

Pope to Make First Papal Visit to Holy Land



As part of his first papal visit to Israel next month, Pope Benedict XVI will stop at several Christian and Jewish holy sites in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem, according to Israel Ministry of Tourism.

He is scheduled to be in the Holy Land May 8-15, and will visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, Mount Zion and the Church of All Nations in the Garden of Gethsemane. President Shimon Peres will be the pope's host and escort.

The visit will mark the pope's first trip to Israel since accompanying Pope John Paul II on his pilgrimage in 2000. Pope Benedict XVI will deliver Mass at Manger Square in the Palestinian Authority city of Bethlehem on May 13 and another at Mount Precipice near Nazareth on May 14.

"The Pope inspires an atmosphere of understanding and peace between all peoples and religions," says Israel Tourism Minister Ruhama Avraham-Balil. "We expect his visit to encourage thousands of pilgrims around the world to follow in his footsteps."