

PRAYER ALERT...

'If my people....will humble themselves and pray' 2 Chr 7:14

Informing and equipping Christians - Online and to Inbox

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PRaise REPORTS

■ Spreading God's goodwill in the darker places

We praise God for the many churches and charities who will be reaching out to the vulnerable, homeless and lost over this Christmas season. They will do so with love, hope and God's message of salvation as they visit the housebound and lonely, or hold Christmas lunches for people who would otherwise be spending a miserable Christmas alone. They will be delivering hot food, sleeping bags and small Christmas gifts to homeless people, Christmas parcels of food and presents to older people, and toys to children from disadvantaged families. Some will be visiting prisons to deliver Christmas boxes to prisoners and their families as a message of hope and goodwill, others will stand out on cold street corners singing carols and delivering God's message to shoppers and housing estates.

Praise: [God for the joy of the Christmas message that is offered and shared at Christmas. \(Is.9:2\)](#)

More: <http://news.salvationarmy.org.uk/10-things-well-be-doing-help-people-need-christmas>

■ Christmas traditions in different cultures

Christmas in Austria starts around 4 pm on Christmas Eve, when the tree is lit for the first time. Finnish people traditionally eat rice porridge and plum juice for breakfast on Christmas Eve, and at midday the 'peace of Christmas' is broadcast on radio and TV. Christmas Eve in Lithuania is when families celebrate 'Kėšėnė', the big meal which families have together to celebrate the last day of Advent. In Bulgaria Christmas is celebrated on 25 December, but many in Eastern Europe celebrate Christmas on 7 January as they use the old Julian calendar. A Bulgarian legend says that Mary started her labour on 20 December (Saint Ignatius of Antioch's day) and gave birth on Christmas Eve, but Jesus's birth wasn't announced until Christmas Day. Whenever we celebrate, however we celebrate, we are all celebrating JESUS THE SON OF GOD - BORN OF A VIRGIN - LIVED AMONGST US - NOW REIGNING IN HEAVEN - HALLELUJAH!

Praise: [God for sending us Jesus. \(Mt.2:11\)](#)

More: <http://www.whychristmas.com/cultures/>

BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ British Armed Forces prayer needs

Pray for those whose duties take them away from their families this Christmas and New Year, and that soldiers will find peace and joy in the fact that God sent His Son Jesus to be our Saviour, Redeemer and Shepherd. Pray that deployed military personnel will reach out to one another during Christmas rather than retreat into themselves. Pray that Christian servicemen and women will share their faith with their battle buddies, and that families of deployed military will know the

peace, joy and love that God offers through Jesus. Also the Strategic Defence and Security Review has been published, outlining investment in the British Armed Forces to protect the UK and its allies and improve the ability to respond to threats faced by the UK which have increased in scale, diversity and complexity in recent years. Pray for their protection as they protect us. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strategic-defence-and-security-review-178bn-of-equipment-spending>

Pray: for the children of military families posted abroad, celebrating Christmas away from uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents. (1 Cor.16:24)

More: http://members.tripod.com/~vee_5/index-18.html

▣ Pray for Christians sharing their faith at work

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (Jn. 1:5) Jesus was born into a dark world. No sooner was he born than Herod tried to kill him. Even during this season of celebration the world is still a dark place, but the darkness does not have to have the last word. Pray for those facing darkness in the workplace. Britain has a history of religious freedom and tolerance. UK and European law largely protects an individual's right to hold and manifest religious beliefs at work, but this is fast being eroded. Due to badly balanced equality legislation, increasing numbers of Christians have been penalised for their faith at work. Some have been threatened with disciplinary action, suspended, and even sacked for refusing to act against their consciences.

Pray: for the work of Christian Concern and Christian lawyers as they resist restrictions on freedom of speech and expression for Christians in the workplace. (Ro.12:2)

More: <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/employment>

▣ Christian politicians and politics in 2016

There are many Christians in our parliament, and we thank God for the freedom they have to pray and worship together. Please pray that during 2016 this precious freedom will be protected. Pray that Christian MPs, peers, policy staff and house staff will grow in numbers and in the depth of their faith, and that they will be a positive and gracious influence in Parliament, particularly as they take part in political debate. Pray for the wise explanation of God's truth in the public square and that the wisdom of the Bible will be listened to in what it says about human flourishing across all policy areas.

