A Holy Land Pilgrimage
In the Footsteps of the
Virgin Mary
Introduction

For the Catholic visitor, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land can be a spiritual journey of reaffirmation and discovery. To stand within the historical landscape, to visit the holy places and sites mentioned in the Bible and the shrines associated with the life and ministry of Jesus, will provide inspiration for the inner, spiritual journey that each pilgrim hopes to experience during his or her stay. Following a specific theme and narrative will help accomplish this. One such pilgrimage follows in the footsteps of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was born, lived and whose life most probably ended in the Holy Land. Though she experienced the ultimate sorrow of a mother in witnessing the passion and death of her son, a pilgrimage in her honor is a joyous event for she was blessed by the grace of God, as it is written in the Gospel: “Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favor! The Lord is with you.” (Luke 1:28)

In experiencing the presence of the Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Jesus and in the Church, the pilgrim may choose to visit those sites directly associated with her life, or to broaden that experience with an expanded pilgrimage program.

The following information provides a list of holy places and sites directly associated with Mary, with descriptions and practical information to help the visitor and pilgrimage organizer.

Unless otherwise noted, all dates are CE (Common Era) The proposed itineraries include suggestions for organizing activities that will give added dimension to a pilgrimage honoring the Virgin Mary.

1 All Bible quotations are from the New Jerusalem Bible, 1985.
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*See page 50
The city of Nazareth was in the time of Jesus a small village. Its residents were farmers and craftsmen who probably depended on the nearby city of Sepphoris for most goods and services. The villagers led a traditional rural life, far removed from the influence of the occupying Romans (an influence strongly felt in the major cities). They may also have been a bit removed from some of the political, social and religious unrest within Jewish society at the time.

From archaeological excavations we know that the ancient town of Jesus’ time was located in the area of the present Basilica of the Annunciation and the nearby Church of St. Joseph. Despite the importance of Nazareth in the lives of Jesus and his parents, it did not immediately become a place of Christian pilgrimage. The first shrine was probably built sometime in the middle of the 4th century.

The Spanish pilgrim, the Lady Egeria, who visited Nazareth in 383, was shown a “big and very splendid cave in which Mary lived. An altar has been placed there.”

2 This was probably the larger of the caves enshrined in the grotto of the present Basilica. In Roman Catholic tradition, it is the place where the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

**Footnote:**
The Basilica of the Annunciation

Built in 1960-69, the present Basilica of the Annunciation is the largest Christian sanctuary in the Middle East. Designed by the architect Giovanni Muzio, it is built on two levels: an upper and lower church. The lower church follows the outline of the 12th-century Crusader cathedral (a nave, flanked by two aisles), and partly reconstructs the eastern apses; a lower level enshrines the Byzantine grotto, within which are three chapels that are the liturgical focal points of the entire building. The upper church serves the local Roman Catholic parish. The large dome above the nave reaches a height of 60 meters. It was designed to represent a white lily, one of the iconographic symbols of the Virgin Mary. On the walls of the nave are mosaics that were donated by different Catholic communities from around the world.

The entire basilica is filled with Christian symbols and related inscriptions. The western facade of the Church which is the main entry is pyramidal, and at its apex is a statue of Jesus. On the facade are also inscriptions and sculptural reliefs representing principles of the Christian faith and emphasizing the importance of Jesus’ birth. The southern facade is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and her statue tops the wall. The prayer Salve Regina appears on this facade and the word Ave surrounds the entrance. Twelve sculptured reliefs that represent important events in Mary’s lifetime decorate the doors.

To schedule Mass:
Please contact 04-6572501

Opening hours:
Daily 8-11:45 am, 2-6 pm (winter until 5 pm).

Accessibility:
Steep climb from street. Wheelchair accessible.

Parking:
No parking available at the Basilica. A parking lot is situated next to the Tourist Information Center.

The Church of St. Joseph

By popular tradition, this church is sometimes associated with the carpentry workshop of Joseph. Another tradition makes this the location of the home of the Holy Family upon their return from Egypt. The present church, built in 1914, follows the outline of an earlier medieval structure (the Crusader period Church of the Nutrition) and includes elements of an even earlier Roman/Byzantine baptistery. An underground cave and chamber hewn from the bedrock contains silos as well as mosaic fragments. The cave serves as a crypt.

Opening hours:
Daily 8-11:45 am, 2-6 pm (winter until 5 pm).

Telephone:
04-6572501

Accessibility:
Steep climb from street. Wheelchair accessible.

Parking:
A parking lot is situated next to the Tourist Information Center.

The Franciscan Museum

This small museum adjacent to the Basilica of the Annunciation displays finds from the excavations of the Grotto of the Annunciation and the surrounding area of ancient Nazareth. The most impressive artifacts are the "capitals of Nazareth", beautifully sculpted Crusader capitals with Christian scenes rendered with great artistry. They are considered to be amongst the greatest of their kind in the world. They were evidently buried and hidden away during the Mamluk conquest of the 13th century and were never actually utilized as column capitals. They were discovered at the turn of the 20th century during renovations of the then existing church building.

Opening hours:
Daily 9-11:45 am, 2-5:30 pm. There is a small admission fee.

Telephone: 04-6572501

Guided Tours:
Can be arranged with advanced booking.

Accessibility: Steep climb from street. Wheelchair accessible.

Parking: No official parking at the site. A parking lot is situated next to the Tourist Information Center.
Mary of Nazareth International Center

Currently being developed in a complex of buildings across from the Basilica of the Annunciation, the Center invites "pilgrims and tourists to discover the Mystery of the Virgin Mary who leads us to Jesus..." The program will include a multi-media presentation. A number of churches of various denominations are partners in the project. In December 2009, archaeologists excavating the courtyard of the Center discovered the remains of a modest family dwelling dating of the 1st-century period. The four rooms, courtyard and cistern give an idea of what Jesus’ boyhood home may have looked like. The find is now being preserved as the focal point of the new Center.

The Spring of the Virgin Mary (Mary’s Well)

The Spring of the Virgin Mary (Mary’s Well) This recently rebuilt public fountain is fed by a spring originating in the area of the nearby St. Gabriel’s Church (Greek Orthodox). The fountain dates from the medieval period. The spring itself seems to have been the only constant water source within the ancient town, and one can be fairly certain that Mary drank from this well and that from this source she provided water for the Holy Family. The site is sacred to both Christians and Moslems, and is accessible at all hours.

As mentioned, the actual source of the spring is 150 meters distant, in the nearby Church of St. Gabriel (Greek Orthodox; also called the “Orthodox Church of the Annunciation” and the “Church of the Well”). According to the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James, the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary when she was drawing water from the well, and this may be the origin of the Orthodox identification of this place as the location of the Annunciation. The present building was constructed in 1750 and incorporates the walls of a Crusader church. Remains of an older Byzantine church have also been found. The spring flows through the crypt which can be reached via a staircase. The church features a copy of an icon painted by early 15th-century Russian master Andrei Rublev. The icon shows the Three Angels in Mamre who give Abraham the news that his wife Sarah will bear a child.

In Christian tradition, three angels are seen as a representation of the Trinity. The tradition emphasizes the similarities in faith between the Virgin Mary and Abraham -- "Just like the Patriarch of the People of God, so too Mary, during the pilgrimage of her filial and maternal fiat, ‘in hope believed against hope’." 

3 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church, 25 March 1987
The Synagogue Church (Greek Catholic)

According to tradition, this 12th century chapel marks the site of the synagogue in Nazareth where the young Jesus studied, prayed and later preached (Luke 4:16-27).
The sanctity of the site may predate the Crusader period, and it is possible that this is the “synagogue” reported by a 6th-century Italian pilgrim (the anonymous Pilgrim of Piacenza).
The sanctuary has been in the care of the (Uniate) Melkite Greek Catholic Church since 1771.

Opening hours:
Mon – Sat 8 am-12 pm, 2 -5pm.
Telephone: 04-6461266
Fax: 04-6568488
Accessibility: Possibly limited due to steps.
Parking: Not available.

Sepphoris (Zippori)

The ruins of the city of Sepphoris (Heb., Zippori) are located 6 km northwest of Nazareth on a hill rising above the Bet Netofah Valley. It was the administrative center of the Lower Galilee from the time of the Second Temple to the 4th century. According to an early-church tradition, it was here that Mary was born and the place her parents lived. At the foot of the ancient city, a Crusader church was built in the 12th century dedicated to Sts. Anne and Joachim, Mary’s parents. The Church is in ruins today and only the eastern wall of the sanctuary survives.
The site belongs to the modern Franciscan Monastery of St. Anne and Joachim.

Elsewhere in the Galilee

Chapel of the Virgin Mary’s Fright

On the southeastern outskirts of Nazareth, near the intersection of Highways 60 and 75, lie the ruins of a small Franciscan chapel built in 1876 to commemorate the tradition that it was from this place that Mary witnessed the attempt by irate townspeople to throw Jesus off the cliff (Luke 4:29-30). The site provides a wonderful view of the city and the Jezreel Valley to the east.

