



**TO THE WORLD!**

SAT-7 ADVENT PRAYER GUIDE 2019



## JOY TO... THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA?

“Joy to the world,” the Christmas carol proclaims, “the Lord has come!”

### **But where is the joy for the Middle East and North Africa?**

When you think of this part of the world, joy might not be the word that springs to mind. Conflict, poverty, persecution – these are probably the words you are more likely to associate with the Middle East and North Africa.

And that’s hardly surprising. Christians in the region face daily challenges you can only begin to imagine. But despair is only part of the picture...

### **There is another story being told.**

A story of Christians from Morocco to Tajikistan, Azerbaijan to South Sudan – from all across the region – discovering joy.

Here at SAT-7, we constantly receive testimonies of people whose lives are being transformed by Jesus. Some grew up in Christian homes; others first met with Jesus through their television screens. Some had a chance encounter with a Christian and wanted to find out more; others first discovered His joy through picking up a Bible in their own language.

**This prayer guide will give you a glimpse into some of their stories.**

Over the course of Advent, you’ll take a sweeping journey across the Middle East and North Africa, through the 25 countries where SAT-7 works. You’ll visit a different country each day, discovering plenty of reasons to rejoice – as well as ideas for prayer requests.

### **Let us take you on a journey of joy.**

You’ll experience a region of diverse cultures, landscapes and tongues.

You’ll hear from SAT-7 viewers across the region who, though isolated, are able to access Christian teaching and encouragement in their own language.

You’ll meet North African believers whose bitter mourning has been turned to unexplainable joy.

You’ll discover people from Algeria to Yemen who are encountering Jesus through dreams and visions.

You’ll witness Iraqi Christians, once refugees, now dancing through the streets on their way to church.

### **Let their stories lead you rejoicing into Christmas Day.**

As you read and pray, may you encounter the God of joy, whose great love and light burst into a Middle Eastern manger over 2,000 years ago – and, just like the carol proclaims, has brought “joy to the world” ever since.

OUR ADVENT JOURNEY

# THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



Our Advent journey of joy takes us through the entire region of the Middle East and North Africa – from Morocco in the west, to Tajikistan in the east – ending up in Bethlehem in time for Christmas Day!



SUNDAY 1 DECEMBER

# MOROCCO

**Our Advent journey starts in Morocco, where there are thought to be just a few thousand local believers. SAT-7 provides vital support to these isolated Christians in the region's own distinct dialect of Arabic.**

Arabic is spoken across the Arab world, from Morocco in the west to the Gulf in the east. But the language has many different dialects, and it's important that Arabic-speakers across the entire region can access Christian teaching – especially in countries like Morocco, where churches are few.

“SAT-7 viewers like to watch shows in their own dialect,” says Salah Kessai, who produces a range of SAT-7 programmes in North African Arabic. “I met a group of Christians from Morocco, who told me they meet in a home for their prayer meeting and watch our live broadcasts of church services from Algeria. They pray that one day they will have a church like this in Morocco.”

This desire was echoed by Samy, a teenage viewer who got in touch with us via WhatsApp:



I would like to thank you for the great efforts you exert for us as Christians in North Africa. We love you and we wish that one day we can come and attend these meetings and pray with you. Even if this wish sounds impossible, nothing is impossible to God! God bless you and your ministry.

**Samy, Morocco**

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, Berber

## POPULATION

34.3 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

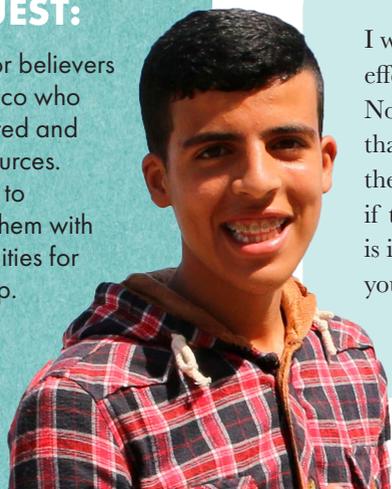
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## REJOICE:

- Praise God for SAT-7 broadcasts in Maghrebi Arabic – the North African dialect that is spoken in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania.
- Thank God for the small community of Moroccan Christians.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for believers in Morocco who are isolated and lack resources. Ask God to provide them with opportunities for fellowship.



MONDAY 2 DECEMBER

# MAURITANIA

**We travel next to Mauritania, where the Sahara meets the Atlantic. Mauritania is one of the world's least developed countries: the literacy rate is just 52 percent, and 31 percent of Mauritians live below the poverty line. Child marriage is also common in this mostly desert state.**

Education is a challenge in Mauritania. Whilst primary and secondary schooling is free, many parents can't afford the costs of school materials and travel, especially in more rural areas. To meet this need, SAT-7 provides free education in an accessible way – via television!

SAT-7 ACADEMY's educational programmes teach core subjects and social skills to children and adults across the Arabic-speaking world who aren't able to go to school. These programmes reach even the most remote communities – and though we don't know the exact figures, we know that people in Mauritania are watching and learning! Galal, a Mauritanian viewer, recently got in touch to say, “Hello my favourite SAT-7 ACADEMY, how are you? I'm thankful that you are helping us to learn and practise speaking English.”

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

3.8 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that Mauritanian viewers like Galal are receiving an education through SAT-7 ACADEMY programmes.

## REQUEST:

- Pray that more Mauritanian children will be able to attend school.
- Pray for strength and joy for Christians in Mauritania, who face persecution from the government and even their own families.
- Pray for improvement in economic conditions and relief for those living in poverty.





TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER

# ALGERIA

**We now make our way across the desert to Algeria, where despite intense pressure and government crackdowns, the Church is experiencing incredible growth. Many Algerians are coming to Christ for the first time – like Amoqran, a Berber man who recently shared his story on SAT-7 Algerian testimony programme *Free Souls*.**

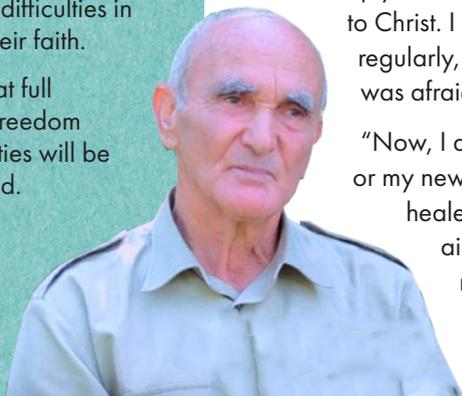
Amoqran (pictured below) worked in the civil service in the 1990s during Algeria’s civil war and lived under near-constant threat of violence by Islamists. One day, he was at work when he was miraculously warned of an imminent attack.

“I heard a voice telling me to run away because the room I was working in was booby-trapped,” Amoqran shared on SAT-7. “I ran out of the building. I don’t know who said this, but I believe it was God. He saved my life that day.”

After living through the brutality of the civil war, Amoqran had a nervous breakdown. “The civil war was a catalyst for me to search for the truth,” he says. A Christian friend gave him a Bible, and he started to read through the Gospels. Gradually, he felt his anxieties and worries subside.

“I asked my friend to take me to church with him. I enjoyed the praise songs and gave my life to Christ. I started going to church more regularly, but lied to my wife about it as I was afraid of her reaction.”

“Now, I don’t care what others think of me or my new faith. God changed my life and healed me from all my psychological ailments. Only in Jesus can one find rest and freedom.”



### MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, French, Kabyle

### POPULATION

41.7 million

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for those who share their stories on Algerian testimony programme *Free Souls*. Pray that stories like Amoqran’s will bring joy and transformation to viewers.
- Give thanks for the growth of the Church in Algeria!

## REQUEST:

- Pray for Christians who face difficulties in sharing their faith.
- Pray that full religious freedom for minorities will be established.



WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER

# TUNISIA

**Travelling away from the blistering heat of the Sahara, we arrive at the Mediterranean shores of Tunisia. Though the country is the only democracy in North Africa and has taken a positive step toward equal rights, Christians remain marginalised and often face violence.**

While Tunisian Christians are legally free to worship in churches, many believers can’t be open about their faith because of family and societal pressures. But even if they can’t meet together, isolated believers can find encouragement and fellowship through SAT-7 programmes in the Tunisian dialect of Arabic.

*Rainbow of Promise* is hosted by two Tunisian friends, Wajdi and Hanan, who discuss subjects and personal experiences from a Christian perspective. Wajdi and Hanan raise topics such as persecution, temptation and living with guilt, as well as more positive issues such as how to share your faith, God’s unchangeable nature, and His promise of eternal life.

Another programme for Tunisian viewers is *With Zack*, presented by Tunisian-Lebanese teenager Zack Dabbour (pictured left). With the aid of advanced technology, Zack tells stories from the Bible using animation to communicate the Gospel to digitally savvy young audiences.

Zack says, “I try to interact with viewers and tell biblical stories in a fun way so that they will be eager to watch and learn more about God.”

### MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

### POPULATION

11.5 million

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for the opportunity satellite television provides to communicate about Jesus in Tunisia.
- Give thanks that the government allows Christians to worship freely, and pray that this will continue.

## REQUEST:

- Pray that Tunisia will continue to make progress towards freedom of speech and gender equality.
- Pray for converts who may feel isolated and under pressure. Ask God to provide opportunities for fellowship.





THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER

# LIBYA

**We now head along the Mediterranean coast to Libya, where instability caused by the revolutions of 2011-12 continues today. Churches for Libyan believers are forbidden, and they must keep their faith a total secret – otherwise, the cost can be great...**

Four years ago, Dany, a 15-year-old Libyan Christian, went out with his school friends. But he never returned – he was abducted and shot three times for his faith. His mother, Mona, contacted SAT-7 programme *From Me To You* to share how God had brought her joy, even in the aftermath of the terrible news.

“When we heard the news of Dany’s murder, my family and friends were weeping, but I found myself singing hymns,” Mona says. “Even I was shocked at my reaction!”

“We went to see him before his burial, and it was very hard, but I said to Jesus, ‘Please give me the strength to endure.’ In the car, I saw a vision of Dany wearing a white garment and a crown of flowers. I saw Jesus seated on the throne and the angels welcoming my son.

“Most of the people who came to the funeral were non-Christians and were amazed at how calm I was,” she says. “I told them that Dany is a citizen of heaven now – the Lord chose him in His time.”

Jamie Helou, the presenter of *From Me To You*, was hugely encouraged by Mona’s faith – and by the response from SAT-7 viewers. “After she shared this story on the show, many viewers sent in messages to Dany’s mother and family,” Jamie remembers. “Our viewers were truly ‘rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn.’”

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

6.7 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

3%

## REJOICE:

- Praise God for Mona’s faith, and the impact her story had on SAT-7 viewers.
- Thank God that He can bring joy out of even the darkest situations.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for the tiny population of Libyan Christians, and ask God to protect them.
- Pray for peace and stability in Libya.



FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER

# SUDAN

**We travel across the desert into Sudan, a land perhaps best known for its decades of conflict and famine. Millions of Sudanese people have left Sudan in search of a better life. Among them is Michael, a Sudanese theology student now living in Egypt.**

“Life in Sudan was very difficult,” Michael told SAT-7. “There was civil unrest, economic crisis and political turmoil. I visited my family in Sudan recently, and they struggle to find even basic provisions. I’m sad to see my country in this condition.

“My message to other Sudanese immigrants is to love life – you may face difficulties, but don’t give up. Each one of us has his own plan for their life. I trust in God’s plan for me and my children – I take all my decisions according to God’s will. Even if He wants me back in Sudan, I’ll return.

“I used to watch SAT-7 when I was in Sudan. It is a very special channel. It is like a church in our homes – it helped us love the word of God and study it. I especially like the Sudanese programmes – just the appearance of Sudanese presenters and hearing one’s own language on TV is a great encouragement.”

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, English

## POPULATION

43.1 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Praise God for the faith of Sudanese believers like Michael, who trust in Him despite their difficult circumstances.
- Thank God for Sudanese programmes on SAT-7.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for new Sudanese believers, for whom the cost of discipleship may be very high.
- Pray for peace in areas of Sudan still wracked by conflict, and pray for an improvement in living conditions.





