

## Ely 900 Diocesan Pilgrimage to Israel 11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May 2009 by Geoff Grayton

Bishop Anthony was unfortunately unable to travel to Israel on the Diocesan Pilgrimage; however, Pope Benedict was available and was in Israel at the same time as the Ely party, though he did not attach himself to our group! The Pope's visit caused road blocks and security restrictions that prevented our group following the carefully planned programme of visits which Revd Malcolm Raby had taken so long to prepare and organise. But this did not prevent Malcolm, his wife Sue, Archdeacon Hugh McCurdy, our guide Gilbert, and our driver Walid from rearranging visits at a moment's notice and with very little inconvenience to the group!

The pilgrimage began in Over at 01:30 on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May when a coach collected Malcolm and other pilgrims for whom Over was the most convenient pick up point, the coach then proceeded to Trumpington where it picked up the remainder of the 33 pilgrims who would be travelling on the Swiss Air flight to Zurich, and then a separate Swiss Air flight to Tel Aviv. A further 8 Pilgrims made their own arrangements to join a B.A. flight which flew directly from Heathrow to Tel Aviv.

In Tel Aviv we met our guide Gilbert, and driver Walid for the first time and we were taken to the Olive Tree Hotel in Jerusalem where we stayed for the first three nights. We later stayed in a Hotel on the Dead Sea, and another in Tiberius.



During the pilgrimage we visited the Mount of Olives, The Church of The Ascension, The Church of Pater Noster (where Jesus is believed to have taught the Lord's Prayer), The Garden of Gethsemane, The Church of All Nations, The Garden Tomb (one of the sites believed to be where Jesus' body was laid between crucifixion and rising again). We also visited the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu (where Paul is believed to have denied Jesus three times), The Temple Mount (including the Dome of the Rock), The Western (Wailing Wall) where Jews still cry over, and pray for, the Temple. We travelled down the Via Dolorosa (path of sorrows/way of the cross), walked through the Old City of Jerusalem

(Christian Quarter). We also took a cable car part way up Masada (the Fortress where Jewish Zealots held out against the Roman army and committed mass suicide rather than accept a life of slavery), visited the Holocaust Museum which records the suffering by Jews during the Second World War, and The Israel Museum where the Dead Sea scrolls are stored.

As part of our Christian Practice we celebrated Holy Communion, renewed marriage vows, and renewed our baptismal vows (in The River Jordan). We were told of the discrimination there is by the Israel government over water and travel for Palestinians: Palestinians are allowed 5 litres of water a day whereas Jews are allowed 50 litres of water per day.

The pilgrimage was a faith building exercise and, in order to build our faith, we had to exercise! Walking and climbing in temperatures of up to 45 Celsius! This gave us some idea of the suffering of the slaves in Roman times when so many of the structures were built.

Our congratulations and sincere thanks go to Malcolm & Sue Raby, Hugh McCurdy, our guide Gilbert, driver Walid and all the support team for a job very well done which made this such a memorable Pilgrimage.

*Geoff Grayton, St Andrew's Impington  
May 2009*