

## **Ancient 'Christ, born of Mary' inscription unearthed in northern Israel**



The region of the Jezreel Valley bears many testimonies of ancient Christian life. A 1,500-year-old Greek inscription bearing the name “Christ, born of Mary” was unearthed in northern Israel, the Antiquities Authority announced on Wednesday. The archaeologists discovered the inscription engraved at the entrance of an impressive building from the Byzantine or early Islamic period, featuring mosaic pavements decorated with a geometric design.

The finding was unveiled in a salvage excavation directed by Tzachi Lang and Kojan Haku ahead of the construction of a road inside the village of Taiba in the Jezreel Valley.

“We did not know what to expect ahead of the work, but we knew that this was an area where archaeological remains had been found. When we came across the inscription, we knew we had a church,” Antiquities Authority (IAA) archaeologist



Yardenna Alexandre told The Jerusalem Post.

According to the law in Israel, a salvage excavation must be conducted prior to any construction project. People from local communities are usually invited to take part in the projects, according to a consolidated policy by the IAA to foster interest in archaeology and the country's heritage.



“Christ born of Mary. This work of the most God-fearing and pious bishop [Theodo]sius and the miserable Th[omas] was built from the foundation. Whoever enters should pray for them,” reads the full inscription, according to Dr. Leah Di Segni, researcher at the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The inscription greets those who enter and blesses them. It is therefore clear that the building is a church, and not a monastery – churches greeted believers at their entrance, while monasteries tended not to do this,” Di Segni commented in a press release.

Theodosius was the regional archbishop of the metropolis of Beit She'an to which Taiba belonged in the 5th century CE. His name appeared in documents related to archbishops' meetings, Alexandre explained.

The words “Christ born of Mary” were widely used at the beginning of documents or other forms of text, serving as a blessing and protection from evil.

“As a blessing, the inscription must have originally stood at the entrance of the church, where people could see it. However, it was now found incorporated in the walls, therefore we know that the stone was reused as construction material. Likely the building collapsed and was rebuilt,” Alexandre pointed out.

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“This is the first evidence of the Byzantine church’s existence in the village of Taiba and it adds to other finds attesting to the activities of Christians who lived in the region,” said IAA archaeologist Dr. Walid Atrash.

Among others, remains of a church from the Crusader period and of an ancient monastery were uncovered in the area.

Taiba itself was a Christian village in the Byzantine period (5th to 7th centuries) and later became the site of a Crusader fortress.

“The modern Arab village grew around it, and some remains are still visible,” Alexandre concluded.

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