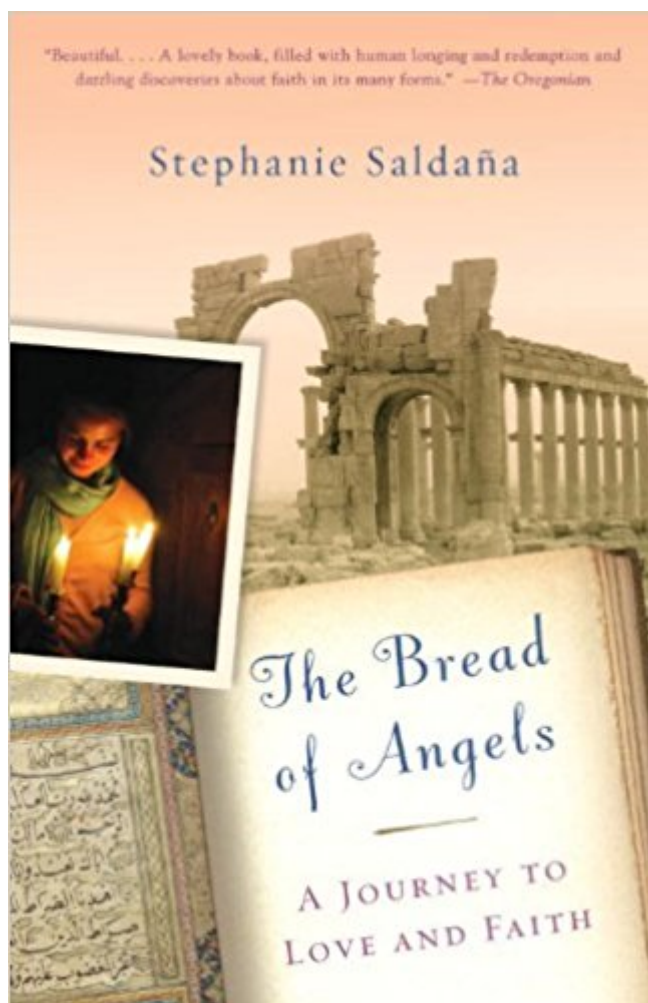


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# The Bread Of Angels: A Journey To Love And Faith



## Synopsis

A riveting memoir about one woman's journey into Syria under the Baathist regime and an unexpected love story between two strangers searching for meaning. When Stephanie Saldaña arrives in Damascus, she is running away from a broken heart and a haunted family history that she has crossed the world to escape. Yet as she moves into a tumbling Ottoman house in the heart of the Old City, she is unprepared for the complex world that awaits her: an ancient capital where Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians, Alawites, Kurds, and Palestinian and Iraqi refugees share a fragile co-existence. Soon she is stumbling through the Arabic language, fielding interviews from the secret police, and struggling to make the city her own. But as the political climate darkens and the war in neighboring Iraq threatens to spill over, she flees to an ancient Christian monastery carved into the desert cliffs, where she is forced to confront the life she left behind. Soon she will meet a series of improbable teachers: an iconoclastic Italian priest, a famous female Muslim sheikh, a wounded Iraqi refugee, and Frédéric, a young French novice monk who becomes her best friend. What follows is a tender story of a woman falling in love: with God, with her own life, with a country on the brink of chaos, and with a man she knows she can never have. Wise, funny, and heartbreaking, *The Bread of Angels* celebrates the hope that appears even in war, the surprising places we can call home, and the possibility of true love.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. With a family history of untimely death and madness, Saldana easily took to a career of danger journalism, reporting from risky locales. In a deliberate attempt to stop courting

