Bethlehem University Foundation

September 2026

Dear Friends,

This summer, Ghassan Johnny Altawil, a Bethlehem University student, boarded a plane, bound for an internship at Georgetown University in D.C., in a country he'd never visited.

When Mary said yes to the angel Gabriel, it was to an unknown future.

Two thousand years later, where she gave birth to her Son, Bethlehem University student Ghassan said his own yes.

Reflecting on his first subway ride out of Dulles International Airport in Washington, D.C., Ghassan said, "I spoke English my entire life with my teachers and foreigners from the U.S., but this time felt different for some reason. In a way, it felt like I was speaking English for the first time ever."

> ***"Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."***
> ***- Luke 1:38***

A Friend from Bethlehem, a World Away
Near the National Mall, Ghassan found himself in a fan zone packed for the World Cup: it was USA versus Turkey. He was there because of Suhair Mohammad Ali, a new Palestinian friend studying for a joint master's and PhD program at Georgetown University.

She'd stood where Ghassan was, two years ago, a previous Bethlehem University intern at Georgetown, in a new country. She saw herself in him and made sure he wasn't alone.

A Picture of Palestine for American Christians
Not every conversation that summer was easy.

Walking through D.C. one afternoon, Ghassan met Andres, a curious teenager from California. "He was surprised by everything I said. I felt like he couldn't visualize life in Palestine at all. So, I did my best to paint a picture for him."

"I spoke to a lot of other students there," Ghassan said, "but Andres stood out to me because he wasn't afraid to ask."

Others were less open. He met Christian students his own age, "who were unaware Christians even lived in Bethlehem, **forgetting that Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus, and that they are talking to a Christian who lives there.** A lot of people didn't even know that Bethlehem is a real place. Many of them were wearing crosses."

—over—

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It's this kind of encounter that Georgetown University hopes will foster education and awareness. Mimi Kirk, associate director of Georgetown's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, spoke of how important it is for the Georgetown community to meet Palestinians, and of their commitment to the longstanding partnership between the two Catholic institutions.

Choosing Home

"Surprisingly, visiting the U.S. made me sure that I want to live in Bethlehem," Ghassan reflected. "While the month I stayed in the U.S. was one of the best months in my entire life, home to me is not just a location. It's the family and friends I have here."

The Ones Who Said Yes

Mary said yes to a future she couldn't see. Ghassan said yes to a summer abroad, and is saying yes again, to a future in Bethlehem. His future is possible because Bethlehem University says yes every day to its students. And people like you say yes to walking with them.

This fall, will you say yes to what comes next for a student like Ghassan?

Your gift to Bethlehem University Foundation's Annual Fund puts education within reach for the next Ghassan. A gift of:

- $4,000 helps sustain Bethlehem University's mission of education and service.
- $1,000 strengthens the resources students need to learn and grow.
- $500 helps keep opportunity within reach.

Whatever you're able to give, it opens the door to someone's yes.

Waleed Zaru
Executive Director

P.S. Ghassan flew home this summer carrying new friendships, life-changing conversations, and a resolve to stay in Bethlehem. Your gift opens the way to the next student's yes.