

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

The birth of the new

It's a question that lies at the heart of our humanity: is real change possible? The Christmas story provides an emphatic answer, writes Gideon Heugh.

After a year like 2020, when the world has faced so many challenges, setbacks and disappointments, answering this question becomes less straightforward. It's easy for a little cynicism to creep in: maybe this is just the way things are?

Waiting for generations

The people of Israel had waited centuries for their Messiah. After the rule of David, they'd seen their kingdom broken in two – then came the Assyrian invasion. Then the destruction of the temple and exile. Then the Greeks invaded. And then the Romans. Every time that God's people seemed to break free, they were oppressed once more.

And still, the words of the prophets echoed through time. Maybe they were whispered around campfires late at night. *Something new will be born.* How many still believed? How many had given up? How many were saying 'maybe this is just the way things are'?

Mary would have known her people's history. She would have known that she belonged to a nation who had suffered, and who had waited endlessly for salvation. It's hard to imagine the shock she must have felt when she was told. The incredulity. The awe. And then the unbridled, overflowing joy.

A declaration of hope

The birth of Christ was an irrefutable declaration of hope. Christmas proclaims that no matter how dark the night, strange stars can appear in the sky; that no matter how hopeless the situation might seem, something new can be born.

We hold to this truth fiercely at Tearfund. Because one of the first things that poverty can take away is the belief that things can change. Communities begin to doubt their ability to make a difference. And so part of our work is to help people rediscover that – even when hope seems lost – something new can come to life in their lives.

Let us declare that over ourselves this Christmas. Let us declare it over the world. Let us declare it over 2021: that something new will be born.

A Christmas prayer

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,
 We declare your name over our lives.
 We declare your light over this world.
 We declare your hope over this coming year.
 Amen.

A note from...

'Thank you for praying for Tearfund this year. We know that prayer changes situations, and your support is creating lasting impact. We look forward to sharing more stories of hope with you next year. In the meantime, we wish you a restful Christmas.'

Pippa Durn, Brand and Communications Team

Beating hunger in Afghanistan

Salima did everything she could to care for her two young children, but they were getting sicker. The nearest hospital was miles away, and she couldn't afford transport costs. It was all looking bleak, until help showed up.

Salima* lives in a remote village in Afghanistan's central highlands. It's at least an hour-long drive on a dusty mountain road to reach the nearest hospital. And it's a journey that families like Salima's cannot afford to make.

'I knew they were sick because they were very skinny and weren't eating a lot,' says Salima. 'I tried to give them food when I could, but we didn't have a car to bring them to the doctor. I didn't know what was wrong.' It's a parent's worst nightmare.

A dangerous sickness

Tearfund's local partners travel to isolated communities like Salima's. They come alongside the local villagers and teach them about nutrition and hygiene – important life skills that are saving lives.

When our partner met Salima, they were able to diagnose both of her children's illnesses. They were suffering from malnutrition. Afghanistan has one of the world's highest rates of stunting in children: 41 per cent. This is where children have a low height for their age, usually caused by malnutrition.

'When your people came, they explained that this really is a dangerous sickness,' says Salima. 'They gave me advice on what to feed them and how much to feed them... they gave me some ingredients like [protein enriched] super-flour... They told me to give the [children] milk, eggs, and greens sometimes. We don't normally do that for our children, so I started learning.'

A brighter future

The team continued to check up on Salima's two children whenever they visited the community. The oldest daughter got big and strong very quickly and though Salima's baby girl's progress was very slow at first, both children are now so much healthier.

Salima often thinks about what would have happened if our partner hadn't shown up: 'I think probably my children would have got pneumonia... They would have had diarrhoea and vomiting.'

Thankfully, Salima's children got the help they needed in time. Salima has also been a part of another course run by the partner – learning things like how to cook nutritious food and the importance of handwashing and clean latrines, meaning the family are less likely to fall sick again. All of this means that the family can look forward to a brighter future together.

Please pray

Creator God,
 Hear our cries for people who are hungry,
 Those with empty bellies and where hope has dried up.
 Bring your provision, Lord – let no one go without.
 Bring your comfort, Lord – let no one feel alone.
 Bring your peace, Lord – let no one feel afraid.
 Bring your light, Lord – let no one be left behind.
 Amen.

**Name changed to protect identity*

A second chance at education in Chad

Growing up in Chad, Katari always felt like an outsider when he was around his friends who could read and write. Katari's parents couldn't afford to send him to school, so they trained him in practical skills such as hunting and farming. But Katari longed to sit at a desk and learn.

His insecurities only grew as he got older. As an adult, Katari felt ashamed having to ask others for help with everyday tasks. He was frustrated that he couldn't write to family members living miles away, or simply read the newspaper.

A miracle

By the time Katari reached his late thirties, he had almost given up on the idea of ever learning to read and write. But when one of Tearfund's local partners set up a literacy centre in the area, he saw a glimmer of hope. Katari was one of the first to sign up for an adult literacy course at the centre.

Before long, his lifelong dream was coming true. 'Today, I can write, read and calculate in the Guley language,' says Katari, who has now been attending the literacy centre for three years. 'I am amazed! For me, it is truly the miracle of God!'

An opportunity

There are many more people like Katari, waiting for a second chance at education. In Chad alone, over half of the adult population are illiterate. Literacy centres, such as the one run by our local partner, are offering valuable opportunities for people to get the education that they missed out on in childhood.

This has been life changing for Katari. He is now brimming with confidence, and finds that life is full of possibilities instead of frustrations. He has also become passionate about encouraging other adults to join the literacy courses. When more adults learn to read and write, they can also pass these skills on to the next generation even if they cannot afford to send their children to school.

'I am raising awareness among my illiterate brothers and sisters who are still hesitant to understand that this second chance is within their reach,' says Katari. 'They can grab the opportunity. If they enrol in the literacy class, they will come out in this very happy state – like me.'

Please pray

- Thank God that Katari was finally able to learn to read and write. Pray that many more adults in Chad will have the opportunity to join literacy classes and be empowered through education.
- Please pray for children who are unable to attend school. Pray that the barriers which are preventing them from receiving an education will be removed.
- Schools in Chad are currently under extreme pressure due to a lack of resources and overcrowding. Pray for Chad's education system, its teachers, and those who are trying to develop it to meet the needs of its growing school-age population.

Pray for the world

 According to reports, deforestation of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil has reached its highest level since 2008. Pray for leaders in Brazil to protect the Amazon for future generations. Lift up indigenous communities who are suffering because of the deforestation; ask God for justice for them and that their voice will be heard by those in power.

 At last Saturday's Climate Ambition Summit, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that the UK will become the first major economy to end direct public funding for oil and gas projects overseas. Give thanks for this bold new commitment to tackle the climate crisis, which comes after years of prayer and campaigning.

 South Sudan is facing the worst flooding in living memory. Our main feeding centre – a lifeline for people suffering from malnutrition – is now underwater. We have opened a provisional feeding centre and are providing clean toilets for people living in the temporary camps. Lift up those affected and pray for provision and protection. Pray that the flooding eases soon.