

= Bethlehem =

Bethlehem (Arabic : بيت لحم Bayt Lahm Arabic pronunciation : [beʔt.laʔm] ; " House of Meat " , Bʔt Laʔm ; Hebrew : בית לחם Bet Lehem , Modern : Bet Lehem [bet ʔleʔem] , lit . " House of Bread " ; Ancient Greek : βηθλεέμ [bʔʔtʔle.ém] ; Latin : Bethleem) is a Palestinian city located in the central West Bank , Palestine , about 10 km (6 @.@ 2 miles) south of Jerusalem . Its population is approximately 25 @,@ 000 people . It is the capital of the Bethlehem Governorate . The economy is primarily tourist @-@ driven .

The earliest known mention of the city was in the Amarna correspondence of 1350 ? 1330 BCE during its habitation by the Canaanites . The Hebrew Bible , which says that the city of Bethlehem was built up as a fortified city by Rehoboam , identifies it as the city David was from and where he was crowned as the king of Israel . The New Testament identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus . Bethlehem was destroyed by the Emperor Hadrian during the second @-@ century Bar Kokhba revolt ; its rebuilding was promoted by Empress Helena , mother of Constantine the Great , who commissioned the building of its great Church of the Nativity in 327 CE . The church was badly damaged by the Samaritans , who sacked it during a revolt in 529 , but was rebuilt a century later by Emperor Justinian I .

Bethlehem became part of Jund Filastin following the Muslim conquest in 637 . Muslim rule continued in Bethlehem until its conquest in 1099 by a crusading army , who replaced the town 's Greek Orthodox clergy with a Latin one . In the mid @-@ 13th century , the Mamluks demolished the city 's walls , which were subsequently rebuilt under the Ottomans in the early 16th century . Control of Bethlehem passed from the Ottomans to the British at the end of World War I. Bethlehem came under Jordanian rule during the 1948 Arab @-@ Israeli War and was later captured by Israel in the 1967 Six @-@ Day War . Since the 1995 Oslo Accords , Bethlehem has been administered by the Palestinian Authority .

Bethlehem now has a Muslim majority , but is still home to a significant Palestinian Christian community . Bethlehem 's chief economic sector is tourism , which peaks during the Christmas season when Christians make pilgrimage to the Church of the Nativity , as they have done for almost 2 @,@ 000 years . Bethlehem has over 30 hotels and 300 handicraft workshops . Rachel 's Tomb , an important Jewish holy site , is located at the northern entrance of Bethlehem .

= = History = =

= = = Canaanite period = = =

The earliest reference to Bethlehem appears in the Amarna correspondence (c . 1400 BCE) . In one of his six letters to Pharaoh , Abdi @-@ Heba , Egypt 's governor for Jerusalem , appeals for aid in retaking " Bit @-@ Lahmi " in the wake of disturbances by Apiru mercenaries. employed by his rivals : " now even a town near Jerusalem , Bit @-@ Lahmi by name , a village which once belonged to the king , has fallen to the enemy . . . Let the king hear the words of your servant Abdi @-@ Heba , and send archers to restore the imperial lands of the king ! "

It is thought that the similarity of this name to its modern forms indicates that this was a settlement of Canaanites who shared a Semitic cultural and linguistic heritage with the later arrivals . Lachmo was the Chaldean god of fertility , worshipped by the Canaanites as Lachama . Some time in the 3rd millennium BCE , they erected a temple to worship the god on the hill now known as the Hill of the Nativity . The town was known as Beit Lachama , meaning " House of Lachama . " The Philistines later established a garrison there . William F. Albright notes that the pronunciation of the name remained essentially the same for 3 @,@ 500 years , but has meant different things : " ' Temple of the God Lakhmu ' in Canaanite , ' House of Bread ' in Hebrew and Aramaic , ' House of Meat ' in Arabic . "

A burial ground discovered in spring 2013 , and surveyed in 2015 by a joint Italian @-@ Palestinian team found that the necropolis covered 3 hectares (more than 7 acres) and originally contained

more than 100 tombs in use between roughly 2200 B.C. and 650 B.C. The archaeologists were able to identify at least 30 tombs .

