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Anglican Women's Studies Centre

Holy Experiences within the Holy Land

By Revd Rosemary Carey



Revd Rosemary Carey, AWSC Link Representative for the Diocese of Waiapu and her husband Venerable Bryan Carey in the Garden of Gethsemane

tance. I sat out on our sheltered balcony 4 floors up, in the very early hours and heard the Lord speaking to my heart through the storm. I had come to Him, here in this far off place and He would reveal himself. Next morning, I was slipped a scripture by one of our team from *Song of Solomon 2: 10-13*. I read it and became excited as I wondered what the Lord would share with me in the coming days!

To get a touch from the Lord is so real!

This recount is a recall of my encounters experienced with the Holy Spirit in Jordan, Jerusalem and Galilee. The Bible turned into colour for me in 1984. But being present earlier this year in the Holy Land where it all took place, it began to dance off the pages and allowed me to experience anew, the living word.

JORDAN

During our first night at the Dead Sea Spa there was a ferocious sand storm that obliterated the lights of Amman City in the dis-

Song of Solomon 2:10-13

¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me:

*"Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;*

¹¹ *for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.*

¹² *The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.*

¹³ *The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.*

*Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.*



Standing on top of Mt Nebo where tradition claims Moses stood and looked down onto the Promised Land, I surveyed the incredibly wide, forever barren, landscape below. It was a surreal experience while listening to the scripture read from **Numbers 27: 12-22**. It did not matter a bit that there were throngs of other faiths doing the same. We all seemed to be overcome with the reality that we were a place that was of most ancient of days, where time seemed to have stood still on this sacred spot.

Numbers 27:12-22

Joshua Appointed Moses' Successor

¹² The LORD said to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim range, and see the land that I have given to the Israelites. ¹³ When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, ¹⁴ because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarreled with me.^[a] You did not show my holiness before their eyes at the waters." (These are the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) ¹⁵ Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, ¹⁶ "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation ¹⁷ who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a shepherd." ¹⁸ So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; ¹⁹ have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰ You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey. ²¹ But he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the decision of the Urim before the LORD; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the Israelites with him, the whole congregation." ²² So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation.

The next experience was discovering frankincense and myrrh inside a small shop deep in the Petra canyon. I was transfixed in a time warp as their perfumes completely filled my senses. Since my childhood I have been fascinated with the story in **Matthew 2: 1-12**: of these expensive, exquisite spices being gifted to Mary and Joseph by the three Kings. Now the reality of their smell, colour and textures brought a whole new dimension to the scripture. These beautiful spices are still around, still very precious and sought after and still gifts worthy for a king. I brought home a small amount of each spice.

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

We encountered a road block, caused by two opposing Bedouin tribesmen, on our return to Amman from Petra. We were informed it could take a while and there was nothing to do but wait. I was moved to pray a knee jerk prayer from the front of the bus. It went something like this... "Lord we are tired, and you have told us to call out to you for help. Please remove the tension that has caused this roadblock in the next five minutes, so we can carry on to our next destination. Thank you. Amen." I slunk back to my seat, thinking "Lord forgive me for putting you to the test, please if it is your will, answer my prayer." Then shortly afterwards I heard our Muslim guide on the microphone say, "The road block is being removed, we will be free to go". It has taken just 4 minutes and 45 seconds. Praise be to God!



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A group from Pakistan being baptised in the river Jordan

My next Holy encounter was on the Jordanian side of the Jordan River, where tradition says this was the place that John the Baptist preached, and Jesus came to him to be baptized before entering the desert. The muddy brown water was divided in the middle by a swimming pool lane rope which marked the border between Israel and Jordan. Armed guards were present on both sides. Opposite us on the other side of the river, a large group from Pakistan were being baptised. We sang to them. They sang back to us. Our souls were joined across the divide by the Spirit through our worship and shared joy in the Lord. I will never forget it.

JERUSALEM

The next encounter was inside Old Jerusalem. Tired and a little bewildered on the first morning in this ancient city. I was seeking a sanctuary to be still and quiet. The Franciscan information centre close by our hotel showed me and another pilgrim a place we could go. Just outside the Armenian quarter through the Zion Gate. We found the walled off garden where we were able to sit in quiet contemplation, gathering our thoughts and allowing our souls to be restored. And they were!

