



## THIS ISSUE:

THE LONELY EVENTS  
OF EASTER

1

BETHLEHEM  
ENCOUNTER 2017

2

FINDING GOD IN  
BETHLEHEM'S  
ORTHODOX CHURCH

4



## Church Meetings

HOPE Outreach is prepared to share in your church either a "Minute for Missions" short or full sermon time on Sundays. We also can share a seminar at any church meeting on any day titled "Seeking Peace and Reconciliation in the Holy Land." Call us at 519-473-4267.

## Christ At The Checkpoint

"Jesus At The Center" is the conference theme for 2018 scheduled in Bethlehem from May 28 to June 1. Visit [christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/](http://christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/) for details.

# The Lonely Events of Easter

*By Salim J. Munayer, Musalaha Executive Director*

During the Easter and Passover season, people from around the world flock to Jerusalem. On Palm Sunday, thousands of visitors and local Palestinian Christians walk down from the Mount of Olives, through the valley, and up into the Old City of Jerusalem. It is a truly moving sight, with groups of people from all over the world waving palm fronds, singing songs of worship and celebrating the ministry of Jesus and his entry into Jerusalem. It is one of the most vibrant celebrations in the world marking the final week of Jesus' physical life on earth.

On the days of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday there is barely any place to stand in the Old City churches of Jerusalem.

These now joyous and deeply meaningful occasions for

celebration appear in stark contrast to the historical and spiritual events they mark. In reality, the events in the life, death and resurrection of Christ were very lonely times. The disciples and most of the people who followed Jesus totally abandoned him when he received his cross. They rejected him by denying they even knew him. Only a few people walked alongside and helped him as he was going to be crucified, and very few were left standing at his feet during his crucifixion.

The contrast between these tragic and horrific events and what we celebrate today is striking; we can learn from the differences. Many times, great events in history come in a quiet way, as in the crucifixion and resurrection.



*continued on page 3...*

# Bethlehem Encounter Mission Trip 2017



Twelve adventuresome Canadians participated in a unique HOPE Outreach of Canada trip to the Holy Land October 27 – November 12, 2017. Organized by Beverley Timgren, who has spent her adult life serving in the Middle East, and now with HOPE Outreach, this trip allowed participants to interact with local people in the Holy Land (Christian, Muslim, Jewish) who are impacting their communities by addressing issues of peace, justice, and reconciliation, and caring for the marginalized.

Based at Bethlehem Bible College, the trip featured lectures (with Q & A) with faculty members to give biblical, historical and cultural insights relevant to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the local indigenous church. The program

also included biblical and historical site visits in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nazareth, Galilee, Jericho and more, but most important was the opportunity to meet and interact with a variety of local people, including Christians—the living stones of the Holy Land.

For example, the team participated in an outreach for orphans with Musalaha (the reconciliation ministry); met with staff of Holy Land Trust and visited a family helped by the HLT house rebuilding project; led a devotional and craft activity with special needs kids at House of Hope; helped with farm work at Tent of Nations (a Christian Palestinian farm); spent a morning working with the disabled young people at L'Arche.

The group learned that modern Bethlehem includes several neighbouring villages and is home to both Christian and Muslim Palestinians. Within a Muslim majority, the Christian population in the West Bank is less than 2%, but there is a significantly higher percentage of Christians in the villages of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. By agreement, the mayors of these villages are always Christian. Christians here are Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant (representing a number of church traditions), and evangelicals are a minority within a minority. Emigration

has been a major factor in the declining Christian population and is due primarily to the political instability, economic hardship, lack of freedom and restrictions due to the Wall separating Israel from the West Bank.

There are also three refugee camps in Bethlehem - Aida, al-Azzeh, and Dheisheh. Initially set up to shelter thousands of Palestinian refugees in 1948, they are now home to their descendants and have become densely crowded communities of concrete buildings on narrow, winding streets. Most cannot afford to live elsewhere. One highlight for the team, though, was their visit to Aida camp for a cooking class with the amazing women of the Noor (Light) project in support of the disabled children of families living in Aida and Azzeh camps.

One team member said in conclusion, “I was very touched by this statement of Sami Awad, head of the non-violence movement, Holy Land Trust, in Bethlehem.”: “How does all this fit into our faith? If Jesus were here, would He stand with the marginalized, and against the occupiers? No, Jesus never stands against anyone. Jesus calls us to love. The concept of loving one’s enemy only exists in Christianity. How many of us really do so? Loving one’s enemy is a command. Think of Jesus’ life and the oppression in



*Dr. Bishara Awad, the founder of Bethlehem Bible College with the group.*

His society? It was probably even more difficult for Him.”

Another one was deeply impacted by the words of Bethlehem Bible College President, Dr. Jack Sara: “In the world, even the word ‘Palestine’ is not acceptable. Spiritually and missiologically speaking, if you use the word ‘Palestine’, you are labeled as anti-Jewish, anti-Israel. Is there any hope? Yes. In Christ, there is always hope. Don’t leave Palestine feeling hurt and

thinking that you have lived your lives with hatred for Palestinians, and now leave with hatred for the Jews. No. Leave with new love for all, and commitment to pray for both. Go as ambassadors of peace!

