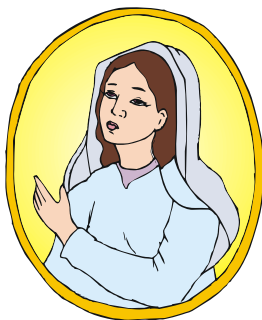


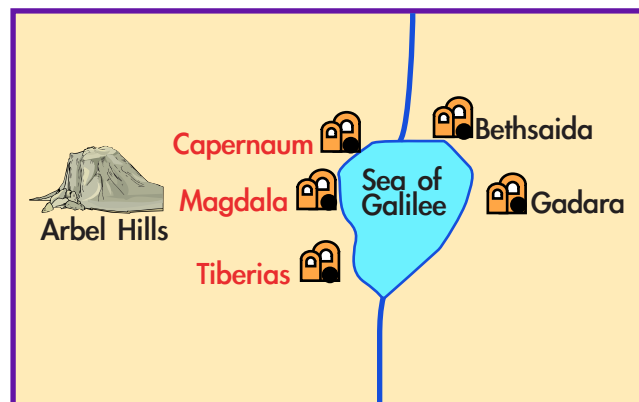
# Tour of the Holy Lands - Magdala



Do you remember that the Sea of Galilee was 685 feet below sea level? It's like a huge lake basin with high hills for sides. Jesus might have chosen any one of those hillsides for his outdoor teaching theater. A person's voice could be heard for long distances. We picked the highest hill we could find. It's called the Arbel and it's located high above the town of Magdala. If Magdala sounds familiar, it should. It was the home of Mary Magdalene. Her name meant "Mary of Magdala."



Mary Magdalen  
"Mary of Magdala"





We parked at the foot of the mount and followed a trail through pastureland that was home to lots of cows and donkeys.





When we finally stood at the very top, we were 1578 feet above the lake. We had to watch where we were going because there was no fence to keep us two-footed animals from falling off the edge. Some of us liked that better than others! But what a view! Just think, Jesus could have sat right here giving his Sermon on the Mount, which, by the way, can be found in Matt 5-7. Some people think it was a collection of several sermons. But this afternoon we feel as if he gave it here as a single sermon.





Jesus was the first one to reach the top that day. His sermon began with the Beatitudes - good preparation for every good student. We know the Beatitudes by heart and so we imagined every time he said, "Blessed..." how gentle his voice must have been. It wouldn't have been as stern as Moses must have sounded on Mt Sinai when he announced many of the Ten Commandments by saying, "Thou shalt not...".

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT: FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**

**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN: FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.**

**BLESSED ARE THE MEEK: FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.**

**BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER  
RIGHTEOUSNESS: FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.**

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL: FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.**

**BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART: FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.**

**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED  
THE CHILDREN OF GOD.**

**BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS'  
SAKE: FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**





When Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God," he probably scooped up a couple of kids from the crowd and gave them big hugs. Children loved Jesus and he loved them, too. When Jesus uses children as examples in his stories, we pay attention!





From here we could look down on several cities. When Jesus said, "You can't hide a city that's built on a hill," he probably pointed to a hill close by. To be a city on a hill probably means to be a good example for everybody who looks up to the city. Maybe Jesus wanted all of his listeners to shine like the little white villages. We thought about the community groups we belonged to back home - our school, our sports teams, the scouts, our church, our neighborhood. They can all be good examples.





Jesus asked them not to hide, but to shine like lamps placed up high on a lamp stand. Let people see the good deeds you're doing, not just hear about them. And make sure the light is not you that is shining. Make sure the light is you reflecting the love of God. God gets the glory here. He's the source of our love. We heard that the new followers in Jesus' day showed such love to others that everyone wanted to be like them and become new followers, too.







Of course they would have gotten lots of raindrops up here in Jesus' day. His audience would laugh as they ran for cover from the rain, and then they would hear him shout, "Your Father treats everyone alike. His sun shines and His rain falls on everyone, good or bad." We should treat everyone the same, too.







