

Bethlehem in Good Hands

Not sure whether you've noticed or not, but this issue of *This Week in Palestine* has been beefed up to 124 pages, mainly to accommodate the large amount of material about Bethlehem – theme of our current issue – sent to us. This is an exceptionally rich issue that also happens to mark our seventeenth anniversary.

The little town of Bethlehem, where Jesus was born in a humble stable two thousand years ago, is bustling with life today. Despite closures and restriction of movement by the Israeli authorities, the city is thriving and undergoing a major build-up. Particularly proud of their city, the people of Bethlehem have taken matters into their own hands and are working ceaselessly to improve the quality of their lives. The challenges are immense, but the city that is rich in history and culture, not to mention being the cradle of Christianity, is challenging first and foremost itself to provide its citizens with the best amenities and comfort possible under the current circumstances.

Bethlehem is in good hands and its municipality acts like a bee hive. Even before Christmas season – the busiest time of the year for Bethlehem – starts, the municipal employees are constantly on their toes, tirelessly trying to complete their assignments. I have no clue how the mayor, Vera Baboun, does it all; I am certain that Sindbad made less mileage, and surely he did not foster relationship with cities around the globe like Vera is doing. To add to the credit of Bethlehemites, a few years ago they approached the late Said Tawfiq Khoury, a prominent Palestinian entrepreneur and philanthropist, with the appeal to aid the city. When Khoury vowed to do just that, this promise led to the establishment of the Bethlehem Development Foundation. The BDF is loyally fulfilling the stipulations of its mandate and has actively assisted in further developing the city of Bethlehem.

We received today the calendar of events for Bethlehem's Christmas season that in fact has already started with the launch of the "Christmas Nights Festival" on 28 November (check out our events section for the entire listing.) During this season, many thousands of pilgrims from all over the world as well as locals from out of town will visit the city to catch a glimpse of its glitter. I counted forty-two fantastic events among which are the ceremony for the lighting of the main Christmas tree at Manger Square on the fifth of December; children's activities; Christmas concerts featuring local and international choirs that are coming from as far as Italy, Spain, Lithuania, and Switzerland; a major Christmas parade that tours Bethlehem on different days throughout the month of December; a Run For Peace marathon; naturally, the high mass at midnight on Christmas Eve; and many more brilliant and exciting events.

Like all other cities, villages, and camps in Palestine, Bethlehem recently rose against injustice, against land confiscation, and against occupation. Yes, Bethlehem is the city of peace – but there is always a limit to one's patience. Didn't Jesus himself enter the temple to drive out all those who were there to buy and sell their goods, overturning the tables of the money changers? (*Mathew 21:12*)

Bethlehem is indeed in good hands: apart from its municipality, the Bethlehem Development Foundation, and its conscientious inhabitants, Bethlehem will remain in the hands of Jesus Christ. It's his hometown after all!

Sani P. Meo
Publisher

