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GREEK ORTHODOX PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLYLAND & CYPRUS 14 Days / 12 Nights

DAY 1- May 29, Thursday: ATLANTA/NEW YORK/ TEL AVIV

This afternoon, we will depart for an unforgettable and fulfilling spiritual odyssey!

DAY 2- May 30, Friday: TEL AVIV / TIBERIAS

Welcome to the Holy Land! After clearing Immigration, a Cloud Tours' representative will meet us and assist us with our baggage and through Customs. Transfer to Tiberias, a drive of approximately two hours. Dinner and overnight at hotel (D)

DAY 3- May 31, Saturday: TIBERIAS / RIVER JORDAN / CAPERNAUM

Depart this morning for our first day in the Holy Land! Enjoy a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus met Simon, Peter, James and John, his first disciples, and performed many miracles here. He stilled the raging storm on the Sea of Galilee that was about to flood their boat and walked on the stormy sea to His Apostles.

Continue to Capernaum, the headquarters of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and walk in the same village Jesus did. It is here in Capernaum that our Lord and Savior chose and called forth His Apostles, and where He preached and performed miracles such as the healing of the paralytic, the mother-in-law of Apostle Peter, the servant of the centurion and many others. See the remains of the House of Saint Peter, one of the very few exact sites we know Jesus visited. A Franciscan Church has been built over the ruins of the house. See the ruins of the Synagogue where Our Lord preached. Continue to the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles. Enjoy the peaceful setting of this beautiful church with its red domes, and enjoy an afternoon coffee at the very place Jesus called His first disciples. In the 4th Century A.D., many monasteries and churches were built in the places where our Lord lived, taught and performed miracles.

Drive on to the Mountain of Beatitudes, where Jesus Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount and where the Lord's Prayer was said for the first time. Then, time permitting, on to Tabgha (Seven Springs) and the Church of the Multiplication of Fishes and Loaves. It is here that the miracle of the loaves and fish took place. Over 5,000 men, women and children were fed from the miraculous multiplication of the five loaves of bread and the two fish.

Our last stop will be Yardenit on the River Jordan, the site for Spiritual Baptism and Agiasmos. Experience an affirmation of your baptism in the same river that our Lord was baptized by Saint John the Baptist 2,000 years ago. You may purchase or rent a white robe to wear into the Jordan River for your Spiritual Baptism, and you may wear your bathing suit below your robe. For those who purchase or rent robes, a room is available to change. What a way to begin a Pilgrimage! It sets the tone for everything else that will follow. Return to the hotel in Tiberias for dinner and overnight. (B, D)

DAY 4-June 01, Sunday: TIBERIAS / MT. TABOR / CANA / NAZARETH / JERUSALEM

AM Liturgy (location TBA). After, visit the Church of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. According to Christian tradition, this is the traditional site of the Transfiguration, with a church and monastery built on the ancient foundations of its summit, 588 meters (approximately 2,000 feet) above sea level. At the foot of Mt. Tabor is the little village of Naim, where Jesus raised the only son of the poor widow from the dead. Take a taxi to the top of Mt. Tabor. There, see an utterly commanding view of all of lower Galilee and the valley of the Armageddon. It was here that Jesus revealed the wonderful power of presence in communion with the Lawgiver and prophets of the past (Moses and Elijah). This also became immediate evidence of Communion with His Father. View the mountain from the bottom or visit the site of the Transfiguration where the Transfiguration of our Lord took place. Enter the Church of Transfiguration and pray.

Our next stop is Cana and the Greek Orthodox Church where our Lord performed his first public miracle. Jesus turned water into wine at the request of His blessed Mother the Virgin Mary to spare the bridegroom the embarrassment of running out of wine at his wedding party. You may purchase wine from the church. A special service for married couples will follow.

