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### **A Christmas Message of Hope**

The coming of Christ into the world holds many meanings for many different people. For us as a Palestinian Christian community, it is primarily a message of hope. Although we do feel despair when we look around us and witness the further entrenchment of the occupation, we are nevertheless filled with hope when we look to Christ and reflect on his coming.

Indeed it is hope that is our greater source of empowerment. And so despite all the difficulties of this past year, we join our voices with the Apostle Paul and affirm that: 'We are saved by hope' (Romans 8:24).

Luke's narrative of the birth of Christ and the angels' proclamation to the shepherds is familiar to us all (2:8-14). There are four key phrases in the message of the angels that are especially full of hope and liberation for those of us living under occupation, as were the shepherds 2,000 years ago.

*'Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you **good news of great joy** for all people: to you is born this day ... **a Savior**, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'* And suddenly there was with the angel a great multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, *'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and **on earth peace** ...'* (10-14).

For people who live in situations of oppression this is great news: **fear** is to be dispelled, **joy** will replace it, a **savior** - a liberator - is coming who will usher **inpeace**.

This great Christmas news, however, is sent to us in a most peculiar way. That is, our savior and liberator arrived in the form of a child born in a stable (2:12). To many it may seem absurd that God challenged the strong and mighty through such a vulnerable creature. This baby was not born into the powerful political or religious establishment of that day, but rather into the poor and marginalized section of society. God chose to become incarnate in a child whose parents could only find shelter in a cave and an adult who had no place to lay his head (9:58). Salvation, it appears, derives from the most unlikely people and places. This is the paradox of a God whose very essence is bound with the refugees, the outcasts, the abused and the oppressed. So it is that Paul could very well write: 'For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength' (1 Corinthians 1:25).

This year's Christmas message to those who appear to be in 'power' is that they cannot continue to misuse and abuse a peace process so that its outcome might be to their sole advantage. Ultimately, they cannot disregard and discount God. To those who appear 'powerless', the message lies in deriving hope from a baby, the most vulnerable of all beings, and from a cave, the most improbable place of power. So it is that we must continue to rely upon God's seeming illogic and our collective action to bring about a just peace.

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## **The Peace Process as an Instrument of Oppression**

*by Naim Ateek*

During the time of the prophet Jeremiah when Jerusalem was threatened by the Babylonians, the political and religious leaders of the day tried to insulate their people against the coming danger by assuring them of peace. The facts on the ground did not reflect the peace which the leaders predicted. They were speaking of peace, when there was no peace (Jer. 8:11). It is natural that when people are promised peace, they

expect to experience and enjoy its benefits. The people were saying, 'We looked for peace, but no good came, for a time of healing, but behold, terror' (Jer. 8:15).

Amazingly, this latter verse speaks directly to our situation today. After the peace process came into being many people were enthusiastic and expectant of the coming peace. As the months and years passed, the hope for peace has eroded. Now, many people's experience echoes Jeremiah's words, 'We looked for peace, but no good came, for a time of healing, but behold, terror'. The achievement of peace brings with it the promise of prosperity, economic development, and a good life. People expect the healing of broken relationships and reconciliation between enemies. When they see, instead, increased violence, oppression, and bloodshed, they rightly surmise that even the semblance of peace is missing and real peace is still far off.

This is the way many people currently perceive the Middle East peace process. What started in Madrid at the end of October 1991 with great excitement as a vehicle of promise for a better future, has become today a means for the perpetuation of injustice and even its extension. The instrument called 'the peace process', was perceived as right and good because it was intended to bring about a just peace to Israelis and Palestinians. It opened the way for a peace based on United Nations' resolutions 242 and 338 which call for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. By the end of 1991, many people, on both sides of the conflict were ready to accept the principle of a two state solution as the best prospect for an acceptable justice that will bring about a viable peace in our region. This peace process, however, has turned out to be an instrument that is used by Israel to create new injustices whose effects will be felt for many generations to come.

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***The reality on the ground is that Israel is using the peace process as a convenient cover for expanding settlements and tightening its control.***

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It is important to remember that the international reaction to the handshake on the lawn of the White House in Washington DC, September 1993, was electrifying. It left the impression around the globe that the apparently intractable Middle East conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has finally come to a happy end. Peace has arrived between the two arch enemies. Locally, however, the peace process did not realize its full potential under the Israeli Labor government and has certainly not done so under the Likud government. The injustice against the Palestinians has not ceased. The opposite is true. While the rest of the world slept comfortably dreaming that Jews and Arabs are now living in peace, Israel continued and, at times, even accelerated its

unjust policies. In fact, Israel used the 'direct talks' to neutralize intervention by the rest of the world. It used the 'peace process' as a substitute for the application of international law and the principles of human rights. In other words, under the guise of a so-called peace process, the injustice intensified.

To illustrate this, one needs only to look at some statistics regarding the confiscation of Palestinian land. Although in the Oslo Accords, Israel implied it was freezing the settlements, land confiscations did not halt, and the number of settlers increased by 40%. 73,741 acres of Palestinian land were confiscated by the Israeli military, under the Labor government, since Oslo. The closure of Palestinian areas, along with the harassment and humiliation of Palestinians at permanent and instantly mounted Israeli army checkpoints, has disrupted Palestinian life and economy. The economic life of Palestinians has worsened as their per capita income has dropped by 30%, and the unemployment rate has reached 50% in Gaza and the West Bank. The reality on the ground is that Israel is using the peace process as a convenient cover for expanding settlements and tightening its control over the Palestinians.

One cannot imagine that the United States government is not aware of these Israeli tactics in the peace process. It is important to remember that the U.S. promised to be involved as an equal partner in the negotiating process. However, it has since insisted that peace must be negotiated directly between the two parties. In a situation where there is no symmetry of power and the dynamic is still that of occupier and occupied, the real negotiating power resides with the Israelis, who can dictate their terms or drag the negotiations indefinitely until the agreements are to their liking. It is like leaving a tiger with a deer to negotiate their existence together. Without championing the right of the more vulnerable and weaker party, there is no guarantee that a just peace will ensue.

