Scene 1: The crowd begins to gather at the Lions’ Gate on the east side of Jerusalem’s Old City. Outside of Sultan Suleiman’s 16th century walls, people converse in many languages: Russian, Slovak, Italian, French, Arabic and English.

At the appointed time of 11:30 a.m., Catholic priests lead the crowd into the Old City and onto the Via Dolorosa -- the route that Jesus supposedly took from Pilate’s palace to his crucifixion on Golgotha. As the worshippers move through the narrow street, they sweep everyone before them. No one even attempts the opposite direction.

Scene 2: Shops line the Via Dolorosa. This lucrative route is designed for Christian pilgrims, whether they’re visiting on a holy day or not. They sell frankincense, myrrh, icons and rosaries, as well as antique religious items, woven rugs and jewelry. On most days, shopkeepers come out of their stores to entice passersby to enter. Today, walking the street an hour after the crowd has gone by, most shopkeepers do not appear. They have already had excellent sales!

Scene 3: At each of the 13 stations of the cross, the crowd stops, and the priests conduct a short worship service. All movement on the street stops. No one can go anywhere. Everyone becomes a participant, whether that was their intent or not.

If you get claustrophobic in crowds and try to leave, you will discover that you are in a highly secure zone. The police have blocked off all streets connecting to the Via Dolorosa; no one can walk down them in either direction. The only way out is the way in.

Scene 4: As the pilgrims enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the street clears, a muezzin sounds the call for the Muslim Friday midday prayers. From all around, Muslim men appear, moving quickly eastward down the Via Dolorosa to the El-Aqsa mosque. After all, Friday is the Muslim holy day, and the other end of the street leads directly to this most sacred area.

Scene 5: An hour later, I sit in Jafar’s Sweet Shop eating a plate of hot kanafi. Everyone knows, that in Jerusalem, Jafar’s is the best place for this cheese-based dessert with the crumbly red topping.

Scene 6: Outside the Old City, the flower store on Salah ed-Din Street is busy. A Mercedes is pulled up onto the sidewalk, a large spray of white flowers attached to its hood. Soon, it will be driven down the street to the bridal store, where the bride will walk down its broad steps, through the gate and into the car to be whisked off to her wedding.

Scene 7: In Judaism, this Friday is Purim, the topsy-turvy holiday, which last night highlighted readings of the biblical story of Esther, and today features crowds of children dressed in costumes. In West Jerusalem, a party atmosphere reigns -- as in a children’s birthday party. There are street musicians, clowns tying balloon animals, face painting and general joyous fun.

Scene 8: At Mary’s Tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane, a multitude of shoes nearly block the entrance. In Islam, Mary is the mother of one of their greatest prophets, namely Jesus. So, on this special day, a group of Muslim pilgrims visit her tomb, removing their shoes before entering, as they would at a mosque.

Scene 9: Today’s wanderings took me between West Jerusalem, East Jerusalem and the Old City. At the day’s end, I discover I traveled between two time zones. Daylight savings began Thursday night in West Jerusalem, but not in the other two areas. I saw the Purim parade at 10 a.m., and then Mary’s tomb at 9:30 that morning. Does anyone really know what time it is? What century?