

Prayer Alert

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For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

We are pleased to enclose this week's edition of Prayer Alert.

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The next edition of Prayer Alert will be circulated on Friday 4th January 2019.

We wish all our subscribers a peaceful and blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

David Fletcher – Editor

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Praise Reports

The most wonderful time of the year

In Toronto's main square, a giant Christmas tree illuminated by over 300,000 lights shines from dusk until 11 pm. In the Philippine city of San Fernando, on the Saturday before Christmas, huge elaborate lanterns made from a variety of materials create a kaleidoscope of patterns in the sky. In Colombia, people place candles and paper lanterns in windows, and gardens, lighting up entire towns and cities with elaborate displays in honour of Mary and the Immaculate Conception. Neighbourhoods compete for who can create the most impressive arrangement. Each person entering Ethiopian churches on Christmas Day is given a candle. Dressed in white, they walk around the church three times in a solemn procession, holding the flickering candles. [See https://people.howstuffworks.com/culture-traditions/holidays-christmas/christmas-traditions-around-the-world-ga4.htm](https://people.howstuffworks.com/culture-traditions/holidays-christmas/christmas-traditions-around-the-world-ga4.htm)

Praise: God for His Light that entered the world. (John 8:12)

More: www.momondo.co.uk/discover/article/christmas-traditions-around-the-world

A testament to God's power

The trailer for a Franklin Entertainment faith-based film *Breakthrough* broke records with 40 million views in one week. It is a real-life story of an adopted son falling through ice into the freezing waters of a Missouri lake. He lay without any signs of life for over an hour. His mother began to pray fervently for a miracle. Miraculously, his heart started beating again, astounding everyone present and defying every scientific prediction. Only days after the accident, he left the hospital, fully healed. The author, who is also CEO of Franklin Entertainment, said, 'It's a testament to God's power, and proof that people are hungry for hope and inspiration'.

Praise: God for Christian media reminding us that God is still a miracle worker today. (Mark 16:18)

More: www.gospelherald.com/articles/71903/20181210/new-chrissy-metz-film-breakthrough-tackles-identity-choosing-faith-over.htm

Significance of Jesus' swaddling clothes

Rabbi Jason Sobel recently spoke on the significance of baby Jesus being placed in swaddling clothes after his birth, as announced by the angel to the shepherds. He believes these shepherds weren't ordinary shepherds. He believes the lambs they were raising needed to be without blemish, because they would be offered as sacrifices in the temple. So these 'Levitical shepherds' would wrap the lambs in swaddling clothes to protect them. In that case, swaddling would have been an important connection point for the shepherds. 'What did they see? A baby born in the same place that the Passover lambs were born, swaddled like a Passover lamb, pointing to the fact that Messiah was the Lamb of God who would take over the sins of the world.'

Praise: God for fascinating insights that remind us of His provision for the salvation of His creation. (Isaiah 48:3)

More: www.faithwire.com/2017/12/14/the-incredible-significance-of-baby-jesus-being-wrapped-in-swaddling-clothes-after-his-birth/

British Isles & Ireland

Intercessor Focus: New Year, new politics

Pray for truthful accountable reporting by the media in the coming year. Pray for reporters and researchers to be more prepared to speak out without favour or bias. Ask God to grace our political news presenters and bloggers with heavenly wisdom and vision in all that they say and record. Bless and pray protection over all our politicians and their families, who have had to live and work under incredible pressure in this season of change. May God give them peace as they step back from battles and into Christmas. May each of them find recuperation and rest, and may unity replace diversity in the Cabinet in 2019. Ask God to give our MPs the humility and insights needed to make accurate choices and may they be delivered from the temptation to work for personal platforms or party politics (Matthew 6:13).

Pray: for the Palace of Westminster to be filled with the power of God invading every conversation and decision so that division, deception, confusion and anger are defeated. (Daniel 2:20)

More: <https://www.prayer-alert.net/british-isles-ireland-pa-site/itemlist/tag/Intercessor%20Focus>

'Politicians need to learn kindness from Christians'

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, wants politicians to look to the Church to learn lessons in kindness. He expressed disappointment in some of the dialogue coming from Parliament in recent weeks. 'One thing which inspires me about our churches is a simple word - kindness. The Church does kindness so well - treating each other with civility and respect - and I wish we politicians learnt from that. We don't even have the patience to hear someone else's argument, giving people the benefit of doubt.' Mr Khan was speaking to approximately 10,000 from the London Carols event at Wembley Arena. He thanked the Christian community for the 'huge contribution' they make to London.

