



VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

SILENT CELEBRATION

Written by Omeed Jouyandé from
SAT-7's Persian channel, SAT-7 PARS

The quietness and calm in Iran around Christmas time is not out of reverence for the Messiah whose birth was part of God's amazing plan of redemption for humanity. "We can't openly celebrate Christmas and sing Christmas songs here in Iran because of terrible oppression", shares Keyvan from Iran. "If we celebrate Christmas openly the government will find out and they will cause problems for us. So we don't have large gatherings and instead choose to keep in our family group."

Many believers are in a similar position and those whose families are not tolerant or sympathetic feel especially isolated at this time of the year. And yet, regardless of background or belief, ordinary Iranians love the Christmas lights and decorations that cheer up the darkest time of the year. As it happens, Christmas comes on the heels of a much-loved traditional festival on 21 December, Yalda's Eve, which celebrates light and the end of darkness.

A SAT-7 PARS viewer, Hormoz, observes: "More or less all Iranians see Christmas as a symbol of beauty and love. Alongside the table they set for Yalda's Eve, many also decorate a Christmas tree, adorn it with lights and lay out gifts."

Ironically, while Iranians who are not Christian

may openly enjoy the outward trappings and festivities of the season, for Muslim-background believers, celebrating Christmas involves significant risk. Any investigation by the authorities would soon reveal a believer's Christian faith and almost certainly lead to persecution.

Some believers are able to celebrate Christmas together with trusted friends or within families where every member has turned to Jesus. These believers can celebrate Christmas without fear of a neighbour, or even someone within the group, reporting them to the authorities. Mahnaz, a believer in Iran, wrote to share her experience of last Christmas: "I made friends with a young man called Alireza who is a believer. We were able to celebrate Christmas and worship God together with a few others. All we have is from the Lord and we are grateful to Him."

Many like Dara rely on Christian content on SAT-7: "Of course we are unable to openly celebrate Christmas, but praise God for His kindness – we are able to celebrate Christmas with you and with our families in our home."

In the darkness of these times, the light of Christ and His message of peace, love and joy are captivating for growing numbers of Iranians. The God of Jesus Christ forgives sins at His own expense. He loves, redeems and saves the sinner and brings the believer to a place of repentance. He has promised joy to His people when He returns to establish His everlasting kingdom.

Arvand, a believer in Iran, writes: "Christmas for me is the symbol of reconciliation between the Lord, the Creator of all things, and humanity. I was lost and now I am found; I was in sin and through the Lord's intervention I have become a son. In Christ we are children of the King! What could be better?"