EXPERIENCE

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Where The Story Began



WHERE FAITH & TRADITIONS MEET!

Discover timeless traditions, warm hospitality, and the magic of Christmas.

Issue NO.6

travel Palestine

Christmas Message from the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities

Palestine: Where the Christmas Story Began!

As we celebrate the joyous season of Christmas, we extend our warmest greetings from Palestine, the land where the Christmas story began and where its timeless message of peace, love, and hope continues to inspire the world.

Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, stands as a symbol of faith and spiritual heritage. Its ancient churches, historic streets, and cherished traditions reflect a living story that has connected generations of pilgrims and visitors from across the globe.

Christmas in Palestine is more than a religious celebration. It is an expression of our rich cultural identity, enduring traditions, and the warmth of Palestinian hospitality. From the sacred Church of the Nativity to the historic streets of Bethlehem, every corner invites visitors to discover

A unique blend of history, spirituality, and authentic experiences.
As we look toward a future of peace and renewed hope, we invite pilgrims, travelers, and friends from around the world to visit Palestine, explore its remarkable heritage, connect with its people, and support the communities that keep these traditions alive.

This Christmas, come to Palestine. Walk through history, experience our hospitality, and discover the land where the story began.

May this Christmas bring peace, hope, and joy to all.

Hani Al Hayek,
Minister of Tourism and Antiquities.





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St. Catherine's Church!

Where History, Faith, and Christmas Come Together.

Adjacent to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, St. Catherine's Church stands as a remarkable symbol of centuries of Christian faith and pilgrimage. Dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, the church is part of the Franciscan complex and holds a special place in Bethlehem's Christmas celebrations.

The present church was rebuilt in 1882, incorporating architectural remains from earlier Byzantine and Crusader periods. In 1948, restoration work by renowned Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi further enhanced its historic character.

Inside, a beautiful stained-glass window depicting the Nativity, installed in 2000, adds color and spiritual beauty to the sacred space.

St. Catherine's Church is especially significant during Christmas, as it hosts the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass on December 24, a celebration followed by worshippers around the world. Renovations in 2013 helped accommodate larger congregations during thisimportant occasion.

Today, the church continues to welcome pilgrims and visitors, offering a meaningful connection to Bethlehem's rich Christian heritage and living traditions.

A visit to St. Catherine's Church is an invitation to experience the enduring spirit of Christmas in the city where the story began.




Don de la Religieuse 1936


TOTA PULCHRA ES MARIA
dreamstime

Experience the Nativity Scene Through Artworks!

The International Nativity Museum is one of the unique thematic museums in Palestine which have their own style and charm. It is located at the core of the Old City of Bethlehem, along the historic Star Street. Originally, it was an orphanage built by the Salesian father Don Antonio Belloni in 1864, then was turned by the Salesian fathers into a museum. It was appreciated and promoted by the UNESCO, and has been sustained by the Palestinian Authority and the Italian Government. This amazing museum is still a hidden gem to be explored not only by tourists, but also by many of the local inhabitants.

The museum is a lovely experience at any time of the year, especially at Christmas time. You can imagine living the experience at the land of the nativity. You can enjoy exploring and admiring more than 300 nativity crèches. It houses art pieces of all sizes, shapes and materials. Some are made locally of Olive wood and mother of pearl, others of copper, ebony and other materials, and are gifted by local and foreign artists, mostly Italians. Its centrepiece is a pictograph diorama of twenty scenes of the Nativity story.



Once you enter the museum, you feel the magic, the warmth and holiness of the place. Wandering from room to another, experiencing the beautiful pieces of art, while listening to classical music, makes time stop for a while taking you back hundreds of years. The authentic architecture of the museum building also adds to the charm of the place, and to its historical value.

When visiting Bethlehem, or celebrating Christmas in Bethlehem, don't miss this unique place; but make sure to make a prior booking as the museum is mostly open upon demand. (Tel: (02) – 2742421/ (02) – 2747161).
www.salesianbethlehem.com http://www.salesianbethlehem.com/museum.html







The Soul of Palestinian Craftsmanship!

Where Tradition Comes to Life.

In Palestine, craftsmanship is not simply something made by hand—it is a story, a memory, and a living connection to the land.

