

# The McCabe Educational Trust

## Christmas Edition 08

*"But you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel" Micah 5*

As Christmas approaches our thoughts are with our friends in Bethlehem. Especially Helen and the children at the Al Shurooq School for the Blind and her brother Edmund and his staff at the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation. Last month was a record breaking month for the Trust and your donations are making a real difference to the lives of our friends in Bethlehem. A special **Thank You** to McCabe pilgrims who helped us raise **£45,044** during November, and a total of **£170,059** so far this year.

We recently received a letter from an Israeli citizen who, against the rules of her country, visited Bethlehem. I reproduce her letter in full as a challenge to all of us this advent:

### Letter to churches about Christmas in Bethlehem, from a Jewish visitor

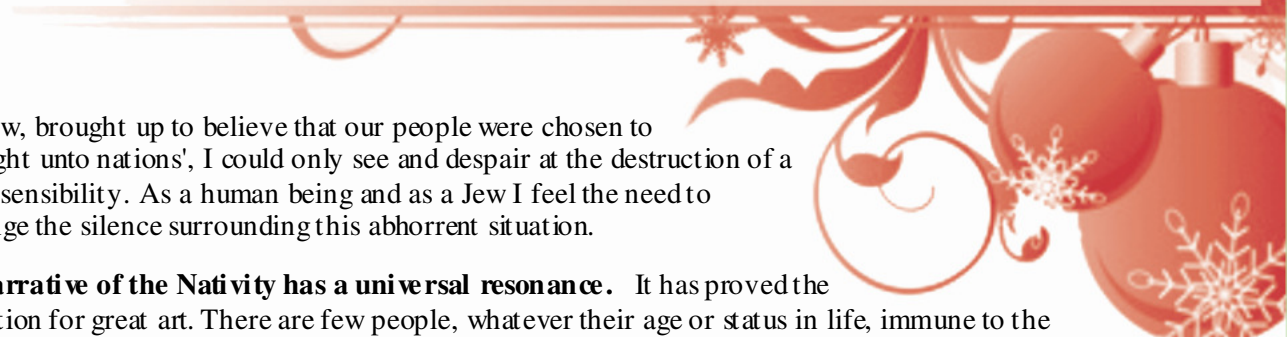
This year I visited Bethlehem. I was warned that it would be dangerous for a Jew to visit a town in occupied Palestine, that 'the Arabs' were my enemies and that the wall surrounding Bethlehem was there to prevent suicide bombers. That did not deter me. I had to find out for myself.

Bethlehem is now a town surrounded by a 10 metre high wall, punctuated with watch towers, brimming with the latest electronic gadgets. The International Court of Justice ruled in 2004 that this wall is illegal, but without international commitment to enforce this ruling, it has no effect on the ground. Israel has decorated the outside of this huge monstrosity with a hoarding saying 'Peace be with you'. Strangely when I tried to photograph it, a very angry Israeli soldier made me delete the image. This was the only time I knew fear in this town.



**What I learnt in Bethlehem** is that the Palestinians live in a ghetto, like Jews once did in Europe, and that the Jewish state occupies their land, and destroys their hopes and future. The wall is not there to prevent suicide bombers, because it is not on the border, and anyone determined enough would be able to find a passageway out of the walled city. What the wall actually does is deny Palestinians freedom of movement, a right that everyone takes for granted. People cannot visit their relatives, their schools, their hospitals, or their fields, without asking for permission and leaving the city means passing a checkpoint where bored young soldiers abuse their power.

Permission is a privilege denied more often than allowed. The economy has been all but ruined



As a Jew, brought up to believe that our people were chosen to be 'a light unto nations', I could only see and despair at the destruction of a Jewish sensibility. As a human being and as a Jew I feel the need to challenge the silence surrounding this abhorrent situation.

**The narrative of the Nativity has a universal resonance.** It has proved the inspiration for great art. There are few people, whatever their age or status in life, immune to the story of a family, living in an occupied land, rejected by the powerful, ultimately finding sanctuary among the lowliest, and, through the birth of their child, opening a path of hope for the future. However, as a Jewish dissident, I find the silence of the majority of Christians about the situation in 'The Little Town of Bethlehem', particularly at Christmas, difficult to fathom.

In many ways the Israeli occupier is worse than the Romans. At least the wise men could reach the child. Today they would be turned back. No family would be able to get into the town without passing guards, checkpoints and walls. Yet during Christmas, the time of peace and goodwill, we hear nothing of this and I wonder why. To be silent is to be complicit and to be acting against what I regard as the spirit of Christmas.

Crime flourishes in dark places. That is why it is important to throw a light onto this dark place.

This Christmas meditate on good tidings by all means, but also tell the world about the oppression and restriction that is the legacy of '**The Little Town of Bethlehem**'. Perhaps the Israelis will not like this, but they need to be reminded that they have the solution in their hands. They can tear down the wall. They can actually treat non-Jews like equals and dispense justice, not ascendancy. To sanction the Jewish state to commit these crimes, means that this state is held to a lower standard than others, thus enshrining anti-Semitism, the treatment of Jews as different and of lesser capability precisely because they are Jews. A true friend of Israel is not one who can tolerate this corruption. A real friend is one who tells you the truth.

It is time that the Christians of the world supported their own co-religionists, many of whom are fleeing impossible lives in their once Holy Land, and stopped finding excuses for this barbaric occupation.

The time has come to grasp the nettle and show the world that the people of Bethlehem are not forgotten. In this way it may be possible to begin to fulfil the message of Christmas.

Diana Neslen

[dneslen@googlemail.com](mailto:dneslen@googlemail.com)



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