We are going into this Advent and Hanukkah season, moving toward the end of one year to the beginning of another. If we look around us, political systems are collapsing, the financial situation is not meeting people’s needs, natural disasters are occurring, wars and devastation are taking place, and we witness the unprecedented movement of people as hundreds and thousands have fled their homes. God’s Christmas message came into a world that also faced turmoil. At that time, the land was under Roman occupation which controlled nearly every aspect of Jewish life, there was great internal religious and political strife, and the poor and downtrodden suffered greatly.

God chose to work through one of the most marginalized individuals in history, a poor, unmarried woman from a backwater town in Nazareth who found herself with an unexpected and divine pregnancy. Mary seems like a central character of the story, but in her own life and experiences, she was on the margins of society because of her social status and the situation she was in. God came to Mary, not because he pitied her, but because he favored her and sought to show her that he is with her, and by extension, with the world.

The favor Mary found with God brought many new complications into her life. She was pregnant out of wedlock. She would have to address this with her family and betrothed, which could potentially put her at physical risk. She would jeopardize her own reputation and be considered an outcast by society; in fact, this is how the non-believing world remembers her until this day. All of this was certainly troubling.

Nevertheless, Mary exhibited great faith in God and rejoiced in Luke 1:46-55. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Just as Mary embraced her role to carry God’s child, we too need to bear this Gospel message of the incarnation to a world in need. We can do this by partnering with (coming alongside) those who find themselves on the margins due to their circumstances. These are the people who serve, struggle and look for a way forward through their pain and rejection. They are like Mary -- the poor, those in need of social and religious support, those in need of mercy and strength. Instead of looking at refugees, victims of natural disasters, and others as people in misery, we need to see them as those who are better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3), those who God seeks to make recipients of his mercy and grace. They are not to be “kept out” or feared, but those whose needs we need to meet to live out the Christmas message today.

Mary’s message to us is that hope is found where it is least expected. If you look at the suffering world around you and cannot see hope, then perhaps that is where you can be a part of bringing forth this hope. Mary’s life and message challenge us beyond our current achievements, as they spur us to find areas to bring the incarnational hope of God with us to those who need it. We hope you will join us in finding ways to incarnate God’s love to others this holiday season.

*Cover picture taken from the Online Congress Library.*
This summer a group of young Israelis and Palestinians went on a trip to Ireland in order to learn and reflect on the Northern Irish conflict and our own. Sometimes, when we are absorbed in our conflict, it helps to step out of our context and gain insights from someone else’s conflict. One of the things I learned on this trip is that it is not about the quantity of people involved, but rather the quality of efforts for reconciliation.

We shared a little about this trip in our September e-mail prayer letter. In some of the activities, we split our Israelis and Palestinians into two national groups to identify core issues of our conflict. Interestingly, both groups identified similar things - land, religion and security. At the same time, they looked at things quite exclusively; both sides said the land belongs to them. We also heard from a number of speakers during our time in Ireland, but one that stood out to me is Dr. Trevor Morrow. During the Irish conflict, he was a church minister. He spoke about his role during the negotiation between the Protestants and Catholics in N. Ireland. He shared how the churches in N. Ireland played a negative role in the conflict because they maintained the social divide. Some even said, "Because I am a Christian, I will not forgive them," because they did not see what they deemed "true repentance" from the other side.

The majority of the churches agreed with the conflict between the Protestants and Catholics and even used the church as a place to endorse it, something he called "the idolatry of the church." However, some chose to use their individual freedoms to think critically about their place in the conflict. Morrow noted that it was individuals on the fringes of the local church who were successful in making a difference. These individuals challenged the "idolatry of the churches" and questioned its justification of violence.

When preaching in churches about loving the enemy and seeking reconciliation, Morrow saw congregants shake their heads in disapproval. He was alienated in his community because of this, and was rarely invited to preach in churches. He shared about the pain he felt because of this marginalization.

During his talk, I could not help but think about our context. During one of the reflection sessions, we asked our group if they thought our communities, Messianic Jewish and Palestinian Evangelical, are agents of or an obstacle to reconciliation. An Israeli participant said, "As individuals we are all trying, but as a community I can’t say. Each one is in their own bubble." A Palestinian participant said, "There are so many issues in our community. There are people who are hungry or suffering from basic human needs, and reconciliation is not a priority."

In light of what Morrow shared, some expressed that our churches can increase our sense of marginalization. At the same time, Morrow’s personal story shows that an individual has the ability to influence others within her religious community and then her nation. Morrow ended his testimony by encouraging us to keep building bridges and he gave us some recommendations on how to engage in reconciliation:

1. If we follow and have the mind of Christ we must serve others, including those with whom we disagree. We should pursue what is just for them as well as for ourselves.
2. When Jesus became man, he did not cease to be God, but he set aside the rights and privileges of God in order to be with us. If you are going to be involved in peacemaking, you set aside the rights and privileges of being Israeli or Palestinian.
3. In order for forgiveness to be practiced, Jesus gave himself up. The cost of forgiveness is enormous, but we are commanded to practice it.