From the delicate stitches of Tatreez to the intricate carving of olive wood, from handmade pottery to traditional weaving, Palestinian crafts reflect generations of creativity, patience, and pride. Each pattern, texture, and shape carries a piece of the place where it was created.

Tatreez tells stories through color and motif. Olive wood transforms one of Palestine's oldest symbols—the olive tree—into lasting works of art. Pottery and weaving preserve techniques that have been passed from one generation to another, keeping traditions alive while allowing them to evolve.

For travelers, discovering these crafts offers a glimpse into a Palestine that cannot be found in a guidebook. It means stepping into a workshop, meeting the hands behind the craft, listening to stories, and seeing how heritage becomes part of everyday life.

Because the most meaningful souvenirs are not simply things we take home. They are the stories we remember, the people we meet, and the moments that stay with us.

Beyond the Souvenir

Meet the maker. Hear the story. Experience the tradition.
Take a piece of Palestine with you.


Virgin Mary
And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
Luke 1:38
BANDURA





Shepherds' Field Church – Orthodox!

Where the Christmas Story Echoes Through Time.

Just east of Bethlehem, in the town of Beit Sahour, lies the Orthodox Shepherds' Field—a sacred place closely associated with one of the most cherished moments of the Christmas story.

According to Christian tradition, it was here that shepherds received the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The site invites visitors to journey through centuries of faith and Christian heritage. At its heart is the Grotto of the Shepherds, an ancient rock-hewn cave transformed into a place of worship. Its floor preserves traces of mosaics dating to the early Christian period, while archaeological discoveries throughout the site reveal remains associated with Byzantine-era churches, monasteries, and Christian communities.

Nearby stands the Orthodox Church of the Shepherds, distinguished by its richly painted Byzantine-style icons and murals depicting biblical scenes and the story of Christ's Nativity.

During the Christmas season, Shepherds' Field takes on a particularly meaningful atmosphere. Here, only a short distance from Bethlehem, visitors can reflect on the message proclaimed to the shepherds centuries ago—a message of peace, hope, and joy.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace..." — Luke 2:14




ΠΑΝΤΑ ΤΑ ἜΘΝΗ ΚΡΟΤΗΣΑΤΕ ΧΕΙΡΑΣ ΕΠΙΠΑΛΑΙΣΑΤΕ ΤΩ ΘΕΩ
ΕΠΙ ΦΑΝΗ
Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ

Bethlehem: Where Christmas Renews Hope

Bethlehem, the city revered as the birthplace of Jesus Christ, comes alive with joy, faith, and the richness of its heritage during the Christmas season. Manger Square glows beneath its towering Christmas tree, while the streets and historic alleys fill with festive celebrations, bringing together spiritual devotion and the city's rich cultural traditions.

