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Jerusalem

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was preaching in its streets, Jerusalem had already been an important Jewish city for a millennium. Even before it was established as a Jewish capital, its site had seen human settlement for 2,500 years.

Just as Jerusalem is dear to Jews for its central place in their history, it is also precious to Christians for its place in New Testament events, and to Muslims because it is the place they believe their prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven.

Indeed, millions of words have been penned by adherents of each religion about Jerusalem, a city as much alive to visitors because of its dead as it is because of its current late 20th century inhabitants. This point is laid out extensively in Karen Armstrong's book *Jerusalem - One City, Three Faiths*, published this year.

"When they discussed the troubled present, both Israelis and Palestinians turned instinctively to the past, their polemic coursing easily from the Bronze Age through the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Again, when Israelis and Palestinians proudly showed me around their city, the very monuments were drawn into the conflict," wrote Armstrong, a noted author of religious history books.

King David started the area that became known as Jerusalem down the road to its central place in Western and Middle Eastern history when he took it in a bloodless conquest around 1004 B.C., according to Armstrong.

"A city which had hitherto been of only secondary importance in Canaan had been drawn into the ambit of the tradition that would eventually become historical monotheism," Armstrong wrote. "This would make it one of the most sacred - and hence one of the most disputed - places in the world."

Jerusalem today has a population that bespeaks its multi-religious history, according to information provided by a display on the city's eight gates that the Rochester Jewish Federation presented last week at the Jewish Community Center in Brighton.

Created by the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston, and titled "A Walk Through Jerusalem," the display noted that the city is currently home to 378,200 Jews, 131,800 Muslims and 14,500 Christians.

For Jews, the city's most important religious site is the Western, or "Wailing" Wall, the only remnant of Jerusalem's famed Temple that was destroyed by the Romans in the first century A.D. Thou-

sands of Jews - and non-Jews - visit the wall daily to pray, the display notes. Many place their petitions on pieces of paper that they stick between the giant stones that make up the wall, Murphy said.

"I think there's no mortar left between those huge stones," she said.

For Christians, Jerusalem contains such sites as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, reportedly located where Christ was buried, and the Upper Room, located in the same neighborhood where Jesus ate the Last Supper with his apostles, Father Glogowski said. The priest said visiting such sites and realizing that Christians have done the same for centuries touched him deeply.

"You feel near God when you're standing there," he said.

Muslims consider Jerusalem their third holiest city, surpassed in importance only by Mecca and Medina, both located in Saudi Arabia, according to Dr. Salahuddin Malik, a history professor at the State University of New York College at Brockport, where he specializes in Islam and the Middle East.

In addition to believing that Mohammed ascended to heaven from Jerusalem, Muslims also believe that in 620 A.D., Mohammed once took a nocturnal flight on a winged horse with the angel Gabriel from Mecca to Jerusalem's Temple Mount where he met several long-dead prophets and then also met such figures as Moses and Jesus as he ascended to heaven from the Mount. In heaven, Mohammed received divine guidance, and then returned to Jerusalem, Malik said.

When he was back in Jerusalem, Moses asked Mohammed how often his people prayed each day. Mohammed said 50 times, and Moses told him to go back to God and ask if that number could be reduced, Malik said. He added that Moses told Mohammed he should ask for the reduction because Moses knew that most people could not maintain that amount of prayerful devotion on a regular basis.

Mohammed went back to God, and asked for a reduction, and God said that Muslims could pray five times a day, a practice they continue to this day, Malik said.

Marcia Rosenfield, a docent, or museum teacher, at the JCC, traveled to Jerusalem back in the 1970s and recalled pondering the city's multi-religious history as she walked its streets. For example, despite being Jewish, she found walking through the Via Dolorosa (Way of Sorrows) - a section of the city where Jesus reportedly carried his cross - to be a moving experience.

"I am not a Christian, but it was terribly exciting to me to stand in the Via Dolorosa," she said. "I said to myself 'I'm walking on pavement that's very dear to my Christian friends.'"

Alice Nussbaum, a staff member of the JCF's Department of Jewish Education Services, felt the same historical pull when she visited Jerusalem three years ago.

