



VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Christians in Egypt are relatively free to live out their faith, and, though tensions simmer below the surface, we give thanks in the last year there have been fewer reports of violence against Christians. Here, Mary Joseph from SAT-7 Egypt shares a more immediate concern this Christmas – the economic hardship facing the country – and shows how SAT-7 is giving a voice to those who are struggling.



TIGHT CELEBRATIONS

Written by Mary Joseph
from SAT-7 EGYPT

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 is a time of giving where many donate to the church and its affiliated organizations to



Traditional Egyptian foods, including bread, chickpeas and lentils

help those in need. But the donations are slowly decreasing with the rapid rise in prices of all commodities.

A member of one charitable church organisation noticed how there's less money in the donations box located inside the church. As she opened it in Easter, there were a handful of Egyptian pound notes. She said that donations have been affected recently with less money coming in.

Prices of commodities in Egypt have risen doubly, with the devaluation of the Egyptian pound and the war in Ukraine, since many essential food items, such as wheat, are imported. Bread is a staple in every Egyptian home where people eat it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Even locally produced vegetable prices have soared, not to mention poultry and meat, which have been replaced in many homes by vegetables instead.

Local and international media report that compared to the same month last year, the price of food and beverages in May 2023 increased by 58.9 percent. Prices of meat and poultry surged by 87.9 percent, while prices of dairy products, cheese, and eggs rose by 67.7 percent. Meanwhile, prices of housing, water, electricity, natural gas, and fuel rose by 6.4 percent.

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In response, SAT-7 is providing support through its programming by helping viewers live in faith through the economic challenges. Many churches, such as Kasr El-Dorbara Evangelical Church, are organizing special prayer meetings to pray for Egypt specifically. Other churches are holding spiritual conferences and concerts to engage believers in praise and worship during this time. SAT-7's Arabic channel, which has a studio in Cairo, is not only covering such events live and recording others, it is also addressing the economic crisis on its studio-produced programmes, such as current affairs weekly programme *Different Angle*.

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

