

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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Issue 51-2017

Website

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Friday 22 December 2017

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PRAISE REPORTS

■ Looking forward to 2018

In 2017 we have witnessed miracles and seen suffering. But as we look ahead to 2018, we remember and proclaim that God is sovereign over every corner of the globe! He alone is the hope of 2018 - the Hope of the Nations. Though some situations may seem hopeless, we recognise and rejoice that He reigns ‘far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title’ and that ‘all things are under His feet’ (Ephesians 1:21,22). Nothing is impossible for Him. ‘The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all’ (Psalm 103:19). Nothing has or ever will usurp His authority and power. He reigns, and He rules over China and Europe, North Korea and Syria, Boko Haram, and IS. He rules over polio, cancer, and hunger. He rules over corporations, celebrities, and sports. He even rules over galaxies, stars, and planets, ‘and calls them each by name’ (Ps. 147:5).

Praise: [be to the Lord, the God of Israel. \(Luke 1:68-70\)](#)

More: <http://prayercast.com/you-reign.html>

■ BBC New Year ‘religious resolution’

A BBC review published on 20 December found religious people ‘poorly presented or satirised’ by the corporation, and suggests programming that ‘better reflects the UK’. BBC proposes to include religious themes in popular dramas and soaps on TV and radio, make more documentaries covering religious and ethical issues, and expand its religious affairs team. The ‘Thought for the Day’ slot on Radio 4 will be more closely linked to news items with women and young people. Figures from a wider range of religions will be invited to contribute. Pray that Tony Hall, the BBC’s director general, will remember its religion home page statement: ‘Christianity is the largest religion in the world with over two billion followers. 42 million people in Britain today describe themselves as Christian, and six million are actively practising.’

Praise: [God that broadcasting has the opportunity to reflect religious values: may it not be at the expense of covering Christianity. \(Matthew 10:27\)](#)

More: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/dec/20/bbc-to-increase-religious-coverage-to-better-represent-all-faiths>

BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Friday Focus: reaching out at Christmas

So it is only three days to go until the big day! It can be so easy to be caught up in the frenetic activity, getting everything ready for those we know, that we can often forget those for whom the Christmas season is difficult. Take a moment to ask God to bring someone to mind for whom that is true. (Jane Holloway, World Prayer Centre)

Pray: [Lord Jesus, help us to learn from this story of when angels told the shepherds on the hillside about your birth, they left their flocks and went to see. May we be ready to put down our own agendas to make time to both worship you](#)

and give time to help to those who are struggling this Christmas. Amen. (Luke 2:13-18)

More: http://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/283989/Friday_Focus.aspx

■ Christmas, children and divorce

Christmas can be financially or emotionally stressful for some families, 'I married the wrong person' can be a cry for help when it comes from a person unable to cope with stresses this time of year. There is a battle over marriages today, and the enemy would love nothing more than to destroy families and damage the children caught up in difficult family relationships. We can pray for social workers and councillors looking after the interests of children involved in family breakdowns, separations or court proceedings. Cafcass is an employer of social workers who look after the interests of children involved in family court proceedings. It reported that in November 2017 it received a total of 3,811 new private cases.

Pray: for the thousands of children this Christmas who need the gift of a stable family situation, and for couples under stress to recall, renew and relive their marriage vows. (Mark 10:9)

More: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/>

■ Internet shopping on Christmas Day

The Bishop of Chelmsford has called for a crackdown on internet shopping on Christmas Day, after plans for major sales for that day. Stephen Cottrell said he would support laws to allow only essential services during the Christian festival. Stores such as Amazon, Debenhams, and John Lewis are to launch sales on Christmas Day, slashing prices by up to 66%, and experts predict millions will spend record amounts online. The Bishop said that shopping should not tempt people away from precious time with family and friends over Christmas, and companies should voluntarily postpone their sales. But he added, 'How you shut down the internet for a day I don't know, but if anyone has an idea I would certainly back it in the House of Lords.' In further erosion of Christianity, a survey has found, nearly a third of primary schools have dropped or watered down traditional nativity plays, because of fears of offending non-Christians or non-believers. See the next article.