It is interesting to contrast this with the U.S. policy in the Arabian Gulf after Iraq occupied Kuwait. The U.S. government did not say that peace must be negotiated between Iraq and Kuwait around the negotiating table and whatever the two agree upon, the rest of the world would accept. Rather the U.S. insisted that Iraq must implement United Nations resolutions without delay and was ready to go to great lengths to force Iraq out. It is not so in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One is reminded of the fact that there is no lack of UN resolutions regarding the question of Palestine and they are sufficiently clear. The problem has always been that of implementation. The Palestinians are, therefore, negotiating today under extremely excruciating circumstances without guarantees that the outcome will be, out of principle, in consonance with UN resolutions and the requirements of justice. If Israel extracts out of the Palestinians unjust concessions then those presumably become the binding agreement between the two parties. The peace process is perceived today by many as an instrument which furthers the oppression and consecrates the injustice. It

allows Israel to maximise its achievements and legitimize them, so that which was difficult to achieve before the peace process, Israel can now accomplish through it. That is why many people today feel that the situation is more volatile and dangerous than that which existed before the peace process began.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells the story of two sons who were asked by their father to go and work in the field (Matthew 21:28-32). One said 'yes' to his father, but never went to work. The other one said 'no', but changed his mind and went to the field. Obviously, it was not the lip service that ultimately mattered but the doing of the work.

In many ways, this story echoes the attitudes of Israel and the Palestinians regarding peace. For many years, Israel gave the impression that it has always been genuinely seeking peace. It has said 'yes' to peace, while the Palestinians have said 'no'. Today, it is apparent to an increasing number of people that the Palestinians are the ones who are actively and unflinchingly endeavoring to work in the field, sowing and planting the seeds for a permanent peace based on justice.

In order to fully understand the dynamics of negotiations and the current stalemate in the peace process, it is important to consider the underlying basis of the Israeli position. It seems to many of us that the Israeli government has defined the peace process in a very utilitarian way. When one considers the two concepts of right and good as foundational in ethics, their definition will determine whether justice or injustice will be done. Utilitarianism defines them separately. What is good is defined independently from what is right; and what is right is defined as that which maximizes the good. In our experience, the state of Israel began by defining what is good for the Jewish Israeli people without regard to what is right. It wanted peace and security for them only. It wanted as much land as possible in order to accommodate mass Jewish immigration from abroad. It wanted to provide Jews with a good life in a country which they considered their own without the threats of anti-semitism or any form of prejudice or discrimination against them. This constituted the good. The right was then defined as that which can bring about the good.

The Palestinians, I believe, have been defining the right as justice, and justice as fairness. Throughout the negotiations, the Palestinians have insisted that the peace process must bring about the right so that the good can be reaped by all. This, however, is not the definition according to the Israel. The Israelis have already determined what is good for them and have defined right accordingly. From a Palestinian perspective, the good cannot and should not be independent from the right, and the right should take precedence over the good. Furthermore, the 'good' cannot be narrowly defined as the interest of one side only. John Rawls writes,

*In justice as fairness ... persons accept in advance a principle of equal liberty and they do this without a knowledge of their more particular ends. They implicitly agree, therefore, to conform their conceptions of their good to what the principles of justice require, or at least not to press claims which directly violate them. An individual who finds that [s]he enjoys seeing others in positions of lesser liberty understands that [s]he has no claim whatever to this enjoyment. The pleasure [s]he takes in other's deprivations is wrong in itself: it is a satisfaction which requires the violation of a principle to which [s]he would agree in the original position. The principles of right, and so of justice, put limits on which satisfactions have value; they impose restrictions on what are reasonable conceptions of one's good. In drawing up plans and in deciding on aspirations [we] are to take these constraints into account. Hence in justice as fairness one does not take [our] propensities and inclinations as given, whatever they are, and then seek the best way to fulfill them. Rather, their desires and aspirations are restricted from the outset by the principles of justice which specify the boundaries that [our] systems of ends must respect. We can express this by saying that in justice as fairness the concept of right is prior to that of the good.*

(A Theory of Justice, John Rawls, Cambridge, Mass, 1980, p. 31)

Ultimately, a peace process that is cut off from international law and any reference to universal principles is bound to be only a pragmatic ordering of reality. It will serve the strong at the expense of the weak. So long as the principles of 'justice as fairness' are not accepted as the foundational basis for the negotiations, and the mechanisms which are used do not reflect the ethical demands for a just peace, the process itself will continue to be oppressive and unjust. Furthermore, any peace that will emerge will be, as in the days of Jeremiah, a false peace, and as such it cannot prevail.

Our commitment to the God of justice and peace, demands of us to raise our voices, and appeal to people in power to halt the oppression and constructively use the peace process as an instrument of justice, so that a genuine peace can prevail.

*Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, director of Sabeel, is Canon of St. George's Episcopal Cathedral and pastor to its Palestinian congregation.*

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## **A Christmas on the 19th of January**

*by Sahag Mashalian*

Christmas Tradition in the Armenian Orthodox Church

The Armenian Orthodox community in the Holy Land celebrates Christmas on the 19th of January. The Armenian Orthodox Church calendar, though, does not contain any festival called Christmas dedicated to and limited to the birth of Christ. Rather Epiphany, or *Theophany* - Greek for 'manifestation' or 'revelation of God' - is still celebrated, in its most ancient form, by the Armenian Orthodox Church as a joint commemoration of the birth and the baptism of Christ. Nowadays, when the Christmas season ends worldwide by 6th January, Armenian Orthodox celebrations in Bethlehem on 18th and 19th January may seem odd. A short historical survey is sufficient to justify and explain the present day Armenian Orthodox practice, and to place it within a meaningful context.

We do not know the exact date of Christ's birth, since no date is given in the Gospels. Historically speaking though, we may safely assert that 6th January was the oldest date of the celebration in all the churches. After severing religious ties with Judaism, Christianity gradually developed a distinctive liturgical cycle along with a Christian calendar of festivals based mainly on the redemptive events of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Theophany*, the manifestation (Greek: *epiphaneia*) of God to the world in Jesus Christ, is first known to have been honored in the 3rd century, on 6th January. There is certain evidence that this festival may be older. Clement of Alexandria reports that the Gnostics in Egypt celebrated the day of Christ's baptism in the 2nd century on 6th or 10th January. As early as 386, 6th January was observed in Bethlehem as the day of Christ's birth and baptism. Egeria Silvia of Bordeaux, whose writings about her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 385 have recently been discovered, testifies that 6th January was observed in Bethlehem as the feast day of Christ's birth. A letter directed to the Bishop of Rome in the 4<sup>th</sup> century gives valuable detail on how these celebrations took place: the faithful met before dawn at Bethlehem to celebrate the birth from the virgin in the cave; but before their hymns and the prayers were over they had to hurry off to the River Jordan (13 miles away) to celebrate the baptism. The consequence was that neither commemoration could be kept fully and properly. About the same time, Pope Siricius of Rome, spoke of 6th January as *Natalitia Christi*, the birthday of Christ.

