

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHEARN CHURCH IN JORDAN AND THE HOLY LAND

CHRIST IS
BORN,
HALLELUJAH!

ولد المسيح هلوليا

NEWSLETTER
DECEMBER
2025





CONTENTS

PAGE 3

BISHOP'S CORNER

Read about Bishop Azar's travels to Lebanon and Jordan

PAGE 4

CONGREGATIONS

Our congregations mark the Advent season and celebrate Christmas together.

PAGE 5

EDUCATION

Read about how our schools finished the first semester.

PAGE 6

MINISTRIES

End of year conferences, Christmas celebrations, culinary classes, and more.

PAGE 9

BISHOP AZAR'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Read Bishop Azar's Christmas greetings to our partners around the world.

BISHOP'S CORNER

WCC Meeting in Lebanon and Meeting with Lebanese President

Bishop Azar traveled to Lebanon this month for a meeting with the Middle East Council of Churches. While he was there, he met with partners at the Near East Theological Institute and visited the Lebanese president.



Christmas Greetings with Local Partners



Bishop Azar and the ELCJHL delegation visited Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and the Latin Patriarchate to offer Christmas greetings. Bishop Azar also welcomed visits from represents of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate and Greek Orthodox Patriarchate to the Church of the Redeemer.

Christmas Meeting with King Abdullah II



Bishop Azar attended the annual Christmas Meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II and religious leaders from Jordan.

CONGREGATIONS

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE ELCJHL

Advent

Throughout the Advent season of anticipation, the ELCJHL congregations lit candles and said prayers of hope for Christ's light to come into the darkness.



Christmas

The ELCJHL congregations met on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day to welcome the birth of the Prince of Peace into our troubled world.



EDUCATION

Christmas Celebrations

The ELCJHL schools, including Al Mahaba Pre-School, shared songs, prayers, and stories of Christmas to celebrate the hope this season brings. Even as the difficult situation in the Holy Land persists, our students remind us of the light Christ's birth brings to the world. Merry Christmas to all from the ELCJHL schools.



Palestinian Teacher's Day

Teachers from the four Lutheran Schools and Mahaba Pre-School gathered at Talitha Kumi for a special afternoon organized by the ELCJHL Education Office honoring their hard work for Palestinian's Teachers Day. The day included the annual volleyball tournament, followed by bingo, special games, gifts, and lunch.

As we recognize Palestinian Teacher's Day this year, our hearts are still with the teachers in Gaza. We remember those who have been killed and we express solidarity with those who are working to continue education for their students despite being displaced from homes and classrooms. We hope the coming year will bring a time of rebuilding and true peace.



ENVIRONMENTAL



15th Annual Conference

The Environmental Education Center held the 15th Palestinian Conference on Environmental Awareness and Education, titled "Environmental and Climate Justice for Palestine," in Jericho. Held in partnership with the Environmental Quality Authority and IUCN Palestine, the conference brings together national and international experts to discuss ecocide, climate change, and artificial intelligence.



Speakers addressed the severe environmental destruction in Gaza and the West Bank and called for shared responsibility, accountability, and nature-based solutions to protect people and the environment. The conference included specialized sessions on environmental recovery, legal accountability, and ethical approaches to artificial intelligence.



Conference on Biodiversity

Also in December, the EEC held the Second Palestinian Conference on Biodiversity, titled "The Role of Universities, the Current Reality, and International Experiences."

The conference is held in partnership with the Environment Quality Authority, the Ministries of Agriculture and Higher Education, and the National Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Palestine.



In his remarks at the conference, Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar emphasized that the message of Christmas is inseparable from protecting the land, caring for creation, and safeguarding biodiversity.



The conference serves as a national platform to assess the current state of biodiversity in Palestine, exchange expertise, and benefit from international experiences, with the aim of strengthening environmental policies and promoting sustainable development.

GENDER JUSTICE



Advent Gatherings

Each year, the Gender Justice Ministry holds two Christmas gatherings, one for the five churches in Palestine and one in Jordan, as the Amman congregation is not able to easily join the gathering in Bethlehem. The annual Wine and Cheese Advent Gathering was held at the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman and was a special time for the congregation to come together to celebrate the Advent and Christmas season and to spend time in fellowship, prayer, and song.

The gathering for the five Palestinian congregations was held at Christmas Lutheran Church and Dar An-Nadwa in Bethlehem. The event included a Christmas meditation from Bishop Azar, carols and hymns performed and led by Luna Jaha, games led by Angie Saba, lunch, and gifts for all attendees. We give thanks for the fellowship and joy these spiritual gatherings bring to our communities.

Judges Training

Training from the Palestinian Judicial Institute for the ELCJHL Ecclesiastical Court Judges in partnership with the ELCJHL Gender Justice Ministry and Sawasya Program Palestine continued in December with three training days. These trainings focused on Lutheran Ecclesiastical Court procedures and included topics like judicial impartiality, disqualification and recusal, and appeal mechanisms by Judge Raed Zidat.

