

Prayer Alert

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An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' (Matthew 1:20-21)

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

You may like to explore our new online Prayer [Alert Prayer Wall](#) where we can add our own prayers and praise, interactively. We trust that you will find this helpful and encouraging!

Join the Team!

Prayer Alert is produced by a voluntary online team spread across England. If you appreciate what we do and are computer confident, with researching news, writing, editing and / or proofing skills, we would love to hear from you! Please hit reply, introduce yourself, and we will be in touch.

This is the final edition of Prayer Alert for 2023. We will be back on Friday 5 January 2024!

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

David Fletcher and the Prayer Alert Team

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Praise Reports

[Blackpool 'giftmas' tree a treat for 200 children](#)

The Half Way House pub in Blackpool has initiated a 'giftmas' tree project to provide Christmas presents for nearly 200 underprivileged children. Traditional decorations on the tree were replaced with tags indicating an anonymous child's age and gender. Patrons were encouraged to pick a tag and donate a suitable gift. This initiative led to over 185 children receiving gifts for Christmas. The landlords highlighted the importance of the project, acknowledging that many children might not receive gifts otherwise. The presents will be distributed through Blackpool's Children's Services. This initiative is significant in the UK, where around 4.2 million children live in poverty, and research suggests one in five might not receive a Christmas present. Following the success of this scheme, other pubs in the same chain are following suit. The chain's marketing manager praised the initiative for demonstrating the pivotal role pubs play in their communities, ensuring that many children will have gifts to open this Christmas.

Praise: God for this community expression of care for needy children. Pray for children living in poverty this Christmas - that they and their families will find financial relief and hope in Jesus. (Proverbs 22:6)

More: www.lancs.live/news/lancashire-news/beloved-blackpool-boozers-giftmas-tree-28323660

['United at Christmas': football club launches original carol](#)

Cambridge United Football Club, inspired by Baptist minister and fan Simon Cragg, has introduced an official club carol titled 'United at Christmas' to connect football enthusiasts with the teachings of Jesus. This unique carol was a highlight of a 1,000-person carol service at Abbey Stadium, attended by players, staff, and fans. It was also featured at halftime during the club's FA Cup match against Fleetwood. The lyrics of 'United at Christmas' use football-related imagery to convey themes of love, hope, and peace, and include references to the club's nickname and historical Christian narratives. Club director Graham Daniels, a former player and head of Christians in Sport, noted the growing openness to faith in football. He credits past Christian footballers like Gavin Peacock and Cyril Regis for setting strong examples of faith in the sport, leading to a cultural shift where being a devout Christian and a professional footballer is respected.

Praise: God for this seasonal project that is uniting faith and football, spreading hope and joy. (Ephesians 4:3)

More: premierchristian.news/en/news/article/football-club-s-official-carol-that-relates-football-to-jesus

British Isles

Teenagers found guilty of transgender schoolgirl Brianna Ghey's murder

Two teenagers, aged 16, were convicted of murdering 16-year-old transgender girl Brianna Ghey in Cheshire. Brianna was lured to Linear Park and stabbed 28 times. The assailants, a boy and a girl, were 15 at the time and denied the murder, each blaming the other. Their premeditated plan for the killing was evidenced by a handwritten murder plan and messages. During the four-week trial at Manchester Crown Court, it was revealed that the girl, known as Girl X, had a fascination with violence and serial killers. The boy, Boy Y, diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, is non-verbal. Prior to the murder, they compiled a 'kill list' of other children. Brianna's mother, Esther Ghey, expressed her enduring grief and gratitude to those who showed kindness to Brianna in her last moments. She also urged empathy for the families of the convicted teens. Brianna's father, Peter Spooner, shared his heartbreak over his loss. The case, which incited global protests against transphobia, awaits sentencing by Judge Mrs Justice Yip. Police believe the motive was not transphobia but a general thirst for violence.

Pray: for healing and comfort for those who are grieving in the wake of this tragedy. (Psalm 34:18)

More: www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/boy-girl-guilty-trans-teenager-brianna-ghey-murder-culcheth-warrington-b1128300.html

Falling inflation could boost the housing market – but there's a catch

The Bank of England's interest rate hikes, aimed at reducing inflation, have led to a slowdown in the UK housing market. Recent data reveals a significant drop in house prices, the largest since October 2011. This decline, most pronounced in London, reflects the impact of pandemic-driven price surges. Despite this decrease, the housing market faces long-term challenges. Interest rates have risen, functioning slowly like drip filter coffee, and have a delayed effect on the market. This delay is due to the time taken for banks to adjust mortgage rates and for these changes to be reflected in official statistics. The latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show a 1.2% drop in house prices over a year, marking the fastest decline in over a decade. Financial markets anticipate rate cuts next year, which could revive the market. However, the overall cost of living remains high, with increased expenses from food to household bills. Over a million people will face higher mortgage costs next year.

