



# BETHLEHEM

Palestine

2008

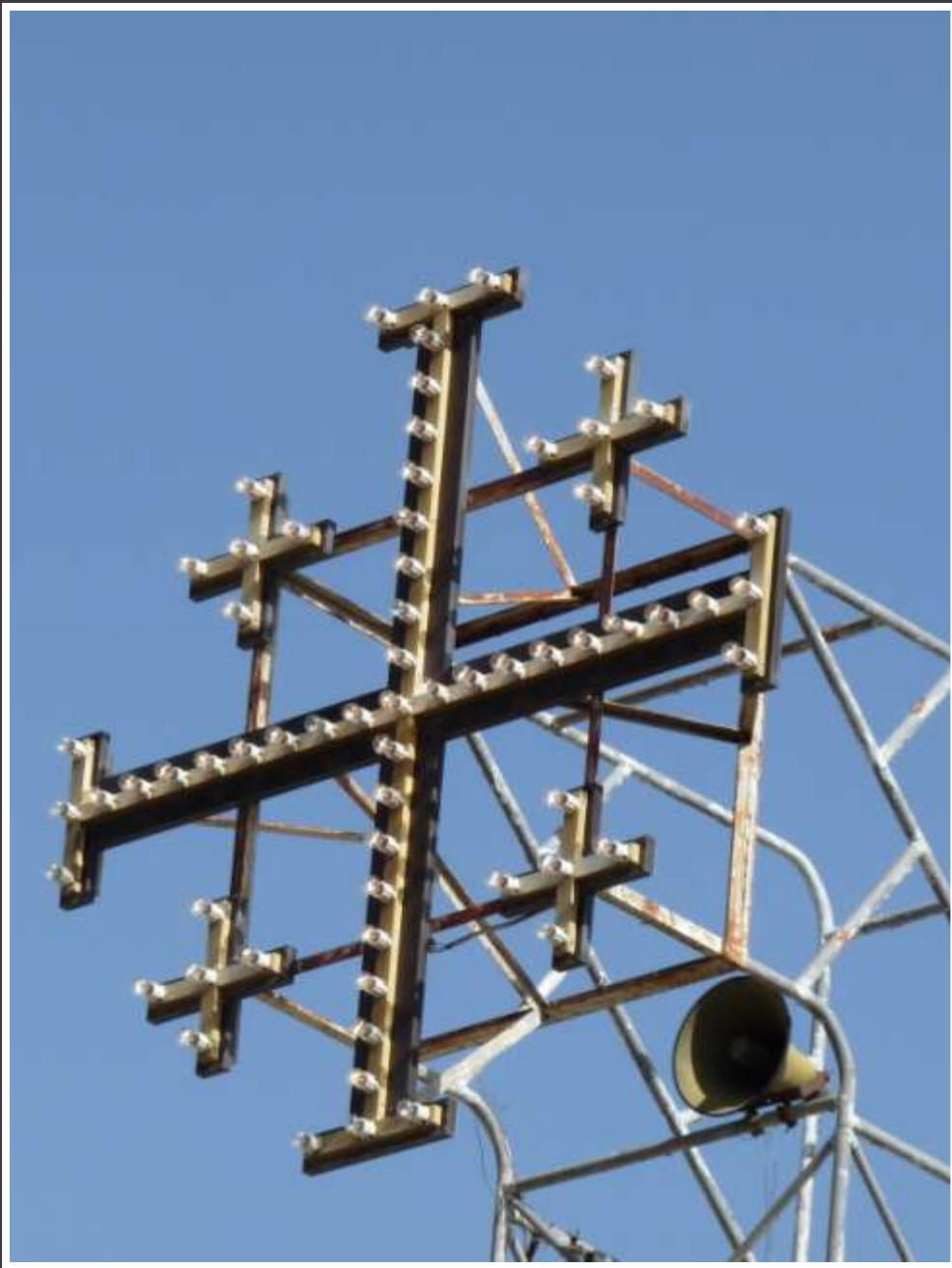


Bethlehem (“House of Bread”)—the birthplace of King David (?) & the Messiah (Micah 5:2)



Somewhere in the distant hills are the fields where an angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus to some shepherds (Luke 2:8-14)





## A pilgrim's cross

St Helena, the mother of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 326-328 CE when she was in her 80s

In that pilgrimage, she identified sacred Christian sites over which a church would then be erected



The Church of the Nativity was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century over the place where Jesus was born (as identified by St Helena)

However, it was burnt down during the Samaritan Revolt in 529 CE

The present building, the oldest church in Palestine (& Israel), was reconstructed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Emperor Justinian & underwent further repairs by the Crusaders

A wall mosaic inside the church



It is said that the Persians, when invading Palestine in 614 CE & burning churches along the way, spared this church because of what they saw on the mosaics—the magi were depicted in Persian clothing