= = = Israelite and Judean period = = =

Archaeological confirmation of Bethlehem as a city in the Kingdom of Judah was uncovered in 2012 at the archaeological dig at the City of David in the form of a bulla (seal impression in dried clay) in ancient Hebrew script that reads " From the town of Bethlehem to the King , " indicating that it was used to seal the string closing a shipment of grain , wine , or other goods sent as a tax payment in the 8th or 7th century BCE .

Biblical scholars believe Bethlehem , located in the " hill country " of Judah , may be the same as the Biblical Ephrath , which means " fertile " , as there is a reference to it in the Book of Micah as Bethlehem Ephratah . The Bible also calls it Beth @-@ Lehem Judah , and the New Testament describes it as the " City of David " . It is first mentioned in the Tanakh and the Bible as the place where the matriarch Rachel died and was buried " by the wayside " (Gen. 48 : 7) . Rachel 's Tomb , the traditional grave site , stands at the entrance to Bethlehem . According to the Book of Ruth , the valley to the east is where Ruth of Moab gleaned the fields and returned to town with Naomi . It was the home of Jesse , father of King David of Israel , and the site of David 's anointment by the prophet Samuel . It was from the well of Bethlehem that three of his warriors brought him water when he was hiding in the cave of Adullam .

Writing in the 4th century , the Pilgrim of Bordeaux reported that the sepulchers of David , Ezekiel , Asaph , Job , Jesse , and Solomon were located near Bethlehem . There has been no corroboration of this .

= = = Classical period = = =

After the Bar Kokhba revolt was crushed , Hadrian converted the Christian site above the Grotto into a shrine dedicated to the Greek god Adonis , to honour his favourite , the Greek youth Antinous . Some scholars hold the view that this site was one that had originally been dedicated to Adonis @-@ Tammuz and Christians had taken it over .

In 326 ? 328 , the empress Helena , consort of the emperor Constantius Chlorus , and mother of the emperor Constantine the Great , made a pilgrimage to Syra @-@ Palaestina , in the course of which she visited the ruins of Bethlehem . The empress promoted the rebuilding of the city , and Eusebius of Caesarea writes that she was responsible for the construction of the Church of the Nativity .

During the Samaritan revolt of 529 , Bethlehem was sacked and its walls and the Church of the Nativity destroyed ; they were rebuilt on the orders of the Emperor Justinian I. In 614 , the Persian Sassanid Empire , supported by Jewish rebels , invaded Palestina Prima and captured Bethlehem . A story recounted in later sources holds that they refrained from destroying the church on seeing the magi depicted in Persian clothing in a mosaic .

= = = Middle Ages = = =

In 637 , shortly after Jerusalem was captured by the Muslim armies , ' Umar ibn al @-@ Khattab , the second Caliph , promised that the Church of the Nativity would be preserved for Christian use . A mosque dedicated to Umar was built upon the place in the city where he prayed , next to the church . Bethlehem then passed through the control of the Islamic caliphates of the Umayyads in the 8th century , then the Abbasids in the 9th century . A Persian geographer recorded in the mid @-@ 9th century that a well preserved and much venerated church existed in the town . In 985 , the Arab geographer al @-@ Muqaddasi visited Bethlehem , and referred to its church as the " Basilica of Constantine , the equal of which does not exist anywhere in the country @-@ round . " In 1009 , during the reign of the sixth Fatimid Caliph , al @-@ Hakim bi @-@ Amr Allah , the Church of the Nativity was ordered to be demolished , but was spared by local Muslims , because they had been

permitted to worship in the structure 's southern transept .

