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# LEVENHAGEN UPDATE

## SEPTEMBER 2022

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### Family Update

I need to begin with an apology: I am so sorry that it has been so long since I have written. But I am excited to share with you the highlights what have been a crazy few months for our family. It has just been a blur! From the excitement of receiving my vicarage assignment on Call Day, to wrapping up my second year of study at the Seminary, to beginning my vicarage assignment, to the extraordinary blessing of being able to tour and study in Israel...there is so much to tell!



In April, I was blessed to receive my vicarage assignment to Our Savior Lutheran Church and Early Childhood Center in St. Charles, Missouri. Staying in the Saint Louis area

for the next year will allow Nathan to finish high school here, which is a real answer to prayer. Our Savior is a midsize congregation with a thriving early childhood center that reaches over one hundred kids every day, ranging from six weeks old up to pre-K. With that many



Gathering with my classmates just before the beginning of the Call Day service (April 2022)

#### THE LEVENHAGENS

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tiny humans around ensures that there is never a boring day in the office!

I began serving on July 5<sup>th</sup> and was installed on the following Sunday. I have been able to preach couple of times so far and will be preaching roughly every other Sunday from here on out. If you like, you can check out on of my recent sermons here: (<https://youtu.be/lwIJB9EHOE?t=1500>, or scan the QR code to the right). I have also had the opportunity to teach adult Bible classes, give devotions for the summer day camp, hospital visitation, planning for a community block party, among other things. It is going to be a busy year! I am already learning so much from Rev. Dr. Mike Iannelli, DCE Mark Engelhardt, and the rest of the staff at the church. It is a bit easy amid seminary studies to lose sight of what sparked your passion for ministry. These early months on vicarage have really reinvigorated me and renewed my passion for the pastoral ministry.



Scan here to view one of Aaron's recent sermons on vicarage.



Jill and our cat, Eden having a snuggle.

Jill wrapped up her part-time work for the LWML in mid-June. She had been performing various web design and communications functions. But we really felt that Faith needed a bit more of her time and focus during this school year. It has already proven to have been the right choice for our family.

I cannot believe I am saying this, but Nathan has started his senior year of high school. He continues to juggle his studies, his part-time job at the Kartplex and his passion for competitive racing. His move up to the Margay Ignite karting series has been more challenging than he expected, but we have seen tremendous growth in his racecraft, even if the results have not always been what he would like. Keep him in your prayers as he begins to think about what next steps after high school will help him to best reach his goals.

Last, but certainly not least is Faith. She is now in the eighth grade at Christ Community Lutheran School. She is active in the Ignite Youth Theater Company and was recently cast in "Elf: The Musical" so she will be rehearsing that throughout the Fall in preparation for performances in December. She is also active in youth groups at the Seminary and at our vicarage congregation.



Faith on the first day of eighth grade.

On the following pages you will find a travelogue of sorts from my study trip to Israel. It will give you just a taste of what I experienced there. As always, thank you for your faithful support and prayers. They mean the world to us!

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# ISRAEL JOURNAL

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Our normal routine during the trip would be to leave the hotel around 7:30 each morning, tour sites for 11 to 12 hours, return to the hotel for dinner, and then have classroom instruction or group study activities for an hour or two. The emphasis of the trip was on learning how to use what we were seeing to preach and teach the Scriptures more effectively. So much of our work focused on putting together lesson plans based on the sites we were seeing or the related passages of Scripture.

## Day One – Friday, May 27

After arriving at the Tel Aviv airport, we stopped at an overlook of the Aijalon Valley, continuing up the western approach to Jerusalem. We went around the city to the Mount of Olives and viewed the Old City. After getting settled in our hotel and getting a bit of rest, in the evening we walked from our hotel through the Old City via the Damascus Gate to the Western Wall. Being there as Sabbath observances were beginning was unforgettable. Afterward, we decided spur-of-the-moment to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—and I am glad we did! We were virtually alone in the church and were able to spend as much private time as we wanted inside the Edicule.



Looking west toward Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.