Pray: that the Christians in the three main parties will grow in influence and make positive contributions in the coming year. (Ps.25:4)

More: <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/>

▣ Christian input through the media at Christmas and in 2016

Jesus came and brought light into the darkness, so we can pray that his light will be spread even more powerfully through the media into all aspects of our culture over Christmas and in the coming year. Pray for God's people working in TV, radio, newspapers, and online as they serve and love people in each area of their ministry. Pray for them to reveal Jesus as they interact with the world and their colleagues. Pray for God to position more of his people in these fields. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pray for organisations like Christians in the Media Network who seek to strengthen the existing Christians by Bible teaching and helping cynical shift workers stay Christian. Pray for more small groups to develop and grow, and for outreach to the next generation, all those studying communications on the various university campuses.

Pray: that Christians in the media will bring about positive tipping points towards God's values in our culture during 2016. (Ps.143:10)

More: <http://www.christiansinthemedias.org/about/>

▣ Christians in entertainment over Christmas and 2016

'Christians in Entertainment' encourages a Christian presence in the entertainment scene in Britain by providing a network of emotional and spiritual support to professionals. They engage with Christians and those of little or no faith. They help the church to understand, support and pray for the entertainment business. They also work in association with other arts groups. Pray that the good news of Jesus's birth will be heard and understood as carols are broadcast in shops and on the air. Pray for the fun and laughter of pantomime; and for those producing and taking part. Pray for all who work behind the scenes in the business. Also pray for all in the arts and entertainment business facing 2016 with uncertainty about their next job, that they may have wisdom on the way forward and will see doors open. May they remain encouraged.

Pray: for wholesome entertainment this season and throughout the coming year. (Pr.13:15a)

More: <http://www.cieweb.org.uk/>

▣ Christians in education - being true to their faith in 2016

Matt Kägi, a Christian teacher, writes, 'My main concern is that Christians who work as teachers will maintain their conviction and their joy for their profession, and will thus remain as contagious Christians in schools. I believe that the message of Christ - real love - is as core nowadays as it always was. Schools need real Christians who know they are not themselves the authors of their love, but that they may and must receive this love from Christ, and they may and must let Him guide them in their behaviour and actions; Christians who not only give a 'redeemed impression' but are redeemed with a contagious joy, which does not depend on circumstances.' Pray particularly for teachers with more than 50% immigrant students in their classes, and for those working as special education teachers.

Pray: for teachers struggling to get children through tests and the school into the high ratings. (Jn. 7:38)

More: <http://www.eureca-online.org/articles/being-a-real-christian-teacher>

▣ The joy (and pain) of giving at Christmas

In many countries Christmas is filled with festivities of exchanging gifts and sharing meals with friends and family. A Daily Mail survey found that this year each individual in the UK will on average spend £868 on Christmas food, drink, decorations and presents. According to debit card Switch, people living in Scotland are the most generous when buying presents, averaging £413.80, while those in the South will spend £335.43. Many will use a credit card or loan, and 19% of the people

admitted they failed to budget for the festive season. Last year almost half of us used credit cards, store cards and overdrafts to cover the cost of Christmas, and are predicted to do the same this year and suffer a financial hangover in 2016.

Pray: for more people to recognise Christmas is about celebrating Christ's birth and spending time with family and friends, rather than simply spending. (1Tim.6:10)

More: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-201950/Britons-spend-868-Christmas.html>

EUROPE

■ Christmas in European refugee camps

Families in refugee camps are safe - for now - from any immediate danger, but dropping temperatures pose another serious threat. Little David has not experienced many Christmases, but he and many other refugee children know this one will be different from any other they have known. 'I do not think Father Christmas will come this year,' he said, 'because he does not know where we are living now, and we are always changing places. Father Christmas knows our house in B. and he will go there, and there is nobody who will tell him where we are now. My father told us that all our neighbours have left and our village is empty.' Thirty-eight European countries are receiving asylum applications from families. See also:

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/issues/december-19th-2014/christian-refugees-in-iraq-face-up-to-a-bleak-christmas/>

Pray: for children spending Christmas with strangers, in temporary accommodation. May they realise that the 'Babe of Bethlehem', born into cold and damp conditions, understands their feelings. (Lk.2:7)

More: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02d9346.html>

WORLDWIDE

■ Jesus is making headlines in Jerusalem

Walla! is the second largest internet portal in Israel and is putting Hebrew-language testimonies about Jesus on its front page. 95% of Israelis are hooked into the internet. Walla! is producing a series of 24 live interviews with Messianic Jews about Jesus. A well-known Israeli actress will ask believers questions about faith in Jesus. Topics being discussed are: who are these Messianic Jews? what's the difference between Messianic Judaism and Christianity? why is the Hebrew New Testament not available in Israeli book stores? and Isaiah 53. Of the multitude of subjects argued and debated in Israel, Jesus is by far the most controversial. Walla! has taken a bold and risky step by promoting interest in Jesus, and Messianic Jews, to their massive audience. There are likely to be repercussions. They're asking Christians around the world to use their blogs and websites to link to their Walla! Messianic websites to increase exposure and raise their rating on Google's search engine.

