

Monday 17th December

Lighting the Candle of Hope

“I need help lighting the candle of hope in my spirit,” I had written in a prayer letter. “My heart is desperate for a revival of hope.”



I confessed to my supporters back home that I was fighting discouragement. My husband and I had been planting seeds of the Word in so many of our Muslim friends. While some had shown initial interest in the gospel, we had yet to see any go deeper. We longed to see our friends give their lives to Jesus with focus and undivided hearts. Given what seemed to be a lack of fruit, my hope was burning out.

Little did I know that God was about to use my neighbour Amina to help me, quite literally, light that candle. It was Christmas Eve and Amina was calling for me from our gate. Her eyes were sparkling.

“Sara,” she said, “I must tell you about a dream I’ve had.” I welcomed Amina in and sat her down in the living room. “What was your dream?” I asked her.

Amina had dreamt of a man dressed in white, surrounded by young children. He called her name several times. Twice she turned to him, but both times he replied, “No, not you.”

The third time he called her, Amina said, “Yes, that is my name! You are calling me!” “Yes, you!” he said this time. The man was lighting several colourful candles and said to her, “Take these coloured candles to light your life. And this white one, give it to Sara.”

“Sara?” Amina asked him. “Why Sara?” “For it to shine in her life,” the man replied.

As Amina related her dream to me, I looked at the Advent candles burning on my dining room table. I rose and invited her over to see them. “The first candle represents hope,” I told her, pointing to the shortest of the coloured candles. “The second is for peace, the third for joy and the fourth for love.”

Then I pointed to the middle candle, the Christ candle which hadn’t been lit yet. “This one represents the light of Christ that came into the world at Christmas,” I explained.

“It’s white,” Amina gasped, tears welling up in her eyes. “It was a white candle, just like your Christ candle, that the man in my dream told me to give you!” She went on to say that when she had described the dream to her husband, he had pointed out that the man must be Jesus.

“The man in your dream is dressed in white,” her husband had said to Amina, “and is surrounded by little children, just like all the stories about Jesus that Sara shares with us. He is Jesus!”

I removed the middle candle and gave it to Amina. She took it and carefully held it to one of the other candles to light it. Then she turned to me and gave the lighted candle to me, saying, “This is for you, because Jesus gave me the lighted white candle to present to you—to make your life shine.”

In that moment of miracle and mystery, the Lord ignited hope in me and revived my spirit.

God is drawing Amina to Himself, revealing to her the hope that is available to her in Christ Jesus. She is hungrier than ever to know more about Jesus and we have started reading the Bible and praying together.

- Pray that Amina and her husband will believe the whole gospel and be used by God to spread hope in Jesus Christ, the Messiah who shines His light in our lives.
- God heard and answered Sara's cry for hope. Let's pray for Sara, that the hope that has been ignited in her will stay strong and she will continue to be encouraged to reach out to those around her and continue to plant seeds of hope.

Tuesday 18th December

The Christmas Treasure

Inside our home, it's a Christmas haven. We've put up simple decorations and there's a constant stream of Christmas music playing.

But outside our front door, every trace of Christmas disappears. It feels like another Central Asian November, with a bit more snow. Songs like "Silver Bells" feel out of place. We walk around the market and see no holiday lights, no nativity scenes and no trees for sale.



Here, as in other parts of the Muslim world, it's winter without Christmas. It's a bit like Bethlehem the day before Jesus was born, full of people holding onto their hopes and fears and completely unaware of the treasure that was about to appear in their neighbourhood.

Living in this yuletide vacuum is eerie, because the hope of Christmas is actually for Muslims.

It's for Muslim men like Mansour, a hard-working friend with four children. His newest child is only two weeks old. Mansour has horrific stories of encounters with the Taliban and life as a young child in refugee camps. But these experiences still haven't wiped the grin off his face.

Christmas is for Muslim women like Khadija, who gets up before dawn to make bread for her family. Then she goes off to clean the home of a wealthy family. When she returns home, carloads of guests from her village are waiting, expecting food, lodging and help with medical bills. Even with two incomes, Khadija and her husband and children seldom eat meat. She constantly worries about money.

