



2019

# Christmas Alert



# CHRISTMAS ALERT 2019

“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  
Christmas Alert 2019**



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# CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2019

*H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah*

Jesus Christ is born. Let us rejoice. “The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory” (John 1:14) and “from his fullness we have, all of us, received—one gift after another” (John 1:16).

“The angels said to the shepherds in Bethlehem: ‘I bring you news of great joy... A Savior has been born to you’” (Luke 2:10-11), and they sang the song of “peace on earth” (Luke 2: 14).

In Bethlehem, Christmas is a remembrance of what happened 2,000 years ago. In the hearts of people, there is joy and prayer but also sadness: O Lord, have mercy.

Because in Bethlehem, in all the Holy Land, Israel and Palestine, soldiers armed with weapons dare to silence the voice of the angels.

Many in our land today do not hear the song of angels and the message of heaven. Our world still needs a Savior who transforms people's hearts and teaches them peace and justice. Because the land of peace is still a land of war. Israel imposes military occupation on Palestinians with all kinds of assaults on their God-given dignity. Israel sees its survival only by stripping the Palestinians of their independence, even their existence. Therefore, the lives of the two peoples are still at war, not living in peace.

When Jesus was born, God conveyed a holy message to the shepherds watching over their cattle (Luke 2:8-14): «A Savior is born to you...» They sang the hymn of peace that connects earth with heaven: «Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.»

God did not deliver this message to the great and powerful people in those days. Today, too, the simple receive the message of Christmas. The prayers of the simple—poor and marginalized—are offered to God for those who pretend to be great; may they open their minds and hear the message. With their joy and prayers and support, the simple also reach out to those who are tortured and oppressed, the captives, those who



have had their homes demolished, those humiliated by the soldier with a gun, the soldier who forgets that he or she is a human being and forgets too that the person whom he or she humiliates is also a human being. Those who are great in the world—who have power, who support injustice and war in our land—some of them perhaps still believe and pray. Perhaps they come to Bethlehem to listen to the message of heaven and to the hymns of Christmas. But they do not hear. The word of God is far from them. To those who join with the great and powerful of our land to support war, God tells them when they come before God to pray, “The message of Christmas is not war, neither in Palestine and Israel nor in any country in the Middle East and in the world.”



Christmas is a message to those who are «saved» or seek salvation, those whose hands are not dipped in the blood of peoples, especially in the blood and humiliation of the human being in the Holy Land. God says to them when they come to pray, “Go, wash your hands of the blood of peoples first, then come pray.”

Today, the great of the world offer Palestinians the «deal of the century,” in which they offer to purchase Palestinians’ freedom and independence with a lot of money. They want to exchange our Palestinian identity, existence and soul for the promise of prosperity. But Christmas says to them, and we say, “We are human beings, God’s creation. Our dignity is from God, not from any human power. We are equal in dignity to every human



being, every people. More precious than money.” Christmas says, and we say, “The human being, Israeli and Palestinian, cannot be bought or sold with money. God created all of us in God’s image and likeness. Whom God has honored, all people must honor, especially those who have power and might.”

We pray, “O Lord, tell the great of the world that you have made human beings, Israeli and Palestinian, “a little less than God, you have crowned the human being with glory and beauty, made humankind lord of the works of your hands, put all things under his feet” (Ps 8:5-6). No people are to occupy another people and their land. No one has the right to strip the Palestinian people from their land and their dignity—no matter the price.

This is a sad Christmas message. The great of this world are required to change the Deal of the Century by looking up, where they will hear God tell them—if there is to be any rest of Christmas in their hearts, “Listen to the message of the angel: A Savior has been born to you.» If you are able to hear the message of heaven, make peace based on seeing God’s image in both Israeli and Palestinian human beings. Follow the ways of God and the logic of God. Money and power will pass. The oppressed will remain, despite their weakness, because they remain human beings blessed by God and demanding their God-given dignity.

As we learn of the «Deal of the Century» aimed at buying the freedom of a people, this year’s message of Christmas from Bethlehem is a cry to God, our Creator and our Father.

O Lord, have mercy. O God, the message you sent to the simple shepherds in those days, send it today to those who have power. O Lord, change the hearts of the great of this world. Grant them light to see and to know that the Palestinians and they themselves are equally created in your image and have the same dignity you gave to all.

Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Pray, believers all over the world, that God may grant peace and justice to the land of Nativity, so that the feast will be complete in Bethlehem and throughout the earth.



“ **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



## AN OPEN LETTER TO MY FELLOW AMERICAN, CIVIL SERVANT JARED KUSHNER

*By Sam Bahour*

The White House finally released the much-anticipated economic plan of what has been infamously coined “the deal of the century.” I just read it. I honestly don’t know whether to laugh or cry so, instead of doing either, I thought it would be best to share my thoughts by way of the following open letter to Jared Kushner.

