



*Holy Child within a manger, long ago yet ever near  
Come as friend to every stranger, come as hope for every fear.  
As you lived to heal the broken, greet the outcast, free the bound  
As you taught us love unspoken, teach us now where you are found.\**

## In Advent hope and Christmas assurance, God is with us

It had been nearly ten years since I last walked the streets of Bethlehem and worshiped at Christmas Lutheran Church.

I knew the massive cement separation wall coils its way through and around Bethlehem and throughout the occupied territories. I knew of the watch towers and check points with armed guards. I knew about long lines that daily form at the check point "cattle stalls," delaying workers, students and those in need of medical care.



*The massive cement separation wall coils its way through and around Bethlehem and throughout the occupied territories.*

To "know" in a different, more personal way, I traveled to Bethlehem by bus and on foot.

The beautiful view of Bethlehem and its hills is gone, hidden from sight. The hardship of occupation and injustice sits heavy on the people.

Today, as long ago, the people live in Advent hope, watching and waiting with deep longing for a just peace and a better life. Today, as long ago, the people live with the Christmas assurance of Immanuel. Jesus Christ the Savior, the flesh and bones of God's love, was born. God is with us.

*ELCA missionaries Gloria Strickert and her husband, the Rev. Fred Strickert, began their service in Jerusalem in 2010.*



\*"Carol at the Manger" by Marty Haugen  
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