

Chronicle of the 2023 Walk to Emmaus.



On the road to Emmaus-Nicopolis

The third JC2033 walk on the road to Emmaus took place from 16 to 23 April 2023. 28 people aged between 20 and 75 took part, from Switzerland, Belgium, England and the Philippines. We were 8 Catholics, 8 Evangelicals and 12 Reformed. Here is a short chronicle of this wonderful week, written mainly by Martin Hoegger and helped by three other participants Jane Maire, Olivia Manderson and Andrew Taylor.

Walking in preparation for the Jubilee of the Resurrection in 2033

From the very beginning of JC2033's vision, the Holy Land has played an important role, since it all began in a garden in Jerusalem, almost 2000 years ago.

But how do we relate to it, and in particular to Jerusalem, where everything is so complicated? We thought about this question in prayer.

That's when we came up with the idea of inviting people to walk along the road to Emmaus in preparation for the Jubilee of 2000 years since his resurrection, every year until 2033. According



to Luke's Gospel, this is the road on which the risen Jesus walked on Easter Day.

The road to Emmaus is the pilgrimage par excellence. Walking it is very special, because Jesus has gone before us. And, since he is risen, his promise is to accompany us. Not just on this road, but on all our roads.

A "pilgrimage"

Walking the Emmaus Way is a "*pilgrimage*", not a tourist trip. Of course, we discovered new sites, magnificent landscapes and beautiful people. But what distinguishes the pilgrim from the tourist is a personal dimension of faith and commitment.

Walking is a human experience. There are pilgrimages everywhere, and Jesus was a pilgrim, going up to the Temple in Jerusalem every year, like the people of Israel.

A pilgrimage is an opportunity to experience a certain detachment and poverty, so beneficial for the soul! Detachment allows the soul to be more open to grace.

Pilgrimage is a privileged time, a favourable opportunity to let God work in us. But he will do so only to the extent of the openness we offer him, in complete freedom.

To entrust our week to God, we said this **pilgrim's prayer** together:

May the God of walking go before you to lead you and give you confidence,

Let him walk behind you to push you and question you,

May he walk beside you to bring you joy and make you feel his presence,

May he move beneath you to support you and give you courage,

May he journey within you to make you feel his forgiveness, his peace, his unconditional affection!

May the God of our journey bless you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

"Living Emmaus

The idea of this pilgrimage is not to separate form from content. We wanted to "**live Emmaus**" by walking, sharing and meeting the various communities along the way. Various communities with whom we want to be connected in order to prepare with them a magnificent celebration in 2033, which will be the birthday present we want to give to Jesus.

We reflected on four aspects of Emmaus: a Way, an Encounter, a Word, a Meal.



This Song from Colombier has accompanied us. I invite you to listen to it and sing along. It's catchy and very easy to learn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8l5y6PX19Jo>

Emmaus, a journey

Emmaus is a great text on the spirituality of pilgrimage. The Christian life is a journey: "*walking in the Spirit*"! Walking is important in Luke's Gospel: Jesus is a man walking with resolution towards Jerusalem. Israel is also a people on the move in the desert, and so is the Church: the story of Emmaus expresses the profound nature of the Church: to be on the move together with Christ among us. The word "*synod*" means "*on a journey together*".

We begin the first day by sharing our "existential Emmaus journeys". Inspired by the Global Christian Forum, each person is invited to say how they have walked with Christ, in seven minutes in small groups of seven people.



The English-speaking group during the "Existential Emmaus Journeys" sharing session

Gethsemane

Then, from the *Salesian Guesthouse*, we go to the Hermitage of Gethsemane: a place where Jesus stopped before walking the Way of the Cross. This tranquil spot with a magnificent view of the old town is owned by the Franciscans. **Brother Diego** welcomes us and explains the meaning of this garden.

God created man and woman in a garden. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord is looking for us, just as he looked for Adam: « *Where are you?* » Let us allow ourselves to be met by the Lord in this place where we remain in silence to seek the Lord.



A blessed hour of silence in the Hermitage of Guetsémané

We then break for an hour of silence, during which we are invited to give thanks for our personal Emmaus journeys, by writing a text or a prayer.