SATURDAY 7 DECEMBER

# SOUTH SUDAN

**Next, we cross the long-disputed border to the southernmost stop on our journey – South Sudan. It is the newest country in the world, having become an independent Christian-majority nation in 2011 following years of civil war. The country is still plagued by violence, and more than half the population is on the brink of famine.**

Yet against this bleak backdrop, people are still coming to know about Jesus! Madelina, a South Sudanese believer, appeared on SAT-7 programme *New Eve* to tell her story.

“I was rejected by my parents. They treated me cruelly,” Madelina says. She was the only girl among her many brothers, so for years she was rejected and oppressed by her parents. Then an event near her hometown changed everything.

Madelina was at home when she heard the sounds of a gathering nearby. Curious, she ventured out to find a speaker talking about Jesus to a large group of people. “The preacher explained that the Lord loves us, even if others reject us. I gave my heart to Jesus, and prayed to feel His love.”

Madelina moved away from her family but continued to pray for them. Eventually, she found the courage to get back in touch. “I called my mother, but she didn’t recognise my voice. When I told her it was me she began to cry. I eventually visited her and told her that I loved her.”

Gradually, Madelina’s family also experienced transformation. “Now I am accepted by my family and they ask me to pray for them. I no longer feel rejected because I found peace and love in Jesus. I am a new person in Christ.”

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, English

## POPULATION

10.2 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

60%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for the change he brought about in Madelina and her family.
- Give thanks that there is freedom for Christians in South Sudan, and that Christian leaders are promoting peace.

## REQUEST:

- Pray that families will learn to treat boys and girls with equal love and respect.
- Pray for peace in South Sudan and for an end to the horrendous violence against civilians.



SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER

# EGYPT

**We now journey up the River Nile into Egypt, home of Pharaohs, pyramids – and the largest population of Christians in the Middle East! Christians have relative freedom to worship in Egypt, and there are many thriving churches, but recent years have seen increased attacks on Christians.**

One such attack, at St Mark’s Cathedral in Alexandria on Palm Sunday 2017, claimed the lives of 18 people and injured many more. But none felt the loss more keenly than Mary, who was attending church that day with her husband, Kareem:



We were holding hands just outside the church when the blast went off. I was lifted into the air and thrown to the ground. I was two and a half months pregnant at the time, but the baby didn’t survive. Kareem died in hospital after nine days.

A lot of times I break down and lose it completely, but in those moments I resort to prayer. Sometimes I feel like there is a volcano inside me, but when I read the Bible the volcano is calmed.

Before Kareem died, he told me, ‘If anything happens to me, I want you to go to the church and serve.’ When I go to church, I feel a joy that can’t be compared to anything else, even spending time with my husband. It’s the unexplainable joy that can only come from God.

Mary, Egypt

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

99.4 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

10%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for the steadfastness and joy of Egyptian believers like Mary!

## REQUEST:

- Pray for greater tolerance towards Christians in Egypt by the state and other religious groups.
- Pray for peace for the families of those who have been lost to violence.





MONDAY 9 DECEMBER

# SAUDI ARABIA

**Our route now takes us across the Red Sea into Saudi Arabia, the spiritual home of Islam. Every citizen here is expected to be a Muslim, and it is the only country in the world with no church buildings.**

Yet surprisingly in a country where Christianity is all but banned, Saudi Arabia is home to an estimated 1.4 million SAT-7 viewers.

Among them is Ibtesam, who, despite not being a Christian herself, sees SAT-7's children's programmes as a positive and loving influence:



By chance, I watched your channel SAT-7 KIDS on YouTube and was thrilled by what you marvellously present to kids – you raise them up on the principles of love, forgiveness and peace. I believe it's my duty to support your wonderful channel, despite it not belonging to my faith. It's enough that it spreads love to the world.

Could you please upload your programmes to YouTube for me to watch? I ask the channel to pray for me because I am confident that your prayers are full of love and goodness. May your hearts always be filled with God's love.

**Ibtesam, Saudi Arabia**

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

33.1 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for Saudi Arabian SAT-7 viewers – especially those like Ibtesam, who aren't yet believers but still enjoy watching.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for joy and strength for Christians in Saudi Arabia, for whom the cost of discipleship may be great.
- Ask that citizens will have the freedom to change their religion.
- Pray for progress in attitudes towards women's rights in Saudi Arabian society.



TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER

# YEMEN

**Our next stop is Yemen, a country in crisis – racked by famine, crippling poverty and an ongoing civil war.**

There are only a few thousand Christians in Yemen, and they must keep their faith a total secret, as religious freedom has declined since the civil war broke out in 2014. But even from the midst of the devastation, SAT-7 hears stories of God's transforming power in people's lives.

Adnan, a Yemeni viewer, recently shared his story with SAT-7 programme *Family of Jesus*. "It all started when I was a child playing with my friends at the beach," Adnan recalls. "I saw a man in white riding a white horse. I pointed him out to my friends, but they didn't see him."

As an adult, Adnan prayed that God would lead him in the right way. "I started reading the Bible and searched the internet to learn about other religions," he says. "Eventually I saw the truth and accepted Jesus with all my heart. Since then, my life changed."

Like many Yemeni believers, Adnan soon came under intense pressure because of his newfound faith. "My wife and children also accepted Jesus, but it was difficult to share our faith with others," Adnan says. "Relatives, friends and neighbours threatened us until we had to flee to the capital, Sana'a, where nobody knows us."

Throughout Adnan's tribulations, God has never forsaken him. "I recently dreamed again about the man on the white horse. He put something golden on top of my head. I told him I wanted to be baptised."

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, Mahri

## POPULATION

26.7 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that He is revealing Himself to Yemenis like Adnan.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for Adnan and his family, who are facing threats because of their faith.
- Pray for stability in Yemen: for an end to conflict and bloodshed and for respite for the starving and struggling population.
- Pray for greater religious tolerance in Yemen and that the tiny Christian minority will be able to practise their faith in freedom.



WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER

# OMAN

**We now journey around the Arabian peninsula to Oman, known for its historical frankincense trade and rich natural beauty.**

Like many Gulf countries, Oman's Christian population is made up mainly of expatriates, who are able to worship freely. But local Omani Christians are few and they often lack fellowship with other believers. Watching SAT-7 can help these believers feel connected to the wider body of Christ – believers like Adham, who found himself "glued" to a SAT-7 broadcast from Egypt:



For fifteen years now I have been a big fan and a regular viewer of SAT-7.

Thank you for carrying the very important message of the Good News of Jesus Christ to millions – especially to those whose circumstances don't allow them to have any internet, and TV becomes their only available way to learn about it. Thank you for always broadcasting important events from all these different places.

It's hard to explain how I was glued for three hours in front of the TV during one of the conferences you broadcast from Egypt. The message reached millions and I am sure it was a starting point of change for many Christians. Please pray for me.

Adham, Oman



## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

3.5 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

7%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that SAT-7 helps Omani believers feel connected to the rest of the Church.
- Give thanks for the good relations between different religious groups in Oman, and pray that these will continue.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for greater political freedoms and rights for all Oman's residents.



THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER

# UAE

**Our next stop is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), an oil-rich country of futuristic desert cities. Religious discrimination is illegal here, and believers can worship in relative freedom, though proselytising is forbidden, and there is strong societal pressure against conversion.**

In a country where sharing one's faith face-to-face could be risky, technology provides a perfect opportunity for teaching people about Jesus. And the potential audience in the UAE is huge – an astonishing 99% of the population are active on social media, and the average time spent online is almost 8 hours per day!

Many of these internet users are discovering SAT-7's channels and programmes on YouTube and Facebook – SAT-7 ARABIC has had over 240,000 YouTube views from the UAE in the last year. Among them was Dalia, who tuned in to a live Facebook broadcast of marriage and relationship programme *From Heart To Heart* and found it greatly encouraging.

"My greetings from Dubai," Dalia commented. "I am touched by your transparency and faith. Your love to each other rejoices our God. I pray that you always reflect the joy and love of God and stay serving Him. May His grace increase in your life. Remember me in your prayers, your sister in Christ."

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, Persian, English

## POPULATION

9.7 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

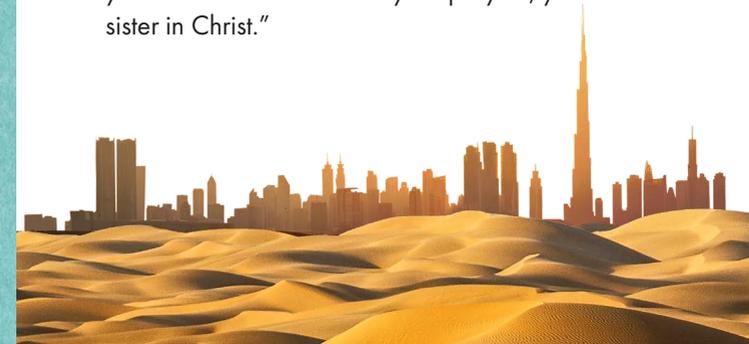
9%

## REJOICE:

- Praise God for the opportunity that social media provides to share about Jesus in the UAE.
- Give thanks for the acceptance of different religions within society. Pray that this will continue and that residents will be free to change their religion if they wish.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for Christians who face restrictions on some of their activities, and ask that God will provide ways for them to share their faith.



IRAN

SAUDI ARABIA

QATAR

UAE

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER

# QATAR

**We now hop across the sea to Qatar, the richest nation in the world. Foreign workers have flooded in to Qatar to benefit from the explosion of jobs and now outnumber locals by 10 to 1. This influx of people from around the world, mostly from southeast Asia, means that local Qatari people are now meeting Christians on a regular basis.**

"In Qatar, they haven't interacted with Christians for the last thousand years, so the misinformation is phenomenal," the Venerable Bill Schwartz, Chaplain of Qatar, tells SAT-7. "Now we have an opportunity to interact, and everything we do is part of our witness and expressing the character of God."

Schwartz is originally from the USA and moved to Qatar ten years ago, where he began building one of the first churches in the country for 1,400 years. The church complex now serves 85 congregations from different nationalities every week, and up to 18 congregations at a time. "You better not preach too long," Schwartz says, "because there are hundreds queueing outside to begin their service!"

Schwartz believes that the role of SAT-7 in the Gulf goes hand-in-hand with the witness of expatriate believers, as it starts to open a window on Christian life. "People here don't know what Christians do and why. So when they see a church service on television, they start to understand. It challenges how they think about us."

Schwartz is particularly excited that Qatari children are watching SAT-7 KIDS. "We can't underestimate the value of children watching SAT-7 programmes and picking up values they have previously had no exposure to," he says. "In 20 years, society will be driven differently than it is now."

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, English

## POPULATION

2.4 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

14%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for the tens of thousands of Christians from around the world who are bringing the Good News to Qatar.

## REQUEST:

- Pray that Christians will have enough worship space, as their current facilities can be overcrowded.
- Pray for Qatari citizens who may face opposition and pressure if they decide to change their faith.

SAUDI ARABIA

BAHRAIN

QATAR

SATURDAY 14 DECEMBER

# BAHRAIN

**We continue up the Arabian Gulf to Bahrain, a tiny but incredibly wealthy group of islands whose name in Arabic means "between two seas". Perhaps surprisingly, there is a small indigenous Christian community in Bahrain, and people of all faiths are allowed to worship in total freedom here.**

Bahrain is home to thriving Coptic, Catholic, evangelical and Anglican churches, and there is even an interdenominational prayer group that meets monthly to pray for Bahrain and the Gulf.

But despite the freedom available to believers from Christian families, people from Bahrain's majority religion can face pressure from their communities if they choose to become Christians.

As in other MENA countries where questioning one's religion is prohibited, satellite television provides a wonderful opportunity for seekers to discover more about Christianity in relative secrecy.

"I want to know the truth," one Bahraini viewer told SAT-7. "I recorded the Jesus movie and I watch it over and over. I love Jesus very much."