Cooking Course

In December the ELCJHL Gender Justice Ministry in partnership with the LWF Vocational Training Center in Beit Hanina began a cooking course for women in Jerusalem. This class is the latest course in the Gender Justice Ministry's Skill Development Course series designed to help women gain tools for financial success and independence in the current difficult economic situation. Each Monday, women from the Jerusalem congregation will meet to learn new cooking skills and techniques. Two classes were held in December. Special thanks to ELCJHL Youth Jeries Saeed for his leadership in implementing this course.

DIAKONIA



Deaf Ministry Christmas Lunch

The ELCJHL Diaconal Ministry hosted the annual Christmas Gathering for the Deaf Ministry in December. This gathering is one of the highlights of the year for our Deaf Ministry. Due to increased checkpoints and restrictions on movement for Palestinians in the West Bank, it is more difficult to bring the entire group together these days, but we were very grateful to have many members join the event, including some of our group members from Ramallah.



During the event, attendees spent time talking and praying together. Staff from Flowers Garden led a workshop on making Christmas wreaths, and each member got to take their completed wreath home. We ended the afternoon by sharing lunch together.

Annual Christmas Concert

The Diaconal Ministry hosted the annual Christmas Concert on the third Sunday of Advent, featuring the Cradle of Music Ensemble from the Edward Said Conservatory of Music.



This is the first time the concert has been held since 2022, and it was a great joy to be together to enjoy sacred music and fellowship together. Through these beautiful hymns, people are living the spirit of Christmas.



Joint Youth Ministry Event

The ELCJHL Youth Ministry, in collaboration with the ELCJHL Diaconal Ministry, held a special Advent evening for youth in Beit Jala. The night included worship at the Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala with a special performance by Brass for Peace, followed by activities, games, and dinner.



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



**الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية
في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة**

Christmas Message 2025

Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

"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 2:10-12

Salaam, peace be with you. As Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, I send you warm Christmas greetings from the land of the Nativity.

Christians around the world are preparing for one of our most holy days of the year: the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ. Here in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the land of Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection, our preparations and festivities are underway as well. However, as we get ready for Christmas, we are still mourning the impacts of two years of war.

Christmas can never be canceled; its light can never be dimmed. But for the last two years, Christmas worship and prayers in the Holy Land were kept to people's homes, churches, and other private spaces, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters under bombardment in Gaza. This year, we will once again light trees in the public squares of our cities and renew many annual traditions. Our scout troops will march through the streets proclaiming the joy of Christ's birth and the resilience of our community. We will share in the hope of peace and brotherhood that Christmas brings. But as we approach Christmas for the third time since the war in Gaza began, our hearts are still with those who have lost their lives, their families, and their homes.

With our fellow people of the world, we give thanks to God for the ceasefire agreement in Gaza. We hope and trust that this truly signals the end of the war, despite the ongoing ceasefire violations. But we realize that the work of



peacebuilding has just begun. The path to healing and reconciliation will be long. We need time to heal the wounds of our children, youth, and families, so they can look forward to a future instead of looking behind.

In Gaza, tens of thousands are dead, and many more are trapped under rubble, with survivors returning to destroyed houses and neighborhoods full of debris. As the winter rains arrive, our Gazan siblings are sleeping in flooded tents. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza continues, as do harsh restrictions on Palestinian movement throughout our own land. Instances of violence and settlement expansion in the West Bank and Jerusalem are on the rise. True peace and justice have yet to come.

But even in these difficult circumstances, we find hope in the miracle of the Christmas Story. When we read about Mary and Joseph, journeying from Nazareth to Bethlehem because of the demands of an occupying force, we see a mirror of what many Palestinians experience daily. As we remember the flight to Egypt, we hear of the Holy Family facing displacement under threat of violence, like thousands of our sisters and brothers in Gaza and beyond. We, like the shepherds in the fields of nearby Beit Sahour, take comfort in the angel's message: "Do not be afraid." And above all, we find hope in the birth of our savior. Jesus did not choose to be born as a prince in a comfortable palace in a rich land, but in a humble cave to a people living under the control of empire. The light of hope came into the world here, in our homeland. Immanuel, God with us.

Here in the Holy Land, Palestinian Christians are still here. Our congregants come to church Sunday after Sunday to worship God and pray for the situation to improve. We see our siblings in Gaza who have sheltered in their churches for two years, and we find our spiritual shelter in the church as well. We rely in our faith in Christ's holy justice and everlasting peace to sustain us. Our hope is in our work for the future of our church and our land. Through education, diaconal work, and striving for gender justice and environmental sustainability, we can help build a different future for our people.

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



**الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية
في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة**

Just as the circumstances of Christ's birth remind us that he is always with us, we are steadfast as we remain in this land. And this year, we will once again share the hope that comes from the birth of our savior throughout our community here.

Our public Christmas celebrations this year do not mean we have forgotten or turned our backs on all those still suffering. Rather, we lift up the light that came to the world in Bethlehem as a beacon of hope. Though we come to this Christmas in mourning, our witness to the Christmas message here in the place of Christ's Nativity is not weakened. The message of Christmas, God's light shining out of darkness, cannot be dimmed. Even though it is not easy to celebrate this year under the shadow of what we have been through, the light of Christmas lives in the hearts of our people.