

Prayer Alert

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When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:10-11)

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

We would invite you to join with a united German-British online worship offering and prayer time at New Year! The 25-Hour continuous event runs from 11.00am on New Year's Eve until 12.00 noon on January 1st GMT. It's been organised by a number of UK and German partner ministries including the World Prayer Centre. Full details are [here](#)

This is the final edition of Prayer Alert for 2020! During the break, you may like to explore our new online [Prayer Alert Prayer Wall](#) where we can add our own prayers and praise, interactively. Meanwhile, we will be back on January 1st!

We wish all our readers a happy, blessed and healthy Christmas.

David Fletcher and the Prayer Alert Team

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Praise Reports

[Christmas shoes for barefoot children](#)

A little child - a long walk - a rocky road - no shoes - twice a day - five times a week. This is life for thousands of Indonesian Christian children because their parents cannot afford shoes. The more fortunate children have jepit (meaning pinch sandals because they must be gripped by toes). Not easy walking over rough ground, and not healthy for young growing feet. Christians asked Barnabas to provide proper school shoes for them. A local Christian shoe company is providing shoes at a 67% discount. This Christmas the children, who walk every day for miles in bare feet, will receive a gift of school shoes thanks to many generous donations.

Praise: God for the generosity of those who have who give to those who have not. (Hebrews 13:16)

More: mailchi.mp/barnabasfund/give-a-pair-of-shoes-this-christmas-change-the-life-of-an-indonesian-christian-child-814990?e=026ee53901

[A Christmas gift in Lahore](#)

In Pakistan, false accusations of blasphemy are common and often motivated by personal vendettas or religious hatred. Imran was falsely accused of blasphemy and imprisoned for life. On 15 December the Lahore High Court acquitted him and released him, after he had spent over ten years in prison. The development came as a shock to Imran's family. 'It is a day of resurrection for us', Naveed Masih, Imran's brother, said. 'God has heard our cry and we are very thankful to Him. It's a Christmas gift for us.'

Praise: God for answered prayers, and ask Him to help Imran to readjust to freedom. (James 1:17)

More: www.persecution.org/2020/12/15/court-pakistan-acquits-christian-sentenced-life-prison-blasphemy/

[USA: unity is Christ's priority](#)

At a time of deep racial tension, two pastors - Derrick Hawkins, middle-aged and white, and Jay Stewart, young and black - have united their culturally segregated churches. The pair are leading the journey of racial reconciliation by example. In 2014 Pastor Derrick visited Jay's church service and asked him to mentor him as he prepared to take over the role of senior pastor in his church. They began meeting and established a great friendship. In 2016, they decided to go beyond the norm and merge their completely culturally different ministries. 90% of African-American Christians worship in all-black churches. 90% of white American Christians worship in all-white churches. The pair believe God has a 'better narrative of unity', and want Christians to step out of their comfort zones and reflect the bride of Christ. Stewart said the risks of forming relationships with those who look different from you is worth the reward that comes from doing so.

Praise: for this example of racial unity to be repeated across the nations in and outside the church. (John 17:21)

More: www.christianpost.com/news/how-a-white-church-and-a-black-church-felt-led-to-merge.html?uid=6f9e8ab413

British Isles

Brexit: race against time

Stripping away the spin in both the UK and EU, the prospects of a deal feel very slim at present. In the next few weeks everything rests on intense negotiations behind the scenes. The process is unlikely to be straightforward as this is all uncharted territory. Please continue to pray for God to direct every conversation around this challenging situation. Pray for everyone to be creative and able to keep the basis of negotiations on level ground. Political observers say that if they wanted to, the EU and the UK could, in theory, come up with an agreement outside EU law. Meanwhile the UK and USA are in talks over a mini trade deal to reduce tariffs. Pray for the success of post-Brexit deals with Washington. Pray for God to pave the way for excellent future communications between US trade representative Robert Lighthizer and the UK international trade secretary Liz Truss. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-55341970>

Pray: for the minimum amount of disruption to the movement of goods, legal fishing fields, future trade deals and tariffs. (Philippians 4:6-7)
More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/55321742

Rash Christmas Covid rules

In a joint editorial, two leading medical journals have said the UK's plan to ease Covid rules over Christmas is a 'rash decision' that will 'cost many lives'. They said people might see the lifting of restrictions 'as permission to drop their guard'. However, Number 10 said it would not review plans to allow household mixing over Christmas. It is only the second time the two publications have written a joint editorial. Pray for people to understand the danger and keep social contact to a minimum over the five days of reduced restrictions.