In 1099 , Bethlehem was captured by the Crusaders , who fortified it and built a new monastery and cloister on the north side of the Church of the Nativity . The Greek Orthodox clergy were removed from their sees and replaced with Latin clerics . Up until that point the official Christian presence in the region was Greek Orthodox . On Christmas Day 1100 , Baldwin I , first king of the Frankish Kingdom of Jerusalem , was crowned in Bethlehem , and that year a Latin episcopate was also established in the town .

In 1187 , Saladin , the Sultan of Egypt and Syria who led the Muslim Ayyubids , captured Bethlehem from the Crusaders . The Latin clerics were forced to leave , allowing the Greek Orthodox clergy to return . Saladin agreed to the return of two Latin priests and two deacons in 1192 . However , Bethlehem suffered from the loss of the pilgrim trade , as there was a sharp decrease of European pilgrims . William IV , Count of Nevers had promised the Christian bishops of Bethlehem that if Bethlehem should fall under Muslim control , he would welcome them in the small town of Clamecy in present @-@ day Burgundy , France . As a result , the Bishop of Bethlehem duly took up residence in the hospital of Panthenor , Clamecy , in 1223 . Clamecy remained the continuous ' in partibus infidelium ' seat of the Bishopric of Bethlehem for almost 600 years , until the French Revolution in 1789 .

Bethlehem , along with Jerusalem , Nazareth , and Sidon , was briefly ceded to the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem by a treaty between Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II and Ayyubid Sultan al @-@ Kamil in 1229 , in return for a ten @-@ year truce between the Ayyubids and the Crusaders . The treaty expired in 1239 , and Bethlehem was recaptured by the Muslims in 1244 . In 1250 , with the coming to power of the Mamluks under Rukn al @-@ Din Baibars , tolerance of Christianity declined . Members of the clergy left the city , and in 1263 the town walls were demolished . The Latin clergy returned to Bethlehem the following century , establishing themselves in the monastery adjoining the Basilica of the Nativity . The Greek Orthodox were given control of the basilica and shared control of the Milk Grotto with the Latins and the Armenians .

= = = Ottoman era = = =

From 1517 , during the years of Ottoman control , custody of the Basilica was bitterly disputed between the Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches . By the end of the 16th century , Bethlehem had become one of the largest villages in the District of Jerusalem , and was subdivided into seven quarters . The Basbus family served as the heads of Bethlehem among other leaders during this period . The Ottoman tax record and census from 1596 indicates that Bethlehem had a population of 1 @,@ 435 , making it the 13th largest village in Palestine at the time . Its total revenue amounted to 30 @,@ 000 akce .

Bethlehem paid taxes on wheat , barley and grapes . The Muslims and Christians were organized into separate communities , each having its own leader . Five leaders represented the village in the mid @-@ 16th century , three of whom were Muslims . Ottoman tax records suggest that the Christian population was slightly more prosperous or grew more grain than grapes (the former being a more valuable commodity) .

From 1831 to 1841 , Palestine was under the rule of the Muhammad Ali Dynasty of Egypt . During this period , the town suffered an earthquake as well as the destruction of the Muslim quarter in 1834 by Egyptian troops , apparently as a reprisal for the murder of a favored loyalist of Ibrahim Pasha . In 1841 , Bethlehem came under Ottoman rule once again and remained so until the end of World War I. Under the Ottomans , Bethlehem 's inhabitants faced unemployment , compulsory military service , and heavy taxes , resulting in mass emigration , particularly to South America . An American missionary in the 1850s reported a population of under 4 @,@ 000 , nearly all of whom belonged to the Greek Church . He also noted that a lack of water crippled the town 's growth .