Dear Jared,  
I just read your Peace to Prosperity Economic Plan. I must give it to you. You produced 136 pages of nothing. I read this on my veranda, the one facing the illegal Israeli settlement of Psagot across the valley. Every time I looked up to take a sip of water, I looked at the settlement lights

glaring down on me and then looked down to your plan to see where it fits. I see it fits perfectly since you don’t even hint that it exists. I know, we Palestinians should not get bogged down with inconvenient facts on the ground.

I really liked the part of the plan’s vision which notes that it can only be achieved “following a peace agreement.” You are spot on here, Jared, but isn’t that what the Palestinian leadership and people have been saying to you from the outset: Show us the political parameters and then we can talk economy?

I loved how you started the narrative

part of the plan, “Generations of Palestinians have lived without knowing peace, and the West Bank and Gaza have fallen into a protracted crisis.” Really? I wonder why. “Falling” into such a crisis is such a bummer, we must be more careful next time.

Now, seriously Jared, I read English well, or so I thought, but parts of your plan just left me hanging. Can you explain?

You state that the plan can “fundamentally transform the West Bank and Gaza and open a new chapter in Palestinian history—one defined, not by adversity and loss, but by freedom and dignity.” “Adversity and loss,” another bummer. I wonder how we got that to start with. I was so happy you did not go there in the report; it would have





been so “old talk” to explain why. Let’s just pretend an earthquake hit us and stay focused on the future.

You’re on target again, Jared, when you say, “No vision for the Palestinians can be realized without the full support of the Palestinian people and their leadership.” I can kiss you for this one.

I was so happy that you are aware that “certainty and predictability for investors” is needed and that your plan promises it. The plan also promises to “open the West Bank and Gaza Strip.” Only problem with these promises, my friend, is that you skip here the how and the who is not allowing for “certainty and predictability” and the why we are “closed” today. Jared, you’re losing me here.



Your plan promises to “provide financial and technical assistance to build the capacity of immigration and customs officials to operate and manage crossing points in coordination with neighboring states” and to “construct new ports of entry.” Excuse my ignorance here, but these require a state, so I must ask what will the nationality of those “immigration and customs officials” be and to what country will these new ports belong?

Your plan says, “While agriculture accounts for approximately eight percent of Palestinian employment, this sector has not met its potential due to limited access of Palestinian farmers to land, water, and technology.” Jared, you did not mention what was the percentage before the last 25-year, U.S.-run

peace plan called Oslo. I know, I know, look forward, stay positive. I’m trying, really, I’m trying but when you went on to note that it’s because of “limited access of Palestinian farmers to land, [and] water” I just looked up and saw that damn settlement across the valley again. But don’t worry, I pretended it was not there and actually feel good now.

Jared, oh Jared, I was literally jumping for joy when I read this: “In accord with the principles of the rule of law and separation of powers, the independence of the Palestinian judicial branch must be reassessed and strengthened.” YES! YES! YES, but can we agree to do this in the U.S. first, you know, as a pilot?

I can go on, but I know you are busy. You produced a plan for Palestine without mentioning Palestine. You

spoke of the Palestinian people without recognizing that 300,000 of us are in Jerusalem and 5 million of us are waiting to go home. You did not use the word “occupation” once in all 136 pages of the plan. Well, you did come close by using the term “high-growth occupations,” which could be a pun but one you did not intend to make.

I know better, Jared. I’ve been here on the ground in the private sector for 25 years. This is a nice snow job. In the management consulting world, we call it desk research, with no field work, no assumptions and definitely no agency that can make the project real. Nearly every single project you list is not original. But I have to give it to you, you even say that in the report.



Jared, you are driving drunk on power. Since we are now friends, please listen. From one American to another: Get out of the car. Go home. You are wasting time and taxpayers' dollars trying to whitewash 52 years of Israeli military occupation, one that is alive and well today even if you are blind to it.

Yours Truly,  
Sam I Am

**“Sam Bahour** is a Palestinian-American business consultant from Ramallah/Al-Bireh in the West Bank. He is chair of the board of Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy (AVPE) and serves as a policy adviser to Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network and is co-editor of “Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians” (1994). He blogs at [ePalestine.com](http://ePalestine.com). @SamBahour



# Reflect

“Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

Benjamin Franklin

# Pray

O God Who Appeared Among Us Overturning Tables, stir in me a sense of outrage, temper it with your wisdom and discernment, and move me to act with a courage that goes beyond common sense. Amen.

# Act

Read a copy (or summary) of the Deal of a Century and write a brief critique exposing its flaws. Send your critique as a Letter to the Editor and/or an Open Letter to the elected leaders who represent you. Post it on social media.



