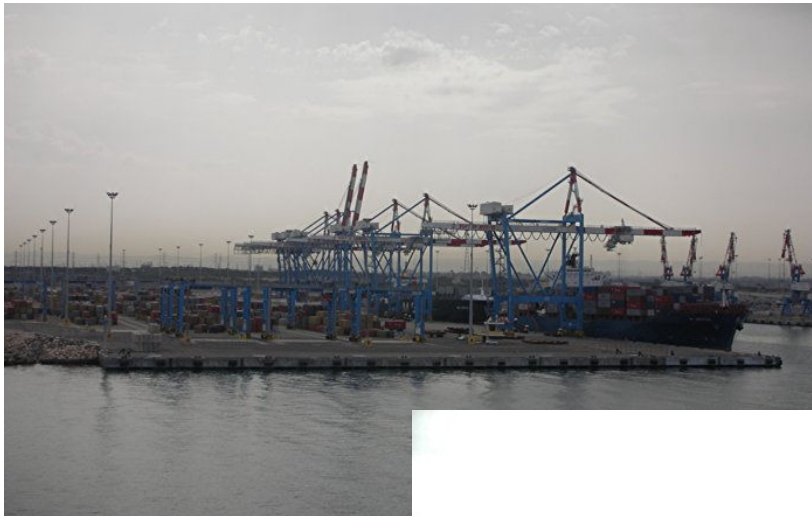


4/5/07 Day 80 – Jerusalem and Bethlehem - Thursday, 5 April, 2007: We arrived in the port of Ashdod, Israel about 10am on a calm and hazy day. Here is where we were located on the map.



The port was a typical industrial site.

After the ship was cleared by Israeli officials we left the Amsterdam about 11am. We were met at the gangway by an Israeli welcoming party handing our ball caps, pins, and other trinkets wishing us well from the nation of Israel. We immediately started a three hour bus ride for a tour of the cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Our guides name was Virkens. She spoke excellent English and was very knowledgeable about



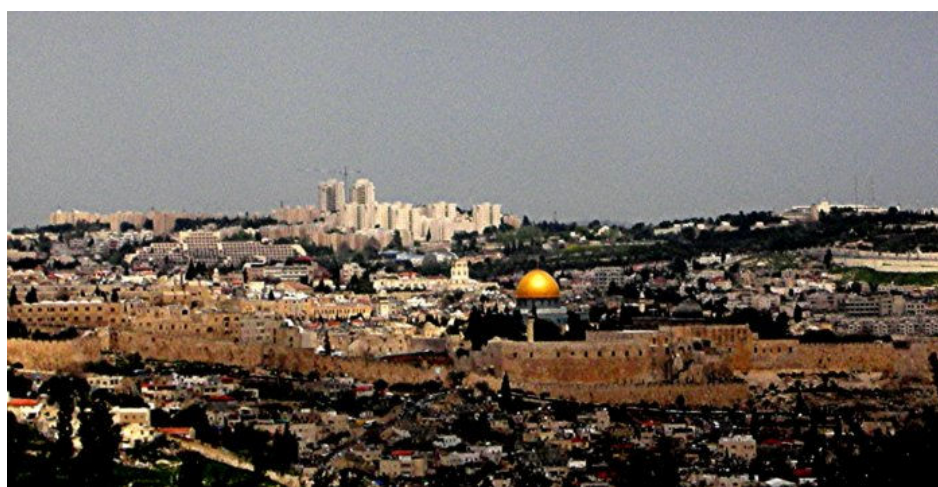
the cities and religious traditions of the region.

The bus we were riding belonged to the Nazarene Express Company which, as Nazarene Church members, made us feel right at home.

Israel is a right hand traffic country. We rode along over good highways through a rocky and hilly rural terrain. Olive orchards and grape vineyards were occasionally seen.



After about 3 hours we arrived in the outskirts of Bethlehem where we had a photo stop to take pictures of Jerusalem across the valley.



A better view of the Dome of the Rock and Jerusalem's Walls is shown on the left.

Barbara used this opportunity to show her Oak Ridge Library card in the Holy Land.