= = = Modern era = = =

Bethlehem was administered by the British Mandate from 1920 to 1948 . In the United Nations

General Assembly 's 1947 resolution to partition Palestine , Bethlehem was included in the special international enclave of Jerusalem to be administered by the United Nations . Jordan captured the city during the 1948 Arab @-@ Israeli War . Many refugees from areas captured by Israeli forces in 1947 ? 48 fled to the Bethlehem area , primarily settling in what became the official refugee camps of ' Azza (Beit Jibrin) and ' Aida in the north and Dheisheh in the south . The influx of refugees significantly transformed Bethlehem 's Christian majority into a Muslim one .

Jordan retained control of the city until the Six @-@ Day War in 1967 , when Bethlehem was captured by Israel , along with the rest of the West Bank . Following the Six @-@ Day War , Israel took control of the city . In 1995 , Israel turned it over to the Palestinian National Authority in accordance with the Oslo peace accord .

Today , the city is surrounded by two bypass roads for settlers , leaving the inhabitants squeezed between 37 Jewish enclaves , where a quarter of all West Bank settlers , roughly 170 @,@ 000 , live , and the gap between the two roads closed by the 8 @-@ metre high Israeli West Bank barrier , which cuts Bethlehem off from its sister city Jerusalem .

= = = = Palestinian control = = = =

On December 21 , 1995 , Israeli troops withdrew from Bethlehem , and three days later the city came under the complete administration and military control of the Palestinian National Authority in conformance with the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1995 . During the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 ? 2005 , Bethlehem 's infrastructure and tourism industry were damaged . In 2002 , it was a primary combat zone in Operation Defensive Shield , a major military counteroffensive by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) . During the counteroffensive , the IDF besieged the Church of the Nativity , where dozens of Palestinian militants had sought refuge . The siege lasted for 39 days . Several militants were killed . It ended with an agreement to exile 13 of the wanted militants to various foreign countries .

= = Geography = =

Bethlehem is located at an elevation of about 775 meters (2 @,@ 543 ft) above sea level , 30 meters (98 ft) higher than nearby Jerusalem . Bethlehem is situated on the southern portion in the Judean Mountains .

The city is located 73 kilometers (45 mi) northeast of Gaza City and the Mediterranean Sea , 75 kilometers (47 mi) west of Amman , Jordan , 59 kilometers (37 mi) southeast of Tel Aviv , Israel and 10 kilometers (6 @.@ 2 mi) south of Jerusalem . Nearby cities and towns include Beit Safafa and Jerusalem to the north , Beit Jala to the northwest , Husan to the west , al @-@ Khadr and Artas to the southwest , and Beit Sahour to the east . Beit Jala and the latter form an agglomeration with Bethlehem . The Aida and Azza refugee camps are located within the city limits .

In the center of Bethlehem is its old city . The old city consists of eight quarters , laid out in a mosaic style , forming the area around the Manger Square . The quarters include the Christian an @-@ Najajreh , al @-@ Farahiyeh , al @-@ Anatreh , al @-@ Tarajmeh , al @-@ Qawawsa and Hreizat quarters and al @-@ Fawaghreh ? the only Muslim quarter . Most of the Christian quarters are named after the Arab Ghassanid clans that settled there . Al @-@ Qawawsa Quarter was formed by Arab Christian emigrants from the nearby town of Tuqu ' in the 18th century . There is also a Syriac quarter outside of the old city , whose inhabitants originate from Midyat and Ma 'asarte in Turkey . The total population of the old city is about 5 @,@ 000 .

= = Climate = =

Bethlehem has a Mediterranean climate , with hot and dry summers and mild , wetter winters . Winter temperatures (mid @-@ December to mid @-@ March) can be cool and rainy . January is the coldest month , with temperatures ranging from 1 to 13 degree Celsius (33 ? 55 ° F) . From May through September , the weather is warm and sunny . August is the hottest month , with a high

of 30 degrees Celsius (86 ° F) . Bethlehem receives an average of 700 millimeters (28 in) of rainfall annually , 70 % between November and January .