The change to 25th December, along with the establishment of a new Christian festival called Christmas or Nativity, happened in the west in the 4th century. The 25th December was the date of a pagan festival in Rome, chosen in 274 by the emperor Aurelian as the birthday of the unconquered sun (*natalis solis invicti*) which begins to show an increase of light at the Winter Solstice. At some point before 336, the Church in Rome established the commemoration of the birthday of Christ, the sun of righteousness, on the same date. The prevailing Christian festival, *Theophany*, was divided into two: the birth of Christ with the name of Christmas on 25th December and the baptism and the visitation of the Magi with the name of Epiphany on 6th

January. Such a change prevented the Christians from attending the 'scandalous' pagan celebrations, and in the long run, transformed a deep rooted pagan custom into a Christian tradition. This pattern of development did not prevail immediately throughout the whole church. In Jerusalem opposition to Christmas lasted a long time; it was not until the 6th century that the Nativity was finally detached from 6th January and celebrated on 25th December.

The Armenian church did not follow the change and clung to the older date and form. This was for various reasons: 1) Armenia was not within the Roman Empire; 2) Armenians did not have such a pagan festival on 25th December to suppress, so it did not see any reason to follow the new custom; 3) The Armenian Church in the early 5th century had already completed the formation of the liturgical year and calendar, fixing most of the dates of the main festivals. Therefore the Armenians today celebrate the Nativity and the Baptism of Christ under the name of *Theophany* on 6th January instead of Christmas. In the case of the celebrations in Bethlehem, because of the prevailing rules of the *Status Quo* at the holy places, the rest of the eastern churches use the old Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian calendar. There is a difference of 13 days between these two calendars, which explains why the Armenian celebrations in Bethlehem take place at such a late date on 19th January, and not 6th January.

We must highlight the fact that liturgy and festivals are not merely memorial celebrations of past events, but actual participation in a continual truth. There is no Christian theology without identification with the life and person of Jesus Christ, incarnate Son of God. Christ is everything for the Christian faith, He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. As Paul rightly points out, our Christianization happens with a direct individual and communal identification and unity with the Incarnate and Resurrected Lord (Romans 6:3-6). The Christian festivals thoroughly reflect this basic understanding of faith in Christ. We do not only celebrate Jesus' birth, baptism, death and resurrection, but together with Him, our birth in Bethlehem, our baptism in the River Jordan, our death on the cross, and our resurrection from the tomb. Our church calendar is an eternal journey we walk through again and again with Jesus Christ, living His thirty-three earthly years of ministry, until his return.

*Father Sahag Mashalian is an Armenian Orthodox priest in Jerusalem.*

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## **A Painful Journey**

*by Wassef Daher*

*As many of you travel and visit loved ones this holiday season, spare a thought for Palestinians who have great difficulty in travelling, both within their country and abroad.*

This is the story of the painful 'journey' a Palestinian is forced to go through before she or he can embark on a journey, for business, pleasure or for any other purpose.

For travel purposes there are two categories of Palestinians according to Israel, not to mention the Palestinians inside the 'green line' (Israel) or those in the diaspora. The first group carry blue identity cards which identify them as 'permanent residents' of Jerusalem. Through this category they are denied the status of citizens in the country of their birth and ancestry. For this group, their suffering begins at the Israeli Ministry of the Interior on Nablus Road in East Jerusalem. You only have to pass through Nablus Road during the week to see the crowds of people waiting in the street, often beginning as early as 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and sometimes for days before their turn comes, in order to get their exit permit.

The other group are those residents of the West Bank and Gaza, who carry orange identity cards. Their painful journey begins after they acquire their Palestinian passports. They have two stages to go through before they can join their sisters and brothers from Jerusalem at the doors of the foreign consulates or embassies to apply for visas.

Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza have to wait for their names to be registered in the Israeli computer at Ben-Gurion airport and the other borders before they can actually use their passport. This can take a long time or may not even happen, which means the traveler may be turned back at the border. If, God willing, their name is entered on the computer, they will still have to obtain a permit to travel across the 'green line' in order to reach the airport. Even a fortunate person who is able to obtain the permit from the Israeli liaison office may not get it until the day before the departure date or even a few hours before the flight. The permit only lasts a few hours - the time it takes to travel to the airport and go through 'security'. Many travelers have had to cancel their trips because they were not able to obtain this permit, and consequently travel agents have faced embarrassing situations for which they certainly cannot blame the traveler.

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The next stage, where these two groups of Palestinians meet, is a sad one created by the international community. This is where we confront the great difficulty of acquiring an entrance visa or even a transit visa for the required country(ies). The process may take several weeks or even months and quite often the answer is negative. While this is still happening to Palestinians, most countries are easing travel restrictions across their borders for others. It is often the Arab countries more than others that hurt us with their visa restrictions while they welcome other visitors from all over the world.

The Palestinian traveler who is able to overcome the above mentioned obstacles and reach the airport now has to take a deep breath. Palestinians must arrive at the airport at least three hours ahead of time. After standing in line with everyone else, and going through the usual interrogation - which is understandable - Palestinians are taken to a room at the furthest of the depart hall. Here, every item of their luggage is searched and shaken, even every part of every item. Many passengers have missed their flights, many passengers have lost a piece of luggage, and many have been told that they cannot travel for one reason or another. I have no objection to security checks *per se*, my objection is to the needless harassment and humiliation reserved for Palestinians.

The story is not over for the lucky ones who survive all these difficulties, for upon their return they have to brace themselves for another ordeal. Palestinians are singled out for the 'VIP' treatment of the interrogation room where they are again subjected to questions, cross-examinations, searches and the usual humiliation.

We cry out to the international community; especially to the US, to Europe, and to the Arab countries. We cry out to the Israeli government: Enough, enough!

