

# Tantur Ecumenical Institute



## Newsletter

**The Holy Fire – Christ has Risen!**

by

**The Very Rev. Timothy S. Lowe**

### Latest News and Events:

- **The Holy Fire – Christ has Risen!** by *The Very Rev. Timothy S. Lowe (Tantur), Jerusalem, originally from Connecticut, USA*
- **Sun Over the Sinai** by *Rev. Dr. Michael Hurley based in Dublin originally from Co. Cork, Ireland.*
- **What to Expect from the Three Month Enrichment & Renewal Program at Tantur?** by *Keith Begg (Tantur), Jerusalem, originally from Limerick, Ireland.*
- **A Reflection for April** by *Rev. Dr. Yazid Said, (Tantur), Jerusalem.*



The miracle of the Holy Fire.....



Every year on the day preceding Orthodox Easter, Holy Saturday, there is the annual miracle of the Holy Fire that springs from the tomb of Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. For the local Christians, it is an annual miracle not to be minimized or easily dismissed. This year, I did not even attempt to get to the Old City, but chose a much simpler route and went to Bethlehem. All Christian villages wait for the coming of the Holy Fire from Jerusalem where it is then greeted with great celebration, chanting and joy. Men and women dance, some on the shoulders of others. All have candles of various kinds as the fire parades through the streets and is passed one to another. The somber lamentations of the previous day remembering the crucifixion and death of Christ are now replaced with the proclamation that Jesus is in fact the messiah, the one who has dominion over death itself by his resurrection.

Now I have been a priest for 29 years and this was not my first time being in Jerusalem for Easter. I had even participated in the previous Holy Week and Easter of the Western churches one week earlier since as rector of Tantur there are times when I have a foot in both traditions and celebrations. Yet the setting of Bethlehem was unique. Bethlehem is 80% Moslem. In the city of Christ's birth, Christians are a now small minority. To proclaim so publically and vociferously that the one born generations ago in this town was **THE** Jewish messiah risen from the dead was rather bold, and quite frankly odd, given the current political realities where Christians make up less than 2% of the population in the larger sea of Jewish-Muslim populations. You see I am used to proclaiming the resurrection of Christ from a position of power and strength as a Westerner. Regardless of the demise of Christianity in the West, it still remains dominant and assumed by most, and at worst met with indifference by others. But here, the local Christians proclaim and live their faith from a position of cultural weakness at best. It should challenge us to think more deeply about our own relationships to power and how we use it in relationship to the larger world around us as Christians. To remember and then to live with the notion that Christianity was born in weakness and ended with earthly humiliation, and only afterwards was there glory and power in the resurrection of Christ, is not as easy as it seems when lived out in daily life. We seem to prefer shortcuts to glory and power. As I was leaving Bethlehem, a local Arab Christian was shaking his head in disbelief that other Christians (meaning us foreigners) did not believe in the miracle of the Holy Fire. He was trying to wrap his head around our skepticism but was not succeeding. He put it this way: "How is it that you can believe that someone actually rose from the dead 2000 years ago, but find it hard to believe in the miracle of light (fire) that springs from the tomb of Christ?" Or to put it in the words of a hymn: "Yesterday I was buried with you, O Christ. Today I arise with you in your resurrection. Yesterday I was crucified with you. Glorify me with you, O Savior, in your kingdom." Perhaps in relationship to the resurrection, time is irrelevant?



## Sunrise above Sinai

by

*Rev. Dr. Michael Hurley*

Magnificent sunrise above the Sinai desert



The Rev. Dr. Michael Hurley watching the sun rise over the Sinai desert



Soon after 2.00 am on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March, we moved away from St. Catherine's Monastery, with the moonlight and flash lamp as light for our steps. Soon we were transported into the world of almost ghostlike shadows as Bedouin and camel greeted us in the semi-darkness. Suddenly, at the mild suggestion of its Bedouin minder, the camel hoisted me upwards in one sudden movement, and forwards over its ostrich-like neck. I was now part of the shadowy procession of camels, with their pilgrims, and some walkers toward Mount Sinai, which is forever linked with Moses (Gabel Musa), and perched 2,285 meters above sea level.

I was setting out with longings for revelation and the wisdom of commandments to guide and nourish my life. Suddenly, my Bedouin minder let go the reins, and tied it around my camel's neck. He disappeared into the darkness. I felt alone, and somewhat afraid. I was no longer in control. My camel raised its head into the night sky, as if in response to her newfound freedom and, with preened ears, wondered where to go next. But then I realised that this is her regular early morning work. Almost 2 hours later, the camel arrived at her destination. Here we rested for our coffees and some carbohydrates. Then came the final 'leg', a steep 753 steps, which brought us to the mountaintop, from where we looked over the vast expanse of hills in this desert place. A scream of 'here it comes' alerted us. What followed surprised me. Gradually, the sun leaves its dark grey home and rises up to stand host like in its warm crimson bed at the edge of the world. Here was for me a moment of Eucharist. It was resurrection time. I gazed, I stood, I looked, I took photographs. I did not want the moment to pass. I desired a tent where I could have time to savour what I was experiencing.