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

1.4 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

9%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that indigenous Bahraini Christians are free to worship.
- Praise God that Bahrain's different denominations are working together, and pray this will continue.

## REQUEST:

- Pray that new believers who endure opposition will know God's peace and joy throughout the trials they face.
- Pray that those who are curious about the Christian faith will find answers through SAT-7.





SUNDAY 15 DECEMBER

# KUWAIT

**Our final stop in the Arabian Gulf is Kuwait, a tiny country nestled between Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the sea. The country’s Christians are mostly expatriates, but there is a small community of national Kuwaiti believers.**

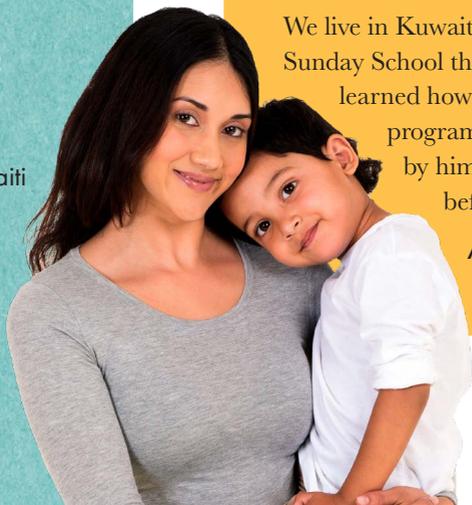
Like Bahrain, Kuwait officially grants “absolute” freedom of religion, but there is strong societal pressure against converting to Christianity. There are a few authorised churches in the country, although evangelism is prohibited. Amira, a local Christian mother, got in touch to express her gladness at finding Christian teaching for her son on SAT-7:



My son loves SAT-7 KIDS so much and he won’t let me change it, even for a cartoon channel! He is only three years old and yet he knows almost all the worship songs by heart. SAT-7 KIDS has made a huge difference in his life and made his speech progress even more.

We live in Kuwait and you are the only Sunday School that he attends, and he learned how to pray through your programmes. Now he prays all by himself before lunch and before sleeping.

**Amira, Kuwait**



## MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

## POPULATION

2.9 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

18%

## REJOICE:

- Give thanks for the good relations between different communities in Kuwait, and pray that this will continue.
- SAT-7 had over 700,000 YouTube views from Kuwait in the last year – which is remarkable given the country’s small population!

## REQUEST:

- Pray for the tiny number of indigenous Kuwaiti believers, that they will know God’s strength and joy.



MONDAY 16 DECEMBER

# IRAN

**Our journey now takes us away from the Arabian Peninsula and into the Persian-speaking world. Iran is an especially difficult place to be a Christian, and congregations frequently see their services raided and their members arrested.**

Somayeh became a Christian after meeting Jesus in a dream. “I saw a man coming towards me, but I didn’t know that he was Jesus,” Somayeh remembers. “He said to me, ‘Somayeh, don’t be sad, because I love you. I am Jesus.’”

Somayeh soon started watching SAT-7’s Persian programmes, and started a small house church. The group were praying and worshipping together to celebrate Pentecost when the police arrived. “Suddenly they broke the door down, came in with cameras, and arrested us,” Somayeh says. “They brought us to the court but didn’t let us say anything. They called us terrorists and insulted us. Then they sent us to jail, with criminals who had received the death sentence.”

Lawyers told Somayeh she would go to prison for at least five years. Since she couldn’t afford the high legal costs, she had to represent herself in court. But what happened next surprised everyone.

“The day of the court was amazing!” Somayeh remembers. “The judge told us, ‘You shouldn’t be here, you are not guilty.’ He did not charge us, and we were free to go. My sister was crying because she saw Christ standing behind the judge.

“We decided to leave Iran and came to Turkey. We hope in Jesus. God protected us many times in Iran and also Turkey. We trust in Him.”

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Farsi

## POPULATION

83 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that He is revealing Himself in dreams to Iranians like Somayeh.
- Praise God that Iranian Christians continue to meet together, despite the risks.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for justice for those imprisoned in Iran on religious grounds. Pray that Iran’s human rights record will improve.
- Pray for encouragement and protection for the country’s Christians.



TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER

# AFGHANISTAN

**We travel next to Afghanistan, whose people are weary after decades of warfare. The number of Afghans contacting SAT-7 has doubled since 2017, which is remarkable in a country that allows no churches and prohibits people from changing their faith.**

One of these Afghan viewers, Jahan, courageously called SAT-7 PARS programme *Signal* to share his incredible story of transformation – from extremist fighter to devoted Christian:

“

I am 24 years old and was born in Afghanistan. I loved rifles, and all I heard was about attacking infidels and those who had become Christians. One day, when I was 14, I ran away from home and managed to get to Iran. I don't know how I got across the mountains, enduring hunger and thirst, sleeping in the cold.

I became a builder's apprentice, and so the days passed. I experienced much hardship to be able to have some light in my life. I got to read His book and found Him. When I read the Bible, I understood that what I had been taught is very different. Someone who reads the Bible can go to his God and solve his problems.

My heart aches for my father and mother. They don't answer my calls, and I know if they found me, they would kill me. Even here, I am in danger. But I feel I am in the right place. I am happy that I have found the way for me.

**Jahan, Afghanistan**

## MAIN LANGUAGES

Dari, Pashto

## POPULATION

34.9 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

<1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that increasing numbers of Afghans are contacting SAT-7 to ask questions about Christianity.
- Rejoice that Jahan found Jesus and that he experienced such dramatic transformation! Ask that God will keep him safe.

## REQUEST:

- Pray that God will protect believers in Afghanistan, who are often isolated and vulnerable.
- Pray for peace between Afghanistan's many people groups.



WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER

# TAJIKISTAN

**Next, we cross the Panj river into the mountainous land of Tajikistan. SAT-7 has an increasing range of TV programmes in the Tajik language – including a discipleship series presented by Rustam (pictured below), a local pastor with a dramatic story.**

Growing up with ten siblings in one of the poorest countries of the former Soviet Union meant that life had always been tough for Rustam. But when his father was lethally poisoned, things took a turn for the worse. Rustam found himself unable to pay for his studies and took to robbing people in the streets.