Pray: for those who receive gift cards for Christmas not to be drawn into 24/7 internet shopping on Christmas Day. (Matthew 6:21)

More: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5187267/Senior-bishop-calls-crackdown-internet-shopping.html>

■ Christmas and Christian creeds

The approach to Christmas is a perfect time to reflect upon the true nature of the babe of Bethlehem. It is fashionable these days, at least in some circles, to downplay doctrinal distinctions and credal formulations when discussing Christ. Some think it is more inclusive to leave things rather loose and free; that a rigid definition of the Prince of Peace could offend people. But does a watered-down Christ and a warm and fuzzy definition of Jesus match what Scripture reveals concerning the Son of God? In the early centuries of Christianity believers put together written summaries of the Christian faith. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed declare among other things that Jesus 'was conceived by the Holy Spirit' and was 'born of the Virgin Mary' (Apostles' Creed); and Jesus is 'very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made' (Nicene Creed).

Pray: for Christian witness to all that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit this Christmas. (Colossians 2:8)

More: <https://www.christianpost.com/voice/christmas-colossians-and-christian-creeds.html>

■ Dickensian Christmas even in 2017

People say Christmas is all about the children - and for Christians, one child in particular. But this year many children are faring badly in villages, towns and cities. Granada ITV news has been reporting on child poverty. Primary school staff spoke of hungry children, and parents collapsing in the school hall because they had not eaten for days so that their children could eat. Those parents were invited into the breakfast club for cereal and toast, and then referred to a foodbank. Other parents are being allowed to charge their phones and wash children's clothes in the school, because they have no electricity or hot water at home. Coats and shoes are given to children who haven't got them. The schools reported that they had seen a 'noticeable rise' in the numbers of working families who were in this kind of poverty. Mrs May was recently challenged in parliament about 128,000 children being homeless this Christmas.

Pray: for God to give strength and wisdom to the Government as it carries the responsibility of caring for all in the United Kingdom in a time of economic challenges. (Leviticus 19:10)

More: <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/24817>

■ Universities: 'Rules of the Game' report

For twenty years the Sutton Trust has been improving the chances of young people from less advantaged backgrounds to get to our most selective universities. Their annual summer schools support thousands of students, enabling them to achieve personal social mobility. Now they want the government to overhaul university admissions processes, and end making offers based on predicted A level grades and a review of personal statements. The trust's research reports that the brightest disadvantaged students are losing out in the current system. 'All too often the rules of the admissions game are against them', said Dr Gill Wyness, the author of the report. Her data show that money not merit is driving university choices: disadvantaged high attainers are less likely to choose courses that meet their potential, while advantaged low attainers are more likely to be on courses that exceed theirs.

Pray: against admission gaps between the better-off and less well-off. (1 Samuel 2:8a)

More: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Rules-of-the-Game.pdf>

■ Domestic abuse victims 'turned away' from refuges

Hundreds of victims of domestic abuse are being turned away from refuges in Wales due to lack of space. As many as 500 women, children and men were turned away in 2016-17, half the time because units were full. Welsh Women's Aid said there had been a 5% funding cut in specialist services for violence against women. There are fears that the loss of a protected Welsh government grant could see more refuges close (already 34 have done so since 2010). Fleeing violence and finding refuge is not just a Welsh challenge. Across the UK one-third of all referrals to refuges are turned away,

according to Women's Aid; others say two out of three women are turned away. Specialist domestic violence services for black and ethnic minority women and women with disabilities have borne the brunt of the cuts. See also <http://www.theweek.co.uk/checked-out/90364/the-truth-about-british-funding-for-women-s-refuges>

Pray: for adequate funding for qualified staff helping victims of domestic violence. (Isaiah 1:17)

More: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-42416676/funding-change-could-see-domestic-violence-refuges-shut>

EUROPE

European Christmas traditions

There is a story of Martin Luther walking in the woods in Latvia and creating the first Christmas tree in 1510. Whether or not it is true, the first Christmas tree recorded was in the town square of Riga, Latvia - not Germany. In Argentina Christmas trees are decorated on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December). Globos are lightweight paper decorations with a light inside that many Europeans release into the sky after midnight on Christmas Eve - hundreds of tiny God-lights in the sky. The Nativity crib scene was first made popular in Italy by St Francis of Assisi in 1223, a year after he had visited Bethlehem and seen where it is believed that Jesus was born. Many Italian families have Nativity cribs in their homes. Croatian Christmas preparations begin on St Catherine's day (25 November) with an Advent wreath of straw and evergreen twigs holding four candles representing hope, peace, joy, and love.