A spring of gratitude welled up through my being. Lord, it is good to be here. The God of Moses and the God of Elijah is today again being revealed on this mountain. I glimpse Him who speaks in this quiet and gentle rising of the sun, and who announces, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12).

After breakfast together at the mountaintop, in our own unique ways we bade farewell to what had happened. We came past the reputed place where Elijah is said to have heard the voice of God in 'a light murmuring sound' (1 Kings 19:12). We returned for another day in the environs of St. Catherine's Monastery, home to twenty-five Greek Orthodox monks. For more than 1400 years monks have prayed here; people have come on pilgrimage here. The high surrounding serrated hills continued their revelation. They held me securely in their alluring mystique of silence and stillness.

The desert at Sinai blessed me. I felt sadness as we sped away from it after our two-night stay. I suspect it will remain a great abiding memory of my six weeks at Tantur. I was taken, and ascended, through the shadows to be touched by what, and more properly the One who, is profoundly real.



## What to Expect from the Three Month Enrichment & Renewal Program at Tantur?

by  
**Keith Begg**

At Tantur Ecumenical Institute we are still taking bookings for our 2012 Three Month Enrichment & Renewal Program starting in September. So what can you expect? Tantur is located on a beautiful hill in Jerusalem within a short bus journey to the Old City and walking distance to the historical centre of Bethlehem.

Tantur serves as a welcoming place in The Holy Land for visitors who come from all over the world to stay at this *Oasis of Learning, Community and Hospitality* and to serve those seeking to deepen their understanding of this land, its history, its culture, its people and their own faith. Our Three Month Enrichment & Renewal Program commences on the **06<sup>th</sup> September 2012** and concludes on the **01<sup>st</sup> December 2012**. The Program offers an organic experience to the many facets and unique aspects of The Holy Land. St. Jerome was one of the first to refer to this part of the world as “the fifth Gospel” that is, once you know the land, you will then understand the other four Gospels more deeply. To achieve this Tantur intertwines lectures on such varied topics at the Old & New Testament, Biblical Geography, History of the Middle East and Spirituality into the geographical realities of the land through many guided tours of the religious and historical sites, thus bringing the class room to life. This presents the participant with the incredible opportunity to truly experience the fullness of the “fifth Gospel”

Of utmost importance to us is to introduce the participants to the peoples and cultures of the Holy Land. In meeting local Christians, Muslims & Jews, the “Living Stones” of the land, you get the opportunity to hear about their history while also experiencing their lives in a contemporary setting. At Tantur we feel that the classroom experience is not complete without the many field trips that bring to life the very religious faiths we speak of. These trips are wide ranging and include sites around Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho, the Dead Sea and the Negev Desert. One of the highlights of the program is a 5 day trip to the Galilee where you can immerse yourself in the places where most of Jesus’ ministry occurred. The surreal beauty of The Sea of Galilee, the amazing landscapes of the deserts, the historical cities and rustic villages of this diverse region combined with our in-house lectures strive to give you an overall holistic view of the Holy Land. Guests at Tantur discover living together with other members of the Christian family, as well as the broader inter-faith community to be an incredibly enriching experience. Our guests represent many countries of the globe, literally the four corners, and so you might find yourself befriending a Sri Lankan Anglican, a Japanese Scholar, a Canadian Mennonite, or an American Professor an Indian Carmelite Sister or an Australian Teacher to name but a few. So many people from diverse backgrounds and cultures add to the rich tapestry of community life here at Tantur. We pride ourselves on being an Ecumenical Institute for those who are open to learning from others and have an adventurous, faithful, tolerant, grounded and flexible spirit. Tantur employs a wide range of lecturers and tour guides for all of our Programs whose backgrounds are as diverse as the region they teach in, all adding to the vibrant pulse and multi-culturalism of Jerusalem. For further details on the application process and indeed all our programs visit our website <http://tantur.org/enrichment-renewal-programs/>

Bringing the class room to life at the very heart of Tantur’s Programs



Bringing the class room outside so you get to experience the life, culture and historical sites of the Holy Land



Pacing throughout the Program allows you ample free time to do your own exploring





*A Reflection for April by Rev. Dr. Yazid Said*

New Testament research about the judicial execution of Jesus of Nazareth reflects a context in which the Judeans and the Romans were afraid of each other and were concerned that there would be an explosion of violence that would be destructive for all. The leaders looked for ways to avoid this and Jesus would have been a perfect scapegoat; they eliminated one common enemy. For us who live in the Holy Land this all sounds painfully contemporary, whether among Israelis and Palestinians, or among our Churches. We manage our fears with short-term 'toleration' of others at best. But, as we know this has made no real difference in the Holy Land. What we need instead is to pause for a moment and get our heads around the shocking fact that this Jesus is risen, not to revenge his killers but to be our hope, changing the terms of reference, and healing our unreasonable hearts if we take courage to face him. We need to learn more as Christians particularly in Jerusalem how to be the sacrament of that new life by allowing our lives to be informed and shaped by the life of Christ, stand where he stands at the Eucharist and show in action that there is a different way of doing business together in and because of the Risen Lord.

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