



**Kairos Palestine**

*A Moment of Truth* **ومفحة حق**

**Christmas Alert**

*2020*

# Christmas Alert 2020

“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)

Kairos Palestine  
Advent and Christmas Alert 2020



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*...to give light to those  
who live in darkness  
and in the shadow of  
death,*

*and to guide our feet  
into the way of peace*

*Luke 1:79*

# Christmas Message 2020

By: H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah

*Christ was born. Come, let us adore him.*

*Christ was born for us; come, let us be enlightened by his light.*

This is the great mystery we meditate on when we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

*“The Eternal Word of God who was since the beginning, who was with God, and through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him, who was the light and life of men, the Eternal Word of God became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (from John 1:2-4,14).”*

He was born in Bethlehem, humble and poor. He had no place in people’s homes. With his birth a new peace was born on earth, and the angels sang in our sky their new message: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth.” (Luke 14: 2)

Christmas is a new light for humankind to guide “our feet to the way of peace.” In fact, much peace entered humanity and filled the hearts of individuals and people’s. Love appeared. “The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5). Every human being became able to see in oneself, and in his/her brother and sister, the image of God. The light of God filled the minds and hearts of many.

But the opposite also remained true. Until now, the relationship between many in humanity remains a relation of war, death and hatred. In this Holy Land also, where the light of Christmas shone, where the prophets prophesied, where God spoke and sent God’s light, Cain still kills his brother Abel. Many in our land are still in the old darkness, which generates injustice, blindness and prevents one people from seeing the image of God in the other people. Many, failing to see the image of God in the other, turn the other into an enemy and themselves into killers of their brothers and sisters.

*“The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.” (John 1:9-11)*

These verses describe our situation today. Here came the light for every human being, the light through which the world was, yet here darkness and injustice still prevail. Here the light “came to his own and his own people did not accept him.” From the beginning, both acceptance and estrangement appeared in our land, revealing how humanity continues to exist in a land of life and death, of hatred and love, of war and peace. In our land, the Prince of Peace was born. The humble and the shepherds knew him. They heard the voice of the angels and came to Bethlehem. They saw and believed in the mystery of God and expressed their adoration. King Herod was there, too. He also heard the good news from the Magi, but he did not see. He made himself a killer of the innocents.

In our land Jesus Christ came “to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:70) Some of us have found the way to peace. Some of us still prefer the path of war and oppressive force. Our land saw the light, but the mighty ones did not see, nor were they guided to the path of peace.

In Bethlehem, this year also, we celebrate Christmas. We fill our souls, our homes and our children with the joy of Christmas. At the same time, we do not forget our suffering and the suffering of our land. We make it part of our celebration and prayer. We raise it to God and say: Lord have mercy. You are the Almighty, the Creator of all, and the Lord of all.



Just as in God's time and by God's will Jesus was born in our land two thousand years ago, today in God's time and God's will Jesus will be born. Peace and justice will be born. Simple people will see and make peace. The hearts of rulers and the mighty ones do not see. They claim to build peace but they make war.

Why is peace absent, even though everyone wants peace? Because the powerful do not want God's peace, based on justice and on the equality of all God's children. They base their peace on their power and money, and do not care about the human being's dignity and equality with all one's brothers and sisters. Everyone wants peace. But in the hearts of the powerful there is pride, war, darkness and injustice. That is why we have no peace, as the Prophet said: "They say Peace! whereas there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6-14)

Jesus Christ was born and brought light for those sitting in darkness. They became able to see God, and they became able to see all of God's children, from every religion and nation. They became able to be children of the one humanity that does not discriminate between peoples, and is able to reject every injustice and all kinds of destruction.

But in the land of the Nativity, there is still death, destruction and hatred. Those who celebrate Christmas, those who believe in God in the land of the Nativity, should remove the death, destruction and hatred, and turn the land into a land of light and life.

Those who believe in God's mystery in Christmas throughout the world—true believers, and sincere rulers—should be able to see the light, and act for justice, peace and equality in the land of the Nativity. Achieving peace in our land is our responsibility and the responsibility of believers all over the world. Our peace indeed is in the heart of every believer, in the prayers of every believer, and in the voice and action of every church for justice, peace and equality in our holy land.



Here in a nearby field, the angels sang the hymn of peace that we repeat every year, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all humanity, to all those who seek peace, not to those who kill their brothers, nor to their oppressors. Peace on earth for all people of good will, for all people who accepted the light and saw the glory of heaven in their land.

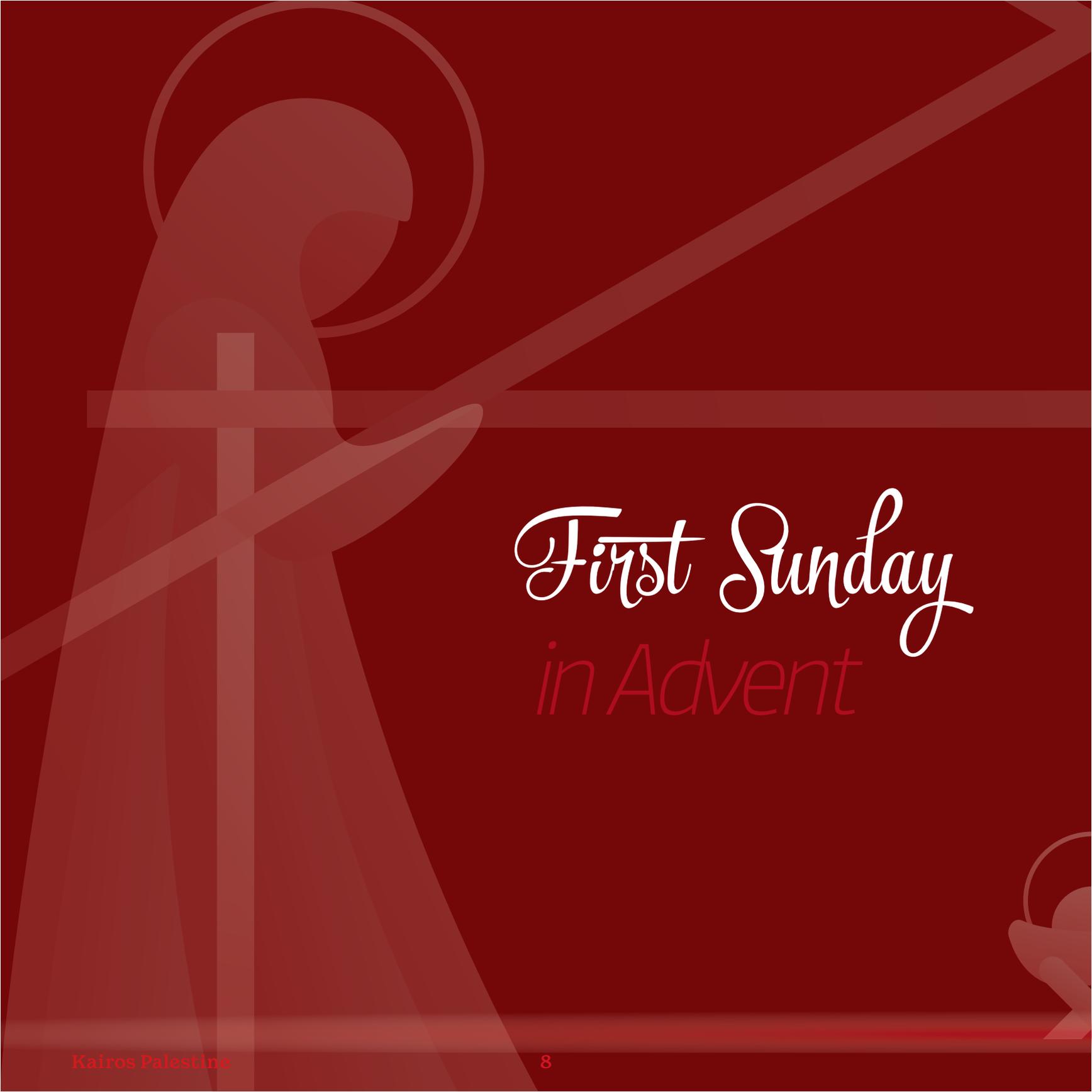
Our land needs peace, love and light. In the Land of the Nativity, the relationship today between its two peoples is a relationship of death, and it must become a relationship of life, grounded in the light and love of God. The strong who claim to own the land, and those who put our destiny and the fate of our land in their hands, must see the mystery of God in this land. They must know the true meaning of the Nativity, for the future of humankind and for us, the inhabitants of this small land full of hardship and oppression of the poor by the powerful.

The land of the Nativity is a land of light, love, peace and justice. The rulers and the people who will survive in it are those who are able to see God's image in all human beings, who are able to see the light, and to be makers of peace, justice and equality. Those are the people who inherit the land, today and tomorrow.

*Merry and Holy Christmas to all.  
Christ was born. Come, let us adore him.*

### ***Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Emeritus***

*H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah served as the Archbishop and Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem from 1987 to 2008. Patriarch Sabbah was ordained a priest for the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in June, 1955. He was a parish priest for a few years before being sent to the University of St. Joseph in Beirut to study Arabic language and literature. Shortly thereafter, he became Director of Schools for the Latin Patriarchate. In 1980, he was named President of the Bethlehem University. In 1987, Pope John Paul II appointed him Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, making him the first native Palestinian to hold the office for centuries. Since 1999, Patriarch Sabbah has been the International President of Pax Christi, a Catholic organization promoting peace. Sabbah resigned as Patriarch in 2008. He is currently the Grand Prior of the Chivalric Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, one of the knightly orders founded in 1099. Patriarch Sabbah is a co-author of the Kairos Palestine Document and believes in pluralism and equality in order to preserve the dignity of human beings.*



*First Sunday  
in Advent*

# **From the East: Learning from the Wisdom of the Wisemen**

*By: Yousef AlKhouri*

*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*

*Matthew 2:1-2*

Who were the wisemen from the East? What could we learn about and from them? The colonial representation, or worse misrepresentation of people of the East has been disturbing for centuries. Edward Said, in his masterpiece *Orientalism* (1978), analyzes the ways western orientalists had romanticized the people of the Orient. Orientalists—some were Christian missionaries—viewed the people of the east as barbaric, illiterate and uncivilized. As many nations celebrate emancipation from their colonial powers, colonialism is still a present reality for Palestinians, marked by the Israeli occupation of their land and misrepresentation by Christian Zionists and many media outlets in the west. For decades, Palestinians were projected as blood-thirsty terrorists, a nation with no history, and a people incapable of governing themselves. Palestinians after all, for the west, are people of the east, near or middle.

