

Standing firm in the risen Christ amid Holy Land conflict

This Easter, six months after the outbreak of war in the Holy Land, SAT-7 has been broadcasting the voices of its hard-pressed Christians. In the midst of this devastating conflict, they are finding hope and peace in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Life in the war zone

A recent episode of SAT-7's current affairs program *You Are Not Alone* featured an interview with a Christian who lives in the heart of the conflict zone. He vividly described the traumatic experience of the local Christian community, who number around 900 people.

"I live in a building that was occupied by Christians mostly. The building came down to the ground, and so our homes are gone. We all had to take refuge in the church. We live inside the church halls and sleep on the floor, over a hundred people to one hall. We have been living here for six months."

Harsh economic conditions add to their distress. "There are hardly any products to buy from the market that would be sufficient for us all. There's hardly any food in the market: sugar, rice, canned food... Even if it's available, the prices are so high. One kilogramme of meat costs almost 100 USD. One egg costs three USD."

Even Easter has been shadowed by the ongoing violence. "This year there's no joy or celebration, just as there wasn't any at Christmas and New Year. We are sad over losing our loved ones in the war. But the church continues to pray."

Yet believers are standing firm in faith and hope and are reaching out in love to others. "We took the decision to either all die together or live together inside the church. We protect the church, and the church protects us. We will not leave our churches no matter what or how difficult it becomes.

"We have a place for children and for those with disabilities. They are not Christians, but the church cares for them and tries to provide for them. We help those around us."

Quoting Psalm 18, he boldly confessed, "'The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.' I pray the war will end and that the message of love from Jesus will spread."

Peace amid the pain

SAT-7 ARABIC also broadcast a special Easter program, *Hope of Resurrection*, in which church leaders from the Holy Land spoke to some of the pastoral issues raised by the conflict.

Father Bernard Poggi, a seminary president in Beit Jala, posed the common question of why the righteous suffer when they are created and loved by God. "There's no one answer except in the life of Jesus Christ," he said. Jesus was righteous but experienced pain, and He gives meaning to the pain we experience. God is present in our pain, and in it we can experience His closeness. "He did not give us salvation with a word or with a miracle, but through His pain."

"The peace that we have is inside of us," said Father Issa Thaljieh, a church leader from Bethlehem. He said that many people envy Christians in the Holy Land because they live in Jesus' homeland,

but they have never seen peace there. But he then went on to explain that they have peace in the risen Christ even in the midst of conflict. “The resurrection gives us hope; Jesus came out of the closed tomb and gave us life.” Father Poggi agreed: “The resurrection reminds us that nothing should stop us from persevering.”

Resurrection changes everything

In late 2023 the nativity scene at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, showing Jesus in the rubble of a destroyed building, was widely circulated online. But this Easter the church’s pastor, Rev. Dr Munther Isaac, offered believers in the Holy Land an inspiring message of hope at a service broadcast on SAT-7. “The good news,” he said, “is that if we have faith then resurrection changes everything.

“The women came first to the tomb. They came broken and sad. The cruelty of the crucifixion was still in their minds. But the resurrection changed everything and turned their lives round completely. It gave them new hope and power, and today the resurrection can do the same thing for us. Jesus arose and gave us victory.

“Resurrection is the victory of Jesus over hatred and revenge, over fear, over sadness and despair. God has the last word. Let us put our trust in the Lord, because there will come a time when we shall praise Him. We as Christians do not have sorrow like others, because Jesus rose from the dead.”

A message for all

Leading the *Hope of Resurrection* program, Rev. Dr Jack Sara, President of Bethlehem Bible College, said:

“Here in the Holy Land we have always had difficulties. But there are challenges and wars in other countries in the Middle East. This message of hope and resurrection is not just for us but for all, so you would have faith in the Lord and lift your eyes up to Him, ask for his mercy, and ask for resurrection power to live in faith in all circumstances.”

His words are a powerful encouragement to Christians living in a region experiencing widespread strife, and a reminder to pray for these brave brothers and sisters as their ordeal continues.

Pray

Even as our hearts ache for those in the Holy Land, we find hope in God’s unwavering faithfulness. We hold firm to the belief that God’s ultimate design is to instil peace and reconcile all to Himself. As we pour out our heart cries to the Lord, we trust in His promise to hear and respond to our prayers. Please join us in praying for...

- Pray for a lasting ceasefire.
- Pray for aid to reach those who need it.
- Pray for hostages to be returned home.
- Pray for hundreds of children who are unaccompanied and without shelter.
- Pray for the grieving families.
- Pray for peace and justice.