

Group calls for Orthodox church reform over alleged Israel land sales

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Protesters at Catholic Action Circle in Bethlehem await Patriarch Theophilos' arrival en route to the Nativity Church on Jan. 6, 2014. (MaanImages/Alex Shams)

By [Alex Shams](#)

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Christmas is a time for holiday cheer in Bethlehem, as thousands from across Palestine and around the world converge to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in the hilltop West Bank city.

Onlookers at the Orthodox Christmas parade on Jan. 6 this year, however, were surprised to find protesters awaiting the traditional visit of the Patriarch to Nativity Church, and six youths were even arrested after chanting slogans against him in Manger Square.

For those participating in the rally, it was the visit of Jerusalem Patriarch Theophilos III -- not their protests -- that had ruined Christmas.

"I came here to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in my way as an Arab Orthodox (Christian)," Jalal Barham, a member of the Follow-up Committee of the Arab Orthodox High Council in Beit Sahour told Ma'an at a protest greeting the church leader at Bethlehem's Catholic Action Circle.

"My celebration would not be complete if it did not include expressing my opposition to the illegitimate