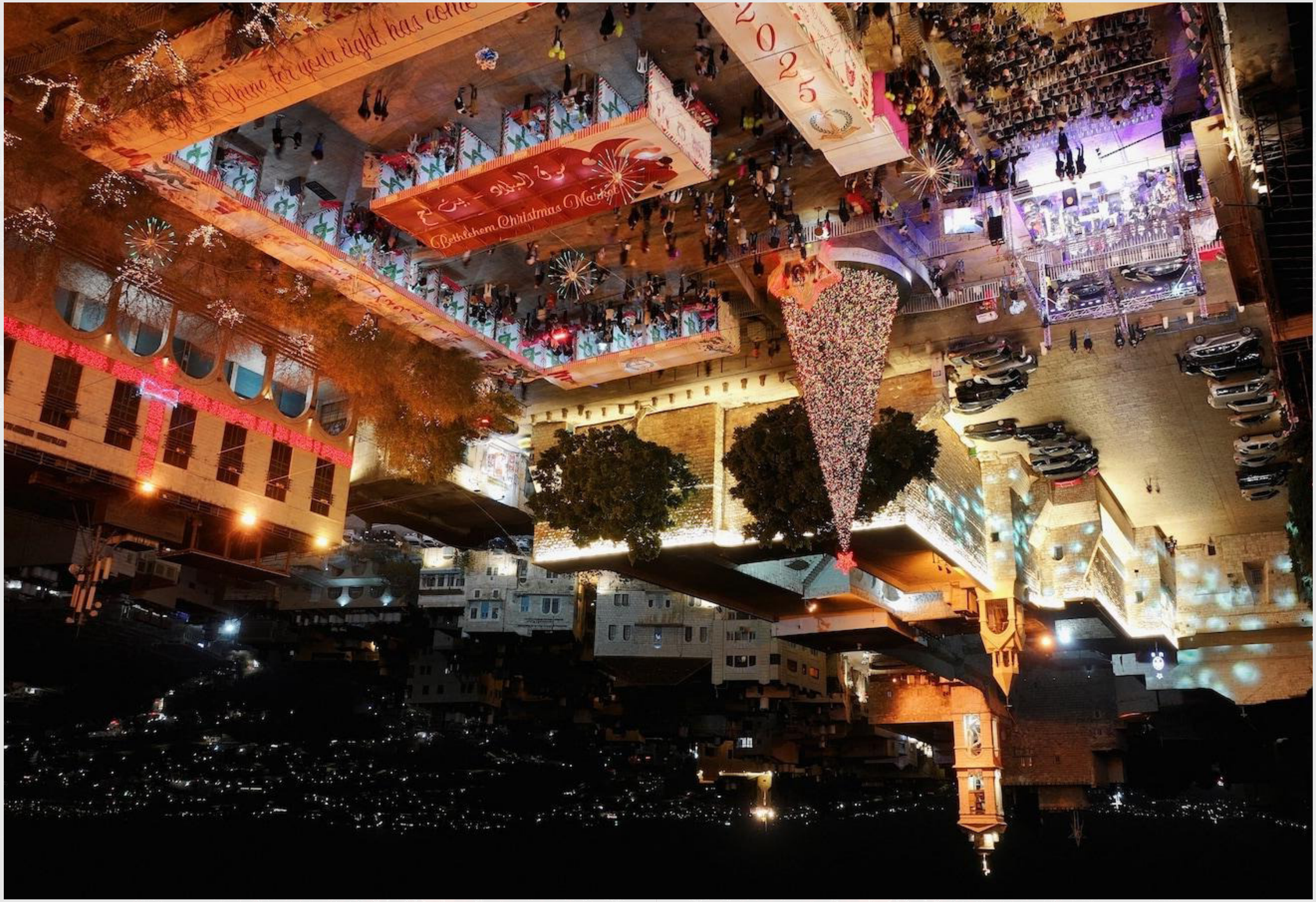
One of Bethlehem's most distinctive features is its Christmas season, celebrated on three different dates according to the calendars followed by its Christian communities. Western Christian celebrations begin on December 24, followed by Greek Orthodox celebrations on January 6 and Armenian celebrations on January 18.

Among the season's most moving moments is the solemn procession of the Patriarch along historic Star Street, traditionally associated with the route taken by the Holy Family on their way to Bethlehem. Accompanied by the melodies of scout bands and the rhythmic beating of drums, the procession draws residents and visitors who gather to welcome its arrival at the Church of Saint Catherine and the Basilica of the Nativity. During the Christmas liturgy, the statue of the Infant Jesus is carried in a solemn procession to the Grotto of the Nativity, symbolically commemorating the birth of Christ.

Beyond its religious ceremonies, Christmas in Bethlehem is a celebration of resilience, hope, and coexistence, bringing Christians and Muslims together in a shared appreciation of the city's heritage. The festivities also breathe life into traditional markets and showcase the craftsmanship of local artisans, particularly those who create the city's renowned olive-wood works.

More than a seasonal celebration, Christmas in Bethlehem offers a profound spiritual and cultural experience, welcoming visitors from around the world to a city whose enduring message of faith, hope, and peace continues to inspire generations.




Bethlehem Christmas Market
2025



Saint Barbara: Where Faith Meets Tradition!

Every December, Palestinian Christian communities commemorate Saint Barbara, celebrating a beloved custom that brings together faith, heritage, and family.

According to Christian tradition, Saint Barbara lived during the third century AD and remained steadfast in her faith despite persecution, becoming a symbol of courage, devotion, and perseverance. Over generations, her story has become deeply woven into local customs, transforming her feast day into an occasion that honors both spiritual significance and cultural heritage.

