

Obama recalls Holy Land at prayer breakfast

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [May 1, 2013](#) issue

As he gathered with clergy at the White House on a Friday in early April, President Obama recounted personal details of his recent Holy Land trip, calling it a chance to experience “the eternal spirit of Easter” and feel closer to Jesus.

“For Christians to walk where he walked and see what he saw are blessed moments,” Obama told religious leaders April 5 at the Easter Prayer Breakfast.

As in years past, Obama used the annual Easter-themed breakfast to meet with Christian leaders and also to speak openly about his faith.

The president said he visited Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity and the patriarch of Jerusalem led him to the 14-point silver star that marks where Jesus was born and “welcomed me to, in his words, ‘the place where heaven and Earth met.’”

Many of the faith leaders dining in the East Room murmured in appreciation as the president described his experience. “And there, I had a chance to pray and reflect on Christ’s birth, and his life, his sacrifice, his Resurrection,” he said, joining other “faithful pilgrims who for 2,000 years have done the same thing.”

Obama said he thought of the poor and marginalized and of future pilgrims who would travel to the same sacred spot. “I was reminded that while our time on Earth is fleeting, he is eternal,” the president said. “His life, his lessons live on in our hearts and, most importantly, in our actions.”

Attendees included megachurch pastors Joel Hunter of Florida and Bishop T. D. Jakes of Texas; Bishop John Bryant, senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; National Council of Churches president Kathryn Lohre and National Association of Evangelicals president Leith Anderson; and Luis Cortes, founder of Esperanza, a Hispanic evangelical faith-based network.

Despite such events, polling has shown that a significant minority of Americans still believe Obama is a Muslim. A 2012 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that 17 percent of respondents held that belief about the president, while 49 percent said he was a Christian and 31 percent did not know his faith.

In his weekly address before Easter, the president made a point of describing his Christian family. “As Christians, my family and I remember the incredible sacrifice Jesus made for each and every one of us—how he took on the sins of the world and extended the gift of salvation,” he said.

Obama added that they are committed to following Jesus’ example: “To loving our Lord and Savior. To loving our neighbors. And to seeing in everyone, especially ‘the least of these,’ as a child of God.”

In remarks introducing the president, Vice President Joe Biden recounted his recent trip to Rome for the installation of Pope Francis, saying he was moved by the new pope’s focus on justice. —RNS