*“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*





# Second

SUNDAY IN ADVENT

# THE RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEAL OF THE CENTURY ON CHRISTIANS

*By Rev. Dr. Stephen Sizer*

Jared Kushner's long awaited "Deal of the Century" aspires to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians through \$28 billion of investment in the Palestinian economy. Previous international initiatives have proposed exchanging land for peace. This U.S. initiative, appropriately called "Peace to Prosperity", unashamedly proposes trading land for money. In this regard, Kushner's "deal" actually has strong biblical precedent. In Genesis 25, we read of how Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright for a bowl of stew.

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob,

"Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. (Genesis 25:29-33)

Despite Kushner's tempting bribe, Palestinians are not going to sell their birthright: the right to self-determination; the right to an independent, sovereign contiguous Palestine; the right of return for refugees; the right to compensation for land stolen, homes demolished and businesses destroyed. These inalienable rights are enshrined in international law and they will not be traded for Kushner's "Deal of the Century".

This has not, however, inhibited Christian Zionists from endorsing unilateral decisions taken by the US Administration to facilitate the creeping annexation and colonization of Palestine by Israel. Robert Jeffries, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, and John Hagee, the founder of Christians United for Israel (CUFI), for example, spoke at the opening ceremony of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem. Evangelical Christians had for decades lobbied successive U.S. Presidents to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem to assert exclusive Israeli sovereignty over the city. President Trump has also reversed decades of





U.S. policy in recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. With over 40 million adherents, pressure is now being exerted by Christian Zionists for the U.S. President to endorse the annexation of the West Bank, or "biblical heartland" as they like to call it.

Zionist Christians believe a promise God made to Abraham 4,000 years ago justifies the present Judaization of Palestine. "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates...'" (Genesis 15:18-21)

Here are three observations from scripture which show how Christian Zionists have misunderstood the true nature of Abraham's inheritance.



### **1. Abraham's Inheritance was Conditional**

There should not be any ambiguity over title to the land because the Lord is crystal clear in Leviticus: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers." (Leviticus 25:23). God's people were only permitted to reside in God's land as foreigners and strangers. The land was never their personal possession. They enjoyed leasehold not freehold.

### **2. Abraham's Inheritance was to be Shared**

When the exiles returned from captivity, as a sign of their repentance, God insisted they share the land with those of other nations residing among them.

"You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners residing among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe foreigners reside, there you are to give them their inheritance,' declares the Sovereign Lord." (Ezekiel 47:21-23)

The prophet Isaiah insists: "Let no foreigners who have bound themselves to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.'" (Isaiah 56:3). God's people were always defined by faith not race.

### **3. Abraham's Inheritance is ours through Jesus Christ**

The Apostle Paul explains: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16)

The scriptures insist that the inheritance of Abraham was never intended to be the 'everlasting' possession of Palestine but instead, through faith in Jesus, our eternal home in heaven. The writer to the Hebrews insists: "None of them received what had been promised since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Hebrews 11:39-40)



Christian Zionists who justify Israel's apartheid colonialism have much in common with those who defended King Ahab's murder of Naboth to steal his inheritance. As we celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, our gospel witness must embrace a total commitment to justice as the prerequisite for lasting peace and, God willing, ultimately, reconciliation. Inshallah.

“**Revd Dr Stephen Sizer** is the founder and director of Peacemaker Trust, a charity dedicated to peacemaking [[www.peacemakers.ngo](http://www.peacemakers.ngo)]. Stephen has served as an Anglican parish priest for 35 years. He has an MTh from Oxford University and PhD from Middlesex University. He has written several books and articles on Christian Zionism, accessible from [www.stephensizer.com](http://www.stephensizer.com). He was a contributor to “Time for Action”, a British Christian response to A Moment of Truth, the Kairos Palestine document.



## Reflect

The Fundamentals of Religious Fundamentalism:

- Triumphalism (faithful are called to be in charge)
- Emphasis on only a few verses of holy text, taken out of context
- Adherents are called and empowered to “restore” the kingdom of God
- Religion is ideology, not relationship
- Identification of an enemy

Fr. Rafik Khoury

## Pray

God of Every Tribe, Language, People and Nation, awaken those in power to the truth that the earth is yours and all that is in it, the land, and all those who live upon it. Give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Guide their feet into the way of peace. In the name of the One Who is Our Peace. Amen.

## Act

Read one of Stephen Sizer’s resources on Christian Zionism. Then share it with a friend to begin a conversation about how through the centuries the church has misused the Scriptures.



*“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*

The background of the slide features a faded, light-colored image of two cherubs. One cherub is on the left, and another is on the right. They appear to be holding hands or are in a similar pose. The overall tone is soft and ethereal.