*Wassef Daher, a member of Sabeel Strengthening Committee, is a travel agent in Jerusalem and an active member of the Greek Catholic Church.*

**Pray for those Palestinians who are separated from their loved ones at Christmas, and throughout the year, due to unjust obstacles placed in their way. Continue to work for Palestinian residency rights, family reunification and freedom of movement.**

## The First Security Check *by Ronald Searle*

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#### **Dedication of Our New Center**

As mentioned in the previous issue, *Sabeel* has moved into a new center in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem. On Sunday 20th October 1996 we held a dedication service, when we were honored to welcome over 100 Palestinians and internationals to our new home.

Many of our friends could not be with us on this blessed occasion, so we wanted to share some of that day with you. Reflecting upon the ministry of *Sabeel*, the following scripture and prayers were read by church leaders, the *Sabeel* committee and staff, and participants in *Sabeel's* various programs.

As Samia Khoury, a member of *Sabeel's* executive committee, explained in her welcoming remarks, the dedication was not merely an occasion for celebration, but an affirmation of our commitment to make our faith and the word of our Lord pertinent to the life of the Palestinian people, a life that has been encompassed by much suffering, injustice, and oppression. This is why our liberation theology goes hand in hand with our struggle for the liberation of our country.

*Sabeel* aims to connect the true meaning of Christian faith with the daily lives of Palestinian Christians, as they walk in the footsteps of our Lord who chose to become flesh and dwell in our midst. The prophet Jeremiah tells us: *Thus says the Lord: 'Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls' (6:16).*

The *Sabeel* center seeks to establish the foundations of justice and righteousness for all, according to the prophet Amos: *But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream (5:24).*

*Sabeel* follows the path of mercy and humility in its search for justice, as is summarized in the words of the prophet Micah: *He has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (6:8).*

If we walk that path we shall learn the meaning of true liberation, as the evangelist John tells us of Jesus' promise: *'... and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (8:32).*

We at *Sabeel* firmly believe that the path of justice, righteousness, mercy and liberation leads to real peace which is acceptable to God and humanity. Matthew the evangelist has relayed to us the words of our Lord: *'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (5:9).*

The fruit of real peace is reconciliation. We have been given the responsibility of this ministry as written in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (5:18).*

It is quite evident that our goal is beyond the ability of any person, but we find courage in the words of Paul to the Philippians: *I can do all things through him who strengthens me (4:13).*

*Sabeel* lays its dependence on the God of justice from whom it draws its strength. We seek the unity of all churches in order to fulfill each other and to grow together, into the stature of the fullness of Christ, following his commandment as given to us in the Gospel of St. John: *'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (13:34-35).*

To conclude, we ask God's blessing upon us, and your support for us at *Sabeel* center, which is home for all of you. We receive our inspiration from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ at the beginning of his ministry on earth, as Luke reported to us: *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' (4:18-19).*

*The dedication of Sabeel's new center.*

*Written in Arabic on the arch in the entrance/meeting hall are the words of Jesus:  
'... and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:32)*

### ***A Prayer for the Sabeel Center***

*Almighty God source of all good and righteousness, we thank you for your bounty for you have given us this house to be the center for Sabeel.*

*We beseech you Lord, to abide within its walls and to head all its committees to inspire its programs and guide all those who work in it.*

*May it be a beacon to the whole community so that your light, Lord, will shine through. May it raise the voice of justice and call for peace and reconciliation. May it serve you, Lord, through the service of humanity.*

*Bless this house, we beseech you Lord. Bless all those who enter and those who leave.*

*Strengthen, Lord, all that leads to the establishment of justice all that leads to the unity of your church all that contributes to the building of a better society.*

*May this place be a way (sabeel) that will lead to your knowledge and your love, so that your name will be glorified and honor and worship will be offered to you now and always.*

### ***A Prayer for Justice and Peace***

*Almighty God, guide us into the way of justice and truth, establish peace in our land which is the fruit of righteousness, so that all may dwell in safety and reap together the benefits of peace to the glory of your Holy Name. Amen.*

*Sabeel*

### ***A Prayer for Jerusalem***

*Our heavenly father who allowed us to live in this city where your beloved son was crucified and raised from the dead make us worthy of its heavenly message.*

*We pray that the holy places will turn us to the things that deepen our faith and renew us in the hope of everlasting life.*

*We beseech you Lord, who know what the people of this holy city have suffered, and are suffering: uprootedness, lostness, the pain of being torn apart in separation, the pain of unsettlement, the pain of death.*

*We beseech you Lord to give this holy city peace built on justice.*

*We beseech you Lord to give the people of this city calm in their souls, and courage in their hearts.*

*Strengthen O God the hearts of those who work to bring justice.*

*Bless their efforts and make them succeed over the power of evil, and value and support them with your Holy Spirit.*

*Inspire our leaders, O Lord to achieve a just solution to all the problems of this city so that Jerusalem - the city of peace - will have everlasting peace for all its people.*

*Help us God, as we pass through such difficult trials, that we may witness to you our savior, by our lives. May the way of the cross be the one we choose for ourselves, that each will carry their own cross to follow you, Shepherd of our souls, Teacher crucified and raised from the dead.*

*Najwa Farah*

*'A prayer for Jerusalem' was written for the YWCA Palestine annual ecumenical worship service.*

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## ***Seeing with the Eyes of Jesus***

*A Reflection on Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26*

*... Suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, 'My daughter has just died;*

*but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.' And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples ... When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout the district.*

From the Gospel of Matthew we know the story of the raising from death of the religious leader's daughter. The daughter had just died when the leader knelt down before Jesus to beg for his daughter's life to be restored. With a crowd making a commotion outside, Jesus went to their house and announced to the people that: 'the girl is not dead, she is sleeping'. In response the crowd laughed at Jesus. Jesus then took the girl by the hand and she got up.

What seems so significant in this story is the way Jesus looks at things and evaluates them. He sees things in a totally different way than we do. His view is different; his perspective new. In this story the people saw death, whereas Jesus saw life. They saw a dead body with no life in it, and yet, Jesus saw a girl alive by the power of God.

This is very liberating. When we begin to view things through the eyes of Jesus, our attitude to each other and to events changes. We begin to see through Christ's eyes. We become empowered to walk to the edge, look out and imagine the world differently. We create hope. Just as God incarnate created hope from a cave on the Bethlehem hillside, we are similarly called to try on that 'Jesus look' and create hope in the ordinary places in which we find ourselves everyday.

