



When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Luke 2:15-16

Dear sisters and brothers,

We greet you in the precious name of our Lord, the Prince of Peace, whose birth in our land we now commemorate with joy and gratitude,

It can be difficult – even here in the Holy Land – to remember that Christmas is not a celebration of trees, or of Santa Claus, or even of gift-giving and family. Lights, trees, generosity and time with family and friends are beautiful and good. However, sometimes when we are racing from one holiday activity to another, we forget that we are preparing for, and what we are waiting for, is not the perfect holiday dinner, but the birth of the long-awaited Messiah, the shepherds did not leave their flock by night to go see a decorated tree! They went to meet the Christ-child, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

In the same way, the faithful of our land, together with pilgrims from around the globe, gather in Bethlehem, as other Christians in all corners of the world gather in their places, not to worship a tree, but to celebrate the coming among us of the One by whose word the universe was created: God of God taking the form of a human, born as a tiny baby, powerless and dependent, oppressed and under occupation, and at the same time endowed with matchless power and with love beyond measure, full of grace and truth. This special baby, named "Prince of Peace" by the prophet Isaiah, and "Emmanu-el, 'God-with-us'" by the angel, is the One whose Good News of peace and salvation disrupts Herods of the world and overturns all powers that obstruct the way of His promise of the gifts of peace and justice, and of human liberation.

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



الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية
في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة

Compelled by the awesome Good News announced by the angel, the shepherds responded “with haste;” they took immediate action and came to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus.

As the direct descendants of the earliest believers of the Good News and witnesses of the miracle birth, we, the Christians of the Holy Land, invite fellow Christians from around the world to join us in our joy and in our witness. Come and see, participate in our celebration, share in our fellowship, stand in solidarity with us as herald of good tidings and as makers of peace. In the face of aggression and conflict, injustice and oppression, racism and discrimination, walls of division and incursion, we maintain our steadfast resolve to bear the banner of peace and to carry the message of the Child of the Manger: a message of love toward neighbor and enemy, a message of justice and liberation, a message of the abundant life for all. Though our numbers are small, and despite all obstacles, distresses and challenges, we seek to maintain a qualitative presence in our land; we do not lose heart.

So come with us to the manger! We are compelled by the story of Jesus; and so we hurry closer to the manger, closer to Emmanu-el, God who is still with us. We come because we need to sense the nearness of God, to know God, to be known and loved by God. When we come closer to Jesus we know that we are not alone, that we are known, that we are loved. So come with us.

As a Palestinian Christian, I want to say we are thankful that our Christian sisters and brothers from around the world are coming to be in fellowship and in solidarity with us. How we need your presence to gird and support our presence! Here, you will find more than shepherds and angels, stars and trees, lights and candles, tinsels and souvenirs. Come! Experience with us the supreme love of God that shines in the face of the child of the manger.

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