

Special El Al Flight 'Jumbo for Jesus'

NEW YORK --- The largest airborne pilgrimage in history left JFK Airport April 4, the "Star of Bethlehem", as the special EL AL flight is dubbed will fly some 400 Christians to the Holy Land.

This "Jumbo for Jesus" is the brainchild of Gaylord Briley, a religious journalist and fundraiser for the Holy Land Mission of Kansas City, Missouri, which serves crippled and orphaned Arab children. The purpose of the trip is to raise funds for the Bethlehem Crippled Children's Hospital.

Singer Pat Boone and his family will be on the trip. Boone will star in a CBS Television special "Christmas in Bethlehem" being filmed by American Video Cinema of Dallas. A record album will also be recorded for MGM. The cover of the album will picture the entire tour group. Boone, who composed the lyrics for "This Land is Mine", is making his first trip to the Holy Land.

Each member of the pilgrimage will be carrying shoes for the children at the Holy Land Mission. Child Life of Milwaukee donated 400 specially made orthopedic shoes as well as 700 pairs of new Easter shoes for the orphans.

Fifty of those going over are foster parents of young Arab orphans who will meet their American "parents" for the first time.

A children's forest in Galilee will have a tree planted in the name of each pilgrim.

All of the pilgrims are supporters of the Holy Land Mission. They are mostly evangelical Christians -- Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostal, Assembly of God and other denominations. The group, which represents some 30 states, responded to an invitation from the Holy Land Mission to visit the Mission's facility and watch the Boone family film their television special in the Holy Land.

The Holy Land Mission is the largest and oldest

organization of its kind in the Mideast. It was founded in 1936, to provide housing, education and care for widows, orphans, the poor people of Bethlehem and refugees. The trip symbolizes the strong ties between the Kansas City-based Holy Land Mission and the complex of hospitals, homes and the school it maintains in the Holy Land.

The group will attend dedication ceremonies for the Bethlehem Crippled Children's Hospital to be constructed on the Mount of David overlooking the oldest Christian shrine in the world, the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem. Services will be held in Manger Square with Bethlehem's Christian Arab Mayor Elias Freij presiding. The group will be welcomed to Jerusalem by Mayor Teddy Kollek.

The pilgrimage will run until April 12, with visits to many of the historical sites in the Holy Land. Isravia Airlines will take the group on an angel's-eye-view of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Masada and the Dead Sea where they will be flying below sea-level. They will also visit Jericho, the Moab Mountains, the Jordan River, the Qumran Caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, the Garden of Gethsemane, Mount Zion, the room of the last Supper, Nazareth, Tel Aviv, Haifa, and other sites of profound Christian interest. Travel arrangements were made by Tagger Tours International in New York.

Gaylord Briley has spent most of his life serving non-profit religious and charitable organizations. In 1971, he organized the largest Christian gathering in the Holy Land in the past 2000 years -- a religious congress on the subject of Biblical prophecy.

Briley sees the Holy Land Mission as a working center for peace in the Mideast. Set atop the Mount of David, the 18-building compound is the largest employer in the city of Bethlehem. There is a regular school, a trade school and a church in the compound.

The 42-year old Briley lives with his wife and daughter on a 17-acre tree-covered farm in the Pennsylvania Dutch town of Red Hill. He keeps up with his busy schedule by piloting his own Cherokee Arrow plane.

Briley points out that the U.S. evangelical church members (some 50 million strong) are Israel's strongest supporters -- because the revival of a Jewish state fulfills Biblical prophecy that the Jews will be regathered. "The city of Bethlehem", Briley points out, "unites people of all faiths -- Christians, Jews and Arabs." When asked about the Jews for Jesus movement, Briley is quick to reply that the tour group does not seek converts, rather: "There are not enough Christians for Jesus. We're going to the Holy Land to help our fellow Christians, to do the same work Christ would be doing today -- ministering to the widows, orphans and helping heal crippled bodies."

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