Bethlehem 's average annual relative humidity is 60 % and reaches its highest rates between January and February . Humidity levels are at their lowest in May . Night dew may occur in up to 180 days per year . The city is influenced by the Mediterranean Sea breeze that occurs around mid @-@ day . However , Bethlehem is affected also by annual waves of hot , dry , sandy and dust Khamaseen winds from the Arabian Desert , during April , May and mid @-@ June .

= = Demographics = =

= = = Population = = =

According to Ottoman tax records , Christians made up roughly 60 % of the population in the early 16th century , while the Christian and Muslim population became equal by the mid @-@ 16th century . However , there were no Muslim inhabitants counted by the end of the century , with a recorded population of 287 adult male tax @-@ payers . Christians , like all non @-@ Muslims throughout the Ottoman Empire , were required to pay the jizya tax . In 1867 an American visitor describes the town as having a population of 3 @,@ 000 to 4 @,@ 000 ; of whom about 100 were Protestants , 300 were Muslims and " the remainder belonging to the Latin and Greek Churches with a few Armenians . " Another report from the same year puts the Christian population at 3 @,@ 000 , with an additional 50 Muslims . An 1885 source put the population at approximately 6 @,@ 000 of " principally Christians , Latins and Greeks " with no Jewish inhabitants .

In 1948 , the religious makeup of the city was 85 % Christian , mostly of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations , and 13 % Muslim . In the 1967 census taken by Israel authorities , the town of Bethlehem proper numbered 14 @,@ 439 inhabitants , its 7 @,@ 790 Muslim inhabitants represented 53 @.@ 9 % of the population , while the Christians of various denominations numbered 6 @,@ 231 or 46 @.@ 1 % .

In the PCBS 's 1997 census , the city had a population of 21 @,@ 670 , including a total of 6 @,@ 570 refugees , accounting for 30 @.@ 3 % of the city 's population . In 1997 , the age distribution of Bethlehem 's inhabitants was 27 @.@ 4 % under the age of 10 , 20 % from 10 to 19 , 17 @.@ 3 % from 20 ? 29 , 17 @.@ 7 % from 30 to 44 , 12 @.@ 1 % from 45 ? 64 and 5 @.@ 3 % above the age of 65 . There were 11 @,@ 079 males and 10 @,@ 594 females . In the 2007 PCBS census , Bethlehem had a population of 25 @,@ 266 , of which 12 @,@ 753 were males and 12 @,@ 513 were females . There were 6 @,@ 709 housing units , of which 5 @,@ 211 were households . The average household consisted of 4 @.@ 8 family members .

= = = Christian population = = =

After the Muslim conquest of the Levant in the 630s , the local Christians were Arabized as well even though large numbers were ethnically Arabs of the Ghassanid clans . Bethlehem 's two largest Arab Christian clans trace their ancestry to the Ghassanids , including al @-@ Farahiyyah and an @-@ Najajreh . The former have descended from the Ghassanids who migrated from Yemen and from the Wadi Musa area in present @-@ day Jordan and an @-@ Najajreh descend from Najran . Another Bethlehem clan , al @-@ Anatreh , also trace their ancestry to the Ghassanids .

The percentage of Christians in the town has been steadily declining over the years , primarily due to emigration . The lower birth rate of Christians also accounts for some of the decline . In 1947 , Christians made up 85 % of the population , but by 1998 the figure had declined to 40 % . In 2005 , the mayor of Bethlehem , Victor Batarseh explained that " due to the stress , either physical or psychological , and the bad economic situation , many people are emigrating , either Christians or Muslims , but it is more apparent among Christians , because they already are a minority . " The Palestinian Authority is officially committed to equality for Christians , although there have been incidents of violence against them by the Preventive Security Service and militant factions . The only

mosque in the Old City is the Mosque of Omar , located in the Manger Square .