Accessibility:
Entails a walk up a steep hillside trail.

Nearby are the remains of a 6th-century synagogue that has a mosaic containing seven panels with dedications in Hebrew and Greek, and a carved stone lintel with a Greek inscription commemorating the building’s completion and the names of the donors. A separate road leads to the National Park of Ancient Sepphoris (admission fee).
Archaeological and other historical evidence suggests that the city with its mixed Jewish and Gentile population was a model of co-existence not only in the time of Mary, but well into the Roman/Byzantine period.
Sepphoris is important in Judaism as the place where, at the beginning of the 3rd century, the Mishnah (the compilation of oral traditions in Jewish religious law) was collected and codified under the leadership of Rabbi Yehudah the Prince. A Jewish quarter has been excavated in the upper city and many ritual baths have been found.
On the other side of the hill, a large, luxurious Roman villa was discovered with one of the most beautiful mosaic floors in Israel. It bears pagan motifs on the life of Dionysus. The lower city is notable for its many mosaics in the public and private buildings that were built along wide and well-paved avenues. Best known among them is the Nile House that has many pagan motifs. One can visit the impressive and large water system located at the east of the site, next to the main entrance to the Park.

Cana

Tradition identifies this town, located not far from Nazareth, with the Cana mentioned in the Gospel of Saint John “On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.” (John 2:1-2) Cana became famous because, as the Evangelist tells us, it is the scene of the first miracle of Jesus, where he turned the water into wine (John 2:3-9).

“Mary is present at Cana in Galilee as the Mother of Jesus and in a significant way she contributes to the beginning of the signs” (John 2:11). Cana is also known for two other events. The first concerns Nathanael (St. Bartholomew), who initially doubted Jesus and later became one of his disciples. He is thought to have been a resident of the town, and a church, named after him, was built at the place where by tradition he first encountered Jesus. (This church is only open to the public on August 24). The second event to take place in Cana was when Jesus healed the son of an official (John 4: 46-54). This episode is sometimes seen as Jesus’ first outreach to the Gentiles and was, according to the Gospels, the second miracle he performed. The two towers of the Franciscan Church of the First Miracle are said to represent the bride and the groom. Inside are large jars commemorating the miracle. Ancient architectural elements, possibly of a synagogue, are incorporated into the church. These include an Aramaic inscription in mosaic. Steps lead down into a cave-crypt.

4. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical EVM.
Since the 4th century, Mount Tabor has been identified as the traditional site of the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13 and Luke 9:28-36). The mountain is first mentioned in the accounts of Deborah and Jael, that “Most blessed of women” (Judges 5:24). The description of Deborah, who “…arose, mother of Israel” (Judges 5:7), is paralleled in Catholic Church’s view that the Virgin Mary is the mother of the faith community. So too, is the praise for Jael in the Song of Deborah – “most blessed of women be Jael” (Judges 5:24) – echoed in the Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-54), and in Elizabeth’s praise of Mary: “Of all women you are the most blessed…” (Luke 1:42).

The biblical battle over the Canaanites started at Mount Tabor. There Deborah gathered the men of Israel and called them to fight in the name of God. From the Franciscan monastery, one can look down upon the Jezreel Valley (the plain of Esdrelon), the ancient scene of battle. Nazareth, to the west, can also be seen. In the Second Temple period and later, signal fires were lit atop the mountain to relay announcements of the beginning of a new month and the start of the Jewish Festivals.

The Basilica of the Transfiguration

The Basilica of the Transfiguration and the adjoining Franciscan monastery and hospice are located on the top of Mount Tabor, amid remains of Byzantine and Crusader churches and monasteries. The present structure was built in 1924. The design of architect Antonio Barluzzi follows the general ground plan of the earlier Byzantine church. The crypt, below the central apse, commemorates the location and the event of the Transfiguration.

Flanking the main door of the church are two chapels dedicated to Moses and to Elijah, who were present at the time of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). Wall paintings adorn both the chapels. In the Chapel of Moses is a depiction of the Burning Bush, which not only symbolizes the appearance of God before Moses, but in Catholic tradition also represents Mary and her virginity – “there was the bush blazing, but the bush was not being burnt up” (Exodus 3:2).
The nearby Greek Orthodox Church of Elijah is dedicated to the Prophet Elijah, who was present at the Transfiguration. In the courtyard are Byzantine and Crusader remains. The wall surrounding the compound incorporates elements of a wall built by Jewish defenders during the revolt against the Romans in the year 67.

**The Church of Elijah (Greek Orthodox)**

The site of the ancient fishing village of Capernaum (Heb. Kfar Nahum, the Village of Nahum) is located on the northwestern shore of Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee). The site has two major highlights: the Church of the House of St. Peter, and the ancient Synagogue.

**Capernaum**

The town is mentioned several times in the New Testament where it figures prominently in the Gospel narratives as the place where Jesus lived during much of his ministry in the Galilee. The town is also important in the Marian pilgrimage. According to the Gospel, Mary accompanied her son to Capernaum:

"After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, but they stayed there only a few days." (John 2:12)

Both Mathew (12:46-50) and Mark (3:31-35) relate an episode in which Jesus’ mother tried to approach him, unsuccessfully, because of a large crowd gathered outside the “home” of Jesus (Mark 3:20), which most probably refers to the house of Simon, called Peter (Mark 1:29).

The site of Capernaum was “re-discovered” in 1838 by the American biblical geographer Dr. Edward Robinson. In 1894, a portion of the ancient site was purchased by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, and has been subject to archaeological excavations since 1905. The site is administered by the Franciscans, who have carried out the archaeological investigations, and is open to visitors for an admission fee.

**Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee)**

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The Church of the House of St. Peter

Archaeological investigations carried out by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (Jerusalem) revealed an octagonal mid-5th century ecclesiastical structure built around an earlier one-room dwelling dated to the 1st century. The plastered walls of the enshrined room were found to be scratched with graffiti in Aramaic, Greek, Syriac and Latin, containing the words “Jesus”, “Lord”, “Christ” and “Peter”. It is presumed to be the “House of Simon, called Peter” reported by the Spanish pilgrim, the Lady Egeria, who visited the town sometime during 381-384, during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In the mid-5th century, this room was enshrined within an octagonal-shaped building. Like the nearby synagogue, it was destroyed in the 7th century, possibly at the time of the Persian invasion. The present Franciscan church was built in 1990 over the site of the Insula Sacra to preserve the archaeological finds and to permit visitors and worshippers an overview of the various architectural elements.

The Synagogue

The ruins of a great synagogue were first identified in 1866 by the British cartographer Captain Charles W. Wilson. Partially reconstructed in 1926, the dating of the Capernaum synagogue continues to be a matter of debate. Various theories have been proposed. Evidence for a 4th century date is based in part on coins and pottery found beneath the floor. What is certain is that the imposing ruin is not the synagogue referred to in the Gospel of Mark (1:21), but is most probably to have been built upon the same site.

The Synagogue Church of the Twelve Apostles (Greek Orthodox)

This Greek Orthodox Church is situated on the north side of the Franciscan site and marks the location to which the village of Capernaum was relocated following the earthquake of 746. Archaeological excavations were carried out in 1978-82. The church is a striking whitewashed building with red cupolas. Inside, the walls are completely covered with frescoes depicting iconographic scenes.

Opening hours: The church has no regular hours, but visits can be arranged with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

Telephone/Fax: 02-6282048

Accessibility: No difficulties.

Parking: Available.
Other sites around Lake Kinneret not directly associated with Mary

- **Tabgha, the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and the Fishes**, is the traditional site of the two miracles when Jesus fed the multitudes (Mark 6:31-44; and Mark 8:1-9). The reconstructed circa 5th-century Byzantine church protects the extensive, original mosaics depicting Nile-river birds and plants. A section of mosaic immediately under the altar depicts two fish and a basket of bread loaves. The site is maintained by Benedictine monks.

- The **Church of the Primacy of St. Peter** is on the shore at Tabgha, just to the east of the Church of the Multiplication. The chapel marks the traditional place where Jesus appeared for the fourth time after his resurrection (John 21:1-24).

- The **Mount of Beatitudes**, to the north of Tabgha, is the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. The hilltop overlooks the Sea of Galilee. The first known church on the site has been dated to the 4th century. The present Roman Catholic church was built in 1938.

- The ancient **Sea of Galilee Boat**, the so-called “Jesus Boat”, a seven-meter-long, 1st century fishing boat found buried in the mud of the lakebed at Ginnosar in 1986, when the water level of the lake was unusually low. Admission fee.

- The **Ancient Chorazin** excavations include houses, public squares and a beautiful synagogue, partially restored (National Park, admission fee).

- **Magdala**, the town of Mary Magdalene. Excavations have revealed remains from the time of Jesus and Mary as well from later periods.

