

While the past 7 days have been full of amazing experiences, on your last full day in Israel there are 2 places you will visit that had a huge impact on us personally. You will travel to Ein Karem, the birthplace of John the Baptist and where Mary visited Elizabeth (Luke 1: 26-40). Christian tradition places the birth of John the Baptist, who announced the coming of Jesus Christ, his cousin, in the picturesque village of Ein Karem 7.5km southwest of Jerusalem. Luke's Gospel tells of the circumstances of John's birth (1:5-24, 39-66).

The angel Gabriel appeared to the elderly priest Zechariah while he was serving in the Temple and told him that his wife Elizabeth was to bear a son. Zechariah was skeptical, so he was struck dumb and remained so until the baby John was born. In the meantime, Gabriel appeared to the teenage Virgin Mary in Nazareth, telling her that she was to become the mother of Jesus. As proof, he revealed that Mary's elderly cousin Elizabeth was already six months' pregnant.

Mary then "went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb." (Luke 1:39-41)

After Ein Karem, you'll travel to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial. I know Pastor Phil has mentioned it several times as it is an incredibly moving experience and to this day, I still re-live some of the images in my mind. The physical structure of the building is interesting and many of the areas, such as the one with children's photographs are beyond comprehension.

Your last stop will be a visit at the Garden Tomb, a rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem, which was unearthed in 1867 and is considered by some Protestants to be the site of the burial and resurrection of Jesus. The tomb has been dated by Israeli archaeologist Gabriel Barkay to the 8th–7th centuries BC.[1] The re-use of old tombs was not an uncommon practice in ancient times, but this would seem to contradict the biblical text that speaks of a new, not reused, tomb made for himself by Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57–60, John 19:41). Also, the trough in front of the tomb and the nearby cistern, described by proponents of the Garden Tomb as part of the tomb's sealing system and as the surrounding garden's source of water, respectively, have both been archaeologically dated to the Crusader period (12th–13th centuries).[1] The organization maintaining the Garden Tomb refrains from claiming that this is the authentic tomb of Jesus, while pointing out the similarities with the site described in the Bible, and the fact that the Garden Tomb better preserves its ancient outlook than the more traditional, but architecturally altered and time-damaged tomb from the mostly crowded Church of the Holy Sepulchre; for all of these reasons, they suggest that the Garden Tomb is more evocative of the events described in the Gospels.

The Garden Tomb is adjacent to a rocky escarpment which since the mid-nineteenth century has been proposed by some scholars to be Golgotha. It has since been known as Skull Hill or Gordon's Calvary after Charles Gordon.

Your last experience event will be a communion service held at the Garden Tomb. This time of communion, singing and reflection will be a perfect ending to your experience in Israel, one I hope you have found moving, joyful, thoughtful and fulfilling.