

Christmas Canceled in Bethlehem?

In an unprecedented move, Bethlehem's annual Christmas display has been canceled by Palestinian authorities "in honor of Hamas martyrs" amidst the ongoing conflict with Israel.

The Bethlehem Municipality officially announced plans to forego the traditional Christmas tree and festive decorations in Manger Square, a site adorned with Christmas cheer since the inception of modern celebrations of the season.

This marks the first instance since 1988, during the first Intifada, that the iconic birthplace of Jesus Christ will be devoid of Christmas decorations.

Officials cited solidarity with their compatriots in Gaza and reverence for the fallen as the reasons behind scrapping the usual plans. While the traditional Christmas mass and prayers will proceed, the city will lack its customary Christmas tree and festive lights.

Additional plans for the festive period are anticipated to be disclosed in the coming days.

"The reason is the general situation in Palestine; people are not really into any celebration, they are sad, angry and upset," a spokesperson explained. "Our people in Gaza are being massacred and killed in cold blood. Therefore, it is not appropriate at all to have such festivities while there is a massacre happening in Gaza and attacks in the West Bank."

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This year, Bethlehem, typically a bustling tourist destination

in the lead-up to Christmas, seeks to convey a message of condolence and mourning rather than celebration. Pilgrims and tourists, who usually flock to Manger Square and the Church of the Nativity, will find a quieter atmosphere this year.

The Church of the Nativity, recognized as the birthplace of Jesus and a UNESCO World Heritage site, holds profound religious significance for Christians worldwide. Originally associated with Jesus since the fourth century AD, the existing church dates back to the sixth century AD.

Since the initiation of Hamas' attack on Israel and the ensuing war, Bethlehem has experienced a marked decrease in its usual Christmas cheer. The region has remained quieter than usual, reflecting the somber mood that has settled over the town.

The conflict between Israel and Hamas erupted on Oct. 7, triggered by the terrorist group's breaking of the ceasefire in place that resulted in the death of approximately 1,200 people and the capture of at least 240 individuals. {eo}

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