The church is now under the care of 3 religious authorities



Greek Orthodox



Armenian Apostolic



Roman Catholic

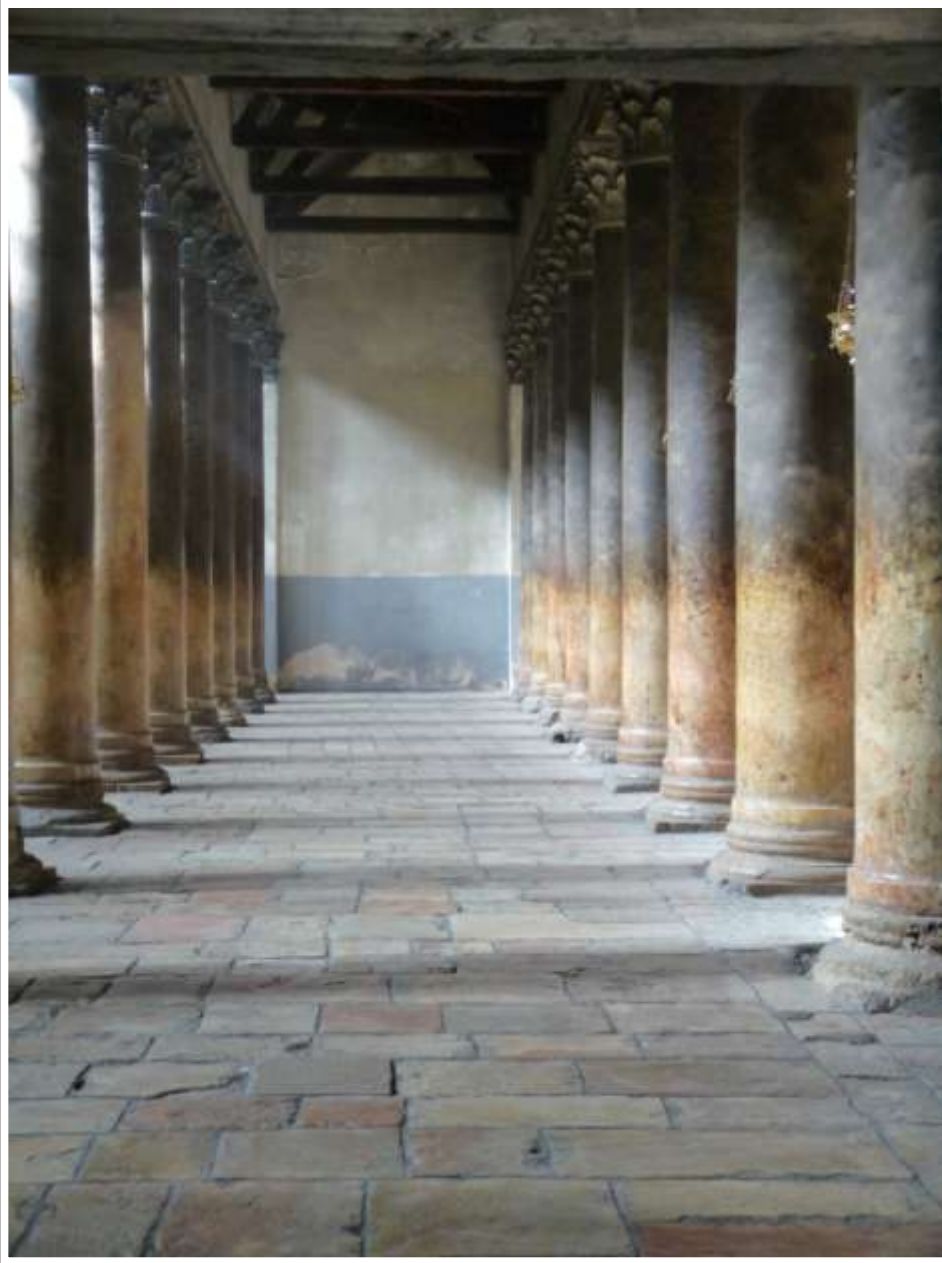


One enters the church through a low doorway, the Door of Humility

One story is that the door was installed by the Muslims during their rule to remind Christians that they were guests in the country & must Another story is that the small entrance was made by the Crusaders to prevent mounted horsemen from riding into the sacred sanctuary

The outline of the Justinian square entrance can still be seen above the present doorway





Inside, the church is divided into 5 naves by 4 rows of Corinthian pillars with pictures of saints on them

The columns are of pink, polished limestone

Most of them are reused from the 4<sup>th</sup> century church built by Emperor Constantine

Floor mosaics that date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century







Fragments of wall mosaics dating from the 1160s decorate both sides of the nave





# The main Basilica of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem







The Grotto of Nativity of the  
Armenian Apostolic





The exact spot where Jesus was born is marked beneath an altar by a 14-pointed silver star set into the marble floor



The Chapel of the Manger is maintained by the Roman Catholics & marks the site where Mary laid the newborn baby





The Church of St Catherine of Alexandria is modern & was built by the Franciscans in 1881



# The cloister of the Church of the Nativity





A pillar with the sculptured figure of St Jerome stands in the centre of the cloister

Jerome came in 385 CE with a group of pilgrims from Rome to settle in Bethlehem & start a monastic order

From Bethlehem, he produced his Latin translation of the Bible—the Vulgate

He died here in 420 CE

The Church of the Nativity was the only place we visited in Bethlehem. These were some of the sights we saw as our bus drove out of the City of David (Luke 2:4)

