Since the fourth century at the latest, Christianity has set aside a certain day to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The dates may vary; Western churches mark Christmas on the 25th of December, while most Eastern churches celebrate it on January 6th or 7th.

Historically, the older Eastern churches linked this season to the Epiphany tradition, thereby relating the Incarnation to the baptism of Jesus, when God proclaimed: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) According to these Church fathers, God demonstrated on this occasion the divinity of His son.

In celebrating Christmas, the central character is a small, vulnerable infant. While our view of Jesus should never be reduced to a mere child in the arms of His mother, it is precisely this frail and delicate baby who is at the center of the Christmas narrative.

The child as sign

Already, the prophet Isaiah saw “the child” as a sign of salvation for the Jewish people.

In his day, Israel was challenged by a serious military threat from Assyria and was governed by a king who “not only wearied men but who wearied God also” (Isaiah 7:13). Yet God decided to give this hopeless king a sign of redemption. “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)

In chapter nine, Isaiah again presents a picture of looming national disaster. The region of the Galilee is beset by hostile invading armies. But it is precisely this “dark land” and “the people which walk in darkness” that see the bright light of salvation – a light which will remove the rod of oppression and heavy yoke of the enemy. But all those who expected the appearance of a military hero will be disappointed. The agent of salvation which brings redemption to Israel is surprisingly weak: “...for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given!” (Isaiah 9:6)

A similar image can be found in the book of Micah. Here, the prophet also paints a dark picture of oppression: “Now also many nations have gathered against you, who say, ‘Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.’” (Micah 4:11) Yet Micah also sees the redeeming light which would transform a hopeless situation: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2)

Yet again, the timing of Israel’s salvation is tied to the birth of a child, as Micah notes: “Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth.” (Micah 5:3)

Is it not remarkable that three times the Hebrew Prophets of old declare that the sign of salvation for Israel is the birth of a child? And this is exactly what was announced to the lowly shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem.

>> CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was founded in 1980 as an act of comfort and solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people in their claim to Jerusalem.

Today, the Christian Embassy stands at the forefront of a growing mainstream movement of Christians worldwide who share a love and concern for Israel and an understanding of the biblical significance of the modern ingathering of Jews to the land of their forefathers.

From our headquarters in Jerusalem and through our branches and representatives in over 80 nations, we seek to challenge the Church to take up its scriptural responsibilities towards the Jewish people, to remind Israel of the wonderful promises made to her in the Bible, and to be a source of practical assistance to all the people of the Land of Israel.

The ICEJ's United States Branch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with offices in Washington, D.C. and in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. We are a non-denominational faith-based ministry supported by the voluntary contributions of our members and friends.

We invite you to join us as we minister to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide by using the enclosed response slip to make your donation to the ongoing work and witness of the ICEJ.

Please mail all donations to:
PO Box 440276
Nashville, TN 37244

Or make your tax-deductible gift online:
www.icejusa.org

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

Did you know ICEJ Speakers are available to visit your community?

Bringing a Balanced Biblical Perspective on Israel to the Church!

Call Teresa for more information: (615) 895-9830

2012 TOUR

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Feast of Tabernacles Tour
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ICEJ Events
Seminars, Tours, Conferences & Solidarity Events, 2011

USA Seminars & Speaking Tours
ICEJ speakers continue to travel throughout the United States, enabling Christians to grow in their understanding of Israel. Our educational seminars impacted dozens of churches and a number of Christian colleges in 2011, including Le Tourneau University in Longview, TX and Regent University in Virginia Beach. The event at Regent opened the door for US Director, Susan Michael, to talk about the ICEJ’s educational programming with Pat Robertson on CBN’s 700 Club and to share devotions with the entire television network staff. Altogether, ICEJ speakers reached thousands of people in more than a dozen states from New Mexico to Wisconsin. If we missed you this year, why not invite us to your community in 2012?

Conferences & Solidarity Events
In May, ICEJ Media Director, David Parsons, joined Rev. Malcolm Hedding and Pastor Allen Jackson for our Spring Teaching Conference at World Outreach Church in Murfreesboro, TN - giving a powerful biblical perspective on the unfolding turmoil in the Middle East. Meanwhile, in Washington DC, Susan Michael spoke at the annual CUFI Summit and the Jerusalem Day Prayer Breakfast on Capitol Hill before leaving for Northern Ireland to address the annual Israel solidarity event at the parliament in Belfast. In early September Susan was travelling again, this time to Singapore to speak at a pastor’s conference in that nation. Another highlight of our international speaking ministry came in November when ICEJ Executive Director, Dr. Juergen Buehler, was invited to address over 12,000 Christians and parliamentarians in Budapest, Hungary.