On the contrary and surprisingly, the Gospel—and the Christmas story in particular—portrays a different image of the people of the east. It tells a story of three wisemen coming from the east to witness the birth of the king of Jews. What can we learn from these wisemen coming? Why does their visit carry so much significance that Matthew documented it?

Some archeologists and historians speculate that the wisemen were Nabataean Arabs. Justin Martyr, the Palestinian born second-century church father, believed that they were Arabs. Notably, the gifts offered to Jesus were native of the Arabian desert. In addition, the description of the wisemen according to Matthew goes against Orientalists stereotyping of people of the east. Eastern wisemen were highly esteemed in the ancient world, even elevated to the status of kingship. They were able to read the movements of stars, comets and astronomical bodies. They were capable of understanding their cosmic, metaphysical and spiritual significance. In this season of Advent, we can learn some ancient wisdom from them.

## Follow God

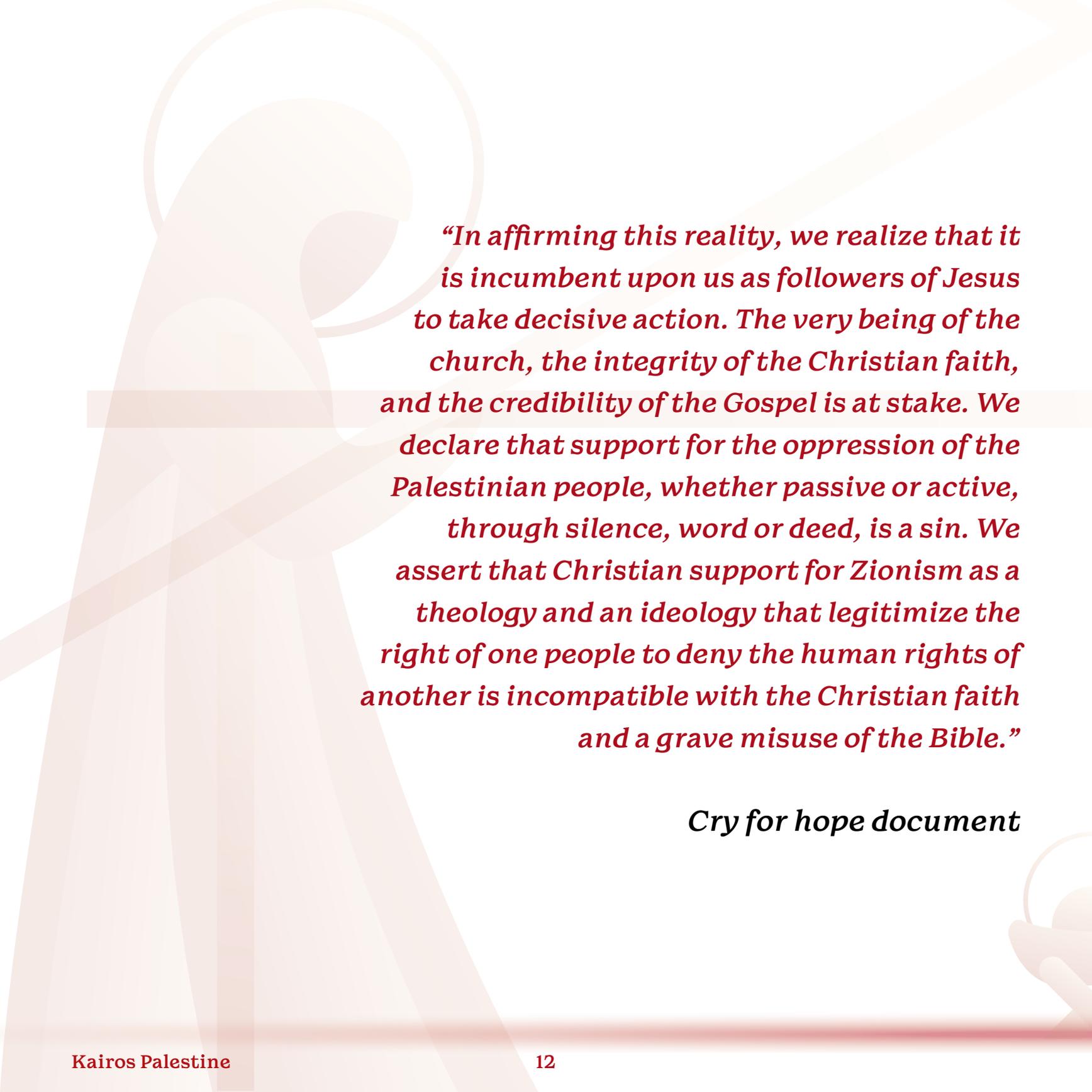
God moves with people beyond the borders of east and west, nationalities, and ethno-religious centrism. God is, after all, the God of the universe and all nations. God prompted three non-Jewish wisemen to follow a star/comet to witness a miraculous event that would change the course of history. While ancient Jews were blind to see the signs of heaven and to recognize the birth of their king, God opens the eyes of the Arabian/Nabataean wisemen. It is fascinating that the three offer gifts and worship to Jesus. I suggest that the message Matthew intended to deliver is that God is not only the King for the Jews of Israel but also the King of all nations. We cannot confine God to a land, ethnic group, a religious tradition, or even a certain theology. Some call for an exclusive right to land and God, not learning from the wisdom of the wisemen, that God is God for all people and Lord of the universe.



## Resist Oppressive Kings

God gives people wisdom to resist empires. When Herod, king of Judea, learned that the King of the Jews was born in Bethlehem, he was terrified for his throne. He asked the wisemen to lead him to where baby Jesus was. The wisemen did not comply with Herod's orders. By a divine inspiration, they knew the evil intentions of Herod. Noncompliance to orders of oppressive systems is a form of active resistance. On the other hand, political and religious leaders were afraid of losing their privilege, dominance, and power. They hoped to maintain the status quo. They attempted to eliminate the threat by killing the newborn king of the Jews. The wisemen were faithful to their mission. By their noncompliance with Herod's order, they protected the vulnerable baby Jesus from the brutality of the empire. In our world, oppressive systems expect people to abide. We are to learn from the wisdom of the wisemen to protect the vulnerable and resist the oppression of the empire creatively. Creative resistance against oppression is at the core of Kairos Palestine document ethos.

***Yousef AlKhouri*** is a Christian Arab Palestinian. He was born in Gaza to a Christian family that has a long heritage of serving in the priesthood of the Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine. He is a lecturer of Biblical Studies at Bethlehem Bible College, where he earned his first degree in Biblical Studies and Christian Education. He also holds a Master's of Divinity from Alliance Theological Seminary, NY. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Contextual Biblical Interpretation at Vrije University of Amsterdam. Yousef is a member of Christ at the Checkpoint- Young Adults, Global Kairos for Justice, and the Academic Alliance for Interfaith Dialogue in Palestine. He has contributed to two books, *Majority World Theologies and Refugee Diaspora* (2018), in addition to several articles in Arabic and English. Yousef is passionate about contextual theologies, holistic missions, peacemaking, and advocacy. He is married to Merna and they live in Bethlehem, Palestine.



*“In affirming this reality, we realize that it is incumbent upon us as followers of Jesus to take decisive action. The very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian faith and a grave misuse of the Bible.”*

***Cry for hope document***

# From Bethlehem to the World, with Love

*By: Rev. Moss Ntlha*

The birth in Bethlehem of our Lord Jesus Christ presents the world with a choice. Proclaimed by the angels as the Messiah, everyone is called to decide what they want to do with Him. As Christians, we join the shepherds who heard the joyful message of the angels, "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." (Luke 2:10-11)

How delightful the news that all the peoples of the earth may have hope in Christ. For Jew and Gentile alike, a new day has dawned that calls all to a new covenant of grace. There is no exclusion principle for anyone willing to appropriate this grace by faith.

From birth throughout His life and teachings, even up to His execution, Jesus proclaimed that the acceptable year of the Lord had come. Through Him, the Kingdom of God was breaking into human history, ushering in a new value system based on the reconciliation of humanity with God and neighbor. Put another way, in Christ the future was interrupting the present, prefiguring how all the nations of the world will one day worship the true God.

How sad it is that this glorious message of hope to all the peoples of the earth has often been high-jacked and manipulated to serve sectarian interests. The history of Christian missions is replete with examples of commercial, political, cultural and religious projects conniving to use Christianity to subjugate the interests of the Kingdom of God and further the interests of the powerful.



As a South African, I have witnessed firsthand how, in the hands of shrewd and ungodly politicians and their admirers both at home and abroad, the good news of our Lord Jesus has been used in the service of apartheid. Not only did the architects of apartheid pride themselves on being Christians, they understood their role to missionize the natives in the name of God. Needless to say, this discredited Jesus in the eyes of many African people, because those missionaries—meant to be the witnesses of Jesus—misrepresented and betrayed him in significant ways.

Thankfully, God has a way of overthrowing tyrants, no matter how powerful they pretend to be. God transforms evil systems in order to continue God's mission as summarized in Luke's gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19) This is why the peoples of the world do not look to Jesus in vain for hope.

It is tragic that in 2020 a visitor to Bethlehem will not miss the irony: this place that has inspired hope for millions around the world holds so little hope for its inhabitants. The following continues to mark the daily lives of Bethlehemites:

- Continued occupation, oppression and dehumanization by the state of Israel.
- Human rights abuses and the incarceration of many, including children.
- Blatant racism that uses the name of God to justify land grabs and the abuse of power.
- Complicity by an astonishing number of Christians around the world who should know better about the values of the Kingdom of God, yet find themselves blindsided by the political maneuvering of the State of Israel and its most important ally, the USA.

This complicity of much of global Christianity with the political project of Zionism calls into question the nature of discipleship in the western church. One would have thought it is common knowledge that to love God is to love one's neighbor, even if the neighbor happens to be Palestinian. Instead, many enable the brutalization of Palestinians on account of a mistaken belief that this state of affairs is required by Jesus to prepare for His return!

