

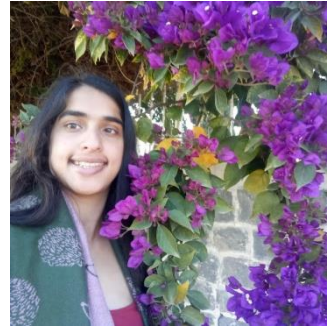
Living Christianity in the Holy Land

A report on the trip by Annika Mathews

(aged 28, confirmed Anglican and Methodist Worship leader)

Who is it for?

The trip is for Methodists (though others can go) interested in combining a pilgrimage to holy sites alongside learning from visits to charities and seeing the situation on the ground. All are welcome, whether you've been to the Holy Land before or not. You should be reasonably fit to walk, though talk to the group leaders if you have any concerns.



What do I see?

So much! Many of the places from Jesus' life mentioned in the Bible – Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem to name but a few. A diversity of Christian worship (we visit in Christian Unity Week). You also see the geographical and cultural landscape of the Holy Land and the reality of life in the occupied Palestinian territories.



What were some of your trip highlights?

1. Sitting on the side of a boat on the Sea of Galilee, watching the sun set. (Picture credit: Angleena Keizer)
2. Meeting Leila, the only female shop keeper in the Hebron market and eating lunch in her store, while people walked past.
3. Our day in Jericho. We visited a well-preserved archaeological site with stunning mosaics - Hisham's Palace, went on the cable car (lowest below sea level) for lunch at the hilltop restaurant with stunning views below and went shopping after.
4. Sally Azar's ordination, the first of a Palestinian woman in the Holy Land.
5. The privilege of entering the Al-Aqsa mosque buildings, feeling at peace and seeing the beautiful designs.



What's the food and accommodation like?

The accommodation is comfortable. We got our own ensuite rooms. The food's delicious –salads, houmous, pitta bread, meat, fish, potatoes and vegetables aplenty. Drinks recommendation: pistachio white hot chocolate.



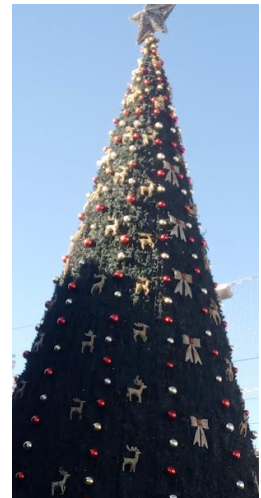
Who do you meet?

You'll predominantly meet Christians (Palestinians and other foreign nationals) but also those who are Jewish or Muslim. You'll hear local people's stories. Some represent organisations which may be doing one or more of the following: making a difference to people's lives, highlighting what's happening and bringing people of different faiths together.

Where did I sense God speaking?

God spoke through those I met and the places I visited. My heart was moved to anger and sadness by the discrimination I saw and the reality of life under occupation. We were also jarred by experiences of the Nazi persecution of Jews and others that we read about at Yad Vashem. I was struck by the hopeful courage of many I met, their daring to make a difference in their communities despite the difficult conditions several live in and the innovative ways they find to keep going. While it was great to journey in Jesus' footsteps visiting sites, I

reflected too how God speaks now through those in the Holy Land keeping the faith. Both the stones of the archaeology and ruins of past villages 'spoke' their truths alongside the 'living stones' of the people present.



What will I do now?

I will try to share the stories of those I met and what I saw and heard, as well as challenge the news we get here. I will continue to pray for justice and peace for all living there. I pray for hope and courage to be with all wishing for a better life and God's strength to be with those feeling forgotten.

If you get a chance to go, then don't miss out! A big thank you to John, Angleena and Samar, who ran the trip and to those we met for their hospitality and grace in sharing with us. Thanks to my fellow pilgrims for making it such a great experience and to the World Mission Fund for the generous bursary.