Continue to near-by Nazareth, one of the holiest towns in Christendom. This city was the home of Mary, Joseph and Jesus until the beginning of His ministry. Nazareth is also where Jesus spent some years of His youth after returning to Israel from Egypt and until His public ministry began. Visit the Virgin Mary's Well where the Angel Gabriel announced the "good news" to Mary that she would give birth to Our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation is built over this site. Drive to Jerusalem. Time permitting; we will stop at the Church and Tomb of St. George in Lydda. Venerate the relics, Tomb and Chain, of St George. Arrive at your hotel for dinner and overnight. (B, D)

DAY 5-June 02, Monday- JERUSALEM

AM visit to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and enjoy a private audience with His Beatitude Theophilus III (subject to his availability and confirmation).

After visiting the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem we will leave the coach to walk through old Jerusalem. Visit the Church of Saint Anna (birthplace of the Theotokos). Within its grounds are the Pools of Bethesda. These are the pools located near the sheep gate where the Lord cured the paralytic. Archeologists have uncovered all of the pools and the five porticoes, as was reported by St. John in the Gospel. Then, we will walk along the Way of the Cross – Via Dolorosa with its 14 Stations which starts from the Fortress of Antonia and ends at the Temple Mount. We will not do the entire walk. En route, visit the Prison of Christ (Praitonion). Venerate at the same cell the Lord was held prisoner before His crucifixion. It is located deep in a dungeon. There is a slab of stone with two holes through which His legs were passed and ankles shackled together. The cells of Barabas and the two thieves, who were crucified with Him, are here. In the church is a large wooden cross (275 years old) which is brought out of the church on Good Friday and carried down the streets, as Christ himself did, ending at the Holy Sepulcher. We will continue with a visit of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of our Savior's death and resurrection. This is the most important church for Christians. We climb the stairs to reach Golgotha, the place of the crucifixion. Over the site, a main altar has been built and is under the care of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. You may reach through a case and touch the place that held the Holy Cross. To the right of the altar is a split in the rock floor where the Lord finally took His last breath. Take a moment to reflect in this Holy Place and to feel the spirit engulf you and appreciate all that Our Lord has given you and your loved ones. At the bottom of the stairs, as you leave the Chapel of the Golgotha, is the site where the body of Christ was placed after he was taken down from the cross (Apokathelosis). It is covered by a slab of stone where you can venerate. A tradition is to bless pictures of family and loved ones, as well as any religious items purchased, on the marble by making the sign of the cross. Then, we are led to the site of the Tomb, the place of the Lord's resurrection. A small chapel has been built over the sacred place under the watch of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. In the first small room is the great stone that sealed the tomb. It was here that the Angel of the Lord sat proclaiming the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The next small room contained the slab of stone on which the dead body of the Lord was placed, entombed and resurrected. It is a truly incredible experience to be in this church! It is from this tiny room that the Holy Light of the Resurrection emanates. Free time for shopping in the Christian quarters and lunch or perhaps a visit to the Israeli museum to see the Dead Sea scrolls.

We will attend midnight Liturgy at the Holy Sepulcher (subject to confirmation) for a truly unforgettable and spiritually fulfilling evening. This is also the best time to visit Golgotha, the place of Our Lord's crucifixion, and His tomb. Tonight, experience the Holy Sepulcher with other pilgrims but no tourists. It will be quiet and solemn. Dinner and overnight at the hotel in Jerusalem. (B, D)

DAY 6-June 03, Tuesday: JERUSALEM / BETHLEHEM / JERUSALEM

After breakfast, depart the hotel and drive to the village of Ein Karem, the birth place of St. John the Baptist. Continue for Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord and Savior.

Continue to the cradle of biblical history, Bethlehem, which is located five and half miles from Jerusalem. No town in the world has such a glorious history as Bethlehem. Visit the Shepherd's field and the Church of the Nativity. A Greek Orthodox Church has been built over the birthplace of Our Lord by the Emperor Justinian and is over 1,500 years old. It is the second oldest Orthodox Church in existence. It was not destroyed by the Persians, as they saw a mosaic of the Magi dressed in Persian wear over the front door. Venerate and touch the actual ground where Jesus was born. A few feet away is the Holy Manger. See the Cave of St. Jerome.