The outbreak of the Second Intifada and the resulting decrease in tourism also affected the Christian minority , since they are the owners of many Bethlehem hotels and services that cater to foreign tourists . A statistical analysis of the Christian exodus cited lack of economic and educational opportunity , especially due to the Christians ' middle @-@ class status and higher education . Since the Second Intifada , 10 % of the Christian population have left the city .

In 2006 , the Palestinian Centre for Research and Cultural Dialogue conducted a poll among the city 's Christians according to which 90 % said they had had Muslim friends , 73 @.@ 3 % agreed that the PNA treated Christian heritage in the city with respect and 78 % attributed the exodus of Christians to the Israeli blockade . However , it is likely that there are many factors , most of which are shared with the Palestinian population as a whole .

= = Economy = =

Shopping is a major attraction , especially during the Christmas season . The city 's main streets and old markets are lined with shops selling Palestinian handicrafts , Middle Eastern spices , jewelry and oriental sweets such as baklava . Olive wood carvings are the item most purchased by tourists visiting Bethlehem . Religious handicrafts include ornaments handmade from mother @-@ of @-@ pearl , as well as olive wood statues , boxes , and crosses . Other industries include stone and marble @-@ cutting , textiles , furniture and furnishings . Bethlehem factories also produce paints , plastics , synthetic rubber , pharmaceuticals , construction materials and food products , mainly pasta and confectionery .

Cremisan Wine , founded in 1885 , is a winery run by monks in the Monastery of Cremisan . The grapes are grown mainly in the al @-@ Khader district . In 2007 , the monastery 's wine production was around 700 @,@ 000 liters per year .

In 2008 , Bethlehem hosted the largest economic conference to date in the Palestinian territories . It was initiated by Palestinian Prime Minister and former Finance Minister Salam Fayyad to convince more than a thousand businessmen , bankers and government officials from throughout the Middle East to invest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip . A total of 1 @.@ 4 billion US dollars was secured for business investments in the Palestinian territories .

= = = Tourism = = =

Tourism is Bethlehem 's main industry . Unlike other Palestinian localities prior to 2000 , the majority of the employed residents did not have jobs in Israel . More than 20 % of the working population is employed in the industry . Tourism accounts for approximately 65 % of the city 's economy and 11 % of the Palestinian National Authority . The city has more than two million visitors every year .

The Church of the Nativity is one of Bethlehem 's major tourist attractions and a magnet for Christian pilgrims . It stands in the center of the city ? a part of the Manger Square ? over a grotto or cave called the Holy Crypt , where Jesus is believed to have been born . Nearby is the Milk Grotto where the Holy Family took refuge on their Flight to Egypt and next door is the cave where St. Jerome spent thirty years creating the Vulgate , the dominant Latin version of the Bible until the Reformation .

There are over thirty hotels in Bethlehem . Jacir Palace , built in 1910 near the church , is one of Bethlehem 's most successful hotels and its oldest . It was closed down in 2000 due to the Israeli @-@ Palestinian conflict , but reopened in 2005 as the Jacir Palace InterContinental at Bethlehem .

= = Religious significance and commemoration = =

= = = Birthplace of Jesus = = =

Early Christian traditions describe Jesus as being born in Bethlehem : in one , a verse in the Book of Micah is interpreted as a prophecy that the Messiah would be born there . The New Testament has two different accounts of the birth . In the Gospel of Luke , Jesus ' parents live in Nazareth and travel for the Census of Quirinius to Bethlehem , where Jesus is born , after which they return home . The Gospel of Matthew mentions Bethlehem but not the census . Told that a ' King of the Jews ' has been born in the town , Herod orders the killing of all the boys aged two and under in the town and surrounding area . Joseph , warned of by an angel of the Lord , flees to Egypt with his family ; the Holy Family later settles in Nazareth .