The implication of this for Christian mission in the world is far reaching. For those who have come under the spell of Christian Zionism, it will be difficult to proclaim, as the Scriptures do, that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."



The missiological cost of Christian Zionism is that it forfeits the right to represent Jesus well in the world, let alone to those nations that have to host Palestinian refugees denied the right of return.

**Rev Moss Ntlha** is the general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, and chairs various church based initiatives for justice, reconciliation and transformation in the South African society. These include Kairos Southern Africa, which flows from the Kairos document published by South African activists and public theologians in the mid 80s, aimed at theologically undermining apartheid. He also chairs the South African Christian Leadership initiative, whose main agenda is to engage stakeholders in Business, Government and civil society and churches broadly in the pursuit of social justice and the common good. Moss has addressed conferences internationally on matters of faith and justice. He is married to Khumo and they are blessed with two children. He is a pastor of a local church in Randfontein, west of Johannesburg.

## *Reflect*

Civil disobedience, grassroots protests, divestment, satire: list still more ways that the leaders and policies of oppressive systems can be resisted. In what ways can each of these be an expression of one's faith?

## *Pray*

God of the Universe and All Earth's Peoples, teach your church how to resist oppression in ways that are an expression of your love. Lord, lead us to practice justice, love and kindness, and to speak for those on the margins of our societies. Your community come on earth as it is heaven. Amen.

## *Act*

Commit yourself to practice one act of resistance during Advent.



*Second Sunday*  
*in Advent*

*“Our connectedness to this land is a natural right. It is not an ideological or a theological question only. It is a matter of life and death.*

*There are those who do not agree with us, even defining us as enemies only because we declare that we want to live as free people in our land. We suffer from the occupation of our land because we are Palestinians. And as Christian Palestinians we suffer from the wrong interpretation of some theologians. Faced with this, our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that «the good news» remains what it is, «good news» for us and for all. In face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, we renew our faith in God because we know that the word of God cannot be the source of our destruction.”*

***Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 2.3.4***

# The Shepherds are still here

By: Yusef Daher

*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, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said 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." Luke 2:8-12*

In this little town called Beit Sahour, east and adjacent to Bethlehem, the grandchildren of the shepherds are still here. From the first followers of Jesus, their children are now called Palestinian Christians. Their ancestors lived here long before people knew God, long before Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They are still here even after all foreign occupations. Their blood is mixed ethnically, their faith has developed multi layers, and their struggles have passed many exams. The shepherds who witnessed the birth of the Word chose to remain steadfast in their town and deliver the message to the whole world. Holding the olive branch in one hand and the story of Jesus in another, today their grandchildren dwell here and in all Palestine and Israel. Maybe most of them are no longer shepherds, but they are still trusted to be living witnesses to Christ's teachings and the New Testament.



These children of the first shepherds have surpassed all kinds of military aggressions and occupations. Every time I visit the town, I am reminded of their heroic stand against discrimination and occupation. These people were the first to adopt civil disobedience against Israeli policies in the 80s, the “First Intifada.” They paid a high price in holding to their values of equality for all the children of God. Their slogans at that time: “One man one vote”, “No taxation without representation.” They saw Palestine as an inclusive country where all are equals. At the turn of the new millennium, they resisted illegal settlements nonviolently by building on their church lands in front of Israeli buildings crawling towards the outskirts of their town (Jabal Abu Ghneim and Har Homa).

From these people and their sisters and brothers, together with their clergy, came the Kairos Palestine document, a word of Faith, Hope and Love in the midst of the Palestinian suffering ([www.kairospalestine.ps](http://www.kairospalestine.ps)). They are the ones who called for creative resistance: to love your enemy is to free it from its sin. To love Israel, help it end its atrocities and illegal occupation.

The shepherds are still here carrying the message from the angels:

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests.*

As expressed in their Kairos Palestine document, Palestinian Christians believe God favors all God's children. Thus, they work for the end of occupation. They resist racism and discrimination in order that Peace becomes a fact on earth as God's will.

***Yusef Daher:*** *Born in Jerusalem in 1966, Daher is the Executive Secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem in association with the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. He holds a master's degree in Pilgrimage and Tourism from London Metropolitan University. One of the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document “Moment of Truth”. Tourism Reference guide for Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, 2014. Tourism team leaders for Jerusalem Multi-Sector plan 2008. Yusef is also Executive Director of the Arab Hotel Association and the Holy Land Incoming Tour Operators Association, representing the Palestinian Tourism private sector in many fields and occasions.*



*“We make this call out of concern for the future of both peoples. In the words of Kairos Palestine, our call is rooted in the logic of love that seeks to liberate both the oppressor and oppressed in order to create a new society for all the people of the land. We continue to hold firm to the hope articulated in the Kairos document that Palestinians and Israelis have a common future”*

*Cry for hope document*

# Angels & Shepherds, Then & Now

*By: Rev. Eilert L. Rostrup*

I once met the angels. In Palestine. In Beit Sahour, “House of the Shepherds.” And I heard their song of good news and peace. I noticed how they mobilized new messengers—angels—for justice and dignity. I saw them move to see and serve the vulnerable, the voiceless, the ones who have no proper room for the night, those who are locked out. These vulnerable ones were children and youth, victims of the occupier’s violence when they refused to give up their hope and visions of freedom. The angels I saw? The East Jerusalem YMCA staff and volunteers at Field Of The Shepherds Center in Beit Sahour.

They also serve as shepherds, watchmen alert and on guard against evil threats in the night. Over the years they have brought good news to children, youth, families—victims of the night of occupation, repression, military and settler violence. Good news of a new opportunity for life and dignity beyond the physical and emotional wounds their fellow Palestinians have carried. Good news that their just resistance, and the cost of it, is met with care, love, affirmation and restoration. Good news that their stories add more voices to the unstoppable choir proclaiming peace and justice and love on earth.



## **It will come.**

We are building it. It is already here. In each vulnerable, resisting, voiceless cast-aside claiming her or his right to be. To be a human with equal rights. To be liberated and free, with opportunities and accountability. To be in their own land.

The old story of shepherds and angels is too strange, too extraordinary to form a concrete image in my mind. I don't mind angels. Perhaps it is possible for some to experience them. For me, it's enough that the shepherds in the field met and had an exchange with some unknown, strange persons. It might well be that suddenly some extra-earthly soaring choir of a multitude of voices could start singing. But the beauty of the birds' song, the rhythms of the crickets, the waves of the wind like a long stroke over the strings of a harp, and the symphony of the silence of night is heavenly music enough for me. I'd love to see a star moving like a remote-controlled neon light and blinking its signal over a specific place. But I don't mind being informed by a friendly local about the route I am to take. Such hospitality is brightening my soul and surrounding me as if it were a star lit just for me.

I don't mind the story of the shepherds in the night. I can even be moved and feel some familiarity when the romanticized version is depicted in paintings and other visual tableaux. I neither believe the story nor deny it. But the energy which hits me with surprise, attentiveness, reflection, joy and hope lies in some specific elements of the narrative. In the good news of love and transformative justice that God brings us light in the darkest of nights. In the mandate to angels and shepherds and all of us to mobilize to explore justice and peace in the world. In the sign of solidarity and power manifested in the total vulnerability of a child without armies or wealth or VIP connections—or even moral impeccability as his mother was only betrothed and not formally wed.

What happened in the middle of the night to some simple shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem can be retold as a charming story, packed in sweet music and light. To me, it's a story that reveals the good news: faith, hope and love. The Kairos message. The good news of faith in a greater truth that affirms the dignity, right and justice for the most oppressed and for all. The good news of hope, a vision for an end to injustice, oppression and occupation. The coming peace on earth. The confidence in a justice that builds mutuality, equality and coexistence to replace enmity. The good news of love that acts for the transformation of both the oppressor and the oppressed that they may enter into a new relationship.

The messenger or angel brought the good news. The shepherd acted confidently and left his familiar space (his comfort zone?) and placed himself with the homeless and vulnerable child. Like what the people of Beit Sahour and other Palestinian communities very practically did in the days of the first Intifada. And have done several times since then. And do all the time. During the first Intifada, Beit Sahourians led a bold act of civil disobedience, putting their shops, goods, factories and machines at risk to be unlawfully confiscated by the Israeli occupation forces. Hope and longing for freedom was their 'guiding star' and 'angelic call.' For me, the mystery and wonder of incarnation is of solidarity and confronting power.

I commit that forwarding the good news is to go and see, to humbly confess mine and our joint complicity, to courageously join the messengers of today: those who resiliently and stubbornly remain on their land. These who unstoppably continue shouting to the world to make us all see the truth about what is unfolding. Those who, in their vulnerability and rejection of violence, commit and challenge us all to act with the new and different logic of love through boycott, divestments and sanctions so that just peace may come.

Advent. Looking to what is coming, the vision of liberation. Joining the messengers' choir of action, because the Good News of faith, hope and love doesn't leave any other option.

***Eilert L. Rostrup***; Norwegian theologian. Worked since the mid-80ies with partnership programmes with civil society organisations (CSOs) in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Middle East.