Pray: for the Government to recognise the seriousness of the danger and rethink the Christmas rules amid unprecedented pressures on some hospitals. (Proverbs 16:1,3)
More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55311717

Justin Bieber joins NHS choir for Christmas

Justin Bieber has teamed up with the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS choir to record a Christmas single, a remix of the star's single Holy, which reached number seven in October. The charity collaboration comes five years after the two acts were locked in a battle for the Christmas number one. Bieber said, 'I was honoured to meet everyone from the choir and I'm really happy that they got their number one.' Their new charity single is aiming for Christmas number one, with proceeds to be split between NHS Charities Together, which represents more than 230 NHS charities, and the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust Charity. An immunisation clinical coordinator said, 'The message that holding someone is such a special thing that it's almost a holy experience is so resonant with current difficulties and personal challenges.'

Pray: for this song to encourage and touch people's hearts over the Christmas season and beyond. (Psalm 34:18)
More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-55300312

Worshippers must reserve seats at Christmas

A Church of England spokesman has said, 'At Christmas around six million people of all ages wish to attend services to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Covid-19 has meant it is necessary to limit the capacity of church buildings to keep everyone safe.' Those wishing to attend services this Christmas are being encouraged not to leave it too late to book their seats. Churches have been advised to set up free online ticket booking systems to ensure adequate physical distancing can be maintained. The popular Christmas services are quickly filling up. St Paul's Cathedral has no tickets left for Christmas services. York Minster tweeted, 'Tickets for 23rd and 24th carol services are sold out, although they will be livestreamed'. Some churches have added additional services to their programmes to keep up with demand, while advising online bookings. Churches are urged to add their Christmas events to the CofE's 'A Church Near You' page.

Pray: for every person who wants to attend a Christmas event to be able to do so, either at actual services and via technology. (Hebrews 10:25)
More: premierchristian.news/en/news/article/worshippers-urged-to-reserve-seats-as-christmas-services-reach-capacity

Christmas hardship for many

This year has been tough for us all, but for millions of the poorest in our country life is now desperate. They don't know where their next meal is coming from and are facing a Christmas of hunger and hardship. Centrepoint say this could be the worst homelessness crisis in their fifty-year history, with 23,000 young lives at risk. They are not just a Christmas statistic, they need a safe warm room to live in. They need to be able to turn their lives around (see <https://centrepoint.org.uk/>) The Salvation Army said that after a difficult year they want to reach out to those who are suffering the most and bring joy and hope into their lives this Christmas. In over 650 communities across the UK they will be rolling up their sleeves and doing all they can for them.

Pray: for the thousands who have to turn to charities this Christmas and in 2021. (Matthew 25:35)
More: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/support-salvation-army-christmas-3

Making ethical decisions that value human life

As the first Covid-19 vaccines are rolled out, many people are asking what Christians should think about the safety of vaccines developed and tested so quickly. There are questions around the equitable distribution of vaccines both in the UK and to the global community, plus the ethical issues surrounding a false rumour of their connection with tissue derived from an aborted foetus. The media are full of false vaccine claims - everything from alleged plots to put microchips into people to the supposed re-engineering of our genetic code. At a webinar hosted by the Evangelical Alliance NI two renowned speakers, Prof John Wyatt and Dr Mary Neal, addressed some of these issues and gave believers guidance on how to make up their own minds about what to do when their turn comes.

Pray: for the views of the Christian Medical Fellowship and others with facts and influence to be heard and understood by those in doubt about new technologies and vaccinations. (Proverbs 11:3)
More: cmfblog.org.uk/2020/12/14/covid-19-vaccines-making-ethical-decisions-that-value-human-life/

Vaccination programme

On 8 December a mass Covid-19 vaccination programme began, starting with the elderly, health workers, and carers. The next day, after two

NHS workers suffered allergic reactions to the vaccine, a warning was issued that such people should not be given it. Both women have a significant history of allergic reactions and need to carry an adrenaline auto-injector with them. There are still many questions that the public have over the vaccine's safety: [see \(https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/vaccines-and-immunization-what-is-vaccination\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/vaccines-and-immunization-what-is-vaccination) Many are asking, 'How can we be sure the vaccine is safe with such a short testing period?' Pray for the WHO, scientists, and experts on human medicine to be given enough media coverage to answer all fears and questions clearly, so that the anti-vax misinformation in social media is silenced. [See also https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/coronavirus-news-vaccine-pfizer-nhs-oxford-covid-uk-cases/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/coronavirus-news-vaccine-pfizer-nhs-oxford-covid-uk-cases/)

Pray: for a smooth rollout of training healthcare workers and social care staff, admin of consent records and all documentation, and guidance for what to expect after vaccination. (Colossians 4:6)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-51176409