Our next stop was in Bethlehem at the Church of the Nativity which is a Greek Orthodox Church that lets tour groups in. The tradition is that the church was built over the site where Jesus was born. First we entered through a small door that was purposely made smaller than the original to make it easier to defend the church from various attacks on it over the centuries.

Archeological work has discovered mosaic tile work of the original floor of the church. The original floor was several feet under the existing floor so an opening in the current floor reveals the original mosaic tile design which is beautiful.



The birthplace of Jesus is a sacred place in the basement of the church that is accessed down some steep steps and narrow doorway. Hundreds of tourists were in the church for Easter Season and all were eager to view the birthplace of Jesus. We got in line and it took about an hour to process all the tourists ahead of us through the manger site. There was an unfortunate scene of some people trying to crowd into line and they were confronted by the people already in line.



We were finally able to go down the staircase and through a narrow door



Finally the view of Christ's birthplace,



The location of the manger.

While this should have been a profound religious experience it turned out to be the second worst experience of our tourist life. The worst tourist experience was two hours shuffling cheek to jowl with thousands of other tourists through the Vatican in Rome.



We exited the Church of the Nativity and proceeded down a busy and steep Bethlehem street to where the bus was parked.





Our next stop was at the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

We found Gethsemane to be a beautiful, peaceful and pleasant experience. The ancient olive trees and

lack of large crowds of people helped in our effort to



visualize what it might have been like when Jesus retired to this place.



We had lunch at the Ambassador Hotel. While we were there an enterprising vendor of shawls and souvenirs parked beside our bus and opened for business as people wandered back to the bus.

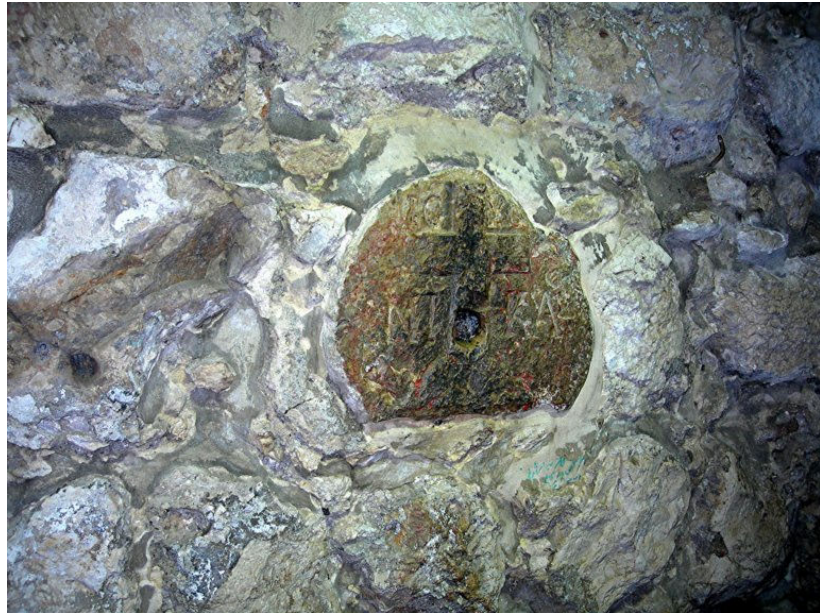
It was getting late in the day by the time we entered the walls of Jerusalem through the Jaffe Gate.



We went to the Church of the Holy Sepulture. The church is located at Station 14 on the Via Dolorosa which is the path that Jesus took with his cross on the way to Golgotha.



