

The Pilgrim's Companion

A Resource for Asian Americans
who Journey with Jesus

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1. Introduction to Pilgriming

A pilgrimage is a sacred journey to holy places for

- **Connection**¹ to God
- Spiritual growth and **renewal**², and
- Transformational **self-understanding**³ and self-integration.

The travel, reflecting our walk with God, takes us from our normal space and time to new places for intentional prayer, reflection, and devotion. It can involve sacrifice and physical hardship as we journey through uncomfortable spaces to encounter God in new ways.

Christian pilgrims connect to the life of Jesus, his disciples and his saints as people journey to sites such as Jerusalem, Rome, and the Camino in Spain. Followers of Jesus often seek inner transformation, wanting to be unburdened by the past and gaining spiritual renewal and clarity.

They often join other Christians on these pilgrimages for fellowship and for shared meals, prayers, and story-telling. The element of sacrifice reminds us of the hardships that Jesus and his disciples suffered for our sakes.



Asian adherents of varied traditions—Buddhist, Shinto, Muslim—also undertake pilgrimages to holy sites for:

- Spiritual **blessing and power**⁴
- **Healing and comfort**⁵
- Personal **transformation**⁶
- Community **fellowship**⁷

Asian Americans, too, have historical sites where followers of Jesus have met Jesus, especially in times of hardship, trauma and racism. As pilgrims journey to these places, we can experience God's presence and power as we consider the resilience and resistance of our ancestors and family members.

Through pilgrimages to these sites, Asian Americans not only might connect to the historic experiences of Asian Americans, but also can see how God works in and through their ethnic and racial identities. Unlike tourism, where we visit places mostly for enjoyment, pilgrimages offer a deeper experience with God for transformation.

Reflection Questions:

1. *What reasons do you have for joining this pilgrimage?*
2. *What do you hope for?*

2. Preparing for Pilgrimages

To prepare for their journeys, pilgrims prepare their hearts, bodies, and minds to go with intentionality.

Spiritual preparation⁸ of your heart includes:



- Setting your intentions: define why you're going and what you're hoping for
- Prayerfully ask God to meet you
- Discerning what you need to let go of
- Forgiving and reconciling with others
- Preparing emotionally to recall difficult memories and conversations



Physical preparation involves:

- Starting early
- Daily walking
- Medical consultation, if needed



Practical, mental preparation includes:

- Studying about the places you visit
- Learning some phrases of the languages you might need
- Packing lightly
- Logistics planning

Reflection Questions:

1. *What do you want to leave behind so that you can focus on the pilgrimage?*
2. *How and where would you like the Holy Spirit to meet you as you journey? What hopes do you have?*

3. Pilgriming Together



Pilgrimages build community as fellow pilgrims journey together, share experiences and struggles, and reflect together. In these ways, not only are individuals transformed, but communities can be strengthened and renewed. Your group may draw closer together through

- Shared meals
- Walking together
- Encountering new experiences together
- Story-sharing
- Bearing witness to injustices and resistance

Further, on Asian American pilgrimages, pilgrims learn of historic communities and connect with ancestral stories. As we develop understanding and empathy of the struggles and resilience of our forebears, we can gain closer ethnic ties and stronger racial solidarities.

The visits may:

- Strengthen your group identity and commitments
- Connect you to stories you may have not learned
- Build your conviction to support others with similar experiences

Finally, pilgrims recognize how Asian families and churches have encountered God in their journey and settlement to the US. In meeting this cloud of witnesses, we can be encouraged by God's faithfulness and our communion with the saints.

In learning about historic Asian American Christians, you may:

- Gain strength and courage from their faith
- Draw upon their models of love and hope
- Be inspired to pursue God's will in new and creative ways

Pilgrims journey not merely as individuals but as companions. Groups should strive to practice hospitality, confidentiality, attentive listening, and mutual care throughout the pilgrimage.

Reflection Questions:

1. *What common circumstances and aims led individuals to migrate or to take a pilgrimage? What global situations shaped these circumstances?*
2. *You'll leave your family and all that is familiar and comfortable to you. How do you feel as a stranger in this new place?*
3. *Consider those on the journey with you. How do you feel towards them? What do these feelings say about your ethnic/regional identities?*

4. Encountering Asian American Sacred Historical Sites

Although God was and is present everywhere, certain sites may be considered sacred in that individuals and groups encountered God in powerful ways in historical moments. After a military victory, Samuel declared, *“Thus far the Lord has helped us.”* (1 Sam. 7:12) Just as he set up a stone and named it Ebenezer to commemorate God’s help, we recognize specific spaces and times where we honor God’s faithfulness and intervention for Asians in the US.