On the way back to Jerusalem, visit the Monastery and Church of the Prophet Elias and the Church and Tomb of St. Symeon, the Just. In addition, visit the Monastery of the Holy Cross. Return to Jerusalem and our hotel. Dinner and overnight at the hotel in Jerusalem. (B, D)

DAY 7-June 04, Wednesday: JERUSALEM

After breakfast, drive to the Mount of Olives to enjoy a breathtaking view of the Holy City. Jerusalem, a 4,000 year old city, is the center of the three main monotheistic faiths and the place where our Lord sacrificed Himself for our salvation. Drive to the Church of Our Father and the Chapel of Ascension, the site where our Lord ascended from the earth to Heaven. According to some people, it is here where the second coming will take place when both the living and dead will be raised before Him for judgment.

Continue to Gethsemane. Visit the Church of All Nations and the Garden of Agony. Only the Apostles knew Jesus often went to the Garden of Agony to pray in solitude. Here, Judas led the authorities to Him. In the Garden, our Lord prayed to God, the Father, before He was betrayed, arrested and crucified. In the church, there is a stone slab for pilgrims to venerate. It is here our Lord prayed with great passion before He was to endure the selfless sacrifice to come. Continue with a visit to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary. It is from this site that the holy body of the Virgin Mother was taken into Heaven by her Son and God.

Drive to the Zion Gate to walk to the Western Wall (Wailing Wall) on Mount Moriah, where it is said the Patriarch Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son. Here also stands the Dome of the Rock, with its marble and multi-colored mosaics, quotations from the Koran and the Golden Cupola. Tradition has it that this rock marks the center of the earth for the Jewish religion. In the Muslim religion, tradition says this is the point where Mohammed ascended to heaven on his horse and is the third holiest place on earth for Islam. Continue on to Mt. Zion to visit the Room of the Last Supper, King David's Tomb and the Church of the Dormition. Return to the hotel for dinner. Dinner and overnight at the hotel. (B, D)

DAY 8-June 05, Thursday: JERUSALEM / JERICHO / JERUSALEM

This morning. Drive northeast of Jerusalem to Jericho to climb the Sarantaron Mountain (The Mount of Temptation). Take a cable car up to the Mount (Sarantaron Oros). It was on this mountain that the Lord fasted for forty days and forty nights before He was tempted by the devil. There is an altar built over the same slab of stone where Jesus prayed and fasted. The Monastery was built over this site, and there is only one elderly monk who takes care of it. He is truly inspirational. Enjoy lunch and a chance to shop some Dead Sea products.

Continue to the Church of St. Eliseos and Zacchaeus' Tree. This is the tree upon which Zacchaeus climbed in order to see the Lord as He walked by. Time permitting, we will drive to the little town of Emmaus. It is in this location that our Lord appeared before two of His disciples after His Resurrection. (This occasion is mentioned in one of the Eothina Evangelia we read in Church during Orthros (Matins). Dinner and overnight at the hotel. (B,D)

DAY 9-June 06, Friday: ISRAEL / CYPRUS / FAMAGUSTA / AYIA NAPA

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Larnaca. After arrival in Larnaca meet your guide at the airport and start your tour of Cyprus with a visit to the 11th century Byzantine Church of Panayia Angeloktisti, whose name

means “built by angels” and was erected over the ruins of an early Christian basilica in Kiti. The original apse has survived together with one of the finest pieces of Byzantine art of the Justinian period, a rare 6th century mosaic of the Virgin and Child between two archangels.

Continue to the Church and Tomb of St. Lazarus, situated in the center of Larnaca, this magnificent early 10th century stone church of Saint Lazaros is one of the most important surviving Byzantine monuments in Cyprus. It was built by Byzantine Emperor Leo VI in exchange for the transfer of the Saint’s relics to Constantinople. The church lies over the tomb of Saint Lazaros, the resurrected friend of Jesus Christ who came to ancient Kition in 33 AD and was its first Bishop and Patron Saint. The tomb, along with other marble sarcophagi can be seen inside the church crypt. Stop for lunch at a local restaurant in the City of Larnaca.

