Meet Mary and Joseph: Maternity Worldwide launches its Christmas 2019 Appeal

Sunday 3 November, 2019

Media:












After a long, hazardous journey over rough terrain, a young mother relies on the kindness of strangers to reach a safe place to deliver her baby. It's a familiar story being enacted in Nativity plays across the UK but for Mary and Joseph Chimwanza in modern-day Malawi, it was their family's reality. Maternity Worldwide are asking people to donate just £27 to their Christmas 2019 Appeal, less than 1% of what a typical UK family will spend in the run-up to the festive season.

When her labour pains started at midnight, Mary Chimwanza had to travel by bicycle rather than on a donkey, but she still faced dangers and harsh weather. Not to mention 'three wise men' although these turned out to be members of a Maternity Worldwide sponsored Participatory Learning Action group rather than Magi.

In Mary's own words:

'On our way to hospital, we met some people who were coming from the beer hole. We become scared and because of my condition, we decided to face them and explained our story - that we were rushing to the hospital for delivery. The men then decided that to escort us to the health centre. Later in our discussions with the men, we discovered that two of them belonged to the Participatory Learning Action (PLA) group in our village.'

'My condition become worse when it started to rain and it was cold. One of the men who joined us had a raincoat which he gave me and we had to seek shelter in the nearby village until the rain became less heavy. When the rain stopped, we continued our journey to the hospital where we were assisted quickly and it did not take long before I delivered our baby, Earnest.'

In low-income countries, it is still too easy to draw parallels with the Christmas story. At the time of the Nativity, only the very rich sought medical help in childbirth and today in sub-Saharan Africa roughly 50% of mothers give birth without the help of a midwife. Many women still have to travel unacceptable distances on foot in the last stages of pregnancy or are carried over rough roads while in labour. In the Bible, Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable with no electricity or clean running water and many clinics today still lack even basic facilities.

Maternity Worldwide is a charity dedicated to saving lives in childbirth by helping women and girls in low-income countries access the high-quality maternal health care they need to be able to give birth safely.

We train and employ local midwives so medical intervention during childbirth is available for a woman when she needs it. Our projects aim to give access to better local healthcare facilities so no woman has to face a painful journey during labour, and we work to provide well-equipped, clean environments where skilled staff can to deliver a baby safely.

Actress Emily Watson (Chernobyl, Apple Tree Yard) presented Maternity Worldwide as her chosen charity on the BBC Radio 4 Appeal in 2018 and is supporting the charity again this Christmas. She says:

'To me, Christmas means catching up with family and making time to enjoy each other's company. Too many children in low-income countries will be without their mother this Christmas because of needless deaths in childbirth and the inability to access the standard of medical care we take for granted in the UK. Since 2002, Maternity Worldwide has been working to ensure that every woman, regardless of where she lives, can give birth safely and without fear. I would like to encourage you to donate to the Maternity Worldwide Christmas appeal, and help them continue to save lives in childbirth.'

Maternity Worldwide Chair, Dr Adrian Brown says:

'Whenever a baby is born, it should be a joyful celebration of new life but in low-income countries, a woman's likelihood of dying in childbirth today is still as high as one in 45 (in the the UK, it's only one in 5,400). Maternity Worldwide is asking you to support our work and help bring down these odds by giving just £27 to our Christmas 2019 Appeal.'

You can help families like our modern-day Mary and Joseph and their baby Earnest by donating just £27 to Maternity Worldwide's Christmas 2019 Appeal. A donation of any amount will make a huge different but £27 is less than 1% of the amount a typical household in the UK spends in the run-up to Christmas.

£27 could provide a safe birth for a mother at a health centre and follow-up care such as a preventative course of antibiotics. Or £27 could sponsor the training of a student midwife for a week. Or £27 could contribute towards the cost of a caesarean delivery for women experiencing difficulties or could help towards covering the cost of a bicycle so healthcare workers can reach mothers in remote villages.

[ENDS]

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Please encourage donations to our Christmas 2019 Appeal via the dedicated JustGiving page:

• https://justgiving.com/campaig...

Maternity Worldwide is a charity saving lives in childbirth in low-income countries by training midwives and skilled birth attendants, improving access to health centres and hospitals, providing communities with maternal and newborn health information and empowering women to become financially independent and decision makers about their own sexual and reproductive health. We have a vision of a world where every woman, wherever she lives, can give birth safely and without fear.

Our mission is to work with communities and our partners to:

• identify and develop appropriate and effective ways to reduce maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity

• facilitate communities to access high-quality, skilled maternity care

• support the provision of high-quality skilled care

Maternity Worldwide is a registered charity no. 1111504 and our registered address is Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton BN1 3XG.

For further details or if you have any questions, please email info@maternityworldwide.org (this box is monitored regularly throughout the day) or visit our website: www.maternityworldwide.org.

Additional resources for journalists are available in our online press area:

• https://www.maternityworldwide...









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