If we go back to the first Palm Sunday, we are reminded that the disciples were overjoyed with the demonstration and procession into Jerusalem. From their perspective, they were witnessing a very important event in the life of Jesus and thus they began to sing praises. Yet, as Jesus approached the city, he looked over it and wept (Luke 19:41). Indeed, Jesus saw things from a completely different angle of vision.

Likewise, when the awestruck disciples pointed out to Jesus the beautiful stones and architecture of the temple, Jesus saw that God's house had been turned into a den of robbers (Matthew 24: 1-2, Mark 11:17). He saw a city full of injustice and corruption, in the political as well as in the religious realm, and surmized that it and the temple would eventually be destroyed.

Currently, the government of Israel believes that its life can be maintained and enhanced only if it takes the land of Palestinians. However, if Israel would look again,

look differently, it would realize that its existence, its security, and its life does not depend upon confiscating land. Rather, these depend upon the doing of justice. Stealing land will not bring security nor will it bring a good life. A different look is required, one which will foster the doing of justice and the loving of one's neighbor as oneself.

In Matthew's account of the raising from death of the girl, Jesus saw life. We, too, must learn to see the world with the eyes of Jesus. Just as Jesus saw life in the dead daughter, we must see life in the people and nation of Palestine. Although the enemies of new life and liberation may laugh at us, we must affirm that the daughter, Palestine, will live, and the people will be free.

Today, as we, Palestinian Christians, prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we find comfort and liberation in the eyes of Jesus. When everything around us seems so gloomy and dark, when the so-called peace process seems to bring us more travel restrictions, economic violence and human rights violations, most of us cry out in desperation. Nevertheless, Jesus stands in our midst and in the overwhelming presence of death, new life, enduring hope and resurrection are proclaimed. This hope keeps us striving for a better future. When some are talking about Armageddon and death, we are called to proclaim and work for the establishment of justice, peace and reconciliation for all people.

May all of us this Christmas, renew our commitment to acquire and maintain a 'Jesus look', creating hope and right relationships wherever we may be. Together may we become stronger in our unity, as we continue to strive non-violently for a just peace to reign in Palestine, Israel and throughout the world.

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## **A Doctor's Perspective on the September Clashes**

*by Sandra Ballantyne*

*Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, a medical doctor, is president of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees and director of the Health Development Information Project.*

*Sandra Ballantyne spoke to him at his office in Ramallah.*

***Dr. Barghouti, the clashes in September between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip created another medical emergency, and you were one of the doctors who responded in Ramallah. As you and your colleagues reacted, what did you see, and what could you do?***

I was called to the scene, about an hour and a half after it started. Clashes were taking place between the civilian population and the Israeli army. The Israeli soldiers were using rubber bullets and high velocity live ammunition. I was there between 11:30am and 3:30pm. During this time, no Palestinian soldier or policeman shot at the Israeli side. On the contrary, they were trying to prevent people from reaching the Israeli checkpoint and from demonstrating there.

By 3:30pm we had 152 injuries, 25% of which were from high velocity bullets. The high velocity bullets used are very explosive, something I was to experience later. When they hit the body they explode inside, creating something like a dum dum effect. I was shocked. There was so much blood, so many injuries, Israeli soldiers shooting at the people, and it was like a massacre.

***So you were there to give first aid in a very urgent situation.***

I remember a particular case which we transferred to the hospital, he had a bullet in the heart. It was around two o'clock. He is a student from Birzeit University. It's a miracle he's still alive. Doctors cut his chest and performed direct massage to the heart in the emergency room. But many others died. By 3:30pm we lost four people who received high velocity injuries to their brains, and died. Two others were practically brain dead. So we had six people dead, and 152 injured, before any Palestinians shot at the Israeli side.

I felt very sad because this was happening after five years of peace talks, in which I was involved for sometime. Seeing the young people being killed again, in the same old manner, was very hard for me. By the end of the day, I realized we've finished a period and entered a whole new era. For five years Palestinians have been waiting for things to change. Obviously, with this new government, there is not a peace process anymore.

The second day was even worse. It was like a war zone. We had nine people killed that morning. I was helping to transport the injured and providing first aid, right there on the confrontation line. Then some young people called me, and told me somebody was injured, and he was stuck on the fifth floor. They could not bring him down, and he was bleeding to death. I was the only doctor there, so I went up with my assistant. We were about to reach him, when suddenly the Israeli soldiers shot at us. Snipers were shooting from the opposite mountain or the opposite building. They were

definitely using telescopes, because we were inside the room. I was wearing a white coat, as was the nurse with me.

***The soldiers were aiming at the doctors who were evacuating injured and providing first aid?***

Oh yes! It was obvious that they wanted to prevent us from reaching that guy. Two bullets passed by me. One passed very close to my ear, so close that I even lost hearing for a while. Then I felt something strike me in the face and then I touched it and felt blood. The person beside me fell down -- he had been hit in the head by a bullet. Later, in the ambulance we discovered I had injuries in the band in the shoulder from shrapnel, from the bullets which exploded -high velocity bullets.

***And the person who you went in to assist?***

Another team went up for him, and they finally managed to get him, to provide assistance. He's alive.

***Was the crisis not what you had expected at this time?***

If anybody had told me that after the *Intifada*, after participating in the peace talks, and after a five year peace process, I would be injured by a high velocity bullet at the age of 42, I would have told them that they're crazy. But you never know what will happen.

***The incidents were said to have been sparked by religious fervor and religious fears, specifically in Jerusalem, surrounding Muslim holy sites and Israeli actions around them. What do you think about this factor?***

Well, the religious factor is important. Nobody can ignore it. Netanyahu is trying to impose a situation where Jerusalem is a Jewish city. Jerusalem is not a Jewish city. It is also not a Muslim city. It's for Christians, Muslims and Jews. It has to be considered as such. So in that sense he was very provocative not only to the Islamic religion, but to Muslims and Christians.

On the other hand, I don't think that religion was the only factor. I think the religious factor just triggered the problem. The problem is of oppression and suppression, and exploitation. Palestinian workers are exploited, Palestinian society is oppressed, and we are sick of it. It's been thirty years. Thirty years of occupation.

