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Dear Friends,

Welcome to our first issue of the SeeJordan.Org E-Newsletter.

In an attempt to keep you connected to Jordan, we will be sending you updates on a regular basis through this medium. I hope this newsletter is beneficial to you and your organization. Please do not hesitate to contact us to let us know if this format works for you and if you have any further questions or information.

Wishing you a very happy prosperous 2004 and we hope you visit Jordan in 2004!

Best wishes,

Malia Asfour  
Director

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## Jordan a model for the region – US ambassador

The Jordan Times – January 7<sup>th</sup> 2004

AMMAN (Petra) — US Ambassador in Amman Edward Gnehm hailed Jordan as a model for the region in democracy, human rights and economic reforms on the one hand, and political development and the socio-economic transformation on the other.

In an interview with the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Gnehm said that the US urges regional countries to follow in the footsteps of Jordan and embark on a similar political development programme, highlighting in this context His Majesty King Abdullah's keenness to activate the role of political parties and produce a modern elections law. The envoy said the June 2003 parliamentary elections were free and fair according to monitors who attended the polls. He said the Lower House is also playing its role as a partner of the government with efficiency.

The US ambassador also highlighted amendments to economic legislation with the aim of realising envisaged economic growth.

Regarding US assistance to Jordan, Gnehm said the US supported the Kingdom with \$700 million last year to make up for losses incurred as a result of the US-led war on Iraq.

He renewed Washington's commitment to support the implementation of projects in the water, health and women's empowerment sectors.

The envoy noted the dramatic rise in the trade exchange between Jordan and the US. Citing figures, he said the Kingdom's exports to US markets rose from \$10 million in 1997 to \$600 million in 2003.

He added that the two sides will expand their cooperation this year, especially in the anti-crime and counterterrorism fields. He said Jordan is aware of the nature of terrorism because it has been a victim of terrorist acts itself.

On the Palestinian issue, Gnehm reiterated US commitment to the roadmap and the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He said that Washington, while recognizing countries' right to defend themselves, has demanded that Israel reconsider its policies towards the Palestinian people.

Ambassador Gnehm added that the US wants to see the Middle East region free of weapons of mass destruction, and he voiced hope that this year would witness positive and substantial progress with regard to transition of power to the Iraqi people.

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## Epiphany, Annual Day of Pilgrimage to be celebrated today – January 9<sup>th</sup>

The Jordan Times – January 9<sup>th</sup> 2004

By Reem Halasa

AMMAN — Christians will converge on the east bank of the Jordan River at the biblical site of Bethany on Friday to mark the feast of Epiphany and the Annual Day of Pilgrimage.

According to the Baptism Site Commission, the body in charge of developing and maintaining the biblical site, there will be three consecutive celebrations between Jan. 9 and Jan. 23.

The first ceremony (today) will bring together members of the Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Anglican, Evangelical, Lutheran, Chaldean, Maronite, and Copt churches, said Dia Madani, director of the Baptism Site Commission.

“Pilgrims will meet at the Baptism Site at Tell Kharrar, beginning at 8:00am on Friday, and will head by bus to the Jordan River at 11:00am,” Madani said.

In the Eastern churches, the feast is known by two names: Epiphany and Theophany.

It is celebrated “to commemorate the birth of Christ, his baptism in the River Jordan, and the adoration of the Magi (the three wise men mentioned in the Bible),” Reverend Nabil Haddad of the commission told The Jordan Times.

“Christians celebrate in this feast, Christ's mysterious union with humanity — a union of faith and love, leading men to a new spiritual life through baptism,” Haddad explained.

The early church highlighted the celebration of the Feast of the Theophany by celebrating the baptisms of catechumens (those who receive religious instruction in preparation for baptism) in great numbers. Today, this feast includes the “Great Blessing of Water.” Water is considered a source of physical life as well as the life in Christ through baptism, the reverend continued.

The Greek word “Theophany” means “God's appearance” or “God's manifestation.”

The commission said the Roman Orthodox Church is expected to celebrate Theophany at the site on Jan. 16, and the Latin patriarchate on Jan. 23.

“A special prayer ceremony will be held at the Church of St John The Baptist, at the site on Jan. 18.” Madani said.

The commission said it has completed preparations to host the pilgrims, including enough parking spaces, trails on which the pilgrims will walk to the baptismal pools, and appropriate baptism basins.

“On this occasion, we are expecting around 5,000 to 6,000 pilgrims to take part in this important celebration, weather permitting,” Madani added.

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