

Kairos Palestine



Christmas Alert 2015



In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:1-2:1, NIV)

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What is the meaning of hope?

“Hope within us means first and foremost our faith in God and secondly our expectation, despite everything, for a better future. Thirdly, it means not chasing after illusions—we realize that release is not close at hand. Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it. We see nothing in the present or future except ruin and destruction. We see the upper hand of the strong, the growing orientation towards racist separation and the imposition of laws that deny our existence and our dignity. We see confusion and division in the Palestinian position. If, despite all this, we do resist this reality today and work hard, perhaps the destruction that looms on the horizon may not come upon us”

Kairos Palestine Document - A Moment of Truth, Chapter 3.2

Introduction:

Let this be a special Advent

By Hind Khoury

As we prepare for Christmas this year let us consider places around the world where real hope for real peace continues to dwindle.

In Palestine, the Apartheid Wall and illegal settlements limit our mobility, deny us access to our natural resources, and strangulate our economy. Wherever one looks, be it the prolonged and inhuman siege in Gaza, the isolation of East Jerusalem and the fragmentation of the West Bank, the fabric of Palestinian society is being torn to shreds.

Fear grows in the shadow of Israeli settler violence that has increased most dramatically per month. Settlers, accountable to no one and acting in total impunity, have set blaze to churches, mosques, and most recently, a house with its family inside, burning to death eighteen month old baby Ali Dawabsha and his father Saad Dwabsha. The mother Riham, also succumbed to her wounds in early September.

This prolonged occupation contorts the great human values born in the cradle of our Abrahamic faiths. Arguments about divine election and misinterpretation of the Holy Book are summoned to deny Palestinians their God-given rights and to justify policies of dispossession and expulsion. “They say: ‘Peace, peace’ when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). Our challenge must be to implement a course of action that can change the dehumanizing realities of our lives as Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims. If the arc of the moral universe does indeed bend towards justice, then let us continue pursuing a just peace with courage and confidence.

Palestinian resilience in the face of a prolonged occupation is a clear message that our humanity stands tall and a better future is possible. We are thankful for the growing international solidarity and efforts for justice in Palestine, and we hope those efforts will continue to push the international community to act in ways that bring melding and moderation rather than polarization and extremism to the Middle East.

This Advent season, we take you to Bethlehem accompanied by the spirit and actions of brave, unyielding and resilient Palestinian women, the bearers of good news. These women continue to weave hope every new day, just as their foremothers and forefathers did for centuries. Amidst suffering, they continue to explore the mysterious forces of faith, hope and love.

In the following reflections Hanadi takes us to the Apartheid Wall and reconfirms the love of parenthood and the struggle for normality under the wall's suffocating impact.

Rania speaks to us of Palestinian resilience, unity, and mutual respect despite Israeli policies of "divide and rule."

Amira shares with us the energy of Palestinian youth and their growing faith in the face of harsh realities.

Sister Virginie inspires us by affirming the status of Palestinian women, and tells of the blessed event when two Palestinian women were canonized by the Vatican as Saints in recognition of their great vision and selfless sacrifice for their communities.



Finally, we end this Christmas Alert with the message of the inspirational mayor of Bethlehem, Ms. Vera Baboun. With her courage and persistence, she speaks of her desperate hope and new developments planned for the holy city of love and peace.

In Solidarity from Brazil, Nancy Cardoso reflects on the Alert for all women everywhere.

This is a Kairos moment where you too can be builders of a Just Peace by participating in one or more of the following:

- Advocate for an inclusive and plural Jerusalem that allows free access to all religious groups.
- Lobby for the end of the inhuman siege and blockade of Gaza.
- Campaign to de-legitimize the illegal Israeli settlements.
- Support the right of Palestinian children to security and education, and denounce their detention and torture.
- Remind the world of the plight of our refugees and their internationally recognized right of return
- Campaign for the rights of Palestinian political prisoners, many of whom are women and children.
- Call for the removal of the Apartheid Wall as endorsed by the World Council of Churches .The International Court of Justice in The Hague released an “Advisory Opinion” in 2004 concluding that the construction of the wall is contrary to international law (Para. 142).
- Write letters of solidarity for Justice in Palestine to Israeli embassies in your own countries. (see www.allembassies.com/Israeli_embassies.htm)

Our joint pledge this Christmas is to take our light out from under the basket and to act as agents for positive change in the Holy Land.