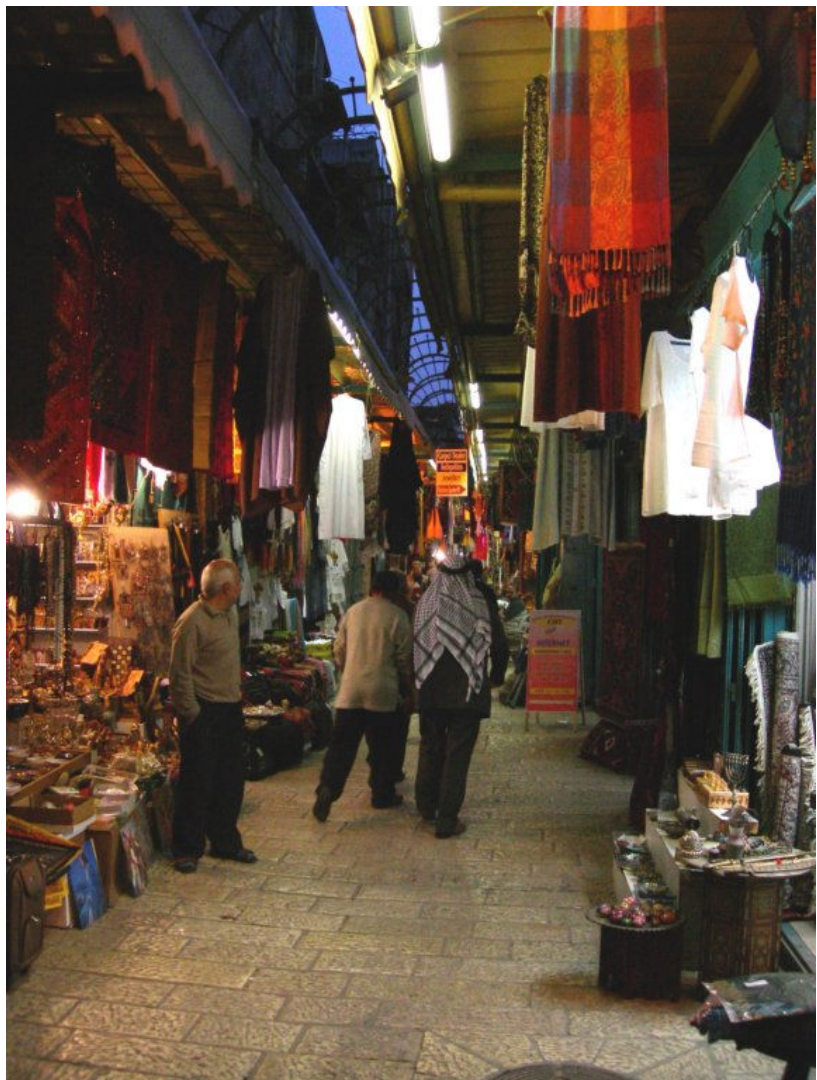
Station 14, shown on the right, is where tradition has placed the crucifixion of Christ and there is a place on the wall at Station 14 where people making a pilgrimage to the site can touch and complete their commitment to honor Jesus by their effort.



We learned later that this site may have been outside the walls of Jerusalem when Christ was crucified. There were porous limestone deposits which produced chunks of rock that resembled a human skull called a Golgotha. That is where the name, Golgotha, for the hill was derived.

The guide took us to most of the remaining 13 stations of Via Dolorosa inside the walls of Jerusalem. This was a more moving experience for us than we had felt with the crowds in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

As shown on the left, we walked down narrow streets filled with vendor's stalls selling food, clothes, souvenirs, and many other things.



We passed by the Western Wall which is also known as the Wailing Wall. This is the only portion of the original walls of Jerusalem that remain. The current walls have replaced or covered over the rest of the original walls. There is a Jewish tradition to go to the wall to pray to God. We found a huge crowd of Jewish people dressed in the black coats at the Western Wall the evening we were there. The guide offered to wait for anyone who wanted to go and touch the wall but there were no takers. It was clear that it would take an hour or so to work your way through the crowd of people around the wall.

This completed our tour inside the walls of Jerusalem and we walked out through the Lion's Gate

where our bus was waiting for us. Our



guide thought we would need a toilet break and coffee so we stopped at a really neat place on the outskirts of Jerusalem called Elvis. Elvis was a coffee shop that was decorated completely with memorabilia from Elvis Presley. Here are a couple pictures as examples of what you might find there.



As loyal Tennesseans and fans of Elvis we probably got more fun out of this stop than the guide anticipated. It looked like a regular stop for the bus line that caters to American tourists.

We completed the three hour ride back to Ashdod and boarded the Amsterdam about 11pm.

The ship got underway about 15 minutes after we arrived. Tomorrow we dock in Haifa, Israel and take a tour of Nazareth, the childhood home of Jesus.