

Longing for Christmas peace in the Holy Land

By Tony Magliano, 23 December 2022



A view of Jerusalem. Image: neufal54/Pixabay.

During this wonderful time of the year, when Christians throughout the world focus minds and hearts on the coming of God himself upon the earth as one of us, our attention naturally turns to the place where the incarnation occurred.

While all the earth is a holy creation of the Almighty, Bethlehem and the surrounding lands that Jesus walked upon, taught upon, miraculously acted upon, suffered and died upon, and gloriously resurrected upon is uniquely holy, and thus deserving of the title Holy Land.

In the Holy Land, the Prince of Peace taught humanity the way to true peace.

In word and deed, Jesus showed the world that love, especially to love as he loved to the full, with justice, merciful forgiveness, solidarity, compassion, special care for the poor and vulnerable, nonviolence and complete trust in God – not trusting in material wealth and military might – are the necessary steps we must take if we truly desire to walk the path to peace.

But sadly, so many people, corporations and governments arrogantly ignore the wisdom of the Prince of Peace – even in the Holy Land.

The Palestinian West Bank came under Israeli control as a result of its conquest during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Due to increasing Israeli settlements, much of it has

become a permanent part of Israel – in violation of international law according to the International Court of Justice.

The same court ruled that the Israeli separation barrier of walls, barbed wire and trenches in the West Bank is also illegal. This barrier – built overwhelmingly in occupied territory – effectively takes more land away from the Palestinians, and prevents many Palestinians from normal access to their vineyards, olive groves and fields.

Another injustice is that Israelis living in the West Bank enjoy an unlimited supply of running water all year round, while Palestinians are allotted a small, fixed amount, resulting in constant water shortages.

In many ways, the situation in Gaza is even worse. With an Israeli land and naval blockade in place, Gaza is known as the world's largest outdoor prison (see: https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip).

Rev. Dr Mae Elise Cannon, executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), who lived in Jerusalem for a year, and has returned to Israel/Palestine dozens of times, explained to me that “The reality on the ground for Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza continues to worsen with travel restrictions, ongoing military control, the effects of the separation barrier, and other human rights violations” (see: <https://bit.ly/3W96z4o>).

Cannon added, “Christian presence in the Palestinian territories is continually under threat of disappearing. Tourists tend to spend more time in Israel proper and only travel to Bethlehem for day trips to visit the Church of the Nativity and Shepherd's Field. Thus, souvenir shops and the economy in Bethlehem is largely cut off from tourists” (see: <https://cmep.org/>).

According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. assistance since World War II. When adjusted for inflation, this amount is equivalent to \$236 billion in 2018 dollars. Furthermore, nearly all U.S. assistance comes in the form of grants for weapons (see: <https://bit.ly/3YtyehF>)

Please kindly consider a Christmas gift to Churches for Middle East Peace <https://cmep.org/donate/>

or Catholic Near East Welfare Association <https://cnewa.org/work/christmas>

Like the shepherds keeping watch over their sheep on that first Christmas night, may we too be humble, simple, and thus open to receive the angels' wonderful announcement, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rest!”

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