



## Congregational FAQs

*This resource is designed for pastors, priests, and small group leaders to navigate questions and concerns that people in their communities might have about participating in Red Candle this Advent.*

### **Is participating in this campaign or supporting Palestinians antisemitic?**

As Christians, we believe every person is made in the image of God and bears inherent dignity. Advocating for justice and freedom for any group of people does not mean advocating for the oppression of another. This is why in our pledge we state:

We commit to naming and resisting all forms of dehumanizing rhetoric, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Palestinian hate. We call instead to another way—the radical peacemaking of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Red Candle is centered on Palestinian liberation because we recognize that our Palestinian siblings are suffering unjustifiable violence, displacement, and abuse in the land of their ancestors. And for American Christians, we are uniquely implicated; much of the weapons, words, and theologies that sustain injustice are wielded in our name.

Yet, as we light red candles for peace and justice in Palestine, we cannot allow antisemitism or hate to cloud our prayers. Any form of hostility, hatred, or violence—physical or verbal—directed toward Jewish people must be condemned.

One important distinction needs to be made: criticising the State of Israel is not in and of itself antisemitic. We can, and must, call out what is broken, unjust, and harmful in systems and structures—no matter the country. The State of Israel is not an exception. But, such criticism becomes antisemitic when Jews are blamed collectively for the actions of the State of Israel, or when Jewishness is equated with the Israeli government and military. These conflation cause real harm and must be opposed.

The way of peacemaking that follows Jesus sets everyone free. As Christians, we advocate against injustice, stand up for the oppressed, and actively work towards a world where everyone can flourish.

### **Aren't all Palestinians Muslim?**

Palestinians, like all people groups, ascribe to a spectrum of religions. While the majority of Palestinians are Sunni Muslims, there is a wide diversity of religious beliefs across Palestine. A



variety of Christian denominations, Samaritans, and Druze also make up a significant population across the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel.

Palestinian Christians are the oldest Christian community in the world, tracing their roots back to the first church, described in Acts 2. Some Palestinian villages in the West Bank like Taybeh, where Jesus went to be with God in the days leading up to his crucifixion, are still nearly 100 percent Christian. These communities have rich Christian traditions that have been passed down from mother to daughter, father to son, for generations.

### **Shouldn't Christmas focus on Jesus, not politics?**

While popular Christmas celebrations focus on buying and receiving gifts, the biblical story of Christmas took place in the context of harsh political realities. Jesus was born as a vulnerable baby to unwed, poor, immigrant parents within an occupied land. He fled to Egypt before he could walk because of state-sanctioned violence and the very real threat to his life. Those who were first told about the birth of the Messiah were the shepherds, outcasts of society.

Throughout his life, Jesus stood with those on the margins, telling his followers to care for the least of these, that peacemakers are blessed, and that the last will be first. By saying "follow me," Jesus disrupted a political system that demanded allegiance to Rome and its ruler. His death was itself a state execution for a political crime.

We cannot celebrate Christmas and our holiday traditions with integrity without recognizing that our sisters and brothers in Christ in the land of Jesus' birth are suffering violence, displacement, and systemic injustice. If we are truly following the example of the Prince of Peace, our celebrations will be to "proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free..." (Luke 4:18).

If Christmas is about proclaiming and embodying peace on Earth, as followers of Christ, our traditions should help bring about that promised reality.

### **Isn't Jesus Jewish?**

The New Testament gospel stories make clear that Jesus was a Rabbi of Jewish lineage and a masterful teacher of Jewish law, prophecy, and philosophy. He celebrated the seasonal Jewish holidays and kept Jewish dietary and purity customs. Yet the national and religious identities, and borders worked differently in Jesus' time. The people groups we refer to today as "Israeli" and "Palestinian" do not correspond to the same people groups from Biblical times. The modern, secular nation-state of "Israel" is not interchangeable with the Israel of the Bible. In fact, many of the Jewish people who made up the early Church after Christ's crucifixion and who remained in the land following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD are now the Palestinian

Christians who are still living, working, and worshipping there today. Many Palestinians consider Judaism as much a part of the indigenous historical and cultural melting pot of the Holy Land as Islam or Christianity would later become.

Today, some contemporary Palestinian theologians reference Jesus as Palestinian not as a historical matter, but a key theological point. They note that Jesus lived under a military occupation, stood with the suffering, came near to the oppressed, and declared a new “Kingdom” where neighbors and even enemies could live alongside each other and flourish. Identifying Jesus with Palestinian Christian communities offers encouragement that they are seen and known in their suffering by a God who identifies with them, calls them “beloved children,” and promises liberation. Such claims do not deny Jesus’ Jewish heritage; they simply remind us that Jesus came to redeem all people, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity.

### **Would Jesus Consider Himself Israeli or Palestinian?**

Centuries before Jesus’ birth, Greek writers referred to the area—known to today as Israel/Palestine—as “Palaistinê, with Ancient Egyptian sources calling it “Paleset.” By the time of Jesus’ birth, the region was occupied by the Roman empire and known as the province of Judea, as its people came from the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and worshiped Yahweh. The Romans officially changed the name to Palestine after the Bar Kokhba revolt in the second century. Before the British occupation after WWI and Israel’s founding in 1948, Israel/Palestine was a province of the Ottoman Turkish Empire called Palestine. Many people of different faiths who lived in the region referred to themselves as Palestinian. “Israeli” and “Palestinian” identities, which mapped to religious and ethnic identity, emerged surrounding Israel’s founding in 1948.

Instead of an Israeli or Palestinian, Jesus would have kept his own self-concept much closer to home, referring to himself along familial, commercial, or communal lines. For example: introducing himself as Jesus, son of Joseph or Mary, Jesus the carpenter, or Jesus of Nazareth. He would have known he was from the tribe of Judah and was a catalyst in the history of the Jewish people. But in a world with fluid borders and ever-shifting empires, people tended to think and identify themselves much more locally.

### **Isn’t the Nation of Israel God’s chosen people?**

Pastors, priests, scholars, theologians, and everyday people have wrestled with the question of the contemporary identity of God’s chosen people since the dawn of the Abrahamic faiths. There are a variety of opinions on this important question. However, some thoughtful, nuanced answers to this question have been shared by Palestinian and Jewish theologians in these podcasts:

- [Does God Still Have a Plan For Israel? - Across the Divide](#)

- [The Jewish Understanding of the Land - Across the Divide](#)
- The Church, Israel and the Jewish People - [Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#) - The Munther Isaac Podcast

### **Why are you only talking about the genocide of Palestinians? What about Sudan, Myanmar, or Congo?**

The ongoing reality of genocide wherever it appears is a deeply important concern. While Western Europe and colonialism have much to answer for in creating the root problems for much of today's global humanitarian issues, few are as directly and continuously linked as Palestine, Israel, and Western states. For those who live in what is considered to be the "Western World"—Europe and North America—our taxes and policies directly impact the welfare of the Palestinian people. When our nations, be it the United States, France, the UK, or Germany, fund and/or send bombs to Israel that are used to level entire neighborhoods and leave thousands under the rubble, our tax dollars pay for them. When IDF soldiers come to our nations to be trained, our taxes pay for it. When we buy Sabra hummus, "Israeli-grown dates," or use a SodaStream machine, we are often unknowingly supporting the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank in which these products are grown or made.

While Red Candle specifically focuses on justice and peace in Palestine, it is by no means an exclusive concern. We recognize that we are all interconnected, and that none of us can be truly free until all of us are free.