

“Stephen Binz has combined solid scholarship with deep devotion. For those who have never been to the Holy Land, this book will induce you to go. For those pilgrims on their way, it will serve as an excellent guide. And for those who have been blessed in their travels there, this book will keep that memory alive.”

—Rev. Michael Patella, OSB, Rector, Saint John’s University School of Theology and Seminary

“It is no small task to distill two-thousand years of history on the holy sites into a readable and inspirational format, but Binz has successfully done just that.”

—Laurie Brink, OP, Professor of New Testament Studies, Catholic Theological Union

“A marvelous guide for pilgrims to the Holy Land that combines history, personal reflection, and prayers and meditations designed for the holy sites. Stephen Binz’s inviting and accessible book will be a great asset to anyone wanting to explore the land often known as the Fifth Gospel.”

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“A pilgrimage to the Holy Land is an extraordinary journey of faith, conversion, and joy, which Stephen J. Binz has laid out in brilliant detail. I hope this book inspires the faithful to say ‘yes’ to this invitation for the most invaluable gift that you can ever give yourself.”

—Dr. Peter E. Bahou, President of Peter’s Way Tours

“Stephen Binz’s *Holy Land Pilgrimage* is a wonderful guide both in preparation for your pilgrimage and a sure help while traveling where Jesus and the apostles walked.”

—Jeff Cavins, Creator of The Great Adventure

“As a biblical scholar and experienced group leader, Stephen Binz understands how important it is to prepare the pilgrims with knowledge of the biblical sites so they can fully enjoy the richness a Holy Land journey provides. Every pilgrim should read this book before traveling, use it as a reference during the trip, and as a reminder of all the places visited upon return.”

—Edita Krunic, President of Select International Tours

“I greatly admire the dedication of Stephen Binz to the Christians of the Holy Land. The support he brings through his work assures us that we will not be forgotten and will be kept in the prayers of our brothers and sisters worldwide, whom we look forward to meeting when they visit the Holy Land.”

—Shibly Kando, Holy Land coordinator of Select to Give Foundation,
Bethlehem

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“*Holy Land Pilgrimage* is a gift to those called to make a journey where the Bible comes alive. Stephen Binz helps us connect the dots between the Scriptures and pilgrimage sites, walking quite literally in Our Lord’s footsteps.”

—Milanka Lachman, President of 206 Tours

“Stephen Binz’s book comes at a most opportune time. Few are better qualified than Stephen to lead us through the Holy Land in a way that brings out both history and spirituality that is applicable to our modern times today.”

—John Michael Talbot, musician, author, and founder of The Brothers
and Sisters of Charity, Little Portion Hermitage

Holy Land Pilgrimage

Stephen J. Binz



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Preface

The Holy Land is my favorite place on earth. I love it not because God is present there in a way he is not in New York, Paris, or Shanghai, but because I can experience the divine presence more easily there, in the places where God has been revealed in history. I don't believe I'm any better in God's sight because I travel frequently to the Holy Land. In the Christian worldview, every place and every person is holy, irreplaceable in God's creation and unconditionally loved by God. But I love the Holy Land for the place it holds in the history of God's revelation. These are the places where God made his presence and identity known, entering into covenant with our ancestors and revealing himself fully in the life of Jesus Christ.

Ever since my graduate education in Jerusalem, studying with faculty from the Pontifical Biblical Institute and Hebrew University, I have been exploring the Holy Land. For thirty years, I have been leading biblical pilgrimages, enabling many to savor this land and read the Bible with new eyes. It's the fruit of these experiences that I hope to bring to this book. I will explore with you the mountains, seas, deserts, cities, and towns as well as the sanctuaries, altars, peoples, and cultures of the Holy Land. But I will do so not just as a historian, geographer, or archaeologist, but especially as a pilgrim, inviting you to experience these places as sacred, allowing them to deepen your faith and to form you more fully into disciples of Jesus.

My interest in biblical studies and pilgrimage is complemented by my enjoyment of photography. I enjoy making images because it helps me to see more clearly, to take notice of light, color, texture, and detail. The photographs throughout this book are my own, the fruit of several years of shooting in the Holy Land. I hope they help you to imagine and remember your encounter with the Holy Land.

I have chosen the term Holy Land for the land of the Bible in order to avoid the more political designations of the land as Palestine and Israel. Although this land has been designated as Palestine and Israel at alternating periods of its history, it is recognized by all people of faith as the Holy Land. Although using this term to refer to Canaan, ancient Israel, or


Roman Palestine might seem anachronistic, keep in mind that the term “holy land” was used from ancient times, even in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (Zech 2:12; Wis 12:3; 2 Macc 1:7).

I have written this guide for both the adventurous traveler, preparing for a physical journey to the Holy Land, and the imaginative traveler, visualizing the places of the Bible from your armchair. Either way, I hope you will be able to envision these sites and experience them with a biblical understanding and an experience of prayer.

I am grateful to friends at Liturgical Press, with whom I have published this and several other biblical books, especially Peter Dwyer, Hans Christoffersen, Tara Durheim, Stephanie Lancour, Colleen Stiller, Julie Surma, and Monica Bokinskie. I thank, too, my colleagues in offering Holy Land pilgrimages and those who have offered me feedback and direction during the writing. I am especially grateful to the many pilgrims who have traveled with me on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Each of them has given me new insights and enthusiasm for the art of pilgrimage. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to the Christians of the Holy Land, whose faithfulness under trial continually inspires me.



Stephen J. Binz, author, biblical scholar, and pilgrimage leader



Chapter I

The Way of Pilgrimage

Before going on pilgrimage, would-be travelers must divest themselves of their naive outlooks. Pilgrimage is not an experience of pleasant sight-seeing. Rather, pilgrimage immerses travelers in a formative journey, a multifaceted experience that can be described as universal, communal, and liturgical.

