

Holy Shrines in Galilee

Galilee is a province on north Israel. The Lord spent most of his time on earth traversing Galilee. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom..."(Matthew 4:3). In Galilee are; the town of the Annunciation Nazareth, Cana – where He worked the first miracle, and the sea of Tiberias or Galilee where a multitude of events of His earthly life emanated. That was prophesized by Isaiah, who wrote 800 years before the presence of the Lord: "...the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali...by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:1-2). In Galilee and especially around Gennesaret there are holy shrines where marvellous gospel incidents took place. Amongst them are the Holy Monastery of the Apostles in Tiberias, where the third appearance of the Lord happened after His Resurrection, Bethsaida, Magdala and ancient Capernaum.

Lake Tiberias

A multitude of occurrences have been related to the Holy Land, as its natural beauty makes it a much travelled holy shrine. Lake Tiberias is on the south part of Galilee. It is a small interior sea with salted water, 212 metres below the surface of the Mediterranean. The river Jordan estuary crosses Palestine through the lake and concludes in the Dead Sea. Capernaum, Bethsaida and Magdala were some of the thriving towns surrounding the lake during the Lord's epoch. The name of the lake in Hebrew and in the Old Testament is Kinneret stemming from the word Kinor (violin) because its shape from a sky view looks like a violin. In the Gospels it is called Lake Gennesaret. Churches and monasteries have been built around the lake since the Byzantine era. Of interest to the pilgrims are not only the original sites of gospel related wonders, but

also ruins of monuments of the Christian antiquity.

Magdala

As referenced in the New Testament, the name of the town is related to Mary Magdalene. It is possible that Magdala is equivalent to Evangelist Mark's village Dalmanutha where Jesus went after the miracle of feeding the five thousand people. In Greek historical writings, especially according to Iossipos Flavius, Magdala is known as Tarihea. The town was famous then for the parched fish made there, from which it got the name Tarihea. Archaeological excavations brought to light ruins of a synagogue of the time of Jesus and ruins of an old Byzantine Monastery. Monk Epiphanius who visited Magdala in mid 19th century found a church built over the place that used to be Mary Magdalene's house.

Nazareth

Nazareth is Joseph and Theotokos' birthplace and the small village where Jesus lived in his childhood. It used to be a small village with few inhabitants but it became a holy shrine after the 4th century with the spreading of Christianity. During the Byzantine years there were churches or chapels over four holy shrines: The Spring of the Annunciation, Joseph's cave – workshop, the synagogue in which Christ preached and the cliff over which the Jews wanted to kill Christ (Luke 4:29). These shrines are preserved to this day.

At the Annunciation Spring there is the Greek Orthodox Church of Archangel Gabriel, while at the synagogue of Nazareth there is the Greek-Catholic church-synagogue. At the site where Theotokos' house and Joseph's workshop used to be, there is the impressive Latin Church of the Annunciation where the pilgrim can see Byzantine artefacts. A chapel at the site of the Cliff hosts in its premises the ruins of an older Byzantine church and monastery.

The Holy Monastery in Cana of Galilee

Cana is located near Nazareth. It is the place of Christ's first miracle, when He and His mother were guests at Nathanael's wedding and He turned the water into wine. Tradition has it that the church in Cana is built over the former house of Simon the Cananite, one of the twelve Apostles. Inside the church there are two of the stone vessels that were used at the first miracle and a part of Simon the Cananite's holy relics.

The Holy Monastery of the Apostles in Capernaum

The Church of the Apostles is on the shore of the lake. It is built on the place of the house that Jesus was preaching and healed the paralyzed man who was lowered down from the roof in front of Him (Luke 5:18-25). Capernaum was the central place of the Lord's teaching and where he worked a multitude of miracles; He healed the two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31), the woman that "was bowed together and could in no wise lift herself up" (Luke 13:11), Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13), the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34), He resurrected Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43), etc. There used to be a synagogue in this area where the Lord would go on Saturdays to fulfil his religious obligations. The house of Saint Peter's mother-in-law was nearby. Today in Capernaum only the ruins of the synagogue and the Church of the Apostles by the lake are preserved.

Capernaum

Ancient Capernaum was built on the west of Galilee. During the Roman epoch Capernaum was a big customs centre and among other people eminent publicans inhabited the city. During the Byzantine era, Capernaum was an established Christian shrine because it was related to the events of the New Testament. After the Arab occupation in the Holy Land, Capernaum fell in recession and it was completely abandoned after an

annihilating earthquake in the 11th century. Today Capernaum stands in ruins near the shore of Gennesaret. On the east side of the ancient town there is a Byzantine Church of the Apostles with exquisite wall paintings. It is built at the place where the paralyzed man was lowered down from the roof with his mat in front of Christ. When the Lord saw him He healed him saying at first "Friend, your sins are forgiven" and then "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (Luke 5:18-25). The Lord had made Capernaum the centre of his mission and teaching. The Evangelist Matthew writes accordingly: "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtal" (Matthew 4:13). Many of the Apostles were born in Capernaum. It was there that the Holy mystery of Eucharist was taught and where the Lord gave the marvellous "Sermon of the Mount". Among the many miracles Jesus performed in the surrounding area are also the healing of the Demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1-20) and Peter's mother-in-law as "he touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him" (Matthew 8:15).

The Holy Church of the Twelve Apostles in Tiberias

The Holy Church of the Apostles on the west shore of Tiberias was initially built by Saint Helen when she came to Jerusalem and found the Sacred Cross. She then built the Holy Church of the Resurrection and many other churches in places that witnessed incidents from the Lord's life. In Tiberias the Lord appeared for the third time after His Resurrection and Saint Helen built a church there in honour of the Apostles. The church was destroyed by war raids and rebuilt by Justinian in the 6th century. It was a three-aisled church. The middle aisle was dedicated to the Gathering of the Holy Apostles, the north to Saints Peter and Paul and the south to the equal to the Apostles Saint Mary Magdalene. Justinian's Church was also destroyed and reconstructed by Markinianos in 650 A.D. When the Crusaders came in 1200 A.D. they seized the church and

demolished it. The present church stands over the ruins of Markinianos' church. In 1978 refurbishment brought the church to its initial form. The construction site encompasses parts of the medieval walls of the city. On the south-east side there is Saint Nikolaos chapel. The lake's water level has been rising making an embankment fill necessary for the church, as well as a dam at the outlet of the water towards the river Jordan so that the water is used for irrigation purposes. The Church belongs to the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.