

All Age Talk Idea

Christian Aid Christmas Appeal 2024

Background

South Sudan, by many measures, is the very poorest country in the world, ranking joint lowest in the Human Development Index (World Bank). One in ten children will die before their fifth birthday, and only 1% of secondary aged children are enrolled in school. For most people, simply meeting their basic daily needs is a challenge.

Around 90% of the population rely on traditional farming for their income, although conflict and extreme weather events are making it increasingly difficult to cultivate and harvest crops. Only 10% of the population have access to sanitation. Clean drinking water is often limited in rural communities, who instead rely on boreholes. In flood season, the lack of clean water and sanitation means deadly waterborne diseases such as cholera become prevalent.

The climate across most of South Sudan is divided into a long, hot dry season and a short, humid wet season. But the climate crisis is intensifying these seasons, with extreme heat in the dry season causing droughts, and heavier rains in the wet season causing flooding. The country is ranked globally as the second most vulnerable country to natural hazards according to the 2023 INFORM Risk Index. An estimated 95% of the population depend on livelihoods, such as farming, that are threatened by changes in climate. As harvests fail and land for grazing livestock diminishes, the competition for remaining resources leads to conflict.

These painful challenges are deepening extreme poverty, and food insecurity is widespread in South Sudan.



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Introduction

This all-age talk is designed to encourage those participating to consider the impact of sudden displacement on families like theirs. It draws connections between Mary and Joseph's escape into Egypt (Matthew 2), because of Herod's edict to kill all boys aged under 2 years old, and the experience of Shede, a mother and grandmother from Sudan, who had to flee her home and country as a result of civil conflict that threatened hers and her family's lives.

Reading: Matthew 2:13-15 (NIV)

The Escape to Egypt

¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Preparation

Set up seating in groups around small tables. Have images of everyday objects found in a home (mobile phone, furniture, handbag, tv, kettle, car keys etc), blank paper and pens on each of the tables.

Discussion Activity

What makes you feel comfortable in your home and in your community? How do these things make you feel safe and secure?

Using the pictures on the tables, build up a collage of items that make your everyday life possible. If your group comes up with ideas that aren't shown in the pictures, you can use the blank paper and pens to write down the name of the items or draw them.

Practical Activity

You have to leave your home – IMMEDIATELY! You may not ever be able to come back and I can't tell you where you are going and for how long. You only have three minutes to pack your bags and get out of your home – what will you bring and what will you leave behind?

Set a timer for three minutes and invite each group to consider the following:

From the pictures in front of you, what items will you take and why?

What will you have to leave behind?

Invite feedback from each group and have them explain their choices and if there was any disagreement in the group about what they should bring and what they had to leave behind.

Discussion Activity

What other considerations do you as a group think that you would need to make as you leave your home and your community?

You could use the following as prompts if the group is unsure of how to proceed:

- The need to have a common language
- Medical requirements
- Family and friends nearby
- Finding or buying food, water, shelter
- Having the correct currency
- Having transferrable skills in order to gain employment

How has this activity made you feel as an individual and as a member of your group?

Unpacking Together

This is the frightening reality for a staggering 120 million people in the world. In South Sudan, over one-third of the population are displaced. When war broke out in neighbouring Sudan in April 2023, a wave of refugees and returnees entered South Sudan in search of safety, creating an additional urgent humanitarian crisis.

Shede is from the city of El-Daein in Darfur, Sudan. She's married with three daughters. The youngest, Saida, is six years old. Her eldest daughter also has a six year-old daughter, Mariem. Before the war, Shede worked in a restaurant and enjoyed tending her organic farm. But on 15 April 2023, everything changed. As conflict tore through Sudan, Shede's family was torn apart. Shede's brothers were killed, and she made the courageous decision to travel to South Sudan to protect the lives of her children and grandchild. Her husband stayed behind, but with no means to contact him, they haven't spoken since.

Shede explains, "I did not come with anything. I only came with these clothes on. The rest of my belongings were all left behind. No table, no teapot, no chair, no bed. Nothing. I left all my belongings behind."

On arrival at Wedweil Refugee Settlement, Shede's older daughters took the difficult decision to make a further onward journey, setting off to look for work to support the family. They couldn't take Mariem with them, so now Shede lives with the two little girls in a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) shelter.

Christian Aid works in the settlement with their partner, Smile Again Africa Development Organisation (SAADO), to offer financial support to Shede and thousands like her. This support provides a vital lifeline to the family. Although the UN World food programme provides basic rations, our financial assistance means Shede can buy nutritious food for Saida and Mariem to protect them from malnutrition and ill health.

"When they give us support, we appreciate it. This money will help me so much." Shede

Shede, who once grew her own produce, must now carefully balance her food and cash rations, deciding how much to spend on their immediate needs and how much to save to replace their lost belongings.



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Our church's Christmas gift can help people seeking refuge to buy nutritious meals, medicine, blankets, and other essential supplies. Our support can help a family like Shede's to find some comfort and joy during upheaval, uncertainty and conflict.

As Shede looks to the future, she wants to save up to buy cooking pots and utensils. Remembering her former life in Sudan, and her work in the restaurant, Shede knows preparing food will be a means for her to earn a living. If Shede can secure these items, she'll slowly but surely build a brighter future for her and her girls.

Response

As we reflect on Mary, Joseph and Jesus' desperate escape to Egypt, share in Shede's own story of displacement and consider how our lives are free from such dreadful and sudden upheaval, may we respond in compassion and solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world.

We can give to support the work of Christian Aid's partners in South Sudan and beyond:

£5 could purchase the shovel that means someone can establish a vital veg plot.

£8 could buy the 4kg bag of corn that means a family can prepare several filling meals.

£10 could pay for the watering can that means a family can nurture a nutritious crop.

We can act as a church by:

- Campaigning for climate justice,
- Welcoming refugees into your community and living out the radical hospitality Christ embodies. (share local examples)

We can pray together for those displaced by conflict, climate and poverty. So let's pray together now.

God of peace-making, peace-building, peace-restoring. As we remember those for whom peace is a far-off memory, whose daily bread is conflict, uncertainty and fear, grant that we who have safe beds and secure homes would also have the courage not just to speak peace but to keep peace and to build peace, wherever we are. God of peace, strengthen our hearts to act in service of those living through violence and conflict. Amen





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