

Mary and Joseph's Journey

When Palestine was under Roman occupation, Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be taxed.

If a modern Mary and Joseph had to make that journey today, they would travel from Israel into the Palestinian West Bank which is under Israeli occupation.

What would they see?



The Holy Cave in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, believed to be where the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary.

Nazareth is the largest Palestinian city in Israel and about 30% Christian.

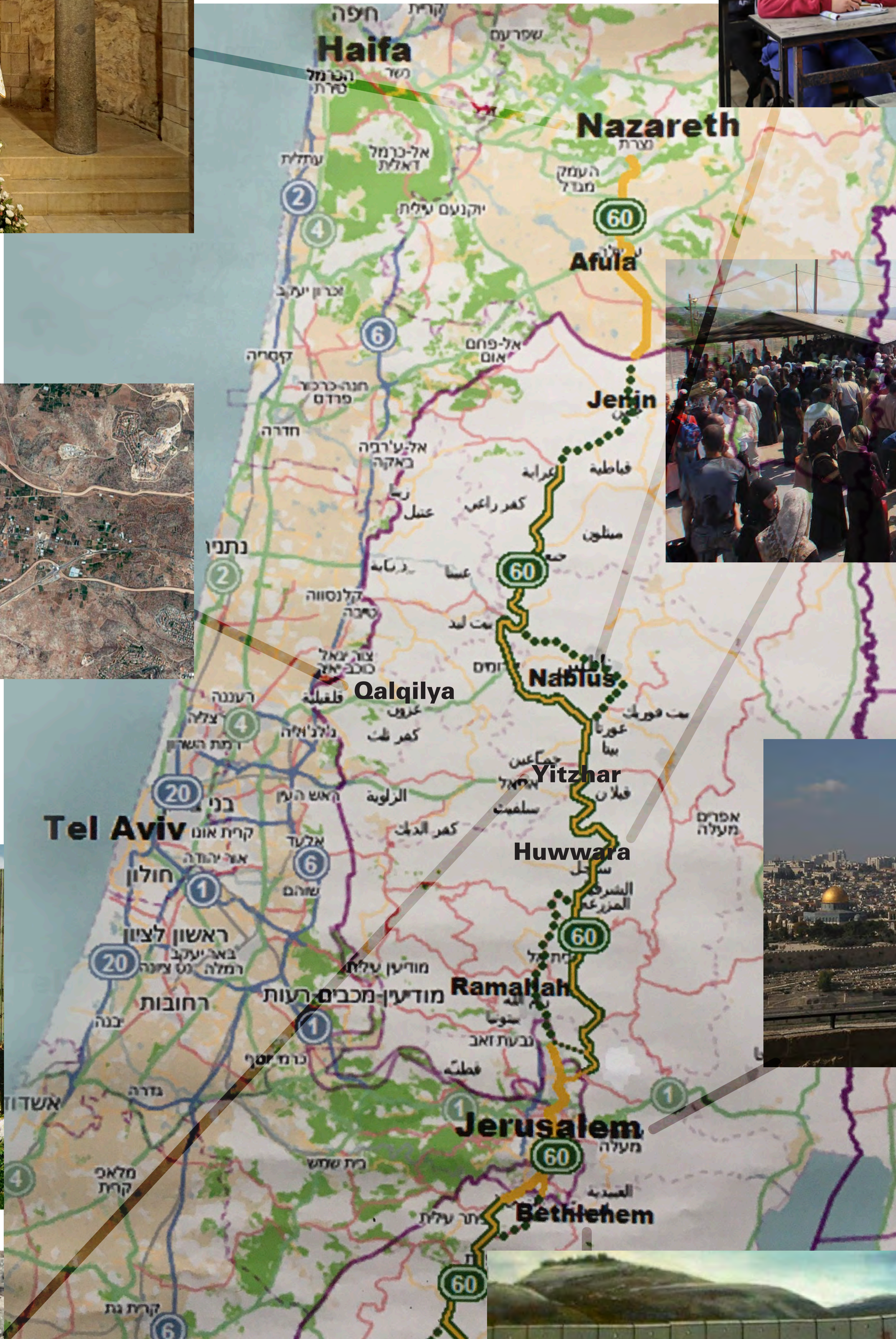


Life is frightening for children living under military occupation. Children at this school near **Nablus** are taught emergency drills to deal with frequent raids on their classrooms by Israeli soldiers and armed settlers.



Mary and Joseph may have lodged in the ancient city of **Qalqilya**.

Israel has now almost encircled the city with its Separation Wall, cutting off the population from most of their ancestral lands which have largely been taken over by settlers.



Today's **Mary and Joseph** would have to pass through three Israeli military checkpoints, including this one at **Huwwara**. **Palestinians must queue for hours** and scores of babies have been born at checkpoints.



Christian Issa Kassissieh dresses as Santa to bring cheer to tourists who throng **Jerusalem**. But Israel denies permits to enter the **Holy City** to the vast majority of Palestinians, and Mary and Joseph would have to bypass it today.



Around 750,000 Israelis live in settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, deemed illegal under international law. A minority, including some from **Yitzhar** settlement, attack Palestinians and destroy their crops.