Kindly start by widely sharing this document and former publications including the Kairos Palestine document; let our Kairos Call reach schools, congregations, universities, political representatives, theological institutes and church hierarchies. As Christians, we need to ensure that the global church critically revises a theology that justifies the oppression of peoples, and in its stead advocates a theology of justice and liberation, equality and peace. Our faith has empowered us with moral courage, love and faith to act boldly and speak prophetically. Do support Palestinian civil society in their non-violent struggle to boycott and divest from the occupation and injustice. 'Come and see', visit us, talk to Palestinian Christians, and find the truth which liberates both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Collectively we can make incredible change and turn the tide towards real peace. Together, we can make this Advent a time of reflection and action. Let us stand firm, truthful and righteous and we shall be amply blessed and rewarded.

A very happy and fulfilling Christmas to all!



Hind Khoury
Kairos Palestine – A moment of Truth
General Secretary

Kairos Palestine would like to thank all contributors for their help in compiling the Christmas Alert, especially

Hanadi Soudah, Amira Farhoud, Rania Murra, Sr. Virginie Habib and Mayor Vera Baboun.

*A heartfelt thank you to Ryan Rodrick Beiler from MCC for the inspiring photos included.
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First Sunday in Advent

Entry point: The Wall

Pope Francis prays for peace, Bethlehem, May 2014

“Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: “Never again war!” With war everything is lost. Instill in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace. Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of love, You created us and you call us to live as brothers and sisters. Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace. Enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister.”

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

Ephesians 2:14



“Living in faith near the wall and a refugee camp”

By: Hanadi I. Soudah-Younan

“I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

Mathew 5:44-45

These may be the most challenging words and most arduous duty that our Savior, Jesus Christ, has required of us, Palestinian believers, in the Holy Land. Going to the city of the Nativity, Bethlehem, from Jerusalem every day and crossing the segregation wall on the way in and out, make these words even more challenging. Yet, what captures my attention every time I think of this dictum of the Lord, are the following words: “that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” The presentation of God as Father is an emphasis on parenting that is very much, in my opinion, the feminine side of the Lord. Parenting is an unrelenting, life-long and conscious commitment to the future that every mother and father is faced with. As a parent and a teacher these words remind me of the duty that is expected of me as a Christian. My



own biological children, and the young men and women entrusted to me at Bethlehem University require me to fulfill my parenting duty in light of this “commandment”. Despite the fact that the segregation wall makes us all refugees, turns us all into prisoners on either side of it, and transforms the beautiful blessed land into a scarred helpless place, it is this faith of the first Christians from whom we are descendants that keeps us strong. This is the faith of the first women believers, starting from the Mother of God to all the women who were disciples, early Christians and the Palestinian mothers today. Despite the wall, despite the anger, despite the hate, despite the injustice, women stand tall against hate spreading the “Good News” through acts of faith, love, good parenting and hope. That is the legacy of the challenge and the “light” burden women of all walks of life, knowingly and unknowingly, are fulfilling. We make sure that we are worthy of the privilege to be the children of our “Father in heaven” in order to help all human beings become the children of God. Accordingly, at this time, on the first Sunday of Advent, it is our duty as Palestinian women to call on all the people of this Holy Land to earn the privilege of being “Children of [our] Father in heaven.”



Hanadi Younan

Ms. Hanadi I. Soudah-Younan is the Acting Dean of Arts and the Chairperson of the English Department at Bethlehem University. She is a board member of Al-Liq'a Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land and the Helen Keller School for special education.

Related links:

“**Stop the wall**” is a local grassroots movement uniting the popular local committees struggling with the construction of the Wall: www.stophthewall.org
The Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ) is an excellent source on getting information connected to sustainable development in the framework of occupation. You will find verified information on the conservation of natural resources and occupation practices: www.arij.org

