

Christmas in Bethlehem

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” – Micah 5:2

The Jerusalem cross. A symbol used by Christians that can be seen in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the surrounding area.

Bimonthly Newsletter #3

You all, without a doubt, know the story. Depending on your Gospel of choice, you may know a different version than your fellow church goers. But you know the gist. The savior of the world is born in a grungy place. Everyone seems to agree that Jesus was born in a very small town called Bethlehem. In the picture to the left, you can see the widely-perceived birthplace of Jesus Christ. It's a hole. A well-decorated one, but a hole nonetheless. Believe me,



I've seen it. It lies in the grotto beneath the Church of the Nativity in the center of Bethlehem, Palestine. To be living and volunteering in a place so close to

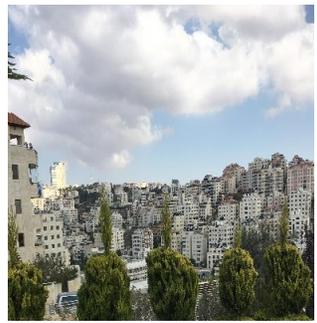
this very church is, quite frankly, surreal. I've grown up hearing about the hills upon which Bethlehem stands. The shepherds' field. The intermingling evergreen and palm trees. It always seemed like such a mystical place. Now, I'm living here for a year. That may not seem like a lot of time, but it's already been long enough to make connections and experience the commonalities of day-to-day life. It's been long enough to condition me to be just a little annoyed at the site of overly long lines of people waiting to get a chance to see places like this. There's a bit of a "Christian Disney Land" feel to it all, as someone I know so eloquently put it. But, the local people are the reason I am here. The Palestinian Christians that I have the absolute pleasure to interact with each day make the whole experience a gift. And, regardless of the lines, it is a privilege to see this Holy place.

So then, what is it like to be in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve? Well, I must say that I have never seen so many people celebrating a Christian holiday in one place. The lines at the Holy sites were longer. Nativity square, in the center of town, was packed for most of the day. It was impossible to walk through the space without stepping sideways and bumping into people after the sun went down. The great tree that had assumed the focal point of the square was surrounded by Palestinian and foreign visitors alike. But the real excitement of the day came from the parade in the morning. Hundreds of scouts from area churches and religious organizations gathered in bands and drumlines and marched throughout the city. They were clad in colorful outfits to represent their churches and hometowns. In this photo is a band of drummers and bagpipers dressed in capes decorated with the Jerusalem cross.



To cap off the day of festivities, a group of my friends and I attended a 10:00 p.m. prayer service at the Christmas Church. We sang, prayed, and listened to a heartfelt sermon together before returning home for the night.

Just so you can see how heavily visited Bethlehem is, here are some of languages I heard on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day: Arabic, English, Hebrew, German, Spanish, French, Hindi, Xhosa, Mandarin (and those are just the ones I could recognize!)



Cities in the West Bank

Top left: the wall in Bethlehem

Top right: a view of Bethlehem from Star Street

Bottom right: Ramallah from the Mahmud Darwish Museum

Bottom left: Nablus from just outside one of two remaining Samaritan villages

Learn Arabic

Happy New Year Kul seni w-entum
saalamin كل سنة
وانتا سالم

Holiday Eid عيد

Vacation Ijaaza إجازة



Our host family, the Haddads, on Christmas day

Clockwise from back left: Imad, Rula, Rose, Yara, and Daleen