Pray: for politicians to be inspired by Christian values in the workplace. (Ephesians 4:32)

More: www.premierchristianradio.com/News/UK/Sadiq-Khan-politicians-need-to-learn-kindness-from-Christians

2019: small businesses

As Brexit negotiations hit critical stages, the Federation of Small Businesses has published a guide which outlines the main outcomes and describes what good contingency plans should cover. Pray for our business leaders to have wisdom and clarity of vision to devise such plans. Ask God to give leaders in agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, engineering, and industrial developments the insights to deal successfully with any unexpected Brexit scenarios. We can ask God to give heaven's direction as they consider risks and opportunities. Brexit will affect the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and of UK citizens living in EU countries. Pray for justice to reign for individuals and families caught in this shifting situation.

Pray: for the wise use of company funds and resources, that produce orderly change. (Proverbs 13:20a)

More: www.fsb.org.uk/standing-up-for-you/brexit/introduction

2019: potential agriculture labour shortage

Machines can replace human hands in some farming but not when harvesting many types of fruit or vegetables. Growers rely heavily on people for all these jobs in season and out of season. It might be possible to reduce seasonal labour by investing in mechanisation for some crops; however hand picking is currently the only option for quality of produce to meet consumer demand. Just 1% of seasonal farm workers are British. Most come from Eastern Europe, but with the end of free movement, growers could have to look even further for labour. Africa, Asia? Already, labour shortages have left produce rotting in fields and polytunnels. As Britain prepares for free movement of people to end, farmers are anxiously saying, 'Who will pick the crops next spring? Brits won't do it.'

Pray: for government schemes to attract foreign farm workers with appropriate visas. (Proverbs 21:22)

More: www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-eu-agriculture-farms-fruit-picking-migrant-workers-labour-shortage-a8469806.html

Pray for our prodigals

Tens of thousands of people have prodigal family members. The dictionary defines a prodigal as extravagant, a big spender. The word describes the son in the well-known parable: does it also describe the Father, who threw a great extravagant feast in honour of his errant son? You might empathise with him; he loves his son but has not seen him in many months and is worried about his adventure in the big, wide, often dangerous world. Fathers, mothers and siblings of prodigals know the deep ache as they pray for them to come back to Jesus. Prodigals are on God's heart. Ask Him to prompt families to know when to open a reconciling conversation, and when to remain silent. May there be strengthened relationships so that people draw closer together.

Pray: for God to call the prodigals home and give them a clear revelation about Jesus this Christmas. (Luke 15:7)

More: www.worldprayer.org.uk/world-prayer-centre-news/item/11278-praying-for-our-loved-ones-to-come-home-at-christmas

Homeless people's deaths up 24%

597 homeless people died in England and Wales in 2017, compared to 482 in 2013. 84% of this figure were men, and over 50% were because of drug poisoning, liver disease caused by alcohol abuse, or suicide (also known as the diseases of despair). The average age of death was 44 for men and 42 for women. Homeless charities say pressure on their services is increasing. The director of Shelter called the deaths a source of national shame, 'a consequence of a housing system which fails too many people'. The CEO of Crisis called on the Government to fix the root causes of homelessness - building more social homes and a welfare system to support people who fall on hard times.

Pray: for Government, police, NHS, councils, and charities to provide safety networks for people sleeping rough. (Titus 3:14)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46613609

Drones cause chaos at Gatwick

Gatwick Airport reopened on 21 December, after drones caused it to shut down for 40 hours. Thousands of passengers remain stranded, while police have not yet found the operator, who could be an environmental activist. The airport could not operate while the drones were in flight in case they hit and damaged a plane. There is no evidence at present that the disruption was terror-related. Transport secretary Chris Grayling said the situation was unprecedented, and 'lessons need to be learned'. In 2013 there were no incidents involving drones, whereas in 2018 there have been well over 100. In June a drone came within ten feet of a Virgin Airways plane carrying 260 people. Mr Grayling said the Government was looking to go further with drone control, including considering age-limits for users.