After lunch visit the men’s Monastery of Saint Georgios tou Mavrovouniou (Saint George of the Black Hill) near Troulloi Village in the Province of Larnaca. No one knows the origins of the monastery but according to R. Gunnis (1936), it dates back to Byzantine times. What is known for sure is that the Monastery is very old because Saint Neophytos the Egleistros (1134-1214) refers to it in his writings. According to traditions of the region, the monastery was once an important religious center. During the Medieval period it may have been a women's monastery because one of the hills in the area is still known as the hill of the nuns.

Now our itinerary proceeds to Derynia and the Cultural Center of Famagusta, built in 1998 and host to the anti-occupation events of Famagusta Municipality. Climb to the observation tower where you can see from afar the occupied city of Famagusta (the "ghost town"). Informative and enlightening literature on the Cyprus problem and on the Turkish invasion is available in different languages and it is free to all visitors. The final stop will be your hotel in Ayia Napa where you will enjoy dinner and overnight accommodation. (B, L, D)

DAY 10-June 07, Saturday SALAMINA / MARATHOVOUNOS / NICOSIA/ AYIA NAPA

After breakfast set out with your guide to the Turkish occupied part of Cyprus (since 1974) to Salamina (Salamis) (the first stop of St. Paul in his first missionary journey), located 9.5 km north of Famagusta, it is a wonderful ancient site with an amphitheater, mosaics, columns and ancient statues. The remains of a Roman villa, baths, gymnasium temple of Zeus, an aqueduct and a Roman agora are all still evident. Unfortunately, the site has an air of neglect yet deserves to be considered a UNESCO World Heritage Site and be preserved with professional care. Ancient Salamis was for many centuries the main city of Cyprus. Severe earthquakes in AD 76 and 77 caused much damage. In the 4th C. AD more earthquakes and tidal waves left much of the site in ruins and, gradually Paphos in the west emerged as the main city on the island.

We now continue to the Monastery of Apostolos Varnavas (St. Barnabas). St Barnabas of Cyprus was born in Salamis, and joined the apostle Paul to spread the Gospel throughout Cyprus and Asia Minor. However, the two men parted company over the objection to Barnabas' cousin Mark joining them. In AD 75, the Jewish community in Salamis objected to his missionary work and had Barnabas stoned to death. Mark later rescued his cousin's body and buried it at a secret location, which was miraculously revealed centuries later and lies nearby his monastery. (Today lunch will be provided in pre-packaged lunch boxes).

Proceed to Marathovounos, built on a hillock called Vounos (Greek for “hill”) on the northern edge of the Messaoria plain. It is named after the fennel (Marathos) an aromatic and flavorful herb used in cooking and folk medicine and is located 4 km south of the Turkish village of Tziaos and 39 km from its provincial capital Famagusta, to the east. Evidence of mid to late Bronze Age habitation was discovered here. There's also an ancient Basilica at nearby Petrera. There is speculation that an earlier Christian village with a small church existed at Vounos since the 1700s. The newer bigger church (now ruined by the Turks) was built on the location of the smaller one around the year 1900.

Our itinerary now takes us to the Old Archbishop’s Palace in the heart of Nicosia which is an 18th century religious, national and political monument and closely associated with modern Cypriot history. Adjacent is the new Archbishop’s Palace, a two story stone building built in Neo-Byzantine style which houses the offices of the archdiocese and the residence of the archbishop. It was built by Archbishop Makarios III between 1956 and 1960 and also houses the Byzantine Icon Museum and the Library of the Archbishopric. Since the completion of the new Archbishopric, the Old Archbishop’s Palace has housed the Folk Art Museum and the National Struggle Museum.

Also in Nicosia is Saint John's Cathedral located within the old city walls and built on the site of the 14th century chapel of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint John the Evangelist of Bibi. Archbishop Nikiforos rebuilt the monastery chapel from its foundations in 1662. Dedicated to Saint John the Theologian, it is small, single-aisle and barrel vaulted in the Franco-Byzantine style, with external buttresses and a west portico. In contrast to the deliberately modest exterior that was required by Ottoman rule, the gilded woodwork and bright interior illuminated by crystal chandeliers can take the unsuspecting visitor by surprise. Covered in gold leaf, the woodcarving is in the best tradition of 18th century Cypriot craftsmanship. The four large icons are the work of Cretan master John Kornaros and were painted between 1795 and 1797. The 18th century wall paintings depict scenes from the Bible and the discovery of the tomb of Apostle Varnavas near Salamis.

