

# THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

## Finding an Angel at Nativity Church

Dan Koski, Tantur Staff



At the start of this year, I was able to climb the scaffolding at the Church of the Nativity, put up by the renovation team working on restoring the ceiling and mosaics in its nave. The project in of itself is nothing short of a miracle: after centuries of impasse and conflict on jurisdictional concerns over the Church, the religious and civil authorities brokered a much-needed way forward. Restoration has been underway throughout 2016. We seem to have been blessed for our labors, for an angel appeared, or more accurately, an angel *reappeared* during renovation. Unseen by the human eye for centuries underneath layers of plaster and soot, a near-complete mosaic of a seventh angel was revealed, and will once again be seen as Christians gather together to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of Christ throughout December and January.

The Church of the Nativity continues to astound and inspire me as much as it first did when I first entered through its Door of Humility nearly a decade ago. The Holy Land can be a grinding, challenging place at the best of times. Those who live here can easily become indifferent to the eternal truth of God's love for us as daily news and personal experience seems to confirm that our part of the world is becoming increasingly sectarian, divided and perpetually embroiled in conflict. Yet every now and then, especially when it seems that we are most tempted to give in to despair...

...an angel appears in our midst. Sometimes where you least expect it, sometimes exactly where you might. Such was the case in both senses as I stood at the start of this year, staring at the seventh angel of Nativity Church. Either way, it's an angel, and this Christmas, its presence is once again known to us as Christian gather to celebrate the Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem and throughout the world.

From all of us at Tantur Ecumenical Institute, we wish you a Merry Christmas.

## Tantur at a Glance

UK Roman Catholic-Anglican  
Pilgrimage Visit to Tantur



November 8th, 2016 was a particularly ecumenical day at Tantur as we welcomed a joint Catholic-Anglican pilgrimage from the United Kingdom. His Grace, the Most Reverend Bernard Longley, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, and His Grace, the Most Reverend John Inge, Anglican Bishop of Worcester, paid a mid-day visit to Tantur to learn more of the mission of Tantur. Tantur Rector Fr. Russ McDougall gave a presentation of the history and present condition of Christian churches in the Holy Land, and the origins and work of Tantur to the more than fifty clergy and laity in attendance. Following the Litany of Reconciliation of the Community of the Cross of Nails (CCN) in our courtyard icon of Jerusalem, the Bishops and Fr. Russ were joined by His Grace, the Most Reverend Grégoire Pierre Melki, Syrian Catholic Bishop of the Patriarchal Exarch of Jerusalem, who was also visiting Tantur.

## It's That Time Again

Chris McDonnell

**The days of Advent tell the story of a journey, well, two journeys really.** The first journey, told in the books of the Old Testament, gives an historical account of the Hebrew people, of their trials and tribulations and of their seeking to follow the call of God. The second journey, much shorter in time span, from the moment of Annunciation through to a birth in Bethlehem is the fulfilment of their trust, though in an unexpected manner

The image of Visitation Mary meets Elizabeth, at the Church of the Visitation in the picturesque village of Ein Karem, some 7 km south-west of Jerusalem, shows two young women, both pregnant, face to face, greeting each other. It is a poignant image of a shared intimacy, two cousins, the mothers of Jesus and John.

The image of journey is recurrent in religious experience, the translation from one place to another, from one way of life to another, from birth to death, from sorrow to joy. In earlier days, journeys involved risk, often great risk and so became symbols of the difficult times we experience day by day. In many ways the same applies today. We should still be risk-takers, willing to be adventurous in what we do, showing trust in each other and in the care of the good Lord.



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## Thanksgiving and Farewell

**Our 2016 Three Month Program ends with two celebrations: American Thanksgiving and a farewell concert.**

After a warm autumn, the winter made an abrupt arrival to Jerusalem in late November with some much-needed rain and cold, blustery weather. For our resident American expatriates and program participants, it was just the change in order to celebrate American Thanksgiving, which fell on November 24<sup>th</sup> this year as our Three Month Sabbatical program was drawing to a close. As with every year, Thanksgiving was marked at Tantur with fellowship, ecumenical prayer and delicious food, prepared by our world-class kitchen staff.

