

## IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

### The Towns and Cities of Jesus’ Day

For a small village, Bethany is a place of many important events in the life of Jesus. Here we see Him as our treasured Savior, our powerful Lord, our great teacher, and our ascended Christ. Come to this ancient place and find rest for your souls.

#### History and Geography of Bethany

Bethany was located less than two miles eastward of Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. The name *Bethany* could mean “house of Ananiah,” “house of dates,” or “house of misery.” We don’t know exactly what the name means. The modern village sitting near the site of ancient Bethany is called *El Azariye* (named after Lazarus). This town is inhabited today by around 2,000 people. The primary religion is Islam (The Muslims venerate Lazarus as one of their prophets.) This village is probably closer to the tomb of Lazarus than to the actual site of old Bethany. Archeologists are fairly certain that Bethany lay slightly higher up the slope than today’s city of *El Azariye*. They base this on artifacts they have found such as oil lamps, jars, pitchers, and coins.



## Important Events at Bethany

As mentioned earlier, some very significant Biblical events took place in Bethany.

### I. Jesus at the Home of Mary and Martha

John 10:38-42  
Jesus Our Great Teacher

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

- Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus all lived in Bethany (Jn 11:1). How can you tell that both Mary and Martha were excited to see Jesus when He arrived in town?
- Was Martha wrong in wanting to cook a meal for Jesus?
- What did Jesus gently teach Martha about priorities in life?
- What do you think Martha did after Jesus told her about the “one thing needful”?
- What blessings can come to us through God’s word and why are those blessings more important than earthly things?

### II. The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:32-45  
Jesus Our Powerful Lord

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." <sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone.

Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." <sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

- In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed His almighty power over death. It is a reminder that He also has the power to raise us from the dead to eternal life.

### III. Mary Anoints Jesus

John 12:1-8  
Jesus Our Treasured Savior

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." <sup>6</sup> He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. <sup>7</sup> "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial." <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

- Who is the most important person in your life? Your spouse? A child? What kinds of gifts do you give to the special people in your life?
- What gift did Mary give to Jesus? Consider the 'cost' of her gift in today's dollars – why do you think she gave so much?
- What would you give to someone who had raised your loved one from the dead? What would you give to the One who will raise *you* from the dead? Isn't that a gift that is *priceless*?
- Read Romans 12:1 to see how the Apostle Paul suggests we respond to Jesus our treasured Savior.

### IV. The Ascension of Jesus

Luke 24:50-53

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

- Jesus' ascension is His final statement of victory and triumph. He had atoned for the sins of the world and now He would once again assume a position of power and authority in heaven and earth, sitting at the "right hand" of God.
- How appropriate that Jesus' disappeared from view while He was *blessing* His disciples. He continues to bless all His dear children, sharing gifts (Eph 4:8-13), interceding for them (Rom 8:34), and ruling His Church in love and mercy (Eph 1:22).



### Resources

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/mideast/photo/Palestine.html#>  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02531a.htm>  
<http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethanytxt.htm>  
*The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia* Samuel Fallows, ed.