One of the most beloved traditions is the preparation of “Barbara”, a sweet dish made from boiled wheat and garnished with pomegranate seeds, raisins, nuts, and spices. Shared among family, friends, and neighbors, this traditional treat reflects the warmth, generosity, and togetherness at the heart of Palestinian hospitality.

Today, Saint Barbara’s Day remains a treasured part of Palestine’s living Christian heritage, where faith, food, and family traditions continue to connect generations and enrich the Christmas season.



The Wise Men Follow The Star

From Shepherds' Field to the Heart of Bethlehem

Experience Christmas where the story began, journeying through sacred places that have inspired generations of pilgrims and visitors.

Where the Good News Was Announced

The journey begins at Shepherds' Field in Beit Sahour, where an angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds watching over their flocks.

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." — Luke 2:11

Following the Story to Bethlehem

Following in the footsteps of the shepherds, visitors continue toward Bethlehem, discovering how the Nativity has shaped the city's spiritual and cultural identity, making it a destination for pilgrims and visitors from around the world.

At the Heart of the Nativity

At the Church of the Nativity, enter through the historic Door of Humility and visit the Grotto of the Nativity, where a silver star marks the traditional birthplace of Jesus. Continue to St. Catherine's Church and the caves associated with St. Jerome.

A Story That Lives On

From Shepherds' Field to the Grotto of the Nativity, this journey brings the Christmas story to life through Bethlehem's sacred heritage and living traditions.

Come to Bethlehem, where the Christmas story began and its message of hope lives on.









Sebastia: Layers of Civilization!

Discover centuries of Palestinian heritage northwest of Nablus.

Northwest of Nablus, Sebastia invites visitors to explore a landscape shaped by centuries of history. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2026, this remarkable archaeological site preserves interconnected layers of civilisation, offering an extraordinary window into Palestine's past.

Sebastia dates back to the Bronze Age, with settlement continuing throughout the Iron Age. It later developed into a fortified Hellenistic settlement and, during the reign of Herod the Great in the early Roman period, was renamed Sebaste and underwent significant urban transformation. During the subsequent Roman period, the city continued to flourish, eventually attaining the status of a Roman colony under Emperor Septimius Severus. In the Byzantine era, Sebastia became an important episcopal centre, while the medieval period, particularly the Crusader era, further enriched its architectural, historical, and religious heritage.

What makes Sebastia exceptional is the opportunity to discover these historical chapters within a single archaeological site. Successive communities built amidst and above earlier settlements, leaving visible, physically connected traces of changing political, religious, and urban life. This remarkable continuity earned the site recognition under UNESCO's criterion (iii), reflecting its exceptional testimony to the civilisations that shaped it.

Yet this rich heritage is vulnerable. Weathering, erosion, vegetation growth, development pressures, and the ongoing conflict threaten its surviving remains. Protecting Sebastia is essential to preserving its historical significance and its potential for future research and discovery.

For visitors, Sebastia offers a meaningful encounter with Palestine's layered history—a place to explore, reflect, and appreciate the enduring connections between landscape, heritage, and community.





Experiencing Christmas in Bethlehem!

Where the Christmas Story Comes to Life.

Christmas in Bethlehem is unlike anywhere else in the world. In the city where Jesus Christ was born, the festive season brings together faith, history, vibrant traditions, and warm Palestinian hospitality, offering visitors an unforgettable experience.

The Christmas Tree Lighting: Manger Square comes alive with sparkling lights, Christmas carols, and joyful celebrations as the city's Christmas tree is illuminated

The Scout Parades: : Palestinian scout groups march through historic Star Street with colorful uniforms, drums, and bagpipes, creating one of Bethlehem's most cherished traditions.

The Patriarch's Arrival: On December 24, the ceremonial arrival of the Latin Patriarch marks a significant moment in Bethlehem's Christmas celebrations, accompanied by scout processions.

Christmas Markets: Explore festive stalls offering hand-carved olive wood, Palestinian embroidery, handmade gifts, and seasonal treats.

Midnight Mass: Experience the spiritual atmosphere of Christmas Eve at St. Catherine's Church, adjoining the Church of the Nativity.