At the end of their journey, would **today's Mary and Joseph** get through **The Wall**? The Open Bethlehem organisation says: "**The Wall encircles Bethlehem... with the land isolated by the Wall, annexed for settlements and closed under various pretexts, only 3% of the Bethlehem district is available for Palestinian use.**"

Bethlehem Now



Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus fled from the persecution of the Roman occupation and became refugees in Egypt. Some 750,000 Palestinians fled from the violence accompanying the foundation of Israel. But while the **Holy Family** eventually returned home to Nazareth, Israel denies to Palestinians **the universal human right to go home**, and some 7 million now live as refugees around the world.



Manger Square at Christmas



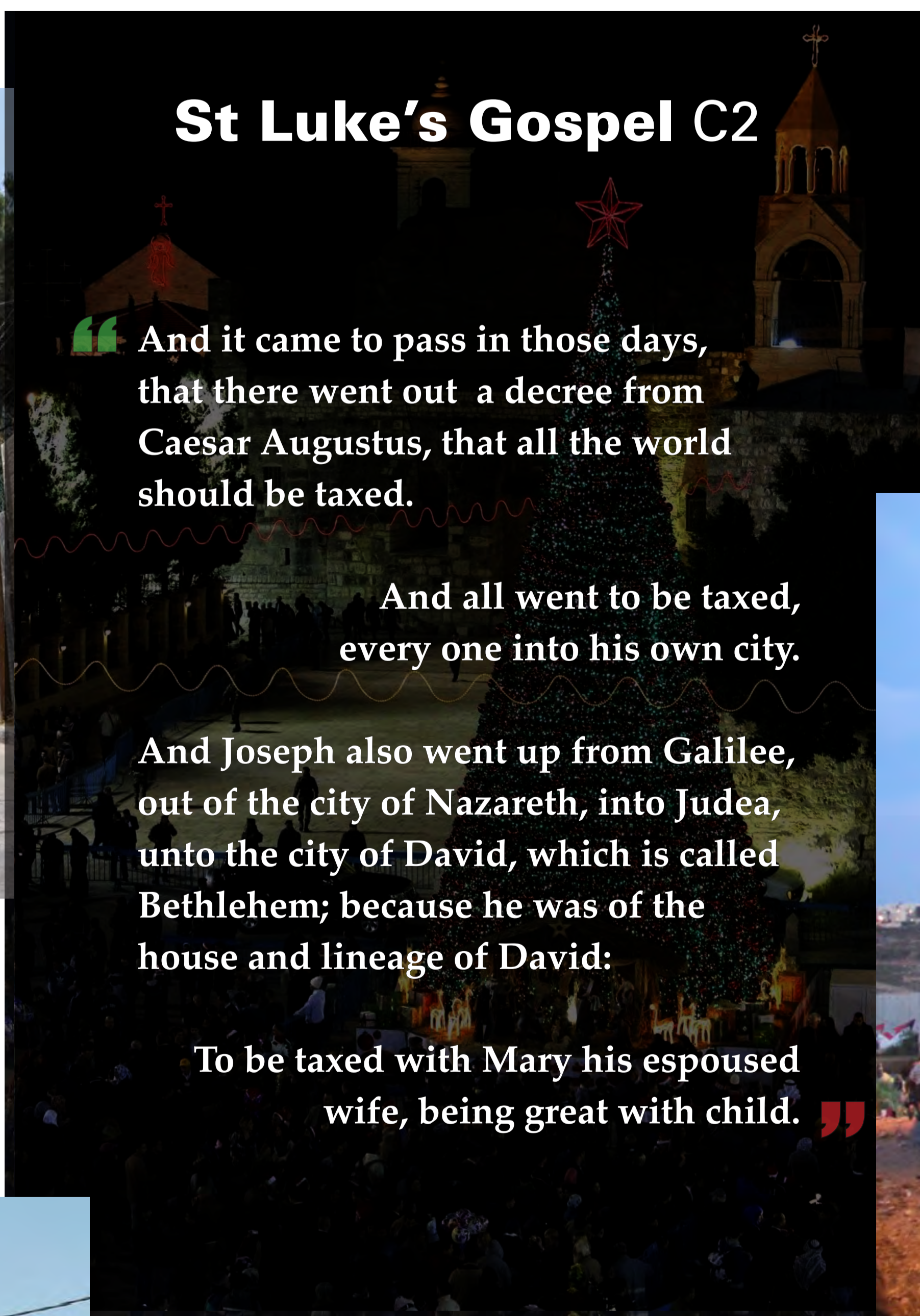
Star Street, which may have been Mary and Joseph's route into Bethlehem. Once full of shops, it is now quiet because few tourists stay in the city.



Only about **47,000 Christians** live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories today. In **Bethlehem** they have **shrunk from 85% of the population to 12%** largely because many have emigrated to escape the harsh conditions of life under military occupation.



Aida refugee camp is one of three in Bethlehem which together house over 20,000 refugees descended from those who fled their homes in what is now Israel. The huge key represents their longing to return



St Luke's Gospel C2

“ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David:

To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ”



Checkpoint 300 which Palestinians must pass through to get to their jobs in Israel or to **pray at the holy Christian and Muslim sites** in Jerusalem. The queue starts forming at 3am and conditions inside are horrendous; sometimes people faint or suffer broken limbs in the crush.



The Walled Off Hotel, designed by the artist Banksy, fronts on to Israel's Separation Wall where it snakes through Bethlehem. Banksy said it has **“the worst view of any hotel in the world”**.

The Star in the Church of the Nativity