Next we continue our exploration of Nicosia with a visit to Laiki Yitonia, a restored area in the heart of the walled city. It covers an area of about 2000 sq. meters and forms a world of its own, away from the hustle of modern life and yet only 100 yards from the capital's main Eleftheria Square. The area was restored by the Municipality and the result is a revived picturesque corner of the city that attracts locals and visitors to its shops and restaurants. Many of the buildings have been restored using the typical elements of traditional Cypriot folk architecture which has been preserved through the centuries. Tonight enjoy dinner and drinks at a local restaurant. After dinner transfer back to hotel in Ayia Napa for overnight. (B, L, D)

DAY 11-June 08, Sunday: AYIA NAPA / BOAT RIDE / AYIA NAPA

Today we will attend Divine Liturgy at the Ayia Napa Church for the Feast of Pentecost. After Liturgy we will visit the charming medieval Monastery of Ayia Napa dedicated to "Our Lady of the Forests", it stands in the middle of the village of Agia Napa surrounded by a high wall. Both the village and the monastery take their name from the ancient Greek word for wooded valley "Napa"- a reference to the morphology of the area in the past. Built like a medieval castle around 1500 AD, Agia Napa Monastery is the best known landmark in the village or surrounding area. The church of the monastery is partly built underground and cut into the rock. Restored in 1950 and in 1978, it became an Ecumenical Conference Centre serving churches in Cyprus and the Middle East. A new church was built in 1990 south west of the monastery is also dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Once our visit to the monastery has been completed, we board our tour boat at 11:15 am to sail the south eastern coast of the island. We'll visit numerous bays and beaches including Ayia Napa caves, Palatia cliff diving site, Cape Greco, Pirates' caves, Witches Cave, Church cliff diving site, Konnos Bay, Fig Tree Bay and Famagusta "Ghost Town". Lunch will be served on board and return to the dock at 3:30pm. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure. This would be a good opportunity to join the traditional local festivities for the feast of the Pentecost. This evening choose from any of the plentiful nearby local restaurants to enjoy dinner on your own. (B, L)

DAY 12 June 09, Monday: AYIA NAPA / MACHAIRA MONASTERY / ST. IRAKLIDIOS / OMODOS VILLAGE / AYIA NAPA

After breakfast, we start our touring with a visit to Machairas Monastery. This is the "monastery of Panayia" referred to in the book "The Mountain of Silence". Situated at an altitude of 870 meters on the slopes of Mount Kionia in a picturesque valley of the Machairas Mountains, it houses the miraculous icon of Panagia of Machairas. The monastery has extensive estates of land acquired from donations dating to the Frankish era. The three-nave church of the monastery was built between 1892 and 1900. Its wood-carved iconostasis was made between 1919 and 1921 by Georgios Kyriakou from the village of Chrysidea. The bell tower is 19 meters high and dates to 1900.

Next we stop at the Monastery of Saint Iraklidios, located in Politiko village, about 20 km from Nicosia. This convent was named for the saint who was baptized and consecrated first Bishop of Tamassos by apostles Paul and Barnabas during their trip to Cyprus. Saint Iraklidios, one of the most important saints in Cyprus, was martyred at the age of 60 and buried in the cave where he lived and preached. In 400 AD a church and monastery were built over his grave. The monastery was destroyed and rebuilt several times until it was fully renovated in 1773. The relics of the saint are kept in a silver gilded case. This location is noteworthy as it also represents the presence of Christianity in Cyprus for 2000 years.