- **Beit Saida** was the town where three of the Disciples – Simon Peter, Andrew and Philip – were born (John 1:44). It was visited by Jesus who restored the sight of a blind man (Mark 8:22-26). A few houses from the period of Jesus have been preserved for visitors as well as earlier remains from the time of the First Temple. The site is within the Jordan River Park (admission fee). Next to Beit Saida is a beautiful cascading part of the Jordan River.
The ruins of the 5th-century Byzantine Monastery of Kursi are located on the eastern shore of Lake Kinneret, 5 km north of Ein Gev. The largest Byzantine monastic complex in the country, it was a place of pilgrimage because of its identification as the site of the Gadarene (or Gerasene) exorcism (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17). The remains of the very large church include large areas of mosaic flooring decorated with various motifs. There are remnants of a chapel further up the hill that probably commemorates what was thought to be the site of the miracle when Jesus cast the demons into the herd of swine. It is a National Park (admission fee).

The Sea of Galilee itself is an important site to Christianity. Visitors can take a cruise on the lake. There are companies that provide this service, and groups can coordinate the location of embarkation and landing, the length of the trip, and (upon request) stops for prayer, preaching and reading the Scriptures.

Yardenit Baptismal Site, on the Jordan River just below the southern outlet from the Sea of Galilee, is a modern facility providing a comfortable, safe and clean location where one can be baptized in the waters of the Jordan River. [The traditional site of the Baptism of Jesus is on the Jordan River at Qasr al-Yahud, south of Jericho.]

The Monastery of Stella Maris

The Carmelite monastery of Stella Maris atop Mount Carmel in Haifa is dedicated to the Virgin Mary in her capacity as Our Lady, Star of the Sea (Stella Maris, in Latin). The monastery also serves as the world center for the Order of Carmelites. The church also celebrates the Holy Family and the prophet Elijah. A statue of the prophet in the cave/ crypt commemorates the tradition that Elijah sometimes stayed here.

Haifa and Mount Carmel

The monastery, situated on the western edge of the Carmel ridge, overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. The nearby lighthouse evokes the imagery of Mary in her intercessory role in the Church as a “guiding light”.

Yardenit Baptismal Site

Opening hours:
Every day from 7 am-4 pm.
English Masses
Every Sat at 6:30 am;
Sun 7 and 9 am.
Location:
Yardenit Road, Kfar Yarden.
Telephone: 04-5918918
Parking: Available.

Haifa and Mount Carmel

Opening hours:
Every day from 8:30 am -4:15 pm.
Telephone: 04-6759111
Accessibility:
Ramps with railings lead into the water; dressing rooms requiring coin-entry.
Parking: Available.
Elijah’s Cave

The cave, holy to Christianity, Judaism and Islam, is on the western slope of the Carmel, below the Monastery of Stella Maris. Besides the association with the prophet Elijah, Christian tradition since Byzantine times has identified the cave as a place where the Holy Family rested on its way back from Egypt.

Monastery of the Prophet Elijah (Deir al-Muhraka)

The small Carmelite monastery at Muhraka (built 1868) on a southern peak of the Carmel ridge is a few kilometers southeast of the Druze town of Dalyet el-Karmel. The monastery commemorates the struggle of Elijah against the priests of Ba’al, at the end of which the prophet ascended to the top of the mountain (by tradition identified as this place), where he commanded his servant to look out to see the approaching rain that would end the years of drought.

Opening hours:
Mon-Sat 8:30 am-12:30pm, 2:30- 4:30 pm.
Telephone: 052-8779868, 054-7517274
Accessibility: Requires climbing steps to reach the terrace.
Parking: Available.

(1 Kings 18: 41-46). For the Catholic pilgrim, these showers are symbolic of the good that the Virgin Mary brought unto mankind.
In ancient times, as today, Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life. Mary, especially as an adult, may have visited the city at least once a year, either at Passover or perhaps during the autumn festival of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles), which was possibly the most well-attended of the three pilgrimage festivals because the harvest was over and the rural population was free to travel. The New Testament accounts tell us that Mary was present in Jerusalem during the last week before the arrest and trial of Jesus and that she witnessed the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It was there that her life probably ended, even though one 4th century tradition says that she followed the Apostle John to Ephesus (in today’s Turkey), spending her last days in that city. However, the earliest known traditions all locate the Dormition of Mary as having taken place in Jerusalem.

Ancient Stairs leading to the Hulda Gates

It has not been possible to excavate on the Temple Mount itself in order to find remnants and traces of either the First or Second Temples. However, for many years now, extensive archaeological excavations have been carried out in areas outside the Mount, at the foot of the massive Herodian retaining walls. These have revealed meaningful and impressive finds from different periods in the history of the city. On the southern side of the Temple Mount, in the area designated as the Jerusalem Archaeological Park, one can see a portion of a monumental flight of stairs upon which Jesus, his Mother and disciples actually may have walked. This is because the staircase led from the Ophel (the “City of David”) up to the western and eastern Hulda Gates, the principal public entrances to the Temple Mount. The gateways are now blocked and the western gate and the stairway partially covered by a medieval tower. Entrances on other sides of the Temple Mount were used by dignitaries or by priests and servants of the Temple. The 2nd century Protoevangelium of James relates that the child Mary was presented in the Temple and that she herself climbed the Temple steps. According to this tradition, she served at the temple and received her education there with other children until her betrothal to Saint Joseph.
The Gospel of St. Luke lists numerous occasions when the Holy Family visited the Temple. The first time was 40 days after the birth of Jesus when Mary and Joseph went up to the Temple to present the Infant Jesus to God. It was during this event that they were approached by Simeon the Priest and Anna the Prophetess (Luke 2:22-39). In the course of Jesus’ childhood Mary would have made many more pilgrimages to the Temple with her family during the feast of Passover – as it is written: “Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.” (Luke 2:41) The last mention of Mary visiting the Temple with Jesus and Joseph was when Jesus reached the age of twelve: “…they went up for the feast as usual. When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it.” (Luke 2:42-43)

The Internet site for the Jerusalem Archaeological Park and Visitors Center: www.archpark.org.il

Opening hours:
Sun-Thurs 8am-5pm, Fri and holiday eves 8 am-2pm, Closed Saturdays. (Please note that even though the site is open, the area of the Monumental Stairs is closed to the public from 11:00 am on Fridays because of Muslim prayers on the Temple Mount [the Haram esh-Sharif].
Entrance fee includes excavations and Visitors Center.
Advance booking and an additional fee is required for the viewing of the virtual model and a guided tour with a guide on the site.
Telephone: 02-6277550, Fax: 02-6277962
E-mail: Davidson@pami.co.il

The Western Wall

A remnant of the great retaining wall around the Temple Mount platform, the Western Wall [Heb., ha-Kotel ha-Ma’arav], has been a place of Jewish prayer and devotion since the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. According to traditional Jewish religious practice, the area adjacent to the Wall is divided into separate sections for men and women. The Esplanade and the Western Wall are open at all times. Visitors are requested to respect the sanctity of the site. Modest dress should be worn and heads covered (this according to traditional Jewish practice).
Subterranean excavations to the west of the Wall include the “Western Wall Tunnel”, a 500-meter-long excavated passage that follows the original street level and then enters a series of chambers culminating in a Hasmonean water channel leading from the Struthion Pool (part of which lies within the Ecce Homo Convent on the Via Dolorosa).
The Temple Mount

As already mentioned, the Virgin Mary made several visits to the Temple. Non-Muslim visitors today can see, but not enter the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Non-Muslim visitors can only enter via the Mugrabi Gate (located between the Dung Gate and the Western Wall). However, exit may be made through any of the gates.

Opening hours:
8-11:30 am; 12:30-2 pm; during Ramadan 7:30-10 am; closed Fridays.
Accessibility:
Wheelchairs need to be pushed up the ramp. The central platform with the Dome of the Rock is accessible only by flights of steps.
Parking:
Not available directly at the site.

The Church of St. Anne (Bethesda Pool)

The Church of St. Anne, located inside the walls of the Old City near the Lions’ Gate (also known as St. Stephen’s Gate), marks the site (according to Byzantine tradition) of the birthplace of the Virgin Mary, daughter of Sts. Anne and Joachim. Inside the 12th century Romanesque church, steps lead down to the crypt dedicated to the birth of Mary. The church is next to the site of the medicinal baths identified as the place where Jesus cured the lame man on the Sabbath (John 5:1-13). The large, adjacent reservoirs (The Sheep’s Pools) stored water for the Temple.

During the Byzantine period, a large church was built at the site to commemorate the events at Bethesda, with a smaller church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. At the time of the Crusades, the importance shifted and the present church was built (1138) to mark the birthplace of Mary. This Romanesque-style building is very well preserved and can be visited together with the excavations and finds from the periods of Bethesda pools.
The holy site is ministered by the White Fathers.

