

Tantur Ecumenical Institute

Newsletter

“Spiritual Wifi”

by

Rev. James Kirby

Latest News and Events:

- **“Spiritual Wifi”** *by Rev. James Kirby, Iowa, USA*
- **Reflecting on the Four Week Summer Program at Tantur.** *by Rev. Les Mather, Gloucester, UK*
- **Living in the Desert** *by Beverly Sansom, Birmingham, Alabama, USA*
- **A Reflection for November** *by Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI, Tower Hill, London, UK*

Close up of the South Western Corner of The Temple Mount



Wireless Internet has fast become a standard in homes and in public gathering places such as schools, restaurants and of course coffee shops. A person can be connected with the world almost anywhere these days either by computer, satellite or cell phone. The computer savvy theologian, pilgrim or tourist who is traveling, can find themselves constantly aware of the presences and strength of any local WIFI signal in order to satisfy their need to “be connected” to the internet world. Spending several months at Tantur this past year I became acutely aware of the locations and sites of the strongest WIFI signals in and around the “Old City” of Jerusalem. Not surprisingly the WIFI signal was weak around most religious sites and much stronger in restaurants and cafés. You might be interested to know that there is wireless service in the Holy Sepulcher for some reason and it is particularly stronger down in the Chapel of Finding the True Cross. I know this because I was shocked to receive an email from a friend as I was there one day wanting to know if I had his “Iowa Sweatshirt.” I didn’t, but Pilgrims may be comforted to know that they are able to post status updates on Facebook while visiting the site of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Old City of Jerusalem contains possibly the most and the strongest “spiritual WIFI” signals in the world. People come from all over the world to visit these “hot spots” so that they can “be connected” somehow to the Divine in a more intimate and intense way. Moslems find the spiritual signal strength strongest at the Masjid Qubbat As-Sakhrah or The Dome of the Rock and Jews flock to the Western Wall in order to connect with their God, faith and tradition.

There is no shortage of Christian spiritual hot spots in and around the Holy City. Perhaps for Christians the strongest most intense source of the Divine signal can be found at the Holy Sepulcher. For me, however the one place I felt this signal the most intensely was at the southwestern corner of the retaining wall of the Temple Mount. This is a relatively recent excavation site near the old temple market area and not far from the original steps to the temple. Reflecting on the history and significance of the spot we were then standing, many archeologists and theologians are convinced that Jesus no doubt walked there. That spot was a natural meeting place for people coming and going to the temple and that there is no way that Jesus did not do the same. For me this was a theophany as I felt this intense connection with Jesus standing on THE spot that is historically, archeologically and theologically “it.”

Most people prefer the presumed Sacredness of The Holy Sepulcher or The Church of the Nativity. No doubt those places represent monumental moments in the life of Jesus, but for me standing on the spot where Jesus actually stood and walked, there is a pure, simple and intense Sacred WIFI signal present in that seemingly insignificant out of the way corner whispering, “Emmanuel, “God is with us”

Reflecting on the Four Week Summer Program at Tantur

by
Rev. Les Mather

The Summer Group on a boat Trip on the Sea of Galilee.....



Two strays adopted into the “Tantur Family”..... Keith & Cyclops



I never thought that I would ever say ‘I enjoyed the Genealogy of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel.’ Genealogies in the gospels are texts that I usually skip through quickly to get to something more interesting. Yet Tim Lowe, during a seminar on Matthew’s Gospel, brought the genealogy to life in a way I had not thought possible. That is real teaching talent. It was just one of many surprises during my stay at Tantur. Arriving at the end of June for the four-week Biblical Studies course, this was my first visit to Israel-Palestine and I discovered that I was part of a group of 15 people – female and male, lay and ordained, belonging to Roman Catholic and various Protestant traditions – who had come from all over the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, the UK and the USA. Within days it felt like we had known each other for a long time, something that was helped by the wonderful hospitality and atmosphere of Tantur, which helped us to settle quickly. In swelteringly hot weather – even the locals were complaining – we discovered (for some it was rediscovery) the land, from close by the Lebanese and Syrian borders and the land of Dan in the Golan down to the Negev, from the Jordan and the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean coast. And of course we tramped through the old city many times. We grappled with the political situation together, and grew closer as we empathised with the oppressed, and tried to understand the oppressor. We had our hearts broken in Hebron.

We enjoyed a lot of fun, too, from light-hearted days out, to playing some interesting card games in the evenings, when the rules seemed to keep changing before our very eyes. The table fellowship was special, as was the worship we shared each day. When we arrived, we were advised to take some ‘veranda time’ during our stay. We did a lot of that too, enjoying the relative cool of the evening and the night-time view over Bethlehem (which looks so much better when you can’t see the separation wall, even though you know it’s there). We shared in some excellent seminars and lectures, as well as field trips, led by some superb academics and guides. I learned much – theologically, biblically, politically, and about my new-found friends with whom I shared a month-long journey that will remain in my memory and heart for a very long time. Even Cyclops, the one-eyed feral kitten, rejected by his mother and adopted by Keith Begg, added to the experience. It was great to see Cyclops finally welcome human contact. Healing comes in all kinds of ways. Through those new friends, who have kept in regular email contact with each other since, I feel part of the World Church in a new and real way. We truly are part of one body, following one Lord, and practicing his command to love one another, even over enormous distances.

Living in the Desert

by
Beverly Sansom

Life brings desert experiences--loneliness, pain, illness, rejections. The Spring 2011 Wadi Qelt hike with Tantur in the Judean Desert tangibly reflected this.



Wadi Qelt Sunrise

Hermits actually choose to live in this environment—having almost all support systems removed. They face their finiteness and learn to rely at a deeper level on God alone. Their spiritual roots are forced to descend into a hidden reserve of holy sustenance.



Hermit's Home

This plant also found grace to live and bloom in a most unlikely and inhospitable place. (See opposite page)

How do we endure, perhaps even thrive through hard times? Take a lesson from Wadi Qelt. Do not depend on outward life circumstances, which can “dry up.”

Rather draw from the inner, living provision of God in Christ. Heed the words of Paul in Ephesians 3:17-19:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith that ye, being rooted and

grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

We at Tantur would like to express a sincere thank you for Beverly's Living Series – Living Stones, Living Water & Living Desert

Blooming in Harshness



Sunset over The Sinai, reminding us of beauty even in the most inhospitable of environments



A Reflection for November by Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI – “London Today”

Today I visited St. Paul’s Cathedral, London. Anti-Capitalist protesters have erected two hundred tents on the street outside. Media focus has been on the relationship between the protesters and the Cathedral. One of the signs prominent in the Camp says “What would Jesus do?” The question invites to make a connection between what is happening before our eyes and events in Jerusalem more than two thousand years ago. Sitting quietly in the Cathedral I found myself making that connection. All the characters were there. Among the protesters were the zealots, people from every margin of society, the crazies and even a prophet or two. There were the Cathedral people, the priests, the officials the worshippers and of course the bishop. The police were there carrying the threat of possible future violence. And there were the tourists, the crowd. They come from every corner of the globe, sidestepping through a scene which captures the essence of a global crisis. As I sat in silence I was brought back to my days in Jerusalem. I could visualise when Jesus walked those streets among all the people of his time. I could be with Jesus as he entered the Temple. I could see the connection between what happened then and what is happening now.

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