

December 2023

## Footsteps of St. Paul 2024

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, for some time now we have had the privilege of leading special overseas study tours to the lands of the Bible, on behalf of Catholic Theological Union. We are preparing once again in Fall 2024 to trace the footsteps of Paul and other courageous early missionaries as they established the church in Greece and Turkey. As the Acts of the Apostles testifies, Paul himself blazed a trail through some of the most fascinating parts of the ancient Mediterranean world, planting Christian communities wherever he went. This is a journey you should not miss.

Traditionally, tours like these have been led by our late President Emeritus and Chancellor, Fr. Donald Senior, CP. As we continue these memorable trips, we look forward to honoring him by introducing a new generation of CTU friends and supporters to the legacy he leaves to the world of the Word he loved so much. This year, I will be joined on the trip by my colleague, Rachel Kuhn, Director of Development at CTU. Rachel is a veteran traveler to the Middle East and a superb administrator of our travel arrangements. We will do everything we can to make your trip enjoyable and memorable.

Entitled "The Birth of Christianity," scheduled for **October 5 – October 18, 2024**, this program will explore historical sites in Greece and Turkey made sacred not only by the presence of the Apostle Paul but also by the Evangelists John, Matthew, Luke, and other early Christian leaders. No other area in the world can match the natural beauty, spectacular archaeological, and significant historical sites connected with the first traces of the early Church as it moved out beyond the boundaries of Israel into the wider Gentile world. Here lie the historical foundations not only of the New Testament itself, but also the development of the earliest Apostolic Church as it began to take root in the Greco-Roman world.

### The Itinerary

The itinerary we are proposing to you is the following:

We will leave Chicago (or other similar staging points convenient to you in the U.S.) on Saturday, October 5, arriving in **Thessaloniki**, Greece on Sunday, October 6. This region of ancient Macedonia is the famed homeland of Alexander the Great and the first area that Paul visited in Europe.

On Monday, October 7 we will visit the beautiful Mediterranean port city of Kavala, which is the site of ancient Neapolis where Paul first landed, and then visit the nearby magnificent ruins of the Roman city of **Philippi**, Paul's favorite community. We will celebrate Eucharist at the grove of trees near the river where the Acts of the Apostles tells us Paul met Lydia and made his first converts in this region.

On Tuesday, after touring Thessaloniki itself, we will head due west to ancient **Boerea**, another city Paul visited, and then to **Vergina**, the site where the kings of ancient Macedonia were entombed, including the tomb of Philip, the father of Alexander—one of the most spectacular archaeological finds of the modern era. Then we take a beautiful drive down the central highlands of Greece, through the historic pass of Thermopylae, to the region of **Meteora** with its breathtaking monasteries built on the peaks of high rock mountaintops. Here we will overnight in the lovely

Divani Hotel and in the morning explore some of these haunting and beautiful Orthodox monasteries.

Wednesday, October 9, after visiting the monasteries in the sky, we come back down to earth and once more pick up Paul's trail, travelling down the east coast of Greece by superhighway to **Athens**. We will arrive there in late afternoon and stay at the centrally located five-star Hotel Divini Caravel.

Thursday, October 10, we take a short drive along the shores of Piraeus, passing over the famous Corinth canal begun by the emperor Nero, to one of the most important places connected with Paul: the ancient Roman city of **Corinth**. We will have a thorough tour of this site filled with memories of the apostle. After lunch in a nearby Greek village, we will conclude our visit in the ancient port of Cenchreae, which Paul mentions in his letter to the Romans. Then, it is back to Athens for a guided visit to the Acropolis and its beautiful Parthenon.

Friday, October 11, we will check out of our hotel early and spend the first part of the day doing further exploration of Athens. Sites will include the Agora where Paul preached and the Areopagus where he explained the message of Christ to the leaders of the city. In the late afternoon, we will head to the Athens airport and fly to Izmir, the ancient city of Smyrna. We will stay that evening in a beautiful seaside hotel in Kusadasi, Turkey.

On Saturday, October 12, we will travel a short distance to the magnificent site of **Ephesus**, one of the most well-preserved and famous ancient Roman cities in the world. The city holds memories of Paul, of John the Evangelist, of Luke, and of Mary, who may have spent her last days here; we will encounter them all. We will visit all the Ephesian highlights, including its fascinating museum, and conclude our visit anticipating Sunday Mass at the beautiful shrine to Mary in the hills surrounding the city.

