

**AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR BETHLEHEM**  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**Simulcast Between National Cathedral and the People of Bethlehem**  
**followed by a Procession Led by Mary and Joseph with Donkey**  
**Event on December 22, 2007**

In Washington, D.C. on December 22, 2007- Christians from the land of Jesus' birth will participate in a simulcast worship service between Bethlehem Chapel at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. and the people of Bethlehem. A specially prepared service will be enjoyed in unison by Christians here and Christians in Bethlehem, though physically apart, together in spirit. A procession led by pregnant Mary and Joseph in traditional garb, with a donkey will follow the service. The re-enactment of the pilgrimage that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem 2000 years ago will shed light on the dire situation of Bethlehem's residents today.

This first ever simulcast between the National Cathedral and Bethlehem will reflect not only the joyous season, but the fervent desire for better days ahead in the land where Jesus was born. The Rev. Canon John L. Peterson, Canon for Global Justice and Reconciliation at the National Cathedral and Rev. Doctor Mitri Raheb, Pastor of Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem will offer interdenominational services. The Right Rev. John Bryson Chane, Episcopal Bishop of Washington will participate as well.

Every Christmas, Palestinian Christians from all over the Holy Land come together at the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square built over the manger where Jesus Christ was born. Today, the joy of Christmas in Bethlehem is overshadowed by great suffering, forced displacement and growing poverty caused by a 30-foot-high concrete wall that is being constructed around the city. Palestinian Christians who desire to travel to Bethlehem for Christmas are stopped at the entrance to the ancient city by the wall. They cannot freely enter nor can their brothers, sisters and neighbors on the other side of the wall freely exit. The Israeli military occupation stifles every aspect of life for the residents of Bethlehem today.

Both Palestinian Christians and Muslims are seriously restricted. Many, especially Christians, are emigrating from Bethlehem. Just since 2000, more than 400 Christian families have left the area. **While Christians comprised almost 20% of the population of the Holy Land in the early 1900s, they make up only 2% of the population today.**

If these conditions persist, the indigenous Christians in the land of Christ's birth itself will be at risk of disappearing entirely. In the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, "It's a sobering thought that we might live to see the last native Christian believers in the region."<sup>1</sup>

The simulcast service at the Bethlehem Chapel of the Washington National Cathedral will begin at 10:00 a.m. The procession will follow at 10:30 a.m. beginning at Woodley Road next to the Cathedral. Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace and Sharing Jerusalem are co-sponsors of the event.

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For further information, please contact: Reverend Susan P. Wilder (703) 913-5913 or (703) 798-9584. A live webcast can be accessed at [www.nationalcathedral.org](http://www.nationalcathedral.org). To reach The Rev. Canon John L. Peterson at the Cathedral call (202) 537-6248.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article1264095.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article1264095.ece)