Opening hours:
Mon-Sat 8 am-12 pm, 2-5 pm (summer 6 pm). The church is closed on Sundays. Entrance fee.
To schedule a mass: contact the numbers below:
Telephone: 02-6283285, 02-6281992
Fax: 02-6280764
Accessibility: No difficulties.
Parking: Not available at the Church.
The Via Dolorosa

The present course of the Via Dolorosa (the Way of Sorrows) begins near the arch of Ecce Homo in the Muslim Quarter and ends at the Holy Sepulcher (Golgotha) in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Christian Quarter. The devotional route commemorates events as Jesus carried the cross from the place of condemnation by Pontius Pilate to his place of crucifixion at Golgotha (Calvary) and entombment, places which at that time would have been outside the walls of the city [the current battlements date from the 16th century].

Fourteen stations with chapels are dedicated to encounters and events that are either described in the Gospels or in Apocryphal Books. Of the fourteen stations, four are directly or indirectly connected to the Virgin Mary who was present and witnessed the ordeal. The Fourth Station, situated at the Armenian Catholic church, recalls the place where Mary suffered seeing her son burdened by the cross on his way to Golgotha. The church incorporates remains from earlier periods including a mosaic floor from a Byzantine church with an image of two footprints or sandals at its center, considered to indicate the place were the Virgin Mary was standing, watching her son. This church together with the adjacent Third Station is the center of the (Uniate) Armenian Catholic Church in Israel.

Three other Stations associated with Mary – X, XII and XIII – are found within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher

The Church of the Resurrection, according to the Orthodox tradition

Construction of the first Church of the Holy Sepulcher began in 326 by order of the Emperor Constantine. It was erected on the site of a 2nd-century Roman temple that, according to local tradition, has been built over the place where Jesus had been crucified and buried. When the Roman buildings were demolished, a series of rock-cut tombs was discovered. One of these was identified as that of Joseph of Arimethea. The sloping bedrock was cut away around this tomb, leaving a free-standing shell (at the site of the present Aedicule).

Little remains of the original Byzantine structure, which was burned and looted by the Persians in 614, partially rebuilt by the Patriarch Modestos, damaged by earthquake in 806, and destroyed in 1009 by order of the Fatamid Caliph al-Hakim. A portion was rebuilt by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Monomachus in 1048, but most of the present building is the result of 12th-century Crusader reconstruction as well as later renovations (the most recent begun in 1959). The present Church encompasses half the area of the original Byzantine shrine and basilica.

The appearance of the present building dates from the 12th century, but the Rotunda and ambulatory around the Tomb itself, follow the lines of the original Byzantine structure, though recently restored.
The building is held in condominium by the Greek Orthodox, the Roman Catholic and the Armenian Apostolic churches. The Syriac Orthodox, the Coptic Orthodox and the Ethiopian Orthodox also possess certain rights and small properties in or about the building. The rights and privileges of all of these communities are protected by the Status Quo of the Holy Places (1852), as guaranteed in Article LXII of the Treaty of Berlin (1878). The Church contains several shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The Tenth Station commemorating the stripping of Jesus’ garments (Matthew 27:35) is located in the Roman Catholic chapel that shares with the adjoining Greek Orthodox chapel the balcony platform built level with the top of the Rock of Cavalry (the Rock of Golgotha). The Catholic chapel is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to John the Baptist.

The Twelfth Station, the place of the Crucifixion, is atop the Rock of Golgotha, in the adjoining Greek Orthodox Chapel.

Below the Cross stood Jesus’ Mother Mary. Jesus expressed “his solicitude to his Mother, whom he is leaving in such great sorrow”. The words that Jesus said to his Mother “Woman, this is your son!” and then to his disciple “This is your mother!” (John 19:26-27) “signify that the motherhood of Mary finds a new continuation in the Church, and through the Church, symbolized and represented by John.”

5. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical BVM.

A portion of the bedrock is visible beneath the Greek altar. (The rock can also be seen in the wheelchair-accessible Chapel of Adam, downstairs on the main floor, directly beneath the Greek Orthodox chapel).

The Thirteenth Station is commemorated by a Latin altar dedicated to the suffering of Mary who received the body of Jesus when he was taken down from the cross. This Station is located between the XI and XII Stations. The altar is decorated with a 17th century polychrome wooden statue of Mary, Mother of Sorrows (Mater dolorosa). The effigy was a gift of Portugal, presented in 1778.

The Franciscan Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, located to the north of the Rotunda, is also known as the Chapel of the Apparition, in memory of Jesus’ meeting with his mother after the Resurrection. The chapel dates to the 11th century. At that time the chapel could be approached from the outside, via a passage that linked it with today’s Christian Quarter Road. The door, blocked by Saladin is still visible from the road and is named the Arch of the Virgin Mary. Outside of the main entrance to the Church, a small door at the north eastern corner of the Parvis (the courtyard in front of the Church) leads into two Ethiopian Orthodox chapels. In the upper chapel, called the Chapel of the Four Beasts (Ezekiel 1:5), is a wall painting depicting the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. According to Ethiopian tradition, the Queen later gave birth to a child fathered by Solomon, a child who became the founder of the royal dynasty of Ethiopia. In Ethiopian iconography, the Queen of Sheba is represented as a precursor to the Virgin Mary.

Church of the Holy Sepulcher opening hours:
5 am-9 pm (winter until 8 pm).

Telephone: 02-6267000,
Fax: 02-6272742

Accessibility: Most parts of the church are accessible, however Cavalry (Golgotha), the Chapel of the Finding of the Cross, and the Ethiopian chapels can only be reached by very steep steps.

Parking: Not available at the church.
Church of the Redeemer
(German Lutheran)

The German Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of the Redeemer was completed in 1898 (Kaiser Wilhelm II attended the dedication). The church itself is built over the remains of the Crusader church of Santa Maria Latina (St. Mary of the Latins), which was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The medieval north porch is framed with stone-cut representations of the months and seasons. Parts of the medieval cloister are preserved in the adjoining Lutheran Hospice. It is possible to visit the church, which also hosts concerts. From the tower one may enjoy a good view of the Old City and the Mount of Olives, which compensates for the hard climb.

Tower open:
9 am-1 pm, 1:30- 5 pm;
closed Sunday.

Telephone:
02-6266800

Accessibility:
Ease of accessibility.
Hard climb to the tower.

Parking:
Not available at the church.

A stone basin believed to have been the baptismal basin of the Virgin, and an icon of the Virgin Mary, painted according to tradition by St. Luke himself, are displayed in the church.

Church of St. Mark
(Syrian Orthodox)

This church and monastery, located on Assyrian Street on the northeastern edge of the Armenian Quarter of the Old City, is the centre of the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) community in Jerusalem, an ancient church whose liturgical language is Aramaic. The community identifies this centuries-old structure as the site of the house of Mary, mother of Mark, the Evangelist. This is reflected in an inscription discovered on the site, which reads: “This is the house of Mary, mother of John, called Mark. Proclaimed a church by the holy Apostles under the name of the Virgin Mary...”

Opening hours:
Mon-Sat 8 am-4 pm (summer until 5 pm);
closed Sunday.

Telephone:
02-6283304

Accessibility:
No difficulties.

Parking:
Not available at the church.
City of David National Park

The original site of the biblical “City of David” ran along the Ophel Ridge, south of the Temple Mount. Archaeological excavations in this area, both above and below ground, allow the visitor to see something of the ancient history of Jerusalem from the days of the Jebusites through the time of King David, the First Temple period and the Kings of Judea, the burning of the city by the Babylonians in 586 BCE (2 Kings 25:9), the rebuilding of the walls by Nehemiah in the 5th century BCE, down to the time of the Second Temple and the destruction of the city by the Romans in 70 CE. An audio-visual presentation at the Visitors Center provides an orientation to the site.

The most important find dating from the time of King David that has so far been discovered is a large, badly ruined, royal building. This could have been King David’s palace. Parts of the foundation walls and a massive retaining wall can be viewed in the area open to visitors. Underground excavations give access to streets and passages long since covered by centuries of dirt and construction. The complex includes Hezekiah’s Tunnel, the conduit hewn from bedrock that brought water from the Gihon Spring outside the walls to the Siloam Pool within the city (2 Kings 20:20 and 2 Chronicles 32:2-4 and 32:30).

The pool is known in Christian tradition from the Gospel account of Jesus telling the blind man to “Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam” (the name means ‘one who has been sent’). So he went off and washed and came back able to see.” (John 9:7) Excavations in the area of the Siloam Pool have revealed portions of a paved street dating from the time of Jesus. This street led up toward the Hulda Gates, the public entrances to the Temple Mount.

The Cenacle - The Upper Room

The Upper Room (or the Cenacle), is a 14th century hall in a small, two-storey structure within a larger complex of buildings on the summit of Mount Zion. The upper-story commemorates the place where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples. It is also associated with an earlier, at least 4th century tradition that this was the place (or at least the vicinity) where the disciples gathered with the Virgin Mary and others in community after the death of Jesus – and where they experienced the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As such, it has always been considered the site of the Mother Church. The presence of Mary in these events added to her role as mother to the faith community.