Pray: for wisdom for the Chancellor and the Bank of England as they steer the economy. Pray for financial relief for those struggling with high mortgage repayments and debt. (Prov 21:5)

More: inews.co.uk/news/falling-inflation-boost-housing-market-catch-2818215

Mordaunt says Boris's messages vanished from her phone

Penny Mordaunt, a UK cabinet minister, has revealed that her WhatsApp conversations with former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, relating to Covid, were mysteriously deleted from her phone. She provided this information in her evidence to the Covid inquiry, and mentioned that the former chief of staff at No 10, Dan Rosenfield, did not respond to 14 requests for a meeting to discuss the missing communications. This adds pressure on Johnson, who previously informed the inquiry that around 5,000 messages from his old phone, covering January to June 2020, could not be accessed. His lawyers suggested an automatic factory reset of the phone might be the cause. Mordaunt expressed willingness to have her phone examined by the inquiry if it would help. Johnson himself speculated at the inquiry that the disappearance might be due to the WhatsApp app malfunctioning and automatically erasing messages. He claimed that he had not removed any messages and had provided all relevant information to the inquiry.

Pray: for honesty and transparency across the corridors of power. (Proverbs 12:22)

More: www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-phone-messages-penny-mordaunt-b2467069.html

NHS leader: junior doctors' strikes could lead to tipping point

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, has warned that upcoming strikes by junior doctors could push the NHS to a tipping point early in the new year. The strikes coincide with typical winter pressures, including cold weather illnesses, bed shortages, and increases in norovirus cases, potentially overwhelming the health service. Junior doctors in England have been on strike this week, and are planning a six-day stoppage from 3 January. The strikes have already led to the postponement of outpatient appointments and operations, with Cheltenham general hospital closing its A&E unit due to staff shortages. The dispute centres on their demands for a 35% pay rise. Recent talks between the British Medical Association and the department of health have not resolved the issue. Dr Vivek Trivedi, for the BMA, argues that the Government's offer of an additional 3% pay rise is insufficient. He emphasises that junior doctors need fair pay to prevent them from seeking employment abroad, and believes the public still supports their right to strike.

Pray: for a swift and fair resolution to the pay dispute. Pray for NHS workers, patients and their loved ones who are dealing with these additional pressures. (Colossians 4:1)

More: www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/20/junior-doctor-strikes-will-increase-risk-nhs-will-be-overwhelmed-this-winter

Northern Ireland: Donaldson says no agreement on Windsor Framework

Northern Ireland secretary Chris Heaton-Harris has declared that negotiations aimed at restoring the Stormont government have concluded, offering a financial package exceeding £3.3 billion for the Executive's return. However, DUP leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson asserts that no final agreement on the post-Brexit Windsor Framework has been reached. He urged immediate resolution of public sector pay disputes by the UK government, independent of Stormont's restoration. Alliance leader Naomi Long, who believes the financial package is substantial yet insufficient, has urged the DUP to return to government. Sinn Féin's Mary Lou McDonald expressed disappointment over the potential delays, while UUP leader Doug Beattie acknowledged the end of talks but noted ongoing discussions about the 'good financial package.' He stressed the need for public sector pay resolutions before Christmas. The legislation for moving forward is reportedly ready.

Pray: for wisdom and unity across the parties to these talks. Pray for peace and progress. (Philippians 2:2)

More: m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/heaton-harris-insists-stormont-talks-have-concluded-but-donaldson-says-no-agreement-on-windsor-framework/a1258537728.html

Police to run face recognition searches on 50m driving licence holders

The UK government is introducing a law allowing police to run facial recognition searches on a database of fifty million driving licence holders. This change, part of a new criminal justice bill, will enable the police to match images from sources like CCTV and social media with driving licence records. Privacy campaigners warn that this effectively places all UK drivers in a 'permanent police lineup' without clear limits or independent oversight. There are concerns about the lack of public debate and consultation on this significant expansion of police powers. The technology's potential for false identifications, particularly among black and Asian faces, adds to the controversy. The change also raises questions about the legitimacy and proportionality of such widespread surveillance. The Home Office maintains that Clause 21 in the bill merely clarifies police use of DVLA records but does not grant automatic access for facial recognition. However, the move comes as part of broader efforts to integrate various databases into a single system for easier image-matching.

