

BEIT JALA JOURNAL



John Setterlund, missionary
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Hosanna in Excelsis

Palm Sunday was observed March 16 by the Catholic and Protestant churches with a procession on the Mount of Olives. The crowd, larger than I remember from last year, gathered at the church in Bethphage, a village on the east side of the hill. Musicians from many nations led us in joyful singing while we waited for clergy marshals, flag bearers, and scout troops to assemble and begin the procession. We moved slowly to the top of the ridge, where you get your first view of the Old City, then down the narrow path past the Garden of Gethsemane, across the Kidron Valley, into the Old City.

The day was bright and warm, and the crowd blessed with good spirits. Despite several delays due to heavy traffic, the symbolic significance of the event was felt by everyone—especially in the songs and prayers for peace and deliverance from oppression. Finally at St. Anne's Church, which marks the birthplace of the Virgin Mary, inside St. Stephen's Gate, we gathered for more music by a local ensemble, concluding in time to catch the bus back home. ■



The procession of palms assembles in Bethphage



Palm Sunday pilgrims approaching the Old City

Count-Down

My work in Beit Jala will conclude in June, and I will return to the US. I have enjoyed my almost-two years here, especially the warm hospitality shown by so many members of the community and by the children and staff of the boarding home where I have been living. I will miss them. Living in this Holy Land is truly fascinating, and it has been great to host visitors. At the same time, I look forward to reconnecting with family and friends "back home". ■

Thanks

During the recent weeks of unrest in Palestine, I received many letters of concern. And I am sincerely grateful for these expressions of support, and of the flood of prayers that uphold the people of this troubled land. We have remained safe, although there have been audible incidents of gunfire in Bethlehem just 2 km away. As long as the cycles of violence, oppression, and retribution continue, a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine situation seems remote. ■

Easter Celebration

Our congregation, like millions of others around the world, had a joyful, festive worship service on Easter Sunday, March 23. Orthodox churches, however, will mark the Lord's resurrection on April 27, according to a slightly different calendar. So the Easter season is really long in the Holy Land.

The church in Beit Jala was completely filled, including visitors from Europe, Canada and Israel. Five languages were used: Arabic, Coptic, German, English, and Greek.

The church choir sang, and was assisted by a dozen instrumentalists. And the congregational singing was especially rousing. After the 2-hour service, colored eggs were distributed to all the children. A dinner of roast lamb was served on the patio to hotel guests and staff. ■

Jerusalem:

THE EAST SIDE STORY

This new 57-minute video documents the systematic appropriation of Jerusalem by Israel during the past 40 years, and the resulting pressures upon the inhabitants of the city.

Mohammed Alatar has researched the anti-Arab policies imposed in East Jerusalem, which until 1967 was part of Jordan. Interviewed are several Israeli and Palestinian leaders, including our Lutheran bishop, Rev. Munib Younan. ■