A turning point came when Rustam began attending Tae Kwando classes run by a Korean missionary, who taught him about Jesus. One night, Rustam had a vision of Jesus, who told him, "Serve me and spread my word in the whole world."

Rustam took Jesus' command seriously! He went to Moscow to study theology, before eventually returning to Tajikistan to become a pastor. And when Rustam heard that Finnish TV producer Mikael Tunér was looking for Tajik Bible teachers to film for SAT-7, he didn't hesitate. The resulting programme, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, offers an easy-to-understand but extensive grounding in Christianity for Tajik believers.

"My hope is that many Tajiks will watch and be fully established and strengthened in faith," Rustam says. "I hope other pastors will realise they can make programmes with SAT-7 too."

## MAIN LANGUAGE

Tajik

## POPULATION

8.6 million

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

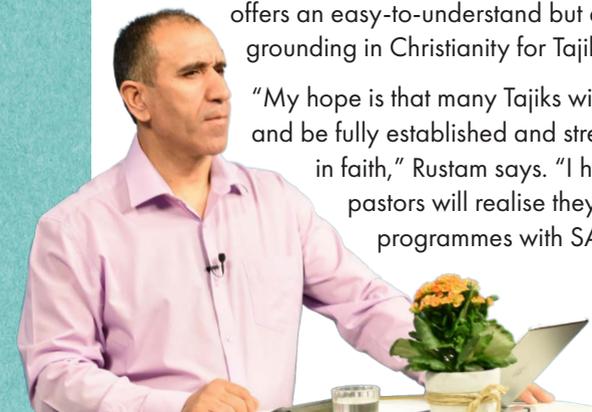
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## REJOICE:

- Thank God for Rustam's amazing story and obedience.

## REQUEST:

- There are only 65 registered churches in Tajikistan. Pray that God will protect and strengthen Tajik Christians, who face heavy restrictions on their activities.
- Pray that SAT-7 will be able to produce even more programmes in the Tajik dialect.





THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER

# AZERBAIJAN

**We travel across the Caspian Sea into Azerbaijan, known as the “Land of Fire”. As in most of the countries we have visited so far, Christians are a tiny minority here, and SAT-7 noticed the need for Christian programmes in the Azerbaijani language to provide teaching and encouragement.**

One of the Azerbaijani programmes on SAT-7’s Turkish channel is *Pleasant Chat*, a women’s talk show which addresses everyday topics from a biblical perspective.

“I’m trying to serve my people, the Azerbaijani people, in a way that is appropriate to our culture,” explains the show’s presenter, Aygün Çamsun. “I have to share the Good News. If we don’t do this, how will people ever know? God loves Azerbaijani people, and we want them to know this.”

These efforts haven’t gone unnoticed, and Azerbaijani viewers are starting to respond.

“As a Christian, I enjoy watching the Azerbaijani programmes. They are blessings from God,” says Göktürk, an Azerbaijani viewer in Turkey.

“It makes us so proud to see you, our Azerbaijani brothers and sisters, working in the field of God. May God bless you all abundantly.”



### MAIN LANGUAGE

Azerbaijani

### POPULATION

10 million

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

3%

### REJOICE:

- Thank God for SAT-7 programmes in the Azerbaijani language, which bring joy to viewers like Göktürk.

### REQUEST:

- Some Azerbaijani churches face registration problems that prevent them from operating freely. Pray this will be resolved, and that God will give joy and strength to members of churches facing restrictions on their activities.
- Pray that true democracy and human rights will be established in Azerbaijan.



FRIDAY 20 DECEMBER

# TURKEY

**Next, we scale the Caucasus Mountains and arrive in Turkey. This is where the early church laid its first foundations – but the country’s ancient Christian heritage has been largely forgotten, and Christianity is now widely seen as a foreign import.**

Christians are a tiny and often misunderstood minority in Turkey. Kerem, a recent viewer of SAT-7’s Turkish channel, used to laugh at the idea of following Christ – but a series of encounters caused him to start questioning his preconceptions:



I’m not a Christian, but once I visited a church in Ephesus. I was sitting outside with my friends and we got chatting to a group of priests. One of the priests told me that someday I would be one of their brothers. I just laughed it off, thinking, “Why on earth would I follow Christ?”

Some time passed, and I had a dream about Jesus Christ. He gave me a fishing rod and told me to go to a lake with Him and start fishing. So I went with Him. We began fishing together and I caught a fish, and inside it were four dinars. When I woke up, the dream felt so real. I have had similar dreams since.

Because of this, I found your channel and began watching. Now I’m thinking about everything that happened and wonder what these dreams mean?

Please pray for me.

**Kerem, Turkey**

### MAIN LANGUAGES

Turkish, Kurdish

### POPULATION

81.3 million

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

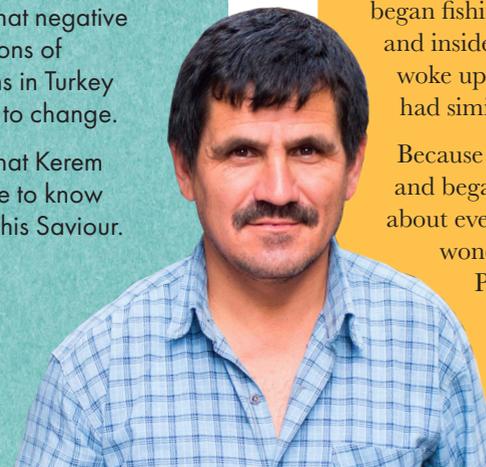
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### REJOICE:

- Praise God that people like Kerem want to find out more about Jesus.
- Thank God that SAT-7’s Turkish channel provides education about Christianity, as well as discipleship to isolated believers.

### REQUEST:

- Pray that negative perceptions of Christians in Turkey will start to change.
- Pray that Kerem will come to know Jesus as his Saviour.