Feast of Tabernacles Celebration & Tour
The 2011 Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles - Israel, A Light to the Nations - saw pilgrims from some 80 nations flock to Israel to receive a powerful challenge to rededicate their lives to prayer. Special guests included Angus Buchan, a man whose personal testimony has impacted hundreds of thousands in his native South Africa. Participants in the official US Feast Tour had a life-changing encounter with the land of Israel through the lens of God’s Word. Many more people around the world were able to taste the Feast thanks to our live streaming partnership with Visjon Norge - enabling the evening celebrations to be seen across Europe, the US and beyond.

Invite an ICEJ Seminar or Speaker to your local church in 2012
Call Teresa for more details on: (615) 895-9830
The Carmel Wildfires
Labeled the worst natural disaster in Israel's modern history, the Carmel wildfires in December 2010 claimed 42 lives and consumed thousands of acres of prized woodlands. In response, we were able to open the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors as an emergency shelter for those who had been forced to evacuate their homes and open a crisis center in Tirat Karmel to provide immediate food, clothing and medical aid to those impacted by the blaze.

Haifa's Holocaust Survivors
Our outreach to elderly Holocaust survivors in northern Israel continued to expand throughout 2011 with the purchase of two apartment buildings on either side of the original ICEJ-sponsored assisted-living facility in Haifa. Subsequent renovations have enabled us to increase the living space to accommodate 125 people, with all their lodging, food and medical care provided.

Today, the phased expansion is now complete. The two dilapidated neighboring buildings have been transformed into a multipurpose complex that includes attractive living quarters, a kitchen and dining hall, a synagogue, courtyards, and a medical and dental clinic that is also serving other needy survivors throughout the Haifa area. Doctors and nurses from local hospitals volunteer to cover the residents' health needs and the Home's kitchen is now feeding other survivors who live in the surrounding community.

The last generation of Holocaust survivors in Israel is aging and the time in which we can help them is running out. Your support has enabled us to respond to this critical need this year!

The Druze of Maghar
Israel's Druze are a truly unique minority. They trace their ancestry back to the biblical figure Jethro, but left the Sinai deserts a millennia ago when the Muslim mainstream rejected their distinctive brand of Islam. Instead, they settled in the highland areas of Lebanon and northern Israel, where they have managed to survive centuries of Muslim persecution.

Today, the Druze community in Israel numbers about 120,000 people living on the Carmel range, the Golan Heights and other scattered villages throughout the Galilee. Typically the Druze are loyal to Israel, and willingly serve in the IDF, but face a host of economic and educational challenges upon re-entering civilian life.

This year, the ICEJ invested some $45,000 to improve educational opportunities in Druze public schools, sponsoring computers, science labs and university scholarships with the objective of increasing the number of local teens able to continue their education after completing their military service. A third of this money was invested in elementary education in the mixed Druze/Christian town of Maghar.

Shelter for Battered Women
'Abrupt Life' started as a pro-life outreach to help women think twice about having an abortion. Now, it is a thriving refuge that also reaches out to victims of sex trafficking and domestic violence in Israel. This year, the ICEJ came to their aid, installing a security gate and alarm system to protect the residents and the husband-and-wife counselling team from the many threats to their safety. They can now focus on helping more battered women start a new life in safety.
Red Carpet Treatment

With aliyah to Israel on the rise for the third consecutive year, we have continued our partnership with the Jewish Agency to sponsor the highly successful ‘Red Carpet’ program that enables new immigrants to undergo a fast-track absorption process within 24 hours of touching down at Ben Gurion Airport. Among the new immigrants helped by this program in 2011 have been olim from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil and the USA.

The Last Ethiopian Jews

A year of drought and political turmoil has forced Israeli authorities to speed up the long delayed relocation of thousands of Falash Mura in Ethiopia - an ancient and isolated community of Jews that have always cherished the dream of one day returning to Zion. In August, the first ICEJ-sponsored flight in this accelerated aliyah initiative landed at Ben Gurion airport. Meanwhile, ICEJ branches from all over the world have raised additional funds to help bring this last contingent of Ethiopian Jews home.

Paralympic Heros

One of those is Asael Shabo (right). In 2002, when he was only eight years old, a Palestinian terrorist broke into his family’s house in the settlement of Itamar and killed his mother and three of his brothers. Asael managed to survive the attack but lost his right leg. Ten years later, thanks to your support, Asael is one of the best disabled swimmers in the world and a member of the Israeli national wheelchair basketball team.

Water Walking

Four years ago the ICEJ built a state-of-the-art therapeutic swimming pool at the Oranim School in the city of Ashkelon. Today, it is helping hundreds of handicapped Israelis every week including Tali (left), who suffers from severe spastic paralysis. “Tali is unable to walk,” says school director Jardena Zachlach, “but when she is in the water she feels like she can.” Thanks to your generosity the ICEJ is continuing to help many more children like Tali through our ongoing support of Oranim.

