



**Christmas Message 2024  
Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar**

***Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land***

Salaam, and peace to you in the name of our savior, Jesus Christ. I bring you solemn greetings from Jerusalem and the Holy Land of Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection. On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the Palestinian Christian community, I send you this message as we prepare for the birth of the Messiah in our little town of Bethlehem.

We are approaching another Christmas without peace in our land. Like God's people in the time of Jesus, we are suffering under the weight of state violence and control. With tens of thousands dead and millions displaced, Christmas in Bethlehem will once again pass without the typical tree lightings, scout marches, and other festivities. As the world prepares to celebrate, our hearts are with our people in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. We feel the darkness that surrounded the first Christmas. Not a night of parades, celebrations, and Santa Claus, but of the holy family searching for refuge far from home.

Yet even in these dark days as we wait for the light to come, we find hope in the words of Paul in Hebrews, Chapter 13 Verse 8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

As Palestinians, we have been facing violence and suffering for decades, and we do not know what will come next. The world will change, and our situation may become even more difficult. But Jesus Christ remains the same now and forever. This has been the message of our church for 170 years. Despite all the challenges we have faced, our mission through our congregations, our schools, and our ministries is to share this message with our people. As Palestinian Christians, this is what gives us sumud, steadfastness, in our lives and in our faith. Our faith is that Jesus, born in Bethlehem, will remain with us here forever.

The birth of Jesus changed the world. Jesus didn't wait for people to come to him. Rather, he came to them. With his birth into the world,



with his ministry to his people, with his teachings and his miracles, he went to people where they were. Our mission as the Church is to go to the people where they are. In our schools we bring the hope of education to the next generation. In our congregations we share the promise of the gospel together. Through our Environmental Ministry we strengthen our connection to our land and to God's creation. Through our Diaconal Ministry we help provide food, housing, and medical care to our neighbors. Through our Gender Justice Ministry we commit to a more equitable future.

For another year, Bethlehem faces Christmas without pilgrims. In the past, thousands have flocked to the city of Jesus's birth to witness the coming of the Christ child, as shepherds and wisemen once did. This year, like last year, the war has left Bethlehem empty of those who would come to seek him. But we, Palestinian Christians, remain. Though it becomes more difficult with every passing month, we hold tight to sumud as we continue our mission here. As Jesus came to his people here on Earth, we are going to our people through our ministry. In their faces, we see God's face, and in going to them we are seeking the Christ Child in Bethlehem again and again.

Despite everything, we have faith in what Paul tells us: that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Jesus was born here in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, and he is born again in our lives today, and he will remain with us forever. We believe that he who chose to be born in a humble cave to a people living in the shadow of empire will not forsake us. Jesus, who overcame death and the grave, gives us the hope of Christmas once again.

Amen.

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Land