Pray: for every single Christmas celebration to draw people closer to Christ in all His fullness. (Colossians 2:9)

More: <https://www.whychristmas.com/cultures/croatia.shtml>

Pope Francis: Lord's Prayer debate

Pope Francis has sparked a debate after saying he wants to make a change to the Lord's Prayer, arguing that the current form wrongly implies that God can lead humans into temptation. The Pontiff said the Roman Catholic Church should adopt a better translation, as the current phrasing is theologically incorrect. It speaks of a God who induces temptation. The French have changed the text to 'do not let me fall into temptation'. The Pontiff said, 'I am the one who falls, it isn't God who throws me into temptation and then looks on to see how I fell. A father does not do this; a father helps us get up immediately. The one who leads you into temptation is Satan, that's Satan's role. The prayer should say, "When Satan leads me into temptation, give me a hand"'.

Pray: for people to reflect more deeply on the source of sin as the media highlight this discussion. (1 Cor. 10:13)

More: <http://www.gospelherald.com/articles/71698/20171208/pope-francis-sparks-debate-saying-lords-prayer-changed-satan-god.htm>

WORLDWIDE

Israel: awaiting Advent

During Advent we sing 'O come, O come, Emmanuel' and prepare our hearts to celebrate the long-awaited arrival of our Saviour Jesus. We honour the most famous Jewish man who ever walked the earth: Yeshua, the Messiah. Yet His chosen people - His treasured possession - have not recognised Him. For them, Advent has not yet come. However 1.7 million Jewish people are now celebrating that the Messiah has come - and his name is Jesus! More Jews believe in Jesus today than in the past two thousand years combined. Despite a turbulent history with the Church that has left many Jews resistant to Christian evangelism, God is healing wounds of the past and creating new relationships of respect and communication between Christians and Jews. Thus avenues are opening that reflect Jesus' love for the Jews and sharing of the Gospel more lovingly and effectively.

Pray: for the estimated 20,000 Messianic Jews living in Israel to help their fellow Jews to understand that they can accept Jesus without denying their Jewish identity. (Matthew 5:17)

More: <http://www.prayercast.com/judaism.html>

Jerusalem days of rage - ten killed, thousands injured

Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital has generated aggressive reactions. The PLO are seeking full UN membership again (they failed in 2011), and will no longer accept the USA participating in peace negotiations. Turkey called Israel a 'terrorist state'. Pakistan's prime minister said, 'We hope the demonstrations of rage will not dissipate into passive acceptance of the status quo.' Many onlookers believe that Hamas deliberately resorts to violence to pursue its ends. The violence is rarely spontaneous, is well organised, and used by leaders because violence achieves their goal. It works because policymakers abstain from making controversial decisions, fearing violent reactions. Meanwhile fighting continues in Jerusalem with ten dead, 2809 injured and 400 arrested. This week a 25-member Bahraini delegation held a five-day visit to Jerusalem, 'sending a message of peace', as Israeli military carried out air strikes on Hamas training compounds in the Gaza Strip after rocket attacks came out of Palestinian territory. See <https://es.gatestoneinstitute.org/11572/jerusalem-violencia-politica>

Pray: for Hamas's call for a new intifada to fail. (Proverbs 30:32,33)

More: <http://www.aljazeera.com/topics/subjects/israelipalestinian-conflict.html>

War-torn areas: shelter and relief

The word 'shelter' literally means a house, a tent, or a refuge. It arises from the command of Jesus that we are to 'love our neighbour.' This additionally implies providing food, clothing and drinking water to the poor and needy as well as a roof over their heads. For over thirty years Shelter Now has assisted with humanitarian and developmental assistance in Pakistan and Afghanistan, providing emergency relief for war-affected refugees and for victims of earthquakes, floods, drought and other natural disasters. It provides reconstruction, rehabilitation and long term development co-operation. Recently the work in Pakistan was closed, to start helping refugees from IS in Kurdistan instead. In November a staff member, Udo Stolte,

visited Yazidi refugees in Sulaimaniya in northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. You can read his report on Yazidi children going to school again by clicking on the 'More' button.

