

## THE HOLY LAND AT CHRISTMAS

While we are singing our Christmas carols are we really aware of what life is like now for the people of the Holy land? Since September 2000 there has been an escalation of violence in Israel/Palestine. Palestinian suicide bombers entering Israeli towns, counter attacks and incursions into Palestinian towns by the Israeli Defence Forces. In June 2002 Israel began building what it calls its “anti-terrorist fence” and what others call “The Wall” or the “Separation Barrier”. Most of the separation barrier is being constructed on Palestinian land dividing Palestinians from their land, work places and schools. The ‘Little Town of Bethlehem’ is now surrounded by the separation barrier, making life increasingly difficult for the people of Bethlehem.

### Did you know



Credit: Amos trust

- After the six day war in 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including East Jerusalem. The occupation has been a significant cause of extreme poverty for those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. 64 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line. The majority of the Palestinian population now exist on less than £1.10 a day<sup>1</sup>.
- From September 2000 to July 2007 1024 Israelis and 4228 Palestinians were killed in the ongoing violence in Israel/Palestine<sup>2</sup>.
- In June 2002 Israel began building its separation wall, mostly on Palestinian land, dividing Palestinians from their land, work places and schools.

<sup>1</sup> Life Lines, Christian Aid 2007 [http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/facts/facts\\_figs.aspx](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/facts/facts_figs.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp) accessed 4/9/2007

### Bible bits

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 4:28-29

“For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.”

*Ephesians 2:14-16*

## Prayer

Living Lord, ignite in us a passion for  
justice and a yearning to right all wrong.

Strengthen us to work for peace in the  
land we call holy;  
For peace among Jew, Christian and Muslim  
For reconciliation between communities  
For harmony between faiths.

Inspire us to act with the urgency  
of your quickening fire,  
for blessed are the peacemakers,  
they shall be called children of God.  
Amen.

*Ramani Leathard, Christian Aid*

## Action Ideas

- **Send a Christmas card to Bethlehem.** Send cards via the Pax Christi office with your peace messages to Bethlehem or send e-cards via the link on our website <http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/Wall.HTML>
- **Write to the Foreign Secretary**, FCO, London SW1A 2AH, explaining your concerns about the situation in Palestine and Israel and asking what action the UK government is taking to promote peace and challenge the separation wall.
- **Sponsor an Olive tree.** The Olive tree campaign – Keep Hope Alive, aims at planting 50,000 live trees in the very places where trees have been uprooted by the Israeli army or where fields are threatened with land confiscation. Send £20 per tree to: Ycare International, 3-9 Southampton Row, London, WC1B 5HY or go to [www.ej-ymca.org/site/Display-Sub.cfm?SubId=22](http://www.ej-ymca.org/site/Display-Sub.cfm?SubId=22)

## Discussion Questions

1. The Wall has been built to keep people apart – do you think this brings peace?
2. What do we do that builds barriers between us and other people?
3. How can we remove the barriers we have created – and help to build peace instead?

## Further resources

1. [www.learn.christianaid.org.uk/Images/war\\_and\\_peace\\_trouble\\_history\\_tcm16-19377.pdf](http://www.learn.christianaid.org.uk/Images/war_and_peace_trouble_history_tcm16-19377.pdf) clear and concise 2 page summary of the history of the conflict
2. [www.paxchristi.org.uk/Documents/ME/Remember\\_Bethlehem.pdf](http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/Documents/ME/Remember_Bethlehem.pdf) photographs taken in the Holy Land and used here to illustrate the well-known Christmas carols, 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' and 'Silent Night'.
3. [www.aeicenter.org/index.htm](http://www.aeicenter.org/index.htm) Youth page of Arab Educational Institute – photos, stories and how to set up email links with young people in Palestine.
4. [www.btselem.org/English](http://www.btselem.org/English) B'tselem is an Israeli human rights group. Read testimonies of those who are affected by the wall and the occupation
5. [www.icahd.org](http://www.icahd.org) Israeli Committee Against House Demolition for excellent maps and information - there is also a youth programme link on home page
6. [www.amostrust.org](http://www.amostrust.org) for alternative Christmas carols, new DVD, CD and book by Garth Hewitt and an olive wood nativity scene with a difference – made in Bethlehem

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