Europe

Europe's Covid Christmas

Across Europe there will be further lockdowns, curfews and travel bans as the number of people infected with Covid has increased. Italy's prime minister Giuseppe Conte summed it up when he told Italians to expect a 'more sober Christmas, without Christmas Eve gatherings, hugs and kisses'. We can pray for people to honour the various restrictions on public gatherings and to obey curfews where they have been imposed. Pray particularly for friends and families to exercise restraint on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Pray also for countries which will be easing restrictions prior to Christmas; may the public act wisely to avoid any further unnecessary sickness and deaths. [See \(https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-what-are-europes-christmas-coronavirus-rules-12162445\)](https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-what-are-europes-christmas-coronavirus-rules-12162445) The EU drug regulator will meet on 21 December to decide whether to authorise the jab after desperate EU countries said the agency risked losing the trust of EU citizens if it did not act fast.

Pray: for the nations to work in unity to control and eliminate coronavirus. (1 Peter 3:8)

More: www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/15/germany-to-begin-vaccinating-against-covid-within-two-weeks

Holy See: Christmas lighting-up ceremony

'Christmas reminds us that Jesus is our peace, our joy, our strength, our comfort', Pope Francis said at the Vatican's traditional lighting ceremony: 'Let there be light.' A 30-metre-tall spruce was placed just off-centre in St Peter's Square. It was lit during a small and socially distanced ceremony as prelates invoked a spirit of peace and encounter after a year marked by the Covid pandemic. Across Europe there have been public unveiling of nativity scenes, lighted trees, angels, and other Christian symbols. We can pray that all who see these artistic creations will be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas.

Pray: for all enduring this pandemic to recognise that Jesus, small and helpless baby, is the 'sign' that God gifts to the world. (Isaiah 9:6)

More: religionnews.com/2020/12/11/vatican-unveils-nativity-scene-and-lights-up-tree-for-christmas/

Worldwide

Christmas unwelcome guest

As we prepare for a different Christmas, thousands of families will be carrying the mental exhaustion of an unwelcome guest - debt. Debt erodes confidence and brings a whole host of stresses, and strains this festive season. Furlough, income reduction, job losses have all taken their toll. The recent collapse of Debenhams and Arcadia put a further 25,000 jobs at risk, on top of the thousands of jobs already hanging by a thread. Our poorest communities are hit hardest, with little or no savings to fall back on, and are unable to cope with the income shocks that this year has brought. Heating or eating is a brutal choice for many families. Pray that those struggling with financial problems and feeling isolated will realise that they are not alone and there is no shame in needing debt advice. May those needing such advice be put in touch with the agencies who are able to support them.

Pray: for those in poverty to be recognised and helped to restore their mental and physical wellbeing. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

More: www.eauk.org/news-and-views/debt-the-unwelcome-guest-this-christmas

USA: election protests escalating

Before the election, political tensions were boiling over in a particularly divisive campaign season. Brawling between people with American flags, people dressed in black and others sporting red gear saying 'Make America Great Again' launched eggs at each other, yelled expletives, and became violent (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/10/25/trump-protest-ny-fight-caravan/>). These political tensions worsened in November as many refused to accept Joe Biden's election victory. Violent demonstrators on the streets of Washington and other cities resulted in [stabblings and arrests \(https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/15/violence-erupts-as-thousands-rally-behind-trump-in-washington\)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/15/violence-erupts-as-thousands-rally-behind-trump-in-washington). In recent battles between BLM, Trump supporters, and the extremist right Proud Boys, five police officers were stabbed, two more were hospitalised, many were arrested, and several were shot, including a Washington police officer. The media is calling this season 'Make America break again' not 'Make America great again'. Meanwhile the most recognisable female Christian speaker, Pastor Beth Moore, warned believers of the dangers of Christian nationalism and called on Christians to 'move back' from supporting dangerous and seductive Trumpism. [See https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/southern-baptist-leader-beth-moore-calls-out-trumpism-as-seductive-and-dangerous](https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/southern-baptist-leader-beth-moore-calls-out-trumpism-as-seductive-and-dangerous)

Pray: for the Christmas season to usher in an easing of the tensions and end to violence. (2 Corinthians 13:11)

More: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9047473/Proud-Boys-BLM-fight-Stop-Steal-rally-DC-protester-shot-Washington.html

