**Connor Pilgrimage 2013 – Day 5 by the Very Rev John Mann**

Today started with the coach leaving with lots of happy pilgrims anticipating a new day; prayers and good-mornings said, but without two of the party! Worse still we hadn't missed them; even worse, they were the Archdeacon and his wife - and they were on time!

Never mind, all was resolved as they flagged us down, and at least yours truly redeemed himself a little by spotting them, before we were whisked away to the Upper Room.  There, Denise Murray, parish reader from the Cathedral, read the long Acts 2 Pentecost account beautifully, and we all sang: "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me".

Crossing to the Palestinian territory we entered Bethlehem and into a different world.  First we spent some money at a Christian Co-operative where olive wood, mother of pearl and jewellery were all for sale.

This is just beside one of my favourite places - the field of the shepherds.  We celebrated communion in the sunshine, sang ‘While shepherds watched’ and ‘O little town of Bethlehem,’ and viewed the beautiful church.  It has no windows; light comes from high up in the cupola - from the heavens; from the sky; and so we are drawn to the dawning glory from above, the angelic choirs and the message of the angels.

A two hour wait was required to join the queue to enter the cave under the Church of the Nativity in the town Centre of Bethlehem later; before us were a happy African group, behind us were some very eager Russians, but we made it to the place of Jesus' birth for a few seconds, seeing the silver star marking the spot, and the place of the manger, but afterwards reading more sedately and quietly in the open air, of the coming of the wise men to pay homage, so many years before we, symbolically, did the same.

We lunched in a hospital canteen - which seems a peculiar thing to do, but by eating at this place we were supporting the poorly resourced, and frankly - compared to us - woefully inadequate, health provision in the Palestinian territories.

The hospital, formerly a Leonard Cheshire Home, manages an amazing range of things from orthopaedics to eye treatment, physiotherapy to abdominal surgery, trauma counselling to support for those with injuries of all kinds, but especially of the central nervous system.  A hospital of just 88 beds. An amazing place!

What a rich and varied day in the land on contrasts, but we all arrived back together and in good heart. One more day in Jerusalem!  It has all gone by so quickly.

But, tonight we have the 'Sultan's Feast' at the hotel. Off we go. I have been to this before and it's great fun, so long as one is not chosen to be the Sultan or a member of his entourage....