

New Hope for Palestine, the Middle East & the World

An Advent Plea from our Sisters & Brothers in the Land of Jesus' birth

[Excerpted from Kairos Palestine's *Christmas Alert*. For the full meditation:
kairos-palestine.ps/images/kairos-palestine-christmas-alert-2018.pdf.]

For two thousand years, prayers and carols have been offered in Bethlehem, the town of Christ's birth. Every year joy is renewed in our hearts. Today,



Bethlehem celebrates the event, glorifies God, prays and rejoices. Yet our rejoicing is incomplete. There is no joy in the hearts of the people, in the city and in the surrounding refugee camps, because the city is still denied its dignity and freedom and is cut off by the separation wall from the city of Jerusalem, our city of faith and worship, our spiritual and political capital.

Brothers and sisters, we address this Advent/Christmas message to you. Today in Bethlehem and in all of Palestine and Israel, Jesus Christ looks at the poor and oppressed and brings them hope. Today, he stands before the separation wall and offers a commandment of love and power that, alone, can remove walls, grant security and safety, and guide the hearts of the aggressors to stop their attacks and end the occupation they impose.

From Bethlehem, I wish you an Advent and Christmas full of holiness, of justice and love.

H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah was appointed in 1987 by Pope John Paul II as the first native Palestinian in centuries to hold the office of Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

The Third Sunday of Advent

New Hope for Palestine

In the face of the difficult conditions in the Arab world in which pressures are exerted on every front, Christians, too, are prone to despair. This critical political situation and the feelings of fear, worry, and confusion it creates in the hearts of Christians in Palestine and in the Arab world dominate our Christian existence and presence on this land. We were born in Jerusalem. Our roots are here. If we were to abandon them, we would be cutting ourselves off from our origins.

This divine choice is not random. It stems from the love of God for us. God honored us to deliver a specific message for which we were given responsibility through those first Christians and the beginning of the church in Jerusalem.

This message: we are to be witnesses for Jesus Christ in his homeland; we are the living stones that adorn the stonework of the holy places that would turn into cold museums and dead antiquities without us.

The church of Jerusalem is the church of Golgotha, which means that believers are deeply engaged in the secret of the cross and the pain that was fulfilled on this earth. We cannot escape the cross of the difficult political situation. We must stand firmly with faith and hope at the feet of the cross, just as the beloved Mary and John did as faithful disciples, to contemplate the great mystery of the Lord in the belief and hope that our church is also the church of the resurrection and victory

over death. We, the people of the holy land, the people of the resurrection, are convinced that all adversities and disasters are only trials and fire that test our belief. This is the hope that will take us closer to the presence of the Lord. "He has given us a new birth into a living hope... so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine." (1 Peter 1:3,7)

"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with confidence." (Romans 8:24-25)

Fr. Bashar Fawadleh, a seminary priest in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, is chaplain of the Christian Youth Movement in Palestine.

Reflect: A Western pilgrim returning home from Palestine observed: "My hopes are small, wishes really: a nice house, good friends, a promotion at work. The Palestinians taught me the difference between a wish and a hope. They truly anticipate what they can't yet see, and dare against all odds to work to make it happen." For what do you dare hope, the realization of which it'll take something like a resurrection from death to experience it? Are you willing to trust and work to bring it about?

Pray: God of the Harvest, may the seeds of faith, hope and love planted by people of faith and good will bring a return of justice and peace throughout the world. Your kingdom come, Lord, here on earth. Amen.

Act: Read (or reread) the Kairos Palestine document (www.kairos-palestine.ps). Organize a Kairos Palestine event (education and action) in the first quarter of 2019.

"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 the 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