

# Overwhelmed With Joy

From Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar

*"When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." ~ Matthew 2*



Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

From Jerusalem, the Holy City, I wish you all a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year! Wherever you are in the world, I pray you are gathering with friends, family, and your church community, to celebrate how God's love for us became known through the birth of a baby in a city in Palestine called Bethlehem.

As we gather for our Christmas celebrations here in Jordan and the Holy Land, we are also looking back at the past year. It has not been an easy year for us. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues, as does the Great March of Return. The United States has cut funding to critical programs for Palestinian refugees, and the US Embassy has now moved to Jerusalem, causing great concern for the future of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Jewish Nation- State Law, passed in July by the Israeli Knesset, has alienated Palestinian Christian and Muslim citizens of Israel, as well as the Bedouin and Druze communities. We have traveled across this whole year and have arrived at Christmas, and we see that nothing has changed for us. Nothing is as we had hoped or expected. It can all feel a bit overwhelming.

Do you suppose the Three Wise Men also felt overwhelmed? They must have been weary and frustrated when they arrived at the palace and didn't find the king they were looking for. After all, they had traveled a great distance, with high hopes and great expectations. And where else would one look for a king, other than a palace?

But the newborn king wasn't in the palace, and he wasn't sitting on a throne. Both the Wise Men and Herod were confused. But the travelers didn't stop there. They continued their journey, following the star until it stopped over the most unexpected place—a humble manger in the little town of Bethlehem.

It was there, kneeling down near the Baby Jesus, that the visitors from afar were indeed overwhelmed. But they were not overwhelmed with fear, with worry, or with exhaustion from the long journey. They were overwhelmed with joy!

Today, In the midst of so many difficult situations in our country—and around the world—we are grateful for the joy of Christmas. Christmas joy is not just about the lights and the trees, the food, and the gifts. Christmas joy comes from hearing again the Good News that God did not leave the world in darkness, bowed down under the weight of our sins, but has rescued us through the birth, the teachings, the death and the resurrection of one very special baby—Jesus, son of Mary and son of God.

As Bishop Peter Chrysologus wrote in the 5th Century:

“God saw the world falling to ruin because of fear, and immediately acted to call it back with love. God invited it by grace, preserved it by love, and embraced it with compassion.”

For this reason, we are overwhelmed with joy to see Jesus in the manger, for it was in Bethlehem that our hope was born! The joy of Christmas joy embraces us and brings us peace during the chaos and drama of life—even in the midst of occupation, and even when surrounded by rumors of war. This Christmas joy renews our faith and hope that soon and very soon, all the people of the Holy Land will know liberation, dignity, and peace based on justice.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus this Christmas.

***Merry Christmas! Kul sane wa intou salmeen!  
Frohe Weihnachten!***