Pray: for guidance and wisdom for the Government as it seeks to balance security needs with respect for peoples' privacy. (Proverbs 2:11)

More: www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/dec/20/police-to-be-able-to-run-face-recognition-searches-on-50m-driving-licence-holders

Europe

Prague: shock after gunman kills 14

A gunman has killed at least 14 people and injured another 25 at a university in the historic city centre of Prague. It was the deadliest attack in modern Czech history. Staff and students barricaded themselves in rooms during the attack; videos showed some people jumping to safety from the top of the building, and many fleeing the area in panic. Police say the 24-year-old gunman was 'eliminated' following the shootings. Prime minister Petr Fiala said he had cancelled upcoming engagements in light of the tragic events. The gunman, a student at the university, was from a village 13 miles outside Prague. His father had been found dead earlier in the day. The gunman's motives were not immediately known. He legally owned multiple firearms: the Czech Republic has the most permissive gun laws in the EU.

Pray: for the families and friends of those who were killed, and for healing both physical and emotional for the wounded. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67793962

Iceland: volcano finally erupts

On 18 December a volcano on the Reykjanes peninsula in south-west Iceland finally erupted, spewing glowing orange jets of lava surrounded by billowing clouds of red smoke. The population of Grindavík, a small fishing town nearby, had been evacuated in November after a series of small earthquakes. The government said the eruption did not present a threat to life; there were no disruptions to flights to and from Iceland, as this type of eruption does not usually produce much ash. Icelandic police have warned tourists to 'think four times' before attempting to get close to the eruption, after they had to rescue an exhausted hiker [by helicopter](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/20/iceland-volcano-tourists-told-to-think-four-times-before-getting-too-close) (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/20/iceland-volcano-tourists-told-to-think-four-times-before-getting-too-close>). Iceland's president, Guðni Jóhannesson, said: 'Our priorities remain to protect lives and infrastructure. We wait to see what the forces of nature have in store. We are prepared and remain vigilant.' The meteorological office said on 20 December that the power, seismicity and deformation of the eruption had decreased.

Pray: that this eruption will not become life-threatening, and that tourists wanting to see it will exercise common sense. (Psalm 95:4-5)

More: www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/19/iceland-volcano-eruption-reykjanes-peninsula-grindavik-blue-lagoon

Ukraine stops drone attack, considers more troops

On 20 December, a major drone attack by Russia was stopped by Ukraine, whose air force claimed to have shot down 34 out of 35 of the Iranian devices. The drones were sent over in several waves over a seven-hour period. The attack comes amid claims by Ukraine that Russian troops are suffering from an outbreak of so-called 'mouse fever'. The disease causes people to bleed from their eyes, vomit several times a day, and experience extreme temperatures and headaches. Volodymyr Zelensky was boosted by news that Germany will provide 88.5 million euros to help strengthen his country's energy infrastructure in the face of Russian attacks. He has been asked by the military for an extra 500,000 troops to join the million or so already in uniform. Vladimir Putin has ordered his military to increase the number of Russian troops by 170,000, to a total of 1.32 million. [See https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/national/24001268.zelensky-considers-ukraine-militarys-request-500-000-troops/](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/national/24001268.zelensky-considers-ukraine-militarys-request-500-000-troops/)

Pray: for Mr Zelensky as he seeks additional aid from his allies, and as his troops battle winter weather and the numerically superior Russians. (Isaiah 54:17a)

More: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-live-putin-mouse-fever-latest-b2467623.html>

Worldwide

Gaza: possible signs of a second pause in the conflict

There are signs which suggest a potential pause in the Israel-Hamas conflict, although a full ceasefire remains uncertain. Hamas, which has consistently said that it will only free more Israeli hostages in exchange for a permanent ceasefire, is engaged in talks in Cairo, led by its leader Ismail Haniyeh. Both Egypt and Qatar are involved in mediating these discussions. Although Israel's goal is to dismantle Hamas completely, it has reportedly presented a plan to secure the release of around forty hostages, focusing on women, elderly individuals, and those in urgent need of medical care. In return, they could exchange Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails with more serious convictions than those released in previous deals. Benjamin Netanyahu emphasised the importance of retrieving the hostages, revealing that Mossad has been actively promoting a new release deal through diplomatic channels. These developments come alongside the news that over 20,000 Palestinians have now been killed in the conflict: [see https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67764664](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67764664)

Pray: that both sides will be willing to make concessions so that a ceasefire will be agreed. (Proverbs 16:7)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67771533

DRC: crucial elections complicated by technical problems

On 20 December, amid widespread delays and logistical complications, polling stations opened in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Because of the delays, it was decided to extend the voting for a second day. The election is a significant moment for the nation. Over 40 million are expected to vote, including Congolese nationals living in some other countries: they will elect not only the president, but also 484 national assembly members, 715 members of provincial assemblies, and 311 municipal council members - a total of more than 1,500, from a pool of over 100,000 candidates (<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/rumble-in-the-drc-its-all-systems-go-as-the-resource-rich-african-country-chooses-its-leaders-20231219>). Several opposition candidates have expressed serious concerns about the chaotic process and possible fraud. Félix Tshisekedi, the incumbent president, is seen as likely to be re-elected, given that the opposition has remained fractured. If re-elected, he has threatened to declare war on Rwanda: see (<https://www.ft.com/content/8611194b-cb8b-442d-a5bd-7de2c2aad26a>) The DRC has grappled with years of conflict and political instability, making this election a crucial step towards achieving stability and democracy.

