



BOOK OF THE MONTH

A Guide to Bethlehem and the Holy Land

By Dr. Qustandi Shomali and Sawsan Shomali
Rai House of Art, Beit Jala, October 2014,
170 pages, 175 pictures, \$10.00

Reviewed by Magdouline Salameh



Few towns in the world have such a joyous history or exalted status as that of Bethlehem. A place so holy is surely a treasure that all humanity should be proud of and seek to protect. Thus the handy *Guide to Bethlehem and the Holy Land* is the ideal book since it relates the history of Bethlehem and points out a wealth of memorable details, conveying the spell that Bethlehem has cast for centuries on the human mind.

Bethlehem has always been able to attract innumerable pilgrims and tourists of various nationalities and beliefs. Moreover, it has evolved to meet the needs of both the local population and visitors. Modern developments safeguard the town's original features. It is still a unique holy city, cherished and treasured by thousands of people not only at Christmas but all year round. Pilgrimage to Bethlehem is important to the Palestinians not only as a boost to the economic sector but also as an important way of presenting our country to the outside world. Furthermore, pilgrimage is a ritual that cuts across and transcends cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries.

A Guide to Bethlehem and the Holy Land is a humble attempt by Prof. Qustandi Shomali and his wife Sawsan to bring to each visitor – through pictures and text – the most important sites of Bethlehem in particular and the Holy Land in general. It was funded by Caritas Jerusalem, and the income it generates will be used for charitable purposes. The book includes such chapters as the History of Bethlehem,

Bethlehem Today, the Church of the Nativity, Sites around Bethlehem, the Desert Monasteries, Museums, Handicrafts, and General Information. It also includes historical and archaeological information on sites in Jerusalem, Jericho, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Jenin, and Gaza within a comprehensive religious and cultural context. The book has been developed in accordance with the goals of cultural tourism and is designed to cover the socio-cultural aspects of the local community to better convey the current situation. It aims to deepen the visitor's understanding of the lives of the Palestinian people.

The authors did their best to provide accurate, well-organised information, brief and interesting explanations, important facts, and practical advice on how to walk through Bethlehem and other cities in the Holy Land. The "hip pocket" format of the book is very convenient for tourists, as is the location of the two key maps of Bethlehem and the West Bank. In a way that beautifully supports the text, the photos show the town of Bethlehem at its best. But that is what a guidebook is supposed to do! In addition to its usefulness as a text to read in preparation for a trip to the Holy Land, it also works well as an on-the-spot handbook for a person walking the streets or as a reference for the tourist in a hotel room who needs to plan the next day's activities. The general style of presentation has a flow that is natural and clear. The use of colour on the edges of the pages makes this guide not only attractive but user-friendly as well.