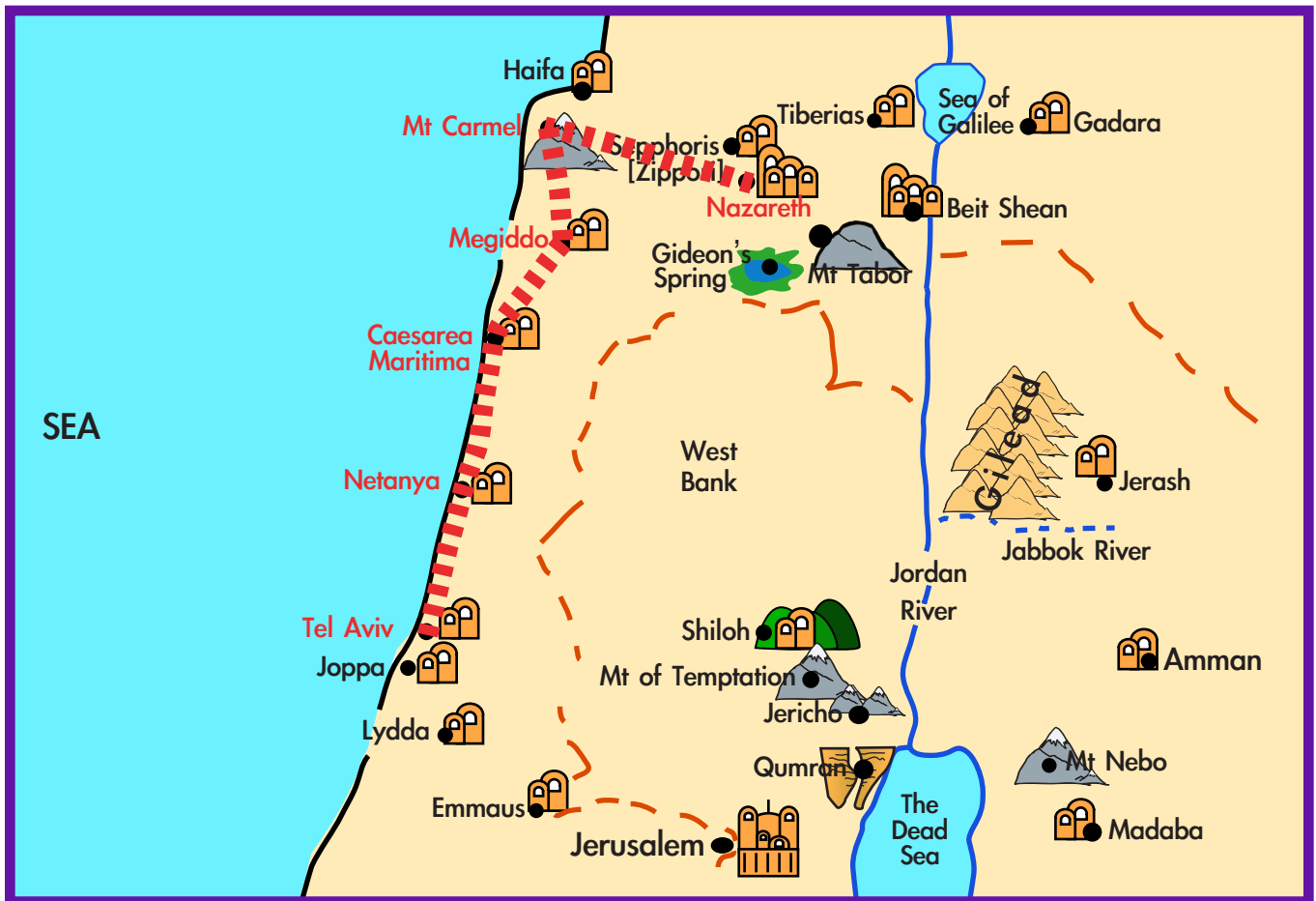


Tour of the Holy Lands - Nazareth



We drove through the busy city of Nazareth looking for a simple reminder of Mary and Joseph. They were ordinary people, who were asked to become parents of the Messiah. What a privilege! Jews had been expecting such a Savior for hundreds of years.





We found a little church built around a spring of water. There is a tradition that Mary was fetching water when the angel visited her. This was just what we wanted. We filed out of the bus, down into the chapel and crowded around the spring. We thought of young Mary. They say she was just a young teenager. When she heard the announcement from the angel that she would be giving birth to the Messiah, her reply was: "I am at your service." (Luke 1:26-38)





We thought about Joseph, too, a simple carpenter. After waking from a dream in which an angel gave him a similar message, he too put away his fears, obeyed the angel and bravely married Mary. (Matt 1:18-25)



What about Jesus? Could we find a reminder of him here in Nazareth? He grew up here, went to school and synagogue here, learned to be a carpenter here. What else happened in his life here? Jesus had been living quietly in Nazareth, but at the age of 30, he left home and went down to the Jordan River. At his Baptism, God announced: "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

After he passed tests in the wilderness, he began to heal others. Now that he had heard it from God, it was time to announce to his family, friends and neighbors back home who he really was - the expected Messiah.