This time is followed by sharing in small groups, where everyone can share a prayer or a thought if they wish. Here is this prayer, the fruit of my meditation:

*Lord, I know you're looking for me in this garden,
just as you looked for Adam in another garden.
I open myself up to you and let you meet me.
I lay myself bare before you and make myself transparent.
You know my paths. Let me share yours!
Give me times of surprise and desolation,
but also times of momentum and renewal!
Thank you for always being there, present in the depths of my being,
Thank you for the assurance that nothing could separate me from you!*

*Lord, I too am looking for you in this garden,
as the bride in the Song of Songs searches for her beloved.
Make my heart burn for you again,
and that I give myself to you without taking myself back!*

Via Dolorosa and Basilica of the Resurrection



At the Lion's Gate, our first guide is waiting for us. He will take us along the Via Dolorosa to the Anastasis, the Basilica of the Resurrection.

We stop at the Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed a paralytic and where we learn about the importance of water for Jerusalem and Temple worship. We follow the various stations to the "Holy Sepulchre" in the Anastasis.

Behind it is a tomb from the time of Jesus, used by the Syriac Orthodox Church on feast days. It probably gives the best idea of Jesus' tomb as it was originally. Here we sing "*Thine be the Glory, Risen Conquering Son*", in French and English. It was a beautiful moment, in a place that is rarely visited, just as the crowds were rushing to visit the Holy Sepulchre!

A tomb from the time of Christ, behind the Holy Sepulchre, in the Basilica of the Resurrection.

On the way back, we cross the Damascus Gate, where we have to walk against the tide of people on their way to the Al Aksa Mosque. Tonight is in fact "*the night of destiny*" when, according to Muslim tradition, the Koran was revealed to Mohammed, undoubtedly the most important night of the year in Islam.

Emmaus, an encounter

The next day, we walk from Neve Illan to Emmaus-Nicopolis. About fifteen kilometres, the longest walk of our stay. It was a magnificent day... but hot, as we felt during the few climbs, whereas most of the route was a gentle descent.

Today we are meditating on "*Emmaus, an encounter*". We note that Jesus takes the first step and takes an interest in his disciples by asking them a question.

Through dialogue, he creates a relationship with them. This shows the importance of friendship and dialogue. But the disciples received him badly: they almost "shouted" at Jesus! However, Jesus was not discouraged: he wanted to meet them... and more: communion!



Stopover on the way to Emmaus-Nicopolis

Despite the women's testimony about the empty tomb and the words of the angels, the two disciples could not believe that Jesus had really risen.

This is also a great text on doubt and the difficulty of believing. With the disciples of Emmaus, we walk with the great procession of doubters for whom the resurrection remains an impossibility.

Here are two questions we pondered along the way: how do I see myself in relation to the resurrection of Jesus? How do I relate to those who do not share my faith in the Risen Lord?

Arriving at Emmaus-Nicopolis, we are met by **Brother Johannes**, who offers us drinks and introduces us to the Community of the Beatitudes. He then takes us on a tour of the archaeological site of the ancient Byzantine basilica. We end the day with a meal at the community, where we also hear **Brother Friedrich** who introduces us to the Lutheran Community of Latroun, which is located next to Nicopolis.

The resurrection, the peace of Jerusalem

The morning of Wednesday 19 April begins with a Bible-sharing session in small groups using the "*lectio divina*" approach. The text proposed follows the Emmaus story, when Jesus meets his disciples in the cenacle, or "upper room". The physical nature of his resurrection is striking! Here are my thoughts:

"He is risen, and from now on time has no bite on him, and space imposes no limitations on him. He is our God, strong and powerful, among us... truly risen! His glorified body is not a ghost or a spirit, but that of a man who eats, drinks and lets himself be touched. He is also a real man among us, close to us all, and interested in everything we experience. That's why we want to live with him and honour him with our bodies, our souls and our spirits".



The group with Ibrahim Azar, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land

We then go to Muristan, next to the Church of the Redeemer, to meet Lutheran **Bishop Ibrahim Azar**, who explains the origins of his family, going back almost to apostolic times. He tells us how his Church wants to bear witness to the Risen Lord. For him, the Road to Emmaus is the image of the Church on the move with its Saviour in its midst, guiding, inspiring and continually reforming it. The resurrection is the secret of the peace of Jerusalem.

Bishop Azar made no secret of the difficulties facing Christians. He noted an increase in discrimination against them, particularly since the last elections, and emphasised the role of the Church in standing against extremism. "Courage, perseverance and love are the words that come to mind when I think of him", said one of the participants in our group.

Led by our guide, Nadine Roumi, we then visit some of the most important places in Jerusalem: the Kotel (the Western Wall), Mount Zion with the Cenacle and the Church of St Peter in Gallicante. Next to this church is a staircase on which Jesus undoubtedly descended to the Kidron valley after sharing his last meal.