Pray: that the authorities will find the perpetrators of this disruption, and that suitable measures will be put in place to ensure that it does not happen again. (Psalm 122:7)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-46643173

Important role of cyber security

Unfortunately cybercrime is increasing. We are twenty times more likely to be robbed while at our computer by overseas criminals than in the street. On 18 December a new security operations centre for Belfast was announced. Businesses with highly connected personal devices, cloud use and rapidly advancing technology are increasingly at risk: see <https://www.businesscloud.co.uk/news/capita-unveils-major-cyber-security-investment> The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) is a government organisation providing advice and support for the public and private sector about how to avoid computer security threats. NCSC works closely with educators and researchers to build a cyber-savvy workforce of the future and enhance the UK's knowledge. Pray for NCSC in 2019 as it implements innovative cyber security and support teaching initiatives after Brexit.

Pray: for government and telecoms operators to manage cyber-security risks. (Proverbs 20:26)

More: www.ncsc.gov.uk/education-research

Europe

Protests and demonstrations

For days, thousands of Hungarians have demonstrated against the rule of prime minister Viktor Orban ([see](#)). Opposition parties, student groups and civilians object to two new laws: one allows employers to ask for up to 400 hours of overtime work per year, and the other has set up a parallel judicial system which will severely undermine judicial independence. A Budapest-based research group observing the protests said there is a committed opposition against the government, and it could be the starting point of a broader movement. Meanwhile, French 'yellow vest' protesters have demonstrated for five consecutive Saturdays against President Macron's rule. The movement was initially against fuel taxes, then education reforms, and now many issues bring them to the streets, even though their protests have forced the government to adjust its economic course. Also, the UN migration pact has brought thousands of demonstrators on marches in Brussels near major EU facilities, amid fears that it could lead to an increase in immigration.

Pray: for God to help Europe's leaders uphold democratically agreed laws. (Proverbs 18:17)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45498514

Ukraine: birth of new church brings violence

Young men brought clubs and brass knuckles to Pechersk Monastery in Kiev, intent on disrupting worship. Police spread-eagled them against a wall depicting centuries-old frescoes of saints, then hauled them away. Meanwhile at a small church in the centre of Kiev, a dozen men organised round-the-clock guard duty against nationalist radicals making their third attempt in a year to seize their place of worship. These incidents underline Ukraine's potent, possibly explosive mix of politics, religious faith, and national identity that is emerging in the creation of an Orthodox church of its own. There are deep concerns about what will happen to the 12,000 churches and their property in the church split. The war between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists, which has killed 10,000+ people, has increased hostility towards the Moscow Patriarchate churches. With such passions on both sides, it is feared that more violence between the two sides lies ahead.

Pray: for the two clashing churches to agree the arrangements for imminent independence from each other peacefully. One God, one Church, many offshoots of fresh growth. (John 15: 2)

More: ausprayernet.org.au/birth-of-a-new-ukrainian-church-brings-fears-of-violence/

Worldwide

Faith for 2019

2018 has been a year of great triumphs and unimaginable tragedies. We have seen both incredible good and unfathomable evil. We have witnessed miracles and seen suffering. But as we look ahead, we remember and proclaim that God is sovereign over every corner of the globe. He alone is the hope of 2019 - 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 1:21,22a). Nothing is impossible for Him. God reigns, and is moving today all over the world!

Pray: for God's Kingdom rule to be more visible in the events of 2019. (Psalm 103:19)

More: prayercast.com/you-reign.html

Yemen: pray for the first truce in years

A fragile calm took hold in Hodeidah on 18 December, after sporadic gunfire between Houthi fighters and forces loyal to the government. Two days later it was being hailed by many as a positive step on the path to peace for the war-torn country. However the agreement is open to different interpretations by the warring parties. It talks of 'mutual redeployment of forces' from Hodeidah and other ports. The Houthis do not see this as meaning that they need to withdraw, while the other side thinks they must do so - a

key point of contention. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/good-bad-peace-agreement-yemen-181218082222574.html>. Everyone is praying that the truce will hold. The humanitarian situation is beyond atrocious. The majority of malnourished people don't know where they will get their next meal. Women can't produce milk for their children. People die daily. 22 million people need aid. 8.4 million face starvation. Pray for immediate co-ordinated availability and distribution of all that is needed.

