

Archaeological Dig Reveals Where Jesus Began His Ministry

Discoveries from a new archaeological dig are creating excitement in the area where Jesus began His ministry. The village is called Magdala (Migdal in Hebrew), and it's the home of Mary Magdalene.

Senior Israeli archaeologist Arfan Najar, who oversees the excavation at Magdala, told CBN News, "She lived here and she met Jesus here and she continued with Him. Yes, it's that place."

Najar said the city lay hidden all this time by just a small layer of dirt.

"Some place almost you touch the surface and you have the wall, waiting for us for 2,000 years to when we are coming," he said.

The most important discovery in Magdala has been a synagogue dating back to the time of Jesus. According to archaeologists, it's the first one discovered in the Galilee.

"An expression that appears many times in several places of the Gospel, 'Jesus went around Galilee preaching in their synagogues,'" Father Solana, general director at the Magdala Center, explained. "So this is the closest synagogue to Capernaum where He lived. So it was likely He was here many times."

In the synagogue, the team discovered a 2,000-year-old treasure. They call it the Magdala Stone, and some archaeologists say it's the most important discovery in decades.

CBN News first reported on the stone just after it was uncovered in 2009. Father Kelly, of the Catholic order Legionnaires of Christ, showed CBN News a replica while overlooking the Temple Mount.

"This particular Magdala Stone is the most important discovery ever made in relation to the Second Temple, the temple at the time of Jesus, which Herod redid. So that's quite the statement," Father Kelly said.

The Menorah (six-lamp candelabrum) on the stone is one of a kind, the first one discovered before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. The Legionnaires of Christ own the land and are building an entire center at Magdala with an archaeological park, hotel and spiritual center. Father Solana dreamed up the project and wants it to be a center for all.

"I'm pretty sure it's a gift for the world, for culture, for religions, for Israel of course," he said.

Visitors to the center see the Bible come to life.

"The altar is in the shape of a boat, a fisherman's boat," said Monica, a Christian pilgrim from Australia. "You're reminded of Jesus standing in the boat and preaching to the people on the shore."

Jane, another Christian from Australia, said, "The whole gospel story has come alive for me here. It will never mean the same ever again."

Father Solana sees the motto of the center, "*Duc in Altum*," Latin for "go into the deep," as a message for today.

"Somehow Jesus tells to all of us, 'Go into the deep, try again, you can. Go, go, go!'" he said. "So I think this a beautiful message that the world needs in this moment. Financial crisis, problems with jobs, many situations and we need to try again. God is on our side."