*Sandra Ballantyne, a Canadian physiotherapist living in Ramallah, works with the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees.*

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## **Jerusalem Peace Walk**

*The Christian community in Jerusalem represented by patriarchs, bishops, clergy, and lay people, both indigenous and international, came together in an unprecedented ecumenical service of prayer and peace march on Sunday afternoon, 29th September 1996.*

*Approximately 1500 people gathered at St. Anne's Church near Lion's Gate, inside the Old City of Jerusalem. The program included prayers, Bible readings, and hymns led by representatives from all the Christian churches in Jerusalem. Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah presided. The sermon below was delivered by Archimandrite Atallah Hanna of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem.*

*After the service, the worshippers, with candles in hand, took part in a silent peace march from St. Anne's to the Chapel of the Flagellation on the Via Dolorosa. The march ended with a final prayer at the entrance to the chapel, exactly opposite the door of the recently opened tunnel which sparked off September's tragic incidents.*

*Peace Walk participants reach the church of the Flagellation. The door of the tunnel is in the right foreground.*

*Photo: Mahfourz Abu Turk*

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### ***A Statement by the Patriarchs, Bishops, Clergy and People of the Christian Churches of Jerusalem***

Our Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the past few days we have been going through the way of the cross. Together we have experienced feelings of pain and bitterness as we lived through the events that

have shaken Jerusalem and the whole of our country, events that have led to the death of scores of people and the wounding of hundreds.

Our first response as Christians in the midst of crises is the response of prayer. We cry out to God to have mercy on all of us, and to grant wisdom to the leaders of all the peoples of this land so that they might make the right decisions that will put an end to bloodshed and lead us to a just peace.

As we lift our voices in prayer, we wish to emphasize three principles that spring from the core of our faith in God and grow out of the experience of the Christian Church in this country for the past 2000 years.

1. Peace and security in our country cannot prevail unless they are established on justice. We believe that God is the God of justice and righteousness. God does not accept oppression, but calls on all of us as members of one human family, Arabs and Jews, to [bring about] justice and to love righteousness. God does not accept the domination of the powerful or their arrogance. Our faith assures us that any effort by the governing authority to impose peace in our country, which is not established on justice and righteousness will lead to failure and disaster. We, therefore, urgently call on the Israeli government to pursue the peace process with all seriousness and to carry out all its obligations to our people. We urge the Israeli government to change its attitude and purify its motives. Peace cannot be imposed by the power of arms. Brutality will not lead to security. Stability cannot be established by way of injustice and the denial of rights. Justice must come first, and then peace will follow - a peace that will lead to security. We as Christians feel that the Israeli government's formula for peace is flawed. Its slogan is: security first and then peace. Such a formula casts justice aside and will never bring peace. As the prophet Isaiah has said 'The effect of justice will be peace and the result of justice, quietness and security forever' (Isaiah 32:17).
2. Our faith teaches us that there is no difference between the life of one person and another. There is no difference in God's eyes between Jew and Palestinian, between Arab and foreigner. God is the creator of all. As believers in one God, we plainly state that all must live under the same law. We, therefore, call on the Israeli government to bring all its discriminatory policies to an end. Palestinians should have rights in their country, just as Jews have rights in their country. This is the only way that peace can prevail. Every time the Israeli government gives preferential treatment to Jews over Palestinians, it sows the seeds of hatred and violence and thus is responsible for the growth of animosity towards its own people. We urge the Israeli government to

abstain from the confiscation of land, to return confiscated land to its rightful owners, to stop the demolition of homes, to release all prisoners and detainees, to remove road blocks, and to respect all signed agreements. We call upon the Israeli government to close the recently opened tunnel, to refrain from causing insult and humiliation to the Palestinian people, and treat the Palestinians as genuine partners, who are seeking a life of freedom and dignity in their own country and on their own land. Racial discrimination does not lead to peace or security. Discrimination cannot be the basis for building trust between the two peoples.

3. The opening of the tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem was only the straw that broke the camel's back. However, the opening of the tunnel itself has great significance for it has touched the religious nerve of our Muslim brothers and sisters. The religious nerve in our country is the most sensitive nerve of all. A just and democratic government does not violate the religious sensibility of others in this way. The easiest fire to kindle is the fire of religious emotion. For our Muslim brothers and sisters, the opening of the tunnel is a prelude to the opening of other tunnels which will inevitably lead to breaking into the compound of the Mosque and the occupation of a part of it. Further archeological claims near the tunnel might also affect Christian sites and restrict pilgrims in the area. Therefore, what is required is the closure of the tunnel, along with a pledge to the Muslim community that the Israeli government will never allow an infringement of any part of the Mosque compound or any violation of Muslims or Christian holy places.

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***The easiest fire to kindle is the fire of religious emotion.***

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"Jerusalem first" is now a priority. it is the heart of the conflict and the key to peace. When the closure of Jerusalem is lifted and the two parties share sovereignty over it, Jerusalem will become the city of peace. If Israel maintains an exclusive sovereignty over the city, and continues its "judaization", Jerusalem will never be the city of peace. Any peace imposed by the iron fist will remain a fake and temporary peace. Jews will never feel secure and Palestinians will never submit to it. We therefore insist on an open Jerusalem, the capital for two states; a city that will be a model for the peaceful coexistence between two peoples, Palestinian and Israeli. Thus, Jerusalem will become a gesymbol of authentic brotherhood and tolerance between the three faiths: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

We call on all authorities concerned to end the violence, to work for the establishment of justice, so that stability might be realized. We ask God to fill our hearts and minds with love, strength and all that is good, so that our region, our country, and our Jerusalem will have the peace for which we all strive and pray.

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### **To Be in Jerusalem**

by Tania Tamari Nasir

*Tania Tamari Nasir, a Palestinian singer from Jerusalem, explains her dream to sing in the city of her birth, which can not come true today, due to the Israeli closure. She lived her dream for a fleeting moment in January 1996, when she sang at the opening of the Sabeel conference. The Israeli closure, although in force at the time, was not as strict as it is now.*

One of my cherished dreams in the nineteen years that I lived - during my husband's exile - away from Palestine, was that I would sing regularly in Jerusalem, the city of my birth, the city that I love, my city.

My dream was about to be realized recently when I received an invitation to give a concert in the courtyard of the Tomb of the Kings as part of the French Cultural Week in October 1996. As I read the invitation, mixed feelings of pleasure and sadness, bitterness and anger, invaded my heart, for I knew that no matter how much I wanted to, I could not go to Jerusalem, I could not sing in Jerusalem. I am a Palestinian residing in the West Bank, and Israel prohibits residents of the West Bank from entering East Jerusalem.

