AN IRANIAN CHRISTMAS
Omeed Jouyandé, COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER AT SAT-7 PARS

**Many Iranians enjoy Christmas as a festive season.** In the capital, Tehran, Christian pastry shops, usually owned by Armenians, are well-lit and well-stocked with Christmas trees, gifts and cards. Even businesses owned by non-Christians will sell trees and flowers for Christmas.

In some parts of the city you will see Christmas trees in the windows, and in Isfahan, a city in central Iran with a famous church, there are some streets where many Christians live and there is a palpable Christmas atmosphere.

But for most Iranian believers, Christmas must be celebrated in secret. Underground churches meet together in small groups and, if discovered, are at risk of persecution.

One Iranian Christian recalls: “**We gather in our house church and play worship songs on a CD, or watch a satellite TV programme. We put up a small tree, and if we have a worship leader they lead us in worship – but very quietly.** If a house is deemed safe, we might clap with two fingers. The pastor might give a message, and talk about Christ’s birth and what He did for us. At times we use blankets to soundproof doors for extra security. ”

Sometimes, a believer might bring a spouse or a family member so they can see for themselves what Christians are celebrating. They find out about the symbolism of the tree, the lights and the star. They hear about the Magi, and are amazed to find out there were Persians at the birth of Christ!

While times are hard for Christians in Iran, the Christmas season is at its core a message of hope and joy. It points hard-pressed believers to the birth and the work of Jesus, and reminds them that He will come again.

“My heart for Iran is simple,” one Iranian believer told me. “After all the things that have happened during the last 40 years, I hope that Iranians hear the message of Christ. I hope that when freedom comes, millions of secret believers in Christ, like seeds hidden under the earth, would blossom... I hope for Iran to point the way to the Lord.”