

HELP US

Open Bethlehem



Open Bethlehem



OPEN BETHLEHEM is both a film and a project that aims to bring the story of Bethlehem to millions around the world.

We are working to mobilize global engagement to keep Bethlehem accessible and to ensure that it remains a living example of an open, multi faith and multi ethnic Middle East.

Above all, we want to offer people an intimate look into the life of an iconic city that inspires great feelings of tenderness through Christmas carols and the story of the nativity, and one that is just as magical in real life.

Bethlehem is in grave danger today, yet we believe in our friends and in the goodwill of people and their creativity and we invite all those who care about Bethlehem to join us and bring their energy to help realize our vision.

**“OPEN BETHLEHEM IS A NON VIOLENT ATTEMPT TO SAVE A CITY
THAT BELONGS TO MANY IN THE WORLD.
IT IS UNCONSCIONABLE THAT BETHLEHEM SHOULD BE
ALLOWED TO DIE SLOWLY FROM
STRANGULATION.”**

Reverend Desmond Tutu
Bethlehem Ambassador

www.OpenBethlehem.org

The Film

OPEN BETHLEHEM is a cinematic diary of the film maker as she chronicles the building of the Israeli Wall in her home town of Bethlehem. The film spans ten momentous years in the life of Bethlehem, revealing a city of astonishing beauty and political strife under occupation.



The Film Maker

LEILA SANSOUR is an acclaimed film maker who has produced a number of feature documentaries and award winning shorts. She started her career as a director on Al Jazeera's leading documentary series, "Encounter in Exile", then moved on to produce two highly acclaimed independent features. She has worked as a freelance news producer for ITN news and as a consultant on several media projects with the UN and IFES.

She regularly publishes articles and speaks on issues related to the Middle East. Most importantly, Leila is the founder, CEO and spokesperson of OPEN BETHLEHEM.



Become a Citizen of Bethlehem

Visit www.OpenBethlehem.org



Raja
Shehadeh



Widad
Kawar



Salma
Yaqoob



Sir Vincent
Fean



Clare
Short



Irvine
Welsh



Dr Mary
King

Open Bethlehem aims to work further to facilitate exchanges between our ambassadors, both online and via gatherings in Bethlehem, to produce high quality multimedia packs so that our ambassadors can continue to educate the public and decision makers about the significance of Bethlehem and the challenges it faces today.

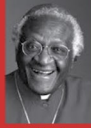
An important thing you should know!

By simply joining our network, you can help us become a stronger and more efficient operation. No matter how modest the contribution from a new ambassador is, it will allow us to continue our important work and it will encourage others to become ambassadors for Bethlehem, too. Help us grow our network!



How Can I Help?

Become a citizen of Bethlehem and join our network of Ambassadors!



Archbishop
Desmond Tutu



Malala
Yousafzai



Fadi
Ghandour



Mary Nazzal
Batayneh



President
Jimmy Carter



Patriarch
Michel Sabbah

Open Bethlehem invites viewers to become citizens of Bethlehem. Members of the public can apply to join the network and acquire a symbolic Bethlehem passport which constitutes a pledge to promote the city's interests and act as ambassadors.

The passport was developed by Open Bethlehem in partnership with the Bethlehem Governorate. It is a beautifully crafted object with the Star of Bethlehem and the image of St. George - Patron Saint of Palestine.

The passport was first launched in 2005 by film maker Leila Sansour and former mayor of Bethlehem, Dr. Victor Batarseh.



The Wall

One of the gravest developments in the city's recent history is the Israeli Wall. Construction of the Wall in and around Bethlehem has reduced the district to less than 13% of its original size, limiting it to its urban core. The Wall has severed the built-up areas from thousands of acres of surrounding agricultural land and water resources, as well as dividing its people from some of the most important historical landmarks and their families.



How Can I Help?

Visit Bethlehem

Bethlehem has been a tourist destination before tourism was even invented. For the past 2000 years, pilgrims from all over the world have travelled to Bethlehem in the footsteps of a star that promised Joy and Goodwill, and Bethlehem welcomed them all as it continues to do today.

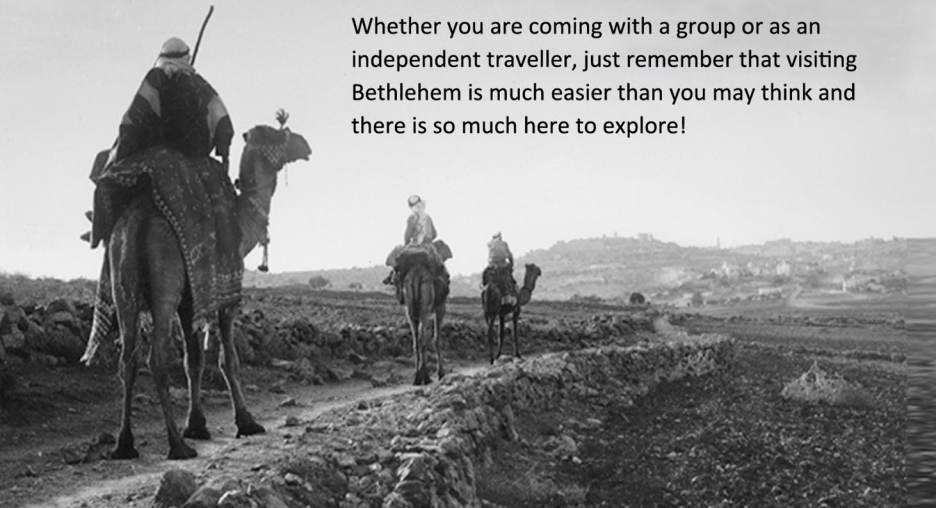
Almost one million tourists a year visit Bethlehem. Yet the vast majority of these visitors only come on whistle-stop tours of the Nativity Church which offer little opportunity to gain insight into the history of the city and the life and nature of its communities.

