



## VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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### **TENSE CELEBRATIONS**

Written by Mary Joseph  
from SAT-7 EGYPT

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With Advent comes the good news of Christ's incarnation and His miraculous birth. During this season Christians around the world prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ. Many Christians in Egypt celebrate by fasting for 40 days and then breaking their fast on Christmas Eve after a special service.

Churches hold events such as choir concerts, charity stalls, and children's activities in the two weeks before and after Christmas. But such celebrations are held only within the walls of church buildings. While the Egyptian government decorates certain affluent areas with lights and the occasional Christmas tree, it is only as a celebration of the New Year.

Christmas celebrations in Egypt are often a tense time for the large but vulnerable Christian community. The build-up of tension comes from an historic accumulation of attacks against Christians, especially during key festivals like Easter, Christmas, and New Year.

During Lent this year, as Christians were immersed in daily church prayers and charitable activities, they were hit with the frightening news of the murder of Coptic Orthodox priest Arsanious Wadeed on the streets of Alexandria.



*SAT-7 ARABIC held a special programme to mark the tragedy of the Abu Sefein Church fire in August 2022*

Although Christians in Egypt appear not to be under systematic attack, separate incidents against Christians do occur and stir up feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, and even dissociation from society. It keeps one wondering who might next be subject to a discriminatory attack based on their identity, and when.

Protection from the authorities is hit and miss. At times the Egyptian police force puts electronic security doors and extra personnel outside churches during Christmas and Easter. At other times, like Easter this year, they do not.

Recent kidnappings of Christian girls and a series of electrical fires at a number of churches have been a constant reminder of the vulnerability of Christians in Egypt. In August, a fire at the Abu Sefein Church in Imbaba, greater Cairo, claimed the lives of 41 people, including 18 children, sparking rage and disbelief among the Christian community.

SAT-7's Arabic channel, which has a studio in Cairo, immediately responded by broadcasting a special episode about the tragedy, inviting experts as well as spiritual leaders to provide counselling and spiritual support to the devastated Christian community in Egypt.

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As we now prepare to mark Advent and Christmas, we refuse to be silenced by acts of violence, discrimination and neglect. But our hearts are unsettled and we ask for you to pray for peace and protection.

In Egypt, we have much more freedom and opportunity to practise our faith than in other parts of the Middle East. And that's where SAT-7 is such a lifeline for believers who are truly isolated, especially at key times like Easter and Christmas, which can feel especially lonely for those who can't meet with other Christians.

Many viewers contact SAT-7 for personal and spiritual support. Throughout the years, SAT-7 has stood by its viewers throughout the region, showing the love of Christ to all. This Christmas, viewers will be blessed by the live church services and other special programmes on SAT-7, and will be able to connect with our viewer support teams for support and encouragement. Please pray for all those involved in this vital ministry.

*St Joseph Choir singing  
Christmas Carols in Cairo*