According to a tradition, it was here that he said his prayer for unity (John 17). **Dominik Berberich**, professor of Sacred Scripture at the Franciscan Theological Institute and a member of the Focolare Movement, joins us to explain the movement's plan to build a centre for dialogue here.

From left to right : Dominik Berberich, Olivier Fleury, Chantal and Martin Hoegger, in front of the "Stairs of Unity".

« A friendly presence »

On Thursday 20 April, we visit the Benedictine monastery of Abu Ghosh, with its church built by the Crusaders in the 12^e century.

Here we meet **Brother Olivier**, a colourful speaker, who explains how monastic life began again in this place. The founder of this monastery (Dom Grammont, prior of Le Bec Hellouin) had a great

affection for the Jewish people. "Let us never forget the rock from which we were hewn, let us not cut ourselves off from our roots, or we shall wither away", he liked to say.



His vision was as simple as it was powerful: "be a cordial presence, at the sources of our faith, listening to the mystery of Israel, without exclusion". He also had the intuition that ecumenical dialogue could only bear fruit if we looked together towards the common source of our faith: Judaism.

This cordial presence is expressed through hospitality: receiving Christ in every visitor, as the Rule of Saint Benedict requires.

Many Jews, alone or in groups, visited the monastery. When Brother Olivier tells them that the monks pray with psalms, they are surprised. They understood him when they heard him sing a psalm in Hebrew.

Brother Olivier, of the Aou Gosh monastery

The fact that the monastery is also in a Muslim town is a call to a wider encounter. Brother Olivier receives Jewish and Arab Christian groups. "It's important to bear witness to these encounters, not just the divisions that the media feed us. There are wonderful people everywhere. We don't have the right to give up or to despair of the human heart", he says with conviction.

The monastery recently received an award from the University of Beer-Sheva for these encounters.

The crypt of the Abou Gosh church, one of the possible Emmaus sites



Emmaus, a Word

At the *Saxum* centre in the heights of Abu Gosh, the history of the Holy Land comes to life through timelines, maps, interactive screens, and videos. This new, ultra-modern centre allows us to discover the space and time dimensions of the land through which Jesus passed. After this visit and a picnic, we reflect on the third aspect: Emmaus, a Word.

Emmaus is above all a Gospel journey. Through dialogue, Jesus built a relationship with the disciples. Their initial hostility gave way to listening and respect.

The example of Jesus shows that it is necessary to build a relationship of friendship before opening the Scriptures to bear witness to who Jesus really is. But the disciples did not understand what the Scriptures had to say about him. They were "without understanding" and their "hearts were slow to believe". Reading the Scriptures appeals to both the mind and the heart. It is simultaneously intellectual and spiritual.

On our way to Neve Illan through some magnificent countryside, we reflected on this question. First as individuals, then as a couple: what is my relationship with the Scriptures? What place do they have in my "mind" and in my "heart"?

Receiving peace along the way



Painting in the chapel of the Saxum Centre, Abu Gosh

Read what **Andrew Taylor**, from England, has to say:

"As I walk along, I focus on Jesus' words in Luke 24:36 "peace be with you", and my meditation turns to prayer: I give you, Lord, my concerns about the future of Youth with A Mission in Cambridge, about the current global turmoil and about the health of my daughters. You said to your disciples "why are you troubled, why do doubts arise in your hearts"? I receive your peace and your call. Open my mind to your Word so that I may be your witness today, tomorrow and for the rest of my life!"

Yad Hashmonah and the Messianic Jewish community



The "Biblical Meal" in the Yad Hashmonah restaurant

At *Yad Hashmonah*, not far from Neve Illan where our walk took us, we discovered this "Moshav" founded by a group of Finnish Christians. The manager of the hotel at the top of the village, **Tsurial Bar David**, explained to us that these Christians wanted to keep "the memory of the eight" (meaning of *Yad Hashmonah* in Hebrew) Finnish Jews handed over to the Nazis during the 2nd World War.

Miraculously enough, they were given permission to settle there, when it seemed impossible. The wood was imported from Scandinavia. A community of 70 Messianic Jewish families now lives

there. There are currently between 16,000 and 30,000 members of this community in Israel. On Saturday, we'll be taking part in the Shabbat celebrations of one of these families.

After visiting the "Biblical Garden", which explains the agricultural life of Jesus' time, we share a "Biblical Meal", a sort of re-enactment of Jesus' last meal.