Opening hours:
Sun-Thurs 8 am- 5pm (summer 7pm);
Fridays and eve of Holidays: 8:00 am-1 pm (summer 3 pm).
Telephone: *6033 or 02-6268700
Fax: 02-6274365
Entrance fee (additional charge for guided tours).
Parking: Not available at the site. Available within walking distance.
**Tomb of King David**

According to Catholic tradition, Mary herself was a descendent of the House of David. This might give added significance to the fact that the lower, ground floor room below the Cenacle is identified by a medieval tradition as the burial place of King David – even though the Biblical account records that he "fell asleep with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David." (1 Kings 2:10).

The close proximity of the two locations is said to be explained by the words of St. Peter; when in the Upper Room during the feast of Pentecost he said, "Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself is dead and buried: his tomb is still with us." (Acts 2:29)

The tomb is marked by a large stone cenotaph. Adjacent to the tomb is a synagogue that is open to all visitors. Beneath the level of the present floor are earlier Crusader, Byzantine and Roman foundations. These indicate that this portion of the building dates from at least the 2nd century, and there is a possibility that it may have been a synagogue or an early place of Christian worship.

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**Hagia Maria Sion Abbey on Mt. Zion - The Dormition Abbey**

The Benedictine Abbey of Hagia Maria Sion (the Dormition Abbey) was consecrated in 1910. It was built on part of the site of the former Byzantine basilica of Hagia Sion (for which it is now named) and a later Crusader church, St. Mary of Mount Zion. The large Byzantine-style mosaic in the central apse pictures Mary holding the Infant Jesus.

The church has a large and impressive crypt dedicated to the Dormition. At the center of the crypt is a carved wood and ivory statue of the sleeping Mary. The dome of the crypt is decorated with mosaics picturing Jesus surrounded by six women from the Old Testament: Eve, Miriam, Yael, Judith, Ruth and Esther. 12 pillars of the outer ambulatory represent the 12 Disciples who were present during Mary’s last hours. Architectural traces of earlier Byzantine and Crusader walls and foundations can be seen in one of the basements of the present church.
The Tomb of the Virgin Mary

The traditional Tomb of the Virgin is located at the foot of the Mount Olives in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, an arm of the Kidron Valley, adjacent to the Garden of Gethsemane and the Church of All Nations. The impressive façade is the 12th century Crusader entrance. A long staircase then leads down to the Byzantine crypt. A chapel to the right contains the Tomb of the Virgin. The church is in the possession of the Greek Orthodox, but they share the shrine with the Armenian Apostolic Church (the Armenian Orthodox). The Syrian Orthodox, the Coptic Orthodox and the Ethiopian Orthodox have minor rights.

The Model of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period at the Israel Museum

A fuller understanding of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period can be gained by visiting the large outdoor model of the ancient city now exhibited at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The model (scale 1:50) can be viewed from all sides. It is constantly updated according to the latest archaeological studies and discoveries.

The Site is accessible at all hours.

Ein Karem

In Christian tradition, Ein Karem is considered to be the birthplace of St. John the Baptist and the place where his parents Zachariah and Elizabeth resided. The New Testament tells of Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth while they both were pregnant. Several sites within the town are associated with that visit.

Mary’s Spring

This spring and fountain was at the center of the ancient village of Ein Karem. According to one tradition, this was a place where Mary and Elizabeth met, and where Mary drank (consequently the spring became a place of Christian pilgrimage). All through the centuries, people took water from this spring back to their homelands.

It is an ancient underground spring and the water flows out of a tunnel. Such a spring is called “a sealed fountain” in the Song of Songs (4:12) and this term is used in Christian imagery for the Virgin Mary.

An internet site provides an interactive tour of the model:
www.imj.org.il/panavision/jerusalem_model/index.html

Opening hours are those of the Israel Museum:
Sun, Mon, Wed, Thurs 10 am-5 pm; Tues 4-9 pm; Fri and holiday eves 10 am-2 pm; Sat and holidays 10 am-5 pm.

Telephone of the Israel Museum:
02-6708811 Fax: 6771332

Parking: Available.
Convent of the Rosary

This convent is located several steps up from Mary’s Spring on the way to the Church of the Visitation. It was founded in 1909 and served as an orphanage until the end of the 20th century. Since then, it has served as a hostel for pilgrims and other visitors. (In November 2009 the co-founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary of Jerusalem, Mother Maria Alfonso Danil Ghattas [1843-1927], was beatified in a ceremony celebrated at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth).

Opening hours: 
Visits must be arranged in advance with the Sister who oversees the hospice (050-8366414).

Hospice Telephone: 02-6413755 Fax: 02-6419790

Accessibility: Limited because of many steps on the way to the convent and inside it.

Parking: Available within walking distance

Tradition states that St. Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, ordered the building of the first, Byzantine church. Today’s altar stands on the spot where St. Helen erected her altar. A few stones in the Church are considered to be from the time of Elizabeth and Zachariah. Another tradition states that a niche in a rock at the back of the church is the place where Elizabeth hid the infant St. John from the soldiers of Herod. Yet another tradition holds that Elizabeth and Zachariah drank water from the ancient cistern found there.

Church of the Visitation

Traditional site of the home of Mary’s cousin Elizabeth and her husband, Zachariah (the parents of St. John the Baptist). The façade of the present church is decorated with a mosaic showing Mary riding a donkey led by an angel. On the right-hand wall of the forecourt are more than 40 ceramic plaques with the text of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) in different languages. The church has two levels, both adorned with artwork. On the upper level are stained glass windows with images of women in the Bible who are associated in Christian tradition with Mary. The lower level of the church incorporates remains of earlier Crusader and Byzantine churches that once stood on this same site.

Church of St. John the Baptist

The tall bell tower of the Franciscan Church of St. John is a landmark in Ein Karem. The church marks the traditional birthplace of St. John the Baptist (Luke 1). The grotto, the traditional birthplace of St. John, is located below the northern apse. Originally a Byzantine sanctuary, the church was rebuilt in 1674 and is decorated with artwork from the School of El Greco, as well as medieval décor and other works of art. Traces of the earlier churches can be seen outside the church in the courtyard, near the main door. The wall of the courtyard carries forty plaques bearing Zachariah’s text of praise and gratitude, the Benedictus, in different languages.
Convent of Notre Dame de Sion

Now a convent and guest house, the Convent of St. John was established by the congregation Les Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Sion (the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion). The order was founded in the mid 19th century by the brothers Theodore and Marie-Alphonse Ratisborne (who is buried in the convent cemetery). They had also founded the religious order of the Pères de Sion (the Fathers of Sion). Until 1948, the convent in Ein Kerem functioned as an orphanage and school. Today the congregation is active in interfaith relations and the building of mutual understanding between Christians and Jews.

Opening hours: Mon-Fri 9 am-12 pm, 2-5 pm; Sat 9 am-5 pm; Sun-closed
Telephone: 02-6415738, Fax: 02-6437739.
Accessibility: No difficulties.
Parking: Available

The Tomb of Rachel

On the way to Bethlehem is the Tomb of Rachel, the wife of Jacob, who died while giving birth to their son Benjamin. It has for centuries been a place of pilgrimage and prayer for intercession. In 1841, the Jewish philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore paid for the rebuilding of the structure which had been damaged by the earthquake of 1837. Being one of the Biblical women associated with the Virgin Mary (as an ideal of contemplative life), the tomb attracts many Christian pilgrims and other visitors.

Opening hours: Sun-Thur 1:30 am-10:30 pm; Fri closes two hours before the start of the Sabbath; Sat opens one hour after the end of Sabbath-10:30 pm.
Telephone: 052-5349555
Accessibility: No difficulties.
Parking: Available.

Public Images of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem

Statues of the Virgin Mary can be seen in several places in Jerusalem and outside the city. A large statue of the Virgin holding the Baby Jesus surmounts the 19th century Notre Dame de France Hospice (today’s Notre Dame de Jerusalem), located across the street from the New Gate to the Old City. Also in Jerusalem, a statue of Mary as the Immaculate Conception surmounts the Franciscan-owned Terra Sancta Building on France Square in the New City. Other statues are found in the village of Abu Ghosh; and at the Shrine of Our Lady, Queen of Palestine and the Holy Land, at Rafat, west of Beit Shemesh (see entry).
The Basilica of the Nativity

The cave believed to be the place where Jesus was born is the focal point of the Basilica, one of the earliest and most important of all Christian shrines. A cave in or near Bethlehem is mentioned in the 2nd century writings of Justin Martyr (in his Dialogue with Trypho) and again in the early 3rd century by Origen of Alexandria, one of the early fathers of the Christian Church. The first basilica on the site was built at the instigation of St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine. Burnt down during the Samaritan revolt in 529, it was rebuilt in its present form in 565, by order of the Emperor Justinian.