A Taste of Bethlehem: : Discover local restaurants and traditional Palestinian cuisine, from musakhan and maqluba to freshly baked pastries and festive sweets, all served with warm Palestinian hospitality.

Living Traditions: Wander through Bethlehem's historic streets and discover the diverse Christmas customs of its Christian communities.

From joyful celebrations and delicious food to sacred moments and living traditions, Bethlehem offers more than a holiday—it offers a Christmas experience to remember.

This Christmas, come to Bethlehem, where the Christmas story began and its spirit lives on!





Experience a season of faith, living traditions, and Palestinian hospitality in bethlehem.

Civic Events!

Saturday, 28 November:

11:00 - Reception of the Most Reverend Father Francesco lelpo, Custos of the Holy Land on the Feast of St. Catherine - Manger Square.

13:00 — Annual Christmas Press Conference: Launch of the Christmas festivities and the 2026/2027 Christmas Message, organized by Bethlehem Municipality at Vienna Hall, Bethlehem Municipality.

Saturday, 28 November:

16:00- The First day of the Annual Christmas Market, which offers a variety of local and international Christmas foods, products, artworks and includes Christmas music performances and children's activities, organized by Bethlehem Municipality – Manger square.

Sunday, 29 November:

10:00- Festive Mass for the Feast of St. Catherine, attended by Father Francesco lelpo, Custos of the Holy Land-St Catherine's Church.

Sunday, 29 November:

10:00- The second day of the Annual Christmas Market, which offers a variety of local and international Christmas foods, products, artworks and includes Christmas music performances and children's activities, organized by Bethlehem Municipality – Manger square.

2-6/12/2026 Saint Elias Christmas market:

16:00 The opening of the second Annual Christmas Market, which offers a variety of local and International Christmas foods, products, artworks and includes Christmas music performances. children's activities, and giant puppets, organized bySaint Elias Hotel- Beit Sahour .

Saturday 12 December:

18:00- Beit Sahour Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, organized by Beit Sahour-Municipality, under the patronage of H.E President Mahmoud Abbas, President of Palestine.

Sunday, 13 December:

18:00- Beit Jala Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, organized by Beit Jala Municipality, under the patronage of H.E President Mahmoud Abbas, President of Palestine.

17-20/12/2026 Catholic action Christmas Land:

Catholic action Christmas land 2 a Christmas celebration for the whole family, which offers a variety of local and International Christmas foods, products, artworks and includes Christmas music performances and children's activities, organized by the Catholic action – Bethlehem

19/12/2026 Saint Nicolas Feast:

7:30 AM–1:00 PM: Divine Liturgy at Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, followed by festive scout parades through the streets of Beit Jala.

Peace Center: Children's Activities and Christmas Evening at the Bethlehem Peace Center, Manger Square.

Thursday, 24 December

11:00- Scouts parade in preparation for welcoming His Beatitude Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem from Star Street to Manger Square.

13:00-Reception of His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem - Manger Square.

23:45 The Pontifical Feast Mass is presided over His Beatitude Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, followed by procession to the nativity scene - St. Catherine's Parish Church.

December 29, 2026

Peace Center: Children's activity will be held at the Bethlehem Peace Center, Manger Square.

Monday, 5 January

11:30 Reception of the Most Reverend Father Francesco lelpo, Custos of the Holy Land on the Feast of Epiphany with the participation of scout troops, at Manger Square.

Wednesday, 6 January

08:30 - Reception of the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop His Eminence Mor Anthimos Jack Yacoub, the Patriarchal Vicar in Jerusalem, Jordan, and all the Holy Land Manger Square

09:30 - Reception of His Eminence Metropolitan Anba Antonious, Coptic Orthodox Bishop - Manger Square.

10:00 - The Epiphany Mass-St. Catherine's Parish Church.

11:00 - Reception of his Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch - Manger Square.

14:45 - Reception of His Grace Abuna Enbakom, Archbishop of Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Holy Land-Manger Square.

23:30 - Greek Orthodox Midnight Mass, headed by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch-Church of the Nativity.

Monday, 18 January:

11:00- Reception of His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem with the participation of scout troops - Manger Square.

Come and experience Christmas in Palestine—where faith, heritage, and the warmth of local communities bring the season to life.