Now we continue to Omodos for lunch. After lunch we visit the pride and joy of Omodos - the Monastery of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross. Built at the heart of the community, it rises majestically and with its imposing presence, it is one of the oldest and most historic monasteries on the island and a significant part of Cyprus' cultural heritage. According to tradition it was established before St. Helen's arrival in Cyprus in 327 AD, but the

exact date of its establishment is unknown. It possibly existed before the village, which was established around the monastery. Historians such as Neofytos Rodinos, the Russian monk and traveler Barsky, the Dean Kyprianos and others, refer to St. Helen's visit to Cyprus and to the fact that she left a part of the Holy Rope in the Monastery. This rope, with which Christ was bound to the Cross, is described as red colored and "stained by the blood of Christ". The Bishop of Paphos, Chrysanthos, did a full renovation of the Monastery in the second decade of the 19th century, in collaboration with the Steward of the Monastery, Dositheos, who served as a church Steward from 1810 until 1821. The monastery also holds a piece of the original Cross of Christ and other holy relics.

Our last visit of the day will be to the ancient site of Choirokoitia which dates back to the 6th millennium BC. It lies in the domain of the village from which it takes its name in the Larnaca district on the west bank of the Maroni River overlooking the south coast, 6 kilometers from the sea. Included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list since 1988, Choirokoitia is one of the best preserved settlements of this early period in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean. Return to the hotel and later enjoy dinner at a tavern in Ayia Napa (B, L, D)

DAY 13-June 10, Tuesday: AYIA NAPA/ LIMASSOL / PAPHOS / AYIA NAPA

After breakfast we start our full day sightseeing with a visit to the ancient site of Kourion and its museum. Considered one of the most spectacular archaeological sites on the island, Kourion was an important city kingdom where excavations continue to reveal impressive new treasures. Noted particularly for its magnificent Greco - Roman theatre, it is also home to stately villas with exquisite mosaic floors and an early Christian Basilica among other treasures. Originally built in the 2nd century B.C., Kourion's awe-inspiring theatre is now fully restored and used for musical and theatrical performances. The House of Eustolios, consisting of a complex of baths and a number of rooms with superb 5th century A.D. mosaic floors, was once a private Roman villa before it became a public recreation center during the early Christian period. The early Christian Basilica dates to the 5th century and was probably the Cathedral of Kourion, with a baptistery attached to the north face. The House of Achilles and the House of the Gladiators also have beautiful mosaic floors.

We continue on to visit Saint Kyriaki Church, a Byzantine era Church in Kato Paphos, also known as St Paul's Pillar, because it is the alleged location where St. Paul was tied and whipped. It was built around the 13th century on the site of an earlier Basilica. If you walk around the grounds you can still see the remains of older churches underneath Saint Kyriaki. The church is surrounded by ancient roman ruins and mosaics. Lunch and drinks will be at a local Fish Restaurant.

Following lunch we set out for Saint Neophytos Monastery 10 km outside Paphos, near Tala village. The monastery was founded by Saint Neophytos in 1159 who died here in 1219 at the age of 85. The main church of the monastery was built around 200 years after his death and is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The famous painter, Theodoros Apsevdīs painted the frescoes in the Enkleistra and Byzantine icons of exceptional artistic quality can be seen in the monastery church. The monastery museum has exhibits from both the ancient and Byzantine periods. Other points of interest are the cave with the cell of Saint Neophytos (the Enkleistra). The Enkleistra, an enclosure carved out of the mountain by the hermit, contains some of the finest Byzantine frescoes dating from the 12th to 15th century. His rock-table and the stone platform on which he slept are still preserved in his cell, as is his grave.

Next we proceed to see Petra tou Romiou an interesting geological formation of huge rocks off the southwest coast in the Paphos district and one of the most impressive natural sites in Cyprus associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. According to legend, this strikingly beautiful spot is where Aphrodite rose from the sea foam and floated ashore on a scallop shell to the rocks known as 'Rock of Aphrodite' or 'Petra tou Romiou' in Greek. The Greek name, Petra tou Romiou, "the Rock of the Greek", is associated with the legendary Byzantine hero, Digenis Akritas, who kept the marauding Saracens at bay with his amazing strength. It is said that he heaved a huge rock into the sea, destroying the enemy's ships. Return to hotel followed by dinner at Vassos Restaurant Limanaki in Ayia Napa. (B, L, D)

DAY 14-June 11, Wednesday: AYIA NAPA/ LARNACA / ATHENS / NEW YORK /ATLANTA

Following breakfast and check-out, transfer to airport for return flight to Athens to connect to your flight back to the USA. (B)