BETHLEHEM*

The Milk Grotto

The Grotto of the Lady Mary, the so-called “Milk Grotto”, is located a few minutes walk from Manger Square. The cave, located in the crypt of a small Franciscan chapel, celebrates the tradition that the cave was used as a place of refuge by the Holy Family before their flight into Egypt. The legend is that while the Virgin Mother was nursing Jesus, a drop of her milk fell to the ground and miraculously turned the walls of the grotto white.

* Under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. Visiting the site may require special arrangements, including coordination for transportation and guides.

Church of Notre Dame de l’Arche de l’Alliance

Located 10 km west of Jerusalem, the village of Abu Ghosh sits on the site of the biblical Qiryat Ye’arim, where the Ark of the Covenant rested for twenty years before it was returned to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 6: 21, 7:1-2). The hilltop Church of Notre Dame de l’Arche de l’Alliance (Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant, built in 1924) commemorates that event with a statue of the Virgin and Child prominently displayed atop a high tower. Remains of a 5th-century Byzantine church, including walls and mosaics, are incorporated into the fabric of the modern church.

ABU GHOSH

The Abbey of St. Mary of the Resurrection within the village of Abu Ghosh is a Crusader foundation built in the 12th century by the Knights Hospitaller of St. John of Jerusalem. The church was built over an ancient spring that once served a camp of the Roman Tenth Legion Fretensis. In 1873 the church building, which still stood, was awarded by the Ottoman government to the French Republic in gratitude for its support during the Crimean War. Since 1873 there has been a community of Benedictine monks from the Abbey of Bec-Hellouin (in Normandy, France); and since 1974, in an adjacent new convent, a separate, cloistered congregation of nuns from the Convent of Saint Mary of Monte Oliveti (near Siena, Italy). The surviving portions of the important medieval frescoes have been restored. Two of the frescoes have depictions of the Virgin Mary. In the half-dome of the north apse, Mary and St. John the Baptist stand on either side of Jesus. The second bay of the north wall depicts the Dormition of the Virgin.

* Accessibility: Possibly limited because of stone steps up into the church, and down into the grotto.

Parking: Available.
Deir Rafat
The Catholic shrine at Deir Rafat Monastery west of Beit Shemesh and Kibbutz Tzora, was established in the 1930’s by the then Latin Patriarch, Msgr. Louis Barlasina. The shrine is dedicated to the Virgin Mary in her role as Queen of Nations and protector of the Holy Land. A statue of Mary, as Queen of Palestine and the Holy Land, surmounts the church. Inside, the ceiling of the nave is covered with paintings of angels who hold ribbons containing the text "Ave Maria" in 343 languages. The Feast of Regina Palestina, recognized by the Catholic Church in 1933, is celebrated every year on the first Sunday after October 25.

Beit Jamal
Two Catholic religious foundations are located at Beit Jamal, just south of Beit Shemesh. The Salesian Monastery was established in 1919 as an agricultural school. The nearby chapel is dedicated as the burial place of St. Stephen, Proto Martyr, and is also dedicated to Raban Gamaliel, who Saint Paul claimed as a teacher (Acts 22:3). Nearby is the Convent of the Nuns of Bethlehem of the Assumption of the Virgin. The members of this closed community maintain a life of contemplation in silence and solitude.

A visit to the complex includes a room with an audiovisual presentation explaining the life of the community.

Opening Hours:
BeitJamal Monastery:
Mon – Sat: 8:30 am- 5:00 pm
Sunday: closed
Convent of the Nuns of Bethlehem of the Assumption of the Virgin:
Satdays only 10:30 am - 16:30 pm.
Telephone:
Monastery: 02- 9918931
Convent: 02- 9997972
Accessibility:
Possibly limited due to steps.
Parking: Available.

Female personalities in the Bible related to the Virgin Mary
In the Bible female key figures are presented. The Catholic Church relates especially to the following women:
Eve, Sarah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Yael, Hannah, the Queen of Sheba, Judith and Esther.

Eve the first mother, thought of as the woman prefiguring the Virgin Mary, since both of them gave birth to sons who were first; the one from whom everything started. Nevertheless, Eve was responsible for the Original Sin. The Virgin Mary however, was instrumental in bringing redemption from the Original Sin, enabling humanity to return to harmony with God, as it was in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. In this sense, the Virgin Mary is the exact opposite of Eve.

Sarah gave birth to Isaac at old age, after having given up hope of having a child. She symbolizes what happened to Anna, who gave birth to the Virgin Mary at old age.

Rachel only had her sons later in life. The escape of Jacob from his father’s house as well as the hiding of the idols, foreshadows the escape of the Holy Family to Egypt in order to save Jesus from death. Rachel mourning her children is understood as mourning for the Innocent Children killed by King Herod.

Miriam, Moses’ sister sang a song of exultation before God, like the Virgin Mary sang her song of praise (Magnificat) while visiting her cousin Elisabeth.

Deborah and Yael redeemed the people in the name of God. The Song of Deborah praises God and the redemption, this also prefigures the prayer and gratitude of the Virgin Mary as well as the redemption she mediated to humanity through the birth of Jesus.

Hannah was childless and prayed to God for a child. Samuel, who was born after this event, was dedicated by her to God. Because of this she is compared to Mary.

The Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, who saw her as his equal; this is considered a prefiguration of Mary, crowned as the Queen of Heaven. The Ethiopians believe that the Ark of the Covenant was moved to their country; the Ark prefigured Mary who carried Jesus in her womb, like the word of God, the Stone tablets, were kept within the Ark.

Judith is a figure mentioned in the Apocryphal books of the Bible who saved the People of Israel from the hands of the Assyrian, by decapitating Holophernes their commander. Her task as liberator makes her the person prefiguring the mediation of God’s liberation through the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

Esther the queen saves her people. She was totally dedicated to her task and risked her life. The effort of Queen Esther made for her people by appearing before the King, is compared to Mary’s efforts for humanity, especially on the Day of Judgment. The crowning of Queen Esther is symbolic of the crowning of Mary as the Queen of Heaven.
Suggested Itineraries

Workshops
The Holy Land experience will be immeasurably enhanced by participation in one or more of the various workshops and “hands-on” activities now offered by museums, biblical “villages” and other educational enterprises in Israel. Such programs included in the group’s itinerary will provide the modern pilgrim with greater understanding of daily life in the Holy Land at the time of Jesus and Mary. Workshops can be arranged in any number of activities: farming, weaving, traditional cooking, ceramics, carpentry and other crafts.
A biblical meal can also be arranged, with dishes that would have been served in a Jewish home of the Second Temple period. Tourist Information Offices and the travel agencies can help you find and arrange such programs.

Workshops

1. Day 1: Arrive at Tel Aviv airport and drive to the Galilee and Nazareth. If time permits visit en route the archaeological excavations at Tel Megiddo, the important ancient city from the times of the Canaanites and the kings of Israel, and the prophesied site of Armageddon (Revelations 16:16). On entering Nazareth, stop at the Chapel of the Virgin Mary's Fright to enjoy the view of the town and the Jezreel Valley to the east. Overnight: in Nazareth.

2. Day 2: Tour Nazareth, the town of the Holy Family, where Jesus was raised. Visit the main sites that commemorate the central events in the life of Mary – the Basilica of Annunciation, where according to the Gospel of Luke the angel Gabriel appeared to her; St. Joseph’s Church, the traditional site of the carpentry workshop; the nearby Franciscan Museum; the Spring of the Virgin Mary (Mary's Well) from which Mary drew water (and the nearby St. Gabriel Church, actual source of the spring); and the Synagogue Church where Jesus is believed to have preached.
Possible workshop: daily life at the time of Jesus (could include demonstrations of dress, work-day occupations, and foods). Overnight: in Nazareth.

3. Day 3: Drive to Sepphoris, the site of the ancient city that may have been the childhood home of Mary. Visit the Church of Sts. Anne and Joachim, and then tour the excavations and the ancient mosaics in the adjacent National Archaeological Park. Continue to Cana of Galilee to visit the Church of the First Miracle. Possible workshops: ancient crafts and agriculture – weaving, woodworking, wine making, olive oil production, traditional cooking, etc. Overnight: near the Sea of Galilee.

4. Day 4: Visit of Capernaum, the fishing village where Jesus called seven of his Disciples.

5. Day 5: Drive to the top of Mt. Tabor for a view of the battlefield of Deborah the Prophetess, Yael and Barak, then visit the hilltop Church of the Transfiguration (Catholic) and the Church of Elijah (Greek Orthodox). If possible walk around the summit of the mountain, seeing traces of the defensive wall built at the time of the Jewish Revolt against Rome. Then drive to Mount Carmel to visit the Monastery of Prophet Elijah at Muhraka, which commemorates the struggle of Elijah against the priests of Ba’al. Overnight: in Haifa.

6. Day 6: Visit the Monastery of Stella Maris, dedicated to Our Lady, Star of the Sea, and the nearby Elijah’s Cave where the Holy Family is said to have rested on their way home from Egypt. Then continue south along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the ancient Herodian city of Caesarea, where Saint Paul was arrested and first tried. Drive up to Jerusalem, stopping at Deir Rafat, the Shrine of the Virgin Mary [alternatively, this visit can be included in the Day 12 itinerary]. Overnight: in Jerusalem.