At Open Bethlehem, we are working to promote alternative travel programs organized by tour operators who offer a well-rounded experience of Bethlehem and the rest of Palestine.

Please visit our website and follow us on social media to get the latest on tours and travel information.

We also encourage you to help your community leaders and representatives to visit our city. Fact finding tours significantly change the way people perceive the situation on the ground. They turn people into better ambassadors and forge long lasting bonds that are essential to influence Bethlehem's future.

Whether you are coming with a group or as an independent traveller, just remember that visiting Bethlehem is much easier than you may think and there is so much here to explore!



Organize a Screening

The film gives those who cannot visit Bethlehem in person a second pair of eyes to experience a new reality from the comfort of their homes and cities. We hope that our appeal will move thousands of people to make a journey to Bethlehem but we also know that the film provides a unique opportunity to reach millions more, especially if we can rely on the support of our resourceful friends.

A nationwide survey of the United States commissioned by OPEN BETHLEHEM during the Christmas 2006 season revealed a startling lack of understanding about Bethlehem, its life today and even knowledge of its whereabouts. A considerable number of people seemed unsure about whether the biblical town existed in the first place.

This is why we invite you to help us spread the word. You can play a significant part in securing a bridge between Bethlehem and those who have the power to influence its future. Our aim is to screen the film in as many cities and communities across the globe as possible, and we cannot do this without your help.



Here are a few steps you can take to support our effort:

- Please recommend the film and invite your friends and those with influence in your community to your local screenings.
- Organize your own screening of the film at a local cinema, city hall, church, community or conference center or even a private residence.
- Buy DVDs of the film and send them to your friends and networks.
- Order the film for online viewing through our website and offer it to a friend.



About Bethlehem

Bethlehem is not only the birthplace of Jesus, but also an ancient town with a fascinating and diverse history and culture. It is three miles south of Jerusalem in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It is still possible to visit the cave that is believed to have provided shelter to the Holy Family on that first Christmas night and to celebrate Mass at the Church of the Nativity built on the site.

The Church of the Nativity was first commissioned in 327 AD by Emperor Constantine who made Christianity the official religion of Rome. It is one of the oldest churches in the world. Today the Church and its pilgrimage route are a World Heritage Site recognized by UNESCO.

Bethlehem is no longer just a 'little town' but a vibrant city, comprising Christian and Muslim communities who have both contributed to the city's cultural and spiritual life for centuries. Both share the same national identity and take huge pride in their traditions and aspirations as Palestinians.

Today, the Christian population of Bethlehem is experiencing a critical decline due to a very high rate of emigration precipitated by an unstable economy and political strife. The town has lived under Israeli occupation since 1967. Following Israeli invasions in 2001 and 2002, Bethlehem lost 10% of its Christian population as more than 300 families left the city.

This is a serious threat to Palestine's mixed heritage and a challenge to a society that has celebrated diversity for centuries.



Project Open Bethlehem – The Organization

OPEN BETHLEHEM exists to promote support for a free and open Bethlehem, within a vibrant and sovereign Palestine, through the use of digital multimedia strategies alongside targeted audience outreach programs.

OPEN BETHLEHEM advocates for the removal of the Israeli Wall that stifles Bethlehem and its population. We operate with a deep sense of duty towards Bethlehem's heritage and take pride in the city's legacy as home to diverse and ancient communities that have shaped Bethlehem's life throughout the ages.

We believe that Bethlehem can play a significant role as a model for the region, and our organization works to ensure that the city remains an international hub with global links and a global outlook.

Donate

We want to bring the story of Bethlehem to millions of people around the world and gain thousands of ambassadors for the city. Your donations will help us spend less time fundraising and more time doing what we know best, bringing the story of Bethlehem to those who might be able to influence its future.

Please Donate Today!
www.OpenBethlehem.org



"I strongly recommend this film, it will not just inform you about the tragedies of Bethlehem but will inspire you, by the courage of Leila and her friends, to believe in yourself and your voice and become part of this movement."

Malala Yousafzai: youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate

"The mission of Open Bethlehem has a poignant resonance for the Middle East today. This is why I am so proud to receive a Bethlehem passport. As an Israeli Jew and a historian of the Arab-Israeli conflict, I warmly recommend this documentary to anyone interested in the Palestine question. I was moved to tears by this beautiful film."

Avi Shlaim, Author of "The Iron Wall"

"Open Bethlehem is an admirable project."

President Jimmy Carter



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