## Day Two – Saturday, May 28

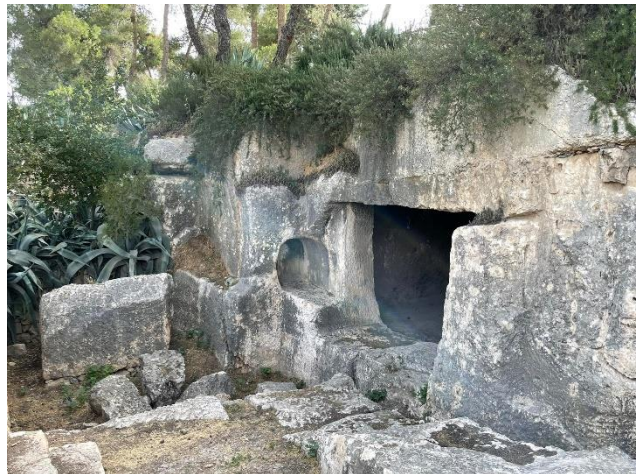
We spent the entire day in the area known as the Shephelah. It consists of four large valleys running west to east between the Judean highlands and the coastal plain. We started our day at Tel Gezer, which was an important fortress overlooking the coastal stretch of the international highway. The site at Tel Gezer dates back almost 4,000 years. The next stop was Bet Shemesh, which overlooks the fertile Sorek Valley, the area where many of the stories of Samson took place. We then continued to the caves at Bet Guvrin/Maresha to reflect on David's experience hiding in caves from King Saul. Next was Lachish, a city that is at least 4,300 years old. We finished the day at Tel Azekah overlooking the Valley of Elah, where David fought Goliath.



The Valley of Elah where David fought Goliath. The encounter likely occurred in the open area in the top center to the left of the road. Notice how fertile the area still is. The Philistines desperately needed this land to grow crops; that is what they were fighting over.

## Day Three – Sunday, May 29

The first stop was one of the unexpected highlights of the trip were the so-called *Kivrei Ha-Sanhedri*, a complex of first-century tombs in a garden-like park setting in the northern Jerusalem neighborhood of Sanhedria. Obviously, these were not Jesus' tomb, but it really gave a vivid picture of what a natural tomb in a garden might have looked. It was a great spot to reflect on the events of Resurrection Day. A couple of the younger guys even decided to reenact Peter and John's footrace to the tomb! From there we headed to the top of the Mosque Ali Nibi Samwil at Mizpah. This gave us a vantage point to view the central Benjamin plateau with a panorama extending from Jerusalem to Gibeah to Geba to Emmaus and then back around to Gibeon. The rest of the day was spent in the Judean hill country near Bethlehem, just a few miles south-southeast of Jerusalem through incredibly rugged terrain. I have never seen a city anywhere built on hills like Bethlehem! We toured the ruins of the Herodium and visited the Church of the Nativity.



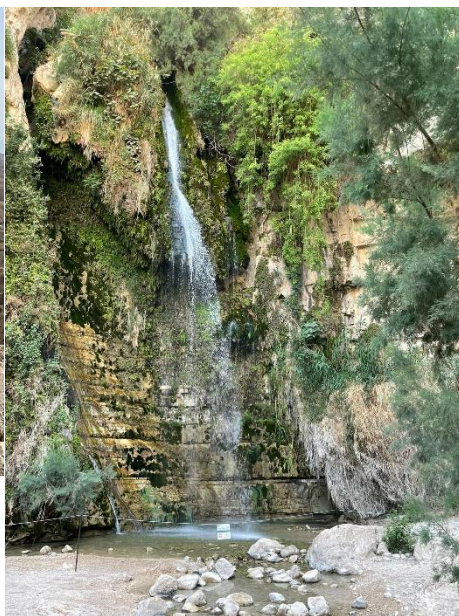
First century tomb at Kivrei Ha Sanhedri.

## Day Four – Monday, May 30

Today was spent in the Judean wilderness. We drove from Jerusalem to Jericho with some stops along the way to view the wadi road that would have been used by Jesus and the



The Judean wilderness.