Sources for Additional Information
Israel Ministry of Tourism website:
www.goisrael.com
www.holyland-pilgrimage.org
For further information about accessibility for the disabled, consult the website:
http://www.aisrael.org/eng

General Remarks
Before visiting any site, be sure to check the opening hours which are subject to change, taking into special consideration holidays and special events.

1. When organizing the pilgrimage tour, time should be allotted at churches and holy sites for religious services and devotions. This should be coordinated with the group’s spiritual leader and incorporated into the itinerary.

2. To arrange the holding of a Mass at a particular (Catholic) site, coordinate in advance with the clergy of the church/monastery or with the denominational authority responsible for the site.

3. Please see to it that visitors are dressed modestly (with shoulders and knees covered).

4. Do not forget to encourage visitors to drink plenty of fluids, even in the winter months.

5. Remember that telephone numbers may change! Current numbers of all the denominations in Israel can be found on the website of the Christian Information Center, Jerusalem.
Day 7: View Jerusalem from top of Mount of Olives. Walk down to the Garden of Gethsemane (with the Church of All Nations) and the nearby Church of the Tomb of the Virgin Mary (where, according to Eastern Church tradition, Mary was laid to rest before the Assumption). Then drive up to Mount Zion to visit The Cenacle (the “Upper Room”) which marks the place where Mary and the Disciples experienced Pentecost (and by another tradition is also the location of the Last Supper). Leaving the Cenacle, descend to the Tomb of King David (also a “traditional” site). Then proceed to the Hagia Maria Sion Abbey, (the Dormition Abbey) which commemorates the Dormition of Mary. Enter the Old City through the Zion and continue to the Western Wall, the remnant of the ancient retaining wall of the Temple Mount. Possible workshops: traditional Jewish scribal art. Overnight: in Jerusalem.

Day 8: To better understand the physical layout of the city of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, see the large outdoor Model of Jerusalem during the Second Temple Period on display at the Israel Museum. The visit can include the Shrine of the Book which displays the Dead Sea Scrolls. Then drive to Bethlehem* to visit the Basilica of the Nativity and the Milk Grotto. Return to Jerusalem, visiting en route the Tomb of Rachel. Possible workshops: traditional woodcarving and glassmaking. Overnight: in Jerusalem.

Day 9: Early morning visit to the Archaeological Park along the southern base of the Temple Mount platform. The site includes a portion of an ancient flight of stairs upon which Jesus, his Mother and Disciples actually may have walked. Visit the Temple Mount (entering through the Mizrahi Gate). Continue to St. Anne’s Church, which commemorates the birth of Mary (and the home of her parents, Sts. Anne and Joachim) and the Pools of Bethesda. Then walk along the Via Dolorosa, paying special attention to the stations relating to the Virgin Mary, Tour the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, traditional site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. At the nearby (German Lutheran) Church of the Redeemer one can see the remains of the Crusader Church of Santa Maria Latina. Continue to St. Mark’s Church. Possible workshops: ceramics, traditional cooking and baking. Overnight: in Jerusalem.

Day 10: Drive to Ein Karem, where Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, mother of St. John the Baptist. The village contains several religious sites including Mary’s Spring where she drank from the water; the Church of the Visitation, traditional site of the home of Sts. Elizabeth and Zachariah; and the Church of St. John the Baptist (which is built over a cave believed to be his birthplace). Continue on out of Jerusalem to Abu Ghosh to visit the 12th-century church of the Abbey of St. Mary of the Resurrection with its important medieval frescoes. [If they have not been previously visited, the itinerary could also include the monastery and convent at Beit Jamal, just south of Beit Shemesh; and/or the Shrine of the Virgin Mary at Deir Rafat, west of Beit Shemesh.]

* See remark page 50

Short 5-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Day 1: Tour Nazareth, the town of the Holy Family, where Jesus was raised. Visit the main sites that commemorate the central events in the life of Mary – the Basilica of Annunciation, where according to the Gospel of Luke the angel Gabriel appeared to her; St. Joseph’s Church, the traditional site of the carpentry workshop; the nearby Franciscan Museum: the Spring of the Virgin Mary (Mary’s Well) from which Mary drew water. Visit the nearby Mary of Nazareth International Center and then continue to Cana of Galilee to visit the Church of the First Miracle. Possible workshops: ancient crafts and agriculture; olive oil production; winemaking; traditional cooking. Overnight: near the Sea of Galilee.

Day 2: Visit of Capernaum, the fishing village where Jesus called seven of his Disciples. The site includes the Church of the House St. Peter and the ancient Synagogue. Proceed to Tabgha and the Church of the Multiplication, where Jesus fed the multitudes; then continue to the Mount of the Beatitudes; and then Kibbutz Ginosar to see the “Jesus Boat”, a 1st century Sea of Galilee fishing boat similar to the craft that may have been used by Jesus and the Disciples. If time permits, visit other Christian sites in the area; and/or take a cruise on the Sea of Galilee (arrangements can be made for boarding and disembarkation at any of several places along the lakeshore).

Day 3: View Jerusalem from top of Mount of Olives. Walk down to Gethsemane and visit the Church of the Tomb of the Virgin Mary. Enter the Old City through the Lion’s Gate (also known as St. Stephen’s Gate) and visit the Church of St. Anne. Walk along the Via Dolorosa paying special attention to the stations relating to Virgin Mary. Tour the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Then walk along the Cardo (the colonnaded, north-south-oriented main street of the Roman/Byzantine city) to Mount Zion to visit The Cenacle (the “Upper Room”) and the Hagia Maria Zion Abbey (the Dormition Abbey), which commemorates the Dormition of Mary. Enter the Old City through the Zion and continue to the Western Wall. If time permits enter the Archaeological Park along the southern base of the Temple Mount platform to see the portion of an ancient flight of stairs upon which Jesus, his mother and his disciples may have walked. Possible workshops: traditional Jewish scribal art; ceramics; traditional cooking and baking. Overnight: in Jerusalem.

Day 4: Visit the City of David National Park and then, to better understand the physical layout of the city of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus and the Virgin Mary; see the large outdoor Model of Jerusalem during the Second Temple Period on display at the Israel Museum. The visit can include the Shrine of the Book which displays the Dead Sea Scrolls. Drive to Bethlehem*, to visit the Basilica of the Nativity and the Milk Grotto. Return to Jerusalem, visiting en route the Tomb of Rachel. Possible workshops: traditional woodcarving and glassmaking. Overnight: in Jerusalem.

Day 5: Drive to Ein Karem, where Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, mother of St. John the Baptist. The village contains several religious sites including Mary’s Spring where she drank from the water; the Church of the Visitation, traditional site of the home of Sts. Elizabeth and Zachariah; and the Church of St. John the Baptist (which is built over a cave believed to be his birthplace). Continue on out of Jerusalem to Abu Ghosh to visit the 12th-century church of the Abbey of St. Mary of the Resurrection with its important medieval frescoes. [If time permits, the itinerary could also include the monastery and the convent at Beit Jamal, just south of Beit Shemesh, and the Shrine of the Virgin Mary at Deir Rafat, west of Beit Shemesh].

* See remark page 50
Israel Practical Data

More information, including links to the various websites, can be found on the Ministry of Tourism website, www.goisrael.com. Additional assistance can be obtained at the Israel Government Tourist Offices abroad and in the information offices in Israel, whose addresses appear on the website.

Hotels

Israel has hundreds of hotels offering a wide choice of accommodations to suit all tastes, purposes and budgets, ranging from small, simple facilities to five-star luxury establishments with prices varying according to grade and season. Hotel rates are quoted in U.S. dollars.

Most of Israel’s major hotels have conference rooms and halls suitable for small to medium-sized gatherings, plus audio-visual equipment, translation, technical and fax services, high-speed Internet and wireless Internet, email and mobile communications, as well as large facilities for exhibitions. Due to the importance of the conventions industry to Israel, most new hotel properties are built with convention and congress facilities.

Information and reservations for many resorts, spas, hotels, boutique hotels, kibbutzim and hotel chains can now be accessed online in Hebrew, English and sometimes other languages as well.

Kibbutz Hotels

The kibbutz (collective settlement) is an Israeli social experience. Most of the 280 kibbutzim throughout Israel are essentially agricultural settlements, but many have moved to a more industry-oriented economy. Several kibbutzim, mostly in northern and central Israel, have established hotels on their premises providing visitors with a close view of this world-renowned lifestyle. They offer guests a relaxed, informal vacation in delightful rural surroundings. Some present special evening programs about the kibbutz experience.

Holiday Villages

Excellent accommodations are available at Israel’s holiday resort villages. They offer a wide variety of water sports, including swimming, water skiing, diving and sailing, as well as horseback riding, tennis, a full touring program and evening entertainment. Predominantly geared to the younger set, with emphasis on outdoor activities and informality, most villages are open only during the summer months.