# Third

SUNDAY IN ADVENT



## U.S. VISION AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE REGION

*Daoud Kuttab*

Ever since Donald Trump was sworn in as president of the United States, it seemed that he was obsessed with finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. But after an initial flurry of meetings with all parties in the conflict, the American point of view became very clear and it wasn't very pleasant. The most important conclusion from the actions and statements that have ensued shows clearly a total and blind bias to one side of the conflict. Trump's white nationalism and his racist hatred for Muslims and nonwhite immigrants also contributed to this mindset. The earlier passion about finding a solution, it turns out, was only made as a result of Trump's narcissism because he thought he could use a

Middle East peace treaty to win the coveted Nobel Peace prize.

In reality Trump was able to create a policy that combined two extreme political parties: far right-wing Israelis with extremely pro-Israel Christian Zionists. The first group led by a right-wing leader with similar characteristics to himself, and the other an important right-wing Republican constituency that became the strongest base of support for him.

It was not difficult for Donald Trump to find people to help him carry out a policy that would please these two groups. Jared Kushner, his son in law, a strong supporter of Israel and a financial supporter to exclusive

Jewish settlements, was appointed the lead person in reaching this elusive peace. Trump also appointed a number of his close American Jewish lawyers to help carry out this policy. David Friedman, his trusted bankruptcy lawyer—a man with no diplomatic experience who also was a contributor to Jewish settlements—was appointed as ambassador to Israel. Jason Greenblatt, yet another pro-Israel American Zionist, was given the position in the White House to carry out this policy.

On the Christian Zionist end, Trump had some key persons in his administration led by Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, daughter of the fundamentalist Christian preacher



Mike Huckabee.

Initially, Palestinian leaders were lured to thinking that Trump was serious. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met a number of times with the U.S. president and his team and there was a false feeling that Americans wanted to find a solution based on an agreed-to compromise which was possibly close to what had been agreed to in previous administrations.

But this turned out to have been a trap. The real U.S. policy soon emerged with the defunding of UNRWA, the transfer of the U.S. embassy, the closure of the PLO office in Washington, and the strong bond between Trump and Netanyahu. Not only was Trump's Middle East team clearly set on supporting the Israeli position. They did something very few political observers could interpret. They went out of their way to try and destroy the Palestinian side. Jared Kushner admitted that the U.S. policy was built on the idea of financially squeezing Palestinians to the point of bringing them to their knees so that they would accept whatever the U.S. wanted them to accept. The idea of putting tremendous pressure on Palestinians appears to fit very closely with the thoughts of another American Zionist and Islamophobic, Daniel Pipes.

Pipes, an early proponent of the need to profile Muslims, is the founder and president of the Middle East Forum, an independent nonprofit organization. Its mission is promoting American interests through publications, research and media outreach. But his most important writing in this area has been his

repeated calls that the resolution of the Middle East conflict should focus on the idea that Israel has won and Palestinians have lost and that peace requires a total Palestinian surrender. Pipes' ideas have been translated into a collaboration between the U.S. Congress, the Israeli Knesset, and American Christian Zionists, entitled The Israel Victory. The project introduces a new policy for a peaceful solution: "The Palestinians 'lose' by giving up their century-long rejection of the Jewish state, and Israel 'wins' by truly succeeding in its 150-year quest for a sovereign homeland."

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, faulted by many for not being totally democratic, responded decisively. Palestinians totally boycotted the most powerful



country in the world in a rare act of principled political courage that has in many ways erased many of his faults and other weaknesses. Palestinians denied the Americans the ability to claim that they have a Palestinian partner in their one-sided attempts at dictating a one-sided solution in the conflict. Americans thought, or were advised, that Palestinians would soon buckle and give in. Israel was brought in to help in this wicked scheme by denying Palestinians their rightful tax funds collected on their behalf as part of the Palestinian-Israel Declaration of Principles which was signed in the White House in 1993. The U.S. did nothing to press Israel to honor an agreement to which the Americans were witnesses, leaving the Palestinians to fight for their own survival with little help even from

Arab countries (Jordan being an exception).

While the so-called U.S. vision for peace in the Middle East has turned out to be nothing short of a dictate, Palestinians are fighting for their political lives and their rights to live in freedom on their own land. Palestinian assets may be few but their steadfastness can only continue as long as the peoples of the world continue in their principled position to support the inalienable and legitimate rights of Palestinians. No time in the history of the Palestinian struggle has the need for this support been as needed as it is today.

“**Daoud Kuttab** is a Palestinian journalist, a media activist and a columnist for *Palestine Pulse*. He is a former Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton University and is currently director-general of Community Media Network, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing independent media in the Arab region.