It's for intellectual Muslims like Saleem, a locally trained doctor who shows care and compassion for his patients. When we talk, he makes a forceful case for Islam and then laughs nervously about getting drunk at the weekends. Despite his full work days, he still has time to devote himself to studying English with a passion.

And it's for elderly Muslims like Jameela, who walks for miles on old feet to sell eggs and milk in the city market. Deep wrinkles line her face, like roads on a map of a life much different than my own. She has a great-granddaughter who is dying of cancer. Her family is saving up money to buy an expensive charm from a local mystic in the hope that it will heal her.

These friends are like Muslims everywhere, clinging to their hopes and fears and unaware of the One who left the blinding glory of heaven to give us life. They have yet to welcome the gift of Jesus Christ who meets their every hope and every fear.

We've shared the gospel with our Muslim friends, but they still do not know who He truly is or worship Him.

Yet here we are, honouring Christ where Christmas is not yet. We press on in telling them about our treasure so they can know and worship Him. How amazing that God would use us to invite Muslims to follow Jesus.

And He is also using you! You are part of bringing the Christmas treasure to Muslims. As you pray, future generations will thank God for the role you played in introducing them to the Saviour.

- Let's thank God for workers living in the Muslim world as strangers and foreigners, pressing on to bring the gift of Jesus to their Muslim friends and communities.
- Let's pray that many Muslims will become aware this Christmas season of the One who left the blinding glory of heaven to give them life.
- Praise God for all the prayer intercessors who faithfully pray for workers and Muslims everywhere to know the truth of the Christmas treasure. Let's ask for God's blessing on each one.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Eph 3:14-19

Wednesday 19th December

Sent into Unwelcoming Places

"It's time for you to go home now," the stern officer said to Russell, a long-term Frontiers worker. "You're not welcome here."

For days, the officer with the secret police had been following him. Other undercover policemen harassed him on the street, bumping into him aggressively and intimidating him. Then Russell was expelled from the country, along with his family and teammates.

Russell's team relocated to another city in the region, to a country with several Muslim people groups completely untouched by the gospel. He and his teammates are the only ones sharing the message of Christ in the entire city.

Again they found themselves facing opposition. They were warned that bombs are regularly planted on the cars of unwanted foreigners. Russell had his car fitted with under-vehicle surveillance mirrors so he could easily look for anything suspicious.



Bringing a family to a country like this, to face such risk, dishonour, and the threat of death, seems foolish. But even Jesus was no stranger to hostility. He was born during the reign of Herod, a king so anxious about losing power that he killed his own family members. When Herod heard about the one *“who has been born king of the Jews”* (Matthew 2:2), he schemed to go to Bethlehem and murder the Son of God. Jesus' young parents fled to save Him from being killed (Matthew 2:13-16). It was from this inhospitable context that God launched His mission to bring peace to all.

Throughout His ministry, Christ faced dishonour and shame. But *“for the joy that was set before him, [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2). In this great plan for redemption, Jesus embraced both joy and dishonour.

Uncertainties and risk are what many Frontiers workers endure as they invite Muslims to follow Jesus. But Russell says that the joy of seeing new believers embrace Christ's everlasting hope is greater than the threats. For even in this unwelcoming city, God is drawing Muslims to Jesus. Russell's team is determined to find these men and women and introduce them to the hope of the gospel.

Throughout the world this Christmas time, there are Frontiers teams living in regions just as inhospitable as Christ's Bethlehem. But that doesn't stop God from calling His sons and daughters to follow Him into risky contexts to reach the lost. These are just the sort of places that need God's mission of peace.

- Pray for Russell's team to persevere amid threats and uncertainty to proclaim the love of Christ to Muslims.
- Ask God to lead them to men and women who long for the hope and peace of Jesus Christ.
- Let's pray for safety and a double portion of blessing for Frontiers field workers and ask God to give them much favour as they share the gospel with Muslims to bring them into the embrace of Christ's everlasting hope.

