



## Capernaum, the town of Jesus

- A project of the Franciscans in the Holy Land -

*"This small 2,000-year-old village – the setting for key events in the public life of Jesus in Galilee – is of great importance in the history of Christianity. Capernaum is a jewel in the crown of the historic and religious sites in the Holy Land. As such, Capernaum deserves to be presented to the public in a way which reveals the hidden message in its remains."*

*(P. Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM – Custos of the Holy Land)*

**To redesign the "town of Jesus" – Capernaum – for current requirements as a pilgrimage site and to better present the spiritual message of this important Christian site.**



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Capernaum – the town of Jesus

The excavations at Capernaum are on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum, which was probably founded in 2 B.C., was a fishing village and a bustling trading center on the imperial road to Damascus in the time of Jesus.



*Capernaum site with the ancient synagogue*

Capernaum played a special role in the life and works of Christ. According to the Gospels, at the beginning of his public life, Jesus left Nazareth to settle in Capernaum (Matthew 4:13).

Here, Jesus appointed his first disciple (Matthew 4:18 ff). The town was home to Simon Peter the Apostle, his brother Andrew as well as James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were all fishermen. Levi, later known as Matthew, was a tax collector in the small town on the shores of the lake when he was called to follow Jesus (Mark 2:13 ff).

Jesus made Capernaum "his town" as Matthew wrote (Matthew 9:1). In the middle of his life, at the time of his public ministry, Capernaum and the surrounding area was witness to numerous acts, miracles and teachings by Jesus. However, the harbor of the Sea of Galilee is also the site of the moving meeting of the resurrected Christ with his disciples, as described in the Gospel of John (John 21).

It is likely that Jesus lived in Peter's house in Capernaum. In any event, he healed the Apostle's mother-in-law there (Mark 1:29 ff) and a paralyzed man who was brought to him through an opening in the roof (Mark 2:1 ff). This house was converted into a place of worship by the first Christians and was rebuilt as a small octagonal church in the Byzantine era. However, the building was destroyed in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, probably during a raid by the Persians.

Capernaum was destroyed by an earthquake in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Although it was rebuilt, Capernaum was

abandoned again a short time later for unknown reasons. A 13<sup>th</sup> century pilgrim reported only a few shabby huts in Capernaum. It disappeared entirely after the Crusades and was forgotten.

It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the remains of Capernaum were rediscovered. In 1893, the site was acquired by the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land.

### **The archaeological site of Capernaum**

The various excavations that have been carried out in Capernaum by Studium Biblicum Franciscanum have revealed a great deal about daily life in the ancient town.

Many day-to-day items from its varied history have been found (vessels, coins, mosaics, etc.). In addition to the remains of many houses and alleys, the archaeological site itself features a large synagogue dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It was built on an older one in which Jesus is believed to have taught himself.

However, the most significant discovery for Christianity is the house of Peter the Apostle, in which Jesus undoubtedly spent a great deal of time. The foundation walls of the house and those of the octagonal church from the Byzantine era can still be clearly seen.



*View of the house of Peter the Apostle*

The excavation site is now accessible to the public. A modern church has been built above the remains of the house of Simon Peter and enables pilgrims to mediate and pray here.

Capernaum is not only the setting for main events in the public life of Jesus, but also the place in which the early church took its first steps. Due to both its beauty and its particular spiritual meaning, it is one of the most important sites of Christianity in the Holy Land.

For this reason, the Custodian, owner of the land and responsible for this Biblical site, set up the "Capernaum Project".



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### The "Capernaum Project"

The "Capernaum Project" aims to enhance the status of "the town of Jesus" as an archaeological and Biblical site and thus to better bring to bear the spiritual message of this place, which is so special for Christianity.

The majority of pilgrims and tourists who visit Capernaum every year are currently greeted by an outdated infrastructure with deficient explanations.

Plans for a new concept for and the modernization of the archaeological site have already been drawn up.

On the one hand, these plans propose a reorganization of the infrastructure. The intention is to renovate the entire entrance to the site, lay additional paths and better organized guiding of visitors.



In addition, the archaeological pilgrimage site will be better explained to visitors. To achieve this, construction of a smaller, lightweight design visitor center is planned, in which Capernaum will be explained from an historic and religious point of view, using traditional as well as modern multimedia methods. Archaeological findings from the site and small exhibitions will also be on display in the rooms. The intention is that visitors will visit the site themselves by following a tour with explanatory boards and models.

The plans pay particular attention to the design of the site's landscape architecture. By planting typical plants from religious times at the site, pilgrims will discover the most realistic landscape from Jesus' time at the Sea of Galilee and also be able to bring the meaning of the Gospels to life more easily.

By visiting the Capernaum pilgrimage site, the important events that took place there 2,000 ago will be communicated to today's visitor on a deeper level.

*"...we should always be prepared to ask ourselves who Jesus was. Because this site should refer us to him... It invites us to ask about the Jesus who took his first steps here towards that church which commemorates him at this site." (P. Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM – Custos of the Holy Land)*



If you would like to support the "Capernaum Project" to enhance the "town of Jesus" as an archaeological and biblical site:

To find out more: [www.proterrasancta.org](http://www.proterrasancta.org)

Email: [infoats@custodia.org](mailto:infoats@custodia.org)

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