## Reflect

“It is a blessed thing to know that no power on earth, no temptation, no human frailty can dissolve what God holds together.”  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

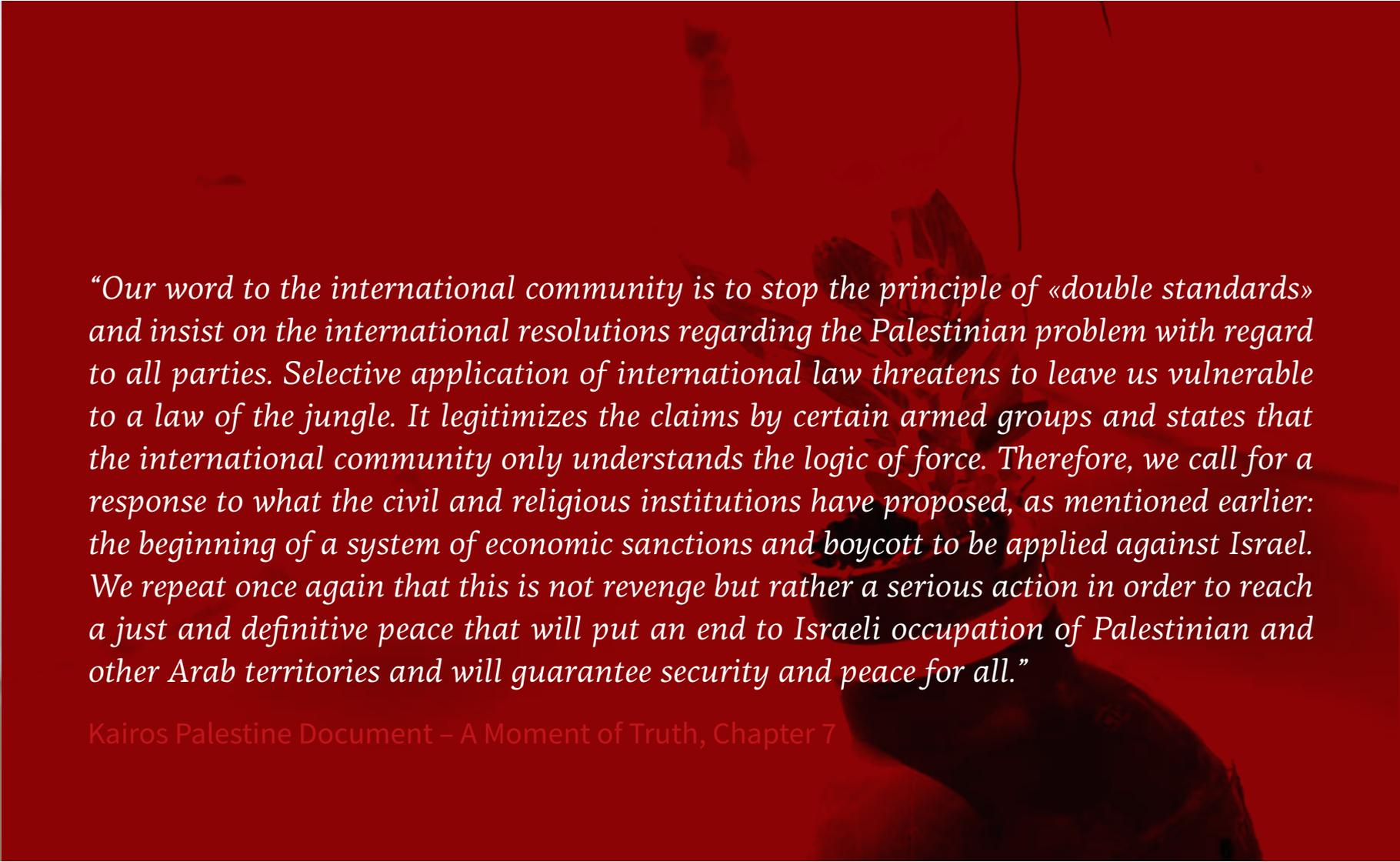
## Pray

God, when I don't have the words to pray, hear my sighs. But let neither my words nor my sighs keep me from rising up to love and serve you by loving and serving others. In the name of the One who in the garden prayed, “Thy will, not mine.” Amen.

## Act

Support Palestinian rights by supporting Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against the State of Israel until its laws and policies and practices comply with International Law and UN resolutions. Speak out for the right of persons, corporations, states and nations to boycott Israel as an expression of free speech.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a vibrant red rose. The background is a deep, dark red, creating a monochromatic effect. The lighting highlights the texture of the rose's petals and the skin of the hand.

*“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

# Fourth

## SUNDAY IN ADVENT



## HOPE IS OUR REFUGE

*By Yasmine Rishmawi*

On the 2nd of November 2016, ninety-nine years after Balfour's Declaration, the co-chairmen of the Israel Advisory Committee to Donald Trump, Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman, released Trump's Position Paper on Israel. The paper emphasized the "unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel" and outlined Trump's strategy in the region, thus representing the corner stone for Trump's "Peace Plan", aka Deal of The Century.

Although the Deal of the Century's formal publication date is yet to be determined, its implementation started already. It started with recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moving of the U.S. embassy to the city, giving Israel

the absolute freedom to expand the settlements and confiscate more lands, along with U.S. recognition of the Golan Heights as part of Israel. In addition, support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was completely cut and the Washington office of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was closed, thus burying the already-dead two-state solution.

