

# Stories of Hope for Advent

## THE ONE ABOUT THE DREAM Middle East

The Christmas story is full of shepherds, angels, dreams and, of course, a very special baby. It's a story full of significance for everyone – and brimming with signs of hope. As we celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, it's great to know that God is still at work today, giving people signs of hope – sometimes through shepherds, angels, dreams and babies! All four of these Advent stories are from persecuted Christians who are supported by Open Doors. This story is about a Muslim family in the Middle East who all turned to Christ after seeing the same dream.

### ★ Light an Advent candle

### ★ Tell the story:

This the true story of a family that lived in a remote mountainous region of a closed Muslim country. None of them knew how to read or write and you may ask: how could a family like this ever hear about Jesus? Well, for God, nothing is impossible...

It all began when the father, the head of the family, died. The family mourned his passing, after which the strongest son took charge of the family, a task he took very seriously.

Shortly after his father died, the son had a dream. In this dream, the son's father told him that he had met Jesus just before he died. The son saw his father lying in hospital. The door opened and Jesus appeared, saying to his sick father: "If you believe in Me, I will give you real life." The father replied: "Yes, I believe in You, but please go to my family. I have a big family," after which, he surrendered his life to Jesus and peacefully passed away.

The dream made a big impression on the son, and he invited the whole family to a meeting. But his younger sister did not want to attend because she was afraid. When the son asked her why, she replied, "I had a special dream..." and went on to share how she had seen, in her dream, her father meeting Jesus. Her brother listened in utter amazement as he realised that

he and his sister had had the exact same dream! At the family meeting, the brother and sister shared their dreams – which had such an impact on the family that they all decided to follow Jesus.

The family needed a lot of Bibles and the son had heard about a shop in a nearby city that was said to sell them. Unfortunately, the shopkeeper was unable to give him all the Bibles he needed – but another Christian met the family and was able to give them the Word of God. He said to the son, "The Lord is with you and your family. He will teach you, and if you need any help, we will be there to help you."

### ★ Pray for new believers in the Middle East

**Dear Lord,  
Please help new believers in the Middle East to continue to meet one another, so that they may be strengthened in the faith. We ask that the church in the Middle East will continue to grow, and that the good news of Jesus' birth will change their lives.**

**Amen**

### ★ Reflect on how this story is a sign of hope.

## Open Doors in the Middle East

Open Doors was able provide this new family of believers with Bibles and discipleship so that they could advance God's kingdom in one of the most closed countries in the world. New believers in the Middle East often tell of meeting Jesus through dreams, satellite TV or the radio. Open Doors helps them to grow in their faith, by providing Bibles and discipleship training, and meeting and praying with believers whenever possible.

# Stories of Hope for Advent

## THE ONE ABOUT THE SHEPHERD Central Asia

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### ★ Light an Advent candle

### ★ Tell the story:

Yusuf\* was a criminal, a thief – and a wanted man. He used to steal from homes and pick people's pockets. He even used to shoot people. He was arrested and imprisoned for the first time in 1988 and was put in solitary confinement several times as punishment for bad behaviour. During a very cold winter, the guards kept him there for 15 days. It was freezing; he had no coat and there was no glass in the windows. Yusuf cursed everyone he knew – including God.

While he was in the isolation cell, he found a sheet of paper with a prayer and a call to repentance written on it. It touched him and he learned the prayer by heart. After two or three days, he found another page with a longer prayer:

'Dear Lord, I come humbly before You now and I give my life to You. I want to be Your child and I want to share Your life. Please, give me Your Holy Spirit and strength, so I can serve you with all of my strength.' With that prayer, Yusuf devoted his life to Jesus.

After prison, Yusuf ended up in hospital twice; the first time due to poor health, the second after being shot in the stomach. After he was dismissed from hospital the second time, he had no place to go, so he started to live as a criminal again, getting involved in drugs.

After one drug-deal went horribly wrong, he fled to the desert and became a shepherd. For two months he

was alone, but he prayed the prayers he had learned in prison again and again. God did His work in Yusuf's heart and Yusuf eventually said to himself "Enough!" He returned to his hometown, confessed his sins and had to forgive many people. Later, Open Doors sent Yusuf to a Bible school to learn more about the Christian life.

Thanks to a microloan provided by Open Doors, Yusuf now runs a small spice shop and is a home group leader. "When we meet in homes, we must do it very secretly without anybody knowing it, otherwise we might have problems," he says. "But we are strong and firm in our faith... I feel very blessed for the position God gave me in church.

"God took my heart of stone and gave me a heart of love," he says.

\*Name changed for security reasons

### ★ Pray for new believers in Central Asia

**Lord Jesus,  
Thank you that you still speak through dreams and visions today. Please give strength to believers in Central Asia who face threats from their families and the authorities. Give them safe spaces to meet and a stable way to make an income as they try to live for your glory. Amen**

### ★ Reflect on how this story is a sign of hope.

## Open Doors in the Central Asia

Open Doors strengthens the persecuted church in Central Asia with Christian literature, training, relief aid and socio-economic development projects.

# ★ Stories of Hope for Advent

## THE ONE ABOUT THE ANGEL Bhutan

The Christmas story is full of shepherds, angels, dreams and, of course, a very special baby. It's a story full of significance for everyone – and brimming with signs of hope. As we celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, it's great to know that God is still at work today, giving people signs of hope – sometimes through shepherds, angels, dreams and babies! All four of these Advent stories are from persecuted Christians who are supported by Open Doors. This story is about Tandin in Bhutan who saw a vision of an angel whilst in prison for his beliefs.

