

Nazareth, Palestine

Northern Palestine

History

AN-NASIRA, meaning “the HELPER,” is where the Angel Gabriel announced to Mother Mary she would give birth to Jesus. Dating back to 2000 BC, Nazareth is located 18 miles southeast of Haifa and 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee, nestled between the hills of Mount Tabor.

After thousands of years and various empires controlling Palestine, Nazareth transformed from a village into a large town as part of a campaign led by Zahir al-Umar, who sought to unify urban areas in Northern Palestine to facilitate agricultural connection, trade, and mutual protection by encouraging Jewish and Christian immigration to the city.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Nazareth prospered as a market center for dozens of surrounding villages. Fellahin purchased supplies from its souks, which were organized by trade: agricultural produce, metalwork, jewelry, and leather goods.

By 1914, Nazareth consisted of eight quarters: ‘Araq, Farah, Jami’, Khanuq, Maidan, Mazazwa, Sharqiya, and Shufani. The city contained nine churches, two monasteries, four convents, two mosques, four hospitals, four private schools, a public school, a police station, three orphanages, a hotel, three inns, a flour mill, and eight souks.

Catastrophe

July 16th, 1948: Operation Dekel by Zionist Israeli forces began its campaign on the outskirts of Saffuriyah, the birthplace of Mother Mary. Palestinian historian Nafez Nazzal documented that the village was bombed by three Israeli planes during the night of July 15th, dropping “barrels filled with explosives, metal fragments, nails, and glass.” Many residents were killed or wounded, and others fled to nearby orchards for cover.

Despite resistance, the people of Saffuriyah were eventually forced out or killed. May we honor the resistance with this remembrance.

Bearing witness to the destruction surrounding Nazareth, the Muslim mayor of the historically Christian city requested that Nazarenes halt resistance and signed a ceasefire with advancing Israeli forces to prevent total destruction. Canadian Zionist commander Ben Dunkelman chose not to ethnically cleanse Nazareth, fearing international Christian backlash. Twelve hours later, he was removed from his post for defying orders from his superior, Chaim L., who had called for the total cleansing of “the Arabs.”

In the years that followed, Israeli settlements replaced destroyed Palestinian villages. Jewish National Fund pine forests were planted to constrict Nazareth’s expansion and facilitate land seizure. For twenty years, Palestinians—now holding Israeli citizenship—lived under military rule with restricted movement.

After 1948, Israeli authorities established Nazareth Illit (Upper Nazareth) as a separate Jewish city designed to “swallow up” Nazareth and transfer the center of life away from the Palestinian city through discriminatory planning policies.

For 78 years, the city of Nazareth, hometown of Jesus Christ, has faced pressure, discrimination, and economic hardship. Its Palestinian residents remain steadfast in preserving their heritage and await reunion with their exiled brothers and sisters. They are waiting for our return.

Notable Artists from Nazareth

- Michael Khleifi (1950) — Founder of Contemporary Palestinian Cinema
- Hisham Zreiq (1968) — Pioneer of Computer Fine Art
- Dib Joubran (1876–1951) — Founder of Palestinian Oud-making; sculptor and calligrapher, known as “The Founding Master”
- Khalil al-Halabi (1889–1964) — Pioneer of religious icon painting
- Hanna al-Mismar (1880s–1950s) — Oldest Palestinian sculptor and pioneer of pottery
- Michel Haddad (1919–1994) — Pioneer of modern Arab poetry and editor of Al-Mujtama

Notable Institutions to Visit

- Saffourieh Museum for Heritage and Return
- Liwan Culture Cafe
- NAZART Art Gallery & Atelier
- Basata Gallery & Cafe
- Zahir Al-Umar Saraya of Nazareth