SATURDAY 21 DECEMBER

# IRAQ

**We now head into Iraq, a land with biblical roots but scarred by recent war. The world watched in horror in 2014 as so-called Islamic State (IS) rampaged through Iraq, driving hundreds of thousands of Christians from their historic homelands.**

Five years on, SAT-7 filmed a documentary, *Sequel of Hope*, in the liberated city of Qaraqosh, where believers are returning to rebuild their lives. Essam Nagy, a SAT-7 presenter and producer of the documentary, was astonished to find thousands of Iraqi Christians, once refugees, now dancing joyfully through the streets on their way to church.

“The place is packed with people,” Essam said. “The whole scene declares the victory of righteousness over darkness and hatred.”

IS destroyed, burned or vandalised every church in the city. Father Majid, a local church leader, showed SAT-7 some of the damage. “They destroyed the Syriac writings, and the walls of the church are full of bullet holes. Even the marble has turned to flakes because of fire,” he said. “But the church is not only a building. We are the true church.”

“IS wanted to bring all the crosses down, and they did,” Essam said. “They wanted to erase all the Syriac and Aramaic inscriptions in the churches, and they did. But in the end, they couldn’t wipe out the hope.”



### MAIN LANGUAGES

Arabic, Kurdish

### POPULATION

40.2 million

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

1%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that Iraqis are returning to their homes.
- Praise God for the faithfulness, resilience and joy of the Iraqi Christian community!

## REQUEST:

- Pray for stable government in Iraq and for peace between the country’s many people groups.
- Pray that Iraqis who are still refugees will be able to return home and live in safety.



SUNDAY 22 DECEMBER

# JORDAN

**Next we journey west, into the inspiring desert landscapes of Jordan. Although Jordan has been known for its relative religious freedom, in recent years Christians in the country have been under increasing pressure.**

When worship programme *Keep on Singing* broadcast a special episode from Jordan, it sent a profound and timely message – that it is possible to be both Jordanian and Christian.

The special show featured the band from Karak Evangelical Church, who sang worship songs in a traditional Jordanian style and dialect. And the episode’s impact was greater than the team could have ever imagined.

“The effect of this episode goes far beyond the people involved,” said Mawiyah, one of the musicians. “It is much bigger than that. The episode included a rediscovery of Jordanian identity. This has been missing in our churches.”

“You have made history for Jordan,” another musician said – and hundreds of SAT-7 ARABIC viewers agreed. Among the many viewers who responded with excitement was Ameen, a teenage boy from Jordan, who said:

“SAT-7, I thank the Lord for your ministry and pray He uses you for the glory of His name. The Lord comforted us through the songs of the programme *Keep on Singing* and filled us with joy.”

### MAIN LANGUAGE

Arabic

### POPULATION

10.5 million -

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

2%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God for the impact of this encouraging episode of *Keep on Singing*, and praise God for SAT-7 viewers in Jordan.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for freedom of worship for Christians in Jordan.
- Pray that SAT-7 will be able to make more programmes specifically for a Jordanian audience.
- Pray for the many refugees who have sought a new life in Jordan.





MONDAY 23 DECEMBER

# SYRIA

**Our road now takes us northward to Syria, a land torn apart in recent years by bitter conflict – but where, despite ongoing violence, signs of life are starting to return.**

Earlier this year, SAT-7 ARABIC broadcast a live prayer event from Syria that celebrated the country’s gradual progress towards peace. Though the crisis is far from over, hundreds of Syrians, including local dignitaries and church leaders, gathered in a park in Damascus to worship God and to pray for the future of their country.

“Today we gather to pray for Syria, our country that we love,” said the event’s host. “The more strife we face, the more faith and praise we express.”

“The Eastern Christian church trusts that the Lord is with it despite tribulation,” said Father Botros Al-Khoury, a local priest. “As seekers of peace, we choose to praise the Lord.”

The concert demonstrated the Syrian Christian community’s perseverance and joy in the face of ongoing turmoil. While IS has been largely defeated in Syria, some groups are resurfacing, and conflict continues between government forces and opposition groups. Furthermore, many millions of Syrians are still living as refugees.

“We thank the Lord for the revival of Syria, but the crisis isn’t over,” said singer Nizar Fares. “Continue praying so that all Syrians can return to their country.”



**MAIN LANGUAGE**  
Arabic

**POPULATION**  
19.4 million

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
10%

## REJOICE:

- Thank God that steadfast Syrian Christians continue to praise Him despite the darkness around them.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for a total end to conflict in Syria. Ask that God will intervene and bring peace where human efforts are failing.
- Pray for all those who have had to flee their homes, and ask God to protect them. Pray that they will soon be able to return home.



TUESDAY 24 DECEMBER

# LEBANON

**We cross the border into the tiny nation of Lebanon, a place of great cultural and religious diversity. One church that learnt to overcome these differences is Resurrection Church Beirut, a thriving evangelical church with a congregation of 1,300 people.**

When war broke out in Syria and refugees flooded into Lebanon, Resurrection Church was ready to respond. “These brothers and sisters were traumatised and had no community,” says Hikmat Kashouh, the church’s pastor. “So we became their family.”

It wasn’t an easy process, though. Religious, ethnic and cultural differences caused barriers, and there was a deep resentment borne of Syria’s long occupation of Lebanon. Kashouh admits that the church needed a change of heart.

“When people from different backgrounds come into a church, some people feel ill at ease. Syrians were our enemies for so many years,” he says. “But this is not what God wanted, of course.”

Transformation began when, in a church service, Kashouh invited a Syrian man onto the stage to wash his feet. As he prepared the bucket and sponge, he found his own anger and hurts flooding his mind. “As I got close to his feet, I saw the feet that stepped on our childhood and destroyed Lebanon. I remembered all that happened to us.”

But, as he stooped to wash the feet of his Syrian friend, something happened. “I learned a great lesson,” Kashouh remembers. “When you bow down to wash the feet of your enemy, God bows down to heal your wounds.”

“Slowly, the Spirit has transformed us as a church,” he says. “We really feel we are one family now.”

**MAIN LANGUAGE**  
Arabic

**POPULATION**  
6.1 million

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
36%

## REJOICE:

- Give thanks that many Lebanese churches, like Resurrection Church, are welcoming and supporting newcomers.
- Praise God for freedom of worship in Lebanon.

