

St. Stephen's Church Comes Roaring Back on Easter Sunday!
Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia. (BAS)



The past three Easters 2020, 2021 and 2022 were muted by the pandemic, but this year the church was filled with people once again. The church echoed with laughter, excitement and joy, which reminded me of the first Easter story and how it transformed Mary Magdalene, the disciples and everyone who witnessed the first resurrection—three days of despair that ended in joy. Our three muted Easters gave birth to a church packed with laughter and wellness.

As we celebrate Easter, I could not help but think about my ten-day pilgrimage in the Holy Land last month. In the Holy Land we followed the life of Jesus from where he was born in Bethlehem to where he grew up in Nazareth, to Jordan River where he was baptised, to the Mount Transfiguration and from where he preached on the Mount of Beatitudes to where he performed miracles at the Sea of Galilee, and to the place where he was crucified, died, was buried and rose from the dead.

On March 25, we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Our morning started with the stations of the Cross, as we slowly made our way to the tomb. When we arrived at the tomb, located in church, we found that it was not open yet. So, we joined the line with hundreds of pilgrims, shoulder to shoulder.

In that period of waiting, the Patriarch of the Holy City -Greek Orthodox Church, came to celebrate the Feast of Annunciation and his own birthday. It was a spectacle, surrounded

by several guards, clergy, incense, bells and people striking the ground. At last, the tomb opened and people went in, four at a time. When my turn came, I slowly walked in and knelt in front of the rock and placed my hand on the place where Jesus's head had lain, kissed the place and said my prayer.

Of course, Jesus was not there but at the same time there was a unique presence. Like he is not here but he is here. It is indescribable. My heart was deeply touched. The words of the angel reverberated in my mind, soul and heart, "He is not here. He is risen. Go tell the world what you saw and experienced." This was real. It was a visit into the supernatural and the natural, simultaneously. This is one of the most Holy sites in the world, the place where Jesus rose from the dead. I have known the story and wholeheartedly believed the resurrection for a long time –but actually being in the very place where it happened more than two thousand years ago made it more real. For me, this was a life-changing experience

I am thankful that I returned home during Holy Week, because I came back walking on air. A few people have asked me how I am doing. Well, the vitality and inspiration I received in the Holy Land has carried me through the week, and I pray that it will continue to do so in years to come. My friends, when we are confronted with the resurrection of Jesus, everything changes and life is new again. That's the way it is with resurrection, new life and Easter. It brings a new purpose, impulse and a joyful movement to life. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Joanna (my patron saint -I am a Canon of St Joanna), the disciples, Cleophas and unnamed friend and the 500 plus people, could not contain their excitement. Everyone, it seems, was shouting and running around. Everything had changed. The resurrection and subsequent empowering with the Spirit transformed them forever.

May the hope of Easter fill your lives this season and forever.

Christ is Risen indeed. Happy Easter to you and yours,

The Reverend Canon George Kwari