For example, these sites include:

1. **Angel Island Immigration Station**⁹, where migrants faced detention while racially profiled as illegal paper sons and daughters.
2. **Manzanar War Relocation Center**¹⁰, where even Japanese who were US citizens were termed “enemy aliens.”
3. **The International Hotel**¹¹, where Filipino manongs—elders and older brothers—fought eviction and redevelopment.
4. **The Tenderloin**¹², where Southeast Asian refugees resettled and created communities for themselves.

Despite the racist and painful experiences at these places, we know Christians have borne witness to how God was present and working in them and through them there.

Overall, Asian Americans as a group have undergone **similar racialized experiences**¹³ when migrating to the United States. In the midst of these experiences, Asian American Christians have encountered God’s presence and guidance. These historic trends include

1. **Racial Exclusion**¹⁴ and **Stereotyping**¹⁵
2. **Acculturation and Community Building**¹⁶
3. **Cultural Preservation and Ethnic Reclamation**¹⁷
4. **Racial Solidarity and Collective Resistance**¹⁸
5. **Religious Change and Faith Development**¹⁹

As Asian American Christians have confronted these issues, they have shared testimony about how God has formed them and instilled in them values such as hospitality and belonging, community and mutual aid, adaptability and risk-taking in faith.

You, too, may gain insights on these experiences and lessons on your pilgrimage. As you visit these sites and reflect on the experiences of fellow Asian Americans,

- Observe with your senses
- Notice emotional reactions
- Practice silence
- Pray for those who suffered there

As a group, you may engage with these specific rituals to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you and illuminate your way.

- Lighting candles or offering prayers
- Scripture reading
- Silent walking
- Naming ancestors
- Group lament



Reflection Questions:

1. *What immigrant and racialized experiences have you and your family shared with other Asian Americans?*
2. *What do you sense God is saying to you about these experiences? What values might God be wanting to form in you?*

5. “Where Have You Come From?” A Theology of Lament, Remembrance, and Healing



The Bible is replete with stories of migrants in flight and on a journey: Abraham, Moses, Daniel. Even Jesus is a migrant from heaven to earth, where he experienced being a refugee, colonial subject, and non-citizen criminal. Many Asian Americans may recognize themselves in the story of Hagar, whose name in Hebrew means foreigner.

Hagar is from Egypt, who traveled far from her homeland to work in Canaan as a slave to Sarah and Abraham. She's a foreigner in every sense of the word:

- Displaced to a foreign land, adapting to a new language and strange customs
- Marginalized and excluded, without much family and social support
- Forced to work as a slave, where even her body wasn't her own

When she becomes pregnant, she becomes a competitor and threat to Sarah. No longer useful, she's deemed dangerous. Sarah mistreats her and forces her to leave, effectively sending her into exile.

In flight while in the desert, Hagar meets an angel of the Lord who asks, “Where have you come from?” Although God knows her circumstances, He invites Hagar to consider her past. God invites her to recall her experiences in migration and in loss, in slavery and abuse. In reflecting upon these painful moments of her past, Hagar realized how God was always with her.

In naming her trauma, “I am fleeing Sarah,” Hagar reclaims her dignity and God redeems her humanity. In fact, God promises not only that she will bear a son, but that Hagar has God’s ear. Her son, Ishmael, means “God hears.”

Upon remembering and reflecting on this question, Hagar becomes the first person who gives God a name: “You are the God Who Sees Me.” Despite her marginalized status as a woman, slave and foreigner, she recognizes that God sees her.

Many Asian American families carry stories of migration, silence, trauma, and survival that are rarely spoken aloud. As you embark on this pilgrimage, consider “Where have you come from?” and meditate on your past.

