



^{*}Finding ^{*}family^{*}



THE OPEN DOORS CHRISTMAS SERVICE SHEET 2020

At the heart of the Christmas story there is a family – a mother, a father, a new-born child, visited by shepherds, discovered by wise men, and hunted by the authorities.

At the heart of the Christian faith there is also a family – a family of believers around the world, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This service sheet is about both these families.

As we think about the magi and the manger, the shepherds and the star, we will also explore another story, of a family rejected by their community, but who found a new family to which they could belong. For persecuted Christians around the world, 'family' isn't just a nice metaphor. It's a living reality. They need a new family. They need people to care for them, support them, pray for them, celebrate with them.

At Christmas, we all need to find our family.

About this service sheet

Christmas will be very different this year! Having spent so much of the year unable to meet together, we can identify, as never before, with Christians who can never openly celebrate Christmas in their own communities. This Christmas service sheet follows one such family in Bangladesh.

From the end of October, you can find out more about the family, and see a video telling their story at **opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily**.

Along with this sheet, there are a range of accompanying resources on our website, including videos, family activities, small group resources and ideas for how to use this service sheet (all available from November). So, whether you are worshipping together or online, as individuals, small groups or as the wider church, this Christmas, we can still connect with our persecuted church family.

✳️ 1. Finding family: Roots

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”

LUKE 2:4-7



Badol* and his family are among only a handful of Christians in their village in Bangladesh. “In my family, my father was the first believer,” he says. “Then my brothers became

believers, and after that I accepted Jesus Christ.” But not all his family welcome Jesus. His wife’s parents are Muslim and, after she came to faith, they cut off all ties.

“People don’t want to talk to us,” Badol says. “I have to go everywhere alone – it’s very lonely.”

Our family roots are important. Yet many persecuted Christians around the world are excluded from their families because of their faith. There is no room for them in their communities.

We pray for all those believers whose families do not welcome Christ this Christmas. Lord, help them to be aware that they always have a home with You.

*name changed for security reasons

ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY

Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,
Through His own redeeming love;
For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above,
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see Him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
Where like stars His children crowned
All in white shall wait around.



✧ 2. Finding family: Outcasts

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

LUKE 2:8-12

Badol’s wife, Maya*, says “In the village, Muslims are the majority. They tell us, ‘Go away, you are Christians, you should not mix with us.’ They drive us away.”

Badol and Maya’s children struggle to find friends. Their 10-year-old daughter Bijli* has her five-year-old brother Mohon* to play with. But she can’t play with the Muslim children. A girl at school told Bijli: “My mother says that your family are infidels.”

The shepherds were outcasts, viewed as impure and unclean. And yet they were chosen to hear the good news. Many Christians are also pushed to the fringes of their communities as well; they are seen as dirty, infectious, even toxic.

We pray for the outcasts this Christmas. Lord, be present with them and show them signs of good news.

*name changed for security reasons

WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS

While shepherds watched
Their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

“Fear not,” said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind,
“Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.”

“To you, in David’s town this day,
Is born of David’s line
The Saviour who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign:

The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid.”

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, who thus
Addressed their joyful song:

“All glory be to God on high
And on the earth be peace,
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
Begin and never cease.”

✧ 3. Finding family: Threat

“Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ... Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.””

MATTHEW 2:1-2, 7-8

Sometimes Bijli comes home crying from school.

“At school,” she says, “some friends push me and make me cry.” When her mother Maya asks her why they do this, she says “Because I am a Christian.”

The family live their lives against a backdrop of threats and suspicion. It makes celebrating Christmas in their village impossible.

“We can’t celebrate in the village because of the restrictions and fear of persecution,” Badol says.

Herod wanted to kill Christ, not to worship Him. Many Christians live their lives under threat of violence and intimidation.



We pray for those who are threatened by rulers and authorities. May they be free to follow their faith without fear.

WE THREE KINGS

We three kings of Orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

Chorus:

*O star of wonder, star of light,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign.*

Frankincense to offer have I;
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, voices raising,
Worshipping God on high.

Chorus

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Chorus

Glorious now behold Him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
Sounds through the earth and skies.

Chorus

✧ 4. Finding family: Joy

“They went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

MATTHEW 2:9-12

Badol, Maya and the children go on a journey. Open Doors partners have arranged a Christmas celebration for them in a safe place. There, they find around 100 Christian families from isolated rural communities. For some, it is the first time they have ever properly celebrated Christmas – and the first time that they have met with so many other believers. It is good to find out that they are part of a much bigger family.

There is a Christmas dinner of daal, chicken curry and rice. Everyone is dressed in their finest. And Bijli and Mohon have other children to play with.

“We have joy and peace, we sing songs and dance,” says Maya. “We do not get to celebrate like this in the village.”

It was a long journey for the Magi to celebrate Jesus’ birth. Many persecuted Christians have to make long, risky journeys to worship with others. And many more are unable to celebrate openly, and must worship secretly in their houses.

We pray for safety for all those who celebrate Your birth this year, Lord Jesus. Protect them from harm and give them a time of joy and peace.

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels:
O come, let us adore Him, (x3)
Christ the Lord.

God of God, light of light,
Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;
True God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore Him, (x3)
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, glory in the highest:
O come, let us adore Him, (x3)
Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be glory given!
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Him, (x3)
Christ the Lord.

✳ 5. Finding family: Return

“They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them... The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

LUKE 2:16-20

Soon it is time for the family to go back to the village. Their absence will attract attention from their community. “They will ask many questions,” Badol says.

So is it worth the risk to come to this event?

“Yes. I will give them our answer, that we are followers of Jesus Christ, and we went to celebrate the birthday of Jesus.”

Despite the difficulties and the danger, millions of persecuted Christians around the world still dare to follow Jesus. The child laid in the manger is much more dangerous than we realise. How far are we prepared to go to be identified as a follower of Jesus?

We pray for all those who risk their lives in following You. Thank You for their courage.



HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! The herald angels sing:
Glory to the new-born king;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies.
With the angelic host proclaim:
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark! The herald angels sing:
Glory to the new-born king.

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell:
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing:
Glory to the new-born king.

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing:
Glory to the new-born king.

Could you support your persecuted family this Christmas?

For Badol, Maya and their children, being able to celebrate with others was a wonderful gift – made possible by your prayers and support. As Bijli says, “I want to give thanks to all of my ‘uncles and aunts’ around the world who organised this programme.”

During lockdown, Badol lost his job. Because of his faith, he and his family were overlooked when government aid was distributed in their village. But his Open Doors family stepped in to provide emergency aid.

Being able to gather and worship together means the world to persecuted Christians. This Christmas, as we reflect on our own struggles to meet as church, please remember those who cannot meet together at any time – coronavirus or not.

- **Every £10 could provide Muslim background believers with resources which help them understand how to love and care for one another**
- **A gift of £42 could help provide a Christmas present for a persecuted child to let them know that their Church family loves them**

About Open Doors

Open Doors supports persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries across the world. Our global networks work in partnership with the local church to provide food and medicine, Bibles and literature, spiritual care, training – whatever persecuted Christians need and for as long as they need it.

Find out more about your part in this worldwide family at **opendoorsuk.org**



opendoorsuk.org

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