



# What's What

*A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.*

## The Walk to Emmaus

This story, unique to Luke, tells of Jesus' appearance to two disciples who had given up their faith and departed from the group of Jesus' disciples.

They were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus when the risen Jesus joined them, seemingly out of nowhere, opened their eyes to the Scriptures, and then revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread.

Where exactly is Emmaus? This question helps move our reflection still further as we explore the "correct" understanding of Scripture.

Pilgrims to modern-day Israel are shocked to learn that as many as six sites are identified as "Emmaus." Here are the four more popular ones.

(1) Latrun. The tradition of identifying this place as Luke's Emmaus reaches back to the historian Eusebius (330).

Christians may have lived here since early times, but the first known Christian is Julius Africanus who in 221 obtained for this village from Rome the rights of a Roman city and a new name, Nicopolis.

The Byzantine tradition never doubted this identification, but it seems to have been forgotten when a plague wiped the village out in 639.

Modern archaeologists doubt that this is the place mentioned in Luke. It certainly is 160 stadia (31 km) from Jerusalem (see Luke 24:13), but

other ancient manuscripts of Luke read 60 stadia, suggesting Abu Ghosh or Qubeiba as the more likely spot.

(2) Abu Ghosh. This is the village on the Jaffa road where the ark of the covenant rested for twenty years (1 Sam 6:21-7:2), but in Old Testament times it was located atop the hill, not in the valley.

The crusaders, our embarrassingly ignorant, Christian, warrior-ancestors in the faith, did not know about Latrun. So in typical crusader style, they measured 60 stadia from Jerusalem and identified the nearest village as Emmaus.

When the crusaders were beaten in 1187 at the Battle of the Horns of Hattin, this place lost its importance mainly because travelers to Jerusalem used a different route. The identity of Emmaus was eventually transferred to Qubeiba.

(3) Qubeiba. Between 1114 and 1164, the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre founded a village here to intensify the agriculture of the region from which they drew sustenance. They named it Parva Mahomeria, perhaps because of a Muslim shrine already here (el-Qubeiba = "a little cupola").

As frequently happens in the Holy Land, later pilgrims assumed this place was related to the life of Christ, and since it was sixty stadia from Jerusalem, they identified it as Emmaus.

(4) "Most probable" Emmaus. After the Jewish War against Rome in 66-70 C.E., Vespasian assigned eight hundred discharged veterans to live in a place called Emmaus, located about thirty stadia, or four miles, from Jerusalem.

Their encampment completely overshadowed the little town, and the site was given the name (until recently) Qoloniya. Abandoned in 1948, it was located near contemporary Motza.

The round trip between Jerusalem and this place is sixty stadia, or about seven miles, half of this being a very plausible distance allowing the disciples to get up from table right after supping with Jesus and to return immediately to Jerusalem (Luke 24:33).

This brief archaeology and geography lesson suggests that those who read the Bible or understand their beliefs too literally will surely encounter serious problems.

Jesus was able to "correct" the misunderstanding of his followers only because they were already familiar with the Scrip-

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### Things to talk about:

- Does it bother you that the exact location of Emmaus is not known? Why?
- Regardless of the location, what do you think the journey was like for the two disciples?
- Where or in whom do you recognize Jesus' presence today?

ture about him. Modern scholarship offers similar assistance to interested contemporary believers.

"Blind" faith, after all, is a curious gift to return to the creator of human intelligence.

*From The Cultural World of Jesus. Sunday by Sunday. Cycle A. John J. Pilch. The Liturgical Press 1995. p73-75.*



