

Prayer and Praise

WITNESSING THE TRIUMPH OF LIGHT OVER DARKNESS IN IRAN

On Yalda's eve (21 Dec), the longest night of the year, Iranians traditionally gather with friends and family to celebrate the winter solstice and the victory of light over darkness. Iranian Christians, however, have witnessed the triumph of the light of Christ over the darkness of suffering over and over in this challenging year.

Yalda's eve has a special place in Persian culture and often represents periods of hardship in Persian poetry. Like Yalda's eve, this past year has been long and dark for many Iranians.

Despite the difficulties of the year, the testimonies of Christians in Iran speak of the hope they find in Jesus Christ, the light of the world who guides us through the darkness of pain. "In the past year, I have only been able to stand by trusting Psalm 91, as I have prayed and wept for my family and for the people of my country. Thank you for praying – I am strengthened through your prayers."

As Yalda's eve is celebrated just before Christmas, early Christians in Iran were drawn to this celebration of victory of light over darkness. They often associated it with the birth of Jesus Christ; the word "Yalda" in fact means "birth". Traditionally, friends and family in Iran gather to celebrate Yalda's eve; however, restrictions this year may prevent or limit these festivities, just as they will Christmas celebrations. But Christians in Iran are familiar with isolation and restriction when it comes to their faith, and their hope in God remains strong.

- In the run-up to Christmas, many Christians in Iran face increased persecution and the risk of raids on house churches increases significantly. Please pray that they will continue to put their faith and hope in God, that they will be able to find fellowship with one another, and that God will protect them from darkness
- Please also pray for the ethnic Christian minorities in Iran, the Armenian and Assyrian churches, as they celebrate Christmas. May they be a light of joy and a blessing to their neighbours and communities.



Prayer + News



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MAKING HOPE VISIBLE

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Prayer and Praise

SAT-7 TÜRK VIEWERS REFOCUS ON CHRIST

"Nothing prevents us from celebrating because joy is in our hearts," shares a SAT-7 TÜRK viewer, as restrictions in Turkey grow tighter and many churches remain closed for Christmas. With focus on the birth of Jesus Christ, SAT-7 TÜRK helps viewers prepare for Christmas.

"We may not be able to go to churches or go outside, but there is nothing preventing us from joining the celebrations in the heavens," says a male viewer on the SAT-7 TÜRK program *World View*, which recently discussed this year's Christmas festivities.

Gulsum, the channel's Deputy Executive Director, explains that many viewers are responding with similar faith and resilience. "This Christmas, we are seeing people respond to the hope and joy of Christ's birth in a very special way," she says. "The pandemic has taken a terrible toll on Turkey. Many people have lost loved ones and the future remains uncertain, but Christmas feels like a light at the end of the tunnel, and people are ready to celebrate."

"We take every opportunity to celebrate," another viewer says. "Maybe online, maybe as a nuclear family – but nothing prevents us from celebrating because joy is in our hearts. We celebrate with praise and worship."

Gurkan, a regular guest on programs says, "Sometimes, people become so preoccupied with Christmas preparations that Christ, who should be at the centre of the celebrations, is left in a corner. But this year, things are different. We can see these restrictions as an opportunity to refocus on God."

SAT-7 TÜRK live programs provide viewers a platform to connect and experience fellowship this Christmas. As many churches remain closed for in-person services, the programs are encouraging viewers to reflect on and share traditions from their own denominations, celebrating the diversity of the Christian community in Turkey.

"I believe that these restrictions have led us as Christians and churches to a new appreciation of the fellowship, the traditions, and the celebrations we so often take for granted," says Gulsum. "These unprecedented times are an opportunity for us to consider the meaning of these traditions, and to focus on Christ and the joy that He brings."

- Pray for isolated Christian families, asking that they will feel and experience the love and belonging they have in Jesus Christ.



MEET OUR VIEWERS

Please pray for the following viewers while reading their messages:

MAHDAD FROM IRAN:

“The coronavirus has led me to a greater realisation of how faith in Jesus Christ gives us strength. The coronavirus has significantly reduced meetings with friends, but with Christ there is no loneliness.”

FARIMAH FROM IRAN:

“When anyone is alarmed and says to me, ‘We have a coronavirus pandemic, and you’re alone, what are you going to do?’ I say to them ‘God is with me,’ May He be with all as He has been with me. If we love Him with all our heart and all our being, recognising the price He has paid for us so we can call on Him as Father, He will never abandon us. Yes, there are storms, even for us as believers; but He is with us!”

FROM A VIEWER IN ARMENIA

“War has left my family very poor. Ask God to bring peace and cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

FROM A VIEWER IN IRAN

“I am a new believer and want to go to a house church for fellowship. Pray the members will trust me to join them.”

FROM A VIEWER IN AFGHANISTAN

“Hashtag gives teenagers hope, even more now that people are home. I concluded God is with us any time and place. Help me learn more.”



“WITH JOY AND DELIGHT, WE CELEBRATE THE KING OF KINGS”

Christmas celebrations are going to be different for many of us this year, however, the reason we celebrate Christmas has not changed. Like Raham and her family in Iran, let us celebrate with joy, the love God has shown us, by giving us His Son, Jesus.

“This year, it will be under the constant threat of persecution that we will celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God, and the world’s Intercessor.

My daughter, son, husband, and I will celebrate Christmas on our own, with Jesus our God. We will rejoice that God came for us, to save the people of the world and to release them from slavery to sin. Our dear Lord endured the weight of our sin and gave Himself for our sake that we may know comfort, peace, love, forgiveness, and faith. We glorify in Christ the Lord and not people, so we will not be alone in our celebration.

Jesus Christ is coming – He is the God of love, the Bread of Life. His name is lifted up. He is the Son of God, our righteous judge, and the King of kings.

Christ is coming. He is coming! He is with us, and so with joy and delight, we celebrate the King of kings.”

- Especially with the approaching holidays, ask for people imprisoned for being Christians to have a clear sense of God’s presence with them, comforting and sustaining them.



MEET OUR VIEWERS

Please pray for the following viewers while reading their messages:

VIEWER FROM ARMENIA:

“In the Armenian Church, we celebrate the birth of Christ on 6 January. The evening before, there is a church service, and at the end everyone receives a candle. With the lit candles, we go outside and celebrate the birth of Christ. Then we try to get home without blowing out our candles! We go to great lengths to prevent the light of the candle from going out, even using little lanterns. The symbolism behind this is to bring the light of Christ into our homes. This also becomes an opportunity to share the Good News with people on the streets who become curious.”

SEPEHR FROM IRAN:

“Heavenly Father, I am so grateful that You are always here with me and that You give me strength, boldness, love, and kindness. I am not anxious for anything and I trust You. I have tried as far as I can to fulfil what You say in Your Word, and You have blessed me. Thank You, my loving Lord. You have freed me from condemnation and have granted Your peace. It is so beautiful when a person sees You – all worldly things lose their value. Father, You are so loving and kind to me and You accept me with all my faults. I am grateful to You for everything. Amen.”