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## An Advent Journey with the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre



## Reflections through the 4 Sundays of Advent

- **Week 1: Light** The Mother's Empowerment Program  
John 1:5
- **Week 2: Welcome** The Inclusive School  
Luke 1:46-55
- **Week 3: Hope** The Child Rehabilitation Program  
Isaiah 35:6
- **Week 4: Life** The Sheltered Workshop  
John 10:10

### 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.



The Jerusalem Princess Basma team

Week 1 Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December

## Light

The Mother's Empowerment Program 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 Empowerment Program', which enables her to stay in residence for 2/3 weeks at the centre whilst her child receives a comprehensive program 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 mothers who may have experienced the same isolation and stigma that having a child with disabilities can bring within her community.

Back at the centre, the mothers talk together. One mother, on her 7<sup>th</sup> 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 program.



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

### **Prayer:**

Lord Christ, we remember how you brought 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 corners of our world, in the knowledge and faith that, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” Amen.





## Week 2 Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December

# Welcome

The inclusive School offers 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 obedience to God and here we read her hymn of praise. 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 is now a wonderful ambassador for the Inclusive School, recognising 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. Lara has found her voice and talks confidently 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 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 find you in unexpected places, perhaps in the faces of strangers, knowing that in you we are all one. Amen.



## Week 3 Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December

# Hope

**The 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 Program, 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 4 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 Wadah 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 be a source of encouragement to those in need.



## Week 4 Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December

# Life

**The Sheltered Workshop offers skills for life.**

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

John 10: 7-10



Ali is the manager of a Handicrafts workshop known as the Princess Basma Sheltered Workshop which provides vocational training for up to 22 adults with a range of disabilities. Here, the apprentices gain valuable skills in working with wood, rattan, sea grass and ceramics and take part in social and recreational activities. He explains how this gives them, “a sense of accomplishment, of feeling wanted and part of society.” Without this, he fears some may be wandering on the street or shut away in their homes, neglected by society.

The motto of the workshop is, “We are able” and Nadal is testament to this. Nadal was first employed in the workshop 15 years ago which was then making artificial limbs for the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre. Today, he has a degree in Education, is studying for his Masters and is working to sustain himself and his young family. He has become an advocate for his fellow Palestinians who live with disabilities and witness to the transforming power of projects like the ‘Sheltered Workshop’ which offers far more than just training but meaningful encounters which we all need to shape, heal and fulfil our lives.

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, light, welcome, hope and life in abundance.



**Prayer:**

Christ the Healer we thank you for the mission of the Sheltered Workshop; for Ali and his team and for the lives that are transformed there. Thank you that you come to offer us all life in abundance. Help us now, to live and serve you, knowing that we too are able 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 here overlooking Jerusalem, the city of the Holy One, as together we anticipate the birth of our Lord.**