

# HOLLY IN THE HOLY LAND

*December Newsletter*

*My YAGM year in Jerusalem  
and the West Bank*

Header picture: the Sea of  
Galilee at Capernaum



## CHANGING SEASONS

*Beauty in Palestine from the River to the Sea*

Marhaba (hello) from the West Bank! Life in Palestine has been full of everyday beauty for nearly 100 days now! Yes, I have been keeping count of each day here! During these months, I have seen the changing of seasons. We arrived still in the hot summertime and soon went into autumn with olive harvesting and are now headed into winter with chilly walks and layers of clothes! Along with these seasonal changes and the natural beauty that comes with them, I have been experiencing changes in my own life here. I have become more involved in my hosting community in the West Bank and have been deeply appreciating my new friendships! I have started some new activities including a belly dance class (raqs sharqi) that I have been LOVING!

Picture: harvesting olives in Beit Jala



## PLACES OF BEAUTY

### DEAD SEA

In November, I had the opportunity to visit the Dead Sea with some new friends! We had a lively day floating in the salty water and covering ourselves in mud before snacking on pita and hummus on the beach!

Picture: at the Dead Sea with friends

### CAESAREA

Caesarea Maritima was an ancient Roman city on the Mediterranean Sea. Built by Herod the Great for games, performances, and horse races. The ruins of the city were so cool to visit on our cohort retreat!

Picture: the view of the Sea at Caesarea

### SEA OF GALILEE

While staying in the Galilee region for our fall retreat, we got to hike Mount Arbel and see a stunning view of the Sea of Galilee! It was a special time spent atop the mountain with all of the special people in our cohort!

Picture: the Sea of Galilee from Mt. Arbel





Picture: students at the School of Hope dancing joyously on Palestinian Heritage Day; many are wearing the keffiyeh/kufiya, the black and white scarf that is a meaningful symbol representing Palestinian nationalism

# SCHOOL OF HOPE UPDATES

*The Evangelical Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah*

The School of Hope has been an incredibly welcoming community to me! I have had such a ball volunteering alongside the generous students, administrators, and teachers in Ramallah. My role at the school has consisted of assisting in English classes, helping prepare for the Christmas party and program, and growing friendships with all of the fantastic people at the school! I always looks forward to arriving at school in the morning and being greeted with warm smiles, high fives, hugs, and some Arabic coffee!

## FALL RETREAT

*Experiencing Hospitality & History in Galilee*

At the end of November, our YAGM cohort in Jerusalem and the West Bank gathered for some intentional time together in the region of Galilee. Before embarking on our retreat, we celebrated Thanksgiving with all of us helping make delicious food that we then shared while recounting our blessings!

In Galilee, we reflected on stories in the Bible where the area was the setting for significant moments. For example, we spent a day in Nazareth visiting sites that honor Mary, Mother of Jesus. These churches, the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation (and site of Mary's Well) and the Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation, celebrate the announcement from the angel Gabriel that Mary will give birth to the Son of God. It was so special to be at the Basilica and see the many mosaics of Mary that were made by artisans in countries around the world and display their interpretation of Mary. Many of them had Mary dressed in traditional clothing of their country and showed her as a complex and honorable person in history and the Bible.

We also visited the Mt. of Beatitudes, multiple spots (and a boat tour!) on the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Mt. Tabor, Haifa, and Tabgha. We discussed elements of empire seen at these places in both the Bible and in the present time under Israeli occupation. The region of Galilee is now called "Israel" despite being part of Palestine for thousands of years, meaning that many of the Palestinians in my hosting community and beyond cannot visit this area or must get permission to go to a part of their own homeland.



Picture: one of the mosaics of Mary at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth; this one says "Regina Palestinae" or "Mother of Palestine" in Latin

I want to express my immense gratitude for my partners near and far for supporting me! Thank you to the ELCA, the ELCJHL, my sending community, and the congregations at St. James Lutheran Church in Johnston, IA and Bethany Lutheran Church in Rice Lake, WI for your blessings and prayers!

My next newsletter will be sent out at the end of January. If you would like to contact me in the meantime, feel free to email me at [hollyannebeck15@gmail.com](mailto:hollyannebeck15@gmail.com). Friend me on Facebook for more updates!



December 2022

Picture: the altar to Mary, Mother of Jesus over Mary's Well at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth

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