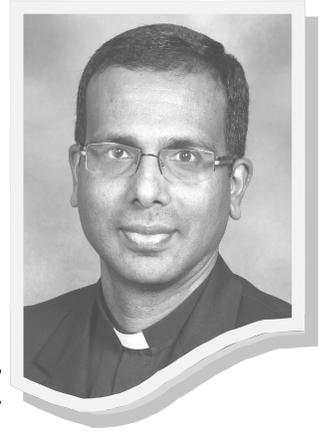




## From the Pastor



### A Savior has been born to you!

I would like to share with you some of my experiences of our pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There were 29 of us, and we had a blessed and fun time. The weather was very pleasant—it rained only a couple of days while we were there. We really did see a lot in 10 days—with so much to take in within such a short period of time. We reminded ourselves every day that we were pilgrims—not tourists.

We began each day with a Morning Prayer, celebrated Mass at various churches, did the Stations of the Cross walking the same path that Jesus took to Mount Calvary, and recited the rosary daily. There is so much to tell about all the amazing experiences we had. The bottom line is that the visit to the Holy Land has helped to make the Scriptures come alive. I hope all of you can go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land at some time during your life.

Being as it's the Christmas week, I would like to reflect on the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem that enshrines the cave where Mary gave birth to Jesus. The only doorway in the fortress-like Basilica is just 1.2 meters high (about 4 feet), called the "Door of Humility." The previous entrance to this church in Bethlehem was lowered around the year 1500 to stop looters from driving their carts inside. The place of Jesus' birth is beneath the Basilica, with a narrow opening and stairs leading to it. We had to wait in line for about an hour and a half to get there, and then we had to bend down to get to the spot to touch and kiss it. The place of Jesus' birth is marked with the 14-pointed Silver Star that stands for the 14 generations from Abraham to David (14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah.) Only a few feet away is the manger where Jesus was placed.

The first evidence of a cave in Bethlehem being venerated as Christ's birthplace is in the writ-

ings of Justin, the Martyr, at around 160 AD. The tradition is also attested to by Origen and Eusebius in the 3rd Century.

In 326, Constantine and his mother, St. Helena, commissioned a church to be built over the cave. This first church, dedicated on May 31, 339, had an octagonal floorplan and was placed directly above the cave. In the center, a 4-meter-wide hole (about 13 feet), surrounded by a railing, provided a view of the cave. Portions of the floor mosaic survive from this period.

St. Jerome lived and worked in Bethlehem from 384 AD translating the Bible into Latin. When he died, he was buried in a cave beneath the Church of the Nativity.

The Constantinian Church was destroyed by Justinian, the Great, in 530 AD. He then built the much larger one that remains today.

Persians invaded Palestine in 614 and destroyed many churches. However, they spared the Church of the Nativity when they saw a mosaic on an interior wall depicting the Three Wise Men in Persian dress. So the Church of the Nativity is the oldest Basilica standing. Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic authorities administer the church jointly. To the left of the main Basilica is an exclusive Catholic Church, which has the relic of the manger of Jesus that the Vatican sent back recently.

It was an amazing experience to be there at the spot where Jesus was born—and at the manger where he was placed—and then to touch and kiss them both. ". . . and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger."

**Wishing you a Very Blessed and Merry Christmas!**

—Fr. Jose Thomas Mudakodiyil