

OUR NATIVITY SCENE & THE SEPARATION WALL

We think of Bethlehem as a place of joy and wonder but that is a long way from the reality both today and 2,000 years ago.

Over 2,000 years ago a cruel and crippling occupation ruled the land of Jesus' birth, with the powers that be seeking to kill the Christ-child.

Current day Palestine is likewise under a brutal occupation. To monitor and control the movement of Palestinians, watch towers, the Separation Wall and checkpoints have been set up by the state of Israel. Freedom of movement is a universal human right. This is just one of many basic human rights denied to Palestinians under a crippling military occupation that has been in place since 1967.

It takes 20 minutes to drive from Bethlehem to Jerusalem but with the Israeli Separation Wall and its armed checkpoints it is extremely difficult for Palestinians to travel between them. Palestinian Christians who live in the land where Christ was born, cannot move freely to visit their biblical sites! Since October 7th no Palestinian has been allowed in or out of Bethlehem, like many of the towns of the West Bank, it remains blockaded by the Israeli army. There will be little Christmas joy in the Holy Land this year.

In the words of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in the Holy Land:

"Since the start of the war against Gaza, there has been an atmosphere of sadness and pain. Thousands of innocent civilians, including women and children, have died, or suffered serious injuries. Many more grieve over the loss of their homes, their loved ones, or the uncertain fate of those dear to them. Throughout the region, even more have lost their work and are suffering from serious economic challenges. Yet despite our repeated calls for a humanitarian ceasefire, the war continues.

Therefore, We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, call upon all Christians to stand strong with those facing such afflictions by this year foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities. We likewise encourage everyone to focus more on the spiritual meaning of Christmas with all the focus directed at holding in our thoughts our brothers and sisters affected by this war and its consequences, and with fervent prayers for a just and lasting peace for our beloved Holy Land."

In response to the message from the Heads of the Churches in the Holy Land, and in solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters in Christ, our Christmas Tree will remain undecorated. Our Nativity Scene depicts the Bethlehem Separation Wall, emblazoned with its famous graffiti (much of it by the illusive artist Banksy). A barrier wall which prevents the shepherds and the wise men from entering Bethlehem to worship the Christ Child. The Christ Child lies amidst broken bricks and rubble. Symbols not just of the death and destruction in Gaza but a reminder that even in the West Bank Palestinian town of Bethlehem, the place of Christ's birth, Palestinian Christians will be prevented from entering the city to attend Mass by the Israeli blockade that surrounds the Holy City. The evil terrorism of Hamas on October 7 can never be justified - but its cause will never be understood, and a just peace will never become a reality, until we acknowledge the evil injustice of dispossession, occupation and oppression that has been inflicted on the Palestinian people since 1948.

It is into this evil and mess that Christ has been born – it is this human tragedy that Christ calls us to work with him to redeem - and make whole.