The work of reconciliation is not easy, especially during heightened violence when both our peoples reject the other’s need, which is often the same need they long for. This is a cycle we are too familiar with, and the only way to release ourselves from this cycle is to do the exact opposite. Reconciliation is to affirm each other’s needs. We need to be prepared to serve, set aside our rights, and forgive, and we can do so from the fringes.
On September 25, our Young Mother’s Group met after a long summer away from each other. Many of us traveled and were busy with family and children over the past few months, and it was lovely to get together again. This time, we met to discuss historical narrative. This subject is one of the most challenging we address in our meetings, yet due to our mothers’ time constraints, we condensed the material down to a few morning sessions. We discussed our relevant terms, the challenges and limitations of narrative, and how narrative is an essential part of our lives.

We had a number of activities where we looked at pictures and reacted to them. To begin, we showed a few optical illusions to illustrate that we can look at one thing and perceive it differently. This showed that we all come from particular, limited perspectives; we can increase what we know through listening to other perspectives; and we can listen with humility, even when we disagree.

In a second activity we examined our different reactions to the same historical events. For this activity, we divided the ladies into two national groups. In the first slide, we showed the ladies two pictures describing the birth of the nation of Israel (see the two pictures on the top left). Each participant evaluated whether she identified with the picture and the words that came to mind when looking at it. The two groups discussed their answers separately, and then shared their respective responses with the other national group.

The Israeli group shared that they felt a number of things: pride, happy, belonging, important. One Israeli noted she felt conflicted, because it was a positive event that was also negative for others. The Palestinian group shared their thoughts on the same pictures: occupation, power through media, control, provoked, angry.

When we showed the second slide with two pictures of Yasser Arafat (see the third and fourth pictures), the Palestinian ladies were notably relieved as they began laughing. The Israeli group remarked that they saw an enemy, felt mistrust, and that Arafat was false and corrupt. The Palestinian group said “He belongs to us,” that it represented victory, it made them feel comfortable, and that he was habibi (a loved one) of their people.

Throughout the exercise we looked at other pictures related to the conflict or our respective people’s history. One featured a number of scenes from the Holocaust (for example, first picture on the next page), and voices quieted. When we saw pictures of Palestinian refugees (third and fourth pictures on the next page), some Israelis were not sure what it was, while the Palestinians immediately recognized it as part of their story. When we saw a picture of Yemenite Jewish refugees coming to Israel in 1949 (eighth picture), some of the Palestinians were confused. This exercise showed snippets of our histories, and our different responses to them.

After this exercise, we had facilitation in Emotional Logic. We broke up into pairs and discussed a hurtful event, what we lost in it, and constructive, empowering ways we can respond.

In the final session, we discussed seven ways to deal with our differences on a personal level. We also addressed five ways to move forward when dealing with conflicting narratives, which begins with learning each side’s perspective.

Afterwards one Palestinian participant shared, “When we talk about the situation, I feel sad. I had many stories in my life of things that are very sad.” At the same time, she continued, “In Musalaha we can appreciate and love each other.”

This meeting gave us a lot to think about, as a group and individually. In our three hours together we covered a lot of material. Learning our two narratives, particularly when they are starkly different, is an exercise in empathy and openness. The more we do this, the more we will be able to understand ourselves and others.
Fellowship Makes a Difference
By Musalaha Publications Department

After a new cycle of violence in the Holy Land, the members of Musalaha’s Young Mother’s Group met together on October 23rd. During violent times like these, participants might not want to venture out to where we are meeting, or they may even want to avoid reconciliation events as emotions can be very raw. Yet, the women that came were eager to share their experiences of the past month and to listen to each other.

As we shared our gratitude to God that morning, a common theme arose. The women were happy to meet in a calm setting with like-minded sisters. One woman shared, “I thank God that we can be together because it makes me really sad and depressed every time I hear the news. I think it’s a blessing to be here even if it’s on a small scale, to create something different from what we are seeing in our societies. God is here and this is different.”

After a time of worship, we revisited the topic of historical narrative, acknowledged that we all had bad experiences over the past few weeks, but we wanted to hear from one another to understand each other’s perspectives. We reviewed a chronology of the injuries and deaths, and noted the differences in what information had been made available about the victims and perpetrators. We examined the differences in how the media on each side reports on the violence through the story of a 13 year-old boy.

As we read this boy’s story from the Palestinian side, we heard about his youth, his childhood home, his family, and his victimhood. When we read about him in the Israeli media, we saw an account of him as a terrorist and his attack on Jewish Israelis. The bias of each was stark, and depending on the perspective of the reader, the articles could be interpreted differently. We concluded that our news never presents us with the whole story and we become more informed in our discussions together.