By going on pilgrimage, travelers enter an experience that is, first of all, universal. Pilgrimage is an ancient practice that is common to every religious tradition. This journey to a sacred place in search of transcendence could be described as one of the archetypal experiences of humanity. Leaving behind the mundane cares and ordinary responsibilities, pilgrims seek to meet the Holy. There seems to be something deep within our human nature that longs to go on pilgrimage.

Pilgrims enter into an experience that is also communal. They bring along in mind and heart those they love, united in faith and prayer. Pilgrims also unite themselves with residents of the new land, uniting themselves to cultural expressions and customs that may differ significantly from their own. Likewise, pilgrims join with other pilgrims from many different places—people of dissimilar languages, races, and nationalities, but sharing one essential purpose that transcends their many differences.

Finally, pilgrimage is a liturgical experience. At these sacred places, where God is believed to have encountered people in transforming ways, shrines have been constructed to mark and honor the place. At these shrines, pilgrims enact rituals that put them in touch with the event of divine encounter at that location, and they perform rites that continue the accumulated worship of their spiritual ancestors through the ages.

These three aspects of pilgrimage—universal, communal, and liturgical—sometimes lead travelers to the Holy Land to experiences quite different from their expectations. After traveling to the splendors of Catholic

Europe, for example, the shrines of the Holy Land can seem disconcerting: exotic rituals of the East competing with the noble simplicity of the West, Byzantine and modern styles perplexingly juxtaposed, the Way of the Cross running through an Oriental bazaar. When a little girl remarked at the altar of Calvary in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, “I never knew our Lord was crucified indoors,” she was expressing the bewilderment that troubles many who come to the Holy Land with an imagination filled since childhood with conventional biblical pictures.¹ This uneasiness is what prompted the nineteenth-century British Army general Charles Gordon to advocate for “Gordon’s Calvary” and “the Garden Tomb,” against all historical and archaeological evidence, as the location of Jesus’s death and resurrection. The pleasant outdoor scene—a tomb with a rolling stone, surrounded by a flowery garden—is just as the Western imagination would expect. It is undisturbed by the two millennia of building and destruction, conquest and defeat, juxtaposing the Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, and Ottoman periods as well as the Greek, Syrian, Latin, Armenian, Coptic, and other architectural and liturgical expressions.

While there are many sacred places throughout the world frequented by pilgrims seeking to draw closer to God, for the Christian, the Holy Land is unique. There our faith has its deepest roots. Most of the events recounted in the Bible happened within its borders. God was revealed to us not only in specific periods of history, but also in very specific places. As Bargil Pixner wrote, we have inherited not only a history of salvation, but also a “geography of salvation.”² By traveling to these sites, seeing and touching these places of divine encounter, we can experience how truly incarnational is our Christian faith.

Beginning with the call of Abraham and Sarah, the Bible is filled with people on a journey. Our ancestors in faith left their homelands to travel to a new land that God would show them. They went out not knowing where they were going, traveling by faith at God’s direction. God led the Hebrew people out of slavery and set them on a long journey. Under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites encountered God on their way in the wilderness and were formed into God’s people through the experience. The New Testament, too, is structured as a journey: the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, traveling from place to place to announce the kingdom

1. Evelyn Waugh, “The Plight of the Holy Places,” *LIFE*, December 24, 1951, 61.

2. Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus through Galilee according to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin Publishing, 1992), 7.

throughout the land, and the journey of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. As we travel on pilgrimage, we enter into the way of our ancestors with our minds, our hearts, and our feet.

1. Pilgrimage in Ancient Israel and the Life of Jesus

The people and tribes of Israel erected shrines to mark the various places where they experienced God's presence in particular ways. Abraham built an altar at Mamre to commemorate his covenant with God, and there he was told by God that Sarah would bear a son in her old age (Gen 13:18; 18:1). Jacob set up a pillar and anointed it with oil on the spot where he dreamed of the stairway to heaven, naming the place Bethel and describing it as "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:16-18). When God spoke to Moses from the flaming bush, God commanded him to remove his sandals because the place where he stood is "holy ground" (Exod 3:5). The people under Moses erected their own traveling shrine that contained the ark of the covenant. Later, the ark was located at various places in the land, including Shechem, Gibeah, Gilgal, and Shiloh, which became places of pilgrimage for God's people.

The Torah of Israel commands God's people to celebrate three annual pilgrim feasts, by which they would remember the travels of their ancestors: Passover (Unleavened Bread), which commemorates Israel's freedom from bondage; Weeks (Pentecost), which remembers God's giving the law on Mount Sinai; and Booths (Tabernacles), which renews Israel's wandering in the wilderness to be formed as God's people. At each of these feasts, the Israelites would travel on pilgrimage to "the place that the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his name" (Deut 16:2, 6, 11, 15, 16). These pilgrimages were opportunities for the Israelites to reassert their identity as God's people and re-center their lives in covenant with God. Eventually these pilgrim feasts were celebrated in Jerusalem, with sacrifices and feasting, praying and singing. The rituals embodied the central narratives and the highest values of God's people.

Throughout the Bible, God's faithful are described through the imagery of pilgrimage. They are people on the journey, always seeking the place that will satisfy them, the place of God's rest. God commanded that the ark of the covenant be constructed with four gold rings attached, through which two poles were placed. In this way, the ark was carried with the people on all their journeys. The text insists that the poles were

to always remain in the rings, never separated from the ark, always ready for travel (Exod 25:15). Even when the ark seemed settled in the temple at Jerusalem, the poles could be seen extending from the curtain covering the place where the ark dwelt (1 Kgs 8:8). Even when they seemed established in their own land, the Israelites were always to understand themselves as God’s pilgrim people.