He's not here, he's risen!

Thanks to **Jane Maire** for her column on Friday 21 April! We start at the Garden Tomb. Not THE tomb, of course, but one that certainly resembles it. In fact, our guide Nadine Roumi tells us that this tomb dates back to the royal era, i.e. several centuries before Jesus!

We were welcomed and guided by a tall man who reminded many of Indiana Jones! The first thing



he points out is where this garden is located: it's stuck to a rock with two huge holes that look like eyes, or rather a skull, "Golgotha" in Hebrew!

We walk down the flower-decked steps towards the tomb, with its low door that forces us to bend down to enter. This is a time and a place where we wanted to stay to savour his peace, and to savour the truth written at the entrance to the tomb: "He is not here, he is risen" (Mat. 28.6).

The "Garden Tomb" on Easter morning

2023, launch of the "Decade of the Resurrection".

Emmaus, a meal

Before walking towards Motza, Martin stops to consider part of the story. On reaching Emmaus, Jesus acted as if he wanted to continue on his way. But where was he going? *To the Father's house*, he suggests. The Eucharist is not just a memory, but an encounter in which Jesus takes us by the hand to lead us to the Father.

We were given this question for our last walk on the road: What does the Lord's Supper represent in my life? A question that was to provoke a change in my own representation from that day onwards.

After some sharing along the way, I wasn't the only one to be struck by the future aspect of Jesus' words at the institution of the Lord's Supper: "I tell you that from now on I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink the new wine with you in my Father's kingdom". (Matthew 26:29)

Benjamin Cruz, from the Philippines, in Emmaus-Nicopolis, which remembers the meal with Jesus





Jesus calls us to be on our way to the Father's house, just as he was. I imagined Jesus waiting for me and looking forward to celebrating his victory with me when I arrived! Let's not just look back when we take the Lord's Supper, but let's rejoice in the reality that awaits us!

Fall on the path!

"We're heading for Motza, continues Jane. The road out of Jerusalem is a bit tricky at first. And this time, it's my turn to fall! In my deep sharing with Marco, I didn't see the water running down a stretch of concrete path and before I knew it, I was on the ground and banging my hips and elbows hard. I soon realised that I hadn't broken anything. As I continued walking, the pain went away. In the evening, I could hardly feel them. Thank you, Lord!

Arrival at Motza

Motza, the real Emmaus?

At the Yellin house in Motza, **Kokavah Peterman-Lipshitz**, who runs this place of remembrance and, above all, is a passionate archaeologist, shows us that Motza can be identified with the real Emmaus. Here are her arguments: the place is 9 km from Jerusalem, which explains why the two disciples were able to return there before nightfall. The Jewish historian Josephus talks about it. And, above all, some remarkable archaeological discoveries have been made recently, including a Byzantine church and another from the Crusader era.

How is it possible that Christians settled here as early as the 4^e century, if not because they identified it with Emmaus? The hostess takes us on a tour of the area around the "Old Synagogue", which dates to 1976, but whose walls are very old!

At supper, back in Jerusalem, we shared bread and wine in a "non-sacramental agape", a precious reminder of the One who has united us during this week.

We come from different Christian backgrounds, but we are together in Jesus Christ, whose love and grace leave no room for division. *Jesus is our centre, our light, our source!*



Kokavah Peterman-Lipshitz, archaeologist at the Motza site, in the "old synagogue".

A Shabbat celebration

Let's let **Olivia Manderson** tell us about our participation in the celebration of the Messianic community in the Prophets Street in Jerusalem:

On 22 April, the Sabbath, we were invited to join in a Messianic service, a first for many of us. Two streets away from Mea Shearim, the small neighbourhood of ultra-Orthodox Jews where all sorts of black hats and long grey beards meet and where the name Yeshua (Jesus in Hebrew) is forbidden, so-called Messianic Jews celebrate him loud and clear in a welcoming hall where caps



and a few yarmulkes have replaced the black hats of the neighbourhood.

The service - apart from being in Hebrew - has a few similarities with the worship I'm used to: songs of worship, Scripture readings, preaching and a glass of wine at the end of the service...

Messianic community worship.

To begin with, a speaker declaims for a good ten minutes a speech that will remain a mystery to us. We heard Hebrew words we all know: *Eretz Israel, Elohim, Yeshoua*. The language is beautiful and fascinating, but completely unfamiliar to me as a French speaker.