Israel has an unusually high number of disabled citizens: 650,000 - almost 10% of the population. Some were born with a handicap, while others were injured during their service as IDF soldiers. Some are victims of the numerous terrorist attacks launched against innocent civilians over the decades, or of the country’s many road accidents.

But Israel also boasts one of the largest facilities for disabled athletes in the world. The Israel Sports Center for the Disabled in Ramat Gan receives no government funding, yet it accounts for almost 80% of all medals that Israelis have won in the Paralympics since 1960. That’s why, for the past seven years, the ICEJ has been sponsoring some of the 2,000 disabled athletes at the center.

It is the last chapter in a story that began some 25-years ago with ‘Operation Moses’ the dramatic Israeli rescue of thousands of Ethiopian Jews who had fled the nation’s bitter civil war and were trying to journey to Israel on foot via Sudan. Since that time the ICEJ has continued assisting the Ethiopian community in Israel, funding psychological therapy, after-school programs, summer camps and college scholarships for at-risk Ethiopian youth and teens. This vital work has continued throughout 2011.
Solutions to Arab Inequality

This year, the ICEJ funded the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken of Arab sector social workers in Israel, as part of our efforts to guide Israeli authorities in targeting the most critical problems facing their communities. Despite enjoying a higher standard of living than other populations in the region, the study’s 85-page report told of social workers overburdened by case loads involving large families, and not enough specialists in handling at-risk children.

“We were extremely pleased to fund this first systematic study of the welfare needs of Israeli Arab society,” said former ICEJ Executive Director Rev. Malcolm Hedding. “It is also our hope that the results will be used wisely to lift many deserving families out of poverty and its ill effects, while also demonstrating Israel’s credentials as a fair and just society.”

Making Israel’s Case

Israel is currently facing an unprecedented campaign of delegitimization by pro-Palestinian activists, sections of the media and even mainline Christian denominations. That’s why in late 2010 the ICEJ launched the Israel Defense Network, a mechanism through which Christians can be empowered make the case for Israel in the local church and the wider community. This year we took that initiative forward, improving our online presence and taking concrete steps to combat two central accusations levelled against the Christian Zionist community. We did this by defending Israel’s theological legitimacy in Christian academia, and advocating a series of practical solutions to the challenges of inequality between Jews and Arabs within Israeli society.

A New Web Platform

In May, the ICEJ was proud to launch an updated version of the ministry’s website, redesigned to provide closer integration with our worldwide network of branches.

The ICEJ’s new global web platform now enables our branches in more than 25 nations to have unique, language-specific information online, listing upcoming local speaking events, prayer needs and campaigns within the framework of a single domain: www.icej.org. The website also allows supporters to make secure online donations in different currencies that are processed according to the varying tax and requirements of their country of residence.

The entire website redesign has not only saved the ministry tens of thousands of dollars, but has greatly increased the speed and efficiency with which your giving can be channelled to the areas of greatest need on the ground in Israel.

This year also saw the launch of the ICEJ News app - providing free smart phone access to the latest news from Israel. Scan the QR code below to download yours!

A Biblical Defense

In September Fuller Theological Seminary’s ‘Just Peacemaking Initiative’ published an ‘Open Letter’ which claimed, that Christian Zionism is not only sinful but produces sin and will trigger a catastrophic war in the Middle East. The ICEJ immediately released a detailed theological response which drew the endorsement of a number of widely-respected scholars from a number of evangelical traditions, including Dr. Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Jack Hayford, of Los Angeles’ King’s University and Mark Tooley of the Institute for Religion & Democracy.

“Our support for Israel does not mean that we think she is perfect,” said Dr. Juergen Buehler. “But if we want true justice for the Palestinian people then we need to admit that their problem is not Israel but their own corrupt leaders who seek the goal of eradicating Israel.”

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A Season of Turmoil

As we moved into 2011, it became clear that Israel was facing some new and severe challenges in the year ahead. That’s why we decided to start the year with a season of prayer and fasting for Israel and our ministry in the land. On the last Wednesday of January, we concluded our special season of prayer with an all-night prayer vigil as part of a global 24-hour prayer watch in partnership with our national directors and staff around the world.

Within weeks the urgency of the hour was underscored by political upheaval which quickly spread from Tunisia, to Egypt, to Libya and on into Syria: a season of turmoil that has destabilized the entire Middle East.