In the writings of Israel’s prophets, the theme of pilgrimage is increasingly universalized. In the future, says Isaiah, all nations will stream toward Jerusalem, “the mountain of the LORD’s house” (Isa 2:2). “The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD” will be brought to God’s holy mountain, and God’s house will be called “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:6-7). “All nations and tongues” will come to Jerusalem to see God’s glory (Isa 66:18). Zechariah prophesies that through Judaism, many peoples and strong nations will come to the Lord: “In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech 8:22-23). God will draw his people from the four corners of the earth for the ultimate, universal pilgrimage.



Bünting’s depiction of Jerusalem at the intersection of Europe, Asia, or Africa

The life of Jesus was marked by his travels to Jerusalem for the pilgrim feasts of Israel. Luke's gospel describes the journey of the family of Jesus, when he was twelve years old, as they traveled to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. We know that this was one of many pilgrim feasts that Jesus shared with Joseph and Mary, since the gospel tells us they went every year for the feast (Luke 2:41). During his adult ministry, Jesus continued participating in the pilgrim feasts in Jerusalem. John's gospel describes Jesus's presence in Jerusalem for several of the Jewish feasts, including the festivals of Passover (John 2:13), Booths (7:2), and Dedication (10:22). And all four of the gospels underscore Jesus's final pilgrimage to Jerusalem as the culmination of his sacrificial life. Through his own life, Jesus shows his disciples the way to follow in his footsteps as they journey through life as pilgrims.

Heinrich Bünting's book of woodcut maps, *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae*, first published in 1581, provided a comprehensive summary of biblical geography and described the Holy Land by illustrating the travels of notable people from the Scriptures. In addition to conventional maps, the book also contained a figurative map depicting the earth as a three-leaf clover, with each leaf representing either Europe, Asia, or Africa. The three are drawn together by a ring encircling the city of Jerusalem, expressing not only its geographical location at the intersection of the ancient continents but, more importantly, the universal nature of God's saving plan to bring all the nations into unity through the saving life of Jesus Christ.

2. Christian Pilgrimage in the Early Church

Many have called the Holy Land "the fifth gospel." In addition to the four sacred texts, the good news about Jesus is revealed to us by the places that mark the events of his life. By exploring the fifth gospel, the world of the four will open to us. The gospel of the land fills out the written gospels with tangible reality. Here we can imagine Jesus with his disciples along the lake, teaching on the mountainside, praying in the garden, and dying on the cross. These places hold memories that carry an enormous sense of expectation for anyone seeking a fresh encounter with him.

It seems inevitable in a religion founded on historical events and on the conviction that God "became flesh" in human life that the most

significant physical places associated with that belief would be remembered and preserved. Oral tradition, sacred texts, and sacred places bridge the gulf between past and present. If there were no places that could be seen and touched, the claim that God had entered history would seem less real. The holy places become witnesses of the truth of biblical history.

St. Justin Martyr, born around AD 100, states that he knew the site of a “certain cave” that the locals venerated as the place of Jesus’s birth and that the Christians of the area took care to preserve the historical memory of the nativity. Other writers assure us that Christians in Galilee and especially in Jerusalem preserved the memory of the places of Jesus’s life and that believers traveled from near and far to honor these places.

The historian-bishop Eusebius of Caesarea describes the accounts of pilgrims in the Holy Land during the church’s early centuries. He tells us that St. Melito of Sardis, a bishop of the second century, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to better understand the Bible—to learn “accurate facts about the ancient Scriptures.”³ Eusebius mentions another bishop, St. Alexander of Cappadocia, who went to Jerusalem “to pray there and visit the sites.”⁴ Eusebius tells us that even though the Romans had landscaped over the holy sites of Jerusalem and converted them to pagan shrines, Christians traveled to Jerusalem to pray at the Mount of Olives overlooking the city.

During the age of persecution, such pilgrimages to the Holy Land were difficult and dangerous. But in AD 306, Constantine became emperor and, convinced of the truth of Christianity, issued the Edict of Milan in 313, by which Christianity became a recognized religion. This new freedom for the church led to a new enthusiasm for the holy places. St. Helena, Constantine’s mother, traveled to Jerusalem and there, after the location was pointed out by local Christians, excavated the true cross of the Lord, discovering the place of Calvary and the empty tomb of Christ buried beneath a pagan temple.

For centuries Roman emperors had used their office and the wealth of the empire to build sacred edifices. Now Constantine began his own building program featuring Christian churches, a project that continued relentlessly until his death in 337. After constructing lavish basilicas in

3. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 26, 14.

4. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VI 11, 2.



Rome and Constantinople over the tombs of the martyrs, he turned to the Holy Land and built three major basilicas on the site of “three sacred caves.”⁵ He constructed the Church of the Resurrection, which included a circular shrine at the empty tomb of Christ as well as a memorial at the site of Calvary. Constantine also erected the Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives, built around the cave honoring the place where Jesus frequently taught his disciples and where he ascended into heaven. The third basilica was the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, focused on the cave marking the place of Jesus’s birth.

While Constantine’s churches were being built, an anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux in Gaul came to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. From him we have the first writings describing a tour through the Holy Land. Arriving in 333, he carefully noted where he went, what he saw, the routes he took, and the distances between one place and another. His descriptions of places like the house of Caiaphas, the tomb of Lazarus, the place of Elijah’s sacrifice on Mount Carmel, and Jacob’s well where Jesus met the Samaritan woman confirm the antiquity of many traditions about the holy places.

