

July 2021

Birth of Christianity Trip 2022 – Greece & Turkey

Dear Friends and Fellow Pilgrims,

As many of you know, for some time now we have had the privilege of leading special overseas study tours to the lands of the Bible. We are preparing once again to trace the footsteps of Paul and other courageous early missionaries as they established the church in Greece and Turkey. As the Acts of the Apostles testifies, Paul himself blazed a trail through some of the most fascinating parts of the ancient Mediterranean world, planting Christian communities wherever he went. This is a journey you should not miss.

Entitled “The Birth of Christianity,” scheduled for April 30 to May 15, 2022, this program will explore historical sites in Greece and Turkey made sacred by the presence of the Apostle Paul but also by the Evangelists John, Matthew and Luke, and other early Christian leaders. No other area in the world can match the natural beauty and spectacular archaeological and historical sites connected with the first traces of the early Church as it moved out beyond the boundaries of Israel into the wider Gentile world. Here is found the historical foundations not only of the New Testament itself, but also the development of the earliest Apostolic Church as it began to take root in the Greco-Roman world.

The Itinerary

The itinerary we are proposing to you is the following:

We will leave Chicago (or other similar staging points convenient to you in the U.S.) on Saturday, April 30, arriving in Thessaloniki, Greece on Sunday, May 1. This is the region of ancient Macedonia, the famed homeland of Alexander the Great and the first area that Paul visited in Europe.

On Monday, May 2 we will visit the beautiful Mediterranean port city of Kavala that is the site of ancient Neapolis where Paul first landed, and then the nearby magnificent ruins of the Roman city of Philippi, Paul’s favorite community. We will celebrate Eucharist at the grove of trees near the river where the Acts of the Apostles tells us Paul met Lydia and made his first converts in this region.

On Tuesday, after touring Thessaloniki itself, we will head due west to ancient Boerea, another city Paul visited, and then to Vergina, the site where the kings of ancient Macedonia were entombed, including the tomb of Philip, the father of Alexander—one of the most spectacular archaeological finds of the modern era. Then a beautiful drive down the central highlands of Greece, through the

historic pass of Thermopylae to the region of Meteora with its breathtaking monasteries built on the peaks of high rock mountaintops. Here we will overnight in the lovely Divani Hotel and in the morning explore some of these haunting and beautiful Orthodox monasteries.

Wednesday, May 4, after visiting the monasteries in the sky, we come back down to earth and once more pick up Paul's trail, travelling down the east coast of Greece by superhighway to Athens, arriving there in late afternoon, staying at the centrally located five-star Hotel Divini Palace Acropolis, convenient to the Acropolis and the other attractions of ancient Athens. It is a short walk to the famous Plaka area with its tavernas and shops.

Thursday, May 5, we have a short drive along the shores of Piraeus, passing over the famous Corinth canal (begun by the Emperor Nero!) to one of the most important places connected with Paul, the ancient Roman city of Corinth. We will have a thorough tour of this site so filled with memories of the apostle. After lunch in a nearby Greek village, we will conclude our visit with Eucharist right on the shore at the ancient port of Cenchreae which Paul mentions in his letter to the Romans and from where he set sail for Ephesus. Then back to Athens for some additional visits in this bustling capital.

Friday, May 6, we will check out of our hotel early and spend the first part of the day doing further exploration of Athens, including the Agora where Paul preached, the Areopagus where he explained the message of Christ to the leaders of the city, and then, of course, a guided visit to the Acropolis and its Parthenon, one of the most beautiful human structures ever created. In the late afternoon we will head to the Athens airport and fly to the Turkish city of Izmir. We will stay that evening in the beautiful seaside Hotel Ilayda Avangarde in Kusadasi, Turkey.

On Saturday, May 7, we will travel a short distance to the magnificent site of Ephesus, one of the most well-preserved and famous ancient Roman cities in the world. Here there are memories of Paul, of John the Evangelist, of Luke, and of Mary who may have spent her last days here, and we will touch them all. We will visit all the highlights, including the fascinating museum, and conclude our visit with Sunday Mass at the beautiful shrine to Mary in the hills surrounding Ephesus.

On Sunday, May 8, we will drive from Kusadasi to the airport of Izmir (the ancient city of Smyrna) and fly to the southeastern part of the country. Here we will drive along the Mediterranean coast to what in the time of Paul was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, Antioch (now known as Antakya). It was from this city that the first missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas were launched into the Gentile world and here, too, the Gospel of Matthew was first composed. During our stay in Antakya, we will stay at the new Hotel Muze, an extraordinary facility built right over one of the largest ancient mosaics in the world and in view of the grotto of St. Peter in the mountain overlooking Antakya.

