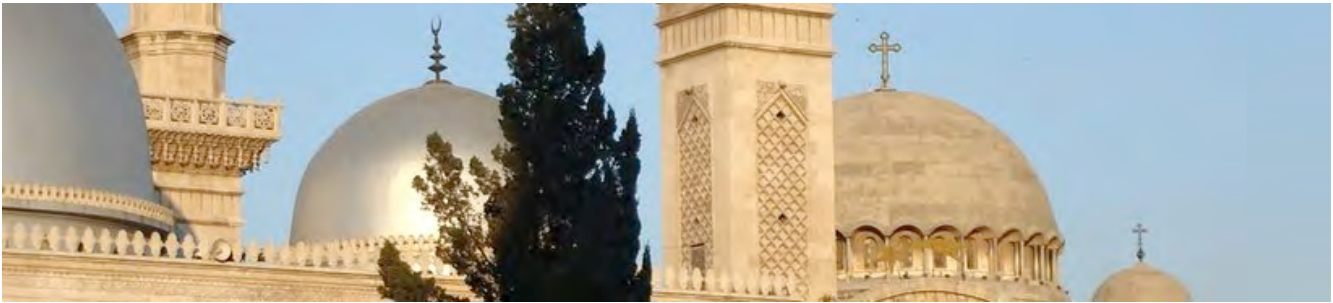


Pilgrimage to Syria 2011

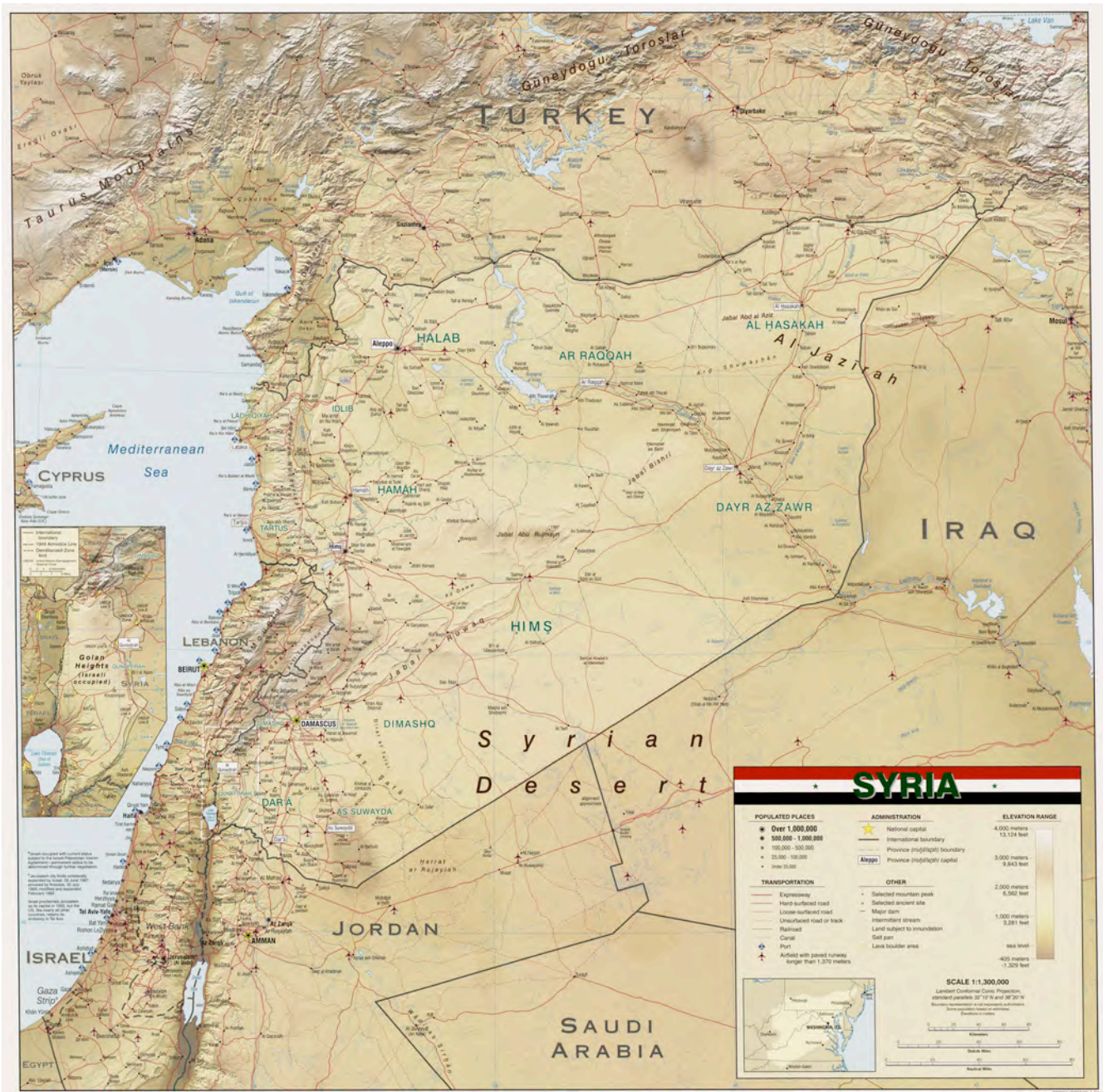
Sponsored by the University of King's College Chapel