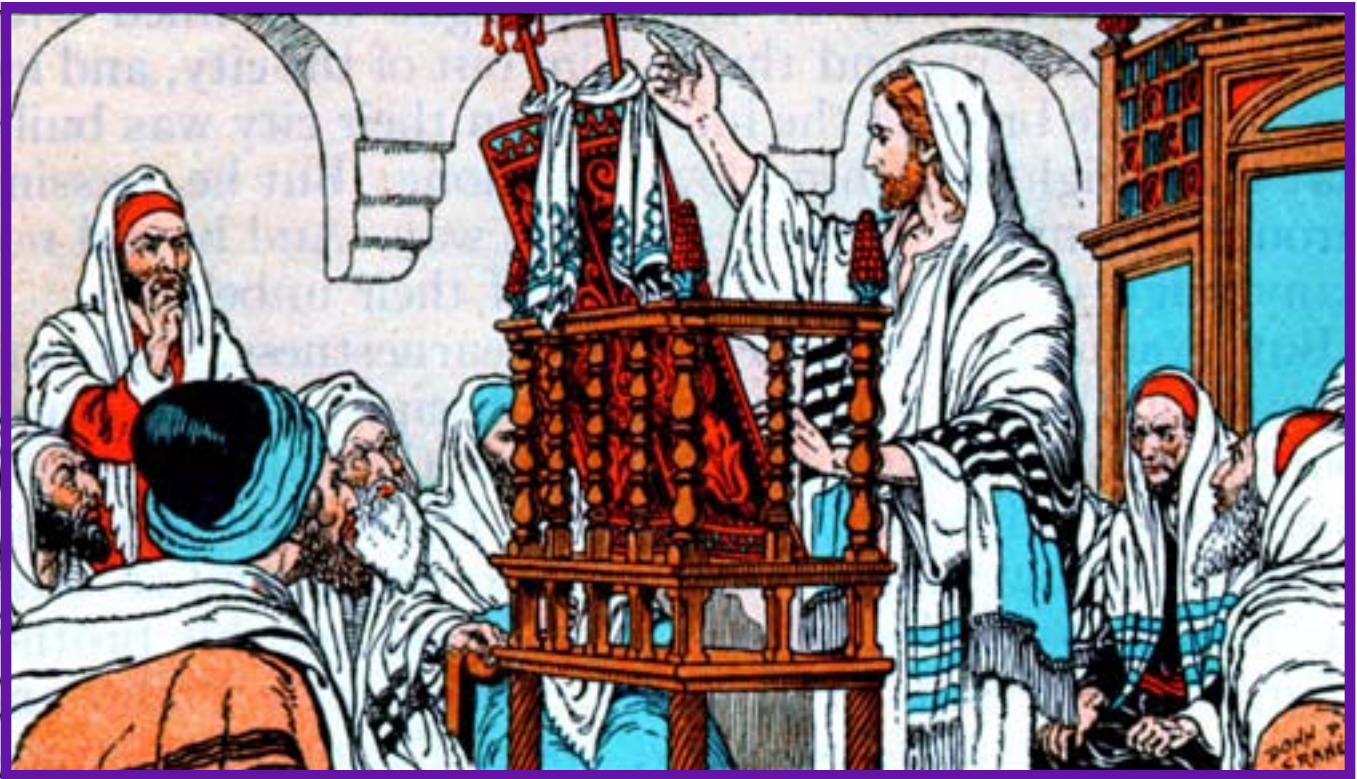


The synagogue was the perfect place to do it- a small-town synagogue like this one we found. We sat on the outside benches. Jesus knew everyone there that Sabbath day. They invited him to read the chosen Scripture. It was perfect - the prophecy about the Messiah, about himself. (Isa 61:1,2) Isaiah listed all the things the Messiah would do - preach and heal. When it was time for Jesus to make comments about the passage he had just read, he made his announcement: "This scripture is coming true right here, today." (Luke 4:16-30)

ISAIAH 61:1,2

**THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD GOD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE THE LORD
HAS ANOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD TIDINGS TO THE POOR;
HE HAS SENT ME TO HEAL THE BROKENHEARTED,
TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND THE OPENING
OF THE PRISON TO THOSE WHO ARE BOUND;
TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD, AND THE
DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD;
TO COMFORT ALL WHO MOURN,**





At first his neighbors loved his words. They were proud of their local boy. But then they changed their minds. On second thought, where would this plain carpenter's son get the talent to be the Messiah? Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said, "You heard of my healings. You wonder why I don't heal here. I don't heal here because you don't listen. You would rather listen to a stranger than to me. Your ancestors never listened to prophets, either. God never sent Elijah to widows of Nazareth. Instead, He sent him to a widow in a foreign city up north. God never sent Elisha to heal lepers in Nazareth. Instead, He sent him to heal a Syrian leper.

Jesus really made them angry. Who did he think he was, comparing himself to famous holy prophets in the Scriptures?!



The crowd was so angry, they grabbed Jesus and dragged him out of town. They were going to push him over a cliff. But he fooled them and came through the angry mob unhurt. This would be the first in a long list of times when God would protect Jesus. But Jesus would never return to Nazareth again.

Here we were, sitting in a synagogue in Jesus' home town. We ask ourselves: "Would we have listened to the words of the local carpenter?"