*Professional career include;*

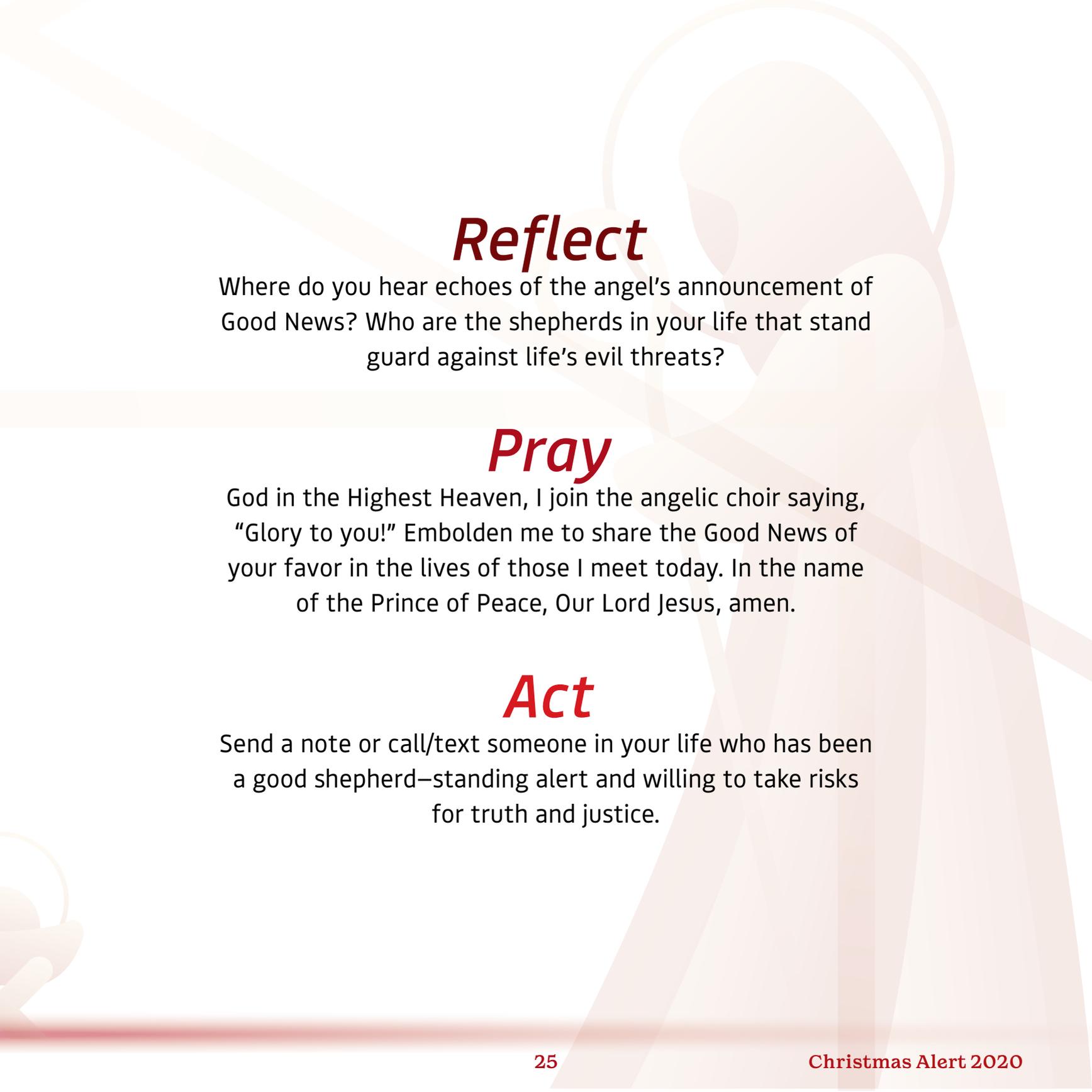
*parish pastor in Oslo (Church of Norway) 1983-1988*

*deputy national general secretary YWCA-YMCA of Norway 1988-1992*

*International director Y-Global (development agency) 1992-2006*

*Director Karibu Foundation, Oslo 2007-*

*Throughout his professional career he has been closely involved with CSO in specific conflict areas like South Africa, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and with Palestinian and Israeli social movements and ecumenical initiatives since the early 1990ies.*



## *Reflect*

Where do you hear echoes of the angel's announcement of Good News? Who are the shepherds in your life that stand guard against life's evil threats?

## *Pray*

God in the Highest Heaven, I join the angelic choir saying, "Glory to you!" Embolden me to share the Good News of your favor in the lives of those I meet today. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Our Lord Jesus, amen.

## *Act*

Send a note or call/text someone in your life who has been a good shepherd—standing alert and willing to take risks for truth and justice.



*Third Sunday*  
*in Advent*

*“Our word to the international community is to stop the principle of «double standards» and insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties. Selective application of international law threatens to leave us vulnerable to a law of the jungle. It legitimizes the claims by certain armed groups and states that the international community only understands the logic of force. Therefore, we call for a response to what the civil and religious institutions have proposed, as mentioned earlier: the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat once again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for all.”*

***Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 7***

# As You Light Your Advent Candle...

*By: Mira Rizeq*

As we approach Christmas, we are reminded again and again about the birth of Christ, the birth of Hope and the symbol of Justice. As Palestinians, we are quite far from being hopeful. We continue to live under colonization, a state of sustained, severe injustice. As if this were not enough, earlier this year the U.S. president blessed the new Israeli Annexation Plan for the West Bank, giving the green light for the Israeli government to start implementing it as early as April 2020. Although Israel has declared that the annexation is postponed, in reality the plan is being implemented under different forms and strategies.

As a matter of fact, since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, annexation has never stopped. More of the West Bank land is being eroded, more settlements are being built, more homes are being demolished, and more families with women, elderly and children are being displaced. The freedom fighters held in Israeli prisons continue to live under severe conditions, aspiring to be freed before they rot. Protected by the Israeli army, settlers mount excessive assaults on unarmed civilians, especially farmers in rural areas who continue helplessly to defend their land and protect it from forced confiscation.

To add more to this aggravation, Palestinians like the rest of the world are facing and living with COVID-19 since the outset of this year. The Palestinian territories continue to suffer. The Palestinian Authority—with its very limited health system, infrastructure, and ever shrinking resources—is less than prepared to face this kind of emergency. Gaza continues to be under lock down, with limited electricity, a hardly functioning health system, and increasing poverty and marginalization.

The outbreak of COVID-19 started in the Bethlehem District. I wonder, has this been coincidental or not? Is God testing Palestinian endurance and resistance in the city where Christ was born? For over two months during the early stages of COVID-19, Bethlehem district has been under lock down, and the people have lived under severe conditions—surviving, adapting, praying, resisting with dignity and perseverance, struggling to maintain their physical and mental health. This global crisis brings a new dimension to our struggle to survive, this time with unpredictability and fear.

Fear, because this pandemic has exposed more of the unjust global structures and unjust global agendas of many of the governments around the world. Fear, because governments are unable to respond successfully to COVID-19. Fear that there will be no resources available for such a pandemic. Fear of further dehumanization. We have seen large countries and super powers standing helpless in the face of COVID-19. This calls us more than ever to expose these unjust power structures and to work to change them. It is only with the global solidarity of people and movements who believe in and work for justice that we can do this. As free citizens of the world, we have the obligation to see that global resources are allocated for a just development and the prosperity of the nations, rather than for war and aggressions.

KAIROS Palestine was written at one of the the darkest moments in the history of Palestine. As stated in the document, “it was written in 2009 at this time when we wanted to see the Glory of the grace of God in this land and in the sufferings of its people.” It lifts up the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love that lie at the heart of the Christian Gospel, and affirms that resistance to injustice and oppression is firmly grounded in these principles. KAIROS is both an anguished cry in a dark hour and a profound testament to unquenchable hope.



Like all Palestinians, Palestinian Christians are driven to lose hope and faith every day as their rights are violated: the right to live in freedom, dignity and justice; the right to sovereignty and establishment of an independent state. These rights seem a long way off. The international community is perplexed and silent. And governments around the globe are supporting the “normalization” process, even as the occupation is sustained and the oppressor continues to impose violations in all forms and places. How is this enhancing peace? As we enter into this time of

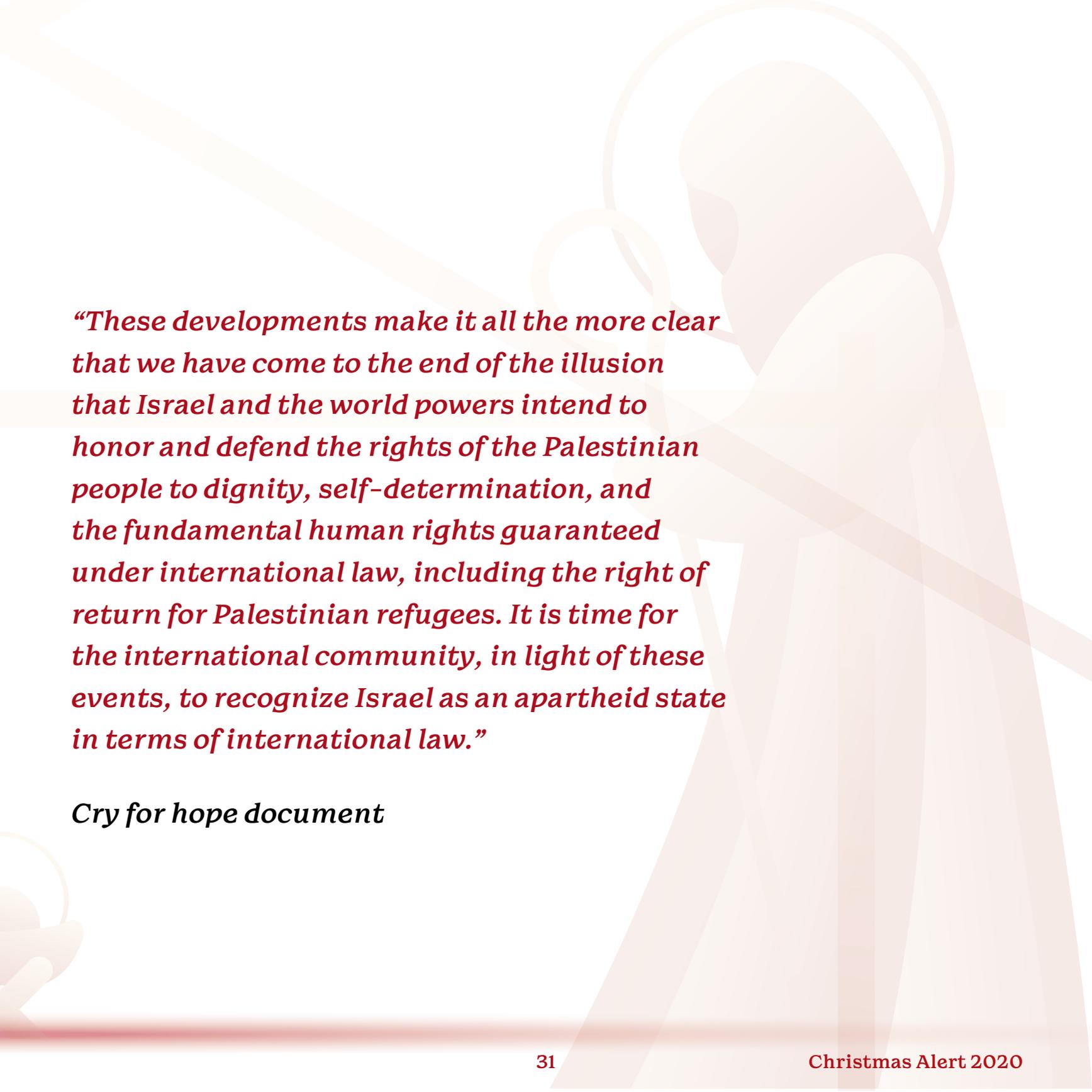
preparation for birth, which symbolizes hope and light, can we still sustain that hope? Will we be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel?