As per Trump's plan, more than \$50 billion will be invested in the region over a span of ten years, promising prosperity and a boost to the Palestinian economy through a proposed reduction of constraints on Palestinian economic growth. This economic peace, however, comes

as a substitute for the Palestinian people's right of self-determination within a sovereign state. In other words, we as Palestinians are being paid to abandon our rights, our land and our narrative in exchange for a prosperous economy. This is a blatant liquidation of the case of Palestine on many levels, not only by changing realities and creating new facts on the ground but also by challenging the Palestinian narrative and the collective Palestinian consciousness. The deal implies that, if we as a Palestinian people aspire to lead a normal life, we must abandon our righteous belief that Israel is a colonial Zionist project and recognize it as a state for the Jewish people and thus revoke our own existence in our homeland. Trump's administration is saving no effort to push the Palestinians into accepting



the deal, by iterating that time is not on our side due to the rapid expansion of Israeli settlements and plans of annexations. However, accepting such a deal is no option for the Palestinian people—even with the ongoing normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab countries, and the Palestinian Authority’s lack of a solid response to the Deal. The Palestinian people are left to face it alone.

Further, Trump’s administration is being supported by some 50 million American evangelical Christians, who give no regard to the indigenous Palestinian population as they are allegedly seeking to speed up the second coming of Christ.

Today, we as Palestinian Christians feel even more abandoned as we witness the use of our own Bible

as a justification for the injustices falling upon us and we watch as the Good News becomes a menace to our very existence in our homeland. Perceiving the word of God as a political program, Christian-Zionists are indifferent to our fate and to God’s love towards humanity. Now, amidst this dark reality, keeping our hope is a challenge. However, we do not have the luxury of despair. Hope is our refuge. Because the moment we surrender to despair is the moment we are defeated. We are defeated the moment we surrender to the dark realities around us and forget to turn to God and ask God to act through us to bring justice and peace to this troubled land. Now is our Kairos moment. It is the time to put our faith in action and work together towards a unified vision of justice and peace.



*Yasmine is a Palestinian Christian born and raised in the town of Bethlehem. Yasmine is holding a BA in Mechanical Engineering, she is part of the Steering Committee of the Palestine Youth Ecumenical Movement (PYEM) and she is part of the Executive Committee (ExCo) of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). Yasmine is passionate about peace, justice and equal human rights.”*





# Reflect

“Yarraba Ssalami”

God of peace, rain peace upon us.  
Fill our hearts with peace.

God of peace, rain peace upon us.  
Give our land peace.

