

# In the footsteps of Jesus



## Eighteen of our curates visited the Holy Land for a week-long pilgrimage led by Bishop Christopher

IT was incredibly moving to see the places where Jesus was born, lived and died – and to understand the geography of the Bible better.

That's what these Church of England clergy felt after a week in the Holy Land, visiting places like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and Galilee. Bishop Christopher led the pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine for 18 curates from across our diocese.

Among the highlights was the chance to sail across the Sea of Galilee, which Jesus would have done with his disciples. The calmness of the landscape contrasted massively with the hustle and bustle of modern-day Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, the group first of

all followed Jesus's Palm Sunday journey down the Mount of Olives and towards the old city walls. They visited the ruins of the Pool of Bethesda, where he healed a man crippled for 38 years.

Bishop Christopher then led them through the Stations of the Cross, as they walked the Via Dolorosa – the route it is thought Jesus took as he carried his cross through the city.

**'It will impact how I read the Bible and talk about faith'**

The journey ended in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on the sites where it is thought Jesus

died and was buried. They were able to touch the rock on which it is thought Jesus was crucified, and to see first-century burial chambers.

They also travelled through the Israeli security wall to Bethlehem, to see the spot where it is thought Jesus was born, and visited hillside caves used by first-century shepherds like those who visited him as a baby.

The Rev Matt Bray, curate at Harbour Church and Portsmouth Cathedral, said: "Being here made everything seem very real. We went into the dungeon under the High Priest's house where Jesus would have been held after his arrest, and you could imagine Jesus being there.

"It will impact how I read the

Bible and talk about faith. There is nothing more relevant to people than a God who knows what it is like to live as a human, as Jesus did."

There was a chance to understand better what people of other faiths believe and experience. The curates saw Orthodox Jews praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and visited Israel's official Holocaust Memorial at Yad Vashem.

They also donated gifts to children at a Bethlehem orphanage and school which is supported by McCabe Pilgrimages, the firm that organised the trip.

The Rev Katy Garner, curate at West Meon, Warnford, East Meon and Langrish, said: "One thing that occurred to me was how easy it is to take one side or other in this conflict – are you on the side of Israel or the Palestinians?"

"What I've seen have been different stories from different people that have shown me the complexity of the situation and how there is no easy fix."

The team worshipped on the Sunday morning at St George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem, with Christians from across the world.

On the way to Galilee, the curates renewed their baptismal vows in the River Jordan, at a spot similar to the one where John the Baptist baptised Jesus.

Then they visited replicas of first-century homes and a synagogue in Nazareth, which gave an insight into Jesus's childhood home. In Capernaum, where Jesus based his early ministry,



Curates on the steps leading to the High Priest Caiaphas's house



Bishop's chaplain the Rev Richard Wyld leads a renewal of baptismal vows service for the curates in the River Jordan

they could see ruins which revealed how closely families lived together at the time.

There were visits to the hills on which Jesus is thought to have been transfigured, and where he may have delivered the Beatitudes. And there was a chance to reflect on our calling at the spot where the risen Christ gave Peter the responsibility of starting the Church.

A highlight for many was a boat trip on Sea of Galilee, a uniquely tranquil spot where the calmness

of the water enables voices to travel much further. The bishop led a reflection, and the group sang 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'.

The Rev Sam Cullen, curate at St Peter's Church, Petersfield, said: "There was something special about being on the Sea of Galilee and it being so still. It's a beautiful lake and easy to experience God there, and to be filled with peace.

"It makes it all the more horrifying that Jesus left that beauty to go to Jerusalem, knowing that