With deep regret, I apologized to the organizers, the French Cultural Center and the Yabous Festival of Jerusalem. They wanted me to share in a performance with the French opera singer, Caroline Dumas, and writer, Bernard Noël, who were coming especially for the occasion. I explained that I would have loved to realize my dream and participate in a cultural event with these renowned French artists, but I simply was not allowed to go to Jerusalem. So in a bizarre and strange fashion, Jerusalem seems to be closer for Caroline Dumas and Bernard Noël who come from thousands of miles away, than for me, who lives fifteen miles away in the Palestinian town of Birzeit.

To some this incident may be a casual affair, an unfortunate result of a complex and intricate political conflict. In reality it is a symbolic example of what happens daily in the lives of approximately two million Palestinians who are denied entry into Jerusalem. Palestinians want and need to go to Jerusalem: whether for a concert, an art exhibit, a doctor's appointment, to visit relatives or be with friends, to pray in the Dome of the Rock or in the Holy Sepulcher, or just simply to go for a walk in Jerusalem.

We Palestinians need to feel Jerusalem, to see it, to touch it, to smell it. Jerusalem is not just a place, it is the embodiment of time, and as such it is part and parcel of our existence. It is the center of our lives, our cultural heritage, the very fabric of our society. No one has the right to deprive us of this reality, of this historic fact. No one has the right to distort the truth. No one has the right to monopolize Jerusalem and claim it solely as their own.

Such is the cruel state of affairs for us Palestinians today, for as long as the occupation lingers and for as long as peace remains a twisted and mangled reality. To sing in Jerusalem is a dream, but to be in Jerusalem is an urgent need and a basic right.

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### **Snapshots of Our Activities**

*Sabeel's* programs picked up momentum after the summer during which we moved into our new center. The youth programs and speakers' bureau remained active throughout the summer and autumn.

#### ***Youth Work***

Once students returned to the routine of school life, disrupted by the chaotic events at the end of September, an encounter between the youth from the Jerusalem and Bethlehem conferences took place at the YMCA Rehabilitation Center in Shepherds' Fields, Beit Sahour on 10th October 1996. Reem Khader, a participant in the Jerusalem youth conference, reflects on that significant experience in "[A Young Person's Dream of Peace](#)"

#### ***Speakers' Bureau***

As eager pilgrims and fact-finding groups arrive in Palestine and Israel in order to seek the truth, *Sabeel* speakers meet with them to share their personal stories and

provide a true picture of life in this land. Those whose hearts are touched return to their home countries to tell the truth and to influence their churches and governments.

Several visiting groups have found their 'way' to *Sabeel's* new center, where the hall can easily accommodate 50 people. Since January 1996, *Sabeel* speakers have met with 70 such groups, reaching approximately 1600 people.

### ***Bible Study***

The ecumenical Bible study for adults on the Book of Revelation concluded in November. A new course will begin in the New Year while a field trip to Megiddo will follow in the spring.

### ***Workshops***

*Sabeel* hosted Emily Shihadeh, an American of Palestinian Arab heritage, who presented excerpts from "[Grapes & Figs are in Season.](#)"

### ***Clergy Gatherings***

In September, parish priests resumed their monthly meetings which began in May 1995. In sharing food and thoughts, prayers, Bible readings, and educational field trips, the gatherings have been instrumental in building closer ties and a better understanding of the rich diversity within shared ministry. The clergy are currently reflecting on the 'Letters to the Churches' from the Book of Revelation, and are discussing Israel Shahak's book, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion*. An ecumenical retreat in Abu Ghosh takes place in December.

### ***Interfaith Encounter and Lecture***

Marc H. Ellis, the renowned American Jewish theologian and author, and long-time friend of *Sabeel*, gave a well-received lecture at the *Sabeel* Center on 23rd November 1996, as part of a 10 day visit to the country. Dr. Ellis was hosted by several institutions and universities throughout Palestine and Israel during his trip. See issue 7 of *Cornerstone* for a full report on "[A Journey to Jerusalem](#)"

### ***International Relations***

USA

Naim Ateek spoke alongside Rashid Khalidi, Director of the International Institute at Chicago, at a symposium on Jerusalem in Seattle, Washington on 2nd November 1996.

## ***International Relations***

Sweden

Peter Bernhardsson, a theological student at Stockholm School of Theology, spent most of October in the country, researching *Sabeel* and Palestinian Liberation Theology.

In September, Samia Khoury and Munir Fasheh, educators and members of *Sabeel's* steering committee, took part in a pedagogical seminar, organized by *Frikyrkliga studieforbundet* in Ljungskile, Sweden. The emphasis was on sharing the knowledge and experience of the delegates from Sweden, South America and Palestine, who have been engaged in non-formal education, through lectures and workshops. Non-formal education can increase self-esteem in order for the individual to work with others to bring about change in the community. The subsequent October *Frikyrkliga studieforbundet* meeting in Cyprus took its theme, *Hope In spite of Awareness*, from Munir Fasheh's presentation, which was proposed for their policy document covering the next fifteen years.

Naim Ateek, director, and Jean Zaru, executive committee member, spoke alongside Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Afif Safieh, PLO representative to the UK and Palestinian delegate to the Holy See, and Harry Hagopian, executive director of the Jerusalem Liaison Office for the Middle East Council of Churches, at a Convocation on Jerusalem in Lund on October 26. It was hosted by the Bishop and Diocese of Lund. *Sabeel* received positive feedback from Sweden for its 'decisive contributions'. The participants who expressed great interest in the fate of Jerusalem, committed themselves to further follow up on this important issue.

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### **A Young Person's Dream of Peace**

*by Reem Khader*

***'Blessed are those who strive for peace. They shall be called the children of God.'***  
***Matthew 5:9***

I joined many students from different schools at the summer youth conference organized by *Sabeel* in Jerusalem. We discussed the peace process, being a peacemaker and the history of Jerusalem. Each of the three days began at 9am with a

time of prayer and worship led by Rev. Naim Ateek and Mrs. Samia Khoury, and ended at 4pm.

