

## Reflections on Easter 2010 in and from Jerusalem

When I see the Arum lilies in the garden here, just at their peak in time for the festivals, it reminds me of Frimley Parish church and how my mother loved them, reminiscent of their Easters in Jordan. We have also walked up memory lane in Cyprus since Easter, having a marvelous family reunion with all three children we met there staying at Bellapais, near Kyrenia on the Northern Cyprus (Turkish "occupied") coast at my dear Godfather Iain and Fabienne's home. My father painted the lovely Kyrenia Castle when we spent one or two summer holidays there from Amman.

The week had started on Palm Sunday, walking with thousands from the Mount of Olives in a carnival atmosphere to the Pool of Bethesda (the nearest accessible point to the Temple Mount) where nuns, priests, pilgrims and tourists joined in dance and song together to a Hebrew Christian band, which on reflection, seemed a miracle in itself to witness.

On Maundy Thursday we walked in the moonlit evening through the Old City with many from Christ Church (the first church built in the Middle East), far down the Kidron Valley to the east, and then up towards the Mount of Olives towards Gethsemane and the Russian Orthodox Church where we stopped in the moonlight with our own thoughts and prayers.

Good Friday saw us host a meditative service and then, for just one day each year, we had the garden open for quiet reflection, and we loved having time to be with individuals who wanted to talk or just quietly steer them as needed. On Easter Saturday evening, about 500 Palestinian believers held their Easter service here and what made that so exciting was that they provided simultaneous translation into Hebrew for the Israeli Messianic congregations they had invited. This too was an historic occasion as Jew and Arab together joined in worship and harmony, together in faith. It was a lively and joyous time, almost marred by the impossibility of us controlling the children who, for many of them, having come by special permit from the West Bank towns, were wound up like coiled springs. A saint, called Diana, from Bethlehem and a school teacher, came to the rescue and marshalled them all like a military manoeuvre into one of our covered areas and brought back calm to our valiant team here!

Sunday dawned bright, but two hours after the Garden's team was out cleaning benches and sweeping paths. At 0400, Richard found Alex, the first of many to have camped in our lane, somewhat like the Last Night of the Proms. When they opened the gate at 0600, it was like releasing a flood. By 0615 we were packed out, the service started early – if only to ensure that we did not overrun. This was televised by the Christian Broadcasting Network in the US and should be available from their web-site. I was manning the First Aid post and that kept me a little occupied until 09.00; for the next service I traded rôles with another nurse in order to contain the crowds who, in spite of the barriers, wanted to go down to the tomb where the worship group was situated. Two of our local staff had organised an Israeli breakfast for our working team in the small chapel here to sustain us all. Richard led into both the services and started by lightening the atmosphere in his seemingly casual, but well scripted, style. Despite a rehearsal, I felt quite scared mounting to the podium and having the privilege of praying at this second service in front of so many. It was hard not to shed a tear when we sang those familiar and beautiful Easter hymns and choruses, thinking of all our friends and family at home or elsewhere and the Empty Tomb before us in Jerusalem as a sign, a testimony to the world that Jesus is indeed alive and was among us just as with those who **"have not seen and yet believe"** ... **John 20:29**

After the two English language services, a Scandinavian followed by a French service, then reordering all the seating so that by 14.30 we were truly ready for lunch in the Garden provided by Sami and his wife Randah. Sami is the Palestinian street trader who comes from Bethlehem and has been selling to Garden visitor for 40 years; he is not a believer, but loves us and loves the Garden and we pray for him and for his fellow traders, M and N who are also kind to us lending a hand when we need it.

So we had a wonderful Easter here in the garden, but sad too as Meg Jack, wife of our Chairman of Trustees and dear friend to us all here, came to Jerusalem for three weeks, heard her son preach on Easter morning, and then died less than a week after returning to UK prematurely with terminal cancer. Meg had read the lesson beautifully on Good Friday; Victor, her husband, led and preached; then there at the Easter sunrise service she was to see and hear their son preach brilliantly to about 2500 gathered that glorious morning with a victorious message for all at the two English services. I do love the words we sang, "See what a morning, gloriously bright with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem", a very poignant message for us all that Easter Day. It has been a great loss to the Garden and dear Meg's family.

This, however, is the message of this garden and of our work here:

**I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies..... John 11:25.**

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Rosalind Meryon