Youth Hostels

The Israel Youth Hostels Association (IYHA), which is affiliated with the International Youth Hostels Association, operates some 22 youth hostels throughout the country for guests of all ages. All offer dormitory accommodation and most provide meals and self-service kitchen facilities. Some hostels also provide family accommodations for parents accompanied by at least one child. Individual reservations should be booked directly at specific hostels and group reservations should be booked with the IYHA.

Field Schools

The Society for the Preservation of Nature in Israel (SPNI) operates a network of 15 field schools throughout Israel, each specializing in the natural history and ecology of its environment. Most also have overnight accommodations for visitors, including a dining room and other services. The field schools, generally located far from densely populated regions, also offer a wide variety of unconventional, challenging and scenic desert and mountain tours.

Bed & Breakfasts

Bed & Breakfasts are one of Israel’s fastest growing tourist accommodations sectors, catering for both the domestic and international markets. Many B&Bs are on kibbutzim and moshavim throughout the country, and some can now be found in Arab villages as well. B&Bs cater to all styles, tastes and levels. Some have specialized motifs, such as horses, sports, or national styles. Many B&Bs can be accessed online.

Rooms for Rent

An increasing number of Israel’s rural settlements offer rooms for rent at reasonable prices.

Health Resorts

A unique combination of therapeutic factors – the mineral-rich Dead Sea, therapeutic mud, thermal sulfur mineral springs and a mild, sunny and extremely dry climate – have made certain areas of Israel excellent year-round health resorts, internationally renowned since ancient times.

Most of Israel’s health resorts are centered in two areas: the Sea of Galilee (220 meters or 655 ft. below sea level) and the Dead Sea (416 meters or 1,365 ft. below sea level). Offering a wide range of accommodations and equipped with modern facilities, they provide a choice of treatments for a variety of ailments and conditions.

Christian Hospices

Various Christian denominations offer accommodations in the vicinity of their religious sites. They are often good value in the low-to-moderate price range.

Additional information on hospices and church services may be obtained from the Christian Information Center.
Organized Tours
Numerous organized tours, mostly in air conditioned buses or minibuses, are conducted by licensed tour operators. Itineraries and prices are determined in accordance with Ministry of Tourism guidelines to ensure a full sightseeing program in maximum comfort. Half-day, full-day and longer tours are available, some combining air with road travel. Tours depart regularly from major cities and from popular resort areas during peak seasons. All organized tours are accompanied by experienced, licensed multilingual guides identified by an official emblem bearing the words “Licensed Tour Guide”. Smaller groups may hire a licensed driver-guide and a special limousine or minibus, identified by the red Ministry of Tourism emblem.

Full details and itineraries, prices and schedules are available at travel agencies, tour companies. Major public institutions and organizations, such as WZO, Hadassah, the universities and the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) offer guided tours of their facilities. Walking tours of the larger cities are arranged by the municipalities. Further information is available at any major hotel.

The Israeli Week
The Israeli work-week is Sunday through Thursday and the weekend is Friday and Saturday. Most businesses that are open on Friday close early in the afternoon before the onset of the Jewish Sabbath, which begins at sunset on Friday, and lasts until shortly after sunset on Saturday. Muslims and Christians observe their own Sabbaths, on Friday and Sunday, respectively.

Languages
Hebrew and Arabic are Israel’s two official languages, but it’s rare to find an Israeli who isn’t bilingual (at least). The country is a melting pot, with citizens from nearly every single country on the face of the earth – many of whom speak the language of their parents. Almost all road signs, shops, restaurant menus, guides and other material are also in English.

Money and Customs Matters

The Israeli currency is the New Israel Shekel (NIS) or shekel for short (pluralized as shkalim in Hebrew or shekels in English). There are 100 agorot (agora in singular) in each shekel. Bank notes are in denominations of NIS 20, 50, 100, and 200; coins are in denominations of 10, 5, 2, 1, 1/2 NIS and 10 Agorot.

Money can be exchanged in just about any bank in Israel. Most banks are open from 8:30 am Sunday to Thursday. Afternoon hours vary; some branches are open from 3:30 pm until 6:00 pm. You can also exchange foreign currency at any post office, and receive money travelers quickly from abroad. Post Office
Most post offices open at 8:30 a.m. Sunday through Friday, and remain open until 12:30 or 1:30 in the afternoon, depending on the day. Afternoon hours vary; some branches are open from 3:30 pm until 6:00 pm. You can also exchange foreign currency at many post offices, and receive money travelers quickly from abroad.

Credit Cards
Most shops, restaurants and hotels accept credit cards. The most common are Visa, EuroCard/MasterCard, Diners Club and American Express.

VAT
The Value Added Tax in Israel is 16.0%. Unless otherwise stated, the amount listed on all bills includes VAT (although non-Israelis paying in foreign currency are exempt from VAT payments at hotels, on flights, organized tours and car rentals, with or without chauffeur).

Tourists who use foreign currency when purchasing more than $50 worth of goods at Israeli shops listed by the Ministry of Tourism are usually entitled to a 5% discount at the shop and a VAT refund at Ben Gurion Airport upon departure. In order to obtain the refund, the (unused) goods that were purchased must be placed, along with the receipt, in a sealed transparent bag and presented to the bank official in the airport departures hall. He or she will break the seal, verify the contents, and refund the VAT in U.S. dollars to nearest dollar (less the bank commission). At other points of departure, Israeli customs officials will handle the matter and the refund will be mailed to the tourist’s home address.

Tipping
Tipping is fairly standard in Israel, though at a current norm of 10% the accepted rate is still fairly low. A service charge may or may not be listed on your restaurant bill. When it is not included, a tip is expected, and at better quality establishments, 12%-15% is now considered more appropriate.

Religious Customs
Except for East Jerusalem, Haifa and Nazareth, public transportation does not operate on the Jewish Sabbath – from sundown on Friday until Saturday night. The same is true on Jewish holidays – from sundown to sundown. However, taxis and (in some urban areas) shared taxis (“shurtu” service) are available. The exception to this is Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, on which no motorized vehicles of any kind move in the streets, except for emergency vehicles, such as ambulances. Just about every major hotel in Israel operates under rabbinical supervision, which means that only kosher food prepared according to Jewish dietary laws is available. Outside the hotels, there are many fine restaurants that serve kosher food and others that serve non-kosher food. In the large cities there are also restaurants that remain open on Saturday, but these are not kosher.

In Arab population centers, shops, restaurants and cafes remain open on Saturdays and nearly all Jewish holidays. When visiting Christian, Muslim, Druze or Baha’i areas and sites, make sure to conform with local religious customs, holidays, and celebrations.

Electric Current
In Israel, the electricity is 220 volts, 50 cycles, though in major hotel rooms there is usually a built-in 110-volt electric razor transformer. Most sockets in Israel are three-pronged, but different from those used in Europe or the U.K., and tourists bringing electrical appliances to Israel would be well advised to bring an adapter from home.

The Value Added Tax in Israel is 16.0%. Unless otherwise stated, the amount listed on all bills includes VAT (although non-Israelis paying in foreign currency are exempt from VAT payments at hotels, on flights, organized tours and car rentals, with or without chauffeur). Tourists who use foreign currency when purchasing more than $50 worth of goods at Israeli shops listed by the Ministry of Tourism are usually entitled to a 5% discount at the shop and a VAT refund at Ben Gurion Airport upon departure. In order to obtain the refund, the (unused) goods that were purchased must be placed, along with the receipt, in a sealed transparent bag and presented to the bank official in the airport departures hall. He or she will break the seal, verify the contents, and refund the VAT in U.S. dollars to nearest dollar (less the bank commission). At other points of departure, Israeli customs officials will handle the matter and the refund will be mailed to the tourist’s home address.

Time Differences
Israel is two hours ahead of GMT and seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, although during the period of daylight savings time, there may be some variations.

Taxis
By law, all taxis in Israel must be equipped with a meter that must be operated for all local rides. Legal taxis are white, with a “taxi” sign on the roof and license number on the sides. Passengers are entitled to a printed meter receipt. The meter can be operated according to three distinct fare rates, the regular fare plus a surcharge for ordering a taxi immediately by telephone, the regular fare, and a surcharge imposed for Saturdays, holidays and at night (between 9:00 p.m. and 5:30 a.m.). There is a surcharge for luggage as well. Intercity fares are determined by an official price list that the driver must show upon request. In Israel, it is not customary to tip taxi drivers.

Tipping
Tipping is fairly standard in Israel, though at a current norm of 10% the accepted rate is still fairly low. A service charge may or may not be listed on your restaurant bill. When it is not included, a tip is expected, and at better quality establishments, 12%-15% is now considered more appropriate.
For more information, including Israel Government Tourist offices abroad:

www.goisrael.com

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A Holy Land Pilgrimage
In the Footsteps of the Virgin Mary

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