

# VISITORS FROM THE EAST



**MAP:** Together, find Iran on the giant map

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**ASK: How would you feel if...**

- You had to meet for church in a living room with only six people?
  - You had to whisper songs about God?
  - You had to keep Jesus a secret?
  - You had to hide all the Bibles in your house?
  - Your family threw you out of the house because you loved Jesus?
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**DID YOU KNOW...?**

- Iran is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian
  - Christians meet secretly in each other's homes, and many others have no Christian friends to meet with
  - People who hate Christians are always watching, ready to arrest them, so Christians have to be very quiet and secretive
  - People lose homes, jobs and even their families because they are Christians.
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**BUT:**

- There is joy growing in Iran!
  - Iran also has one of the fastest-growing churches on earth!
  - Iranian Christians may face danger, but their faith is spreading quickly and widely
  - More than 1.5 million people watch SAT-7's Persian-language channel (SAT-7 PARS) regularly.
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**INTRODUCE SAT-7 PARS**

- SAT-7 PARS broadcasts Christian programmes to the Persian-speaking region (show on the map, highlighting Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan)
- Many people in countries like Iran can't go to church, so they gather secretly in each other's houses and watch church services on their TV screens on the SAT-7 PARS channel
- SAT-7 PARS provides the only Christian fellowship many Iranian people will ever get.

 **Watch: "SAT-7 PARS Overview"** (see video on Advent Resources webpage)

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**DISCUSS:** Can you see joy in the programmes? Do you think people in Iran like watching SAT-7 PARS on TV?

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**INTRODUCE: How do Christians in Iran celebrate Christmas?**

Omeed Jouyande works for SAT-7 PARS and wrote a letter to us to explain what Christmas is like in Iran.

 Read "Omeed's letter" or just the bullet points from "Omeed's Letter Summary" (find both on the Advent Resources webpage)

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**DISCUSS:** How would you feel if you were a Christian trying to celebrate Christmas in Iran?

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**BIBLE STORY:** Tell the Christmas story from Matthew 2:1-12

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### LINK BETWEEN THE CHRISTMAS STORY AND MODERN-DAY IRAN

**Read:** “Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’” Matthew 2:1-2, NIV

#### DID YOU KNOW...?

- The Magi (wise men) are thought to have come from Iran!
- A long, hard journey and questioning by the bad King Herod brought them finally to Jesus
- Iranians today who follow Jesus and celebrate His birth also face a high risk of persecution for their faith
- But, just like the Magi, more and more Iranians are finding joy when they find Jesus, regardless of the dangers along the way. Jesus is worth it!
- The Magi brought their treasure to the new king and were rewarded with wonder and joy when they came face to face with Him.



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#### MEMORY VERSE

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.” Isaiah 9:6a, NIV

 Check out “How to remember a memory verse” on the Advent Resources webpage

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#### PRAY AND REFLECT

- Pray for Christians in Iran, and invite each child to colour in a card bauble and write their name on the other side, and hang on the prayer bauble line
- See the *Joy to the World* prayer guide’s Iran page for prayer point ideas

 Check out “Creative ways to pray with children” on the Advent Resources webpage

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**MAP:** Stick the IRAN sticker on the map, to show the children which country they learnt about today

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#### EXTRA CHALLENGES

 The following extra challenges are available on the Advent Resources webpage:

- **Story:** Tell the story of Ravi using the comic strip to help (“Ravi’s story” and “Ravi’s story - comic strip”)
- **Craft:** Colour the comic strip of Ravi’s story (“Ravi’s story - comic strip”)
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  - Your family threw you out of the house because you watched Christian TV?
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  - Christians meet secretly in each other's homes, and many others have no Christian friends to meet with
  - People who hate Christians are always watching, ready to turn the Christians over to be arrested, so Christians have to be very quiet and secretive
  - People lose homes, jobs and even their families because of their faith.
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### DID YOU KNOW...?

- The Magi (wise men) are thought to have come from Persia – which is called Iran today!
- A long, hard journey and questioning by the bad King Herod brought them finally to Jesus
- Iranians today who follow Jesus and celebrate His birth also face a high risk of persecution for their faith. Arrests and attacks sadly only get worse in the run-up to Christmas
- But, just like the Magi from Persia, growing numbers of Iranians are finding joy when they find God’s Son, regardless of the dangers along the way. Jesus is worth it!
- The Magi brought their treasure to the new king and were rewarded with wonder and joy when they came face to face with Him.



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**DID YOU KNOW...?**

- Iran is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a follower of Christ
  - Christians meet secretly in each other's homes, and many more are utterly isolated
  - Informers are vigilant and ruthless, and believers cannot even risk raising their voices to worship
  - People lose homes, jobs and even custody of their children because of their faith.
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**BUT:**

- There is joy growing rapidly in Iran!
  - Iran is also home to one of the fastest-growing churches on earth!
  - Iranian Christians may face violence and intimidation, but their faith is spreading quickly and widely
  - More than 1.5 million people watch SAT-7's Persian-language channel (SAT-7 PARS) regularly.
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**INTRODUCE SAT-7 PARS**

- SAT-7 PARS broadcasts Christian discipleship, advocacy and educational programmes to the Persian-speaking region (show on the map, highlighting Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan)
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### DID YOU KNOW...?

- The term “Magi” chosen by Matthew to describe these travellers is Persian, and tradition holds that they come from Persia – or modern-day Iran!
- An arduous journey and questioning by a hostile authority (King Herod) brought them finally into the presence of Jesus
- Iranians today who follow Jesus and celebrate His birth also face a high risk of persecution for their faith. Arrests and attacks sadly only get worse in the run-up to Christmas.
- But, just like their Persian predecessors, growing numbers of Iranians are finding joy when they find God’s Son, regardless of the dangers along the way. Jesus is worth it!
- The Magi brought their treasure to the new king and were rewarded with wonder and joy when they came face to face with Him.



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### MEMORY VERSE

“And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6b, NIV



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# JOY THROUGH TRIALS



## READ: James 1:1-18

Encourage young people to delve into the context around a passage they are studying. So let's ask these questions about James. Ask the young people and see whether they know the answers before you offer them.

1. Who wrote James?
2. When was James written?
3. To whom was James written?
4. In what style was James written?
5. Why was James written?

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 **WATCH: "Secret worship in Iran" (1 min)** (See Advent Resources webpage)

And/or **READ: Somayeh's Story** (See Iran page in the *Joy to the World Prayer Guide*)

- Why does James tell his recipients to "consider it pure joy" (v.2, NIV) when enduring persecution? *Develops a mature faith, and a deeper-rooted joy in the hope we have in Jesus*
- How can this letter from James be an encouragement to Christians in the Middle East and North Africa today? *The joy we have in Jesus still stands*
- We don't suffer persecution to the same degree that Christians in the MENA do. But what trials might we come across?
- In light of the struggles of Christians in places like Iran, why is important for SAT-7 to broadcast Christian TV programmes to the MENA?

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## PRAY AND REFLECT

Pray for persecuted Christians across the Middle East and North Africa, and invite each young person to colour in a card bauble and write a prayer on the other side, before hanging it on the Prayer Bauble Line (Use the *Joy to the World Prayer Guide* to help with prayer points)

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## WHAT NEXT?

Here are some ideas:

- Watch "Pastor Milton's Testimony" (18 mins) (See Advent Resources Webpage)
- Write an email/letter to Pastor Milton to encourage him and the SAT-7 PARS team that he works alongside in order to reach the Persian-speaking world with the Gospel. Send the letter/email back to the SAT-7 UK office to be passed on.

