

Serving our communities since 1965

An Advent Journey with the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre



Photo taken at a Coptic altar in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

Reflections for the 4 Sundays of Advent

Follow the links to short films to share in our work

- **Week 1: Light** John 1:5
The Mother and Family Empowerment Programme
<https://youtu.be/mLPHP4MQw68>
- **Week 2: Encounter** Luke 1:46-55
The Inclusive School
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfHR9J47JU&t=2s>
- **Week 3: Hope** Isaiah 35:6
The Child Rehabilitation Programme
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2IBz1tn0zo>
- **Week 4: Life** John 10:10
The Virtual Care Programme
<https://youtu.be/Uh6XRqU81H4>



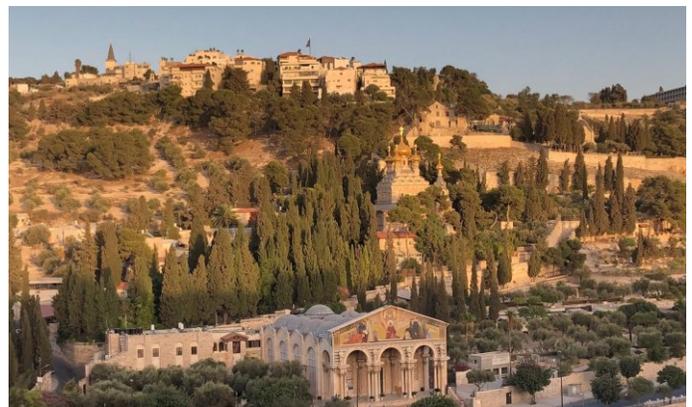
Introduction:

The Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre is situated on the Mount of Olives just 7 miles away from Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord. It operates under the auspices of the Anglican Episcopal Church in Jerusalem, which in this interfaith region, is engaged in a ministry of 'Faith in Action.' The Centre works for the inclusion of all children with disabilities through medical rehabilitation and education.

During this Advent season, as we remember the journey of the Holy Family, we invite you to walk with Palestinian families and their children in this land, whose lives are continually transformed through the medical care and welcome they receive at the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre. In spite of the many challenges they face, they carry a message of hope with them.

Throughout the pandemic the Jerusalem Princess Basma team have continued to treat children either at the centre by adhering to stringent safety measures or by using a virtual care model. You will see this reflected in some of the stories and photos in this series of reflections. This too is a message of hope.

***Photos without PPE were taken before the start of the pandemic.**



Looking towards the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane

Week 1: Light

The Mother and Family Empowerment Programme offers a candle in the dark.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 1:5



It is a Sunday morning at the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre and Ayat has travelled from the West Bank here with her youngest child who has Downs Syndrome. It has not been easy to secure an access permit to travel, to organise care for her other two young daughters or to get permission for absence from the school where she teaches. Ayat is part of the 'Mother and Family Empowerment Programme', which enables her to stay in residence for 2/3 weeks at the centre whilst her child receives a comprehensive programme of therapy and intervention. She will follow her son's progress with care so that she can continue his exercises and rehabilitation when she returns home. She will also be encouraged to share her story with other parents who may have experienced the same isolation and stigma that having a child with disabilities can bring in her community.



In the Gospel of John we read, *“What has come into being in Him was life and the life was the light of all people.”* The light of Christ is given for us all, whether we are welcomed or shunned by society. The abundant, gracious love of God can enfold us all and in the Gospels, time after time, we see how Christ draws into his care and Kingdom the most vulnerable and marginalised. The Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, situated on the top of the Mount of Olives is witness to this understanding. It is indeed a beacon of Christ’s light offering Palestinian families, of all faiths, the medical care needed to enable their child to thrive and reach their potential.

Back at the centre, parents talk together. One mother, on her 7th admission explains, *“When I first learnt about the disability of my child I didn’t leave home or speak to others for nearly a year, I was living in complete denial and I didn’t accept the fact that my child has a disability.”* She describes how she now acts as an advocate for her son back home in her community; how she has found hope hearing the stories of other mothers and watching the progress of her child and of all children on the programme.



“I feel more confident about myself and in the future of my son. Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre lights a candle in the dark for us as mothers and for our children.”

Prayer:

Lord Christ, we remember how you came as light into our world and how you walked and prayed with your disciples on the Mount of Olives. We thank you Lord for the staff at the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre who provide care and rehabilitation for those children who may have been pushed to the fringes of society. Help us, also to carry a light of hope into the dark and hurting corners of our world, especially in this time of pandemic, safe in the knowledge and faith that, *“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”* Amen.



Week 2: Encounter

The Inclusive School provides a place of encounter and a welcome for all.

“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.’”

Luke 1: 46-47



Through the generations, Mary has been revered for her faithful service to God and here we read her hymn of praise. Despite her fear she welcomes this encounter and gift of God's love; she chooses to be open to a God of wonderful possibilities and her life is forever changed.