As you light your candles and hear the church bells this Advent season, please remember us here in the Holy Land, the land of the birth of the Prince of Peace. Remember that it is God who brings light into the darkness—in unexpected places and unexpected ways. Remember that we ourselves can become welcoming fires for each other in the shadows of Empire.



As you light your candles this Advent season, we also ask that you remember the poor, the people who are suffering and the homeless. We need more than your tears of sorrow and outrage, speeches, and alerts. We need all peoples of all faiths who believe in Justice to “Act with Justice and Righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed.” (Jeremiah 22:3) Working for justice is a costly process. Can we challenge ourselves and bear that cost, or do we surrender?

***Mira Rizeq*** is a recognized NGO, women, and NGO leader with over 30 years of solid local and international experience especially in the NGO sector and Human Rights/Advocacy. Mira has worked in several local and International NGOs, the UN agencies and the World Bank in areas of program design, strategic planning, good governance, monitoring and evaluations especially focusing on women’s empowerment and rights programs. She has also joined other academic NGO leaders and Professors from the USA to deliver a course for NGO leaders in the Middle East in the University of Toledo, Spain for two years in the early 2000’s. She has been an active member of the National Committee of Christian Organizations in Palestine, is a strong advocate for Peace and Justice globally and locally within the ecumenical movement, has served for 8 years a Board Member on the Global Ministries board(United Church of Christ/Church of the Disciples) and is one of the founders of the Joint Advocacy Initiative of the EJMCA and YWCA Palestine, as well as a member of the local WCC Palestine/Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) .



*“These developments make it all the more clear that we have come to the end of the illusion that Israel and the world powers intend to honor and defend the rights of the Palestinian people to dignity, self-determination, and the fundamental human rights guaranteed under international law, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees. It is time for the international community, in light of these events, to recognize Israel as an apartheid state in terms of international law.”*

*Cry for hope document*

# What would Jesus say to the prolonged oppressed; how would he keep their hope alive today?

*By: Rev. Inbaraj Jeyakumar*

I recently came across a saying which goes like this: "Do it like God. Become human!" Perhaps this is one line that encapsulates the depths of God's concern for humanity. By incarnating among the human race, God in Jesus Christ indwelled the very reality of our cosmos becoming one among us. However, the reality of human nature is marred by what some call sin, better understood as a distortion of the good purposes that God has for humanity. This distortion is seen in many forms today, millions of years since humanity's inception. It is seen in envy, hatred, violence, oppression, coercion, ostracization and in continuous fragmentation of society pushing humanity further away from God's good purposes.



God, who stepped into this world as Jesus twenty centuries ago, was very aware of the mucky and broken realities human beings were living in. In doing so, God was able to embrace every encounter in his life on Earth, bringing radical transformation. In Jesus' birth, being a refugee himself, he found his first home among cattle and humble immigrant parents. This was not just an act of humility, but an act of solidarity. In his life and ministry, he found himself in places of least significance—with lepers, sinners, widows and foreigners, most of whom were either disliked or outrightly mistreated.

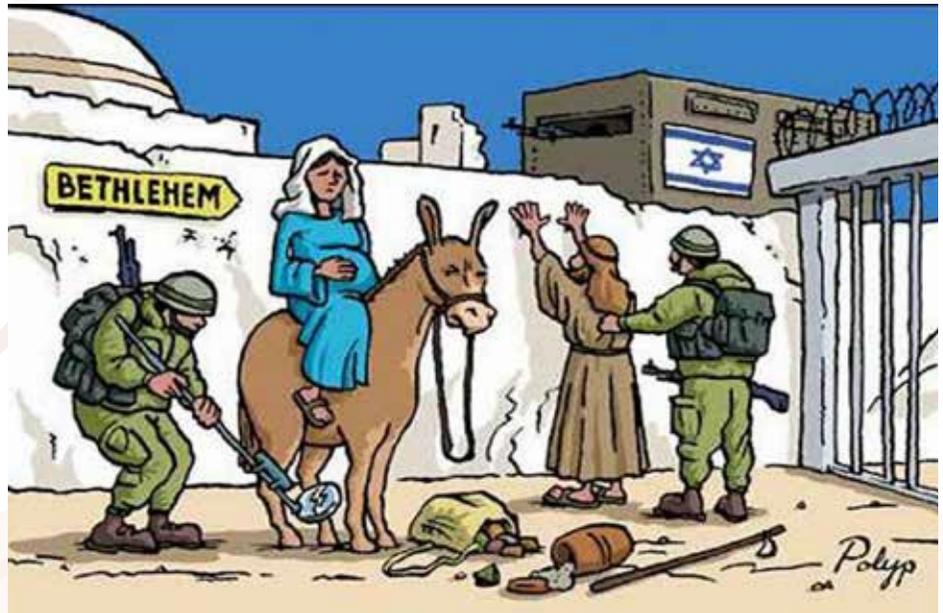
Through these unconventional actions, Jesus was displaying what agency for those in the margins actually means. In his death, he found himself next to criminals and soldiers, thus making sure that no one is out of God's purview for repentance, renewal and restoration. Wherever exclusion was accepted as the norm, Jesus made sure that in God's reign, God's world order, there is no discrimination whatsoever. In his resurrection and ascension, he found himself changing the lives of those who thought that death was the final word. Jesus was the ultimate giver of hope. He continues to be the same today.

Palestinians in the Holy Land are one of the most oppressed people in the world. They are victims of global systems of injustice intersecting at political, economic and social spheres. Annexations and militarization are at alarming heights with the very right to live being taken away from communities, especially in and around the West Bank. Bethlehem, a symbolic city of communion, is under a siege through oppression and injustice.

As the Palestine-Israel conflict is at the heart of global concerns, Zionist ideology still has a stronghold on various Christian groups in the world. It is imperative to constantly be involved in educating the masses on the debilitating effects of such a divisive ideology through Biblical and Scriptural insights and to bring out stories of the Palestinians who are the victims of such prolonged suffering.

What would Jesus do in this situation today is a question that is placed before us. The answer is simple. Jesus would do the same things he did during his years on Earth, adapting his ministry to the particular needs and situations of the 21st Century. Jesus was never out of touch with reality. Jesus is always present with the people. Not only is his presence a light of hope. It is his assurance that he always sides with the victims. Going back to Scripture gives hope in times of hopelessness. We must begin by taking comfort in the words of Jesus, who repeatedly said, "Do not fear."

But we must not stop there, because Jesus didn't. He who affirmed peace and rest also walked the extra mile, overturned the tables in the temple, and spoke truth to the power of Empire by calling out injustice. In the face of abuse and exclusion, encroachment and land grabbing, Jesus asks us to resist and protest with the hope of justice. This hope is filled with the vision of the reign of God where there is absolute joy, peace and justice and where there is no more weeping and pain.



Like the Jesus movement of the first century, we need a coming together of people groups for this cause. Jesus would want coordinated efforts through actions of agency, solidarity, resistance and undying efforts to seek divine alternatives for hope and justice for Palestinians. God who became human calls us to do the same.

***Rev Inbaraj Jeyakumar***, a member of Church of South India, started his journey with SCMI when he was a student in the American College and then in the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (TTS) Madurai. Soon after completing his theological studies from TTS, Inba joined SCMI as the Programme Secretary for South Tamilnadu region. He continued his tenure for four years. SCMI deputed him as an International Social Justice intern at Jan Hus Presbyterian Church in New York for two years, after which he joined the National office of SCMI at Bangalore. As a person coming from the Dalit Community, he has been a source of great inspiration and strength to Dalit and Tribal Students, especially through the Fellowship Programme of SCMI. He is a strong supporter of the Palestinian struggle and currently serve as the General Secretary of the SCM of India.

## *Reflect*

In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic exposed unjust global structures and the unjust agendas of governments around the world? Where in your community do you see the effects of these injustices? In what ways can you and your cohort work to overcome them?

## *Pray*

God Who Hears the Cries of the Oppressed, may the season's lighting of candles and the singing of carols fill my heart and move me to act in partnership with those who are suffering life's injustices. In the name of the One who, born in a stable, made his home among the oppressed, amen.

## *Act*

"Do it like God. Become human."

A large, semi-transparent silhouette of a figure with a halo, possibly representing the Virgin Mary, is positioned on the left side of the page. The figure is holding a cross. The background is a solid dark red color with some faint geometric lines.

# *Fourth Sunday* *in Advent*



*“Furthermore, we know that certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights. Thus, the promises, according to their interpretation, have become a menace to our very existence. The «good news» in the Gospel itself has become «a harbinger of death» for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples.”*

***Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 2.3.3***

# O, that you would rend the heavens and come down!

*By: Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac*

*Look down from heaven and see,  
from your lofty throne, holy and glorious.  
Where are your zeal and your might?  
Your tenderness and compassion?  
They are withheld from us.  
But you are our Father,  
though Abraham does not know us  
and Israel does not acknowledge us.  
For you, LORD, are our Father,  
our Redeemer from of old is your name...*

*O, that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
that the mountains would tremble before you—  
as when fire sets twigs ablaze  
and causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your enemies  
and cause the nations to quake before you!  
For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,  
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.  
(Isaiah 63:15-16; 64:1-3)*

As Christmas approaches, we gather at a time that is filled with challenges. On the one side, there is the spread of the COVID-19 virus with all its medical, economic and psychological challenges, exacerbating the already difficult life on this land that continues to suffer under occupation and oppression. All types of emotions overwhelm our land: desperation and frustration, anger and a sense of helplessness before the occupation policies, and the fear in some of us about what the future might bring. On the other hand, we want to rejoice during the Christmas season: to light up the Christmas tree, and buy gifts for the children. But how can we feel merry?

