

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called,*

*Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God,  
The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*

## Sabeel Christmas Message 2018

*“Do not be afraid, for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...” (Luke 2:10)*

**Dear Friends,**

As we look back on 2018, we see that it has been a very difficult year in Palestine. It has been another year in which refugees were denied rights, and another year of occupation in Gaza, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. There has been continued Jewish settler violence, home demolitions, arbitrary detention and arrests, deprivation of natural resources, and restriction of movement. While these are not new measures of occupation, the situation has been exacerbated by several political decisions. These include the ratification of the Nation State Law by the Israeli Parliament, the American decision to move their embassy to Jerusalem, and the defunding of UN operations designed to help Palestinian refugees.

Although we lament the loss of life and pray for all those wounded, we celebrate this Christmas with hope and joy. One source of hope is the mostly nonviolent Palestinian response in spite of the worsening situation. The March of Return has continued since the month of March, with Gazans of all ages demonstrating every Friday after noon prayers, seeking justice and the right to return to their villages. Various villages in Palestine and Israel also continue their regular nonviolent struggle against the harassment and oppression by Israeli forces. The Bedouins of Khan al-Ahmar (in occupied Palestine) and al-‘Araqib (in Israel), along with fellow Palestinians, Israeli activists, and international supporters, have been steadfastly withstanding in the face of Israeli forces determined to remove them.

It also gives us hope to see that nonviolent resistance has become more of a commitment for both the Palestinian political leadership and, more importantly, the indigenous population. We are hopeful, even though the international community continues to fail in the implementation of its resolutions due to obstructionist US policies. We are hopeful, because we know God will not allow injustice and oppression to last forever. For this reason, we Palestinians will remain committed to nonviolent direct action. We continue to be steadfast in our land, in our beliefs, and in hope—this is the meaning of Sumud.

As Palestinian Christians, our hope and our joy stem from the story of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem. We know that two groups of people came to visit the Christ child after he was born. First, the shepherds came. These were local people coming from the Bethlehem-Beit Sahour area, and for us they represent the Palestinian people today, many of whom followed Christ and became his disciples.

The second group of visitors were foreigners from faraway lands. These Magi represent for us the many who continue to come to Bethlehem, from around the world, to pay homage to the one known as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. In fact, this group includes you, our Sabeel family from around the globe, who continue to hope, to pray, and to take action with us for the sake of God’s justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

Of course, today it’s not so easy to visit Bethlehem, whether you are coming from near or far. Bethlehem is under siege. It is an integral part of occupied Palestine. Palestine has been illegally occupied by the Israeli army for over half a century. In violation of international law, Israel has built a wall around the city. It has mounted checkpoints

with Israeli soldiers in control of its entrances and exits which would keep out the Magi if they were attempting to visit Jesus today. And still, after a half century of illegal occupation, we Palestinians continue to cry out in hope for justice, peace, and liberation.

Even when the situation seems to be worsening, and the night seems too dark and too long, we remember that the Christmas story is about God's love for the world. It is a story of a love that is outgoing, outflowing, unconditional, and sacrificial. We see that same love for justice in the nonviolent resilience of the Great March of Return, and in the nonviolent resistance of Khan al-Ahmar. We see that same love in the direct action and prayer of so many of you around the world. We see that same love when countries are bold enough to speak up for Palestine and to administer justice. We know that where love is found, and justice is practiced, liberation and peace are not far behind.

The challenge of this Christmas is: For our Palestinian people to continue their nonviolent struggle. For the Israeli leadership and all Jews of conscience to hear the cry of the oppressed Palestinians and to work for their liberation on the basis of international law. For all our friends and people around the world to become actively engaged in building a just-peace in accordance with international law.

Therefore, as we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we ask all people of goodwill to rise-up together for justice and through Sabeel's Kumi Now initiative and alongside our Palestinian people, Israeli and international friends to share with others the love and peace, the hope and joy of this Christmas season. (For more information visit [www.kuminow.com](http://www.kuminow.com))

*Merry Christmas and a Happy New year!*

Rev. Naim Ateek  
Chair of Sabeel Board, Jerusalem

December 6, 2018