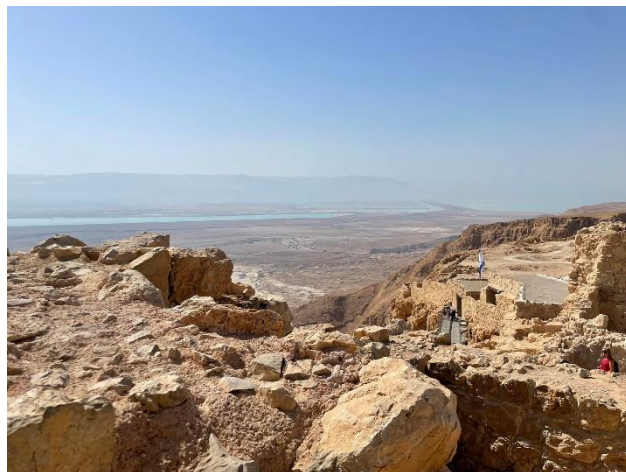


Ein Gedi

disciples on their trips from Galilee to Jerusalem via the eastern approach. Next, we spent time at the Dead Sea. From there we could see Mount Nebo in the distance in Jordan. We then visited Qumran, where the last stop was at Ein Gedi, where David hid from Saul and encountered him in a cave. We stayed the night at a hostel at the base of Masada.

## Day Five – Tuesday, May 31

We began the day taking the cable car up to the summit of Masada to tour the ruins there. A remarkable place with a stunning panorama of the Dead Sea, the southern Rift Valley, and the Jordanian highlands beyond. Leaving Masada, we continued to the southern edge of the Dead Sea to the area of the salt caves near where Sodom and Gomorrah once stood before their destruction. We continued west-southwest out of the Rift Valley to the Negev in the south of Israel. The Negev is the land of the Patriarchs. We viewed the ruins at Tel Arad. The last stop for the day was at Beersheba where we were able to view Abraham's well.



The Dead Sea from the summit of Masada.



## Day Six – Wednesday, June 1

Today was spent in the south-central Negev learning about the forty years Israel spent in the Wilderness of Tzin. We began our day at the top of Makhtesh Gadol, overlooking a beautiful canyon with a panorama of the wilderness. We continued to the Midbar Tzin overlook near Ben Gurion's tomb. Then we took a scenic hike through Nahal Abdat. The day ended at the ruins of Advat. During our time in the Negev, we stayed as guests of a kibbutz at Mash'Abei Sade, about fifteen miles from the Egyptian border. Most tours do not come this far south, so these days were truly a special opportunity.



The Wilderness of Tzin

## Day Seven – Thursday, June 2

We traveled from the southern Negev up the coastal plain (the land of the Philistines). On the way, we stopped to view the ruins of Aphek along the coastal plain. In New Testament times Aphek was known as Antipatris. The Apostle Paul was brought there accompanied by a massive contingent of Roman cavalry and troops to protect him from an assassination conspiracy. From there we continued north along the coast to Caesarea. From there we continued up the Carmelite ridge to view the Jezreel Valley and western Galilee. We spent some time on Mount Carmel itself before stopping for the night in Haifa on the Mediterranean coast.



Caesarea

## Day Eight – Friday, June 3

Today we traveled from Haifa east across the Jezreel Valley to the ruins of Megiddo. From Megiddo we drove north across the valley to the Nazareth overlook on so-called Mount Precipice. Next was the hike to the top of Mount Arbel for our first view of the Sea of Galilee. The day ended with a tour of the ruins of Magdala. As we stopped for the night, the Sea of Galilee was only about twenty yards from my room. Honestly just too much to take in!



Jezreel Valley from Mount Carmel

## Day Nine – Saturday, June 4

We spent the entire day in the Huleh Basin area north of the Sea of Galilee near the borders with Lebanon and Syria. This area was among the most spiritually dark and depraved areas that Jesus visited during His ministry in Galilee. We began the day viewing the ruins at Tel Hazor. We continued to Tel Dan, near the northern border of Israel, where Jeroboam set up a temple and altar to compete with the one in Jerusalem. This stop included a lovely walk along Ein Dan. After lunch we toured the region of Caesarea Philippi and Panias. Next, we went up to the ruins of a fortress built by the Crusaders, called “Nimrod’s Fortress.” From its walls we had a panorama of upper Galilee to the south and west and then Mount Hermon to the north. We concluded the day at the ruins of a necropolis and pagan temple devoted to communication with the dead. The common thread through each of these sites is the darkness and idolatry that Jesus confronted there.