Dr. Salim Munayer, founder of the reconciliation ministry, Musalaha, left others meditating on his challenging statement:

“When you return home, you will be overwhelmed by what you have

heard and seen. Choose one small thing to do. And this will bring the change. God is asking you to do one thing. He will multiply it. The one thing you do will make a difference. There is hope, for God created people, and loves them. Therefore, reconciliation can come from people who have hope in God.”

A similar trip is planned for the fall of 2019. Keep in touch with us at HOPE Outreach for details.



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#### *The Lonely Events of Easter from page 1*

When these events took place, it appeared that the power of evil had won over good. People lost hope and it was a time of desolation. It was not a celebrated, glorious event, but was in fact the total opposite of how we celebrate today.

It is the same for people who are seeking the Kingdom of God today... For those actively working for reconciliation, life can be lonely, full of rejection, not glorious, painful and difficult. Today, most

people are looking for honor, power and adoration, and desire to gain success as defined by society.

It is costly to pay the price that accompanies taking a position on moral and ethical issues, and further, to call for peace and reconciliation and not encourage hostility and isolated disengagement with others who are different from us. And yet, it is the difficult, isolating times that are often the moments of transformation and progress in our society.

In this Easter season of celebration, let us recognize the contradiction in how the events we celebrate actually occurred, and the ways we choose to celebrate them now. May this help us to not miss the transformative moments in our own lifetime.

*Dr. Munayer will be speaking in the Vancouver area in mid-January at the time of Missions Fest 2019. Check our website for updates and details on these events:*  
[www.hopeoutreach.ca](http://www.hopeoutreach.ca).

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#### *Finding God... from page 4*

Soon Maher witnessed how the combination of getting young people to read the Bible and talking about their everyday struggles worked out unexpectedly. “We have some great conversations; some of them experienced healing, others had a sense of revival.”

“Some of the youth made a new commitment to the church. They read their Bible now every day and they are

praying. One of the girls, who is 19-years-old said, ‘I cannot recall the last time I had read the Bible. But now I read it every day.’ I know that is God working in her heart,” he says. For these youth, their whole relationship with their church and community has changed for the better, Maher sees. “They now see that the Church is alive. And they have experienced that they are part of it. But in order to stay alive, you need to feed

yourself. The better nourished you are, the better your life will be.”

He is convinced that people who have that conviction in their hearts will start behaving differently. “People will notice if you have Christ in your heart.”

It is Maher’s strong conviction that only Christ can bring real peace to his region. He concludes, “That is why I use every opportunity I can to share His love.”

# Finding God in Bethlehem's Orthodox Church

*After a humbling experience of rebelliously leaving his church as a teenager and then being called to return years later, Bethlehem-born Orthodox Christian, Maher, now clearly sees God at work in the traditional Palestinian churches. Since that discovery, his heart's desire has been to share God's Word with Palestinian youth.*

**“**When I was 18-years-old, I felt that I was starving spiritually.” Maher grew up in one of the Orthodox Churches in Bethlehem. But despite the fact that he considered himself a Christian, this Palestinian teenager didn't experience God personally and he started looking for Him outside of the Church he grew up in. “In my mind, the Orthodox Church was completely without life. It was just tradition.”

When he moved to the United States for his studies, Maher felt God speak to him for the first time. “I was in a church in Texas when that happened. I cannot describe what I felt; it was pure revival and my life changed.”

Maher started to pray, to read the Bible and to ask for God's guidance in his life. “After a while, God made it very clear that he wanted me to go back to

Bethlehem to serve Him there in the Orthodox Church I grew up in.”

But that was not what Maher wanted to hear. He was convinced that this was a church with no life left in it. Going back as an adult to this congregation he left as a rebellious teenager was a “most humbling experience,” he recalls.

Maher was, however, in for a surprise. “When I joined the circle of core believers in the Orthodox Church, I was amazed to discover that in their hearts the same fire for God was burning that I had discovered in America.”

The first small group meeting Maher attended after returning to the Orthodox Church was themed “the spiritual gifts and baptism of the Holy Spirit and how



to receive them.” These words spoke directly to his heart. “I had to repent. I had been arrogant and judgmental about my church when I said that God wasn't at work there. He was, I just hadn't discovered it before.”

Maher has a full-time job in Bethlehem, but when he is not working he volunteers as a youth worker and counselor in the Orthodox Church. His degree in Theology and training to be a professional counselor are tremendously helpful for that. He feels specially called to connect to the youth. “Living in Bethlehem amidst the conflict and the chaos, Christian youth feel forgotten. They think no one cares about them, not here and not abroad.”

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## PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Pray for faculty, staff and students at BBC and for the need of scholarship funds.
- Pray for Musalaha and their many-faceted reconciliation programs including women and youth.
- Pray for HOPE Outreach of Canada's need for volunteer Development helpers across Canada.
- Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6) and the peace of Bethlehem.

*Donate securely through our new website: [www.hopeoutreach.ca](http://www.hopeoutreach.ca). While there you can learn more about our ministry through partners in the Holy Land.*

*Be sure to see the new video “This is Bethlehem!”*



HOPE Outreach of Canada  
PO Box 32010 RPO Northland  
London, ON N5V 5K4  
Phone: 519-473-4267  
Email: [office@hopeoutreach.ca](mailto:office@hopeoutreach.ca)