



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Reflections from the Holy Land: A different Christmas



In his end-of-year message, Sami El-Yousef, CEO of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, shares his reflections on Christmas in the Holy Land: out of the darkness of conflict, Christmas is now a sign of renewed hope for a rebirth of Justice and Peace for all.

Sami El-Yousef wrote in particular: « There was great hope when the ceasefire was declared in Gaza about two months ago that the war ended and we are on a path to a peaceful resolution (...)».

Sami goes on to explain how the local community is actively committed to continuing to live, sustained by hope: «Despite the relatively bleak situation on the ground, there is room for hope if we consider the work that we are involved in. Our religious brothers and sisters have never been busier spreading faith whether through active parish life and activities involving the faithful of all ages or through more structured programs offered through the Spiritual formation center and the combined Bailasan and family center or through the catechetical and liturgical offices. Nothing other than faith formation, whether formal or informal, will lead our people to develop the hope that is needed to be able to continue to live in our conflict-ridden region. Visits to various schools where the Christian value set filters through to our 19,000 students across the region served by 44 schools, with the lived interfaith experience where dialogue, tolerance, coexistence, forgiveness are the key values lived (...)». Significant practical help has been provided by Patriarch Pizzaballa: «Also of special mention is the decision of His Beatitude Cardinal Pizzaballa to forgive millions of dollars of old tuition debts accumulated on all students in our schools in the spirit of the Jubilee Year bringing relief to thousands of suffering families. You bet that collectively we are making a huge difference through our education pillar to make the Holy Land a better place for all its people (...)».

Finally, Sami bears witness to the joy of the people at the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace: «This Christmas is certainly different! For the first time since 2022, Christmas trees are being lit again in the main squares of most cities, towns and villages. Christmas markets are springing up almost everywhere as well as concerts and performances. There is even a Christmas tree decorated in the Holy Family parish in Gaza! The spirit is certainly back. We see small groups of pilgrims returning to show their solidarity and experience the charm of the Holy places and strengthen their own faith. The economic wheel on the West Bank is starting to move again. While everyone feels it will be a long and difficult road, there is hope that the Christmas season will bring its own magic to our suffering people. Our prayers continue that the wheel that started turning will lead to real peace that is much needed for all people living in this Holy Land and genuinely call it home whether Moslem, Jewish or Christian.»

In conclusion, Sami El-Yousef shares his best wishes: «Please accept my warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May 2026 be the year that will truly translate the magic of the season to a lasting Justice and Peace!».

Livia Passalacqua

(Decembrer 2025)