



Dear Prospective traveler,

We are in the process of planning a trip to the Holy Land in May 2011 and invite you to consider traveling with us. As representatives of Bright Stars of Bethlehem, a nonprofit church based organization that supports the work of Christmas Lutheran Church, we are eager to show you not only the holy stones that give shape to our faith tradition but also living stones that shape the land and life of God's people today. We will walk where Jesus walked and we will look for signs of God's presence in the lives of Christians, Jews, and Muslims who live in the holy land. Participants need to be physically able to do considerable walking on uneven surfaces. If you are interested in traveling with us, please review the preliminary itinerary, contact us if you have questions, and send us your decision (preferable by email) by January 1, 2011. We will then contact you to confirm and request your credit card information in order to secure airline tickets and lodging accommodations.

We anticipate that the trip will cost around \$3000 depending on plane fare and the number of people traveling. We assume shared rooms unless you request otherwise (single rooms increase the cost). We are offering an optional add-on segment which would cost \$500. This segment will only be added if enough people sign up for these extra days (please indicate interest when responding).

This will be the sixth trip that we - Nancy and Bonnie - have led; we are pleased to add Eugenia Brown to our leadership team. Eugenia is a professor of religious history and has traveled previously to the Holy Land. She will add greatly to our understanding of the places we will visit.

As you surely have read, there are significant and, often, contentious issues that complicate the lives and livelihoods of God's people in this land. Sometimes people – or their families - have questions about safe travel in Israel and Palestine. Although we cannot guarantee your safety, we have not encountered any dangerous situations on any of our trips. We plan our trips in communication with our church partners in Bethlehem and, because we have used the same driver for all our trips, we are confident that our contacts have the wellbeing of our groups in mind and are aware of the political situation in the areas where we travel.

Again, please feel free to contact us by email or phone to talk about the trip or answer any questions you may have. Our faith and our lives have been powerfully changed by our experiences in the Holy Land and we look forward to sharing the land and its people with you. We know that your life and your faith will also be enriched as we journey together to the land of our ancestors and partners in faith.

Peace, shalom, salaam.

Bonnie Van Overbeke and Nancy Baumgardner

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Preliminary Itinerary

Friday, May 20: fly to Tel Aviv from Chicago O'Hare Airport

Saturday: arrive in Tel Aviv and travel to Bethlehem where we will stay at the Guest House of Christmas Lutheran Church

Sunday: worship with our partner church, Christmas Lutheran Church and tour the city

Monday: meet with Pastor Mitri Raheb and learn about the ministries of Diyar Consortium in Bethlehem/tour

Tuesday: tour the refugee camp in Bethlehem and travel to Hebron

Wednesday: travel to Jerusalem where we will stay at St. Andrew's Scottish Hospice

Tour the holy sites of the three Abrahamic religions: The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Wailing Wall, The Dome of the Rock/El Aqsa Mosque

Meet with ICAHD – Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions

Hear Dalia Landau, Jewish woman highlighted in the story of The Lemon Tree

Thursday: travel to The Galilee where we will stay on the Sea of Galilee in Tiberias

Tour the places where Jesus taught, preached and healed

Take an evening boat ride on the Sea of Galilee

Friday: travel to Biram, home of Bishop Elias Chacour, author of Blood Brothers

Go to Nazareth, the town of Jesus childhood

Return to Jerusalem (again staying at St. Andrew's Scottish Hospice)

Saturday: take a spiritual journey down the Mount of Olives

Enjoy a free afternoon in the Old City, Jerusalem

In the evening, leave for Tel Aviv for return flight home, arriving Chicago O'Hare on Sunday afternoon, May 29

Optional add-on segment would include: worship at St. Andrews's Presbyterian Church, a day at Neve Shalom/Wahat Salaam (an intentional Israeli-Palestinian Community), the Negev (Masada, Qumran/Dead Sea Scrolls, Dead Sea), and St. Catherine Monastery in the Sinai, Egypt. Return flight for this segment would leave Tel Aviv late Wednesday night returning to Chicago O'Hare on Thursday June 2.

[Be sure to indicate that you are interested in this add-on segment when you contact us.]