Many modern scholars question the idea that Jesus was born in Bethlehem , seeing the biblical stories not as historical accounts but as symbolic narratives invented to present the birth as fulfillment of prophecy and imply a connection to the lineage of King David . The Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John do not include a nativity narrative , but refer to him only as being from Nazareth . In a 2005 article in Archaeology magazine , archaeologist Aviram Oshri points to an absence of evidence for the settlement of Bethlehem near Jerusalem at the time when Jesus was born , and postulates that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Galilee . In a 2011 article in Biblical Archaeology Review magazine , Jerome Murphy O'Connor argues for the traditional position that Jesus was born in Bethlehem near Jerusalem .

The existence of early traditions of Jesus ' birth in Bethlehem is attested by the Christian apologist Justin Martyr , who stated in his Dialogue with Trypho (c . 155 ? 161) that the Holy Family had taken refuge in a cave outside of the town . Origen of Alexandria , writing around the year 247 , referred to a cave in the town of Bethlehem which local people believed was the birthplace of Jesus . This cave was possibly one which had previously been a site of the cult of Tammuz .

= = = Christmas celebrations = = =

Christmas rites are held in Bethlehem on three different dates : December 25 is the traditional date by the Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations , but Greek , Coptic and Syrian Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on January 6 and Armenian Orthodox Christians on January 19 . Most Christmas processions pass through Manger Square , the plaza outside the Basilica of the Nativity . Roman Catholic services take place in St. Catherine 's Church and Protestants often hold services at Shepherds ' Fields .

= = = Other religious festivals = = =

Bethlehem celebrates festivals related to saints and prophets associated with Palestinian folklore . One such festival is the annual Feast of Saint George (al Khadr) on 5 ? 6 May . During the celebrations , Greek Orthodox Christians from the city march in procession to the nearby town of al Khader to baptize newborns in the waters around the Monastery of St. George and sacrifice a sheep in ritual . The Feast of St. Elijah is commemorated by a procession to Mar Elias , a Greek Orthodox monastery north of Bethlehem .

= = Culture = =

= = = Embroidery = = =

The women embroiderers of Bethlehem were known for their bridalwear . Bethlehem embroidery was renowned for its " strong overall effect of colors and metallic brilliance . " Less formal dresses were made of indigo fabric with a sleeveless coat (bisht) from locally woven wool worn over top . Dresses for special occasions were made of striped silk with winged sleeves with a short taqsireh jacket known as the Bethlehem jacket . The taqsireh was made of velvet or broadcloth , usually with heavy embroidery .

Bethlehem work was unique in its use of couched gold or silver cord , or silk cord onto the silk ,

wool , felt or velvet used for the garment , to create stylized floral patterns with free or rounded lines . This technique was used for " royal " wedding dresses (thob malak) , taqsirehs and the shatwehs worn by married women . It has been traced by some to Byzantium , and by others to the formal costumes of the Ottoman Empire 's elite . As a Christian village , local women were also exposed to the detailing on church vestments with their heavy embroidery and silver brocade .

= = = Mother @-@ of @-@ pearl carving = = =

The art of mother @-@ of @-@ pearl carving is said to have been a Bethlehem tradition since the 15th century when it was introduced by Franciscan friars from Italy . A constant stream of pilgrims generated a demand for these items , which also provided jobs for women . The industry was noted by Richard Pococke , who visited Bethlehem in 1727 .

= = = Cultural centers and museums = = =

Bethlehem is home to the Palestinian Heritage Center , established in 1991 . The center aims to preserve and promote Palestinian embroidery , art and folklore . The International Center of Bethlehem is another cultural center that concentrates primarily on the culture of Bethlehem . It provides language and guide training , woman 's studies and arts and crafts displays , and training .

The Bethlehem branch of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music has about 500 students . Its primary goals are to teach children music , train teachers for other schools , sponsor music research , and the study of Palestinian folklore music .