This year has been filled with difficult events: a so-called peace plan which is nothing but a further consolidation of occupation and the apartheid regime; peace agreements with Arab countries that are little more than military agreements and war coalitions. Superpowers around the world continue to control the fate of people and nations. They care less about human beings. Their main concern is to expand their influence and power, with arrogance and a condescending air about them as if they are the rulers of all humankind.

“Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious... Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.” These were the cries of Isaiah in his day. “As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you.”

Isaiah waited for God’s justice after seeing and talking about the coming glory, about consolation, and peace. He spoke these words after he heard Jesus Christ saying,

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Isaiah is now asking when will this materialize? O Lord, come down and make these words a reality on the ground. The land is filled with the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives and the prisoners and those who mourn. Help and save us, for you are our Father, you are our Redeemer. Isaiah seems to be experiencing a crisis of faith. His theology and faith tell him one thing about the God of justice and comfort, yet reality tells him something else: captivity, destruction, darkness, and injustice.



“O, that you would rend the heavens and come down!” These words might today express the yearning of many people. Where are you, Lord? How can you remain silent when injustice and the hegemony of the powerful prevail? How could you allow this arrogance to control the life of the peoples of this earth? Will God rend the heavens and come down to us?

At the time of Advent, we remember that the God of this land is not silent nor distant. Here, however, the divine secret is manifested: God came down as a vulnerable child living under occupation and the power of the empire. God suffered to enter our world. His family had to travel because of the census ordered by the king. Later, Herod tried to kill him as a refugee. It was as if the world and its empire realized that the child born in Bethlehem was their biggest enemy. He would defeat them. He would not bend before the Emperor, nor before the Emperor’s wealth and power, even when offered all earthly kingdoms.

When God came to our world, God chose to come as one of the helpless and oppressed. Jesus came from the little town of Bethlehem to redeem this world and its kingdoms from greed for money and power. He was a peaceful and serving King. His weapon was love, love for God and for the other. Jesus came to build a different kind of kingdom, not like that of the Emperor or the Caliph or a Crusader’s king or khedive or Turkish sultan. He came to build a kingdom that is definitely not like that of Netanyahu or Trump. It is a kingdom for the peaceful, the lovers of good and justice. It is a Kingdom with the cross as its symbol, not like that of the Crusaders, but like that of Golgotha—a cross of love, sacrifice and redemption.

God is neither silent nor distant. Yes, he rent the heavens, caused the earth to quake, and came down to us. We need to have the eyes of faith to read into the events and the world around us. We need to see it from the perspective of the Bible, that tells us kingdoms of earth come and go. Jesus alone remains the crowned King of hearts and adoration, not their Christ of tyranny, injustice, and lack of empathy. Jesus is the Christ of the Bible, the son of God, the lamb that was sacrificed to relieve us from sin. He is the Christ of modesty, bruised but never broken, a light that cannot be blown out.

Yes, kingdoms come and go. But Jesus Christ remains the same—yesterday, today and every tomorrow. Not only that, while kingdoms vanished, the people of the land—the helpless, the powerless who had no support but God—remained. Didn’t Jesus say, blessed are the meek, for

they shall inherit the earth?

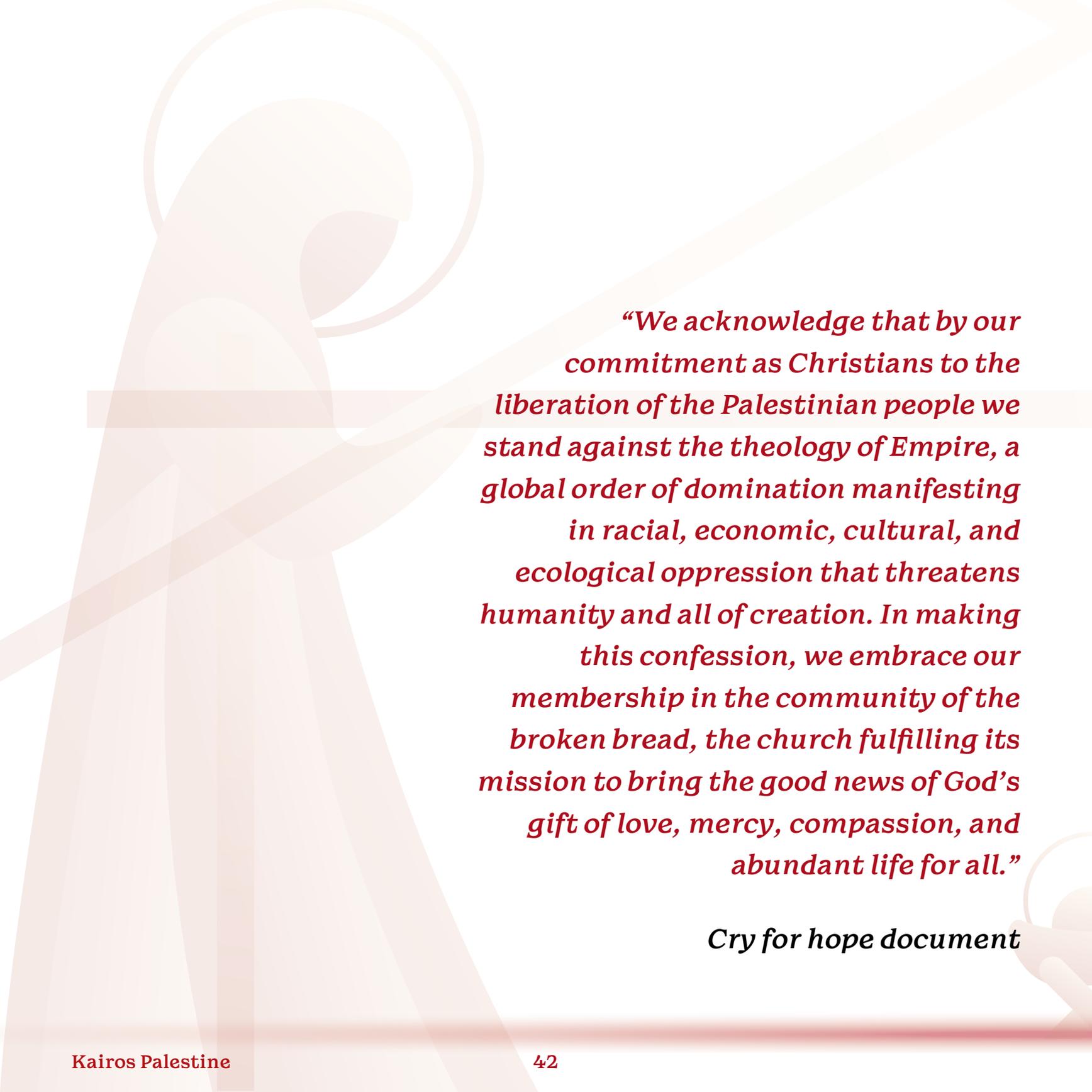
God is our support. God is with us together with all the followers of Christ who have understood Jesus' message across the globe. I receive letters of support from all over the world. There are people who refuse to bend before the monster and his kingdom.

Our message at this time of Advent: God is with us, Jesus is with us. Jesus' birth reminds us how God rent the heavens and came down as Jesus, the son of Mary. The message to us: fear not my little flock, believe, and read the world with eyes of faith. Our message is one of steadfastness. We are here. We will never leave. They came and left, but we stayed. They conspired against us and against our land, yet we held fast. Our steadfastness and resilience are our resistance. Thus, let us live and work, sing hymns of love, of grace, of life, hymns of Jesus, the son of Mary.

### **If God is with us, then who is against us?**

We shall invest in the heavenly kingdom, the kingdom of the meek, the kingdom of the Child of the Bethlehem grotto, the fleeing refugee, who imposed his ways on our world. We are today his followers. Yes, we should stay here and embody another kingdom. We should be the conscience of the world, a bearer of the message to the world about the God of this land, all lands, the King of the earth, who has all the power to hold to justice the living and the dead. The One who said, "I am the creator of all new things." Hail, glory and power to God forever. Amen!

**Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac** is a Palestinian Christian pastor, theologian, writer, speaker, blogger and, more importantly, a husband and a father. He now pastors Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and is the Academic Dean of Bethlehem Bible College. He is also the director of the highly acclaimed and influential Christ at the Checkpoint conferences and is a board member of Kairos Palestine. Munther is passionate about issues related to Palestinians and Palestinian Christians. He speaks locally and internationally on issues related to the theology of the land, Palestinian Christians, and Palestinian theology. He is the author of *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land*". Munther plays the guitar and the flute. He is also an avid sports fan, specially football (aka soccer) and basketball (NBA). Munther originally studied civil engineering in Birzeit. Realizing that numbers and construction sites are not his thing, he obtained a Master's in Biblical Studies from Westminster Theological Seminary and a PhD from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Munther is married to Rudaina, an architect. Together they have two boys, Karam (8) and Zaid (6).



*“We acknowledge that by our commitment as Christians to the liberation of the Palestinian people we stand against the theology of Empire, a global order of domination manifesting in racial, economic, cultural, and ecological oppression that threatens humanity and all of creation. In making this confession, we embrace our membership in the community of the broken bread, the church fulfilling its mission to bring the good news of God’s gift of love, mercy, compassion, and abundant life for all.”*

*Cry for hope document*

# From the Margins and in Community: Sowing the Uncomfortable Seed of Liberating Hope

*By: Marcelo Leites*

*“Hope arouses, as nothing can arouse, a passion for the possible.”  
William Sloane Coffin*

2020 has been one of the most difficult years in recent decades. Readers will identify it with the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the virus and its health consequences are not the only challenges that humanity faces. The international community’s response to COVID-19 has exposed an even greater crisis: the world-wide system of inequalities on which capitalism is sustained, manifested through its political, military, economic and media branches.

From my place in the global south, I see how, during this pandemic, this prevailing system has worked to continue curtailing the most fundamental rights of people—those who dare to rebel against it and those who, willing or not, are subject to the hegemonic media consensus.