Traditional Palestinian/Lebanese chant

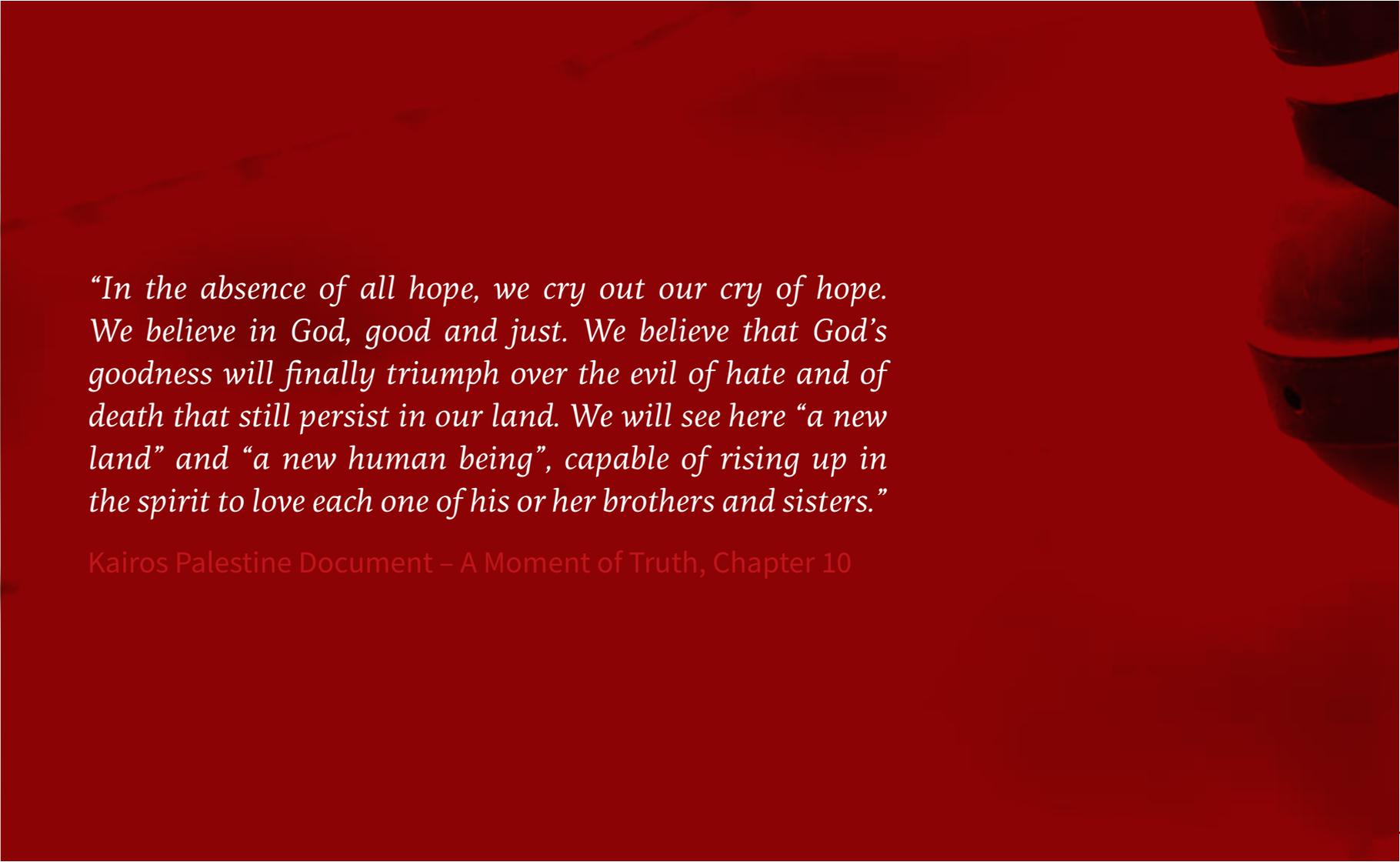
# Pray

Pray the prayer that you have just helped to write. Offer it as a resource in your place of worship.

# Act

Write a third verse to the above and make it your own prayer.





*“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

# CHRISTMAS DAY MESSAGE

## THIS IS WHY FOR THE POOR THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS!

*Munther Isaac*

The Virgin Mary is one of the most influential figures in our Christian tradition. Her example, humility, and sacrificial obedience are indeed inspiring! And today's text (Luke 1:46-55) opens our eyes to an important aspect of Mary. While we often focus on her faith and obedience to God, today we also encounter her deep understanding of who God is. Today we are introduced to Mary the theologian. It is my prayer that we allow her to teach us through her wisdom and insight.

Mary spoke her Song of Praise in a time of crisis. We can summarize Mary's time as follows.

The land was a place of turmoil. Her people were occupied and oppressed. The Empire was strong and active. The people of the land of Palestine tried to revolt many times to gain their freedom, but were always subdued. The Empire was ruthless. It defined the reality that people experienced.

The land was also a place of strong religiosity. Religion was everything and everywhere. There were always discussions about the right worship, tradition and interpretation. And it was assumed that if one got religion right, one would be out of trouble. This created an environment of

religious pride, self-righteousness and control of the other.

The land was a place of expectations. The people of the land were expecting that God would interfere with our world and make it a better place, that God would return to Jerusalem and establish the kingdom—a kingdom that will stand against all other kingdoms and empires. The Messiah will be here any time, and he will deliver his people and bring judgment against the enemies of the people of God. He will bring justice and peace. At least, this is what the people expected.





Luke wrote his Gospel to tell us the time of waiting has come to an end. This is clear in the introduction to his Gospel. The Kingdom is here! God has visited us in Jesus. Today's vision from Mary opens our eyes to the nature of this kingdom, and the nature of the God of this kingdom. Today, I want to address two simple questions. According to Mary, who benefits from this divine visitation? And who is judged and challenged? When we look at the text, we discover that Mary's message is simple: The Kingdom of God is Good News for those who fear God, those of humble estate, and the hungry; it is Bad News for the proud, the mighty, and the rich.

Mary drew this conclusion from her own experience! God's visit to her becomes the paradigm through



which Mary understands God and the way God deals with humanity. A young woman? A virgin? From Nazareth? Probably poor. Not the most well-known family. Not from a line of kings or even religious leaders. A “nobody” by the world’s definition, becomes one of the most important figures in history. As such, she cries, for God has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

Indeed, the whole Christmas narrative is full of such interesting choices—choices we would not have made ourselves! Consider the timing: in the days of political turmoil, occupation, religious extremism, ruthless baby-killing rules, and a proud empire. Then consider the elements of the narrative: Bethlehem, an average family from Nazareth, a refugee

family, a cave, shepherds.

All of this should tell us something about the nature of the kingdom the Gospels are presenting as “Good News!” What we have is a radical reversal. God will turn the table upside down! God is here, but it does not look like what we have expected.

Mary continues, “He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts... he has brought down the mighty from their thrones... and the rich he has sent away empty.” Those who put their trust in their might, richness, their own wisdom, and even their own religious traditions and self-righteousness—for all of them the birth of Christ is bad news.

