



## WATCHING AND WAITING

### THEME:

Like the shepherds watching over their flocks at night and waiting for the dawn, Advent is a time when Christians around the world watch and wait together for the coming Messiah.

### OBJECTIVE:

For young people to gain a better understanding of churches and believers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) who are watching and waiting for Jesus and how SAT-7's ministry supports them.

### BIBLE VERSES:

*"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."* PSALM 27:13-14

*"And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night..."* LUKE 2:8

### ONLINE RESOURCES:

For games, activities, prayer ideas and further resources mentioned in this plan, see our online resources page at: [www.sat7uk.org/advent-resources](http://www.sat7uk.org/advent-resources)

### INTRODUCTION

Advent is a time of waiting for Christmas Day and celebrating the birth of Jesus. How do you prepare for Christmas? What are some of the traditions your church or family have, and why? Share these ideas with the youth group.

Introduce the theme for the session (see above).

**ASK:** What are you "waiting" for in your own life? How does it feel waiting for something you really want to happen? The premiere of the next Marvel film? School exams? The next school holiday? To find a boyfriend/girlfriend? To move out of home and be independent?

### INTRODUCTORY GAME

Pick one of the games or the Advent quiz in the online resources depending on the size of your youth group and space available.



### MAIN TALK

Read the account of the shepherds in Luke 2:8-20 and Psalm 27:13-14.

2000 years ago, the shepherds were watching and waiting on a hillside outside Bethlehem. **ASK:** Why do you think they needed to watch over the flock of sheep?

As well as looking out for danger to protect their flock, the shepherds were also waiting for God to rescue them from the hardships they faced under the Roman occupation, and they were watching for signs of the promised saviour who they hoped would lead their people and restore them to prosperity and greatness again.

Many Christians in the MENA are facing hardships or persecution because of their faith today and, like the shepherds, they are waiting and looking forward to the day when they can worship God in freedom. Children and young people make up about half the population of this region. Poverty, conflict, child labour, violence against girls and limited access to education are robbing millions of children of their childhood today. What's more, children across the region have few opportunities to hear of God's love for them, often due to the lack of religious freedom.

Surprisingly, many Christians in the MENA will be celebrating Christmas by watching their television. Some churches, for example in countries like Iran, have to prepare for Christmas in secret, behind closed doors, as it is not safe for them to worship openly. They may meet just in small groups and sing very quietly. (Continued overleaf)

## MAIN TALK (continued from p1)

SAT-7 is a Christian ministry that broadcasts satellite TV and digital media programmes across this troubled region (show map from online resources) and many viewers say SAT-7 is their church. SAT-7 creates dedicated children's and youth programmes that make God's love known in a clear, fun and accessible way, and will broadcast live services this Christmas for those gathering in secret to watch.

**ASK:** Can you imagine what it is like to celebrate Christmas in secret? How did it feel last Christmas when you couldn't celebrate with friends and family as normal?

Christians in the Middle East prepare for Christmas in different ways. The Coptic Church has a 43-day vegan fast. Some denominations hold their main celebration on 6th January.

Lebanese teenager and SAT-7 KIDS presenter Markus Kashouh shared how he is preparing for Christmas through an extremely difficult time in his country. In August 2020 a huge explosion in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, killed over 200 people and left hundreds of thousands injured or homeless.



*"What helped us all to get through the aftermath was knowing that God is with us. Although we were shaken, the faith God put in our hearts, and the hope that things will get better, gave us strength to continue and to go out and help others."*

*"This year, amidst the economic crisis in Lebanon, my church, Resurrection Church Beirut, is working on a Christmas production that will be performed live in a theatre at Christmas. This production is a musical that tells the story of the nativity, including dancing, singing and a lot of drama. It will be a great outreach to people in Lebanon who need to hear the Good News. We pray it will bring hope and joy to the hearts of the broken."*

## RESPONSE

Some things we are waiting for may never happen, but like Markus, we know that God is with us whatever we face. We know that Jesus *did* come to earth at Christmas, and in the same way we can also be certain that Jesus *will* come again – we aren't waiting in vain! Does this help you feel more confident in your faith? How can this confidence inspire you to show Jesus' love to your communities, neighbours and friends this Christmas?

## PRAYER

Encourage the group to pray together by using one of the creative ways to pray from the online resources.

- Pray for churches in the Middle East and North Africa to be able to celebrate Christmas together in safety.
- Pray that SAT-7 will be a source of joy and will strengthen the faith of children and young people in the MENA this Christmas, especially believers in countries like Iran who have to celebrate in secret.
- Pray for courage and resilience for young Christians like Markus so that they can continue to be a light for Jesus in such difficult places as they watch and wait for His return.

## ACTIVITY

Choose one of the following activities, depending which you think is most suitable for your group. **Before undertaking activity 1 or 2, please make sure you have acquired permission from parents.**



1. Make a short video. SAT-7 is a Christian TV and media ministry that broadcasts programmes to strengthen the faith of believers in the Middle East. Challenge the young people to make their own SAT-7 TV drama/documentary. Find more guidance and ideas for your video in the online resources!



2. Make a TikTok dance suitable for a SAT-7 children's programme. The dance could be of shepherds waiting and watching – again this could be filmed on one of the teenager's mobile phones, but please be sure to gain parental permission first.



3. Design a Christmas prayer card (no bigger than A5) to send to Markus' church in Beirut. Write a simple encouraging message on the back, e.g. 'Praying for you at Christmas'. We will forward the messages and cards to the Resurrection Church in Beirut. These cards can be posted to us at: SAT-7 UK, PO BOX 3941, Chippenham SN15 9HQ.