

A Journey to Jewish Roots

Sadly, the very mention of the Holy Land today brings to mind scenes of conflict and human tragedy. But for Elizabeth Young of Hobart the memories of her month long stay in Jerusalem last November still fill her with joy, fascination and delight.

What began as an enthusiastic email from a friend studying in far-away Israel, led to Elizabeth taking time off from her business commitments, her parish involvements and her family (Elizabeth is married to Tom and mother of ten children aged 6-23), to spend a whole month at the Bat Kol Institute in Jerusalem. There, under the direction of Jewish and Christian scholars, she began a journey of discovery into the Jewish roots of her Christian faith.

Says Elizabeth, 'Reading and studying the Hebrew Scriptures I began to discover the world of Jesus the Jew. I began to know something of the thought patterns, the cultural outlook, the spiritual insights and traditions that were those of Jesus and our earliest ancestors in faith.

'Take the practice of observing Sabbath for instance. Since my return home my enthusiasm for Sabbath has spilled over into our family life. Each week the children look forward to our Friday evening "special time", when we lay the table with a special white table cloth and bless the gifts of Sabbath as we light the Sabbath candles and bless

and share the bread and wine. The blessing of the children has become a precious moment. Our children enjoy this part especially, as their Mum and Dad embrace each of them separately and pray a blessing over them. Our meal together has become a focal point of the week, often shared with guests – a time to celebrate our uniqueness as a people created, chosen and loved by God.

'In Jerusalem I learned the richness and expressiveness of that constant element of Jewish prayer: the blessing. Every day the Jewish people bless God. *Baruk attah Adonai, elohenu meleck ha-olam. Blessed are you Lord God King of the Universe.*

There are many prayers of blessing, always preceded by these words. God is always addressed with a blessing: Blessed are You... Knowing that Jesus prayed this many times a day, I now hear with new ears the words of Jesus as he addressed his Jewish audience in his Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are you...'

So, why would a Catholic go to Jerusalem and study Judaism? Says Elizabeth, 'For me it was simply a response to God's call. And the experience was life-changing, an inner sense of having come home, of belonging. I have discovered as a follower of Jesus that I have a rich heritage to draw upon - a heritage retained and preserved in Torah and Judaism that adds a new depth to my life as a Christian.'

She continues: 'When Pope John XXIII addressed the Jewish people in 1960 with the words "I

am Joseph your brother," a new era in Christian-Jewish relations began. In the document *Nostra Aetate* (1965) the Second Vatican Council acknowledged errors of the past that portrayed the Jewish people as having forfeited their place as children of God by rejecting the Messiah. When in 1986 Pope John Paul II met with the Rabbi Toaff in Rome Synagogue it was the first time a pope had been in a synagogue since St Peter in the first century. John Paul II's words "You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers" acknowledged to the world that "the Jews are beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable calling."

This developing interreligious dialogue of our times has been welcomed by Christians and Jews alike. Elizabeth's experience in Jerusalem is one grassroots story of this dialogue being embraced in the heart of a Tasmanian Catholic family. •

