

Lent 2007 Issue

In the Footsteps of Abraham

My own journey of faith started in his hometown.

Have you ever heard God? I'm not talking about whether you've heard God in a soft stillness, like the prophet Elijah, or as a voice from a burning bush, like Moses.

I mean, have you ever made a choice that warmed your heart because you knew it was God who led you to it? This is what has been happening to me since I arrived in Iraq in March 2006, as part of a Maine Army National Guard unit.

The setting is more fitting than I could ever have imagined. Only minutes from the center of our base are the ruins of the ancient city of Ur. Dominating the flat landscape is a ziggurat built at the end of the third millennium b.c. This is a massive, pyramid-like structure with stairways on three sides.

The Bible connects Ur with Abraham, our great ancestor in faith. This is not where he was living when God told him to go "to a land that I will show you"—by then, his father, Terah, had moved the whole family to Haran (Genesis 11:31; 12:1). But Ur was the childhood home of the man with whom our covenant with God really began. I count it an honor that my spiritual adventure is beginning here also.

Easter at Ur. Though I have known God for as long as I can remember, I have been searching for something all my life. I knew Jesus and was baptized in the Baptist Church on Easter 1972 as an expression of my love for him. Throughout my high school years, I was very involved in my small church. But I felt I was missing something. I wandered through many congregations, sometimes avoiding churches altogether.

Then in 2000, I met Prudence, the woman who is now my wife. When we started seeing each other, I often accompanied her to Mass at a beautiful nineteenth-century church. I enjoyed the peace of the liturgy.

After we married, I decided to attend Mass whenever I was away from home on active duty. Mostly, I admit, I did this as a way of staying connected with Prudence. We enjoy praying and reading the Bible together, and I wanted to share in the same Sunday liturgy that she was attending.

And so, Easter morning 2006 found me at a special sunrise Mass celebrated within ancient Ur. How exciting it was to pray at the birthplace of Abraham! To think that he had looked out over this land and had seen the same sun rise for one last time before proceeding north to Haran. He didn't know it yet, but he was traveling to a place where God would call him to a journey of faith—a new beginning for the whole human race.

At that Easter Mass, I became very aware of all that God had done, not just for Abraham but for me. I was reminded of his great love, especially as revealed in Jesus' death on the cross and rising from the dead. Along with this came an overwhelming desire to begin a spiritual adventure of my own: the journey to becoming a Catholic. I had toyed with the idea before, but had been content to remain an outsider. Now, I felt sure it was the "something more" that I had been seeking. A peace came over me. God had answered my prayer.

On the Way. I am now receiving instruction in the Catholic faith and look forward to every class. I hope to be received into the Church before I redeploy back to the U.S. If all goes as planned, I will have had my first Eucharist with my wife by the time you read this. Meanwhile, my faith sustains me day to day.

Our unit has the mission of protecting convoys of supplies all around Baghdad and the southern regions of Iraq. I do not go off base with the convoys—my role is to provide support for the soldiers who do. Though I often put in long days making sure they have whatever is needed, I am glad to do whatever I can to help with their dangerous mission.

I have been blessed by this deployment in many ways. Most of all, I thank God for using it to get my attention. So often

in the past, I felt the need to pray and ask God for inspiration—without ever really taking the time to listen to what he had to say! Now, with Abraham as my model, I am listening as I continue on my journey of faith.

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