

# FOLLOW THE STAR



The Nativity Scene in the Paul VI Hall in the  
Vatican was donated by the citizens of Bethlehem  
to pilgrims from around the world  
December 2024

Higher Presidential Committee  
for Church Affairs in Palestine  
Embassy of the State of Palestine  
to the Holy See  
Dar Al Kalima University

# The message of Bethlehem is indeed “**Good News of Great Joy**”

(Lc 2,10).

Pope Francis



From the heart of the Holy Land, from Bethlehem, the cradle of Christianity, the Church arose when the time was fulfilled and God sent his beloved Son Jesus Christ to complete the journey of salvation history (Cfr. Gal 4, 4-5). From this land the Church set out on its journey, achieving its role and preaching about Christ the Savior. Thus the origin of the universal Church is in the Holy Land from where the church grew and flourished. The relationship of the universal Church to this land is like the relationship of a river to its source. How can it separate from it or ignore its origin?

## **The Living Stones**

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The universal Church is deeply rooted not only in the Holy Land but also in its living stones, the Christians of Palestine. They were the first to preach Jesus Christ the savior to the world. They have safeguarded the faith and preserved the holy sites, often enduring hardship and martyrdom to stay faithful. Therefore, every Christian Jubilee finds its roots in Bethlehem, and every Christian worldwide has the right to visit and to connect with these roots and its living stones.

So within this context, the Apostolic Penitentiary has emphasized that pilgrimages to the Holy Land are essential during the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025, calling on the faithful to visit either Rome or at least one of the Holy Land's sacred sites, such as the

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Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem or the Annunciation Church in Nazareth.

## **The nativity scene donated by the people of Bethlehem to pilgrims of the world**

Due to the Holy Land's current difficult circumstances, the Embassy of the State of Palestine to the Holy See has made every effort to bring Bethlehem and the Grotto of the Nativity to the peoples of all Nations who will visit the Vatican City during this coming Holy Year. It is meant to serve as a message of love, peace, and hope, and to remind the faithful of the tormented Holy Land that needs our prayers.



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## Nativity Scene and its symbols

In the Hall Paul VI one can admire the Nativity scene made of local olive tree wood, with its wonderful mother-of-pearl Star mirroring the one in the Nativity Grotto and all is made by Palestinian artisans of Bethlehem. The star shines light from above on the newborn baby Jesus, indicating the Savior as is written in the Gospels: "We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (MTh 2, 2). An olive tree, a fundamental element of the Palestinian landscape, forms the backdrop to the nativity scene as a symbol of peace.

## **Tradizione, spiritualità e comunità a Betlemme**

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L'artigianato di Betlemme, come l'intaglio del legno d'ulivo e gli ornamenti in madreperla, riflette una tradizione secolare radicata nella spiritualità e nella comunità locale. L'artigianato del legno d'ulivo iniziò nel IV secolo, diventando una pietra miliare della cultura di Betlemme nel XVI secolo. Allo stesso modo, gli ornamenti in madreperla furono introdotti nel XV secolo dai monaci francescani, e divennero un'industria significativa per i manufatti religiosi sotto l'Ordine di San Francesco. Questi mestieri non solo mostrano un'arte squisita, ma preservano anche l'eredità spirituale di Betlemme.

Gli artigiani moderni continuano queste tradizioni, con iniziative come quelle della Ma'n Lilhayat (insieme per la vita), un'organizzazione cattolica che supporta le persone bisognose, diversamente abili, attraverso l'insegnamento dell'antica tecnica dell'infeltrimento della lana. Questa iniziativa dimostra come l'artigianato di Betlemme si sviluppi sostenendo l'emancipazione sociale. Insieme, questi mestieri esemplificano la resilienza e il legame comunitario di Betlemme, ergendosi come un faro di speranza in mezzo alle sfide, e rappresentano un impegno nei confronti del patrimonio culturale, creando un ponte tra passato e futuro per gli artigiani e le comunità che dipendono da queste tradizioni.

The Nativity Scene project is realized in collaboration with:

**Dar Al Kalima University**, is the first and only university in Palestine dedicated to art, culture and design. It is committed to educating future generations of creative leaders.

**Il Piccirillo Handicraft Center**, aims to preserve and enhance traditional craftsmanship, while providing employment opportunities to people with special needs.

**Ma'an Lil-Hayat** (Together for Life) community and project, founded in 2009 in Bethlehem, Palestine, as an initiative that brings together people with and without intellectual disabilities, who share a culture of friendship, trust and work.

Curator: Johny Andonia, Dar Al-Kalima University

Coordinator: Taisir Hasbun

Mother-of-pearl Star: Salim Atick, Issa Kannan, Issa Kharoufeh, studenti della Terra Sancta School.

Olive wood Nativity Scene : Peter Khano, Sameer Lolas, Akram Anustas

Ornaments of raw wool felt: Amira Abu Haniyya, Muna Al-Ahmad, Waleed Darawi, Razan Mubarak, Mohammad Abu Omre, Fatima Saleh, Rahaf Rabaia'a, Rana Hijazeen, Sabreen Al-Mayya

Engineering and architectural consultancy: George Mura, Diala Andonia

Logistics: Marco Salvatori, Mario Salvatori, Alessandro Berti, Valentino Salvatori, Simone Cirillo, Iyad Ayad, Elias Azar

The team of the Embassy of the State of Palestine to the Holy See: Ahmad Hamoudeh, Jihad Farraj, Sabrina Di Fazio, Amal Hazeen, Bader Chaker, Andrea Olivieri