Sunrise over the Sea of Galilee

## Day Ten – Sunday, June 5

Today was the so-called “Evangelical Triangle.” Imagine a triangle drawn from Chorazin to Bethsaida and then to Capernaum. Seventy-five percent of the events we know from Jesus’ ministry occurred in this tiny area. The day began at the ruins of Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. We then went back across the north shore to Tabgha, the traditional site of the miraculous catch of fish after Jesus’ resurrection. Next was Capernaum, including the ruins of the synagogue built by the centurion whose servant Jesus healed and what is believed to be the ruins of Simon Peter’s house. Capernaum was Jesus’ base of operations and adopted hometown during His Galilean ministry. From Capernaum, we boarded a boat and sailed across to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee to view the so-called “Jesus Boat,” a fishing boat dating to the time of Christ. It is representative of the type of fishing boats that were in use at that time. This boat could easily hold thirteen people, and with the low sides it is not hard to imagine Peter stepping out of the boat to walk on the water toward Christ. No one suggests that this boat has any connection to Jesus other than to give a picture a first-century Galilean boat. The last stop was the Mount of the Beatitudes, the traditional sight of the Sermon on the Mount.



The “Jesus” Boat



## Day Eleven – Monday, June 6

Today was spent along the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee along the Golan Heights. We visited Gamala and the replica first century town at Katsrin. Continuing south we viewed the ruins of Hippus, a Gentile city in the region of the Decapolis. We descended through Nahal Yarmuk along the borders with Syria and Jordan and then back around the southern side of the Sea of Galilee to Tiberias.



The Sea of Galilee from the Golan Heights.

## Day Twelve – Tuesday, June 7

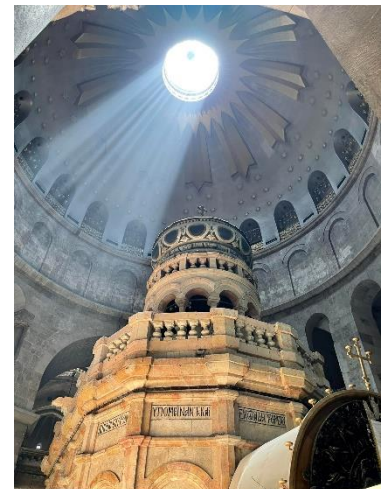
Today we traveled south from Tiberias to Jerusalem. Along the way, we stopped at the ruins of Bet'shean (Scythopolis in New Testament times). It was remarkable. A truly Roman city alongside ancient Egyptian/Canaanite/Israelite ruins. The next stop was Bethany beyond the Jordan (the traditional site of Jesus' baptism) and then it was up to Jerusalem to tour the City of David, the oldest section, including ruins from the Jebusite city, as well as the Davidic and Solomonic expansions. This included a walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel. I made it through...but once was enough for me!



Entering Hezekiah's Tunnel

## Day Thirteen – Wednesday, June 8

This day is best described as "Jerusalem on foot." We began by visiting the Temple Mount (Haram Esh-Sharif) and the area around the Dome of the Rock. It is hard to overstate just how mammoth this area is. We then continued to the area of the Pool of Bethesda. Next was a return trip to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with the opportunity, thanks to the hospitality of the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem, to go into the lower levels below the church to view the original rock quarry in the area which very possibly could be Golgotha. We then returned to the Western Wall and the Western Wall Tunnels and the archaeological excavations on the south side of the Temple Mount (Davidson Museum). The day concluded with the Burnt House, in what would have been the wealthy area of the Upper City in Jesus' day. We



The dome above the Edicule in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher



then walked by the locations of Annas' residence and the house of Caiaphas, which as you would surmise are right across the street from each other.

## Day Fourteen – Thursday, June 9

More of Jerusalem on foot. We began the day in Bethphage, on the southwest side of the Mount of Olives. This is where Jesus sent his disciples to obtain the donkey on Palm Sunday. From there we could look west-southwest toward Bethany. Leaving Bethphage, we walked down the western slope of the Mount of Olives toward Gethsemane, stopping at the courtyard of Dominus Flevit Church, which commemorates Jesus' tears over Jerusalem. We then walked from the Kidron Valley to the Upper City (this is a big hill!). We visited the area of the Upper Room and then the ruins of Herod's palace where Jesus' trials before Pilate and Herod Antipas occurred, near the Jaffa Gate. The rest of the afternoon was spent wandering the Old City. On the way back to the hotel, I stopped by the Garden Tomb.



Olive trees in Gethsemane.

## Day Fifteen – Friday, June 10

Our last day was spent at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. We then drove to the promenade overlook southwest of Jerusalem for a last look at the city and a time of group prayer.

If you would like to see more pictures and further comments about my trip to Israel, you can check out my posts on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/aaron.levenhagen>).