Outside old Jerusalem walls through the new gate, past the Damascus gate and up Derekh Shkhem Road, lies an excavated tomb site which has a quiet beautifully kept garden and a lot of evidence pointing that it could be the tomb where Jesus was laid. In a quiet space in the garden grounds we shared communion with each other. We were in sight of the city walls yet away from the jostling crowds we were able to *be still and remember* sharing the bread and wine outside of a formal church, in this setting, deeply connected us with the liturgy we all knew so well. It was very special.

Later that afternoon I was in the Holy Sepulchre church joining the hour long queue to view the place where tradition says

was the tomb where Jesus was buried, I felt cynical, tired and bothered. Above this space up many stairs, under the same roof, we were informed was the hill, where Jesus was crucified. This Holy Place had become a tourist site. There was no one around the slab of marble where tradition says Jesus was laid on after he died. I was drawn to reach out and place my hand on it. As I reached out, I mumbled our son’s name, and in that moment, I knew God knew my heart’s desire. I knew at that moment not only I, but also Kenneth was profoundly loved by God, tears ran

down my cheeks. I stood up and realised that despite my cynicism, the Lord had touched me. I also realised that He would be meeting others who sought Him. It was humbling moment, and from then on the crowds never bothered me.



A garden tomb outside the old walls of Jerusalem

Luke 19: 41-44

Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

Standing on top of the Mount of Olives site where Jesus wept over Jerusalem and sharing **Luke 19: 41-44** made me weep.



Nothing had changed! We still need to pray for peace and for all to learn to love one another. It was sobering and when Mike started singing I started sobbing. Singing our way down the mountain pathway towards the garden of Gethsemane, we sang songs that we knew so well from Palm Sunday celebrations. Joined by several other pilgrims from other countries we sang ... *Hosanna!* My sadness had turned into joy! This was another taste of what heaven could be like.

Inside the beautiful *The Church of All Nations* next to the *Garden of Gethsemane*, there were many people from different lands. Mike started singing *Amazing Grace*, and again many joined in, singing in their own tongue. It was a joyful spontaneous worship that bound us all together.

Shepherd’s field up in the hills above Bethlehem was a wake-up call to the reality of the walls that divide Israel. Shepherds Field is situated in the West Bank of Jerusalem and looking back over to the city we became very aware of the contrast between the Israeli side and the Palestinian side.

Luke 2:8-20

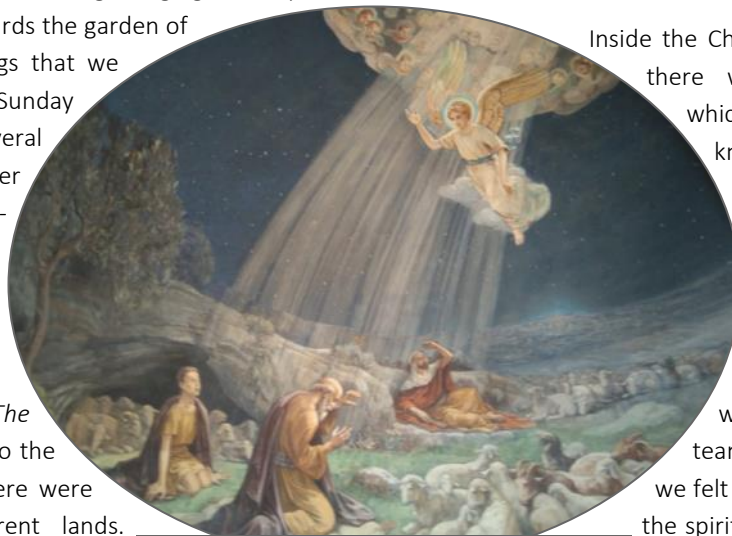
The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.* ⁹ *Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.* ¹⁰ *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:* ¹¹ *to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord.* ¹² *This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”* ¹³ *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,*

¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”^[c]*

¹⁵ *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”* ¹⁶ *So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.* ¹⁷ *When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;* ¹⁸ *and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.* ¹⁹ *But Mary treasured all these*

words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*



A mural in the Church on top of Shepherds Hill, above Bethlehem

Inside the Church on top of Shepherd’s Hill there were large colourful murals which depicted the story we all knew so well from **Luke 2: 8-20**. Our awed silence was broken with ‘*Silent Night*’ being sung very quietly, and then others all joined in with the angels that were all around the walls. I held hands with a German woman, both of us singing with tears rolling down our cheeks as we felt the closeness of being joined in the spirit. There were about four different nationalities in the Church singing the well-known Christmas hymn in their own tongue. It gave us all a taste of heavenly worship.

