

The Church of the Primary of St. Peter is a Franciscan Church located in Tabgha, Israel, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It commemorates, and allegedly marks the spot, of Jesus' reinstatement of Peter as chief among the Apostles. The modern structure was built in 1933 and incorporates parts of an earlier 4th century church. At the base of its walls, opposite the main altar, foundations of the 4th century Church are visible. In the 9th century, the Church was referred to as the *Place of the Coals*. This name refers to the incident of Jesus' preparation of meal for the apostles, building a charcoal fire on which to cook the fish. Also first mentioned in the year 808 are the "Twelve Thrones", a series of heart shaped stones, which were placed along the shore to commemorate the Twelve Apostles. The Church survived longer than any other in the area, finally being destroyed in 1263. This Church was included in the itineraries of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II during their visits to Israel in 1964 and March 2000 respectively. The Church contains a projection of limestone rock in front of the present altar which is venerated as a "*Mensa Christi*", Latin for *table of Christ*. According to tradition this is the spot where Jesus is said to have laid out a breakfast of bread and fish for the Apostles, and told Peter to "*Feed my sheep*" after the miraculous catch, the third time he appeared to them after His resurrection. It is disputed whether this table, or the one enshrined at the nearby Church of the Multiplication, is the one mentioned by the pilgrim Egeria in her narrative of the Holy Land *circa* 380. There is also another *table of Christ* enshrined at the Mensa Christi Church in Nazareth. But it is also remembered for Jesus' third appearance to His disciples after his Resurrection, when He tested and commissioned **St. Peter** as leader of his Church.

Tabgha is at the foot of the Mount of Beatitudes, about 3km south-west of Capernaum. The name is an Arab mispronunciation of the Greek Heptapegon (meaning "seven springs"). Several warm sulphurous **springs** enter the lake here, attracting fish especially in winter. This was a favorite spot for fishermen from nearby Capernaum, and its beach was familiar to Jesus and his disciples. It is easy to imagine Jesus speaking from a **boat** in one of the little bays, with crowds sitting around on the shore. According to chapter 14 of Matthew's Gospel, the miraculous **feeding** came after Jesus learned that Herod Antipas had beheaded his cousin, John the Baptist. Jesus "withdrew in a boat . . . to a deserted place by himself". Crowds followed and he had **compassion** on them, curing their sick. In the evening He told the multitude — 5000 men, plus women and children — to sit on the grass. Then He took **five loaves and two fish**, "looked up to Heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves . . . and the disciples gave them to the crowds". After they had eaten, the leftovers filled 12 baskets.

As the event is described in the 21st chapter of St John, Peter and six other disciples had been **fishing** all night without catching anything. Just after daybreak Jesus stood on the beach, though they did not recognize Him. Jesus told the disciples to cast their net on the "right" side of the boat, not "wrong," and the net filled with 153 fish. When the disciples dragged the net ashore, they found that Jesus had cooked them **breakfast** on a charcoal fire.

The rock incorporated in the Church floor is traditionally believed to be the place where Jesus prepared breakfast. After breakfast, Jesus **challenged** Peter three times with the question: "Do you love me?" Peter's positive response to this three-fold challenge cancelled out his three-fold denial of Jesus the night before His crucifixion. Then Jesus gave Peter a three-fold **commission**: "Feed my lambs . . . Tend my sheep . . . Feed my sheep." And He also indicated that Peter would die by martyrdom. After this event Peter's **primacy** as head of the apostles was recognized. Beside the Church, in a garden setting, is an area designed for group worship. Between this and the lake stands a modern bronze **statue** of Jesus symbolically commissioning Peter with his shepherd's crook.