On Sunday, October 13, we will fly to Adana and drive through the Turkish countryside to **Tarsus**, the birthplace of Paul. From there, we head north through an area reminiscent in its mountainous beauty of Switzerland until we arrive at the high plains of **Cappadocia** and stay in the capital city of the region, **Nevşehir**. This entire region is filled with memories of ancient Christianity and some of the earliest and greatest theologians of the ancient church. We will have the unique experience of sleeping in a 5-star cave at the Kayakapi Premium Caves hotel.

Monday, October 14, we will spend the entire day exploring the unbelievable terrain of Cappadocia, one of the true wonders of the world, with its famous carved cities and beautiful cratered landscape. There is an optional (not-to-be-missed) balloon ride to see the sun rise over this stunning landscape.

On Tuesday, October 15, after completing our visit to Cappadocia, we will drive to a nearby regional airport and board our plane for our flight to **Istanbul**, where we will spend the last three days of our trip until our departure on October 18. Our hotel is the Hotel Titanic (excuse the name!) in the bustling Taksim Square area of the city. Those who have ever visited Istanbul know that it is one of the most beautiful and fascinating cities in the world. Here, east and west meet. During our stay we will visit Sancta Sophia, the Blue Mosque, Topkapi palace, and explore the endless bazaars, capping our visit with a glorious boat ride on the Bosphorus. You will love this city and be sad to leave it when we head to the airport on the morning of Friday, October 18, to return to the U.S.A.

Covering this terrain and visiting these wonderful historical sites will give you a thorough acquaintance with Paul and earliest Christianity. These are not just the usual tourist stops; our itinerary will bring you into contact with some of the most interesting historical sites in the

Mediterranean world. At each place, we will read segments from Paul's writings and other New Testament texts as well as provide their historical background. Both Turkey and Greece require us to engage a state-certified guide. I am happy to say that we will have two of the best guides I have encountered in many years of travel to these areas. I have enjoyed working with each of them, and you will find them always ready to help us in any way they can. We will work together, with my providing of the biblical background of the places we visit while our guides complement the briefing with information about classical history and the contemporary context of these countries. I can assure you that your trip will be informative and thoroughly enjoyable.

But this will not be all work and no play! The scenery is beautiful, the weather is gorgeous, the people are most friendly, the hotels and restaurants we use are of the best quality, and the cuisine is wonderful. Best of all, as in the past, the people who go on these trips have always proved to be glorious; you will undoubtedly make friends who, like you, enjoy travel and want to do something a bit out of the ordinary.

The price is right, too! The total cost of the 12 night 13-day land portion will be \$6,200 per person. This price includes:

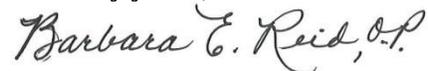
- the three *internal* flights: from Athens to Izmir, from Izmir to Adana, and from Cappadocia to Istanbul
- all lodging (based on double occupancy—all in 5-star deluxe hotels or best available level; single supplement is an additional \$1,700 for the entire trip)
- half-board (breakfast and dinner)
- all land travel in air-conditioned coaches
- entrances to archaeological sites and museums, guides, tips, and portage

It does not include *international* transatlantic air travel, lunches, additional beverages with meals, or Turkish visa [which must be obtained prior to departure from the U.S. either at a Turkish embassy, consulate, or online—further information will be provided for you once your place on the trip is confirmed]. We will suggest some good connections for departure and arrival and leave the purchase of the **transatlantic** ticket to each individual. Note: We will reserve and purchase your seats on the flights *within* Greece and Turkey; as noted, the cost for these internal flights is included in your overall price.

So how about joining us on this journey that will explore the wellsprings of our faith and our cultural heritage?

Enclosed is a registration form. We would appreciate it if you might fill it out and either mail or email it to Rachel as soon as convenient. You can also go online to register at [ctu.edu/events/](http://ctu.edu/events/). If you know of family members or friends who might be interested, please feel free to forward these materials to them, or if you prefer, give us their names and we will send them the information. Once we have received your confirmation, we will provide further details to prepare for this trip of a lifetime!

Sincerely yours,



Sr. Barbara Reid, OP  
President



Rachel Kuhn  
Director of Development

Enc. Application Form & Itinerary