These early pilgrims were drawn by the desire to see and touch the land of the Bible. St. Jerome, a fourth-century biblical scholar who traveled the land, wrote, “We understand Scripture more clearly when we have seen Judea with our own eyes, and discovered what still remains of ancient towns.”⁶ Writing to Marcela in the name of the holy women Paula and Eustochium, Jerome urged her to join them in the Holy Land:

Will the day never come when we shall together enter the Savior’s cave, and together weep in the sepulcher of the Lord? Then shall we touch with our lips the wood of the cross, and rise in prayer and resolve upon the Mount of Olives with the ascending Lord. We shall see Lazarus come forth bound with grave clothes, we shall look upon the waters of Jordan purified for the washing of the Lord. . . . If only you will come, we shall go to see Nazareth, as its name denotes, the flower of Galilee. Not far off Cana will be visible, where the water was turned into wine. We shall make our way to Tabor and see the tabernacles there which the Savior shares, not, as Peter once wished, with Moses and Elijah, but with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Thence we shall come to the Sea of Gennesaret, and when there we shall see the spots where the five thousand were filled

5. Eusebius, *De Laudibus Constantini* 9, 17.

6. *Praef in lib Paralip.*; PL 29, 401.

with five loaves, and the four thousand with seven. The town of Nain will meet our eyes, at the gate of which the widow's son was raised to life. . . . Our eyes will look also on Capernaum, the scene of so many of our Lord's signs—yes, and on all Galilee besides. And when, accompanied by Christ, we shall have made our way back to our cave through Shiloh and Bethel, and those other places where churches are set up like standards to commemorate the Lord's victories, then we shall sing heartily, we shall weep copiously, we shall pray unceasingly. Wounded with the Savior's shaft, we shall say one to another: "I have found Him whom my soul loveth; I will hold him and will not let him go."⁷

A key figure in the promotion of Christian pilgrimage was St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who was bishop from 350 to 386. He developed Jerusalem into the prime "Holy City" of Christianity and center of pilgrimage. His famous *Catechetical Lectures* for the catechumens during Lent and his *Mystagogic Catecheses* for the baptized during Easter Week were delivered in the Church of the Resurrection, a few feet from the places of Christ's death and resurrection. His catechesis is of great importance, as it spotlights the initiation rites and the liturgical practices of the fourth century. In his homilies to pilgrims, Cyril would often refer to the place in which the congregation was standing as bearing witness to the events detailed in Scripture. The many witnesses in Jerusalem include Golgotha, the tomb of Christ, the place of his ascension on the Mount of Olives, and the Upper Church of the Apostles on Mount Zion. As he emphasized when speaking in the holy places, "others merely hear, but we both see and touch."⁸

The most extensive early travelogue was written by a woman from Spain named Egeria in the late fourth century. By this time, Jerusalem was a bustling Christian city, filled with monks, clerics, pilgrims, and adventurers. Its new churches at the holy sites and their elaborate liturgies astonished visitors from throughout the world. Egeria writes to her "revered sisters" back home, leading to the belief that she was a member of a religious community, sharing a common life and interested in both the Scriptures and the church's liturgical life.

The first part of Egeria's written work forms her travel diary, in which she describes her visits to noteworthy sites. Carrying a codex of the Bible

7. Jerome, *Epist.* 46.

8. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 13,22.

with her, she commemorated each sacred site with a ritual consisting of the reading of the appropriate Scripture, psalms, prayer, and at some locations, the offering of Eucharist.⁹ The second part details the rituals of Jerusalem during the liturgical year, as developed by Bishop Cyril. Describing Holy Week, she highlights the Palm Sunday procession from the Mount of Olives, the Holy Thursday liturgy, which ended with a walk to Gethsemane by torchlight, and the Good Friday veneration of the cross. She then relates the Paschal Vigil at the Church of the Resurrection with its baptisms and Eucharist.

Although pilgrimage to the Holy Land was increasingly popular in the Byzantine period—from Constantine in the fourth century to the early part of the seventh century—the value of pilgrimage to sacred places was often debated. In some periods and by certain teachers, pilgrimage was discouraged because it was thought that earthly locations and human structures could get in the way of spiritual encounters with God. Had not Jesus said to the Samaritan woman that true worship had nothing to do with Jerusalem or Samaria, but was all about worshiping God in spirit and in truth (John 4:20-24)? We are too easily tempted to believe that going to a particular place or going through a particular ritual earns us God’s favor.

Paul articulated the Christian position in his speech at the Areopagus: “The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands” (Acts 17:24). Unlike ancient Israel, where God could be experienced as dwelling in the temple, “the place that the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his name” (Deut 16:2), Christians themselves are “the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16). Those who live “in Christ” may worship God at all times and in all places.

Yet, places and rituals can indeed be powerful means to experience God. Although all of creation is sacred and we are capable of seeing God and experiencing his goodness in all things, the particular places where God has been revealed and where Jesus has spent his earthly life can be especially effective signs of divine presence and means of God’s grace. But it is not sufficient merely to go on pilgrimage to see these places. External pilgrimage must be accompanied by interior conversion. So that

9. *Itinerarium Egeriae* 10,7. Commentary and translation by Anne McGowan and Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018).

pilgrimage is not just another journey, the pilgrim must travel in faith, seeking a new heart, and with a will to interior change. Pilgrimage must be the simultaneous movement of the feet and the soul.

The ambiguity of Christian pilgrimage to holy places can be summed up by the words of the angel at the empty tomb: “He is not here; for he has been raised” is balanced by the invitation, “Come, see the place” (Matt 28:6). Because Jesus is the risen Lord, the sanctity of the empty tomb and all other places of his life are provisional. Yet, there is good reason to come and see the tomb and all the other places associated with his life.

