

Journey to Jesus' Footsteps

Moving on to Jordan by Bro. Stephen Pardy, SVD
Lent, 2008

Day 10 (Eight in Israel and then Jordan) March 1, 2008 Saturday

(Here Janice has passed the baton to me for the next two days of our Pilgrimage. In many ways I wished that she were able to do this herself in her own inimitable style! SRP)

Dr. Jim Mullen and Linda, Gene and Melinda Rapp, Ed and Marilyn Legayada, Jerzy and Elizabeth Grabiec, Fr. Mike Manning, SVD our intrepid leader, Fr. John Tran, SVD and Brother Stephen Pardy, SVD enjoy their sleep-in but are up and out of the Hotel to be greeted by Yossi. We have a downsized bus and a new driver to take us to our new destination: the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

We are escorted to the border between the two countries and part with Yossi our caring and knowledgeable guide for the past eight days. He took such good care of us; a mother hen looking after her chicks could not have done a better job.

We went through the Passport controls of the two countries and were met in Jordan by our new guide for the next two days. He proved to be another knowledgeable guide, a Catholic and, actually, the nephew of the newly appointed Patriarch in Jerusalem.

He and his driver got us all settled in our bus and together we set out to see the sites and enjoy the hospitality of the Kingdom. He offered us two choices: one was to visit Jerash, the Pompeii of the East and one of the ancient cities of the Decapolis or, his recommendation, the recent findings on the River Jordan and most likely the site of the Baptism of Jesus by his cousin John. We fortuitously chose the latter.

The area is not completely developed for tourists and there were few other tourists around which were rare on this whole pilgrimage. The remarkable findings there are new and intriguing and it was an excellent suggestion. The digs there have uncovered VERY early Christian foundations marking this bank of the Jordan as the actual site. Such digs are so important and pretty much put the answer to skeptics as to the veracity of such sites. Now there are modern day churches going up in the area to carry on the tradition of those early Christians who have left their mark for us to follow.

The river divides Israel and Jordan and is almost narrow enough to jump across. We could see a massive construction on the other side to mark the spot in Israel. On our side there was one lonely Jordanian soldier, armed to the teeth, armored vest and all. It is a lonely post! He was so friendly and was happy to let his rifle

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rest in the sling around his neck and take our picture. He told us that he was to be married in the next week or so!

Back on the bus we took the long drive to and up Mount Nebo from where, supposedly, Moses was allowed his glimpse of Israel. He never entered the land itself but was able to see the land of "Milk and Honey" from this remarkable mountaintop. We visited the remarkable museum and collection of findings from that spot over the centuries and, as usual, visited the Church entrusted to the Franciscans who have tended so many sites since the Crusades. What a remarkable witness they have given over the years. Their work makes one appreciate the yearly collection to contribute to the preservation of these blessed spots.

It was chilly on the mountaintop and we were glad to get into our bus once again on the way to the Capital. On the way, we stopped at a site sponsored by the Queen of Jordan. This was an art and mosaic studio, which provides employment and training for challenged youth. Challenged or not they are creative and their work filled the studio with not only inlaid mosaics but silk rugs and tapestries some of which accompanied us home.

Back in our bus we headed for Amman, the Capital, a meal and early night. We arrived at our first class hotel in the dark and were ready for supper. Jim and Linda tried to enjoy a pre-dinner drink in the bar before supper but the cigarette smoke drove them back to the dining room and smoke free area. The smorgasbord awaited us and Gene and Melinda generously provided the wine!

Day 11 (Nine in Israel and now Jordan) March 2, 2008 Sunday

The waiters were standing by with pots of good coffee to wash down an excellent breakfast. Our bus and its driver awaited us along with our guide for what would turn out to be a long drive of about four hours or more to the Rose City of Petra. We stopped for coffee half way along and later the driver pulled over just to let us out of the bus and see for ourselves the barren, wind blown and cold landscape of the Jordanian desert

As we headed to the site, the guide filled us in on not only his country and its culture but gave us insights of the local perspective on items filling our newspapers and TV screens. For him this was a repeat run to the wonders of Petra. He has taken people on this route over 700 times and so had "seen it all."

"...match me such a marvel, save in Eastern clime; a rose-red city half as old as time.

(Petra by John William Burgon.)

For us it was a wonder, indeed. We arrived and left the bus in the parking lot and started on the trek into the canyon or "Sig" as it is locally known. The hike was

about two miles in length but it was a beautiful walk. It was like walking into a vertical crack, which wove, snakelike through the towering canyon walls. The colors were russet browns and reds and then, at the end, there was the Treasury made famous in the Indiana Jones film of a few years ago.

Actually there was the option of riding part way by horse, camel or in a horse drawn carriage but us fit pilgrims did it all on foot, in to and out of the Sig. It was worth the walk and an experience we all would recommend. Who built all these tombs and temples? Why? How did they do it and where did they get their sustenance? I can not really describe this adequately. I would need to be a Janice to do the site justice. For more information, however, check out the web page <http://www.bibleplaces.com/petra.htm> and you can experience a bit of what we were able to see,

We spent most of the afternoon in Petra. We had a picnic lunch served by Bedouins and surrounded by camels. We then entered one of their enclosures and in the comfort of their tent and hospitality we celebrated our final Mass of the trip. From our perch we could see other pilgrims scrambling about the many caves and carved mausoleums that dotted the area. There are so many. For all that we DID see we had not seen the half of all there was. Time did not allow. The rich taste that we did have, however, will last a lifetime.

Passing up the opportunity of riding a camel or carriage out we entered the Sig once again and headed for our bus. The slope was against us going back but the new perspective and sites were worth the slower pace out. Petra was an outstanding experience on an outstanding trip.

We left the area at dusk and it was a long trip back with one break on the way. Dinner awaited us, however, and we enjoyed the service before turning in for the night and in preparation of tomorrow's departure.

Day 12 (Departure/Return) March 3, 2008 Monday

We were up before dawn, had breakfast and then left for the airport and our plane in the dark. The tour company's guide and driver were there to take us to Jordan's International Terminal not far from Amman. We were smartly guided through security and to our departure lounge with grace, courtesy and friendliness.

MIDLANDS AIRWAYS carried us to Heathrow and after a delay of about four hours we were back on board *BRITISH AIRWAYS* for the long flight home.

Once in the LAX, once in the USA (!), we finally experience the most dangerous part of a long and wonder filled trip. We three SVD called our Rectory in Inglewood asking for a pickup to collect the car we had left there. "Well," the pastor said, "you will have to wait a bit as there has been shooting in the area

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and we are surrounded by police.” Welcome to the USA and thank you Israel and Jordan. We could not have been in safer or better hands in our entire trip.

Before closing, I want to thank Ed and Marilyn for acting as our group treasurer, collecting our tip money and taking care of our guides and drivers. I want to thank Janice, too for her diary and insights for the major part of our trip. It was a great gift to all of us her fellow pilgrims. It will also be a gift to those curious about such a trip and the wonders that await them all.

“Next year in Jerusalem!”

Wisdom of Solomon, chapter: 18, verse: 3

Then, with a flaming fire at night and with the warmth of the sun during the day, you guided your people through places they had never traveled before.