The sermon then turns to the Book of Leviticus. In the time of Jesus, leprosy was a scourge that ostracized those who suffered from it, and the Gospels tell us of several cases of lepers being cured when Jesus, moved by compassion, came across them. The speaker drew a parallel between the spiritual leprosy of society, the defilements of the soul, and this terrible disease that ate away at the body.

In Jesus' day, the healed leper would show himself to the priest, who would confirm his reintegration into public life. Yeshua has become the High Priest par excellence, and it is to him that we must constantly turn to be cleansed of our sins. Corruption is everywhere, and God is looking for men and women who are ready to stand in the breach, like the prophet Nehemiah when the temple was rebuilt.

The tone is passionate and committed. A verse from the prophet Ezekiel is quoted: *"The priests break my law and have no respect for what is holy. They make no distinction between what is holy and what is not. They do not teach the difference between clean and unclean things, and they ignore the Sabbath. As a result, the people of Israel do not respect me"*. We are reminded that the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between God and his people, which inevitably raises questions for us, Western Christians, about our relationship with Sunday. Tension between laxity and legalism, freedom of worship and obedience.

This was followed by a reading from Psalm 92, some prayers and even comments on the political situation in Israel. The speaker insisted forcefully on the need to pray for this country so divided, for peace in Jerusalem and for the Diaspora. He also recalled the pride of being Jewish, but above all the grace of having been redeemed by the sacrifice of Yeshua, the Messiah. A blessing is offered to the congregation at the end of the service.

At the end of the service, strolling down an alleyway, I realised more clearly what I had just witnessed: Jews proclaiming the Gospel as well as the Torah. What the apostle Paul had fought so hard to achieve. One thought comes to mind: yes, Jewish wholeness does exist...

Olivia Manderson

Reflection: listening to someone else's hurt.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus began by listening to the disciples as they walked. He listened to their wounds because they were on a journey of mourning. And they did not agree among themselves about what had happened.

This is what we must also do amongst ourselves: listen to our wounds. And in particular, in Israel-Palestine: listening to the wounds of the Jewish and Arab peoples. Listening allows us to change the way we perceive each other.



Five minutes of silence at the start of the walk to Emmaus, on "Yom HaShoa".

During our pilgrimage, we listened to the wounds of the Jewish people after the Shoah, on *Yom HaShoa*, the day on which the genocide of the Jewish people during World War 2^e is commemorated. Sirens sounded across the country as we began our walk along the Emmaus Road towards Nicopolis. We then stood in silence for five minutes, together with all the Jewish people in Israel. Two members of our group had been invited the day before by a Jewish family to remember the members of their family who had died during these tragic events.

We also experienced *Yom HaZikaron*, the Day of Remembrance for fallen soldiers and victims of terrorist acts, a day of national mourning on which the Jewish people come together to commemorate the victims who have lost their lives since the creation of the State of Israel.

The death of the Jewish people through the Shoah is followed by its resurrection through the creation of the State of Israel!

We also listened to the wounds of the Palestinian people, through the testimonies of Bishop **Ibrahim Azar** and **Andraous Jarshan**, a member of the *Sabeel* movement. On arriving at Emmaus-Nicopolis, we discovered the destruction, in the aftermath of the 6-Day War in 1967, of the villages in what is now Canada Park: Imwas (the Arabic name for Emmaus), Yalou and Beit Nouba. Every year, their former inhabitants make a pilgrimage to these ruins.

What will be the resurrection of this people?

One thing is certain, if we wish to experience the power of the resurrection, we cannot close our eyes to the wounds of others, or to our own, or to those of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples... and so many other wounds.

It was because they were listened to their wounds that the two disciples were able to meet the Risen One and make their own way towards resurrection, and that their eyes were opened to Him, their hearts burning, and they became His witnesses on the spot.

Martin Hoegger

Next year in Jerusalem

On the last evening, we evaluated this wonderful week. Thanks to the times of sharing, we immediately discovered that we were brothers and sisters in Christ. Opening our hearts to each other and focusing on the Word of the Risen Lord is the key to unity.

In a way, the road to 2033 is a road to Emmaus. What we have experienced by walking in unity and diversity is a fine symbol of what we want to experience with the JC2033 initiative.

To those who are new to this journey, we say: **join us on the road to Emmaus in 2024, to experience Easter in Jerusalem, from 29 March to 4 April.**

At Emmaus Nicopolis, you can become the other disciple, next to Cleopas. Was he his wife, as some people think? The fact that he is not mentioned would indicate that everyone can identify with him!