Second Sunday in Advent

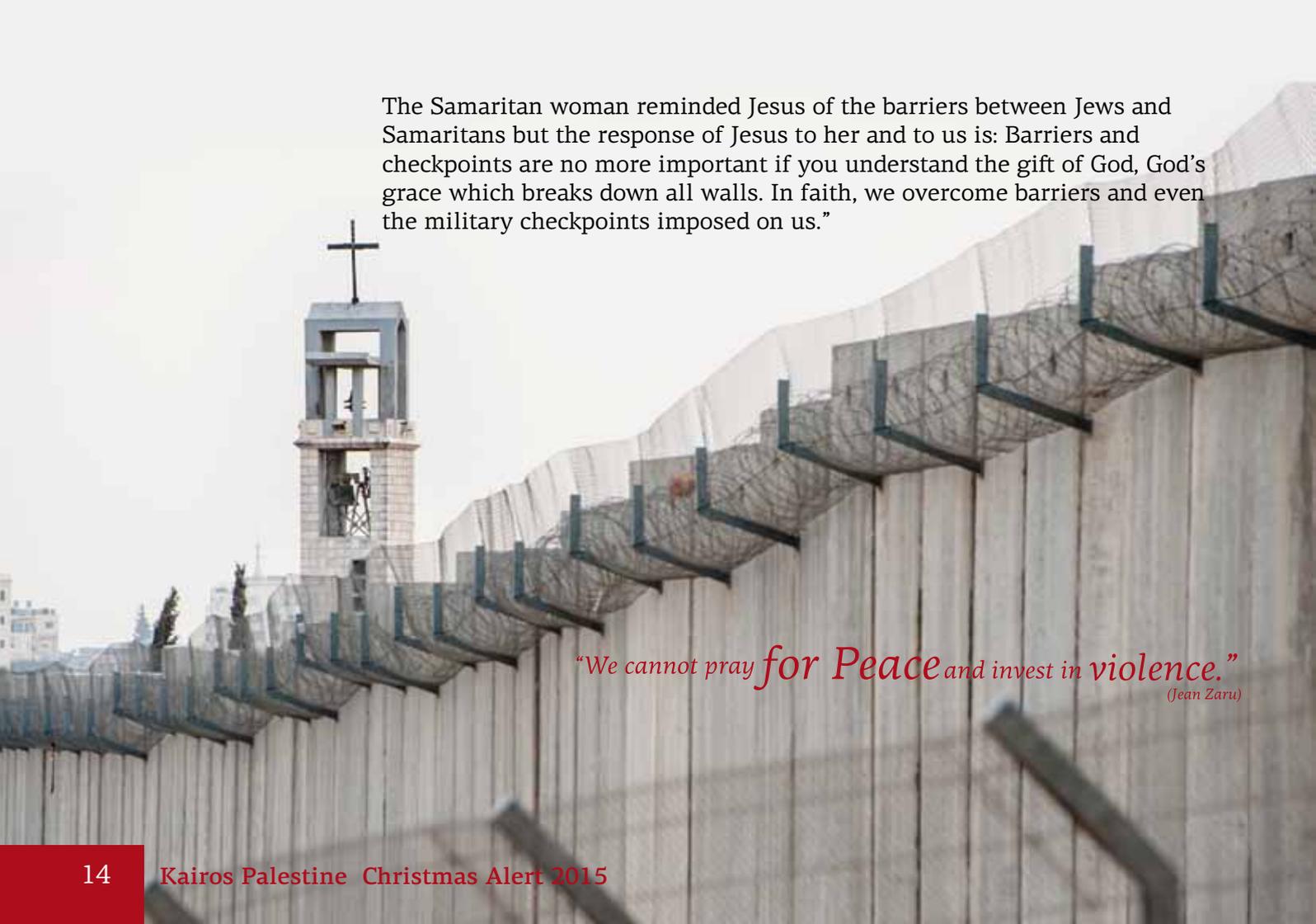
Entry Point: The Checkpoint - BBC College

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? (John 4:3-11)

Comment by H.B. Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Church

“The geography has not changed since the times of Jesus Christ. There is still a barrier of hatred between Jews and Samaritans. Today there is also an economic and military barrier as well as the barrier of hatred. We need to be liberated from both....

A photograph showing a multi-layered security fence made of concrete pillars and wire mesh, stretching across the frame. In the background, a church steeple with a cross on top is visible against a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

The Samaritan woman reminded Jesus of the barriers between Jews and Samaritans but the response of Jesus to her and to us is: Barriers and checkpoints are no more important if you understand the gift of God, God's grace which breaks down all walls. In faith, we overcome barriers and even the military checkpoints imposed on us."