However, Tantur was only beginning its end-of-year festivities as our new Program Director, Frederic Masson, and Program Assistant, Hayley Cohen, organized a splendid farewell celebration for our outgoing Sabbatical program participants, consisting of a sumptuous grilled barbeque feast and a two-hour candlelit Arabic music concert held in our auditorium. Even as a strong winter storm blew outside, residents and guests stayed well into the evening to enjoy the exceptional music. All of us at Tantur hope that both events find their way into next year's calendar, and that even more people will enjoy heralding the start of winter with us.



American Thanksgiving (above) and our farewell concert for our Three Month Sabbatical program.





## *Tuesdays at Tantur: A Review*

Raanan Mallek



***Tuesdays at Tantur* is held on the first and third Tuesday of every month.** It seeks to establish a community of conversation at Tantur. The program is co-hosted by Tantur Ecumenical Institute and the Jerusalem Global Gateway of the University of Notre Dame and nurtures open discussion on theological and other topics relevant to the life of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

The fall session of *Tuesdays at Tantur*, which spanned from mid-October to the beginning of December, had six sessions. We first welcomed Prof. Fr. Brian Daley who is the Catherine F. Huiscking Professor of Theology at Notre Dame University. He specializes in Biblical Studies & Christianity, Judaism in Antiquity and the History of Christianity overall. He is the executive secretary of the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation in North America and received the Ratzinger Prize in Theology which was awarded by the Pope in 2012. Fr. Daley is a historical theologian, who specializes in the study of the early Church, particularly the development of Christian doctrine from the fourth to the eighth centuries. Fr. Daley's topic was on the future of Catholic-Orthodox Christian Dialogue. He engaged the audience in a way which specifically addressed Tantur's *raison d'être*.

We then had the privilege to welcome Dr. Ali Qleibo who spoke about how ancient shrines preserved on our hillsides can teach us about Palestinian culture and history. The interactive session looked at the power of stones, rocks and high places. Dr. Qleibo is an artist, author, and anthropologist. Dr. Qleibo has lectured at Al Quds University, teaching ancient classical civilization. His vast experience includes being the former Director of Cultural Studies Programme at Al-Quds University, a fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute, Director of Department of Fine Arts at Al-Quds University and former Assistant Professor at Birzeit University. At the Center for Jerusalem Studies, Dr. Qleibo developed the Muslim tourism itinerary in Jerusalem encompassing tangible and intangible heritage. It was evident during his presentation that his specialization in Palestinian social history had much to offer to the participants.

This session was followed by Professor Rabbi Daniel Sperber, a world renowned expert in the field of how Jewish law can see Hinduism as a monotheistic faith. Rabbi Sperber is the Milan Roven professor of Talmud at Bar-Ilan University and an expert in classical philology, history of Jewish customs, Jewish art history, Jewish education and Talmudic studies. Currently, Rabbi Sperber is the President of the Ludwig and Erica Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies and serves as rabbi of Menachem Zion Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem. He is the well-known author of *Minhagei Yisrael: Origins and History* which is on the character and evolution of Jewish customs. In 1992, he was awarded the Israel prize for Jewish Studies. Rabbi Sperber brought to the attention of those in attendance the extensive work which the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel did with Hindu Leadership from 2007 to 2008. The declaration of mutual understanding and cooperation from the first Jewish-Hindu Leadership Summit in Delhi has gone a long way to remove misconceptions about each side's faith.

*Tuesdays at Tantur* continued with Professor Gary Anderson who is the Hesburgh Professor of Catholic Theology and specializes in Biblical studies. He works on the religion and literature of the Old Testament with special interest in the reception of the Bible in early Judaism and Christianity. Currently, he is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Hebrew University.

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### **Tuesdays at Tantur: A Review** (Continued from Page 3)

His recent publications, *Sin: A History and Charity* and *The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* trace the way these biblical concepts shape the development of subsequent Jewish and Christian theological discourse. His topic was on seeing where God dwells through the imagery of the tabernacle and biblical verses about seeing God.