On Monday, May 9, we will explore traditional sites in this great city, including its extraordinary new museum and the grotto dedicated to Peter. We will also celebrate Mass at the tiny but fully alive Catholic church which meets in an old Turkish home, and enjoy a lavish Turkish meal in Daphne, a part of the city already famous in Roman times. The afternoon will take us to the nearby mountain where the early (and strange!) mystic Simon Stylites sat on his pillar (he had a great view, as you will see) and then to visit the ruins of the Roman port that served Antioch.

On Tuesday, May 10, we drive through the Turkish countryside from Antioch to Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul. And then from there we head north through an area reminiscent in its mountainous beauty of Switzerland until we arrive at the high plains of Cappadocia and the capital city of the region, Nevsehir. This entire region is filled with the memories of ancient Christianity and some of the earliest great theologians of the ancient church. We stay in the exquisite Hotel Lykia Lodge, with its charming setting.

Wednesday, May 11, we will spend the entire day exploring the unbelievable terrain of Cappadocia, one of the true wonders of the world, with its famous carved cities and beautiful cratered landscape. We will celebrate Eucharist in an ancient cave chapel—rarely visited by others but a favorite, enchanted spot for us!

On Thursday, May 12, we will drive to a nearby regional airport and board our plane for the flight to Istanbul where we spend the last three days of our visit until our departure on May 15. Our hotel is the Hotel Titanic (excuse the name!) in the bustling Taksim Square area of the city. Those who have ever visited Istanbul know that it is one of the most beautiful and fascinating cities in the world. Here east and west meet. During our stay we will visit Sancta Sophia, the Blue Mosque, Topkapi palace, and explore the endless bazaars (including the spice bazaar), capping our visit with a glorious boat ride on the Bosphorus. We will also anticipate Sunday Mass in the nearby church of St. Anthony that also commemorates St. Pope John XXIII, who was once the papal nuncio to Turkey. You will love this city and be sad to leave it when we head to the airport on the morning of Sunday, May 15, to return to the U.S.A.

Covering this terrain and visiting these wonderful historical sites will give you a thorough acquaintance with Paul and earliest Christianity. These are not just the usual tourist stops but our itinerary will bring you into contact with some of the most interesting historical sites in the Mediterranean world. At each place we will read segments from Paul's writings and other New Testament texts as well as provide their historical background. Both Turkey and Greece require that one engage a state-certified guide. I am happy to say that we will have two of the best guides I have encountered in many years of travel to these areas. Alikı Peltiki holds a doctoral degree in ancient history from the University of Thessaloniki and is an expert guide, fluent in English, and totally versed in the history of her country. Ahmet Elçi is a native of Antioch, Turkey, and he, too, has a strong academic background in classical history and is a great lover and interpreter of his country's rich history. I enjoyed working with each of them and you will find them delightful and always ready to help us in any way they can. We will work together, with my providing the biblical background of the places we visit, while our guides complement the briefing with information about classical history and the contemporary context of these countries. I can assure you that your trip will be informative and thoroughly enjoyable.

But this will not be all work and no play! The scenery is simply beautiful, the weather gorgeous, the people most friendly, the hotels and restaurants we use are of the best quality, and the cuisine is wonderful. And, as in the past, the people who go on the trip have always proved to be glorious—with friends like yourselves who enjoy travel and want to do something a bit out of the ordinary.

The price is right, too! Although these prices may be subject to slight change depending on the ultimate size of the group, I am confident they are very close to what the actual price will be. The total cost of the 14 night 15-day land portion will be approximately **\$5,800 per person**. This price includes the three internal flights from Athens to Izmir, from Izmir to Antakya, and from Cappadocia to Istanbul; all lodging (based on double occupancy—all in 5-star deluxe hotels or best available level; single supplement is an additional \$1,000 for the entire trip), half-board (breakfast and dinner), all land travel in air-conditioned coaches, entrances to archaeological sites and museums, guides, tips, and portage. It does not include international transatlantic air travel, lunches, additional beverages with meals, or Turkish visa [which must be obtained prior to departure from the U.S. either at a Turkish embassy or consulate or online—further information will be provided for you once your place on the trip is confirmed]. Recent airline regulations have made the difference between group fares and individual ticket purchases negligible. We will suggest some good connections for departure and arrival and leave the purchase of the transatlantic ticket to each individual. Note, however, we will reserve and purchase your seats on the flights within Greece and Turkey; as noted the cost for these internal flights is included in your overall price.

So how about joining us on this journey that will explore the wellsprings of our faith and our cultural heritage? My partner on the trip and making sure you feel completely at home will be Colleen Kennedy, who is CTU's Vice President for Institutional Advancement and a wonderful veteran of our Bible study tours.

Enclosed is an application form and we would appreciate it if you might fill it out and either mail or e-mail it to Colleen as soon as convenient. If you know of family members or friends who might be interested, please feel free to forward these materials to them, or if you prefer, to give us their names and we will send them the information. Once we have received your confirmation, we will provide further details to prepare for this trip of a lifetime!

Sincerely yours,



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