"We cannot pray for Peace and invest in violence."
(Jean Zaru)

“Christ at the checkpoint”

By Amira Farhoud

Jubran Khalil Jubran, the renowned poet, once said *“In the heart of every winter is a living spring and behind every night is a smiling dusk”*

As a Palestinian girl, I live in an occupied country in utter darkness. The Separation Wall, humiliating barriers, restrictions over the right of movement and the long list that goes on and on are in short, the most effective ways to kill a dream and crush hopes.

What is a Homeland? According to my father, a homeland is the place where we feel comfortable, stable and secure. It is a place where we are capable of living in peace within our surroundings. Does the definition of homeland apply to what is happening in Palestine? Will we ever live what my father described as a homeland? Will we ever be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel in Palestine? I grew up with my Palestinian grandmother’s tales and stories about our homeland and freedom fighters. I used to be mesmerized by the bravery of those heroes standing in the face of injustice and fighting the perpetrators. Now I wonder where they have all gone? How did they vanish away and how can we resuscitate them?

My inner soul was inflamed with anger and outrage; I was furious waiting to explode against the injustice and the unjust. Anger and hatred? Are these terms consistent with my Christian faith and with my being a committed Christian? Not possible. Therefore, I decided to extinguish the anger in me, yielded to the inevitable and distanced myself from anything national or political trying to hide under the guise of so called Christianity, so as not to discredit my Christianity.

Christ at the Checkpoint

Yes, Jesus Christ has spoken and taught about conflicts, justice and peace. He was a person of justice. Being the son of God that came to save the world enforced his standing against injustice and to resist against the Roman tyrant. If Jesus Christ were to stand today in front of the Israeli Military Checkpoint, what would he do? What would he say? What would his message be to the Palestinians at the checkpoint? All these questions were raised and discussed during the “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference that was held by Bethlehem Bible College.

The fact that Jesus Christ had a message about the checkpoints, a tool to humiliate my people, was news to me!

“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles”. Jesus addressed the Roman soldiers who used to force the Jews to carry their belongings one mile, Jesus has asked them to walk not only one but two miles, as a sign of defiance and challenging the law.

“Love thy enemies” is another spiritual answer towards the political conflict we live on a daily basis. Yet, how would I be able to love an Israeli soldier who treats me in a humiliating manner? Frankly, I cannot! Nevertheless, the Christian inside me can, because we are taught not to repay evil with evil. My Christian faith grew stronger and more effective. As a Christian Palestinian youth, I have a solid message, and I know too well that I have a role to do in this land.

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” (Rom 12:12) We shall be able to practice our faith. To resist is to honestly love our enemies because if we only love our relatives and those who love us, then what credit is that to us? For our faith to be effective and influential is to have patience throughout difficulties and tribulations to be able to face it all with love and joy. We shall stop blaming God for his silence upon the injustice and humiliation that we are exposed to; instead we shall lift up prayers and praise God who shapes history and our world.



Amira Khalil Farhoud

Diploma in Journalism and Media from Bethlehem Bible College. Project Coordinator of the magazine A Pot in His Hands – that empowers and supports women services

Related links:

Al-Haq is a Palestinian Human Rights Organization involved in research and advocacy against the violation of individual and collective rights in Palestine. Al-Haq offers a very useful database with monitoring reports and maps on the occupation of Palestine: www.alhaq.org
Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center renders legal aid to vulnerable communities in combatting human rights violations and is involved in legal reforms, community awareness and advocacy www.jlac.ps



“We see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored. Public awareness of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing, and the Jewish and Israeli voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation.”

Kairos Palestine Document - A moment of Truth, Chapter 3.3.4

Third Sunday in Advent

Entry point: Unity in Diversity

“Admittedly, dialogue is a long process and is perfected through a daily effort as we undergo the same sufferings and have the same expectations.”

Kairos Palestine Document - A moment of Truth, Chapter 3.3.2

Sumoud

By: Rania Murra

Often following a Via Dolorosa in life, Palestinian women try to overcome their suffering and pain by mutually supporting each other. We call this community strength in Arabic sumud, or resilience, an inner strength to nurture outward relationships and keep the community together on the land. Sumud is not just a word or a state; it is the actions of Palestinians continuing to live their lives in Palestine, in all their diversity: Moslems and Christians; city dwellers, villagers, Bedouins and refugees. Sumud is how we all laugh, enjoy life, fall in love and raise our children. It is about sticking to our civic values to respect diversity in unity at a time when values are misused to set people apart. It is staying connected to the land even though the occupation divides the land. It is building houses and planting olive trees despite the Israeli army's demolition of houses and uprooting of trees. Sumud is reclaiming humanity and respecting and advocating rights.

