

did not occur. Instead, a man was killed by crucifixion on a hill outside Jerusalem.

It was a shattering blow to the thought-world of the apostles. Having grown up on stories and prophecies about the moon turning to blood, stars falling from the skies, and the sea surging uncontrollably, when none of this happened and when their beloved teacher had been killed, what were they to make of the way things had turned out?

They went through a change in their thinking the scale of which we find almost unimaginable. Their whole mental universe had come crashing down and they were left to pick up the pieces. Everything had to be reconstructed.

But what they discovered with fear and trembling and head-over-heels joy was that Jesus had risen from the dead. His presence with them and the prodigal gift of the Holy Spirit took them on an entirely new and totally unexpected journey. It was as radical and as wonderful as being born again.

They learnt a new theological language. They created new forms of communal relationships. They saw the world in an entirely new way, a world that could never be the same again.

We are the heirs of that immense mental and spiritual shift ... and we are truly blessed in being so.

THANKS BE TO GOD. AMEN.

St. Mary's, Sanderstead & St James, Riddlesdown

Sermon – 17.11.19 Fr. Peter Macan

During the time we spent in the Holy Land in 1968 Doreen and I were lucky enough to stay for two weeks at the St. George's College in the heart of Jerusalem. Also staying there were two teams of archeologists, one from the UK and one from the USA both working on different digs. They each took us to visit their digs to see first hand the exciting discoveries they were making. We learned so much from them about what had been discovered by their predecessors upon whose work they were building giving new insights into the history contained in the Biblical narrative. I heard about the work of Charles Wilson, Charles Warren, and others. They awakened in me a fascination with biblical archeology.

It was in 1864 that a young British officer in the Royal Engineers called Charles Wilson undertook work with the Ordnance Survey in Jerusalem. He discovered a large stone structure, now known as Wilson's Arch, which he believed had carried a road from the Old City directly on to the Temple Mount. Needless to say we were taken to see it in 1968..

Just three years later in 1867 Charles Wilson was followed by another officer from the Royal Engineers, Charles Warren, who continued to survey Jerusalem and began a series of exploratory archaeological digs under the Western Wall of the Temple, also known as the Wailing Wall.

In 1867 Warren crawled along some tunnels near the Gihon spring and discovered a large vertical shaft, now known as Warren's Shaft. It was another breakthrough in understanding

the construction of the Temple Mount. Again our archeologist friends made sure we visited it and walked the whole length of Hezekiah's Tunnel which brought water from the Gihon spring to the Pool of Siloam inside the city.

Since those mid-Victorian times the work of excavation under the Western Wall has continued on and off over the decades, depending on local political circumstances. But now it is possible for visitors to go into the tunnels and excavations, and literally walk down through the layers of Jerusalem's history.

Among the most astonishing discoveries made by archaeologists there was the Master Course. It consists of four huge blocks of stone, the largest of which is 44.6 feet long, approximately 11.5 feet deep and 11 feet high, and is estimated to weigh about 628 tons. It was put in place by the builders of the Temple working under the authority of Herod the Great, and was constructed with such precision that no mortar was used to cement one block of stone to another. The Master Course was designed to act as a stabilizing countervailing thrust for a vault underneath the Temple Mount.

But in AD 70 the stones on top of the Master Course were toppled from their original positions by Roman soldiers under the leadership of Titus. They besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Some of those stones still litter the ground nearby.

The destruction was in response to a Jewish revolt, and the destruction of the Temple was the Roman equivalent of 'shock and awe'. Thousands of Jews were killed, and many thousands were carried into captivity. It was the end of the Temple - and, symbolically, the end of the Promised Land.

Which brings us to today's Gospel reading. You will recall that someone had pointed out to Jesus the magnificence of Herod the Great's Temple. It was indeed a remarkable sight, but Jesus prophesied that it would be destroyed and that not one stone would be left upon another.

But this leaves biblical commentators with a problem. Did Jesus actually prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem, or might Luke, as he was writing his Gospel, having heard about that destruction by Titus, put the words into the mouth of Jesus? The answer, of course, depends upon the date attributed to the actual writing of the Gospel, and that is disputed.

The imagery that Jesus was using in this chapter could well have been drawn from other sources, from the long tradition of highly coloured apocalyptic writing that was, unsurprisingly, in vogue at the time. After all, if the country you believe has been promised to you by God is under military occupation by a foreign power, you have to try to make theological sense of it. Strong and vivid theological language about God's overarching sovereignty and his ultimate control of history had a strong appeal.

The disciples were aware of this, hence their question to Jesus about when God would show his divine hand and restore Israel. Were they living, they wondered, in what were called the end-times? Would the universe be rolled up like a scroll and the new reign of God begin?

Well, we know that the entry of God into history as had been long imagined did not happen. Certainly the Temple was destroyed, and certainly there were wars and rumours of wars, but the promised denouement couched in technicolour terms