"Because we are walking through the same streets and stones and paths that our ancestors walked, (Jerusalem) has a very spiritual atmosphere and it helps you to understand the continuity of the generations," she said.

Christians can have the same feelings about Jerusalem - and the Holy Land in general - because visiting there puts historical flesh on scriptural bone, Murphy explained.

"It goes right down to the core of your faith and soul," Murphy said. "I'll never, never, ever hear the readings of the Gospel again without being transported instantly there."

Like Rosenfield, Murphy walked the Via Dolorosa, a series of very narrow streets that made her contemplate Christ's painful walk to Calvary, she said.

"I know what a struggle it was," she said. "I got in the tighter confines of that walkway."

Jerusalem's trimillennial anniversary sees the city carrying its own cross of disputed identity once again. As reported by the Associated Press, Netanyahu replied "Never" last week to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's renewed call for the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

"The prime minister-elect stresses once again that Israel's position is that Jerusalem will never be divided and will remain united under Israeli sovereignty," the new Israeli government stated in a press release.

Jerusalem has seen a lot of rulers claim sovereignty in its 3,000 years. Almost a score of nations and rulers have taken the city for their own at one time or another. Ancient Israelites and Babylonians, Romans and Ottomans, European crusaders and the British - all ruled Jerusalem in different eras before Jordanians and Israelis split the city for 19 years following the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

Malik said the city has been a prize to be claimed for so long because it arouses equally strong passions among adherents of all three monotheistic faiths.

"Until Jerusalem's fate is decided, there will be no peace in the Mideast," Malik said. "The best thing would be internalization of the city whereby all three faiths share sovereignty of the city."

Whether or not Malik's solution would work, Rosenfield wondered whether the peace that Jerusalem seeks might already be there in its midst, as lived out in the day-to-day relations she witnessed among ordinary Muslims, Christians and Jews who live in the city.

"By golly, it works," Rosenfield recalled saying to herself as she saw different groups of people rubbing shoulders in Jerusalem.

"Why are the politicians making such a mess of it?" she concluded.

Lesson learned in David's city

Father Edward L. Palumbos, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece, has been on sabbatical since Jan. 15 and will return June 15. Most of his time was spent in Jerusalem. In late April, Father Palumbos sent an insightful Easter message via electronic mail to the *Catholic Courier*. It is excerpted as follows.

"It was late in the afternoon on Easter Sunday and I had spent a very short night in sleep and (a) long morning in attending several services in the Old City in an attempt to 'take it all in' on this special day. I was walking back to the bus stop through the winding streets of the City when I passed the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

"As I paused there... I noticed the Jerusalem police guarding the entrance. They tried to keep some semblance of order in the stream of the pilgrim faithful. Next to the door were six or seven Israeli soldiers in their khaki uniforms, automatic weapons slung over their shoulders, extra ammunition clips taped to the gun stocks.

"What a sign of contradiction, I thought to myself, soldiers with machine guns guarding the tomb of the Risen Christ, ready to rough up anyone who got out of line.

"Then, as if to immediately challenge my critical observation, a revelation of the Divine Sense of humbling humor and God's facility to write straight with crooked lines unfolded right before my eyes. I saw one of the young Israeli soldiers head back to the door. And then, reaching into his shirt, he pulled out a chain around his neck from which hung a crucifix.

"With a humble pride he walked to the house of Christian places, his cross on his chest, his army uniform on his back.

"He walked into a quiet corner and there, making the Sign of the Cross in the Eastern tradition, I watched in silence as he prayed quietly on this the Feast of New Life and Resurrection.

"As I stood there watching as he prayed, I was moved to prayer as well. My prayer was one of thanksgiving for this moment of Resurrection. I was thinking, yet again, that God's ways are not our ways and that God can bring profound good out of all situations and circumstances. My judgments about the soldiers had been turned upside down by this young Palestinian member of the Israeli Army.

"The presence of the living God is in our midst. We need only to expect it in unexpected places, much as the disciples on the road to Emmaus learned.

"It was a good Easter Sunday. I am glad that I am in Jerusalem today.

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