Thursday 20th December

The Muslim Who Loved Christmas

“Those cookies are beautiful!” Basima remarked. She took out her phone and snapped a photo of the tree-shaped Christmas cookies I had just set down on the coffee table.

“You’re making too much fuss about those cookies, Basima,” scolded Fatima, the hostess.

“Well, they are beautiful,” Basima retorted to her friend. “I love Christmas and I love the Bible. You know that it tells us to treat each other with kindness and forgiveness.”



I couldn’t believe my ears. I had just met Basima. Never before had I heard a Muslim woman talk this way.

“This would be a better country if they taught the Bible in our public schools,” Basima continued.

Fatima responded with a stream of insults toward Basima. I took Basima’s hand and told her that I found her words delightful. Fatima scowled at both of us. “Basima, she only loves you because you’re a Christian!”

“No, I’m a Muslim,” Basima answered calmly, “but I love the Bible. What’s wrong with reading all of the Holy Books?”

Fatima stormed off into the kitchen.

“How do you know the Bible?” I asked Basima. “Do you own a copy?”

“No,” she replied, “I just read it on the Internet. But I can see that it’s not corrupted like other Muslims say!” At that moment, Fatima returned with glasses of tea and insisted we change the subject.

Later, as I left Fatima’s apartment, I determined to find a way to encourage Basima, away from hostile ears. That opportunity soon presented itself. Basima had given me some dates and the local custom dictated that I personally return the container filled with a gift-in-kind. When I brought it to her home, Basima laid an iron grip on my wrist and pulled me inside. “Can I see your copy of the Bible?” she immediately asked. We agreed that she would visit me so I could share it with her.

When she came two days later, we talked about Jesus for several hours. All she knew about Jesus was what she had been taught to believe as a Muslim—that God took Him to heaven without dying. She knew nothing about His death and resurrection.

“Jesus came to die for our sins,” I explained. I shared John 10:18 with her:

“No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

“Did Jesus really say that?” Basima asked. “The Qur’an says that He didn’t die, but that God put Judas on the cross in His place.”

“That is a major difference between our two books,” I said. “But Jesus had to die to pay for our sins, because ‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins’”(Hebrews 9:22b).

“The Bible really says that?” Basima asked again.

“Yes, and it says much more.” I asked for her phone, and with a few keystrokes, I had the first page of Luke in Arabic on Basima’s screen. “This is the story of the life of Jesus,” I said to her. “Here you can read all about Him.”

“I have wanted to read this for so long,” Basima breathed. “I love Jesus!”

She paused and then added, “When I read this, I may start following Jesus!” She held her phone close to her heart, as if it were her most prized treasure.

- Pray that Basima would continue to be drawn to Jesus Christ and become His disciple.
- As we celebrate Christmas, pray that Muslim men and women would come to love Christmas and the birth of the Saviour of the world.
- All around the world, there are Muslims wondering about the Saviour. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers into these ripening fields.

Friday 21st December

A First Christmas for Many

There’s a knock on the old wooden door of the kitchen. It’s Auntie Aisha, hugging a bundle of blanket-wrapped flatbread fresh out the oven. Her entrance brings simultaneous gusts of warm greetings and cold morning air rushing off the dunes on the edge of town.

“Sabah al-khair—good morning,” Aisha says as she closes the door and places the bread on the counter. “The winter winds are so strong today. How are you doing with this cold?”



“Good morning, we are well,” replies Mariam as she fills several small glasses with hot, sweet tea. “This tea will warm the stomach, but I thank God for His bread that satisfies the soul!”

Fariq, Mariam’s tall teenage son, strides into the kitchen. “Auntie Aisha, we’re all waiting for you!” he exclaims. He wraps his arms around her and gives her a friendly kiss on the forehead. Seeing the bundle of bread, Fariq picks it up and cradles it like a newborn. “Is it time to feast yet?” he

asks.

“Not yet, but go on and take it to the living room,” says Mariam, playfully pushing her son out of the kitchen with the bread.