Nowadays, many in the world forget about the Palestinian cause due to the religious and political strife fostered by dependent Arab regimes and by the terrible conduct of extremist groups which try to divide people. Yes, a fear hovers over us, but as women we are able to face it together, in consolation and encouragement. We apply our special ability of connecting also in international exchanges with women who inspire us through their examples of steadfast solidarity.



What follows is an experience that inspired my own connecting power of sumud. I was in love with a young man, who was active during the first intifada [1987 - about 1992]. Unfortunately, when he wrote graffiti on a wall, an Israeli soldier shot him from close range. After left abandoned for two hours, he was taken by Israelis to hospital. On his way he dreamt about our wedding. In his dream he heard a priest telling him mabrouk- congratulations! His injury was serious; He stayed for 6 hours under surgery. Unfortunately, I was not beside him because I was not allowed to enter Jerusalem. Even though his face was badly affected by the bullet, and though he was affected psychologically, still my strong love, deep faith in God and my just cause gave me the power and sumud to support him. Still I keep my sumud, hope and faith because we, as women have the power to relate to people and bring peace to our land, as well as to our lovers.

Rania Murra

Director

Arab Educational Institute - Open Windows



Related links:

The Arab Educational Institute Center is an education institution in Bethlehem affiliated to Pax Christi International. It addresses community education to women and youth of Bethlehem and visitors from around the world. They recently opened a “wall museum” with stories of Palestinians affected by the separation wall: <http://www.aeicenter.org/>

The Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling is a Palestinian organization providing legal aid, social counseling and protective services to women with a focus on gender-based violence as well as the gender-specific effects of increasing militarisation associated with the Israeli occupation: www.wclac.org

The Young Women’s Christian Association is part of the global YWCA network and supports and aspires to create women leadership. Read their informative newsletter: www.ywca-palestine.org

“

One of the most important signs of hope is the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the “Nakba” (Catastrophe) and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here. ”

Kairos Palestine Document - A moment of Truth, Chapter 3.3.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Education and dedication

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Two Palestinian Saints

From Earthly to Heavenly Jerusalem- Living in the Kingdom of Heaven

By Sister Virginie Habib

The Middle East region in general and the Holy land in particular have been going through political, social, economic and humanitarian difficulties, in which the most sacred human beings, who are loved by God and created in his own image and likeness, are usually the victims to such difficulties and conflicts. For many years now, people of this region and in particular Christian believers are being challenged in every aspect of their existence: their history, heritage, civilization, culture, homeland, life, honor and dignity.

We stand in front of this gloomy picture depicting landmarks of darkened strategies, that try by any means to sink the region and its people in considerable chaos on all levels, it sure does make the believer wonder if there is an end to all of this? When would that be? How can we achieve it? Where does salvation come from?



“I don’t believe in the light at the end of the tunnel, I believe we carry light within us that shall guide us through the darkness of the tunnel.”

Muna Nassar

According to Ecclesiastes 1:9 : “There is nothing new under the sun” these queries are not new, and we read in the Bible cries for help to the Lord by believers and group members at the darkest moments in history. The Lord did not disappoint believers depending on him, The Lord listened and responded to them at a time and way suitable, according to his wisdom and His will.

We, Christians of the Holy Land are being challenged today with critical circumstances leaving us at a crossroad. We either choose to deal with these circumstances, as dictated by our faith or we give in to frustration and despair.

In the midst of this conflict, comes the news of the canonization of two women from Palestine that have devoted themselves and sacrificed themselves and their lives from an early age to the Lord. The first is Sister Mary Alfonsine of Jerusalem (1843 - 1927) founder of the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters, and the second is Sister Mariam Bawardeh or Mary of crucified Jesus (1846 -1878) of Ibillin in the Galilee, the founder of the Carmel Monastery in Bethlehem.

The news of the canonization of the two nuns is not a coincidence under the circumstances that we are experiencing. As a nun in the Congregation of the Rosary and as a Christian believer, I see this event and read this sign as one of the signs of the time, a sign from heaven that needs insight before sight in order for faith to grasp and understand it.

