

# *Christmas in Bethlehem has been dimmed by war and restrictions*

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Bethlehem, December 25 (RHC)-- Christmas in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is far from the usual festive celebration this year, decorations and pilgrims are absent from the manger square, and the Church of Nativity stands largely empty.

For the second consecutive year, the holiday season is overshadowed by war, restrictions, and checkpoints, preventing even local Palestinians from entering the city.

Bethlehem's Christmas this year is filled with sorrow, reflecting the pain and suffering of our people, especially in Gaza where bloodshed continues as the world watches in silence.

Anton Salman, Mayor of Bethlehem said: "Bethlehem's message is clear; from the birthplace of Christ, we call on the world to act, end the suffering and bring peace to a land still yearning for justice."

Typically, Bethlehem looks lively during Christmas, welcoming thousands of tourists and pilgrims.

Christmas festivities have been cancelled this year in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, as Palestinian Christians join Muslims to protest the Israeli genocide in Gaza Strip.

However, this year, many Palestinians, including Christians from nearby cities, are unable to visit the city due to stringent restrictions.

Issa Thaljieh, Greek Orthodox Community Priest, Bethlehem, said: "When Christ was born in Bethlehem, the angels sang joyful hymns, but this Christmas is bleak and sorrowful with no tourists, as you can see, the atmosphere is very somber, and we pray every day for peace to prevail in the land of peace."

The restrictions have also slowed down the pace of daily life, so people here are trying to raise morale during these difficult times.

Alongside Palestinian Muslims, Palestinian Christians have also borne the brunt of the Israeli regime's genocidal campaign in the besieged Gaza Strip, including the bombing of Gaza's oldest church.

The city is under near lockdown, with no tourists or normal activity. The shadows of the war have imposed itself, not only on most holy city in Christianity, but the entirety of Palestine. In Bethlehem, the birthplace of the Christmas story, the holiday is not marked by celebration, but by somber reflection.

As war continues to cast its shadow and restrictions grow tighter, the city sent sends a clear message to the world. Christmas here is far from what it should be.

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