

BETHLEHEM

THE LOCATION

Bethlehem is a city in the central West Bank, located about 6 miles south of Jerusalem. The city is situated in the Judean Mountains and is surrounded by hills and valleys. It is believed to have been inhabited continuously for more than 3,000 years and has a rich cultural and religious history. Arriving from Jerusalem, tourists will go through a checkpoint, but are rarely stopped, especially when they are on a tour bus. It is advised, however, to take a passport to Bethlehem since it is officially under the control of the Palestinian authority rather than the State of Israel.

THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Bethlehem is a significant location in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In the Old Testament, Bethlehem is mentioned as the birthplace of King David in Ruth 4:11 and 1 Samuel 16:1-18. It is also prophesied as the birthplace of the Messiah in Micah 5:2. In the New Testament, it is the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

CHURCH OF THE HOLY NATIVITY

The Church of the Holy Nativity is one of the oldest churches in the world, built over the site where Jesus Christ is believed by many to have been born. The church was originally built in the 4th century by the Roman Emperor Constantine, but was destroyed and rebuilt several times over the centuries. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and attracts thousands of visitors each year.

In modern times, the church is jointly administered by the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Roman Catholic churches. Visitors can see the grotto where Jesus is said to have been born, as well as the historic building itself, including art going back to the time of the crusaders.

JEROME'S WORK IN BETHLEHEM

St. Jerome, a Christian theologian and historian, lived in Bethlehem from the late 4th century until his death in 420 AD. He is best known for his translation of the Bible into Latin, which became known as the Vulgate. Jerome's tomb is located in the Church of St. Mary Major in Bethlehem, which was built over the site of his home.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

SHEPHERDS' FIELDS

The Shepherds' Fields are located just outside Bethlehem and are believed to be the site where the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. Visitors can see the caves where the shepherds may have been living. The fields are surrounded by olive groves and offer a peaceful escape from the city.

SANCTUARY OF THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO

The Sanctuary of the Gloria in Excelsis Deo is a church located in the Shepherds' Field. It was designed by Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi in the mid-20th century. The chapel is adorned with beautiful mosaics depicting scenes from the Nativity story. Its roof includes star-shaped glass that lets in light from outside, providing a visual of the starry night. The acoustics are phenomenal, and every group will want to stop to sing a few Christmas carols.

MATTERS OF MODERN SIGNIFICANCE

Bethlehem has been a site of religious tension for centuries, with clashes between Christians and Muslims dating back to the early days of Islam. In recent years, tensions have increased due to the rapid growth of the Muslim population in the city and the decline of the Christian population. Bethlehem was once a predominantly Christian city, but the Christian population has been steadily decreasing due to emigration and a low birth rate, while the Muslim population has been growing.

This demographic shift has led to concerns among the Christian community in Bethlehem, who fear that their historical presence in the city is under threat. There have been reports of discrimination against Christians in the city, including incidents of property damage and violence.

One of the thriving trades in Bethlehem is the production of religious art products and souvenirs made of olive wood. Many of these products are crafted by local Christian families who have been making them for generations. Visitors to Bethlehem can find a wide variety of olive wood carvings, including nativity scenes, crosses, and figurines. These products make great souvenirs or gifts. The olive wood trade is an important source of income for many families in Bethlehem, and it is a testament to the city's rich cultural and religious traditions.

HERODIAN

THE LOCATION

Herodian is located about 5 miles southeast of Bethlehem. It is a fortress and palace built by Herod the Great in the first century BCE and is notable for its unique architecture and engineering. Visitors can explore the ruins of the palace and fortress and learn more about the history of the region during the time of Herod.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Herodian was built by Herod the Great in the first century BCE. It was a fortress and palace complex located in the Judean Desert, southeast of Bethlehem. The site was chosen for its strategic location, which allowed Herod to control access to Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The palace and fortress were built atop a man-made mountain, which was created by piling up earth and stones around a natural hill. The base of the mountain was over 200 feet in diameter, and the mountain itself rose to a height of over 80 feet. The complex included a palace, a swimming pool, a bathhouse, and a number of other buildings.

According to the historian Josephus, Herod was buried at Herodian after his death. Herod's tomb has only recently been found, and visitors are now allowed to see the burial place of King Herod.

After Herod's death, Herodian continued to play an important role in the history of the region. During the First Jewish Revolt against the Romans in the 1st century CE, the fortress was used as a base of operations by the Jewish rebels. The fortress was eventually captured by the Romans, and the rebels were defeated.

Today, visitors can explore the ruins of Herodian and learn more about the history of the region during the time of Herod. The site offers stunning views of the surrounding desert and is a testament to the engineering and architectural skills of the ancient world.