So, the Isaiah 62 Prayer Initiative was born. On the fourth Wednesday of every subsequent month in the year, the worldwide family of the ICEJ gathered in homes and churches across the world, from Finland to Cape Town and as far as the Fiji islands, to join us in our prayers for Israel and the Nations. Timely, in-depth prayer letters were sent out to over 20,000 people each month via email, posted on the website and reprinted in our publications.

We believe the prayers of God’s people make a difference. Thank you for joining us!

Palestinian Statehood

In September, there was an intensification of global prayer effort in the lead up to a planned vote on Palestinian statehood at the United Nations. Across the world, the ICEJ’s National Directors were active in praying for and seeking to influence the stance of their home nations. It is clear that God heard our prayers in three specific areas:

The Vote was Prevented
An attempt to force a vote in the Security Council was prevented through a combination of diplomacy and an unequivocal threat from US President Barack Obama;

The Standoff was Defused
A number of nations that were previously ‘on the fence’ backed away from their support for a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood in part due to the intransigence of the Palestinian leadership and the belligerence of Mahmoud Abbas’ speech to the General Assembly;

Israel’s Legitimacy was Defended
Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu came across as both conciliatory and reasonable in his willingness to re-start negotiations without preconditions and used the platform of his speech to the General Assembly to make a clear and effective defense of Israel.

New Season of Leadership

In May, former ICEJ Executive Director, Rev. Malcolm Hedding, informed the annual gathering of the ministry’s National Directors in Jerusalem that he would step down from his position after 10 years of service.

“I feel I have accomplished the tasks which God gave me to do when I assumed the helm of the Christian Embassy a decade ago,” said Hedding. “It is now time to make way for a new set of leaders to guide the ministry going forward.”

Malcolm’s decision paved the way for the unanimous appointment of Dr. Juergen Buehler as the ICEJ’s new Executive Director. Juergen has served both as the National Director of ICEJ Germany and the ministry’s International Director. At the same time, Rev. Juha Ketola of Finland was elected Chairman of the International Board, taking over from longstanding Chairman and Norwegian Branch Director, Leif Wellerop.

Get involved: www.icejusa.org/isaiah62
After the angel heralded great joy to all peoples and the arrival of the savior, he explained: “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:12)

Just a few weeks later, when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple, Simeon the Just held up the infant and prophesied: “This child is destined ... for a sign which will be spoken against.” (Luke 2:34)

Why of all things should the delivery of a child, a vulnerable baby, be such an significant sign? Every day countless children are born. And this particular birth did not even occur in some spotlight of the Roman world, but in a dirty stable belonging to a little town in the remote province of Judea.

The Identity of the Child

The Hebrew prophets also answer the riddle of why this child would be so special. He would not stand out by being especially gifted or intelligent. It would not be his skills but his very identity which would make the child a sign of salvation.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” says Isaiah 7:14.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; ... and his name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” proclaims Isaiah 9:6.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrata ... out of you shall come forth to me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting,” assures Micah 5:2.

Both prophets declare the inconceivable, that the God who created the heavens and the earth would come be part of His own creation. This defenceless babe, covered in swaddling cloth and lying in a feeding trough, was at the same time the “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father.”

Our human minds struggle to grasp this. But it is this very fact which some 30 years later gave Jesus the confidence to declare: “No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.” (John 14:6-7)

The birth of Jesus meant the manifestation of God among men. For this reason, his name was to be called Immanuel – “God with us.”

John declares this truth thusly: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. ... And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1, 14)

Micah declares His origins are from “everlasting.” Jesus also said of himself, “before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

A Sign of Controversy

So God became man! That is an incredible concept, which caused offence and misunderstanding back then and even to this day – both in Israel as well as in the Christian world. Simeon was right when he exclaimed: “This child is destined ... for a sign which will be spoken against.” (Luke 2:34)

Even today, belief in the Incarnation of God through the virgin birth is being shed in many Christian circles like it were some irrational fundamentalist ballast. Yet this is not about some bizarre medieval dogma, but the very essence of who Jesus is.

The shepherds were told: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) The old Syrian-Aramaic Peshitta translation of the New Testament translates it as follows: “For there is born to you the savior, Lord and Messiah.” And “Lord” here is the Aramaic name for God in Hebrew, which is Yahweh.

Therefore, Christmas should be for us a feast of gratitude and adoration. God came down to us and had mercy upon a humanity which urgently needed His salvation. This child is still spoken against, yet he has brought deliverance to millions of faithful followers around the world.

Yet the Hebrew prophets made clear that this child is also the deliverer of his own nation, Israel. This part of his ministry is still unfolding. But all signs point to its soon fulfilment. Until then, let us follow the shepherds and wise men and worship our Saviour. Even the angels had to burst forth in enthusiastic praise: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14)

Come and behold Him, Born the King of Angels; O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.
John Wade (1751)