



SABEEL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2009

The Message of the Manger

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!' Luke 2:12-14

In the Christmas story, the sign for finding the Christ-child was this: He would be wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. There are three important messages that emanate from the manger:

1. God in Christ has become accessible. Jesus Christ was born in a manger making God approachable, reachable, and available to all people. This is the great sign of God's love.
2. The manger stands for a different kind of a Messiah. The seemingly contradictory sign that the Christ is lying in a manger does not bode well for the birth of a great leader who was supposed to come from the line and lineage of his great ancestor David. The manger is the way of meekness and humility, the way of sacrificial love, the way of nonviolence.
3. The Christ of the manger brings peace through justice and not through violence. Luke takes the titles that people attributed to Caesar – liberator, savior, lord, and god - and gives them to Jesus Christ. The contrast between the two figures, in the eyes of the world, was huge. For the early Christian community, and for us, Jesus Christ is the authentic Savior and Lord. Caesar brought peace through military means that were tremendously costly in terms of human life and property, and such peace is always shaky. Christ can bring peace through justice and love that when applied and practiced is more stable and permanent. This is what the Christian faith is about and that is why, from Christ to this day, many people have dared to defy the Caesars.

Reading the Christmas story through Palestinian eyes, and in light of our daily experience, is revealing. We live in the shadow of empire, of which the modern state of Israel is part. It is easy for Palestinians to contrast their oppressive situation under the Israeli occupation with people of Jesus' day who lived under the brutal occupation of the Romans with its daily oppression and humiliation.

Empire always talks about peace but its peace is false and temporary. Its peace is imposed and therefore an extension of its oppressive military power. It can never last because it is built on injustice. Israel's peace rhetoric is a mirage that quickly disappears and people are hit with the glaring reality of injustice, violence, and humiliation. Such peace cannot be trusted.

Christ's peace is built on justice and is acquired through nonviolence and love. It can be trusted. Therefore, the unjust and illegal Israeli occupation must come to an end. Doing justice to the Palestinians ensures the achievement of peace through justice. At this Christmas season we need to re-commit ourselves to the liberation that Christ brings; and to continue to walk the way of peace through justice and nonviolence.

**Sabeel wishes all its friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
May the message of the manger inspire our activities throughout the
coming year!**

Jerusalem, December 15, 2009