The message proclaimed through Jesus' earthly ministry is that all are welcome in the Kingdom of God and that in Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male nor female.” The Jerusalem Princess Basma Inclusive School is testament to this. It is a place where children regardless of their religion, ethnic background or disability, study together from Kindergarten to 12th Grade. One third of the pupils have a range of learning or physical disabilities and in addition to their education, receive ongoing treatment and therapies from the adjoining Child Rehabilitation Department at the centre. It is a powerful witness of Christ's call to welcome and serve all those we encounter, which our Bishop in Jerusalem attests is ‘Faith in Action.’



Lara, a 16 year old student with Cerebral Palsy, first came to the centre for treatment when she was three months old. She graduated from the Inclusive School this year and is now a wonderful ambassador for equal rights for all people with disabilities. Whilst at the school, she recognised the unique nature of this environment, the value of having access to specialist support services for her fellow students with disabilities and for students without disabilities to have, *“the opportunity to be introduced to differences and to accept one another. We all have the same rights to speak up.”*

The lives of the students who live with disability and those who do not are changed through encounter with one another. She has found her voice, and talks confidently here about her future dreams. *"I would like to be in a role that allows me to represent people with disabilities. I will not be silent."*

Prayer:

Lord Christ, in a world where divisions seem to dominate, we thank you for the Jerusalem Princess Basma Inclusive School where all children are welcome. Thank you for students like Lara, who embrace the opportunity to learn from those who are different. In this Advent season, prepare us to welcome the gift of life and help us to encounter you in unexpected places, perhaps in the faces of strangers, knowing that in you we are all one. Amen.



Week 3: Hope

The Child Rehabilitation Programme offers children a lifeline to a more independent future.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert."

Isaiah 35:6



Children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups in Palestinian society. Defined and judged by what they lack, they often experience widespread prejudice and discrimination. So when Isra was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at 10 months old as a result of lack of oxygen shortly after a premature birth, the news came as a huge shock to her mother, Sondas.



In the subsequent months, she felt a sense of hopelessness about what the future held for her child living on the West Bank and hid her daughter away. But her commitment to her child led her to one of the clinics visited by the Princess Basma Outreach Team.

She accepted a referral for Isra to the Child Rehabilitation Programme, the first of a number of short-stay visits for residential treatment, a model which is so vital for families with travel restrictions from the West Bank.

With ongoing and intensive support from the Centre, Isra now 5 years old, is a happy and engaged child. Sondos who was once without hope, feels empowered, is a member of a charity that supports people with disabilities in her own community and has returned to university. Lives have been transformed and hope renewed.



Prayer:

Lord Christ, in you, we are promised the gift of life in abundance. We thank you for the faith and hope of all Palestinian mothers who stand up for their children and whose lives are transformed through the care of Dr. Waddah and his medical team at the Princess Basma Centre. We thank you that this place is a source of blessing and hope; a place overlooking the Judean desert, from where indeed, waters gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. O Lord, may hope spring up in our hearts that through our prayers and actions, we can be a source of encouragement to those in need. Amen.



Week 4: Life

The Virtual Care Programme enhances the life chances of Palestinian children in the West Bank.

"I come that you may have life, and have it abundantly."

John 10: 7-10



Farah took her first steps on camera. She and her family are enrolled in the Virtual Care Program, where therapists at the Child Rehabilitation Centre use digital tools to communicate with families and provide therapy for children. This can be via a family laptop, a mobile or simply a landline phone and it ensures that treatment can continue for children living in the West Bank throughout the pandemic, during times of lockdown or quarantine.



Farah was originally given the name 'Leila,' which in Arabic means 'night.' She was born with Down's syndrome and when her father, Hakam, held her in his hands, he decided to change her name to "Farah" which means joy.

Farah's mother, Rawya said that it took longer for her to accept her daughter's diagnosis watching her child face many challenges. Now at 18 months, Farah is able to walk up and down the stairs and her family are grateful for the Virtual Care Model that helped their daughter to take her first steps.

Rawya now urges all parents of children with disabilities to focus on their children's abilities and potential:

"The last thought in my mind is that my daughter has a disability. I'm a mother, empowering my child for a better future. Farah's father's decision to change her name was the right one. This name suits Farah much better since she has become the joy of our life."

The ancient Pools of Bethesda lie just within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, overlooked by the Mount of Olives. Here, Jesus healed a man who had been 'afflicted for 38 years'; His encounter at the pool was life- changing. One pilgrim to the Holy Land, on climbing the Mount to visit the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre described it as the modern day Pools of Bethesda, a place which offers healing, hope and life in abundance.

Prayer:

Christ the Healer we thank you for the team of therapists who are learning to work digitally at the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre and for lives that are transformed there. Thank you that you come to offer us all life in abundance, even at this time of profound struggle in our world. Help us now, to live and serve you, knowing that we are empowered and can empower others through your love and grace. Amen.



On behalf of all our staff, children and families, thank you for walking with us on this Advent journey overlooking Jerusalem, the city of the Holy One, as together we anticipate the birth of our Lord.