The facilitator noted that what is reported can lead to a widespread feeling in society that the other side is and always will be the perpetrator, and that any action against “them” is legitimate, “because we are the victim and they are the enemy.” It was interesting for me to see how the conversation on the conflict shifts when the group members speak as individual women from Israel or Palestine versus when they speak as mothers. The stakes are higher for them when it concerns their children’s safety and futures.

Every now and then I stepped outside to see the children playing together without consideration of ethnicity, religion or language. It brought a spark of hope for the future, that these children whose mother’s cannot freely move to meet each other, have children who may one day do so. Hope is in the difficult work the women are doing in forming friendships, praying for each other, and talking about the things that few are talking about. It is these steps that will get us all closer to peace.

The day’s activities ended with a fun time preparing plates of cookies for each person to give a friend. Each plate had a flyer with Arabic and Hebrew on it sharing that the women were praying together for an end to violence, and a verse of an encouragement from Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

When parting, the women said they hoped and prayed that everyone would stay safe this next month.
Ronza, the new West Bank Coordinator for our Women’s Department. Here is a little bit about her: “I am from Beit Jala and came to know Christ personally at 19 years old. I love working with young children, youth and women. I look forward to the future and how Christ’s love will transform this broken and hurting land. Through my work at Musalaha, I seek to build relationships with people and ultimately point them to the healing power of Jesus Christ.”

1. Our Jerusalem staff, for their safety and the many projects they are organizing and implementing.

2. Our Young Adults’ Bridge Builders reunion in January 2016.

3. The Musalaha Youth Department, for new staff and next year’s activities.

4. Publications projects, including a book on justice and reconciliation.

5. Our West Bank staff, for their safety, project planning and implementation.

6. A Happy Hanukkah to all those celebrating!

7. Website development as we find new ways to share our projects with you!


9. Jill, a student at Hebrew University, who is assisting us with projects in Musalaha’s Publications Department in her spare time. Jill has experience as a communications consultant in international development across three continents.

10. Our new registered charity, Musalaha UK. See back page for more details.

11. John, an intern from the UK who is contributing to our curriculum development.

12. Our Nazareth staff, for their safety, project planning and implementation.


14. An upcoming Young Family Leaders Reunion this month.

15. Midori, an intern from Japan who is translating our website into Japanese and assisting in media development.

16. A Danish consultant assisting in project development.


19. Musalaha’s Board members, for blessing and leadership.

20. A Danish consultant assisting in project development.


22. Unity in the Body of Messiah, particularly in the Holy Land.

23. Our West Bank staff, for their safety, project planning and implementation.

24. Peace.


26. Our Young Adults Departments, for new staff, and continued blessing as we plan new projects for these participants.

27. Our new registered charity, Musalaha UK. See back page for more details.

28. John, an intern from the UK who is contributing to our curriculum development.

29. Our Jerusalem staff, for their safety and the many projects they are organizing and implementing.


31. An upcoming Young Family Leaders Reunion this month.

32. A Happy Hanukkah to all those celebrating!

33. Website development as we find new ways to share our projects with you!

34. New interns in 2016.

35. Jill, a student at Hebrew University, who is assisting us with projects in Musalaha’s Publications Department in her spare time. Jill has experience as a communications consultant in international development across three continents.

36. Our new registered charity, Musalaha UK. See back page for more details.

37. John, an intern from the UK who is contributing to our curriculum development.

38. Our Nazareth staff, for their safety, project planning and implementation.

39. Our Young Adults Departments, for new staff, and continued blessing as we plan new projects for these participants.

40. Our new registered charity, Musalaha UK. See back page for more details.
The summer was exceptionally hot in temperature. We complained (or I did) but we coped. Then there has been and still is the volatile and violent atmosphere in the country. Jerusalem had the majority of ‘incidents’ resulting in many deaths.

Demonstrations take place almost daily outside the Bethlehem Bible College, which is on the main road. In order to make sure we can always leave, Salim and I park our cars in a parking area that avoids the main road so we can exit quickly.

**Now for the good news...**

**Jack** started his MA. He’s hardly at home, studies late, loves the studying atmosphere, still has the beard, and we hope his love of challenging opinions will be met at the University to give us (me) a break at home!

**Daniel** is off to Lesbos Island in Greece to volunteer for at least 6 months with the huge amounts of Syrian refugees arriving there. A humanitarian crisis has arisen and needs helpers. Since graduating from University in May, it was a long dry 4 months till the doors flew open to point him in this direction.

**John** still loves London and is busy with his football and swim teams. He landed himself a cushy job taking foreign English students around London. His second year at King’s College University will demand some studying, John, if you are listening!

**Sam** is now officially in his last year of high school! (At last the last one.) He continues his swim training, has started driving lessons, and has a part time job teaching swimming.

Prayers for Daniel especially as he will be facing many things, the likes of which he has never seen before. He hopes to use his life guard and swimming skills. He is young, he is healthy and he is willing. He will write his own updates if anybody is interested.

Kay Munayer (for the other Munayers)