My personal point of view of the various aspects involved in this great event is:
The news of the canonization of the two nuns is a victory for the plan of God in their lives, in which

they have chosen the path to the kingdom of heaven through all kinds of sacrifices. They have prevailed over all experiences that were put on their way to change their course. The declaration is an affirmation of their holiness and purity, and at the same time, it is victory of the good over the evil and victory of light over darkness, love over hatred and hope over despair. As believers, they have become role models that we aspire to be someday and a source of strength in weakness because they took the path towards salvation “but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit.” The declaration of their holiness signifies that they have become “citizens” in the Kingdom of Heaven.



They have both worked with all their power and strength to release themselves from the earthly chains to improve and develop their community on the humanitarian, spiritual and educational level with all sects and social, ethnic and religious components, using their talent and message that they have received from the Lord.

Their journey from the earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly Jerusalem was not easy, but they didn't let difficulties and challenges stand in their way to reach their heavenly homeland through their earthly journey.

The two Saints left behind a rich spiritual legacy of pastoral and apostolic values; their legacy is a treasure to the one who finds it, and would leave everything behind to acquire it. Their legacy is the compass that leads us today to follow in their footsteps and pass on their message. The legacies that they have left for us to spread around and share like yeast that works all through the dough, amidst other challenges and changes in our community. They were both certain that the last word in our lives and our universe is the word of God of salvation, faith, hope and love “Our faith has prevailed in the universe” and “blessed is the one who has proven oneself till the end”. We have devoted ourselves to the Lord as bearers of His message to serve our community without any race, religious and social status discrimination in the image and example of our Godly savior and the Saints.

Today we ask their intervention for all peoples in the Middle East in general and especially in the Holy Land in order to maintain faith, love and belonging to their land, which is a land of grace and blessings.



Sister Virginie Habib

A Sister of the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters, lecturer at Bethlehem University since 2006 and an instructor at the Latin Patriarchate Seminary.

“Peace is most appreciated by those who lost it, or were without it. For Palestinian women, Peace is associated with Justice and a connotation for self-determination at all levels – Maybe Peace is most existent within the hearts of those fighting for it.”

Soraida Hussein (Women’s Affairs Technical Committee).

“ In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and death that still persist in our land. We will see here “a new land” and “a new human being”, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters.”

Kairos Palestine Document - A moment of Truth, Chapter 10

Christmas Message

By Vera Baboun, Mayor of Bethlehem

It was somehow difficult to settle down to write a message of hope while living states of disparity and despair in my part of the world; pro-longed and stagnant Palestinian living realities that, in many instances, have hindered hope in a better future or a better today.

Being born and raised in Palestine, the land which yearns for peace and justice, I live the realities of my Palestinian nation; realities of hegemonic occupation, systematic land confiscation, brutal wars, and apartheid walls. A national saga that my ancestors lived, we live, and our grandsons will seemingly live.

Being born and raised in Bethlehem, the City of the Cradle and the Capitol of the Nativity, I live a life that unceasingly oscillates between reassurance and anxiety, tranquility and panic, gain and loss, and mostly of hope and despair.

However, and despite all, hope in better moments, days, and future has always dominated my heart and mind. Hope that stems from the intrinsic and holy message of my city; Bethlehem. Every year, since I became the mayor of Bethlehem in 2012, I have been sending the Christmas messages to celebrate the birth of our Lord and thus the rebirth of hope, love, and ever yearning peace.

Purely paradoxical

I send messages of peace, from the city of peace, which literally lives no peace. Bethlehem is besieged

with up-growing settlements and a horrendous wall that does not only wall the city, but its spirit, its faithful, and probably the message of peace itself. Our youth are leaving to seek better life outside their walled city, our elders are still living the dream of peace and justice, and pilgrims get into the city to pray in its Holy Grotto, though speculating whether they remember to pray for Bethlehem itself or not. Amidst these realities, I wondered whether to be hopeful, desperate, hopefully desperate, or desperately hopeful. As a faithful, I have had to remain hopeful, and lead my life as a woman, a mother, or a mayor with adamant hope and resilience.



From my mayoral office that faces the Nativity Church and its Grotto, I look at Bethlehem from a steadfast angle. I look at Bethlehem of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Consequently, in the last three years, my vision in leading the city has evolved around efficient use of land, better services, infra-structure projects, an urban master plan (the last was conducted in 1958), a municipal and city strategic seven years plan, youth empowerment, touristic development, revitalization of our connection with our citizen who live in Diaspora, Bethlehem as a World Heritage Site, and mostly Bethlehem as a global holy city.