He saunters out singing loudly. Mariam and Aisha hear the voices of several others, both men and women, young and old joining his song from the living room. Someone begins tapping a rhythm on a small drum while others clap. It’s a joyous sound that seems to drive out every trace of cold winter air.

This may seem like a typical morning for a typical Muslim family.

But Aisha, Mariam, Fariq and their family are actually quite unusual. They represent the first known followers of Christ in their vast, arid region. And on this winter morning, they gather to read the Word, pray together and celebrate their new life in Jesus. They'll also break bread in remembrance of the One who died in their place and satisfies them with the hope of eternal life.

For the men and women singing in Mariam's living room, every day is like Christmas, full of joy and faith in Jesus Christ, who took on human form to show us the way and set us free from sin.

This family has also discovered the joy of offering this hope of eternal life to others. Thanks to training and coaching from a Frontiers team, they've been sharing the Word with men and women from several Muslim families. Some new believers have even been baptised.

This year, we rejoice that men and women from Muslim communities around the world have embraced Jesus and started following Him. Let's celebrate this Christmas, knowing that men, women and children in the Muslim world are joining us in honouring Christ, the Saviour of all.

- Let's pray that this will be a first Christmas for many Muslims as they discover the true meaning of the celebration of Christmas.

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." Gal 4:4-5

- The night He was born, all our hopes and all our fears were met perfectly in Jesus, the One who is worthy of all our praise. Because of Christ, we have an unfading hope and an abiding peace. Let's lift up those who are perishing in the Muslim world that any fear would be dispelled as they place their hope in Jesus, the One who was born, died and rose again that they might have peace on earth.

Saturday 22nd December

The Raw Reality of Christmas

I stood in front of a crowd of several dozen refugees. They looked at me, a foreigner with a thick American accent, and patiently smiled. These refugees represented several nationalities, most of them coming from neighbouring war-torn countries.

The staff and students at the training centre where I volunteer once a week are predominately Muslim. They don't celebrate Christmas. Still, they had wanted to have a Christmas party. It was an excuse to celebrate, because for them any joyous event is a welcome release from the burdens of refugee life.

Streamers, balloons and lights all decorated the room, and 'Happy Christmas' was written in large letters on the blackboard. I clenched my notebook and opened to a page with the outline of



my speech in English and all the Arabic words I was prone to forget. Butterflies fluttered about in my stomach. I wanted to tell the Christmas story. So in simple Arabic, I started with the angel's visit to Mary and worked my way through the wondrous account of Jesus' birth.

The students were all quiet, listening, perhaps more out of the novelty of hearing a blond-haired foreigner speak the local dialect of Arabic. But they listened.

"The angel came to Joseph and said, 'Get up! Go with Mary and baby Jesus and flee to Egypt.' So they scrambled, fleeing the impending carnage, and came to Egypt."

I paused, and then said to them, "Jesus, too, was a refugee." Tears burned in my eyes. There was a collective sigh from this beautiful group of refugees as they pondered that reality.

Meanwhile, I was undone in a way I had never been with that portion of the story.

Jesus' humble transition from Heaven to earth not only started with lowly beginnings. It continued as He and His family joined the wave of refugees en route to Egypt.

Jesus walked these dusty paths. He was hungry and thirsty. He ached and spent nights without shelter. He cried sometimes. He too, was a refugee.

Jesus personally knows what life is like for someone fleeing violence and war. He endured this for them, so that they could say, "He really does understand suffering as I understand it." The Saviour endured this so that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Him.

Looking across the room, I could see Jesus in the rapt faces before me. *"Truly, I say to you," says the Son of Man in His glory, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me"* (Matthew 25:40).

In this moment, marveling with a roomful of refugees over the miracle of Heaven's Refugee, Christmas became more raw, real and beautiful than ever before.

- Today there are millions of refugees in the Muslim world. How amazing it would be for each of them to know the miracle of Heaven's refugee. Let's pray that they would understand that Jesus knows how they feel and how they suffer and that He cares for each one of them personally.
- Today, social media allow so many to hear the good news and read the Bible. Let's ask God to lead many Muslims to hear or read the Christmas story.

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel." Isa 7:14