

Silent Night in Bethlehem: Jesus's Birthplace Under Israeli Annexation Policies

Israel's "annexation by stealth" has transformed Bethlehem into a model of gradual, illegal incorporation of occupied Palestinian land. Through settlement expansion, land confiscation, forced displacement, and demographic engineering, Israel is entrenching permanent control while erasing its last remaining Palestinian Christian population.



KEY FACTS

Palestinian Christians stand at less than **1%** in the oPt and are on a severe decline since 7 Oct, 2023, due to Israel's occupation, coercive environment, and de-development policies.

For example: unemployment rate in Bethlehem stands at **31%** ; \$2.5 million/day lost in tourism (June 2025).

85% of Bethlehem Governorate is classified as Area C (under full Israeli control).

167,000 dunums (**≈25%**) of Bethlehem's land annexed by military orders (July 2025).

25,000 dunums declared "state land" in 2024–25 using Ottoman-era laws.

Attacks documented in **10+** locales (Al-Makhrou, Tuqu', Al-Khader, etc.).

150,000 firearms distributed to settlers since Oct 2023.

800 new militias formed in the West Bank post-October 2023.

Severe Decline
in Christian
Population

Forced
Displacement

Illegal
Territorial
Control

Settlement
Expansion

Settler
Violence &
Terror

68 structures and homes were demolished in Bethlehem in 2024 alone.

Khallet an-Nu'man village is slated for **total demolition**.

Refugee camps (Dheisheh, Aida, Azza) face regular raids, demolitions, and arrests.

New Settlements in **Beit Sahour**, "Shidma" functions as a connective node between settlements in the Gush Etzion bloc.

New settlements, such as Nahal Heletz, threaten UNESCO sites, including **Battir and Al-Makhrou**.

The settler population in the West Bank grew from **115,700** (1993) to **750,000** (2025).

139 new settler roads (**116 km**) built since mid-2023, mostly through Palestinian land.

GLIMPSES FROM THE GROUND



Al-Khader

New settler roads
cut off Palestinian
access to farmlands

Al-Walajah

Full annexation,
restricted movement,
and pending demolition
orders

Dheisheh Camp

Homes marked for
demolition during
raids

Beit Sahour

A new settlement
directly affects the
most Christian
populated town in
the West Bank

Wadi Fukin

Raids, closures,
and pending
demolition orders

Al-Makhroun Valley

UNESCO World
Heritage site under
threat of annexation

Mount Herodium

Archeology
weaponized for
annexation

Khillet al-Qutn

Farmland
bulldozed by
settlers under
military escort

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Yet, even as Bethlehem's lights dim under Israeli annexation policies and its people and land face erasure, the community's steadfast resilience endures, a reminder that the birthplace of the Lord of peace continues not only to survive, but to assert its right to exist, its people refusing erasure, affirming that it remain a living testament to resistance of oppression, memory, and hope for a life of freedom, dignity and full rights and equality.