She further sings, “And his mercy is for those who fear him... he has exalted those of humble estate... he has filled the hungry with good things.” To those who wait in hope, who put their trust in God, who humble themselves before God—the birth of Christ is good news.

This is a liberating truth... if we accept it! It liberates us from our pride. It liberates us from our lust towards power. It liberates us from our dependence on our own merit and wealth. Finding our worth in God is liberating!

Furthermore, we are reminded today that humility is a prerequisite to receiving the grace of God. Humility is needed so that we can accept the Gospel as indeed good and liberating news. This is why, for the poor, the Gospel is good news!



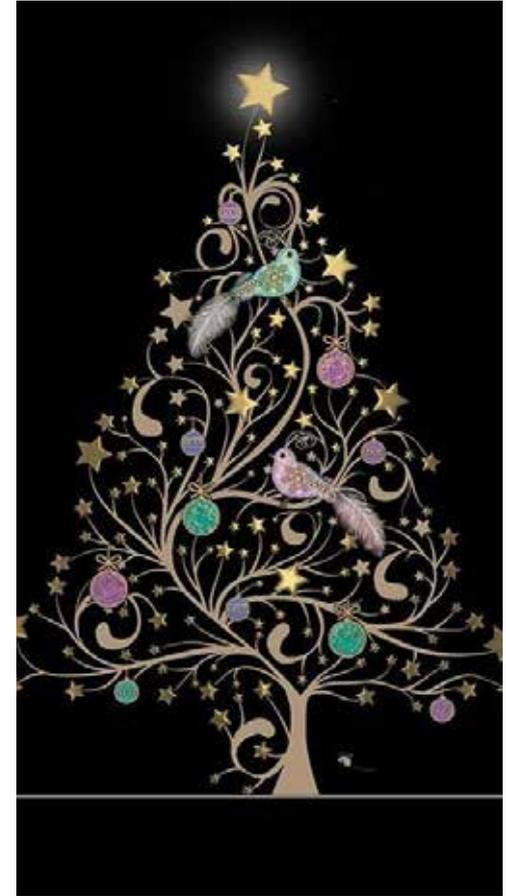
The poor and the oppressed and those who suffer from injustice: they realize that they need redemption and that the world in its current structures needs redemption and correction. The poor do not need to be reminded that they should not put their security in “things” because they do not have “things.” They have no choice but to put their trust in God. They are not threatened by a God who asks for total allegiance. This is what we encounter in the Song of Mary. “For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.” For Mary, this was good and liberating news.

When we look at the Middle East today, we will realize that Mary’s time is not so much different than ours, especially in Palestine. We have the influence of an empire,

occupation, tension, despair and strong religiosity. We still have the same arguments, that if we get religion right, things will be better.

People are expecting... and waiting... and wondering: Has God forgotten us? Can the gospel be good and liberating news today—for the people of Palestine, the Middle East, or anywhere in the world? The answer has to be “yes.” But if, and only if, we accept this eternal truth: God is looking for the humble heart, for meekness, for total dependence on God. If, and only if, we accept the biblical truth that the kingdom of God—a different kind of kingdom—has arrived.

What Mary celebrates in her song is radically different than that of the empire or that of religion.



Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice, for they shall be satisfied.” (From Matthew 5) These are the ones—empowered by truth and love—who receive the Gospel as good news. May this be true to all of us this Christmas. 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 (6) and Zaid (4).*



## Reflect

“By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Luke 2:78-79

## Pray

O Lord, have mercy. O God, the message you sent to Mary and the simple shepherds in those days, send it to those who have power. O Lord, change the hearts of the great of this world. Grant them light to see and to know that the Palestinians and they themselves are equally created in your image and have the same dignity you gave to all. Amen. (Patriarch Sabbah)

## Act

Come and see. Participate in an alternative Holy Land tour to Palestine and Israel, during which you will visit the holy sites, experience many of the realities of occupation that Jesus suffered, and meet with Jews, Muslims and Christians who are working for a just and lasting peace.



## ***Kairos Palestine urges you to do the following:***

1. Please distribute and study background materials and theological reflections in your own churches each Sunday of Advent to inform and educate your sisters and brothers about the situation of your Palestinians brethren living under Israeli occupation.
2. Please share the alert with congregations and dioceses across your country.
3. Please 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)
4. Please come and see. We will fulfill our role to make it known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. Thus will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike. (Kairos 6.2)
5. Take tangible actions and support the Palestinian rights by supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with the International Law and UN resolution and support the right of nations to boycott Israel as part of the freedom of expressions.
6. Please inform your Palestinian brethren about the way you have been involved with the Christmas Alert by writing us at this email address: [kairos@kairospalestine.ps](mailto:kairos@kairospalestine.ps)