The massacres, persecutions and assassinations of social leaders in Colombia have occurred within the framework of the implementation of a failed Peace Agreement from the government. The extrajudicial killings and tortures in the Philippines, under the guise of a “war on terror” and measures of confinement, have taken many lives, including those of many Christian leaders. The resurgence of the apartheid policy in Palestine, including



ongoing attempts at annexation and the signing of spurious “peace” agreements, further subordinate the Palestinians—resulting in emigration, the loss of land, and the destruction of their culture. In Colombia, in the Philippines, in Palestine—and in many other places—the destruction caused by this geo-political system is happening simultaneously under the rubric «Made in the USA” and with the complicity of the western hegemonic narrative.

I wonder, how to have hope? Even more difficult, how to speak of hope to the peasant facing the bulldozer, to the mother who lost her son to arms, to the families divided under the walls of shame?

### **Hope cannot be passive**

Hegemonic narratives undermine our ways of being and thinking. Our understanding of life is shaped by the stories we are told. These narratives describe a vision that success comes from the hand of meritocracy, rooted in the holy myths that our salvation is to be found in individualism, competition and consumption. They call us to immitate the example of those who want to dominate us. As a result, great majorities yield to the powerfuls’ description of “the way the world is.”

These narratives work then to reduce a people to pessimism: «There is nothing we can do, the world is simply like this. We can’t change it.» In these terms, «hope» is simply a passive waiting. Perhaps change is possible for the individual—if the ruling class allows it—but not for the community. Thus, we are manipulated. We eventually lose interest and adapt to what we are told is “the way the world is and always will be.” Take, for example, the belief for many Christians that it “just makes sense” that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. This is a narrative of domination; repeated often enough by those in power, it shapes our individual consciences.

### **The hope that transforms is a call to liberating action**

Hope arrives to break the power of hegemonic forces. This hope is anchored in a transforming faith based on justice. At the same time that it comforts us in our sadness, it moves us towards the liberating action of Jesus Christ manifested throughout history. For this reason, our call is to announce the power of hope in the face of the powers of Empire.

As William Sloane Coffin said, hope arouses the passion for the possible—something better and beyond “the way things are” according to narratives of those in power throughout history. We are the ones who have the duty to maintain a hope that actively transforms, that breaks the established “common sense” thinking and behaving. For Christians, this transforming action begins with our faith then moves to action. It is faith put into prophetic action.

Our work is not easy or naive. It demands that we tell the other part of the story, that of the margins. It demands that we act accordingly, counter to the prevailing narratives of those in power. Hope and action move in dynamic tension, moving us to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to offer consolation to those who suffer by telling—and showing—them that the world is not «what they tell us.» It is what we can do together.

As the pedagogue Paulo Freire used to say, «No one is saved alone, no one saves anyone, we are saved in community.» From different parts of the world, Christians and people of good will have responded to the Cry for Hope coming from the Christian communities in Palestine (cryforhope.org). This call is an example of hope put into prophetic action. It is a call from the margins, born in community and promoting solidarity. We will be there, telling stories and sowing the uncomfortable but liberating seed of hope. Only in this way, hope is kept alive by transforming the world and ourselves.

***Marcelo Leites** is Regional Executive of the World Student Christian Federation Latin America and the Caribbean (WSCF LAC) director of the global Eco-Justice program of WSCF. He is Uruguayan, resides in Argentina, where he works from the WSCF regional office. Marcelo is part of the coalition Global Kairos for Justice and its executive committee. He also co-moderated the Executive Committee of the Youth Network of Religions for Peace Latin America (2013-2019) and is currently a member of the Climate Change group of the World Council of Churches and of the Climate Justice Group (CJG ) of the ACT Alliance.*

# Reflect

Waiting is one of the disciplines of Advent. Ours is a waiting in hope together with others—expectant, trusting, scanning the horizon for signs of God’s presence. 2020 has been a year of disappointment and challenge. What can you do to nurture your hope?

# Pray

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

(Isaiah 64:1-2)

Until then, God, give me courage and put me in places  
where I will make your name known to your adversaries,  
exposing their injustices that they along with the  
oppressed may be set free. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

# Act

Read Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action ([cryforhope.org](http://cryforhope.org)). Commit yourself to one of the seven actions our Palestinian family has implored us to embrace.

# **Advent reflections: “a message of hope to our bereaved and suffering people in this land”**

*By: Archbishop Atallah Hanna; Archbishop of Sabastia*

The Christmas season this year comes amidst a multi-dimensional complex situation. However, the inspiration of the message of Jesus birth gives us the strength, the comfort, sustaining our faith and insistence on humane stances and principles in our defense of justice and righteousness. Globally, the world is suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic that has also invaded our world, our region, and our country, exhausting people, wearing them out, forcing them into a state of mental anxiety, as they find themselves before economic challenges and difficulties in their daily lives.

At the national level, Palestinians are facing the deal of the century, the annexation policies, the phenomenon of normalization with Israel. All of these are critical challenges that target the very core of our Palestinian question, they target our Palestinian people who struggled and continue to struggle for their freedom at a very high cost to them.

Our Christmas message is that we as people of the holy land where God’s love for humanity was embodied, are never allowed to lose hope regardless of the intensity of pressures, conspiracies and challenges.

Palestinian Christians have a mission that derives from the virtues and values of their faith and holy book; it is a mission to be always defenders of what is right, supporters of questions of justice, fighting against injustices that humans are subjected to, regardless of challenges and conspiracies.

Our Christian faith teaches us to say the truth, to say it without fear from anyone. This word today is that Palestinian Christians, just like all Palestinians, continue to suffer from injustice, occupation, and siege. Genuine peace cannot prevail in our land except through justice. In our understanding, justice means the end of occupation and the enjoyment of the Palestinian of their right to much-deserved freedom.

Palestinians will not surrender in the face of any deals, suspicious endeavors, normalization, or any other challenges that target our Palestinian people and their just cause. Our message this Christmas is that our cause is just and that no rights will be lost if they are constantly demanded. We should always call for justice at a time when injustice and conspiracy intensify against our people and their just cause.



We hope that our message during this glorious time of advent would reach the whole world, particularly churches around the world, drawing their attention to Palestine and the Palestinian people. Resolving the Palestinian question cannot happen through deals, or conspiracies, or normalization in return for nothing, or suspicious endeavors. It can happen through ending the occupation and realizing the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

We remain hopeful that the Palestinian Christian's voice, and the voice of all Palestinians who reject the deal of the century, the annexation policies, normalization, and conspiracy, reaches across the globe.

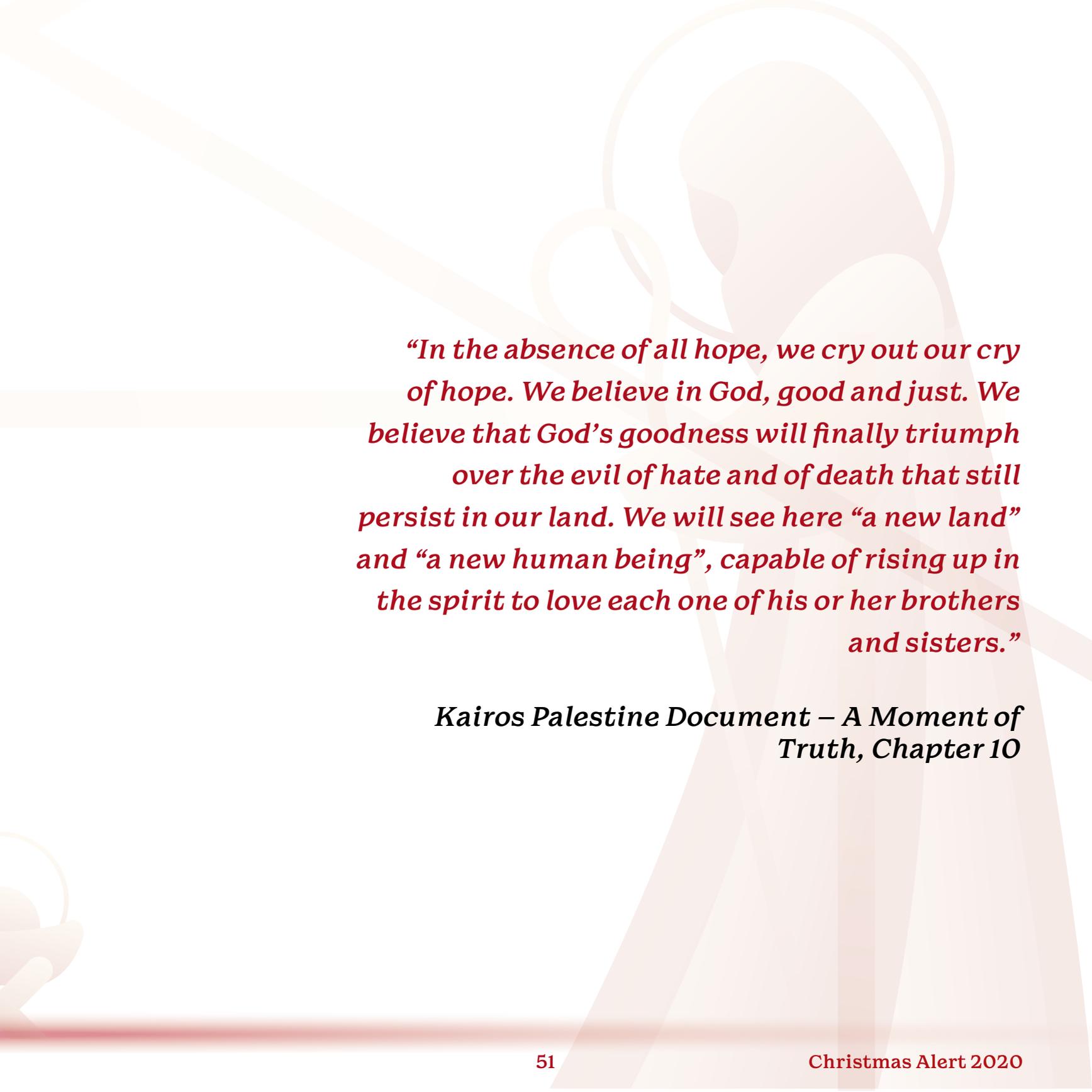
We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ born in a grotto in Bethlehem for our salvation, for His help and support so that we can all fulfill our mission appropriately. We pray that He comforts the hearts of the bereaved and those who suffer in our country and the region.

We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ to lift this pandemic that took over our world, to show His kindness to humanity as a whole, and to grace our Palestinian people and our holy land with genuine peace on the basis of the values of justice, freedom, and human dignity.

