

Second Sunday of Easter, March 30, 2008, Year A

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector     Scripture: Genesis 12

***“Go To The Land I Will Show You”***

*“The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1) Later God said the Abraham: “Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.” (Genesis 13:14-15) God then established His covenant with Abraham: “as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” (Genesis 17:7-8) After Abraham’s descendants were enslaved in Egypt, God appeared to Moses and proclaimed: “I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites-- a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Exodus 3:16-17) They would be led back to that land – the Promised Land. It is there that God sent His Son, Jesus, as the Messiah – where He lived, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven; it is there that He will return – to reign for all eternity.*

After Rome destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70 AD, the children of Abraham – children of the tribes under Jacob – whom God renamed Israel – were scattered all over the world. They would not return until after the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948. How these words from the Prophet Ezekiel 36:24-28 ring loud and clear – in the prophesy fulfilled: *“I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”* This is the Land that God gave to Abraham – and to Isaac – and to Jacob.

Fr. Ward, Deacon Ed, Georgia, Deacon Reitz, along with Bishop Ackerman and several of our parishioners are now in that land – discovering the beauty that God has planted there. Fr. Molison and Barbara leave today for a journey to that land as well. God will meet each one of them in a special way on the trip that He has designed for them. We pray for their safe travel, refreshment, renewal, and safe return to us.

In June of 1999, Marilyn, John, Theresa, and I were blessed to travel to that land – known for generations as “the Land,” as well. We went with our pastor, Fr. Neil Lebhar, his wife, Marcia, their son Peter, and a group of fellow parishioners and others who were interested in finding out about our Jewish “roots.” We went to places like Mount Carmel – where Elijah defeated the Prophets of Baal, Megiddo – overlooking the Jezreel valley – the site of the future battle called Armageddon. We visited Nazareth and then on to the breathtaking Sea of Galilee – and everything that surrounded it. We later went south to the Jordan River – where God saw fit to heal me of the intense pain that had taken away the use of my right leg. After recalling our Baptism, I remember seeing everything and everyone bathed in a white light – so very bright – and then I felt a burning, then numbness, and then the pain in my leg was gone. I was able to run up the steps out of the river – pain free for the first time in years. Two days later, at Ein

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Geddi, where David hid from Saul, I was in prayer by the lower water fall – with two others on the trip that did not make the long climb to the upper cave and waterfall, and I clearly heard my name called. I heard “John” and I responded – “What?” I was immediately told that no one had said anything. That got my attention! We went back to quiet time and again I heard “John.” This time I knew that the Lord was speaking to me as He showed me a vision of myself dressed as a priest in white with a green stole blessing the bread and wine at the altar. There are so many other details I could tell you – but I heard the words “You must do this – in grateful obedience!” You know when you are being told beyond a doubt to do something – it is non-negotiable. That is how I felt. I was in the Land of the Bible – and suddenly my life and the life of my family would be forever different – I didn’t know how – but I knew He would make it all happen.

I often wonder how our lives might be different if we had not heard that call to – as in the words from Genesis 12: “*Go to the Land that I will show you!*” Would my leg have been healed, would we still be living the lives that we lived before? You know – those questions don’t matter – what matters is that we did hear the call to go, and to learn, and to be blessed to be a blessing to others – in His name. We did obediently follow that invitation – and then more importantly – in grateful obedience – followed His call to climb the mountain called “the ordination process” knowing that if He calls – He can move any mountain in His way.

This Land, that God created not only for His people, but in which He would send His Son to dwell – to die, rise from the dead, ascend from, and to someday return to, is rich in beauty, history, and holiness. What a privilege to have walked where the Bible was written.

I want to share with you a 10 minute video that I filmed during that trip in 1999. Marilyn and I put it together – according to the life of our Lord, Jesus. We begin in Bethlehem and end with John 21. Come with us for this visit to the Holy Land and God’s Word – through the places of Jesus. (Show Video)

As our beloved travelers continue their journey on their trip through God’s Land – Let us continue to pray for God to bless them richly during their trip – and to return them to us safely; refreshed and renewed in Him. It is in the name of Jesus that we pray. Amen.