

Nov 04, 2016 by [Gordon Robison](#)

Christmas in Jordan ^[1]

Amman, Jordan

Saturday morning in Amman was so foggy that, in our own way, we actually did have a white Christmas. On the 23rd Mecca Mall was as crowded as any American mall on the day before Christmas Eve (though since Thursday is the end of the work week here it was difficult to say how much of that was holiday traffic as opposed to the ordinary weekend crush), with virtually every shop displaying holiday decorations of some sort.

This holiday season I've also discovered that text messages and the internet are replacing holiday cards in some quarters. I received Christmas greetings from a (Jewish) friend in Jerusalem by SMS on Christmas Eve. Christmas Day brought two more such notes, both from Jordanians: one Christian, the other Muslim. Meanwhile, a number of my Iraqi friends seem to have discovered websites offering free internet greeting cards. Several of these are in my inbox every time I check email.

By far the most intriguing moment of the weekend came on the evening of Christmas Day itself when some Muslim friends dropped by to tell us about the church service they attended the previous evening. The mother and daughter had traveled to Mt. Nebo, a Franciscan-run church overlooking the Jordan Valley where, according to tradition, Moses looked over into the Promised Land before he died. This was particularly striking because during the nearly seven years I lived in Egypt I don't think I ever heard of Muslims dropping by a Christmas Eve service.

Christmas Day is a public holiday here, one that seems to have penetrated the broader culture in a way it never has in Egypt. This may be because Egypt's Christian minority is overwhelmingly Coptic Christian and celebrates Christmas in early January. Does that make it easier for Egyptians to see December 25 as an essentially alien and Western occasion, an important selling season for the western tourist trade, but something with little connection to Egyptian society itself? Jordan's Christian community, smaller as a percentage of the overall population, mostly mark the holiday on December 25. Perhaps that is why Christmas here in Amman feels less foreign, less forced, than Christmas in Cairo ever did.

My daughter looked out at the fog Saturday morning and said hopefully that we might get some snow yet. It was far too warm for that (and having seen the way Amman seizes up on the rare occasions when it snows here it was not a wish I particularly shared), but Christmas has been pretty good this year. So, on the whole, I'll settle for fog.

grr
