



**FROM THE WELL**  
Musings and weekly update from the Senior Pastor of Clemmons UMC



March 11, 2014

**OUR STEWARDSHIP - Budget Update will return next week**

**WEEKLY DEVOTION**  
**ISRAEL-Day 5, January 24, 2014**

**Bethlehem-Church of the Nativity**



Day 5 was long and included many historic sites. For that reason, day 5 will be a 2-part series. Next week we will visit the Bethlehem Biblical Institute, Gethsemane, The Church of All Nations, and the Mount of Olives.

We arrived early at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Our goal was to beat the crowds and long line. The holy site, known as the Grotto, was the cave/stable where Jesus was born. We waited

an hour before we could descend into the cave/stable of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1-6, Luke 2:4-16, John 7:42). Once in the cave, we were able to see the altar and 14-point silver star that marks the spot of Jesus birth. There was also another altar, which marks the spot where traditionally Mary laid the newborn Jesus.



The Church of the Nativity was built on top of the birthplace. The original church/basilica was constructed during the reign of Constantine.

Work on the building started in 329. It was

dedicated by Constantine's mother, Queen Helena on May 31, 339. The church was badly damaged during the Samaritan revolt of 521-528 and was the only church that survived the



Persian invasion of 614. Mosaics of the three Magi in Persian costume helped save the church because they resembled the appearance of the invaders. Incredibly, Mosaic floors from the 4th century church survived and are still visible today.

Today, the church is jointly administered by the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic traditions. All three-faith traditions

maintain monastic communities on the site. The space and time of use for worship, prayer, the singing of hymns, and even janitorial duties is negotiated.

Traveling to Bethlehem is not easy. Bethlehem is in Palestinian occupied territory and is separated from the rest of Israel by a huge wall and military checkpoints. Construction of the barrier began in 2002 in an attempt to stop suicide bombings in Israel. Upon completion, the barrier will be 430 miles long and separate all of the West Bank from the rest of Israel. While the barrier has been effective in slowing down attacks in Israel, it has brought deep division and appears as an ugly scare across the land.



### **Bethlehem-Jerome's Caves and St. Catherine's Church**



Located within the Church of the Nativity complex are St. Catherine's church and Jerome's caves. Saint Jerome moved to Bethlehem in 385 A.D. He lived in caves, located under the Roman Catholic church of St. Catherine. For 36 years he studied, wrote, and translated the Old and New Testaments into Latin (The Vulgate).

St. Catherine's church is named after St. Catherine of Alexandria. The church is said to be built on the site of Christ's appearance to Catherine and is the place where He predicted her martyrdom. The church is built in modern Gothic revival style. It is the church where the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem celebrates the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve that many of us have seen on television.



### **THE SHEPHERD'S FIELD**



The Shepherd's Field is located in the town of Beit Sahour, located just east of Bethlehem. The Shepherd's field is the traditional site where, according to the New Testament, an angel announced the birth of Jesus to the Shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). St. Helena started a convent on the site. Today it is known as the Shepherd's cave.

*Matthew*