



**As a
church
family**

Creative prayer for the Middle East

Praying for Christians in the Middle East

Many of us hear lots of bad news from the Middle East: news of conflict, war, persecution and suffering. At this crucial time this region needs Jesus.

There is a great hunger for Jesus in the Middle East. The good news is that in many places, more and more people are hearing the gospel and choosing to follow Jesus. In many cases, God's love is not being shared by public figures or people who are considered important; God is using ordinary women to quietly share his love with the people around them, and sending them to preach his Word to many who haven't heard it before.

God is raising up women across the region to share his love, but they need us to stand with them. We can support them through giving and of course, through prayer.

Sunday school activities

Game: secret missionary

The children need to work together to hide the identity of a missionary who will help them cross a bridge over a dangerous river one at a time, while a riverside guard tries to catch them out.

You will need:

- Props to make a river and bridge (eg blankets, cushions)
- Characters: 1 bridge guard, 1 riverside guard. 1 missionary (The guards can be adults/leaders so that all the children can play the game)
- The rest of the group are travellers

Continued on next page



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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**

Activity instructions:

- Everyone closes their eyes while the bridge guard quietly chooses one player to be the missionary and whispers the password to them (eg “Jesus is the bridge”).
- The guards can be adults/leaders so that all the children can play the game.
- All the travellers stand on one side of the river. The bridge guard stands by the bridge. The riverside guard watches from the riverbank.
- Only those who know the password can cross the bridge. The missionary must secretly share the password with everyone, without being caught by the riverside guard.
- The other children can move around and whisper or pretend to talk to distract the riverside guard and protect the missionary’s identity. Be careful not to cross the bridge too quickly after hearing the password, or the guard might guess who told you!
- If the riverside guard catches the missionary sharing the password, the missionary must cross the bridge right away, and someone else who already knows the password must become the new missionary.
- If everyone crosses the bridge safely, the travellers win. If the missionary is caught before everyone has crossed the bridge, the riverside guard wins.

After the game:

Explain that this game shows what it can be like for real missionaries who share about Jesus in places where it’s not always safe, like the Middle East. Missionaries are working in secret, but people are watching them and trying to stop them from telling people about Jesus.

We can support them by praying for their safety and for more people to join them.

Christmas decorations

Make Christmas decorations to inspire prayer for the Middle East and use them to decorate a tree together at church (or hang up at home).

You will need:

- Paper/card in different colours, especially red and green
- Printed copies of decoration templates
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pens/markers to write a word on each decoration
- Glitter
- A needle or small awl to punch a hole in the top of each decoration
- String or ribbon

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Activity instructions:

- ▶ Set up tables and lay out all the supplies before the children arrive.
- ▶ Have the children start by cutting out templates and using them to trace shapes onto coloured card. Cut out the Christmas decorations and stick two matching shapes in different colours together back to back.
- ▶ Encourage the children to write one word on their decoration to prompt prayer, eg women, hope, light, love...
- ▶ Decorate one or both sides using markers, glitter, ribbon, etc.
- ▶ Punch a hole in the top and thread string through so it can be hung on the tree.

All-age activity: hanging our Christmas hopes on Jesus

Decorate a Christmas tree together as a church family. Follow the steps below to create a beautiful tree for your church, pray together and finally, switch the lights on as a symbol of sharing God's light with thousands of people in the Middle East.

You will need:

- ▶ Christmas tree
- ▶ Christmas tree lights
- ▶ Optional: Christmas tree decorations made by children (see activity above)
- ▶ Baubles or other tree decorations

Activity instructions:

- ▶ Position the tree somewhere it will be easy to decorate, and put the lights on beforehand, making sure that the plug reaches a socket (don't switch the lights on yet).
- ▶ Using decorations made by the children (as in the above activity, or shop-bought decorations), decorate the tree as a church family. As you hang things on the tree, place your hopes for the region on Jesus. Encourage individual children to say the word they have written on their decoration, and for a parent or another adult to pray for the region based on that word.
- ▶ Switch the lights on as a symbol of sharing God's light with thousands in the Middle East.
- ▶ Sing a Christmas carol, eg O Little Town of Bethlehem, emphasising the parallels between the words of the second verse ("How silently, how silently") and the quiet, humble work of women sharing the gospel in the Middle East today.
- ▶ Pray together for women in the Middle East.

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Youth group prayer night: gingerbread Nativity

Bring the youth group together to build a gingerbread Nativity scene

You will need:

- ▶ Homemade or shop-bought gingerbread nativity/house kits (many gingerbread house kits can be built as a Nativity scene simply by leaving out one wall and one side of the roof)
- ▶ Sugar syrup for construction
- ▶ Icing sugar, water and bags for piping
- ▶ An assortment of edible decorations
- ▶ Plastic or gingerbread props/characters, eg manger and baby Jesus, donkey, Mary and Joseph, etc

Activity instructions:

- ▶ If preparing your Nativity kits from scratch, bake your gingerbread in advance (adding Middle Eastern spices such as cardamom, cinnamon and cloves as well as ginger if you wish). There are plenty of recipes/instructions/templates available online.
- ▶ If you have a big enough youth group, split into smaller groups and make it a competition to build the best Nativity scene.
- ▶ Provide each team with building instructions, decorations, etc. As they construct and decorate their nativity scenes, encourage them to reflect on what it must be like to be a Christian woman in the Middle East.
- ▶ If you're doing it as a competition, crown a winner.
- ▶ Spend time praying through the prayer points, either as one large group or several smaller groups.

Christmas craft evening

Ask a crafty church member to help you put on a craft evening as a fundraiser for women in the Middle East. Invite church members and friends in the community for an evening of:

- ▶ painting ceramic decorations or glass baubles
- ▶ making Christmas wreaths
- ▶ decorating Christmas stockings
- ▶ making macramé or felt decorations
- ▶ making Christmas crackers

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Tutorials and instructions for all sorts of Christmas crafts are available online and many craft shops (eg Hobbycraft) offer a range of craft kits. Make sure to advertise your event in plenty of time. Charge an entry fee to cover materials or kits, refreshments and a donation. Make sure to include a time of prayer during the event.

Take it into the week: personal prayer ideas

Encourage people to keep praying for the Middle East during the week. You could suggest they:

- ▶ Cook a Middle Eastern meal one evening and pray for the Middle East.
 - ▶ Set a daily alarm at a particular time (for instance 8:00am or 8:00pm) to pause and pray.
 - ▶ Light a candle in the evening as a symbol of sharing God's light with thousands in the Middle East.
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Thank you for praying

Your prayers and generosity are a powerful way to stand with women sharing the gospel in the Middle East. Thank you for being part of the work of sharing God's love with many who don't yet know him.

And if your church shares your prayer activities or reflections on social media, don't forget to tag CMS (#middleeastchristmas) so we can pray alongside you.