During the first morning we discussed the history of Jerusalem, and following lunch, we broke up into two groups. I was part of the 'Peace' group. We gave our views on the meaning of peace and on living in a pluralistic society. Our opinions differed slightly, but I think that if we really want peace, we should work harder to achieve it. If we do nothing except say that we desire peace, then we will not have peace. Many Palestinians put themselves above the pursuit of peace. We should help our people to sow peace in our land, so that day after day, when we look at our land, we will see trees full of love and peace. It is my dream to have peace. I can only hope that those in power will see the people who sacrifice themselves for this Holy Land.

We discussed the issues raised by living in this pluralistic society. Some of our group had doubts, but I, along with many others, thought that we could live together. We have the same traditions, the same culture and we share in the same suffering. We talked about ways to avoid disputes.

On the second day we looked at different approaches to peace in Jerusalem. Mrs. Cedar Duaybis described a vision of peace in Jerusalem: first we need to come up to a just political solution for the city, and we must ensure that the Holy Land is open for all - Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims, Christians and Jews. In my opinion, we must bring all the Arab countries together with Israel in order to discuss the future status of Jerusalem. Our group wanted to continue the current peace process, but called for lifting of the closure to enable people from the West Bank and Gaza to come to Jerusalem without having to apply for a permit, which is difficult to obtain.

Following the break, Rev. Ateek considered the ways to make peace. I think that we need to proceed with love, stop the violence against children, and make all the governments work for peace.

The conference ended too quickly. On the final day, we visited Latrun Monastery and the Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salam community of Arabs and Jews. Although some of us had only known each other for a few days, we felt like old friends. We said our farewells, and looked forward to meeting again in the future.

A month later we met with a group of young people from the Bethlehem area who had attended a similar conference. When we were due to meet there were many problems in the Holy Land. It began when the government of Israel opened the tunnel beneath the Al Aqsa Mosque, igniting a flame in all of Palestine. This was not the only problem as the real reason was within the heart of all Palestinians. The bad treatment of Palestinians by Israel and the low salaries for Palestinian workers inside Israel, to

name a few. In spite of all those killed, and in spite of all the pressure, Israel did not allow Palestinians from the West Bank to come to Jerusalem, or for those from Jerusalem to enter the West Bank. So, when we went to meet with the Bethlehem area students in Beit Sahour, the Israeli soldiers wouldn't allow us to drive into the West Bank. They told us to walk. I was very angry at this treatment and from what had happened.

I hope that peace will fly in the whole world and that our children will have peace and hope in their dreams.

*Reem Khader, a 17 year old student at the Lutheran School in Ramallah, is a member of the Episcopal Church.*

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### ***Sabeel Nazareth***

by Violet Houry

The *Sabeel* committee in Nazareth has recently organized more tours to holy places and historical sites in order to discover our Christian Palestinian existence, and to create an ecumenical group interested and active in Liberation Theology.

Our second trip took place on Sunday 6th October, and included visits to Megiddo, Mount Carmel, Muhraqa and Caesarea, with fifty participants of all ages: couples, families with children, single people and students. Our guide, Sami Ghayeb focused on our roots and their relation to the sites. Father Elie Kurzum celebrated Mass at the Carmel Monastery in Muhraqa, where we had a Bible study, readings, discussion and meditation about the Prophet Elias (Elijah), before moving on to Caesarea. A Christian family atmosphere was present all day long.

The third tour on 17th November included a trip to Beisan, the historical excavations and the city, which the Israelis renamed Beth She'an. A participant told us about the history of this Palestinian city and how she and her family, along with the entire population of 5000 Palestinians, were forced out in 1948. We stopped at *Deir Hijla* (St. Erasmus' Monastery) and Qumran on the way to St. George's Monastery in Wadi Qelt. Our trip began with the celebration of Mass at the Little Sisters Chapel in Nazareth and ended in Jericho where we met up with members of *Sabeel* from Jerusalem. Rev. Naim Ateek, director of *Sabeel*, explained the importance of working

together ecumenically, and actively at a grassroots level. All we had experienced during the day became real to us.

*Violet Khoury, a Greek Catholic, is coordinator of Sabeel's Nazareth branch.*

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## **Grapes & Figs are in Season**

*by Anne Maclean*

I was privileged to attend the 'one woman show' produced, directed and acted by Emily Shihadeh in the Parish Hall of St George's Cathedral on Saturday October 12, 1996. This very talented lady moved her audience to tears and laughter as she told her story 'a Palestinian Woman's story.'

Emily Shihadeh was born and lived the first 18 years of her life in Ramallah, Palestine, which now lies in the West Bank. At that time life was governed by the British under the British Mandate. She emigrated to live in the United States with her husband and family.

The performer played the part of her young self, her parents, sisters and sundry other characters as they passed through those 18 years of life in Palestine. Her props consisted of a chair, table, bag, an antique backgammon game and an old Palestinian dress. The audience was transported back with her to the years of childhood and on through the teenage years into marriage. She became the mother, the father, the sister, talking to her (the child). She enabled us to 'live' with her, the life of the times. We heard the music, climbed the fruit trees, ate the grapes and figs, and felt the juice spurting out of our mouths and dripping onto our clothes. We felt the anguish of a teenager refused permission to go to the dances; we lived through the first 'love' of the tall good looking stranger, who became a family friend, and felt the depth of grief at his death in the war. We went to school in Ramallah and laughed with the girl friends. We felt the emotions on the wedding day and the excitement of 'growing up' at last.

Ms. Shihadeh took us from the present to the past and back again. The play opened with her arriving in Ramallah to visit her mother after her father had died. She wove the story backwards and forwards over the years through visits from America to see

her parents. The past was brought alive by remembrances evoked by differing things. The title came from a farewell of her mother's, 'Come in the summer, the grapes and figs will be ripe'.

Emily Shihadeh is a consartist who wove a story of intense emotion, finely balanced with tears and laughter. As she completed her story with the words, 'Next time in Ramallah, Palestine, inshallah', most of us were reduced to tears.

Many of the audience were of a similar age as the performer and those who grew up in Ramallah and nearby, relived their early life the powerful images evoked by Ms. Shihadeh. For visitors to Palestine and Israel, the images gripped our hearts and cut into our souls as we gained a deeper understanding of the loss of freedom and a country. The importance of a 'show' such as this for the education of people is incalculable.

Emily Shihadeh, who lives in San Francisco, is available for other audiences who would like to 'live' with her a Palestinian Woman's story.

*Anne Maclean, a volunteer at Sabeel during 1996, is a member of the Uniting Church of Australia.*