

# ADVENT



## *Salt of the Earth: Palestinian Christians in the Northern West Bank*

Study Guide (leader version)

<http://www.saltfilms.net>

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**Summary:** This session looks at how we as Christians prepare for discipleship. We will meet Mughannam, a young man who teaches Christian religion in the Roman Catholic school in Zababdeh, a majority Christian town in the West Bank. We'll talk about how we as Christians prepare for discipleship.

**Supplies:** Everyone should have a Bible. Bring copies of this session's student guide. You should have a board or flipchart.

### 5 **Prayer and introduction**

*min* Greet everyone. If you are beginning the study series today, spend a moment to go over class objectives and expectations (see <http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/overview.pdf>). If you have already begun the series, and your class is following the Daily Walk, you may invite people to share any reflections they may have from the previous week.

Hand out the student guides and introduce today's study: *Today, we will meet Mughannam (mu-GHA-nam), a young man who teaches Christian religion in the Roman Catholic school in Zababdeh (za-BAHB-deh), a majority Christian town in the West Bank. We'll talk about how we as Christians prepare for discipleship.*

If you have a map, point out the location of Zababdeh on it. Invite someone to open the session in prayer or use the sample prayer at right.

### Sample Prayer

*Merciful Lord, open our hearts and minds to your word.*

*Prepare us for the work you have set before us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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### 1 **Scripture**

*min* Invite someone to read Luke 3:1-6 aloud.

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### 10 **Questions**

*min* As a group, discuss:  
*What does it mean to "prepare the way of the Lord"?  
How do we do it as individuals? As a church?*

20  
min

**Film**  
Show “Advent”  
segment of the  
film.

**Leader Notes film**

Mughannam is young man living in Zababdeh, one of the few majority Christian towns left in Israel or Palestine, and the only one in the northern West Bank. Approximately 3,000 people live there, two-thirds of whom are Christian – primarily Roman

Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Anglican, and Greek Catholic. He is a Christian religion teacher at the town’s Latin Patriarchate (Roman Catholic) school and a youth leader for the Roman Catholic Church of the Visitation. He attended the Roman Catholic seminary in Beit Jala (which educates boys starting in 7<sup>th</sup> grade) and then received his B.A. in Religious Studies from Bethlehem University. He is hoping to continue his education in Rome. We first see him preparing the youth choir for Christmas Eve services.

The Latin school in Zababdeh educates Christian and Muslim boys and girls from pre-school through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Children come from Zababdeh and surrounding towns such as Tubas, Qabatia, and the city of Jenin. Accredited secondary schools must offer Islam classes, and Islam is one of the comprehensive exams students must pass to receive their high school diplomas. Non-Muslim students are exempt from this exam and from taking Islam classes. Christian schools (and government schools in areas with large Christian populations) offer Christian religion classes for Christian students. The Palestinian National Authority textbooks for these classes were created in collaboration with Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant denominations.

Mughannam talks with Fr. Aktham Hijazin, parish priest and school principal. As they discuss a relationship between Mughannam’s class and a church in the United States, they amusingly get two unfamiliar words confused: Pennsylvania and Presbyterian. Fr. Aktham talks about what it means for Christians to be “salt of the earth”: in knowledge, education, and life, Christians must show Christ to the world around them. The goals of the Roman Catholic youth program are to help youth strengthen their relationship with Christ and to enable them to benefit the church, each other, and the larger society.

Mughannam describes his guide to Christian living, which shapes the methodology of the youth program: 1) observe the world around you, 2) discern, using Jesus as your wisdom, and 3) act, based on Christian thought. He considers issues in Palestine and Israel, decrying the violence of suicide bombers as well as the indiscriminate military operations. He calls for freedom and dignity: “Just as Israelis have a right to live, I, as a Palestinian, have that right, too. But to live under the gun, no way. That is not freedom.”

As Mughannam makes the preceding comments to us, we see him at a youth meeting, where the youth are discussing plans for Christmas. The deacon is challenging the kids to prepare themselves and their community so that they can feel the presence of God, not just a momentary excitement to see Santa Claus. The kids discuss ideas, especially revolving around a Christmas Bazaar to raise everyone’s spirits and to help the poor and unemployed. The 10<sup>th</sup> graders suggest a donation box so that the proceeds can help a very needy family. Problems of unemployment and poverty have ballooned since the current conflict began in September 2000.