Pray: that in spite of the problems, the outcome of the election will be the best possible for the whole area. (Luke 12:48b)

More: www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/20/polls-open-in-dr-congo-amid-delays-logistics-issues

USA: two possible setbacks for Trump

In New York, Donald Trump's efforts to dismiss the fraud case against him have been met with scepticism from judge Arthur Engoron. Trump is facing allegations of financial fraud related to his business practices. The judge has questioned the credibility of his arguments, particularly his claims that the charges are politically motivated. He also poured scorn on Eli Bartov, an expert witness who 'doggedly' defended apparent misstatements in Trump's financial documents. Bartov had admitted receiving over \$875,000 from the defence team, and the judge commented, 'For a million or so dollars, some experts will say whatever you want them to say'. In a separate development, the Colorado supreme court has voted to bar Trump from the state primary ballot in March 2024, due to his involvement in efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. The ruling, which will probably be appealed to the federal supreme court, could have significant implications for the 2024 race (<https://www.ft.com/content/51977175-a340-4997-b8a0-fe6902210c56>).

Pray: for all who are involved in different legal proceedings to proceed with honesty and lack of political bias. (Leviticus 19:15)

More: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-fraud-trial-judge-engoron-credibility-b2466530.html

Argentina: 13 dead after intense storm

An intense storm in Argentina left at least 13 people dead and others injured in the southwestern port city of Bahía Blanca. Winds reached up to 140 kilometres (87 miles) per hour in the city on 16 December, and by the next day at least 300 people had been evacuated. The city council said that the situation caused by the storm was a catastrophe, reporting multiple injuries, some extremely serious. The mayor declared three days of mourning, saying: 'I want to reaffirm our solidarity with the families and loved ones of the 13 deceased people.' He reminded citizens of the importance of keeping safe by staying home, adding: 'We are still in an emergency situation, with electrical risk and risk of falling trees and structures.' The city's emergency teams received over 100,000 calls about downed trees, power lines and signs, among other damage. President Javier Milei said that his cabinet is working with provincial and municipal authorities to help the victims and respond to the damage.

Pray: for swift action to counter the damage, and for all those seeking to help the victims and comfort the bereaved. (Psalm 91:15)

More: edition.cnn.com/2023/12/17/americas/bahia-blanca-argentina-storms-intl/index.html

Japan: notable increase in attacks by bears

In Japan, a huge surge in bear attacks has been linked to climate change. Already in 2023 there have been 212 attacks, compared to 158 in 2022; six people have died. Rising temperatures and diminishing food sources in the bears' natural habitats have pushed them into human-populated areas. Experts say this alarming trend highlights the profound impact of climate change on wildlife behaviour and ecosystems. According to local authorities, the number of bear-related incidents, including attacks and sightings, has reached an unprecedented high. Climate change has disrupted their hibernation patterns and reduced their natural food supply, forcing them to search for sustenance in unfamiliar territories. The environment minister has pledged to help affected communities, saying: 'We are considering providing emergency assistance to local communities in response to their needs, such as surveying and capturing bears living in the vicinity of human settlements'.

Pray: that the authorities will know how to deal with this challenge with wisdom and understanding. (Genesis 2:15)

More: edition.cnn.com/2023/12/09/asia/bear-attacks-japan-record-climate-intl-hnk/index.html

Christmas food traditions

Roast turkey and Christmas pudding? Not if you live in Finland, where the traditional dish is porridge made with rice and milk, topped with cinnamon or butter. In Barbados no Christmas is complete without a baked ham decorated with pineapple and sorrel glazes, a rum cake, and a dish which combines pigeon peas, guinea corn flour, herbs, and salt meat. On Christmas Eve in Poland, many families share an opłatek (an unleavened religious wafer), each person breaking off a piece. Marinated steaks and boerewors sausages serve as the main course in South Africa, and gingerbread features in countries such as Norway and the Netherlands. Perhaps most unexpectedly, families in Japan head out for Kentucky Fried Chicken, either ordering their boxes months in advance or standing in two-hour-long queues – a tradition which resulted from a wildly successful marketing campaign in 1974.

Pray: that whatever food is enjoyed during the Christmas season, people all over the world will be reminded of the reason for the feasting and celebrations. (John 1:1)

More: www.countryliving.com/entertaining/g4933/christmas-traditions-around-the-world/

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