### ★ Light an Advent candle

### ★ Tell the story:

On 5 March 2014, Tandin and fellow pastor, Thapa, arrived in a village where they had been invited to hold a three-day seminar for secret believers, when a man stopped them in their tracks. Minutes later, they were being interrogated: "What's in your Bible? Why have you come here? Why are there so many of you?" A neighbour had complained about the event to the authorities claiming that they didn't have a permit to gather.

The two pastors tried to explain – but it was no good. As they were being arrested, Tandin phoned his wife. "This might be the last time I can call you," he said. "God will protect you," she assured him. Tandin believed God would, he just didn't know how.

In September, after attending 20 court hearings, both pastors were found guilty. They had been charged with conducting religious gatherings without prior approval, showing a film without approval, and collecting 'illegal funds'. Thapa was able to pay a fine, but Tandin was kept in prison for another four nights awaiting his final sentence, which was likely to be almost three years.

In his cell there were 12 other prisoners. As they settled down for the night, he continued to pray, as he had done throughout his time there. Then, at 3am, while his cellmates were all asleep, he had a vision of an angel. In it, he saw the angel leading him by the hand. Then the door of the cell opened, and he walked out free. Shell-

shocked, Tandin muttered a quick "Amen" confident that the Lord would release him.

At 3.45pm on the afternoon following his vision from God, the court ruled that Tandin's sentence could be waived in exchange for a fine. In January 2015, he was released.

Throughout the time of these two pastors' arrest, Open Doors supporters had prayed for Tandin and Thapa and hundreds wrote to the Bhutanese authorities on their behalf. "Thank you for all your prayer support," Tandin wrote, as he left prison. "I am speechless and have no words to thank my Jesus. Only He knows what I went through those four nights in jail. If it was not for his grace and peace, I probably would have collapsed."

### ★ Pray for new believers in Bhutan

**Lord Jesus,  
Thank You for protecting Tandin and Thapa and showing Your love to them. We lift to You our other brothers and sisters in Bhutan and ask for Your protection over them. Please provide safe places for them to meet and worship You. May they know Your provision for them day by day. Amen.**

### ★ Reflect on how this story is a sign of hope.

## Open Doors in the Bhutan

Open Doors works through local church partners in Bhutan to strengthen persecuted believers with advocacy support, persecution survival training, literature distribution, literacy and discipleship training.

# Stories of Hope for Advent

## THE ONE ABOUT THE BABY China

The Christmas story is full of shepherds, angels, dreams and, of course, a very special baby. It's a story full of significance for everyone – and brimming with signs of hope. As we celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, it's great to know that God is still at work today, giving people signs of hope – sometimes through shepherds, angels, dreams and babies! All four of these Advent stories are from persecuted Christians who are supported by Open Doors. This story is about an evangelist in China who found a stolen baby down a well at Christmas. It was told by him to Ron Boyd MacMillan, author and expert on world persecution at Open Doors.

### ★ Light an Advent candle

### ★ Tell the story:

A Christian evangelist in China went from village to village telling people about Jesus. Usually, he was welcomed and he had seen a great fruit from his work, but one day around Christmas time he arrived at a village where they were not happy to see him. The villagers said, "we've had a disaster here. A couple have had their baby stolen and they're very sad about it." This sometimes happens in China. Gangs roam the countryside and steal new-born babies to sell to wealthy couples in the cities.

The evangelist said, "Take me to this couple, I'd like to pray for them. I have a god that came as a baby. He's very powerful, let me pray." The villagers agreed so he went with them to see the couple and he prayed and prayed and prayed. When he opened his eyes he saw that the couple were very angry. They said, "Look, you're wasting our time. Your god is doing nothing" He tried to keep praying for them, but they became very angry and started to beat him. "Don't come back to this village," they said, "or we'll kill you."

He started walking to another village, but along the way he remembered John 1:10. He thought, "Jesus came to bring salvation to the world, knowing the world would kill Him, crucify Him - and still He came. That took courage. I need to go back to that village and share the gospel more completely with them, even though they might beat me."

He began to walk back to the village taking a different road. Suddenly he heard a cry coming from a dry well. He looked down and saw a baby, almost blue, lying at the bottom. He clambered down and picked up the baby realising that it must be the baby that was stolen from the village. As he unwrapped the baby he realised why it had been abandoned: it was a girl – and there is no market for stolen baby girls – so it had just been discarded.

Back at the village they were delighted to see him, and he began to tell them about Christmas: "Christ came to a village called the world, knowing they would kill Him. I came back to this village, knowing you would beat me up. If I hadn't have come back, I would never have found the baby and you would never have had the child restored to you."

### ★ Pray for new believers in China

**Lord Jesus,  
Thank You for our Chinese brothers and sisters, and all who are bravely sharing Your story in difficult circumstances. Strengthen those from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds who face expulsion from their communities for choosing to follow You. May Your light shine through Your followers so that others may come to know You. Amen.**

### ★ Reflect on how this story is a sign of hope.

## Open Doors in the China

Open Doors supports persecuted believers in China through training in discipleship, stewardship and how to face persecution, and by providing contextualised Christian literature.