**Archbishop Atallah Hanna** Hanna was born on 6/11/1965 in the town of Al Rama in the Upper Galilee. After finishing high school in Al Rama in 1983 he joined the Orthodox Seminary in Jerusalem. In 1984 he left to Thessaloniki in Greece where he studied Greek and then joined the College of Theology at the Thessaloniki University from which he graduated with distinction in 1990. He was ordained a monk in 1990 at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem. He contributed to the development of the unified curriculum for Christian religion teaching at Palestinian schools. Archbishop Hanna participated in many local, regional and international conferences and advocated for the Palestinian question in all forums. He is a member of many committees and organizations in addition to his membership in several Christian and ecumenical institutions. He played a role in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. He was elected unanimously as the Archbishop of Sebastia in 2005.



# Christmas day



*“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 of 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***

# The Way Forward

*By: Bisan Kassis & Rifat Kassis*

Christmas is a time when we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. It is a time when God shows God's great love for us and for humanity. It is a time of reflection, healing and renewed strength.

When we compare the situation of more than 2000 years ago with developments in the same places today, we see a lot of similarities. Many people in Bethlehem are facing exactly what Mary and Joseph had to face when they were without shelter and could not find a place to stay. Many people in Bethlehem are fleeing their country as Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to avoid the wrath of King Herod.

The checkpoints at Bethlehem entrances and the massive iron gates in the wall that surround the city are similar to the checkpoints and the walls around Bethlehem 2000 years ago. While the Romans occupied Palestine 2000 years ago, more than 150,000 Jewish settlers live in the more than 20 Jewish-only settlements built on Palestinian land surrounding Bethlehem on three sides. The separation wall continues on around 100 km and it is not yet completed. What remains available of Bethlehem to its people today—for housing, recreation, education, commerce and agriculture—is less than 12% of its original land.

The three (un)wise men, who came to King Herod asking him about the birth of Jesus—instead of seeking and talking to the people—are the same unwise people who still believe that kings and presidents can bring peace to this troubled world.

A great difference between today and 2000 years ago is this: when one turns one's eyes toward the sky to see the star of peace above Bethlehem, one's eyes are blinded by the beams of huge search lights on the guarding towers that sweep the roads to ensure that "security" prevails, a security without peace.

All this seems to be a horrible way to celebrate Christmas, but it is a fitting way to remember that Christ was born in the midst of such darkness and misery. This was Jesus' mission to the world, to be born in and live through the darkest realities of our lives. From this perspective,

we can still take courage and hope as did the Beit Sahourian shepherds in the field two millennia ago, and as do the Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem and Christians around the world today.

It is Jesus Christ's call to love one another and to connect with each other to build a loving community. In a world that is faced with increasing violence, human-made and natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty and loss of dignity, the need of the hour is to transform the world into a humane and compassionate world.



Time is running out for your brothers and sisters in Palestine. Support them with your solidarity, commitment and compassion—combined with your bold, public and united refusal to accept any outcome other than an end to the oppression. Together, we can turn the tide. We can finally live in peace with justice, the peace that all peoples aspire to, and the kind of peace that was heralded in Bethlehem.

Kairos Palestine urges you to, please, do the following:

1. Distribute and study background materials and theological reflections in your churches each Sunday of Advent to inform and educate your community about the situation of your Palestinian family living under Israeli occupation.
2. Share the alert with congregations, regions, conferences, presbyteries and dioceses across your country.
3. Read Kairos Palestine and its partners "Cry for Hope" which was launched on the 1st of July this year; sign it by visiting the website ([cryforhope.org](http://cryforhope.org)) and support the implementation of its seven recommendations:



- a. Initiate processes at local, denominational and ecumenical levels that lead to decisive action regarding the denial of Palestinian rights.
- b. Confront theologies and understandings of the Bible that justify the oppression of the Palestinian people.
- c. Support Palestinian resistance, including Boycott Divestment (BDS) and Sanctions and direct political advocacy.
- d. Demand that governments and world bodies employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel's violations of human rights and international law.
- e. Oppose equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism.
- f. Support initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians and interfaith partnerships that oppose apartheid and create opportunities to work together for justice and equality.
- g. Come and see the reality in the Holy Land to stand in solidarity with grassroots initiatives for a just peace.

4. Send letters of solidarity and support for justice in Palestine/Israel to the Israeli embassies in your own country. For further information, see [www.allembassies.com/israeli\\_embassies.htm](http://www.allembassies.com/israeli_embassies.htm)
5. Inform your Palestinian brothers and sisters about the ways you have been involved with the Christmas Alert by writing us at [kairos@kairospalestine.ps](mailto:kairos@kairospalestine.ps). Contact us for any other reason, too. Our strength and courage are emboldened by our contacts with you.

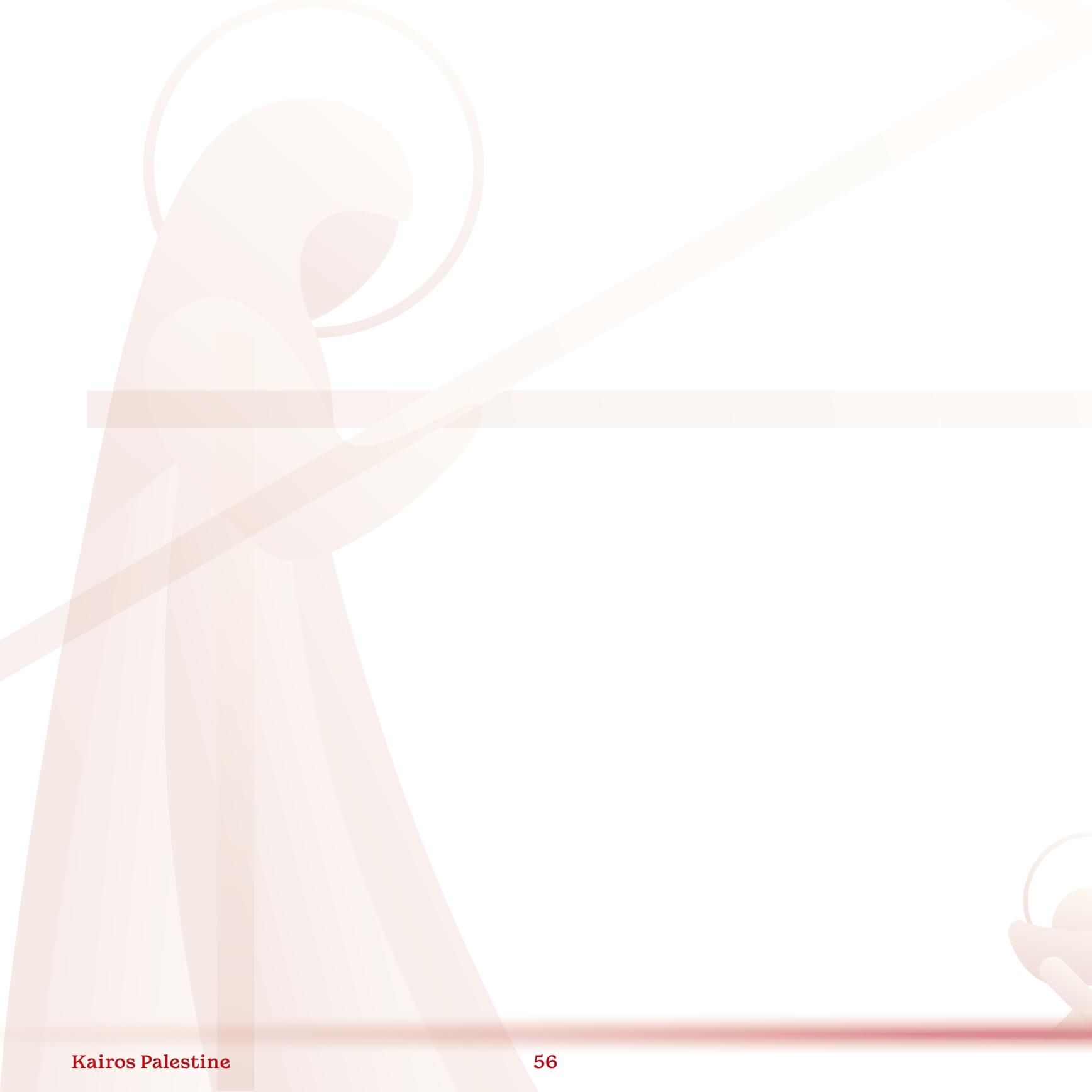
Still, the only hope of the world is in the light of a star that neither tanks nor fighter planes nor separation walls nor huge search lights can keep from penetrating the darkness.

With these few words of reflection over Christmas, we salute you all and wish you a Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year!

**Bisan Kassis;** *Having worked in human rights' based organizations within the Palestinian civil society for many years, Bisan has extensive knowledge and skills in advocacy related work as well as monitoring and evaluation. She was the advocacy coordinator at the EJ-YMCA and YWCA of Palestine's Joint Advocacy Initiative (JAI), and instructor and trainer in the Institute for Community Partnership- Bethlehem University (ICP); Bisan was also the program coordinator of OPGAI; a network of 11 organizations working in advocacy in occupied Palestine and the occupied Golan Heights. She is an experienced, strategic and multi-disciplinary consultant at GRIP Consulting, a Bethlehem based consultancy firm, and is also an INTRAC associate. Since June 2015, Bisan is a full time senior consultant at GRIP Consulting. Bisan is dedicated to enhancing the work of the civil society and has worked as a consultant with numerous Palestinian and international NGOs.*

**Rifat Kassis** *has long been active in the Palestinian struggle on a number of non-violent fronts. He has working experience in different countries and areas; Palestine and the Middle East, Northern Caucasus, Central Asia and Europe! In 1991 he founded the first and only Palestinian independent Child Rights NGO; Defence for Children International (DCI). From 2005 till 2012, he served as the elected President of the international movement in Geneva. In 1995 he co-founded the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG). He served as Executive Director of the East Jerusalem YMCA (2000-2004), and founded the Olive Tree Campaign. In 2005, he ran the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).*

*HHhe was the driving force and one of the co-authors of Kairos Palestine document and became the General Coordinator of Kairos Palestine movement as well as the Global Kairos for Justice Coalition. He is an author and has published two books and contribution in 16 other books*





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