

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM

Vladimir V. Riabov, Ph.D.*

Professor & Department Coordinator, Department of Mathematics & Computer Sciences, Rivier University

There are few places and moments in our lives that we remember forever. The memory of these moments would help us in finding the ways out of adversity, while searching for the routes to the highest spiritual joy and kindness.



Photo 1: The silver star of the Grotto of the Nativity, the place where Mary gave birth to Jesus.

One of the holiest sites in Christianity, Bethlehem is such a place on the Earth. It was here that Mary gave birth to Jesus in the manger (see Photo 1). In A.D. 385, Helena, mother of Constantine, the Byzantine emperor, built a church over the site of the manger. Only beautiful mosaic floors of this edifice (see Photo 2) have survived through centuries.



Photo 2: The fragments of the mosaic floors in the Church of the Nativity.

Several years ago, I visited the Church of the Nativity, and made few pictures of this holy place (see Photo 3). The “modern” church building was erected by the Emperor Justinian. It is the only Christian religious building that has survived the Persian invasion of the seventh century A.D. The interior of the Basilica (see Photo 4) still has mosaics on the walls, the wax paintings on the columns, and the decorations of the Crusader period.

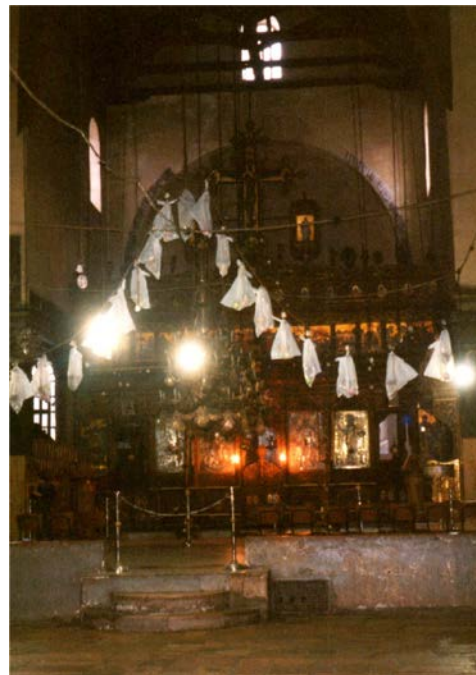


Photo 3: The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. **Photo 4:** The interior of the Basilica of the Nativity.



Photo 5: Nuns pray at the Cradle of Jesus in the Grotto of the Nativity.

Only few people came here to pray that Christmas Eve (see Photo 5). They were not afraid of gunfire and bullets that became everyday life in Bethlehem. Their prayers were for Jesus and for all of us. Here, in the Grotto of the Nativity, the Cradle of Jesus is placed (see Photo 6).



Photo 6: The Cradle of Jesus in the Grotto of the Nativity.

Let the prayer of your heart make connection with the Nativity in Bethlehem. ■

* **Dr. VLADIMIR V. RIABOV**, Professor of Computer Science and Department Coordinator at Rivier University, teaches Algorithms, Networking Technologies, Computer Security, Software Engineering, Software Quality Assurance, Object-Oriented System Design, System Simulation and Modeling, Numerical Methods, Introduction to Computing, and Professional Seminar in Computer Science. He received a Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics and Physics from Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and M.S. in Computer Information Systems from Southern New Hampshire University. Vladimir published about 130 articles in encyclopedias, handbooks, journals, and international and national conference proceedings, including *The Internet Encyclopedia*, *The Handbook of Information Security*, *The Handbook of Computer Networks*, *International Journal of Computers and Structures*, *Journal of Spacecraft and Rockets*, *Journal of Aircraft*, *Journal of Thermophysics and Heat Transfer*, *Congress Proceedings of International Council of the Aeronautical Sciences*, *International Symposia on Rarefied Gas Dynamics and Shock Waves*, *International Conferences on Computer Science and Information Systems*, *International Conferences on Technology in Collegiate Mathematics*, *Conferences of American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics*, and others. He is a senior member of ACM and AIAA, and a member of IEEE and MAA. Together with his wife Lyra, Vladimir travels a lot around the world making numerous pictures of people, nature, and historical, religious, and cultural sites (see his website “Visiting Holy Places” at <https://www2.rivier.edu/faculty/vriabov/religious.htm>). Some of his photo essays have been published in *The Bedford Bulletin* and *The Goffstown News*.