Dr Gary Thorne, Chaplain at the University of King's College, Halifax, will lead a pilgrimage in Syria from 30 April to 16 May, 2011. These dates fall within the end of the academic term and King's Encaenia ceremony. Dr Thorne spent six months in the area in 2002 and is familiar with the Holy Places that we will visit on this pilgrimage. In the Middle East there are numerous routes of pilgrimage that can be easily accessed and many sacred sites that are “tourist friendly”. The Sacred Places to which this Pilgrimage will take us are more remote, less known, and without a guide not easily understood. Dr Thorne specifically chose these less travelled sites with the King’s College Chapel community in mind.

This Pilgrimage is open to all students, faculty and friends of the University of King's College and Dalhousie University. A special invitation is extended to Alumni of the University of King's College. The nature of this trip as a Pilgrimage means that spaces will be limited. The cost of the Pilgrimage will be \$1,000 plus airfare. As a group, fundraising initiatives will be executed to help lower the cost.

The Pilgrimage will begin at the Church of Saint Ananias in Damascus. This church stands where Saint Paul was healed of his blindness and baptised by Ananias - just off 'the Street called Straight' (Acts 9). The Pilgrimage will continue to Qalat Seman (near Aleppo) where the 5th century remains of the pillar of Saint Simeon Stylites can still be seen. Qalat Seman or 'The Fortress of Simeon' was a vast martyrium built c. 475 within twenty years of the death of Simeon. It consisted of four basilicas radiating from the sides of a central octagon, within which was enshrined a pillar atop which Simeon lived and prayed for almost 40 years. The floor space of the four basilicas is almost equal to that of the Hagia Sophia, built more than fifty years later in Constantinople. Qalat Seman was the second most popular pilgrimage site in the Christian world after Jerusalem in the 5th and 6th centuries. For reference: the distance from Damascus to Qalat Seman is 320 km.



The means of travel throughout the Pilgrimage will be primarily by van, with interpreter. In addition, we hope to do a considerable amount of walking, primarily in the desert. The schedule attached is tentative and does not reflect the daily walking that we intend. Pilgrims must be in moderate to high physical fitness, able to walk with pack and gear for several hours a day.

Dr Thorne has been in regular communication with the Canadian Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency Glenn Davidson (recipient of an Honorary Degree in Civil Law from King's College in 2007) and with members of the staff of the Mufti of Damascus. Both the Canadian Embassy and the Office of the Mufti of Damascus are committed to ensuring the success of this pilgrimage.

It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this trip is to accomplish a Pilgrimage. This is not a holiday. The notion of Christian pilgrimage began in the first two centuries after the death of Jesus Christ, when the faithful would gather at the tombs of saints and martyrs to honour them and to pray for their intercessions. A physical pilgrimage to a sacred place involves walking, sore feet, enforced detours, etc. It symbolizes the journey of the human spirit to God - and that inner journey involves many struggles that are akin to the daily rituals and difficulties of a physical pilgrimage to a sacred place. There will be prayers said and sung along the way, and an hour at the beginning of each day will be set aside for silent meditation, prayer, or contemplation. Some of the places we shall visit along the way are themselves significant pilgrimage sites – the final destination for other pilgrims. We shall pray at these sacred places with specific intent to spiritually prepare ourselves for our arrival at Saint Simeon's on 10 May. At some sites we shall meet the leaders and members of religious communities. We also will attempt to hear and join in as much early music and chant of the Near East as possible - both of the Islamic and Christian tradition. Our return from Qalat Seman will be 'by another way'. We shall travel to the East and visit the Euphrates River and then the ruins of Palmyra as we continue our pilgrimage to its completion in Damascus.



If upon prayerful reflection this Pilgrimage is a challenge to which you feel called, please contact Dr Thorne at the contact information at the bottom of page 6.

The following is our TENTATIVE DRAFT itinerary of our movements. It will take further shape as we continue our planning in conjunction with the staff of the Canadian Embassy in Damascus, the staff of the Mufti of Damascus, and local religious leaders. - The Chaplain

ITINERARY :

Sat 30 April : ARRIVAL

Our English speaking guide will meet the group upon arrival to Damascus Airport - visa formalities - transfer to MAR ELIAS GUEST HOUSE (a guest house belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate - very good location and very well furnished). Dinner & overnight.

Sun 01.May : DAMASCUS

After Breakfast we will start our tour on the steps of St. Paul Church, Kokab - National Museum - Tekieh Mosque - Hamidieh Bazaar - Azem Palace - Bab Sharki - St. Ananias Church (worship in St. Ananias) - St. Paul's window - Panorama of Damascus from Kassioun Mountain - (today is Sunday, and we will have the chance to attend the mass in the Greek Catholic Cathedral at 18.00h, and to listen to the chant of the choir of the cathedral). Dinner & overnight.