That the church began in Jerusalem is a historical fact that can never be forgotten, but the center of the church is Jesus Christ, present with his people throughout the world by his Spirit. Jesus himself has become the true “place” of worship, so to go on pilgrimage is to come to encounter the risen Christ. The Christian religion neither possesses nor needs a sacred place. What matters is living “in Christ.” He is “the place that the Lord will choose as a dwelling for his name,” the great I AM. Through the ever-present Holy Spirit, the living Scriptures, and the perpetual sacrament, the Lord is present in any and every local place. He goes before us into all the world, summoning us to follow him.

As we connect the sacred places of our salvation with the sacred texts of Scripture, we become pilgrims. While we look for Christ, we realize that he is really the one looking for us. He is with us walking along our pilgrim way. When we travel humbly, listening for the Lord to speak in the quiet of our hearts, waiting for him to show us his presence, there is no telling in what ways we may be led and changed.

3. The Christian People of the Holy Land

Places are not holy in themselves; places become holy when God is revealed there to his people. From the beginning of the church, an indigenous Christian community has existed in the Holy Land. Many of today’s Holy Land Christians descended from those who encountered Jesus in this land and first experienced the Spirit at Pentecost. These indigenous Christians, most of whom are Palestinians, were the first to venerate the holy places where Jesus walked, taught, suffered, died, and rose.

These descendants of the first Christians feel a certain responsibility to remain in the Holy Land and to maintain Christian worship there. Yet,

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict makes life increasingly difficult for them, and many have chosen to emigrate elsewhere for the sake of their families and their future. Because the barrier wall prevents them from entering Jerusalem for work, they experience a severe lack of employment and opportunity. In 1948, the Christian population of the Holy Land was 30 percent; today it is close to 1 percent.

These Christians in the Holy Land are often called “the living stones.” The metaphor comes from Peter’s first letter in which he refers to Christians as “living stones,” built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices, with Christ as the cornerstone (1 Pet 2:4-6). The living stones join their lives to Christ, the foundation in Zion, to build their lives “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” becoming “a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2:20-22).

For those making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, it is essential not only to see and touch the holy places, but to visit the living stones. For centuries this was a natural process, as pilgrims stayed in monasteries, convents, or the homes of local Christians, participating with them in liturgy and prayer, sharing news, and partaking in the local culture. The mass tourism of today, however, with its international hotels, comfortable coaches, and tightly packed itineraries, has transformed pilgrims into tourists and pilgrimage into vacations. Visitors are isolated from the living stones of the land so visiting the holy places becomes a form of sightseeing.

To experience a genuine pilgrimage today, visitors must try to interact with the local Christians. Worshiping with them in their churches, touring their educational facilities and programs for children in need, sharing meals while discussing their struggles, and shopping in their stores can boost their spirits. Pilgrimages are an important source of aid to the Christian tourism industry. Choosing the services of Christian tour companies, hotels, guides, and restaurants can be a tremendous help to them.

Some of the best souvenirs of the Holy Land are made by Christian artisans, many of whom have perfected their skills for generations. Olive wood carvings, mother of pearl figures, jewelry, antiquities, religious icons, and ceramics make some of the finest memorabilia of your trip and some of the most appreciated gifts. The Christians of Bethlehem take great pride in crafting and selling these handmade souvenirs that typify the pilgrimage experience. By shopping from established merchants, pilgrims can be better assured that the crafts are locally produced rather than imported from abroad.

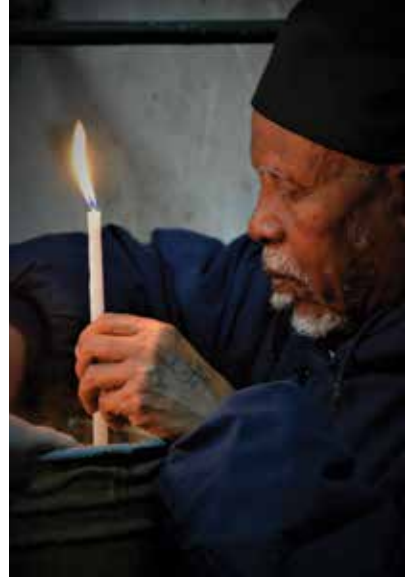
Pilgrims may also want to experience development projects among the Palestinian Christians. These include educational projects, child development centers, Bethlehem University, and relief services for refugees. Many such projects are coordinated by religious communities and welcome visitors.

Because of the rapid decline of the Christian population of the Holy Land, they need and deserve our support and encouragement. In all of these ways, Christians from abroad can help sustain the living stones, validating their rights in the land and endorsing their courageous sacrifice to stay in the land where Christianity began.

Christian Churches and Their Rites

Pilgrims who seek to encounter the local church will discover a variety of ecclesial traditions and ethnic expressions among the Christians. Churches of all nations and cultures are represented there, and contact with these churches will deepen the pilgrim's understanding of the rich diversity of the Christian faith.

In order to truly encounter Christianity in the Holy Land, the pilgrim must begin to understand Eastern Christianity, a general name for the church traditions that developed in the East, which includes the Holy Land, as opposed to the West, which is mostly Western Europe.



*Orthodox man lights a candle
in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher*



*Eastern and Western Christians
pray together in the Holy Land*

These Eastern churches are many, with diverse origins, each of which developed distinctly over centuries. They have their own traditions and ways of worship, all of which are externally characterized by splendid liturgies: chanted by priests and choirs, focused on icons that glow in the warmth of oil lamps and candles, and elevated with wafting incense uniting heaven and earth. The major bodies include the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the Eastern Catholic Churches that are in communion with Rome but still maintain Eastern liturgies.

