



*Notre Dame de Sion*

## “SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”

*Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem*

Ein Karem, Sunday, 23 December 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

News on Nationalism and its fear of differences or 18 NGOs having to leave Pakistan as Pakistan is currently tightening its actions against Christian and secular aid agencies. Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes in Canada are up 60% with 360 reported incidents in 2017. All these realities cannot hinder the light to shine.

We studied with Anne Catherine the feast of Chanukah and Christmas and learned that the two minor feasts in Judaism are Chanukah and Purim with both speaking about persecution. In the feast of Purim, the exiled Israelites are being treated badly in an effort to eliminate them. This all takes place by means of a decree sent out by the wicked Haman, councilor of King Ahasueru (presumed to be Xerxes I or Artaxerxes I of Persia). Here the goal is to destroy the physical people of Israel. It is then that the persecuted take revenge when the persecutor becomes the persecuted.

In the Feast of Chanukah, the Greek wanted to kill the soul of the people of Israel. Here we see the spiritual aspect of persecution, that is to make them forget the Torah and to force them to transgress the statutes of their God. In the recounting of Chanukah there is no revenge but the miracle of light.

In Mathew 10: 28, Jesus speaks “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear rather who can destroy both body and soul...”so let us be on guard at the closing of this year and for the beginning of the new secular year on January first, from the one who can also kill our soul.

Here in the Novitiate community we also struggle with cultural shock. Since each individual takes different ways and length of time to overcome this cultural shock. In the meantime, we engage in building up our inner strength and the strength of the community so that we are able to deal with the reality of being here in this Land.

During this Advent session we have set out on pilgrimages and we have visited Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethania just behind the Mount of Olives. In the NT story we learn of the welcoming house for Jesus' and his disciples when they would come up to Jerusalem after the long and often dusty roads from Galilee.

Our next pilgrimage was to the traditional Birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem in Judea and our third pilgrimage was to Bethlehem in Galilee. Sr. Anne Catherine writes: “This site existed in the biblical periods until the destruction in the 7th century AD. Was Jesus been born there? All his family belonged to Galilee, and this village is about 10-15 km from Nazareth. We were not disappointed in not finding the Holy place. It has remained unknown, but at least a little group of Sion set out to find and to acknowledged it. This was for us another way to prepare for Christmas. So we really felt like pioneers exploring something very unusual. It was a very real emotion when we approached the place and saw the sign: בית לחם הגלילית. It was not a dream; it had existed until now. When we arrived, we discovered an Israeli Jewish village (a moshav), an agricultural village.”

Did the Gospel and Christian tradition adopt the Bethlehem of Judea because it is the city of David and also because of the prophecy of Micah?

We ended our pilgrimages during these weeks of Advent at Nazareth in Galilee with the Arabic parish mass in the Basilica of the Annunciation which is another humble city unknown in the Old Testament and where Jesus had been conceived: “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”.

Holy Christmas greetings and blessings from the St John in Montana Novitiate Community.  
Celia, Colette, Juliana, Hellen, Iulia and Erika