danger, Saldana attempted a normal life at Harvard Divinity School. When the love affair that had provided her a sense of normalcy ended, she opted to take the Fulbright scholarship she had won to study the Muslim Jesus in Damascus, arriving in Syria in 2004 amid the post-9/11 war in Iraq. The tension of American foreign policy and Saldana's own vivid memories of death and destruction witnessed during her reporting life earlier in the Middle East haunted her, particularly when she embarked upon the Catholic rite of spiritual exercises at the Syrian desert monastery of Mar Musa. In lovely prose and with elements of foreshadowing, Saldana shares her struggles to become religious again and overcome feelings that God has abandoned her. Touches of melodrama weigh down an otherwise gorgeous and enlightening read, as Saldana's scholarly knowledge of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism subtly infuse her story. An Eat, Pray, Love for the intellectual set, Saldana's beautiful memoir should not be missed. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In 2004 Saldaña went to Damascus to study Islam on a Fulbright fellowship. Knowing no one there and lacking living quarters, she went door-to-door, asking for help. Finally, she knocked on a door incongruously labeled "10 Downing Street." In this as in many other incidents, her writing is most evocative as she carefully describes, for instance, the "perfumed" streets of Damascus's Old City, "prayer beads dangling from store windows and glimmering in the sun." She freely admits going to Syria to escape her travails and relieve a broken heart. She discusses being an American in Syria during the Iraq war ("unsettling"), clumsily learning Arabic, her fickle faith, her tendency to leave things unfinished, her habitual falling in and out of love, and her relationship with a young French novice monk. This lovely work is magical and poetic about a part of the world and a time "the Middle East in the post-9/11 era" in which many have become keenly interested. --June Sawyers --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Stephanie Saldana is a gifted writer who takes us along on an amazing adventure in, of all places, Syria! As a young woman working on a college degree she is awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study Arabic in Syria. With an open heart she travels to that exotic country (before the civil war descends) and finds acceptance and self-awareness. It was such a pleasure to see that country through her eyes before disaster struck there. I loved learning about the charming culture and surprising connection of Christianity and Islam. Stephanie is one of those people (kind of like Shirley MacLaine) who needs to go on a spiritual quest, which leads her out in the desert and to an amazing monastery atop a hill. And, I must add a spoiler here, Stephanie even finds romance in a

very unexpected place! This book is a treasure that reminds us to reach out to life!

I enjoyed the aspects of the book when the author described her experiences in Syria, compared cultures and used humour. However her constant boring theological references were repetitive, boring and did not flow with the rest of the content. Her struggle was repeated over and over again with no new insights and this was also tedious. The best aspect of the story were her encounters with real people of a different culture who cherished her and while teaching her about language and tradition, the reader also learned many things. This could have been an excellent book. Where was her editor?Evi Blueth

Beautifully written account of Saldana's search for God, herself. Spirituality, and life. Atmosphere and setting, along with the author's honest searching voice drew me in and held me to the last page. I felt like I journeyed with her. This novel has stayed with me, has touched my soul. I loved it, I love Stephanie Saldana.

The author, Stephanie Saldana has lived a remarkable life, traveled to remarkable places and produced a remarkable book mostly about herself reflected amid the ancient streets, homes, and people of Syria. Through her eyes emerges a picture of a land that most of us have little first hand information about and a lot of preconceived ideas, but her portrait is intensely human and astonishingly touching. She sees the details of life and this slows the narrative and while I generally dislike this trait in a book, I found, under her skilled pen, this to be very endearing trait as the reader moves page by page through the story actually tasting the food and feeling the heat and sand; and yes, sharing her heart breaks. Make no mistake, this is a deeply introspective and troubled young woman with remarkable talents and the ability to show others in her words, what she has seen and experienced. She is a seeker and becomes a modern mystic - a person searching for God. We share her spiritual struggles and failures and end the end...well I will not spoil it for you, but you will like this woman, want to spend time with her, and enjoy every moment in Bread of Angels.

As the subtitle suggests, Stephanie Saldana's book is a wonderfully compelling personal story of love and faith. In the process of detailing her spiritual and intellectual journey--from San Antonio to Harvard to Damascus and Jerusalem--she draws the reader in to the colorful, hospitable, and sometimes daunting lives of Christians, Muslims and Jews in the contemporary Arabic speaking Middle East. For many readers whose perceptions are shaped largely by media coverage of

violence and extremism, the human faces of a wide variety of Middle Easterners will be both refreshing and instructive. Thoughtful, well-educated Muslim women, politically disenfranchised merchants, pious Christian pilgrims intermingle with displaced families from Iraq, Turkey and elsewhere in contemporary Damascus, the world's oldest continuously inhabited city. For all the media coverage over many decades, this book reveals how much most Americans do not know or understand about the contemporary Middle East. Those who join Saldana on her journey will be richly rewarded.

I'm not a particularly sentimental individual but this book moved me to tears. Saldana, in telling her own story, perfectly captures the particular struggle of young, independent women to understand our place in the world. The complications of love, heartbreak, faith, and the desire to make the world better in the face of so many overwhelming problems make Saldana's unique story relevant to a variety of audiences, particularly to the generation of post-college 20-somethings undergoing our quarter-life crises. (I'm not saying you have to be in a state of early adult confusion to enjoy this book, just that any one who has experienced that will certainly be able to relate, and any one currently experiencing that will find hope in the author's journey.) I bought it in hardcover for my sisters, my mother and each of my best friends. Every one I've suggested it to has shared my enthusiasm for it. It really is a gorgeously written tale, the kind of story that stays with you long after the last page. I can't wait to see what she writes next!

Glimpses of culture shock, Christianity, Islam, and love woven together as the author lived them. I would recommend to people wanting to better understand Islam and Syrian culture as it was peacefully lived, before war distorted and divided everything.

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