Among the Eastern Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox form the largest Christian community in the Holy Land, encompassing a large majority of the Christian Arabs. Their patriarch claims direct descent from St. James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. In the New Testament, the Greek language and way of life was predominant in the eastern regions of the Roman Empire and many of the first converts belonged to this Greek culture. The Greek Orthodox hold major rights to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The Russian Orthodox are also numbered among the Eastern Orthodox. Russians began coming on pilgrimage in great numbers in the nineteenth century. For many it was a preparation for death and resurrection, so they brought back dirt to be sprinkled on their coffin and a shroud placed on the stone of unction in the Holy Sepulcher. Many Russian pilgrims have stayed, and they have several churches, monasteries, and convents. The Romanian Orthodox also began immigrating in recent centuries and now are well-established in the Holy Land.

Within Eastern Christianity, theological disagreements arose in the fourth century over the nature of Christ, leading to divisions that formed the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. These Oriental Churches developed in reaction to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which defined the human and divine nature of Christ. These non-Calcedonian Churches, including those of the Armenians, Syrians, Ethiopians, and Copts, have been present in the Holy Land since the earliest centuries.

The Armenian Orthodox began to travel to Jerusalem after Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion in 301. They settled mostly in the southeastern part of the city, which is today called the Armenian quarter. St. James' Cathedral, dedicated to both James, son of Zebedee, and James, the brother of the Lord, forms the center of the quarter. The relics of this second James, the first bishop of the city, are

buried under the main altar. The Armenian presence has grown since many survivors of the Armenian genocide in 1915 fled to the Holy Land.

The Syriac Orthodox trace their church to first-century Antioch, where Peter was the first patriarch for seven years before he traveled to Rome. Their liturgical language is Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke. Their Church of St. Mark is said to be built over the house of Mark, the place of gathering for the early Christians and the place where Peter went when an angel released him from prison (Acts 12:12).

The Ethiopian Orthodox trace their Christianity to the Ethiopian eunuch of Queen Candace, who was baptized by Philip while returning from Jerusalem (Acts 8:26-40). Yet, the Ethiopians trace their link to Jerusalem back to the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba who visited King Solomon 3,000 years ago (1 Kgs 10:1-10). Proud of their Hebrew roots, the Ethiopians follow many Jewish customs, such as male circumcision and dietary laws. The Ethiopian chapel in the Holy Sepulcher leads out to the roof of the church, where monks live in small cells. The festive liturgies are colorful and animated, often with singing and drumming.

The Copts are the Christians of Egypt. Their Christian roots go back to Pentecost when pilgrims from Egypt received the Holy Spirit. The Coptic Church was founded in Alexandria by the evangelist St. Mark. The Coptic Patriarchate of Jerusalem and St. Anthony's Monastery is located on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Copts also have a tiny chapel at the back of Christ's tomb within the church. Their liturgy is in Coptic, the ancient language of Egypt, with readings in Arabic.

In the eleventh century, long-standing disputes between the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) branches of Christianity incited the East-West Schism, resulting in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. From that time on, only the Maronites within Eastern Christianity remained in communion with Rome. However, beginning in the sixteenth century, some within the Eastern churches returned to communion with Rome. These Catholic Churches have retained their Eastern liturgies and theology for the most part, while in union with the bishop of Rome. The largest such group in the Holy Land is the Greek Catholics, also known as Melkites. Others include the Chaldeans, who separated from the Assyrian Church of the East, the Armenian Catholics, and the Syriac Catholics.

The Latin Patriarchate is the Catholic episcopal see of Jerusalem. It was established in 1099 with the conquest of the Holy Land by the First Crusade. In 1342, Pope Clement VI gave the custodianship of the holy

places to the Franciscan Order. St. Francis himself had visited the Holy Land and encouraged his followers to travel there. The brown-robed Franciscans administer many of the holy places and have active parishes and schools throughout the land. In addition to the Franciscans, dozens of other Roman Catholic religious orders, both women and men, serve in the Holy Land. Since the mid-1950s there has also been a Hebrew-speaking Catholic community—including converted Jews, Catholic spouses of Jews, and immigrants who have assimilated into the Hebrew-speaking society—which now has its own patriarchal vicar.

Protestant Christian communities began to be established in the Holy Land in the nineteenth century. The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer is close to the Holy Sepulcher, and its tall bell tower offers an overview of the city. The Anglicans have St. George's Cathedral and Christ Church in Jerusalem. Several other Reformed, Pentecostal, and Evangelical communities are established throughout the land. Also, diverse groups of Messianic Judaism are growing in number. These groups profess Jesus as the Messiah while maintaining Jewish practices. Many of them express a Zionist ideology, seeing the modern state of Israel as a fulfilment of biblical prophecies.

In the Holy Land we see the diversity within Christianity to its greatest degree, yet it is also the land in which Jesus prayed that his followers would be one, as he and his Father are one (John 17:11). Cultural diversity and differences in languages, history, and rites are not expressions of division among Christ's followers; rather they express the richness of his church. Division is the result of animosity, the scars of history, entrenched separation, and the lack of ecclesial communion within the body of Christ. How marvelous it would be if the church in the Holy Land, with its beautiful diversity, could become the place where the unity of the church was regained.