Nigeria: struggles

Bullets fly overhead as schoolboys scream out in fear. Chaos. Shrapnel. Hundreds go missing. This was the scene last week when Boko Haram militants stormed a high-school in Katsina, northern Nigeria, to abduct hundreds of students, 400 remain missing. It is a horror story reminiscent of the 2014 kidnapping of schoolgirls that prompted the viral #BringBackOurGirls campaign. The attack came just weeks after the brutal slaying of Nigerian farmers in Borno state by militants on motorcycles (thirty were beheaded). Nigeria's population is 50% Christian and 50% Muslim with groups like Boko Haram subscribing to a warped interpretation of Islam that justifies murder of Christians. In practice, both Christians and Muslims have been targeted in recent years. Pray for the government to improve its standards and protect vulnerable communities. Pray the authorities will also terminate the Special Anti-Robbery Squad's contract to end the torture and extrajudicial killings that

it has engaged in. STOP PRESS: it has now been reported that all the schoolboys have been released by Boko Haram. See <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/nigerian-schoolboys-freed-boko-haram-213909961.html>

Pray: for peaceful neighbourhoods to replace religious and ethnic divisions; for President Buhari's government to end deadly militant attacks; Give thanks that the abducted boys have been released. (1 John 3:18)
More: us12.campaign-archive.com/

USA: Christian campaigner faces death threats

Bob Fu, who lives in Texas, is a former Tiananmen Square protester who now runs ChinaAid and campaigns for religious freedom in China. He has been targeted with death threats and his family were traumatised by bomb threats and protests outside their home as Fu delivered an address in Washington on Christian persecution in China. The threats necessitated the family being evacuated from their home and taken into protective custody. His 15-year-old daughter had to be taken out of school by armed police. Although they have now returned home, they remain under police protection. Fu said, 'I have no doubt this is directly from Beijing. The goal is clear. It's to silence my voice for freedom in China and to destroy the ministry of ChinaAid. We cannot let them stop us: it's business as usual.'

Pray: for God to bless, use, and protect Fu as he seeks to alert the free world to persecution. (John 14:27)
More: www.christianpost.com/news/christian-activist-faces-death-threats-over-religious-freedom-work.html

Global: mission gap

Matthew Skirton is from the UK but has spent many years in Moldova. He says that mission agencies have noticed a decline in Christians engaging in cross-cultural, overseas mission. Less than 1% of Christians around the world are actively involved in global missions, something termed the 'Mission Gap'. Has the Church - in some quarters - moved away from the core belief that followers of Christ are all called to go to the ends of the earth, to every people group, to witness and make disciples? Local mission continues - mums and tots groups, food banks, Alpha and online Christmas carol services. During lockdown the move to online church has seen a surge in people connecting with Jesus' message. Fewer Christians are taking the leap abroad to where there is little chance of the people hearing the Gospel. A Turkish-speaking pastor in London whose services used to attract fifty people now livestreams to over 1,600 Turkish-speakers from his church.

Pray: for livestreaming to be the catalyst leading the Church to re-engage in mission. (Luke 10:2)
More: premierchristian.news/en/news/article/mind-the-mission-gap-less-than-1-per-cent-of-christians-are-actively-involved-in-global-mission

Egypt: Christians persecuted

Christians in Egypt are not safe, despite the authorities' claims to the contrary. The following tragedy shows the dangers Christians must navigate in Egyptian society, and their disbelief that help will come in the form of justice. Persecution is more than violence; it is also about how the authorities respond to these injustices. On 10 December three Muslim brothers attacked Coptic Christians living in Alexandria, murdering one man and significantly injuring two with knives and clubs, then damaging three Christian shops. The brothers have a history of thuggery and escalated harassment of Christian shop owners. They were arrested, but local Christians fear that they will be declared mentally unstable and not fully punished, as has happened before in similar cases. Violence against Christians is commonplace in Egypt, but this happened in Alexandria, where sectarian tensions are normally subtler than in Upper Egypt.

Pray: for the men still in hospital after being attacked (one was stabbed near his heart); for those in mourning and shock to be comforted; and for justice. (Amos 5:24)
More: www.persecution.org/2020/12/15/christian-murdered-two-injured-egypt/

Global: vaccination challenges for developing countries

Wealthy countries should be well-covered with vaccines by the first half of 2021, but low-income countries will still be waiting. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said that vaccine access is a huge challenge for low- and middle-income countries. Even when people in high-income countries have access to adequate vaccinations, if Covid is still circulating in poorer countries we will not see an end to the pandemic. Oxfam said, 'What we want to see AstraZeneca and Oxford do now is to commit to an open licence so more vaccine manufacturers can get on board. We think really the power is in their hands to end this epidemic by the end of 2021.' Both MSF and Oxfam say that both price and supply challenges can be overcome if we look at more systemic issues of patents. We need to open up intellectual property, including patents, so any manufacturer around the world could produce successful products without fearing sanctions.

Pray: for more manufacturers to be allowed to produce the vaccine so that poor and rich countries receive vaccine doses at roughly the same time. (Matthew 7:12)
More: www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/covid-19-vaccine-developing-countries/

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