



# CHRISTMAS in the Heart of the Holy Land

December 22 - 29

*Christmas in the Holy Land is a unique experience: this is where it all happened! Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem all assume a festive spirit, and even the Muslim community participates in some way in the celebrations of the Christian community. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, from whence came Joseph, in fulfillment of the prophecies of old. While the Catholics of the Holy Land celebrate Christmas on December 25th, the Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on January 6th, the day of Epiphany: thus the Christmas celebrations last quite some time!*

*In the outskirts of Bethlehem, you can almost relive the angels appearing to the shepherds in their field and singing "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace to people of good will". Together with the shepherds, we can say: "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, of which the Lord has spoken" (Lk 2:15)*

## December 22<sup>nd</sup>: ROME - TEL AVIV - NAZARETH

Departure with direct flight to Tel Aviv. Arrival at Ben Gurion airport. Transfer to Nazareth by private bus, in the green region of Galilee. Check in to our hotel in **Nazareth**.

## December 23<sup>rd</sup>: TABOR - CANA - NAZARETH

In the morning, we ascent to **Mount Tabor** to visit the Shrine of the Transfiguration, where Jesus gave a glimpse of his divinity to a few chosen apostles, as announcement of his Resurrection on Easter Sunday. We will stop at **Cana** where Jesus and Mary participated in a young couple's wedding feast. In the afternoon, we visit **Nazareth**: the **Basilica of the Annunciation** and the archeological Museum; the **Church of Saint Joseph**, home of the Holy Family; the orthodox church of Saint Gabriel, with "**Mary's Fountain**". We will read the Gospel together, the announcement of the Angel to the Virgin Mary.

## December 24<sup>th</sup>: LAKE TIBERIAS - CAPERNAUM – MAGDALA/CHRISTMAS EVE

Departure to **Lake Tiberias**, where Jesus began his work of evangelization. Here he called his first disciples and healed the ill and the lame. We will visit the **Mount of Beatitudes**, memorial of the "Sermon on the Mount"; we will visit **Capernaum**, with the house of Peter and the Synagogue. We will visit **Tabgha**, with the Benedictine church of the Multiplication of the loaves and the Franciscan site of the Primacy of Peter. We will cross the lake by boat. Then in the afternoon, we will commemorate Mary Magdalen, a disciple of Jesus, in the site of her hometown **Magdala**. From here, we will continue towards **Bethlehem**.

## December 25<sup>th</sup>: BETHLEHEM - AIN KAREM/CHRISTMAS

In the morning, visit to the **Basilica of the Nativity** and to the grotto where Jesus was born. We will visit the **Shepherds' Field**, and then continue towards **Ain Karem** to visit the Church of the birth of Saint John the Baptist and the Shrine of the Visitation, where Mary proclaimed the Magnificat. Visit to the **Garden of the Righteous (Yad Vashem)**. Return to Bethlehem.

## December 26<sup>th</sup>: JERUSALEM/Mount of Olives/Kotel/Via Dolorosa/SAINT STEPHEN

In the morning, we will visit the church of Saint Peter "in Gallicantu", where Peter thrice denied the Lord three times. We will then ascent to the **Mount of Olives** and visit the memorial of the Ascension and the Church of the Pater Noster. We will walk down from the panoramic terrace to the Basilica of **Gethsemane**,



passing by the church of **Dominus Flevit**. We will read that passage of the Gospel that speaks of the Passion of Jesus in the **Garden of Olives** and in the Basilica of the Agony.

We will visit the orthodox crypt of the Tomb of Mary. In the afternoon, we will commemorate **Saint Stephen** in the place of his martyrdom, then the Church of Saint Anne with the **Bethesda Pool** where Jesus healed the crippled man. From there we will continue along the **Via Dolorosa**, from the Church of the Flagellation to the **Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher**, stopping at each of the Stations of the Cross. Return to Bethlehem.

#### **December 27<sup>th</sup>: JERUSALEM/Temple Mount/Mount of Olives/Holy Sepulcher/SAINT JOHN APOSTLE**

In the morning, we will head over to **Jerusalem** to visit the **Kotel**, the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. If security conditions permit, we will visit the Temple Mount. We will stroll through the Jewish neighborhood and see remains of crusader times, the large Hurva synagogue, remains of the byzantine Cardo street, and Zion Gate. We will visit **Mount Zion**: the **Upper Room**, where we will read the gospel account of the Last Supper and of the Pentecost, and the Church of the Dormition of Mary. In the afternoon, free time in the Old City. Return to **Bethlehem**.

#### **December 28<sup>th</sup>: MASADA - JERICHO - DEAD SEA/HOLY INNOCENTS**

Departure in the early morning to **Masada**, a high plateau in Judean desert which King Herod the Great turned into a fortress. Here the Zealots strongly resisted the roman army between the years 70 and 74 A.D. Ascent by cable car to the archeological site, where we will visit the royal palace and the byzantine church, with a great panoramic view of the Dead Sea and the surrounding desert. We will pass through **Jericho** and we will renew our baptismal promises at **Qasr el Yahud**, where John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Return to Bethlehem.

#### **December 29<sup>th</sup>: BETHLEHEM - TEL AVIV – ROME**

Transfer by private bus to Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, passing through one of the sites of Emmaus (if possible, according to the flight schedule). Departure to Rome.

*The program may be subject to variations, without modifying the proposed visits,  
Please note that at Christmas some sites may be closed.*