Pray: for Christian mission workers in closed countries and war-torn areas as they bring Christmas alive for many who have never heard of their Saviour. (Luke 1:47)

More: http://www.shelter-now.org/news/news/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=204&cHash=3af5771609ddc1adcf106ef849f003e9

■ **Pakistan: persecution in churches and prisons**

On 17 December, two suicide bombers targeted a Methodist church in Quetta, leaving nine dead and over fifty injured. Only one managed to detonate his vest: the second was killed by security forces. Over 400 worshippers were in church at the time. A group affiliated to IS claimed responsibility. Pray for the Pakistani government to take all steps necessary to provide adequate security to Christians during this Christmas season. Pray for God's healing mercy upon those injured, and His presence to be with those grieving the death of loved ones. Also, Pakistan Prison Mission Society reported discrimination against Christians in prison. Christians are accused of blasphemy only because of personal vendettas or vested interests, and it takes years before courts absolve them of false charges. They are mistreated by other prisoners as soon as it is known they are Christians. Pray for pastors to be allowed into prisons this Christmas.

Pray: for the Supreme Court to address the prison situation, and for God's protection over His people. (Isaiah 40:31)

More: <https://prisonsmissonssociety.wordpress.com/>

■ **Nigeria fighting Fulani**

'I watched Fulani kill and burn homes with glee. Numan region belongs to us. If the government cannot protect us, then we will protect our land and our heritage. It is all we have to hand on to our children', said Pwanedo Justin after fleeing his village. The government's inability to address the plight of Christians, and policies where Muslim victims are given priority over Christian ones, have deepened the sense of injustice. This recent attack was a reaction to a massacre in three villages by Bachama youths. Bachama are predominantly Christian. The Fulani are heavily armed with sophisticated weapons, which are believed to come from outside Nigeria. Thousands were displaced and are now missing. These attacks remain the single most dangerous threat to Nigeria today. On 19 December the federal government announced it will spend \$1bn on fighting insurgency.

Pray: for the Holy Spirit to prompt Christians to abandon revenge plans, and for God to give the government and military wise tactics to remove the Fulani threat. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

More: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/news/>

■ **Syria: fighting and refugee plight**

In just one area of East Damascus over 500 Syrians are in urgent need of medical evacuation from an area which has been under siege since 2013. There are severe food shortages, with 11.9% of children suffering from acute malnutrition. On 20 December, in the western countryside of Damascus province, advances against the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda terrorists were being made and a number of key hilltops were captured. Pray for civilians still trapped in jihadist strongholds. Pray for those living in fear and desperation, where Syrian troops are unleashing machine gun fire from the hills above their towns, particularly Mazaraat Beit Jinn and Mughir al-Mir. Pray for jihadist fighters to be prevented from mobilising any coordinated counter-attack against army advances in key areas such as East and West Damascus.

Pray: for God to watch over and shelter those caught in the ruthless fighting. (Isaiah 25:4)

More: <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/category/syria/>

■ **Egypt: 2018 election**

Ever since former prime minister Ahmed Shafiq said he would run in the 2018 presidential election, many are speculating about his ability to win. Egypt's religious institutions influence presidential candidates, and journalists supporting President al-Sisi have focused on the ties that Shafiq has with the Salafist Dawa Party and its political arm. The Salafi movement is ultra-conservative Sunni Islam. If Shafiq mobilises the only remaining influential religious blocs of Salafist Dawa and the Copts, his candidacy in the upcoming election might produce a repeat of 2012, when two strong candidates, Shafiq and Morsi, competed against each other. In those elections the Copts supported Shafiq out of fear that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood would win. It is difficult for the largest Coptic bloc not to vote for al-Sisi, who they believe has protected them by overthrowing the Muslim Brotherhood.

Pray: for God to prepare the political atmosphere in Egypt prior to June 2018. (Psalm 47:8)

More: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/12/egypt-presidential-elections-ahmad-shafiq-religious-blocs.html>

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE WORLD PRAYER CENTRE, BIRMINGHAM, UK

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Prayer Alert is produced in association with The World Prayer Centre: Cornerstone House, 5 Ethel Street, Birmingham, B2 4BG