In Nazareth in *The Church of the Annunciation*, five Churches have been built on top of one another over the years where tradition says was Mary’s home. The second floor of the Church held beautiful frescoes of Mary and her child as she is represented by cultures around the world. I was moved to stand in front of the Japanese Madonna and child and pray for women who wanted to conceive. The tears flowed as I felt the presence of Mary assure me my prayers were heard. Outside we walked to the well that Mary would have used and drank from the still freshly flowing source. These places offered tangible evidence of reality for me around the birth of Jesus as foretold in **Luke 1: 26-38**

Luke 1:26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,* ²⁷ *to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.* ²⁸ *And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”^[a]* ²⁹ *But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.* ³⁰ *The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* ³¹ *And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.* ³² *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.* ³³ *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* ³⁴ *Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”^[b]* ³⁵ *The*



The many moods that the Sea of Galilee provides visitors from sunrise throughout the day

angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[c] will be holy; he will be called Son of God.”³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”³⁸ Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.



Rosemary & Bryan renew their wedding vows in The Cana Catholic Wedding Church

GALILEE

The Mount of Beatitudes is a beautifully quiet and serene place, cared for by the Franciscans. We stood together on the hill above the lake early one morning and read the Sermon on the Mount from **Matthew 5** and reflected on the impact of Jesus’ teaching. It was a profound moment for me being in the same space where Jesus spoke these words. Not only the beauty but the silence and calm which surrounded us affirmed it was indeed a Holy spot.

The boat ride out on the *Sea of Galilee* was an awesome experience. During the sail we enjoyed participating in an Israeli dance and watching how the fishing net was traditionally thrown over the side. But the best part of the ride was the 10 minutes of sacred silence drifting. “Be still and know that I am God...”, we were, and we did.

Several of us renewed our wedding vows in the crypt of *The Cana Catholic Wedding Church* where the original water jars that water was drawn from for Jesus to turn into wine were housed! It was a very special sacred moment. We have been

blessed with 46 years of a happy marriage and it really was lovely to be in the same place where Jesus performed his first miracle and offer God thanks for our marriage. **John 2: 1-11**

John 2:1-11 The Wedding at Cana

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **2** Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. **3** When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” **4** And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” **5** His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” **6** Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. **7** Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. **8** He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So, they took it. **9** When the steward tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom **10** and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” **11** Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

On our last morning in Israel we rose to see the dawn break over the Sea of Galilee. In the solitude and silence, we felt very close to the heart of our Lord’s ministry and we quietly gave thanks for all our blessings. That afternoon several of us reaffirmed our baptismal vows.

I recommend the Holy Tour. For me it was like wrapping my Bible in a rich knowing fabric, which bound the living words of my faith with truth. I will forever treasure this experience.

My heartfelt thanks go to Revd Mike and Patsy Hawke for their care and organisation which enabled all of us to absorb this magnificent Holy, ancient of ancient land and its timeless stories. They are taking another tour in 2020 that includes Oberammergau. I would recommend that you contact *Innovative Tours* in Christchurch if you are interested.



WE NEED YOU and YOU and YOU and YOU

*For the new AWSC Publication Project Celebrating
40 Years of Women's Ordination within
the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia*

EDITOR & THREE TIKANGA EDITORIAL TEAM VOLUNTEERS WANTED

The AWSC Council is looking for an experienced Editor to volunteer to lead a small Editorial Team comprising volunteers from each of the three tikanga for our next publication project over a two year period starting next year.

SEEKING WRITERS TOO—Expressions of Interest

The intention of this publication is to present a variety of essays and anecdotal stories of the experiences of ordained women from each of the three tikanga. It will be an opportunity to mark the significant milestones within each tikanga of women's ordination; the women past and present who have been ordained and their journey towards ordination; to acknowledge the journey and advocacy towards gender equality; to witness societal changing attitudes towards women's ordination over the years through personal stories; to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of ordained women in this three tikanga Province; to share the stories of who mentored those being ordained and why.

These suggestions are just the starting point so we look forward to receiving an email expressing your interest in writing an essay or story along with your proposed topic so that the Editorial Team can contact you.

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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the Anglican Women's Studies Centre was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Anglican Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this Church to fulfil their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like web publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.

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EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER: The Anglican Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general, the AWSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.