Reflection Questions:

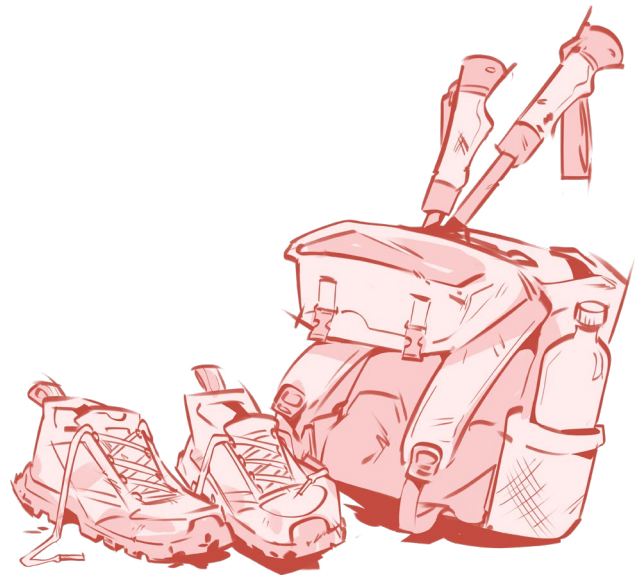
1. *Where have you come from? What shameful memories and past hurts need healing?*
2. *Where have you come from? What relationships and moments need redeeming?*

6. Returning Home

Pilgrims return home, often healed, restored, and changed. After a period of time, reflect on your trip and prayerfully consider what God is inviting you to do and to become.

One enduring strength of Asian American communities is their sense of collective responsibility to each other. Many recognize the sacrifices of their ancestors and their families, so they respond with reciprocal care and support. In these ways, their families grow stronger and more interdependent.

Your pilgrimage may have shown you how you have been heirs to a rich Asian American legacy. As you have received the blessings of ancestral sacrifice and family support, of God's intervention and redemption, how do you want to respond?



Reflection Questions:

1. *What changed in you?*
2. *What stories now belong to you?*
3. *What responsibilities emerge from this pilgrimage?*



A Prayer for Asian American Pilgrims

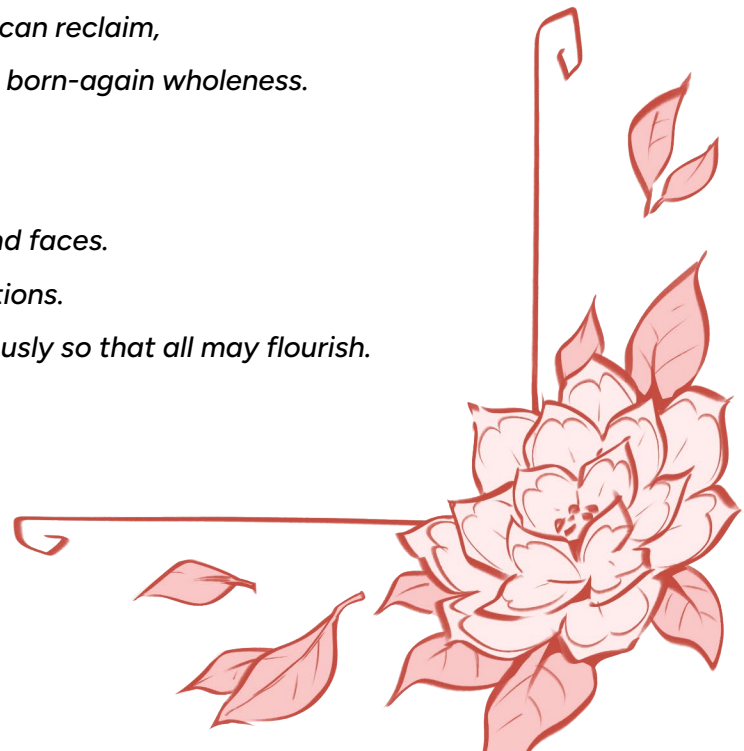
*O God of our ancestors,
We ask that your Spirit guide us this day.
As we journey into the past and into these places,
Reveal to us how you are a God who hears and who sees.*

*O God of our ancestors,
We mourn over what we have left behind and lost.
Even as we seek to escape poverty and war,
Save us from complicity with empires of violence.*

*O God of our ancestors,
We know that You have adopted us into your family.
Excluded and alienated, we've internalized racial shame,
Grant us the honor of being welcomed into Your presence.*

*O God of our ancestors,
We are split from two worlds.
We are grateful for the traditions we can reclaim,
And offer them to You as signs of our born-again wholeness.*

*O God of our ancestors,
You have gifted us with our names and faces.
They speak to the splendor of the nations.
May we share these blessings generously so that all may flourish.*



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