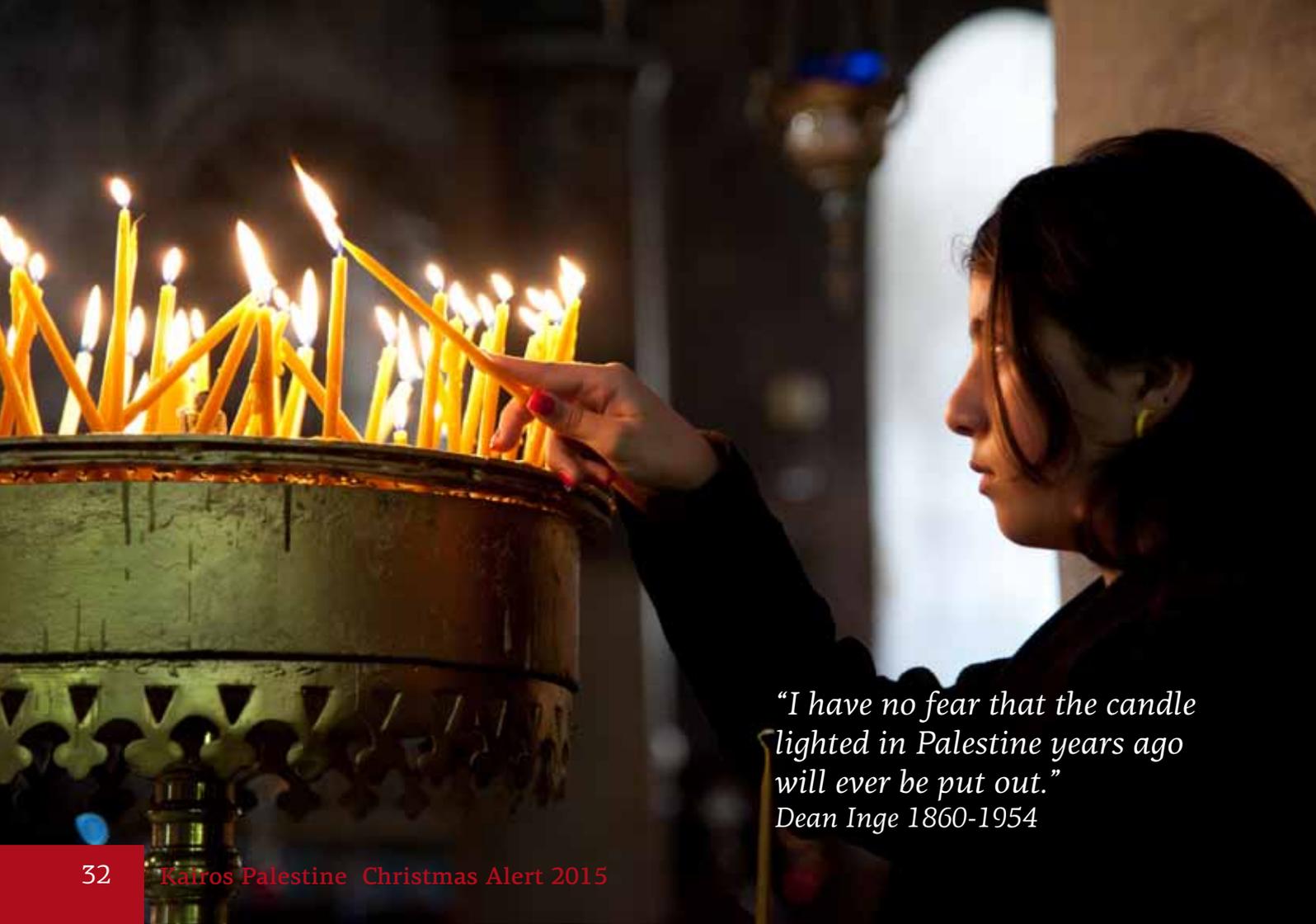
This global Holy entity of Bethlehem is the nucleus of my vision. A city that is open for all, with all, to all. All who respect and appreciate Bethlehem and its message. When peace was ordained to the world through the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem, it was not ordained for “Bethlehemites” only, but for humanity par-excellence. It is a grace that we need to cherish and preserve. True peace can never prevail in the world as long as the city of peace does not live peace.

