

Objekttyp: **FrontMatter**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **77 (2011)**

Heft [10]

PDF erstellt am: **14.09.2024**

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# HELVE<sup>+</sup>EDIA

Magazine for the members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc  
Helvetia is in its 77th year

December 2011/January 2012

## Bethlehem

Bethlehem is a Palestinian city in the central West Bank, approximately 8 kilometers south of Jerusalem, with a population of about 30,000 people. It is the capital of the Bethlehem Governorate of the Palestinian National Authority and a hub of tourism.

when Christian pilgrims throng to the Church of the Nativity. Bethlehem has over thirty hotels and three hundred handicraft workshops. The city's main streets and old markets are lined with shops selling handicrafts, Middle Eastern spices, jewelry

paints, plastics, synthetic rubber, pharmaceuticals, construction materials and food products, mainly pasta and confectionery.

Bethlehem has a wine-producing company, Cremisan Wine, founded in 1885, that currently exports wine to several countries. The wine is produced by monks in the Monastery of Cremisan. The monastery's wine production is around 700,000 liters per year.

The Church of the Nativity is one of Bethlehem's major tourist attractions and a magnet for Christian pilgrims. It stands in the center of the city — a part of the Manger Square — over a grotto or cave called the Holy Crypt, where Jesus supposedly was born. Nearby is the Milk Grotto where the Holy Family took refuge on their Flight to Egypt and next door is the cave where St. Jerome spent thirty years translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin.



Church of the Nativity from Manger Square

The Old Testament identifies Beit Lehem as the city David was from and the location where he was crowned as the king of Israel. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke identify Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus of Nazareth.

In 1948, the religious makeup of the city was 85% Christian, mostly of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations, and 13% Sunni Muslim. By 2005, the proportion of Christian residents had decreased dramatically, to about 20%.

Bethlehem's chief economic sector is tourism, which peaks during the Christmas season

and oriental sweets. Numerous shops in Bethlehem sell olive wood carvings made from the local olive groves. Religious handicrafts are also a major industry in Bethlehem, and some products include ornaments handmade from mother-of-pearl, as well as olive wood statues, boxes, and crosses. The art of creating mother-of-pearl handicrafts was introduced to Bethlehem by Franciscan friars from Damascus during the 14th century. Stone and marble-cutting, textiles, furniture and furnishings are other prevalent industries. Bethlehem also produces

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