

Civil War Forcing Syrian Christians to Forgo Traditional Christmas

“Silent night, Holy night, all is calm, all is bright...”

Many Christians all over the world will sing this Christmas carol in the next few days. Millions look forward to Christmas. What about the Syrian Christians in the midst of a terrible civil war? Will they have the “heavenly peace” this Christmas classic speaks about?

Christmas in Syria will be different for Christians this year. There will be few decorations and no big celebrations. Christians don’t want to attract a lot of attention with their Christmas decorations, fearing that Christmas trees might make them a target for extremists. And, of course, the civil war itself isn’t a good setting for big celebrations.

“We will use the Christmas time to visit the families that have been going through pain and suffering,” a pastor in Damascus says. “Christians will come together in the churches of the capital to have their Christmas services, but no decorations and nothing big,” he says. “The whole city is mourning the loss of their people, family and friends this year, so people will not really celebrate.”

His church will focus on visits to refugee families to bring encouragement and comfort. The congregation in the capital will do “something small” for the children, but there will be no big celebration. “We will be just serving others. We will focus on getting together for prayer,” the pastor states.

A church leader from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo explains that their Christmas celebrations will be very somber, too.

“We are not celebrating Christmas like before,” he says. “We will have services in church and invite church people to come and bring their friends. The focus will be on children more than anyone else because they need to feel some joy.”

Open Doors has heard the same reports from the cities of Latakia and Bloudan: “It will not be like the years before. We will celebrate and have services, but it will be limited. We will have a small program and prayer time,” a pastor from Latakia says.

Over the past two years the civil war between President Bashar al-Assad’s forces and the Free Syrian Army has resulted in approximately 40,000 deaths, mostly civilians, according to several reports. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled the country into Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, according to the United Nations. In addition, about 2.5 million Syrians need aid inside the country, with more than 1.2 million displaced domestically.

Syrian Christians ask prayers for:

- Safety and strength of Christians who have chosen to remain in Syria. That God would not only protect them, but would provide them with His never-failing strength this Christmas.
- Christians will be able to meet during Christmas and Jesus will comfort and strengthen them.
- Believers will continue to share their relief packages and the gospel with their Muslim neighbors.