Mon 02 May : DAMASCUS

After Breakfast we will have a full day to visit the congregations of the city: Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the east, Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, Armenian church in Damascus (we will do our best to meet the Patriarchs, otherwise we will meet the Bishops) - free time to walk in streets of Damascus - Dinner & overnight.

Tue 03 May : DAMASCUS - SEIDNAYA - MAARAT - MAALOULA - MAR MOUSA

Breakfast - departure to Seidnaya (visit the Monastery and meet the Nuns) then to Maarat to visit the Patriarchate of Syrian Orthodox (the Grand Monastery of Mar Efram) proceed to Maaloula to visit the Monastery of Mar Takla and to meet the Nuns then to the Monastery of Mar Sarkis and to meet Father Toufic and to listen to the Aramiac language and songs - proceed to MAR MOUSA Monastery - Dinner & overnight **accommodation in Mar Mousa is to be paid to Father Paolo – this is an additional cost.*

Wed 04 May : MAR MOUSA

Entire day with the community of Mar Mousa.

Thu 05 May : MAR MOUSA - HOMS - KRAK DES CHEVALIERS

Worship in Mar Mousa - departure to Homs - visit OUM AL ZENNAR Church (where we will see the belt of Virgin Mary) and the Church of Mar Elian (some of the best frescoes in Syria) proceed to Krak des Chevaliers - Dinner & overnight in NADARA Hotel (accommodation in the monastery is impossible as 06 May is the feast of St. George).

Fri 06 May : St. GEORGE - LATTAKIA

Breakfast - We will join the visitors of St. George's Monastery in worship and prayer, and we will have the opportunity to see many Baptisms on this Patronal Feast Day - Lattakia - Dinner & overnight in the Guesthouse of the Greek Catholic Church.

Sat 07 May : LATTAKIA

After Breakfast a tour to Ras Shamra and to Salaheddin Castle - P.M. free time on the Mediterranean - Dinner & overnight.

Sun 08 May : LATTAKIA - HAMA

After Breakfast we will leave for Hama by crossing the heights of the western Mountains and arriving to the valley of Orontes (perhaps the most beautiful natural scenery in Syria) - visit of APAMEA (the most important Bishopric in the Orontes valley in the 4th/5th centuries) - visit the historical Cathedral of Hama - free time next to the Norias - Dinner & overnight in CAIRO Hotel of Hama.

Mon 09 May : HAMA - TAYBET AL IMAM - EBLA - ALEPPO

Breakfast - Departure to Taybet al Imam (a new excavation of a mosaic of 20 m by 25 m in the most beautiful church in the area) - proceed to Ebla - Aleppo (accommodation will be in the guesthouse of the Syrian Orthodox Church) - time for a spiritual talk with the bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Youhanna Ibrahim and the bishop of the Greek Catholic Church, Jean Jeanbart - Dinner & overnight.

Tue 10 May : ALEPPO - St.SIMEON - DEAD CITIES - ALEPPO

Breakfast - full day tour to St. Simeon - worship and walking in area - visit to nearby old villages of the first centuries of Christianity in Syria - in the evening back to Aleppo - Dinner & overnight.

Wed 11 May : ALEPPO

Breakfast - Full day tour of Aleppo visiting the Citadel - the Great Mosque - Old Churches - walk in the old streets of the city - today we will have the time to meet the Mufti of Aleppo and to talk with him about Christian life in Syria and the relationship between Christians and Muslims. After the visit we will attend a Sufi evening with music and dance - Dinner & overnight.

Thu 12 May : ALEPPO - RESAFA - PALMYRA

Breakfast - Departure for the Euphrates River - visit the Euphrates Dam - Jaabar castle on Assad lake - then proceed to Resafa - Sergiopolis - cross desert to Palmyra - Dinner & overnight in TOWER Hotel.

Fri 13 May : PALMYRA

Breakfast - full day tour of Palmyra - detailed visit of the ruins - Dinner & overnight.

Sat 14 May : PALMYRA - DAMASCUS

Breakfast - departure to Damascus - short stop for a cup of coffee in Cafe Baghdad - arrival to Mar Elias guest house - free time in Damascus - Dinner & overnight.

Sun 15 May : DAMASCUS

Free day in Damascus (possible tour to the South of Syria to visit Bosra) in the evening farewell worship in the Syrian Catholic Church - we will listen to Syrian songs and melodies - farewell dinner and Sufi dance – Overnight.

Mon 16 May : DEPARTURE

Breakfast - departure transfer to Damascus Airport for return flights.

THE COST OF \$1000 (excluding airfare) INCLUDES :

- 1- Deluxe transportation all through the tour.
- 2- Accommodation in the above mentioned hotels and guest houses. Above mentioned meals.
- 3- English speaking guide.
- 4- Entrance fees to all museums, citadels and archeological sites.
- 5- Evening in Aleppo with music and Sufis.
- 6- Farewell dinner in Damascus with music and Derwish dance.
- 7 - Syrian collective visa free of charge (the group must enter and leave together).
- 8- Tip of guide and driver.

COST DOES NOT INCLUDE :

- 1- Additional meals
- 2- Personal expenses
- 3- Optional tours

If you are interested please contact:

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