4. The Sacred Practice of Pilgrimage

The gospel account of the journey along the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) describes some of the most important aspects of Christian pilgrimage. The travelers encounter Jesus, who accompanies them on their journey. They discuss their life experiences along the way and they read from Scripture. The travelers offer hospitality and they break bread together. Their travel is more than a journey; it is a pilgrimage because they experience the risen Lord. He is present with them on the road—in

the words they exchange, in the Scriptures, in the signs of hospitality, in the Eucharist, and in the community formed through the experience. The encounter with the risen Lord on the journey offers new possibilities and new hope for their Christian lives. These, then, are the elements of genuine pilgrimage: journey, community, Scripture, sacrifice, hospitality, ritual, sacrament, and spiritual encounter.

Unlike traditional pilgrimage, contemporary tourism—with its high-rise hotels, to-do lists, and isolating comforts—has many disadvantages. While pilgrimage is a metaphor of the Christian life, tourism may be seen as a metaphor for modern secular life. Tourists don't belong to the places they visit, and they keep their distance from the locals. While they may observe other cultures and customs, they return to their own whenever they like. Tourists are concerned with amusement, novelty, and pleasure. Reconstructing a world to their own liking, they have experiences made up of disconnected episodes that do not last beyond their own duration.

Pilgrims, on the other hand, travel in search of encounter and transformation. The tourist becomes a pilgrim when the observer becomes a participant. Cynthia Ozick describes the difference: "I would distinguish between a visitor and a pilgrim: both will come to a place and go away again, but a visitor arrives, a pilgrim is restored. A visitor passes through a place; the place passes through the pilgrim. A visitor comes either to



Pilgrims from Brazil gather for prayer

teach or to learn, or perhaps simply and neutrally to observe; but a pilgrim comes on purpose to be taught renewal.”¹⁰

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land is an especially cherished spiritual practice for followers of Jesus because Christianity is a historical, incarnational, sacramental religion. God’s decisive work in Jesus Christ occurred in a particular historical and spatial setting. Yet, through his resurrection, Jesus Christ is unbounded from these particularities.

God uses the visible, material, and particular to mediate the invisible, immaterial, and universal divine presence. For this reason, pilgrimage functions in a way analogous to the sacraments. Through the sacred words, symbolic elements, and ritual gestures of sacraments, God offers us grace, which forms us more deeply into the image of Christ. Likewise, pilgrimage is concrete, relational, and embodied, leading to a divine encounter. Through the sacred places, biblical readings, ritual gestures, communal prayer, and song, pilgrims are formed more fully into disciples of the Lord.

Paulinus of Nola, a fifth-century bishop, expressed this reality well when he said, “No other sentiment draws people to Jerusalem but the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present, and to be able to say, from their very own experience: We have gone into his tabernacle and have adored in the places where his feet have stood.”¹¹

Make sure your travel becomes a pilgrimage by following a few simple pieces of advice:

- Travel lightly by keeping your clothing and your baggage simple, so you don’t get weighed down by too much stuff.
- Travel expectantly by looking forward to the learning and change you will experience through your encounters.
- Travel humbly by visiting the people of this land with respect and reverence for their traditions and way of life.
- Travel gratefully by realizing you are guests in this land and by displaying appreciation for the people who are providing for you.
- Travel softly by seeking an attitude of inner quietness and attentive listening, making time for silence when you stand on holy ground.

10. Cynthia Ozick, *Art and Ardor* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 154.

11. Paulinus of Nola, *Letters*, 49, 14.

- Travel courteously by showing consideration for your hosts and fellow travelers and by helping to smooth the way through difficulties.
- Travel patiently by staying flexible and adaptable, realizing that unexpected changes, delays, and glitches are part of the whole experience.
- Travel relaxed by letting go of tensions and by deciding to have a good time.



Pilgrims rest and converse in the Holy Land

5. Novena in Preparation for Travel

Preparing the heart to encounter God in sacred places is one of the most important elements of pilgrimage. This novena, a nine-day period of spiritual preparation, invites us to get ready, to focus on the experience ahead, and to invoke the assistance of those who have traveled ahead of us. Just as Mary and the disciples waited after Jesus's ascension for nine days of prayerful anticipation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so we prepare with an expectant spirit for the graces of pilgrimage that God wants to bestow upon us.

Each day of the novena will be dedicated to a character from the Bible or a saint of the church. We pray for the intercession of these holy pilgrims who have prepared the way before us. Each day also has a focal symbol, which is a reminder of our upcoming journey. Place this focal symbol in front of you and create a prayer space with a candle, crucifix, or icon. These symbols will direct you to prepare each day for a different aspect of your pilgrimage.

In ancient times, pilgrims were blessed in their parish church, using their walking stick and pilgrim cloak as symbols of the journey. Like our ancestors, we pray each day of this novena that God will bless us as we prepare for all that God has in store for us on pilgrimage.



The ancient pilgrim cry, "Onward," with walking sticks

DAY 1

Holy patron: The Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael

Focal symbol: travel packet with airline reservation

Reflection: How can I better trust in God for my protection and guidance?

Reading: Genesis 28:10-17

He dreamed that there was a ladder . . . and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. . . .

Response: In you my God, I place my trust.

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.” **R.**

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge. **R.**

Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble (Ps 91). **R.**

Prayer: All powerful and merciful God, who is always close to those who trust in you, send your angels to guard us and guide us along our pilgrim way. As you showed Jacob the ladder with angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth, giving him comfort and hope, help us to know that we do not travel alone. As we prepare to travel to the land you made holy, give us heavenly companions to escort us and protect us. Amen.

DAY 2

Holy patron: Abraham and Sarah

Focal symbol: walking shoes

Reflection: What can I do to prepare my mind and body for the challenges of pilgrimage?

Reading: Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out. . . .

