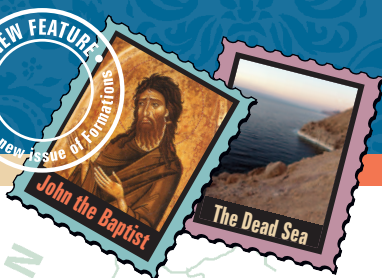


This travel journal leads us on a journey to a location related to the Bible.

NEW FEATURE
in each new issue of Formations



Formations Photo Journal by Jim Pitts

Bethany beyond the JORDAN

Bethany beyond the Jordan has long been a point of transition, a place of crossing from the old to the new, from the past to the future. Located on the edge of civilization, this wilderness way station offered subsistence hospitality to prophets, pilgrims, and other sojourners on their way. Driven and searching, guided and goaded, most are forgotten; yet some have become well-known in the salvation story, such as Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, and Jesus!

Tradition places Moses' farewell address here in the Plains of Moab. Perhaps his final earthly view was on Mount Nebo, looking east at the Jordan Valley below, across Bethany, and beyond Jericho to the hill country of Jerusalem. Joshua crossed the Jordan River here as he initially entered the Promised Land. In his

last days, Moses anticipated that the Israelites would take this same trek as they closed their years of wilderness wandering.



In this region, the Prophet Elijah parted the waters of the Jordan River and walked across with Elisha, his anointed successor. On a small knoll known for centuries as Elijah's Hill is the place the faithful believe Elijah ascended to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire (see 2 Kings 2:5-4).

Orthodox traditions have always identified the area of Bethany beyond the



Bethany Beyond the Jordan



Chariot of Fire Fresco

Jordan with the ministry of John the Baptist and with the baptism of Jesus. John was an austere voice proclaiming in the wilderness a call to repentance, *Make straight the way of the Lord* (Jn 1:23). For his radical ways and prophetic judgments, John was imprisoned and ultimately beheaded by Herod Antipas in his nearby hilltop fortress, Machaerus.

Tradition also places the baptism of Jesus at this crossing point, on the east bank of the Jordan River, just north of where the river empties into the Dead Sea. Ironically, but certainly not accidentally, Jesus is baptized at a storied and sacred intersection: here at one of the lowest points on earth, midway between the mountain tops of Nebo and Jerusalem's Zion.

At this earthly low point, God breaches the distance between heaven and earth. All of the Gospels bear witness in their baptismal accounts to the descent of the Holy Spirit like a dove and a heavenly proclamation, *This is my*



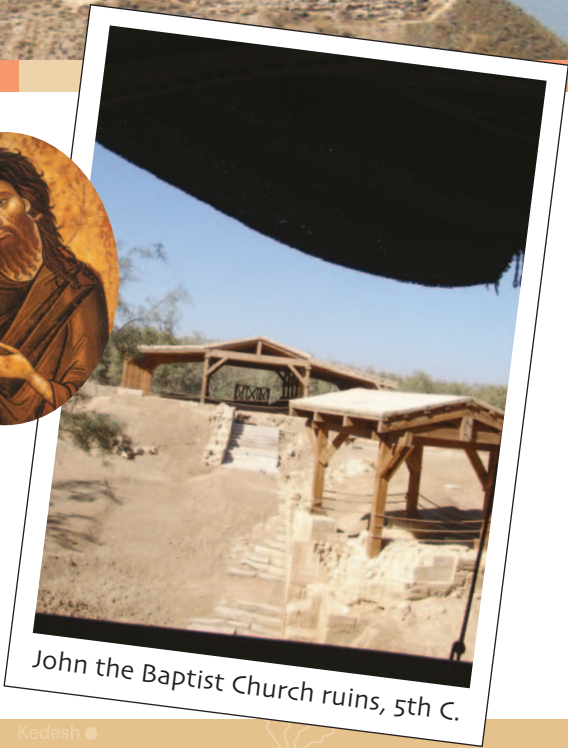
The Brazen Serpent Cross, Mt. Nebo

beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased (Mt 3:17, see also Mk 1:10-11 and Lk 3:21-22, compare Jn 1:31-34). Following this holy moment of affirmation, before the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness before being tempted by the Satan.

Bethany beyond the Jordan (see Jn 1:28 and 10:40) has also been known as Beth-Abara or Bethabara, which means "house of the crossing," referring to Joshua's and Elijah's crossing of the Jordan River. Over the centuries, living

archaeological park in sight of the ancient city of Jericho is once again a place of pilgrimage, spiritual reflection, and baptismal renewal. Bethany beyond the Jordan, in its unique way, is another cradle of Christianity. In the middle of the lands where it all began, this crossing marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

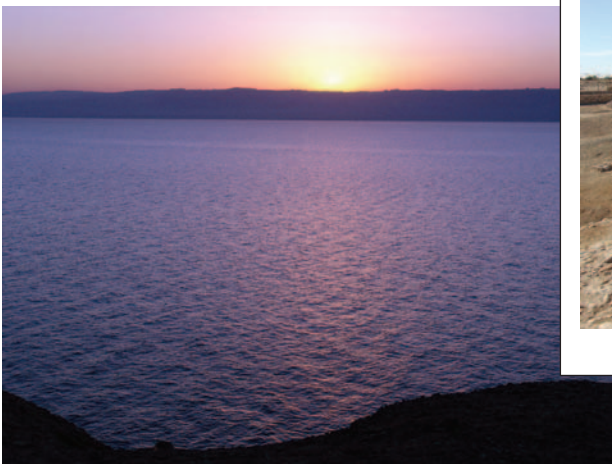
For additional photographs of Bethany beyond the Jordan and other biblical sites, visit www.NextSundayGallery.com.



John the Baptist Church ruins, 5th C.

Geography and archeology can enhance our understanding of the Bible, and NextSunday Gallery depicts the places and artifacts of the lands and the people whose faith story we share. NextSunday Gallery features photos of the lands of Egypt, Greece, Israel,

Italy, Jordan, and Turkey, along with a growing collection of maps. Illustrating historical sites and presenting panoramic vistas, there are images of mountain tops and valleys, cities and villages, deserts and rivers.



The Dead Sea



Ancient pool

NextSunday gallery

● Rabbah

AMMON