Finally, Tantur welcomed Rev. Fr. David Neuhaus. He has served in the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) since August 20, 1994. Fr. Neuhaus holds degrees in Theology and Scriptures from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and was appointed Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew-speaking Catholics by Patriarch Fouad Twal on March 15, 2009. He is also Coordinator of the Pastoral Care for migrant workers and asylum seekers. Fr. Neuhaus has taught Scriptures at the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem Seminary and in the Religious Studies Department at Bethlehem University. Fr. Neuhaus spoke about who the Christians of Israel are today and what their challenges are living in the Holy Land.

*The next season of Tuesdays at Tantur will resume on Tuesday, January 17th, 2017 with Sir Vincent Fean, a veteran of the British Diplomatic Service who is a trustee of the Medical Aid for Palestinians and patron of the Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network.*

### **It's That Time Again** (Continued from Page 2)

The words 'see how these Christians love one another' are often quoted as the defining nature of a follower of the Christ. They are well remembered when we find ourselves being critical of each other, forming opinions that are judgemental, that seek only to highlight differences rather than reinforce a community of love.

Each year in our parish during the First Mass of Christmas, we listen to the Proclamation of the Feast of the Nativity. It begins with these words:

"To a people prepared, came the unrecognised Child, in his time, he came into our time and disturbed the peace. For each of us, half-people wandering in a lost world, peace comes with wholeness".

Expectation and reality were very different. The Christ-child, helpless and dependent, whose journey from Bethlehem would lead to Calvary and the garden of Resurrection, was not part of the story line. But each Advent we explore again the mystery revealed to us, and live again Christ's birth.

Our Advent wreaths are set in churches to count off the weeks to Christmas, the growing light as first one, then two, three and four candles are lit, very often by young children in whose eyes we see the wonder and amazement as light from the taper passes to the candle and a new light glows.

*This article originally ran in the Catholic Times on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016.*

## Advent Haiku

Chris McDonnell



### **Advent 1**

Fog found December days  
in chill expectation  
of the Lord's Advent

### **Advent 2**

Days of waiting  
in anticipation of the birth  
of him who comes

### **Advent 3**

Four flames shape my song  
that this very earth must sing  
fire in the desert

### **Advent 4**

Touch again the stone  
that your open hands wear smooth  
each silent morning.



## AN ECUMENICAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR NAZARETH!

### *Chemin Neuf Community to Manage Melkite Guesthouse "Abuna Farage"*

The Greek Catholic Melkite Archbishopric of Akko and Galilee has entrusted the Chemin Neuf Community of Nazareth with the management of the Abuna Farage Guesthouse following the end of the term of service of its longstanding manager, Sister Martha, as she prepares to depart the Holy Land.

The Chemin Neuf community of Nazareth will continue to manage its own project, the International Marian Center. Both facilities are located within walking distance of the primary churches and pilgrimage sites of Nazareth, and are well-known for serving the millions of pilgrims who arrive to

the city each year. The move highlights the warm relations between the ecumenical Chemin Neuf community and the Melkite Church in the Galilee, which is considered the largest Christian community by population size in Israel.

"We are hoping to continue welcoming you and your groups in the same manner!" notes Chemin Neuf.

Tantur wishes Chemin Neuf *bonne chance* as they begin this new venture as they begin to welcome pilgrims this Christmas season.



Chemin Neuf, a Catholic ecumenical movement founded by Jesuit Fr. Laurent Fabre in 1973, has maintained a community in Nazareth for many years. In December of 2016, the will assume responsibility of the Melkite-operated Abuna Farage Guesthouse as its long-serving manager, Sister Martha (in red) leaves the Holy Land.

*Tantur is an institute for ecumenical and theological studies, situated on a beautiful hill in Jerusalem near Bethlehem. It serves as a welcoming place in the Holy Land for visitors who come from all over the world seeking an oasis of learning, community, and hospitality.*

## TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

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Tantur has begun the process of transitioning its e-list for events and the newsletter to an automated email system. Our local event announcements will now be distributed through the e-service "Mailchimp," with the possibility of the newsletter list also being delivered as such in the near future.

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*Merry Christmas from all at Tantur!*

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