Bethlehem has four museums : The Crib of the Nativity Theatre and Museum offers visitors 31 3D models depicting the significant stages of the life of Jesus . Its theater presents a 20 @-@ minute animated show . The Badd Giacaman Museum , located in the Old City of Bethlehem , dates back to the 18th century and is primarily dedicated to the history and process of olive oil production . Baituna al @-@ Talhami Museum , established in 1972 , contains displays of Bethlehem culture . The International Museum of Nativity was built by United Nations Educational , Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to exhibit " high artistic quality in an evocative atmosphere " .

= = Local government = =

Bethlehem is the muhfaza (seat) or district capital of the Bethlehem Governorate .

Bethlehem held its first municipal elections in 1876 , after the mukhtars (" heads ") of the quarters of Bethlehem 's Old City (excluding the Syriac Quarter) made the decision to elect a local council of seven members to represent each clan in the town . A Basic Law was established so that if the victor for mayor was a Catholic , his deputy should be of the Greek Orthodox community .

Throughout , Bethlehem 's rule by the British and Jordan , the Syriac Quarter was allowed to participate in the election , as were the Ta 'amrah Bedouins and Palestinian refugees , hence ratifying the number of municipal members in the council to 11 . In 1976 , an amendment was passed to allow women to vote and become council members and later the voting age was increased from 21 to 25 .

Today , the Bethlehem Municipal Council consists of 15 elected members , including the mayor and deputy mayor . A special statute requires that the mayor and a majority of the municipal council be Christian , while the remainder are open seats , not restricted to any religion .

There are several branches of political parties on the council , including Communist , Islamist , and secular . The leftist factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Palestinian People 's Party (PPP) usually dominate the reserved seats . Hamas gained the majority of the open seats in the 2005 Palestinian municipal elections .

= = = Mayors = = =

The mayor and the deputy mayor of Bethlehem are required by municipal law to be Christian . In the October 2012 municipal elections , Fatah member Vera Baboun won , becoming the first female mayor of Bethlehem .

= = Education = =

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) , in 1997 , approximately 84 % of Bethlehem 's population over the age of 10 was literate . Of the city 's population , 10 @, @ 414 were enrolled in schools (4 @, @ 015 in primary school , 3 @, @ 578 in secondary and 2 @, @ 821 in high school) . About 14 @. @ 1 % of high school students received diplomas . There were 135 schools in the Bethlehem Governorate in 2006 ; 100 run the Education Ministry of the Palestinian National Authority , seven by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and 28 were private .

Bethlehem is home to Bethlehem University , a Catholic Christian co @- @ educational institution of higher learning founded in 1973 in the Lasallian tradition , open to students of all faiths . Bethlehem University is the first university established in the West Bank , and can trace its roots to 1893 when the De La Salle Christian Brothers opened schools throughout Palestine and Egypt .

= = Transportation = =

Bethlehem has three bus stations owned by private companies which offer service to Jerusalem , Beit Jala , Beit Sahour , Hebron , Nahalin , Battir , al @- @ Khader , al @- @ Ubeidiya and Beit Fajjar . There are two taxi stations that make trips to Beit Sahour , Beit Jala , Jerusalem , Tuqu ' and Herodium . There are also two car rental departments : Murad and ' Orabi . Buses and taxis with West Bank licenses are not allowed to enter Israel , including Jerusalem , without a permit .

The Israeli construction of the West Bank barrier has had an impact on Bethlehem politically , socially , and economically . The barrier is located along the northern side of the town 's built @- @ up area , within meters of houses in ' Aida refugee camp on one side , and the Jerusalem municipality on the other . Most entrances and exits from the Bethlehem agglomeration to the rest of the West Bank are currently subjected to Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks . The level of access varies based on Israeli security directives . Travel for Bethlehem 's Palestinian residents from the West Bank into Jerusalem is regulated by a permit @- @ system . Palestinians require a permit to enter the Jewish holy site of Rachel 's Tomb . Israeli citizens are barred from entering Bethlehem and the nearby biblical Solomon 's Pools .

= = Twin towns and sister cities = =

Bethlehem is twinned with :