

LPNI Devotion – January 2012

The Bethlehem of Today

I have had the privilege and the joy to journey to Bethlehem recently. This is my fifth mission trip to Palestine and Israel. I am constantly amazed as I observe people in the land where our Lord was born, ministered to the people, was crucified, died and on the third day was raised from the dead.

Bethlehem and its people have good reason to harbor resentment, frustration, and fear. Living in a walled city, unable to travel with the exception of very limited destinations, uncertain of adequate water and health care and requiring permits to cross checkpoints and borders is a daily way of life. And yet, these people have something that continues to draw me back time and again. They have hope. They have faith that cannot be shaken.

I witnessed this on a recent trip when the American mission team, along with our sister in Christ, Raida Mansour, Parish Nurse in Bethlehem, came to a checkpoint in a city in Samaria. The American team was asked to show passports, and was granted passage. Raida was questioned, at length, was briefly detained, and had to surrender her identification in order to pass through. I watched all this unfold and couldn't help but ask her if she was afraid. She calmly answered, "No, if they let me pass, that is good. If not, I will wait for you in the bus." To her, it was what she lived **every day**. I saw injustice, degradation, and humiliation.

The Palestinian Christians in the little town of Bethlehem do not waste time and energy on what is wrong or unfair in their lives. Their motto — "**to have life and to have it abundantly**" — is where they keep their focus. They can find hope in the midst of persecution, peace in the midst of chaos, and love in all that they do.

I look to the persecuted, isolated Christians in Bethlehem to inspire me and I long for their faith that is strong, unwavering, and full of hope and love. We do not know what is ahead for any of us. As scripture says, "***No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him***". (1 Cor. 2:9)

The Palestinian Christians know that they are loved by God. They are living witnesses of the love, grace and mercy of God each day.

My prayer is that we all can have the faith of our brothers and sisters who live in Bethlehem.

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