*Leader notes film continued*

As we see Mughannam in worship, we hear him reflect on his own faith journey and his sense of sin and grace in his own life. He wants to be a better witness, to use his discernment better; he sees his faith growing daily. He talks about being part of the Christian family; as a Palestinian Arab, he may differ in skin color, in language and in tradition and habits from others. But as a Christian, he is not different at all.

Fr. Aktham preaches an Advent sermon. The gospel (Luke 3:1-6) makes a point of naming political and religious leaders of Jesus' time. Yet amid these powerful people God sent the Word to a person in the wilderness, calling out: "prepare the way of the Lord." Fr. Aktham asserts that today each of us—laity and clergy, child and adult—needs this voice. We all must remove from our lives impediments to Christ. Mughannam says he is preparing and waiting, for his own discipleship and for peace in his land.

After church, Mughannam's friend teases him for getting a special haircut because he is being filmed for the documentary. Later, he gives a tour around the Christmas Bazaar, as the youth are preparing for it and once it is open. The Bazaar offers the youth a chance to work together, collaborating on something to help the community. As Mughannam takes us to the various booths of the Bazaar, he reminds us of the importance behind the smallest of Christmas tasks: "to paint a smile of the Christ child on each one."

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**20**    **Questions**

*min*    *In describing the goals of the youth program, Mughannam articulates his guidelines for discipleship:*

*Observe the world around you;  
Discern, using Jesus as your wisdom;  
Act, based on Christian thought.*

1) 10 to 15 min: Divide the class into groups of 2 to 4.

List a number of situations or issues on the board. Examples might include Zababdeh (based on what you have just seen), your congregation, your city, a particular issue facing your community.

Ask each group to apply Mughannam's guidelines to one of these situations (or another of their own choice). Groups may use these questions to approach the exercise:

*What have you observed in the situation? Is more observation needed? Of what and why? What scripture, principals, or doctrines might help you discern in this situation? How else can we use Jesus as our wisdom to discern? What kinds of action might the process lead toward? Are the guidelines appropriate/complete/relevant to this or other situations?*

2) 5 to 10 min: Reconvene as one group.

Invite people to share insights from their small group discussions.

4 **Closing and prayer**  
*min* Solicit prayer concerns from the group and then close in prayer, using your own or the sample prayer at right.  
 Remind the group of “Daily Walk” opportunities, and plans for your next meeting.

Sample Prayer  
*Blessed Lord and Savior, we pray for Mughannam and all who seek to be your disciples. Give each of us eyes to see your world, ears to hear your word, and hands to do your work. In your holy name we pray. Amen.*

<p><b>Daily Walk</b>          An invitation to daily prayer and witness</p>	
<p>Daily Prayer:  <i>Frame your daily walk with this series in prayer—feel free to use your own prayer or the one provided:</i>          God of wisdom, I pray for students. Keep them safe as they learn and grow. May they seek your truth and knowledge. May they have the courage and endurance to become instruments of your love and grace in the world. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.</p>	<p>Daily Action:          Available online: <a href="http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/advent-student.pdf">http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/advent-student.pdf</a>          Day 1) <i>Read Scripture:</i> Proverbs 2.          Day 2) <i>Hear from a Holy Land Christian:</i> Voices of students at Latin Patriarchate (Roman Catholic) schools.  <a href="http://www.lpj.org/Nonviolence/Maria/Story14.htm">http://www.lpj.org/Nonviolence/Maria/Story14.htm</a>          Day 3) <i>Learn more:</i> An examination of Palestinian and Israeli school textbooks and the question of incitement.  <a href="http://www.miftah.org/Doc/Factsheets/MIFTAH/English/Jan30by2k4.doc">http://www.miftah.org/Doc/Factsheets/MIFTAH/English/Jan30by2k4.doc</a>          Day 4) <i>Be inspired:</i> Holy Land Trust’s Peace and Reconciliation program.  <a href="http://www.holylandtrust.org/pnr.html">http://www.holylandtrust.org/pnr.html</a>          Day 5) <i>Share:</i> Take time to tell someone new about how you’ve been moved this week by this Study Series. Invite him/her to pray with you.          Day 6) <i>Act:</i> Sponsor a student and help Holy Land Christian schools continue their ministries.  <a href="http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/117.cfm">http://www.hcef.org/hcef/index.cfm/ID/117.cfm</a></p>