We looked for other teaching aids. They were all around us. We could hear Jesus saying, "Look up at those birds: You never see them planting seeds or harvesting grain like those farmers down there; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Don't you think he'd feed you, his own children?" We looked up. There were hundreds of migrating storks. They soared gracefully. We lay down on the ground and enjoyed the sight. Nature was giving us a neat lesson without saying a word.





Then we heard, "And why are you worrying about your clothes? Look at those wild flowers. They don't work for a living, they don't weave cloth. Yet, even Solomon with all his magnificent robes was never dressed like a single one of them." Jesus cleverly named the richest man in the world. He knew his listeners wouldn't dare compare the care that God gives with any other power, even their famous King Solomon.

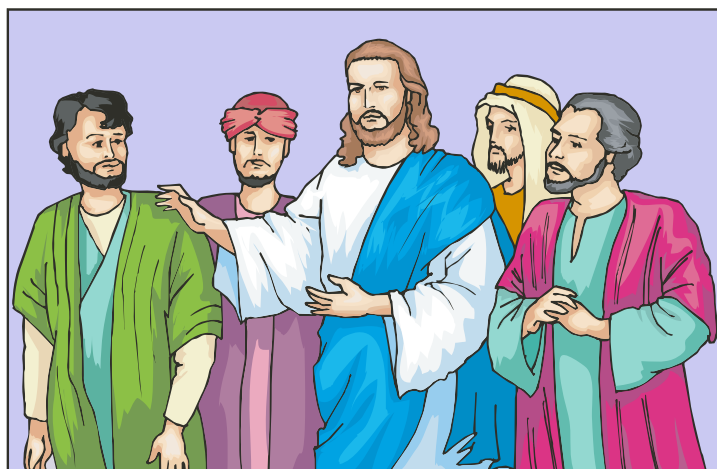


Jesus was still looking down at the ground, "Look at the grass. It doesn't seem very important. We use it to heat our ovens. If your Father cares for something that lives for a day, won't he care for His children who live forever? You don't trust Him enough." That same brown grass covered the Arbel hillside that very day.





The subject changed to gossip - a very important point in Jesus' sermon. We loved this because he could be quite humorous. He said, "Why do you keep looking at the tiny speck of sawdust in your brother's eye when you pay no attention to the huge log in your own eye?" We're sure that if he could have found a log, or even a stick on the ground, he would have held it to his own eye. Then they would have laughed. They would never forget that picture, for sure. Then he said, "First take the log out of your own eye and then you'll be able to see to help your brother." How's that for a clear teacher!







If anyone ever asks us what we remember about the land here in Israel, we would have to say - the stones...stones, stones everywhere. We're sure it was the same 2000 years ago. So Jesus asked them, "When your son asks for a loaf of bread, will you give him a stone?" And he'd probably point down to the stones or pick one up. Of course we don't expect our parents to play those kinds of tricks on us, any more than God would play tricks on His children. God does answer every prayer, the right way.





Our last lesson was a favorite of Jesus. "You can tell a tree by its fruits." He asked the crowd, "Can you pick figs from thistles?" We sure wished we could do that. There are so many thistles, just on this mountain, that we would have a feast on figs. But no, we'd have to find a fig tree for our figs. Those of us with fig experience looked and didn't see any. Jesus wanted us to look closely at a person. If we don't see good fruits, we shouldn't believe them. A big talker is not always one we should listen to. The thistle is a beautiful plant, but it fools you. Once you touch it, you never touch it again. Its beauty is only on the surface. Touching it brings pain. Once you find out that a thistle doesn't produce fruit, you never look again. It looks good but it produces nothing. This is true of what Jesus called "false prophets." They dress up like sheep, wanting to join the flock, but behind the costume is a wolf looking for someone to devour.



We're taking one last look over the edge before we end our day. How cool it's been to hear the Sermon on the Mount surrounded by the earth, the sea, and the sky in the land where Jesus grew up. We learned some major lessons about God, about life, and about how to write a successful speech. When the wisdom of Jesus was mixed with plants and flowers, trees and birds, we heard things that were fresh and new, as if we were hearing them for the first time – and we will never forget them.