However, the un-walling of Bethlehem and all that it represents need a serious reflection on the true meaning of Bethlehem and its global and human significance. We remain hopeful that the star of Bethlehem will ever be sparkling, its bells ringing, and its faithful ever singing Glory to Lord, Glory to justice, hope, love, and PEACE.



Vera Baboun
Mayor of Bethlehem

*“As long as there is a society
that resists, there is hope”*
Maha Abu-Dayyeh



*"I have no fear that the candle
lighted in Palestine years ago
will ever be put out."*

Dean Inge 1860-1954

This is a Christmas Alert.

By Nancy Cardoso

I commit myself with shepherds, angels, women and magis; unwinking, vigilant, wakeful, watchful, waking, alive, ready, awake. Again, the word will become flesh and dwell among us.

This Christmas I do not want to fool with surface reciprocity, nor will I drag reconciliation gestures in the harsh background of a worthless ceasefire.

Displacement, exile, and alienation from the world, but also endurance, ultimately, are at the heart of the Palestinian story. It's Christmas and again in Palestine, a woman runs away to hide her child while the other weeps without consolation because her children are no more (Matthew 2, 13-18).

I will run and cry with them because it is there on the periphery of the Empire's occupation and its soldiers that God will choose again to become human and dwell among us.

Attention! It is Christmas in Palestine and all words will be needed.

When, at first, the novelty touches Mary, the Annunciation words bring blessings and prophecy. In the text of the Annunciation (Luke 1), Mary will receive words of joy and favor (v. 28), confidence and grace (v. 30); in the encounter with Elizabeth (Luke 1), Mary will be received with greetings of happiness (v. 42), and she will be recognized in her faith: "Blessed is she who believed ..." (v. 45).

But how much harder were the words that Simeon tells Mary: "This child is destined both for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, to be a sign of contradiction (a sword will pierce your own

soul also), that thoughts manifest many hearts “(Luke 2: 34-35).

Alert! This can be really close to you as well; it can be in Ferguson, USA, in Ayotnizapa, México or a boat in the Mediterranean Sea. It can be the mothers of kidnapped girls in Sudan or Nigeria, the Mothers of May in Brazil crying for the children murdered by the military police.

*“A woman told the cloud: cover my beloved
For my clothing is drenched with his blood.”
Mahmoud Darwish*



It's Christmas! This will be a sign to you! You will find a woman hiding a child, crying for a prisoner, facing the occupation forces at the checkpoint, confronting patriarchal powers, maintaining the strength of an entire people, wrapping the promises of God in her arms, in the manger of her body made Word!



It's Christmas Eve! Celebrate the lives of these women: stay unwinking, vigilant, wakeful, watchful, waking, alive, ready, AWAKE. God is with us!

Nancy Cardoso
Methodist Pastor
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John de Gruchy, one of the “living ancestors” of the South African struggle against Apartheid and a co-author of *Kairos South Africa* published in 1985 reflecting on Romans 12-9-21 writes: In his letter to the Romans Paul describes the marks of a true Christian. It begins with the word:” Let love be genuine” and then in a few terse, by telling sentences, Paul describes how such love works itself in practice. Among these is his injunction that we should not only rejoice with those who rejoice” but ‘weep with those who weep’. I have always thought that we should cry with those who cry in order to express our empathy and solidarity, which is, of course, true. But now I also see that it is only as we weep, whether alone or beside those who weep, that we begin to see things that have been previously hidden and obscured. For some things can only be seen through the eye that have cried” And this is undoubtedly true in Palestine. So it is that our solidarity with those who nightly shed tears and daily cry until their eyes are empty of moisture, only starts when we see their world through their weeping and our own.

“What hope demands of all of us is not what is beyond ours to deliver, but everything we can and must do for the sake of the common good.”
John de Gruchy

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Kairos Palestine is a group of Palestinian Christians who authored “A moment of Truth” – Christian Palestinian’s word to the world about the occupation of Palestine, an expression “of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”, and a call for solidarity in ending over six decades of oppression. The document was published in December 2009.



Kairos Palestine

A Moment of Truth

A word of faith,
hope and love
from the heart of
Palestinian suffering



We proclaim our word based on our Christian faith
and our sense of Palestinian belonging.

Are you able to help us get our freedom back?
for this is the only way you can help the two
peoples attain justice, peace, security and love.

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