

This Christmas in Nazareth, peace is harder to find

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Nazareth has few public Christmas decorations this year, marking the second year in a row Jesus' hometown has been precluded by wartime conditions from traditional celebrations honoring the birthday of its most notable resident of all time.



Yasmeeen Mazzawi
(Courtesy photo)

Jesus' hometown and the place where his ministry began also is hometown to Yasmeeen Mazzawi, a volunteer paramedic with [Magen David Adom](#), Israel's national emergency services system.

For her, Nazareth is home, yet she feels the sadness of another year with no Christmas trees in the public square. In normal years, Nazareth has three beautiful trees on display, she said.

With the Israeli-Hezbollah [ceasefire agreement announced Nov. 27](#), there's

some improvement over last year. A few Christmas trees can be seen peeking out of windows, Mazzawi noted. But the overall tenor is far from celebratory, her damp, crestfallen eyes in a video call communicate.

Baptist influence

Nazareth is in northern Israel about 70 miles south of Lebanon. An Arab Christian, Mazzawi graduated from Nazareth Baptist School.

Her family did not attend a Baptist church. But, she explained, it was next door to her school, and she was there every day for chapel services.

She said her experience at the Baptist school “contributed a lot to my faith and my life day-to-day and also [her commitment to] helping people in need, definitely.”

Mazzawi said it was amazing growing up in Nazareth, walking the streets Jesus walked. She explained her Baptist school was in the town center, “where we know Jesus walked and where he went to the churches we have only 200 meters from my school.”

She explained her family talks at home about how many people in Nazareth go about life there as if it’s “very ordinary,” never considering Jesus physically inhabited their town. But she and her family think about the fact they are walking where Jesus walked all that time.

Since the war began, she noted, she has been working so much with Magen David Adom, she’s rarely able to attend church.

“It’s day-by-day,” she noted. “No expectations. Nothing is guaranteed.”

Over the last six months, communities in northern Israel, including Nazareth, have been the focus of Hezbollah missile attacks.

The ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel may have stilled the rockets,

but Mazzawi explained explosions and other smaller acts of violence continue.

Mazzawi works full-time as a business analyst with Deloitte in Tel Aviv. But with increased need for emergency responders in northern Israel, she has been working remotely in Haifa so she can serve. Mazzawi explained she works two 8-hour shifts a week as a paramedic.

She has served with Israel's emergency services for about 10 years, joining as a "young volunteer" at 15 years old, until she could take paramedic training at age 18. Mazzawi was encouraged to serve by her parents, Fadoul and Suzanne Mazzawi, according to a news release from Magen David Adom.

She worked with the organization after she became an adult to complete her required years of national service. Then she stayed there as a volunteer paramedic, one of 30,000 volunteer paramedics and EMTs of the 33,000 who serve with Magen David Adom, the release notes.

"I grew up in a loving home on values of accepting the other and loving the other," Mazzawi said in the release.

"We do not judge anyone for their religion, race, color or language. We have only one goal: saving lives. That means accepting people no matter who they are."

Difficult work



Mazzawi and her team serving in the field. (Photo / Magen David Adom)

Mazzawi said serving during wartime conditions is hard. Her paramedic work has called her to cities hit with rockets that could be hit with rockets again.

“It is scary to go to these places, but I turn to my faith for strength,” the release noted. “Sometimes the situation is quite chaotic, and I definitely face fears. But I keep focus on how best to serve the injured and frightened around me. Keeping my attention on how to serve helps me through.”

She noted the difficulty of “disconnecting her heart from her mind” to serve in these challenging locations. “I have to be ‘Yasmeen the paramedic.’ And I have to serve, help and give aid to patients. I have to be with the special units, serving with people I don’t know, who aren’t my team.”

Mazzawi described the noise and the fear she particularly faced serving at the northern border, “but the thing that really helped me is that I believe that our heavenly Father is with us.”

She said she drew all the strength from God she needed to provide first aid

and “be the light” in the moment for those she helped.

But she acknowledged that when she got home in the evening, the terrible injuries she treated would come back to her.

“When we go to bed at night, we recall everything,” she explained.

She said her paramedic team was “like her family,” and they rely on each other to get through what they’ve seen.



Mazzawi working in an MDA ambulance. (Photo / Magen David Adom)

Mazzawi explained she prayed for the ceasefire to result in better days, noting a colleague’s 10-year-old daughter’s experience—two years of COVID restrictions followed by two years of war with only a year of normalcy between.

“They’re not having their childhood,” she lamented. “They can’t go out and see the country. We have so many beautiful places here.”

She’s grateful the constant rocket explosions, for now, are relieved. However, the ability to move about freely is still largely curtailed by

smaller-scale terror attacks that continue to be reported.

Israel is a diverse country, she noted. She serves with Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze and Bahai, religious and secular. And where there is diversity, challenges are inevitable, she said.

But, "I can see, and I feel that people want to live, and people love life. And so, I really pray for better days."

A year ago, she responded to a call to resuscitate a baby. The Jewish mother allowed her to pray for her and the infant and began to pray too at Mazzawi's urging. They have remained in contact, and the baby recently celebrated a first birthday.

The mother commented on the light Mazzawi's calming, peaceful presence provided in dark times. Mazzawi said she shared it was the Father who loves her shining through.