

A WAR WIDOW'S WATCH FOR A MIRACLE



Aziza stared down into the pot of leaves and roots she'd been cooking over the fire. "Has it really come to this?" she asked herself, as she had done every other night that week. "Am I really serving my children boiled leaves for dinner?"

She barely noticed the gnawing in her own stomach as a wave of grief and anger washed over her heart. "I wish that artillery shell had killed me instead of Farid," she whispered. "It would have been better for the children. At least then they would have a decent meal."

Aziza's husband Farid had been killed by a stray artillery shell in 2021 while he was making his way home from work. Since then, she had struggled to provide for her two sons and two daughters and most recently, the 35-year-old widow had resorted to scavenging wild plants from

the mountainsides. She knew the stews that she made from what she collected were hardly nourishing, but she had nothing left to sell to buy beans or eggs or produce from the market.

"There are goats who eat better than my children," she thought as she spooned the contents of her pot into a dish.

Aziza did not need to call her children for dinner. They were already gathered in a circle in the center of the room where they ate as she entered, and their hungry eyes fixed hopefully on the dish in her hands. "It's the same thing we had yesterday," she whispered.

Aziza closed her eyes as she set the dish on the floor and joined her children and said, "Bismillah."¹ Ever since

she'd started serving her children wild plants, she'd begun closing her eyes when she invoked the name of God over their meals—hoping that the God her society called the Merciful and the Compassionate might work some miracle upon the contents of the dish. However, no such miracle was forthcoming and her children were staring dully at the steaming concoction she'd set before them when she opened her eyes. “Eat,” she said. “At least it's hot.”

Aziza couldn't remember how long she had been scavenging in the mountains to feed her children on the day a miracle finally did knock on her door. She stared at the man from the village who brought a basic food basket to her home as though he had materialized out of thin air. The mercy and compassion in his eyes reassured her that he was not there to take advantage of her situation. Moreover, he began delivering the precious baskets every other month, and today, it still feels like a new miracle to Aziza each time he knocks on her door. The basket's contents are not enough to last her household of five for two months, so sometimes Aziza's children still go hungry in between deliveries. However, the food security that the baskets do provide have allowed Aziza to enroll her children in school. And on the nights they do go to bed with empty stomachs, they wake the next morning with hearts full of hope that any day now the kind man from the village will be knocking on their door again with another miracle.

According to Oxfam, one-third of the Yemeni population is now facing extreme hunger while 2.2 million Yemeni children under the age of five need treatment for acute malnutrition—a child malnutrition rate among the highest in the world. Furthermore, the humanitarian

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1 An Arabic phrase meaning “in the Name of God,” spoken by Muslims before eating a meal or starting any activity.

2 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/extreme-hunger-rise-yemen-one-year-end-ceasefire>

3 The Houthis are a Yemeni militia group that took over Yemen's capital, Sana'a, in late 2014—driving Yemen's Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) to the southern city of Aden. When the Houthis tried to enter Aden in March of 2015, a Saudi-Led Coalition of ten nations intervened seeking to restore the IRG to power and Yemen has been at war ever since.

4 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/5/wfp-suspends-food-distribution-in-houthi-controlled-areas-of-yemen>

5 Luke 1:51-53

effort in Yemen is severely underfunded.² On December 5, the World Food Program (WFP) announced it would suspend food distributions in Houthi-controlled areas of northern Yemen—where 70 to 80 percent of the population lives—due to a dip in funding and disagreements with the Houthis³ over how to prioritize the most vulnerable. The WFP said its decision followed consultations with donors and more than a year of negotiations with the Houthis in which they failed to reach an agreement on reducing the number of Yemenis targeted for aid from 9.5 million to 6.5 million.⁴ Meanwhile, according to the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, by November 15 shelling had caused at least 411 civilian casualties across Yemen in 2023—creating more war widows like Aziza across the country. In 2024, households headed by widows and other vulnerable Yemenis on the brink of famine are likely to sink into starvation if they are not reached with assistance.

Over two thousand years ago, a young Jew from Nazareth carried within her womb a Savior who would proclaim Good News to the oppressed and downtrodden of the world. Luke tells us that in her expectant joy, she sang:

He has shown strength with His arm;

He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the
rich away empty.⁵*

Today, lowly and hungry households like Aziza's in conflict-affected communities around the world wait for news of a Savior who was born into solidarity with the poor and powerless. They wait for news of a Savior who called His followers to love their enemies—a Savior who rebuked one of his followers for seeking to defend Him with a sword, and then healed the ear of a man who had come with those who would condemn Him to the cross for His message of peace and reconciliation. As we enter 2024, we invite you to remember hungry mothers like Aziza and their children who have been born into the rubble of war and pray that the new year will bring both spiritual and political peace and reconciliation to their lands.