Pray: for international monitors and negotiators to ensure peace is established. (Psalm 34:14)

More: www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/fragile-hodeidah-truce-takes-effect-sporadic-fighting-reported-181217235749367.html

Israel: Christmas and tourism in Bethlehem

70% of what had been Palestine until 1949 is now controlled by Israel. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the continuing expansion of settlements and military law in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority now has control over about 18% of the West Bank - which includes Bethlehem. The tourism industry there is yet another battleground of Palestinians and Israelis for controlling the narrative around the occupation. At Christmas there are strings of lights over the town's famous Manger Square, with a life-sized nativity scene, and pilgrims entering the church to see where Jesus was born. Tourists come in groups organised by Israeli tour companies, while native Palestinian local guides look for individual tourists to show them around their hometown. There is an unseen struggle for Palestinians, many of them Christians, to earn a living.

Pray: for peace on earth and goodwill towards all men in Bethlehem, Palestine, Israel. (Luke 2:14)

More: www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/christmas-bethlehem-controlling-narrative-tourism-181218051912412.html

Syria: Trump's meandering policy

On 19 December, a week after his special coalition envoy to defeat IS said that US troops would be in Syria for the foreseeable future, Donald Trump has ordered a complete, rapid withdrawal of 2,000 military personnel. He tweeted, 'We have defeated IS in Syria, my only reason for being there.' Earlier this year he said, 'I want to get out. I want to bring our troops home and start rebuilding our nation'. He has always said the money spent on the struggle would be better spent at home. Britain has distanced itself from Trump's perception of the situation, which has also led to the resignation of his defence secretary James Mattis (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46640114>). US allies and Kurdish militias feel abandoned, as this decision hands Iran and Russia more leverage across the country. A group of Kurdish and Arab units raised by Washington specifically to fight IS said that the move would have 'dangerous implications for international stability'. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/20/syria-kurds-trump-troop-withdrawal-isis-turkey>

Pray: for NGOs supporting US agencies bringing water, sanitation and repairs, to demonstrate concern for those they must leave by organising alternates before leaving. (Psalm 142:4)

More: www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/12/19/guide-americas-meandering-syria-policy-under-trump/?utm_term=.0b35d6f16b96

Missionary who uses a gun and brings a Bible

Dave Eubank moved his family into the middle of some of the most dangerous places in the world to spread the Gospel and help others. He has been described as a Christian Rambo. Countless people caught in war zones around the globe are incredibly thankful for his outlook. Eubank achieved media fame last year when he saw IS forces shoot a fleeing family. He assumed everyone was dead, but then spotted slight movement; there was a small child alive in the midst of the horrific scene, lying under her mother's body. With smoke screen and covering fire, he daringly ran into the open, exposing himself to enemy fire, grabbed the girl, and brought her to safety. He was seen praying for protection, crying out to Jesus, before he made the rescue attempt. Jesus is at the heart of everything Eubank does.

Pray: for protection and provision for all who embark on mission work in dangerous places. (Proverbs 2:8)

More: www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/2018/december/the-american-missionary-who-sometimes-wields-a-gun-ndash-but-always-brings-a-bible

Canada: forced sterilisation of indigenous women

In 2017 two indigenous women alleged that they were coerced into undergoing sterilisation at a Saskatchewan hospital. More than sixty women have now joined them in a pending class action lawsuit, seeking compensation for the violation of their rights, supported by Amnesty International (see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/18/canada-indigenous-women-coerced-sterilization-class-action-lawsuit>). The legal challenge centres on whether proper and informed consent was obtained before the women were sterilised. One woman said she explicitly refused to have her fallopian tubes tied when staff suggested the procedure after the birth of her son. On 7 December the UN officially called on Canada to 'ensure that all allegations of forced or coerced sterilisation are impartially investigated, and the persons responsible held accountable with adequate redress for the victims'. Pray for policies and accountability mechanisms across all provinces to ensure there are clear regulations around free will, and informed consent.

Pray: for survivors and their families; and for improved public healthcare for indigenous people. (Job 9:19)

More: www.amnesty.ca/news/sterilizing-indigenous-women-without-consent-torture-says-un-committee

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