be crucified.

This mountain is special to God. Here, the Father speaks to the disciples who are worried about continuing the path of discipleship. Here, the Father reveals who Jesus truly is. Here, we are given hope that every crucifixion, if borne in obedience to the Father and for love of neighbor, is really life-giving, glorious. The crucifixion will still happen; the transfiguration did not erase the death of Christ. But now we know the one who will die is not a criminal. He is truly the Son of God and we have to listen to him because after this he will say, "If you want to be my disciple, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross, and come follow me." You cannot stay on Mount Tabor, you have to follow me. You have to follow me on my exodus to Jerusalem, and there, beholding my

body hanging on the cross, you will remember Mount Tabor and say, "This is the glorious body of the Son of God."

Maybe on this mountain of the Transfiguration we can in a way recap the experience of the day. We started in Nazareth, the place of Mary and Joseph and the place where Jesus grew up. That's why he was known as the Nazorean. Who are Batangueños here? Do we have anybody of Ilocano roots? Any Bicolano, Manileño, Ilonggo, Caviteño, Pangasinense? As you can see, even now our identity is usually linked to the place of our origin. It is the same with Jesus. He comes from Nazareth. He grew up in Nazareth. He is to be known as the Nazorean. It looks mysteriously simple from our perspective, but at the time it could've caused a lot of darkness to Mary and Joseph.

The coming of light brings darkness. We have just been to Nain, where Jesus brought the light of life to a widow who had lost her son. We looked at the place. How dark it was with the church closed and not a single Christian seeming to be in charge. Now we come to the Mount of Transfiguration, the glory that will come when the Son of God faces his cross.

Let us not be depressed. The reality is that when the light comes from above, when the light comes from God, we human beings cannot see it as light. Our norms for what is bright do not always correspond with the light of God. That's why even in Christian tradition the great men and women of prayer, the masters of prayer and spirituality, went through the dark night of the senses, the dark night of the soul. But it is darkness that washes human beings. It is dark to us because the light comes not from us but from God. If we can still see the light, it might not be divine. If it is truly from God, then it strikes us as darkness, and Mary is one of our best guides. So many things remained, humanly, to Mary.

Many times in the Gospel of St. Luke we are told that she did not understand, but "she kept all these things in her heart." She

pondered, humanly speaking, darkness but with the eyes of faith. It is light that human eyes cannot see. Here, Peter did not know what he was talking about. How can you, humanly speaking, make sense of a heavenly apparition, a heavenly revelation? But you can see how the divine enters as light in ordinary villages like Nazareth, in an ordinary workroom like that of Joseph, and on an ordinary mountain like Tabor.

My dear brothers and sisters, at the end of this day let us reflect. As we go back to our respective homes, as you continue to rest and pray, try to reflect on your own “Nazareths,” on your own Nains; try to go back to your own Mount Tabor, where God came as pure gift and pure light but we did not recognize the light and so we trembled before what appeared to be darkness.

In fact, many of us have probably experienced that when light came we said, “Depart from me!” We couldn’t stand the light. But without that light, how dark our darkness will be. So let us continue pondering like Mary, Peter, James, John, Joseph. In our dark experiences, let there be light. See the light, the Lord might be there, the beloved Son, listen to him, open your ears. In the darkness, light comes in the mysterious love of the Father.

Let me close with a personal sharing. Ten years ago, when I was told that I was being named bishop of Imus, I did not see the appointment as light. I saw it only as darkness, and I cried and cried. Then I said, “No!” I thought it would be foolish and reckless of me to say “yes.” I was called again and offered the post again. It remained dark because I was looking at myself, my capacities, my weaknesses, my sinfulness. I knew myself. But I was greatly consoled by the nuncio, who, by the way, is now the apostolic delegate here in Jerusalem. He embraced me and said, “I know this will be difficult for you. I know this will not make your life easier, but believe.” Believe! That was the only thing he asked of me. Just believe. And with all the energies left in me, I tried to believe.

After ten years, it happened again! By now, though, they have learned how to deal with me. When I was called to the office, I asked the secretary, “How much time are you giving me to think about it?” He said, “No, you have already been appointed. We’re informing you, and you accept.” How come when light comes, darkness sets in?

But perhaps darkness is necessary so that the purity of the gift, the light that has not come from us, is preserved. If the light comes and it is met by my own light, then I would not know whether the light is of my own making or is a gift. This is a simple experience of mine. Maybe you have more dramatic experiences of light coming and you feel you are in the dark when it is truly light.

Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him!” After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

—Luke 9:35-36

### ***Prayer: Mysteries of Joy***

**The first joyful mystery is the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary.**

The angel was a messenger of God, the messenger of good news, news-bearing light. What is that news? It is that the Savior of the world will be sent from the

\* Rosary prayed on the way to the Mount of Beatitudes.

Father, the fullness of time has come. But who can see angels, who can hear angels, and who can accept the messages of angels? Only a person like Mary, a virgin who is totally open and available. We can be the recipients of light if we are as open and as available to do the will of God as Mary was.

**The second joyful mystery is the Visitation.**

We have two women meeting each other, Mary running to Elizabeth in an act of compassion. Both of them are with child. Through the work of God, these two women who had no opportunities, as human beings, to bear children at their particular moments in life, are now with child. Filled with the Spirit-bearing life, they are prophets and they meet in order to sing praises to God. The Magnificat of Mary is a prophecy of how God takes care of His people, especially of the lowly. It is a prophetic warning to those who do not plan, think, and decide in harmony with God. Are we bearers of God? Are we filled with the Spirit when we encounter people? How do we conduct the many visitations that the Lord wants us to engage in in our daily life?

**The third joyful mystery is the birth of our Lord Jesus.**

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. When God spoke His Word in the fullness of time, that Word assumed the form of a human being. God enters human history and assumes the human condition. There is nothing human, except sin, that God did not enter. What a wonderful thing for humanity to realize that everything in us has been touched by the presence of God and everything in us has entered the very life

of God. We are saved by such love. Who are we to deserve this love that has the Creator, now present among us as a creature, humbly loving us to life?


**The fourth joyful mystery is the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple.**

In obedience to the law, Mary and Joseph brought their firstborn son to be presented to God in the temple. Again we behold the humility of the Word-made-flesh; the lawgiver now is a human being, and so is subject to the law and obeys the law. The parents offered to God two pigeons, the offering of a poor family. But the presentation is all about Jesus being revealed as the light to the nations. This boy, innocent and haunted down by a crazy Herod, is truly the light of the nations. Simeon saw in him the fulfillment of the prophecy. When we look at the children of the poor, what do we see? Do we see problems? Do we see trouble? Do we see those who pose a lot of difficulties to society? Or do we see the bearers of light in humble persons like the baby Jesus?

**The fifth joyful mystery is the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple.**

What did Mary and Joseph find in the temple? It was not just their son Jesus, a boy of twelve years. They found someone, a mystery, someone who at a tender age had a clear vision that he belonged to someone who may be called “Abba” and that his life was supposed to be spent on the concerns of Abba. They found not only their child but a true Son, the true Son of the Father. If people find us, what will they see in us? And if we do search for people, do we search for them as children of God, especially the lost,





the confused? How do we treat them? Do we find in them children of the Father in search of their mission in life? Mary and Joseph, look for us, and when you see us, may you find us true to our mission.