## REQUEST:

- Pray for good relations between Lebanon’s diverse communities.
- Ask God to bring joy to the many Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Pray that they will either be able to return home safely or successfully build new lives.

WEDNESDAY 25 DECEMBER **CHRISTMAS DAY**

# THE JOURNEY OF JOY

**Our Advent journey comes to an end where a new story begins – in Bethlehem, at the birth of our Saviour.**

You now make your way southwards from Lebanon into the Holy Land and journey through the lush greenery of Galilee, around the mountains of Samaria, past the magnificent hilltop city of Jerusalem and down to Bethlehem. Follow the road away from the hustle and bustle of the town and down the hill, to pause in an altogether unexpected place – a dusty, quiet and unremarkable field.

This is where, over 2,000 years ago, the bleating of sheep and silence of shepherds was broken by angels' song.

*“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”* (Luke 2:10-11)

You leap up with the shepherds and make your way, rejoicing, into town, where this part of your journey comes to its end, on bended knee, at a manger that cradles a new baby.

Reflect on the countries you've been to over the past month, the lives you've seen changed, all the moments of joy to be found even in the midst of suffering. Realise that none of it would have been possible without this baby in a manger – the baby who grew up to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

It's taken you 24 days to travel across North Africa and the Middle East. But SAT-7's broadcasts make the journey in an instant – every second of every hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – beaming out the angel's message of God's “great joy for all the people”, all year round.

As you leave the manger's side, close the door on Christmas and head into a new year, take time to thank God for the birth of Jesus and the great joy He brings. Thank Him for the amazing people of the Middle East and North Africa you've met on your journey. Pray that they will continue to know His life-changing joy even in the midst of a troubling world. May you experience His joy, too, this Christmas and in the year to come. ■



We've prepared this Bible study session for use in home groups or small groups, to help you explore the theme of joy and pray for the Middle East and North Africa. Why not use it for your final session together before Christmas?



## SMALL GROUP STUDY SESSION

# "GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY"

### STARTER QUESTION

What brings you joy in your life? A hobby, activity, person, place, or memory?

### READ: LUKE 2:8-20

#### Discuss:

- Think of a time you have received good news. How did you respond? Did you want to tell others?
- Why do you think God chose lowly shepherds to be the first to hear the good news of Jesus' birth?
- Why should the good news of Jesus bring us "great joy" (vv 11-14)?
- What was the shepherds' response to the angel's message, and to seeing and experiencing Jesus (vv 15-17, v20)?
- If we truly experience Jesus and His joy in our lives, how might we respond?

### READ: ISAIAH 61:1-3

#### Discuss:

- Was there a time in your life when you knew God's joy, even though your circumstances were difficult? Share if you feel comfortable.
- Who is this passage about? (See Luke 4:14-21.)
- What kind of people did the Messiah come to save (v1)?
- The passage says that the Messiah brings "joy instead of mourning" (v3). Why then do those who believe in Him sometimes experience times of hardship?

- What's the difference between experiencing **happiness**, versus experiencing **joy**?
- How do we get this "garment of praise" (v3)?
- Is God's joy intended just to make us feel better, or does it serve a greater purpose? (v3)
- What practical steps can we take to remind ourselves of God's joy every day? (For example: Keeping a notebook of what you are grateful for, displaying joyful Bible verses around the house?)

### READ: MARY'S STORY (Egypt, 8 December)

(A longer version of the story is available at [sat7uk.org/advent-resources](http://sat7uk.org/advent-resources))

- How does this story make you feel?
- How would you feel if you knew you might get attacked or killed for going to church? Do you think you would continue to attend?
- How is it possible that Mary has found joy despite all she has been through?

### PRAY

- Ask everyone to share something they are thankful for this week, and spend time in joyful prayer and praise together.
- Pray for believers in the Middle East, like Mary, who are going through difficult times or are under pressure for their faith. Pray that God's joy will be their strength.
- Pray that "all the people" will know God's joy, like the angel foretold.

### WHAT NEXT?

Christmas is packaged as a time of great joy. But for many people, the season can be a struggle – whether emotionally or financially. Do something this week to bring joy to those around you, like visiting a lonely neighbour, donating to a foodbank or taking a Christmas cake to someone who is going through a difficult time.





# WHAT IS SAT-7?

Through the power of satellite television and digital media, Christian broadcaster SAT-7 is bringing a message of God's love directly into the lives of over 25 million people across the Middle East and North Africa, every day.

SAT-7 broadcasts 24/7 in the region's three main languages, Arabic, Farsi and Turkish. And we don't leave it there: SAT-7 has viewer support teams across the region who respond to the hundreds of people who contact us every day.

**SAT-7's vision is to see a growing Church in the Middle East and North Africa, confident in Christian faith and witness, serving the community and contributing to the good of society and culture.**

[www.sat7uk.org](http://www.sat7uk.org)



SAT-7 is watched by **25 million** people



SAT-7 broadcasts 24/7 in **Arabic, Farsi** and **Turkish**



SAT-7 pledges to respond to the **hundreds of people** who contact us every day



It costs **less than 50p** for SAT-7 to broadcast 24/7 to one viewer for an **entire year!**



Images of people throughout used for representation only, unless otherwise stated. Some names have been changed for security purposes.

Images: SAT-7, Shutterstock.com

All information correct as of August 2019.

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# AN ADVENT JOURNEY OF JOY

"Joy to the world," the Christmas carol proclaims, "the Lord has come!"

## **But where is the joy for the Middle East and North Africa?**

When you think of the Middle East and North Africa, "joy" might not be the word that springs to mind. And that's hardly surprising – from what we see on the news, the region is facing seemingly endless crisis, turmoil and despair.

## **But there is another story being told...**

This prayer guide will take you on a sweeping journey across the entire region, from Morocco in the west to Tajikistan in the east, visiting each of the 25 countries where SAT-7 works.

You'll meet people from many cultures, languages, dialects and traditions, who all have one thing in common – the transforming power of Jesus' joy in their lives.

**So let the journey of joy begin!**

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**MAKING GOD'S LOVE VISIBLE  
ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST  
AND NORTH AFRICA  
THROUGH CHRISTIAN TV**