Response: Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

The word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. **R.**

Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
to deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive in famine. **R.**

Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and shield. . . .
Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in you (Ps 33). **R.**

Prayer: God of salvation, who called Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland not knowing where they were going, give us the faith of our ancestors to set out at your directive. Strengthen us in mind and body for the challenges of the journey ahead. Give us firm purpose and expectation of new experiences. Show us how to walk in the way that many have walked for generations, so that we, too, may be numbered among your pilgrim people. Amen.

DAY 3

Holy patron: Moses the liberator

Focal symbol: name tag/luggage tag

Reflection: In what ways has God cleared the way and prepared me for this pilgrimage?

Reading: Exodus 3:1-15

God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses. . . ."

Response: Holy is the Lord our God.

Extol the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he! **R.**

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called on his name.
They cried to the LORD, and he answered them. **R.**

He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
they kept his decrees,
and the statutes that he gave them. **R.**

Extol the LORD our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the LORD our God is holy (Ps 99). **R.**

Prayer: Lord our God, who called Moses by name from the flaming bush, you have summoned each of us to be your instrument for the salvation of others. By taking off his sandals, Moses prepared himself to encounter your holy presence and to be commissioned as liberator of your people. Open our ears to hear you call us by name, and make us ready to listen to your word on holy ground. Amen.

DAY 4

Holy patron: Elijah the prophet

Focal symbol: smartphone/camera

Reflection: How does God desire to work in my life and change me during this pilgrimage?

Reading: 1 Kings 19:4-13a

The word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah? . . ."

Response: "The LORD is near to all who call on him."

The LORD is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.
The LORD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down. **R.**

The LORD is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.
The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth. **R.**

He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them. . . .
My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever (Ps 145). **R.**

Prayer: Just and merciful Lord, who manifests your presence through fiery mountains, thundering skies, and gentle whispers, help us to encounter you in the holy people and places of our journey. Give us an inner quiet, a contemplative spirit, so that you can work gently within us. As we photograph and remember the experiences of our pilgrimage, mold our hearts and form our minds with the character of your prophets and saints. Amen.

DAY 5

Holy patron: St. Mary Magdalene

Focal symbol: cross, icon, or rosary to bring on pilgrimage

Reflection: How can I become a witness to the risen Lord to those around me?

Reading: John 20:1, 11-18

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord. . . ."

Response: Proclaim God's marvelous deeds to all the nations.

O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day. **R.**

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples. . . .
Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. **R.**

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts (Ps 96). **R.**

Prayer: Holy and risen Lord, who first showed your glorified body to Mary Magdalene, make us witnesses to the good news of eternal life. As we follow in your footsteps on this pilgrimage, teach us how to be missionary disciples, so that our words and actions may reveal your life to those around us. In our discussions, prayers, and good deeds for others, may we be seen as living icons, made in the divine image. Amen.

DAY 6

Holy patron: St. Helena

Focal symbol: luggage with empty space to return with memorabilia

Reflection: What will I bring to the people of the Holy Land and what will I bring home with me?

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified. . . .

Response: Do not forget the works of the Lord!

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth. . . .
We will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD. . . . **R.**

He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all night long with a fiery light. . . . **R.**

He chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.
He built his sanctuary like the high heavens,
like the earth, which he has founded forever (Ps 78). **R.**

Prayer: Compassionate God, you led St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, to travel to the Holy Land and discover the true cross of your Son in Jerusalem. May she, as the patron saint of archaeologists, inspire our journey to every excavation and discovery in the land of God's promise. Through the power of the glorious cross of Jesus Christ, may we share in his triumph over sin and his victory over death. Amen.

DAY 7

Holy patron: St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Focal symbol: passport

Reflection: What will I do to lead others to Christ and to his church?

Reading: Acts 2:42-47

Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. . . .

Response: Listen to me, my children, I will teach you to honor the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad. **R.**

O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears. **R.**

Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble (Ps 34). **R.**

Prayer: Risen Lord, who appointed St. Cyril as bishop of your church in Jerusalem and led him to bring many catechumens to baptism at the Easter Vigil, show us how to lead others to you. As Bishop Cyril welcomed pilgrims from many lands to the city of Jerusalem, help us to transcend the nationality of our passports and, through the graces received in Jerusalem, become the multicultural church of all the nations. Amen.

DAY 8

Holy patron: Sts. Jerome and Paula

Focal symbol: portable Bible or pocket New Testament

Reflection: What obstacles must I remove so that God's word can take root and grow within me?

Reading: 2 Tim 3:14-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching. . . .

Response: Lord, gather your scattered people.

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." **R.**

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.
They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD. **R.**

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow (Jer 31). **R.**

Prayer: O God, who led St. Jerome and St. Paula on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to study the places of Sacred Scripture, give us the ability to imagine the events of our salvation through contact with these holy sites. May the scholarship of your saints inspire us to devoted reading of your Word and to delight in it as the fountain of life. Amen.

DAY 9

Holy patron: St. Francis of Assisi

Focal symbol: this pilgrimage guidebook

Reflection: What do I expect to receive from God as a result of this pilgrimage?

Reading: Isaiah 2:2-4

All the nations shall stream toward [Jerusalem.] . . .

Response: I rejoiced when I heard them say: let us go to the house of the Lord.

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem. **R.**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers.” **R.**

For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, “Peace be within you.”
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek
your good (Ps 122). **R.**

Prayer: God of our ancestors, who established Jerusalem at the center of the nations, you now call us to go up to the mountain of the Lord’s house. May we travel in the spirit of St. Francis, pursuing peace among the nations streaming to Jerusalem and seeking healing among the many peoples who live within its walls. By walking in the footsteps of St. Francis, may we follow your Son, and may we be united in expectant faith and joyful charity.

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