



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

# ROAD TO EMMAUS

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*There, at present, by the command of the Emperor Constantine, has been built a basilica, that is to say, a church of wondrous beauty.*

THE PILGRIM OF BORDEAUX, 333 A.D.

# THE HOLY CITY OF JERUSALEM: A CYCLE OF POEMS

*by St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (634-638)*

The following poems are a cry of longing for the holy city of Jerusalem, written sometime after the young Sophronius' exile from the Holy Land in 603, in the face of the advancing Persian invasion. The beautiful Church of the Holy Resurrection, built by Sts. Constantine and Helen in 325, that Sophronius saw in the early 7th century, was burned to the ground by invading Persians thirty years before Sophronius became Patriarch of Jerusalem. After his consecration to the patriarchal throne in 634, he would have served in the newly rebuilt Church of the Holy Resurrection, another compelling reason to surrender the city to the Muslims in 638 to avoid a second destruction of the holy places. Although the beauty and rhythm of the Greek cannot be rendered in English, the following excerpts from *The Anacreonticon* give a hint of the yearning that echoes today in the hearts of exiled Palestinians and Christians everywhere.

## Jerusalem

Holy City of God,  
Jerusalem, how I long to stand  
even now at your gates,  
and go in, rejoicing!

A divine longing for holy Solyma\*  
presses upon me insistently.

\*Solyma: Jerusalem

## Mount Sion

And, speeding on,  
may I pass to Sion

where, in the likeness of fiery tongues,  
the Grace of God descended;

where, when He had completed  
the mystic supper, the King of All  
teaching in humility  
washed His disciples' feet.

Blessings of salvation, like rivers  
pour from that Rock where Mary  
handmaid of God, childbearing for all men,  
was laid out in death.

Hail, Sion, radiant Sun of the universe!  
Night and day I long and yearn for thee.

There, after shattering hell,  
and liberating the dead,  
the King of All, the Shatterer  
appeared there, the Friend.

## Holy Wisdom (The Praetorium)

Then let me leave Sion's summit  
and, embracing the stone  
where for me my Creator was smitten  
go down to the House and the Stone;  
And let me fall to the ground and venerate -  
I am oppressed by tears! The spot  
where the foremost of those who love Wisdom  
heard His own sentence.

## The Constantinian Basilica

And let me go rejoicing  
to the splendid sanctuary, the place  
where the noble Empress Helena  
found the divine Wood;

and go up,  
my heart overcome with awe,  
and see the Upper Room,  
the Reed, the Sponge, and the Lance.

Then may I gaze down  
upon the fresh beauty of the Basilica  
where choirs of monks  
sing nightly songs of worship.

## The Portico and the Rock of the Cross

Let me pass on to the portico,  
all covered with pearls and gold,  
and go on into the lovely building  
of the Place of the Skull.

Ocean of life ever living  
and of the true oblivion.  
Tomb that gives light!

And prostrate I will venerate  
the navel-point of the earth, that divine Rock  
in which was fixed the wood  
which undid the curse of the tree.

How great thy glory,  
noble Rock, in which was fixed  
the Cross, the Redemption of mankind!

Exultant let me go on to the place  
where all of us  
who belong to the people of God  
venerate the glorious Wood of the Cross.

Let me run to bend the knee  
before the artist's picture  
representing the Rulers,  
to render homage.

## The Anastasis (Church of the Resurrection)

Let me walk thy pavements  
and go inside the Anastasis,  
where the King of All rose again,  
trampling down the power of death.

Through the divine sanctuary  
I will penetrate the divine Tomb,  
and with deep reverence  
will I venerate the Rock.

And as I venerate that worthy Tomb,  
surrounded by its conches  
and columns, surmounted by golden lilies,  
I shall be overcome with joy.

## The Mount of Olives

How surpassing sweet thou art,  
lofty Mountain, from which  
Christ the Lord looked into heaven!

And from that famous valley  
I will mount those steps,  
and venerate the Mount of Olives  
from which He ascended into heaven.

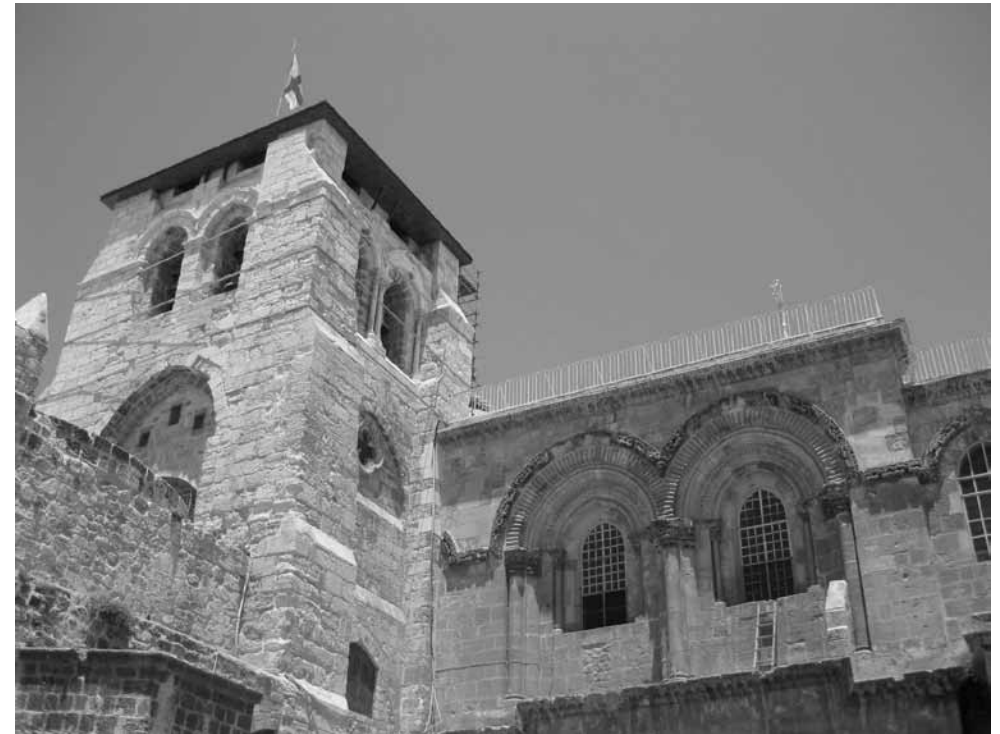
Highly will I praise  
the endless depth of the divine Wisdom,  
by which He saved me,  
swiftly will I pass thence to the place,

Where, to His venerable companions,  
He taught the divine mysteries  
shedding light into secret depths,  
there, under that roof, may I be!

Then let me go out  
through the Great Door onto the steps,  
and regard the beauty of the Holy City  
lying over to the west.

How sweet it is to see thy fair beauty,  
City of God, from the Mount of Olives! ✚

Original translation by J. Wilkinson (*Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, 1977) Editing by Monachos.net (2006) and *Road to Emmaus* (2010).



*The Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.*