Pray: for Israelis to stop, look, listen and hear the Good News over Christmas and in 2016 (Mic.5:2)

More: <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/27964/Default.aspx>

■ Missionaries and their families at Christmas

The holidays are a joyful, yet challenging time for many missionaries - full of opportunities to share the gospel with people in their community. But they can also magnify feelings of homesickness for some. Their email newsletters, which take time to put together, are a great way to keep in touch, so let them know you appreciate them by sending a quick reply. Pray that many sending churches will let missionaries know they are not forgotten, by sending Christmas email greetings abroad, or even a care package for the New Year with goodies that aren't easily available in their country. On the mission field, it can be hard to find ways to grow spiritually, especially in areas without a Christian community. If you find a great blog or book your missionary might enjoy, send it to them and pray that the Lord will use it to encourage them in 2016.

Pray: for missionary children serving with their parents, single adult missionaries, and missionary couples sharing the gospel right now around the world. May they be blessed now and always. (Ps.118:26)

More: <https://team.org/blog/10-ways-missionary-support-christmas/>

■ Religious persecution at Christmas

Christians in some nations have faced intense persecution over the Christmas period in the past. Pray for protection of Christians and churches from bombings, beatings and imprisonment. Over the Christmas and New Year period of 2014/15 three states in Nigeria experienced bombings, beheadings and beatings by militants, resulting in dozens of Christians being killed. On Christmas day last year in Iran, nine Christians were arrested in a raid on a house, and the next day a prominent Assyrian pastor was arrested at his home, along with about fourteen others present for a Christmas celebration. Pray for Christians in places like North Korea and Saudi Arabia to know that God will strengthen His people there and help them find fellowship.

Pray: for God to remove all fear and strengthen them with His peace. (Ps.46:1)

More: <http://www.releaseinternational.org/persecution-intensifies-over-christmas-and-new-year/>

■ Praying for war-torn lands

Five years ago, Aleppo was a thriving, cosmopolitan place, but everybody has suffered in Syria's terrible war. The rich have left, the middle classes have become poor, and the poor are miserable. Two months of Russian air strikes twinned with army ground offensives backed by Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces have shored up Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in his western heartland. The situation is desperate in Aleppo. Last month Pope Francis visited the Central African Republic to comfort a nation which is tired of a civil war which has brought nothing but death and destruction. He wanted to remind all who have made themselves richer from the country's resources of their duty to stand by their country and pay something back through investment in the infrastructure. The list of ongoing conflicts across the nations is enormous. Too much to pray for? Not if we intercede as God leads, in His timing, according to His word in season, during 2016.

Pray: and ask God to give His prayer agendas to His Church in the coming year, prayers that bear fruit for the Kingdom. (Jer.17:8)

More: <http://www.warsintheworld.com/?page=static1258254223>

■ Elections between now and the end of January

The Central African Republic will hold presidential and parliamentary elections on the day after Boxing Day. On 30 December Bangladesh will hold their municipal elections, and the following day, New Year's Eve, Burkina Faso will also hold their municipal elections. On the last day of January people in Central African Republic will vote again, this time in the presidential and parliamentary runoff. In the coming year, across all nations, there are expected to be sixty elections.

Pray: for God to be in the detail of every local, legislative and parliamentary change. (Ro.1:13)

More: <https://www.ndi.org/electionscalendar>

■ Gender discrimination

This month, women in Saudi Arabia were allowed to enter politics for the very first time, but not all were able to access polling stations due to their reliance on men for transport - women are banned from driving. Neither could women candidates discuss policies with male voters prior to voting, because they cannot interact with men. Women can't open bank accounts without their husband's permission, go anywhere without a chaperone, wear clothes or makeup that 'show off their beauty', go for a swim, use the gym, or look at men in swimsuits. They cannot compete in sports or try on clothes when shopping (the thought of a disrobed woman behind a dressing-room door is apparently too much for men to handle). Other unusual prohibitions include entering a cemetery and buying a Barbie doll.

Pray: for the freedom found in Christ to come to this generation of women across the nations. (1Pt.1:3,4)

More: http://www.theweek.co.uk/60339/eleven-things-women-in-saudi-arabia-cant-do?utm_source=taboola&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=TBROS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE WORLD PRAYER CENTRE, BIRMINGHAM, UK

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