



Evangelische Mission
in Solidarität

From Flight to Togetherness

The stained glass window entitled “The adoration of the Magi” housed in the Christ Church of the Theodor Schneller School on the outskirts of Amman has a chequered history. It is a story that tells of flight, but also of new beginnings full with hope.

In 1910, the stained glass window was donated to the church of the Syrian orphanage in Jerusalem by the congregation of the Lutherkirche (Luther Church) in Leipzig. The Syrian orphanage – predecessor of the Schneller Schools – had recently burned down to the ground and was painstakingly rebuilt with the help of numerous donations. A mere 30 years later during the Second World War, the British Army moved into the building. In 1948, the Israelis took it over as military barracks. The window, along with other items, was then temporarily stored on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem.

Finally, in 1959, the stained glass window found its way to Jordan, to the newly founded Theodor Schneller School where it underwent extensive restoration in 2007. The three wise men – often interpreted as kings – had finally arrived at their destination after a long journey.

One of the kings, who is already kneeling in prayer before Mary, is carrying a censer. Mary is holding baby Jesus who is stretching out his arms towards the kneeling king. The other two kings are still standing respectfully at a distance. In the left panel of the triple window are Joseph as well as another man and a boy – presumably shepherds. At the very top of the centre panel is the Star of Bethlehem whose bright rays shine down on Mary and especially on the child.

This star, tiny and easy to overlook, has six points instead of the usual five or eight – it is the Shield or Star of David, the ancient Jewish symbol. Thus, the Star of Bethlehem becomes the promised “Star of Jacob” cited in Numbers 24:17. Bathed in its light, baby Jesus is only conceivable as Jewish – so connecting Jews and Christians.

The sermon for the Feast of the Epiphany states *‘that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.’* (Ephesians 3:6 (NSRV)). This *‘together with’* is fundamental to Christian existence. Christians from the gentile nations have not replaced the biblical people of God, but have been placed at their side – and are thus allowed to share in God’s promise.

Just as Jews and Christians belong together, so too do "Western" Christians belong at the side of their fellow believers in the countries of the Bible – the birthplaces of Christianity. The fact that the former "Western" church windows now have their place in Arabic-language church services is a powerful symbol of this.

The educational and welfare institutions of the EMS member churches invite Christians and members of other religions to learn and live together peacefully, not only in the Holy Land, but also in other places around the world.

Wherever strife gives way to harmony – in mutual acceptance of one another despite all differences – that is the place where Christmas can be found. That is where God's love for humanity becomes visible on the Feast of the Epiphany. That is also where the many stories of flight that have happened in our century can bring hope for a happy end.

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