

## Marked Christians



Recently you might have seen this image in the media. It is being used on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram by a number of Christians. It's the letter "N" in Arabic. Right now there is a lot of conflict in Iraq. ISIS, which is short for the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* are a jihadist group, although they now go by the name IS, *Islamic State*.

This jihadist group is following a specific teaching within the religion of Islam that leverage some particularly violent tactics to dealing with infidels, people like you and me. What's going on in Iraq right now is both sad and bloody. IS has told Christians in recent weeks to get out of the town of Mosul in Iraq or convert to Islam. If they didn't, they would die. The "N" above is used for the word "Nasrani" (Nazarene) which refers to Christians. IS is using this to mark the doors of Christian homes. You can guess as to why.

Our Christian brothers and sisters in Mosul and throughout the world need our prayers. They are being persecuted for confessing Christ, for clinging to the Cross and the gifts which He, the very Son of God delivers to you. Christians are being marked by their enemies with this Arabic letter, but the reality of the situation is that these terrorists are too late. As ones redeemed by Christ, these Christians in Mosul, like you and I, have already been marked. It is not a visible stamp on our front door, but instead it is a sacred stamp upon the forehead and the heart. It's a stamp that was sealed at the blessed font in the waters of Holy

Baptism. A stamp placed upon you when a lowly "infidel" made the mark of the Cross and baptised you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What's more is this Arabic N intends to mark Christians for death, but you can't kill the dead! In Christ your old man has already died, he has been drowned in those waters with that sacred stamp. Out of that death comes life, a life which cannot be taken away from you. A life given to you by the worst of the Nasrani, the Son of God, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. A life delivered to you in Holy Baptism and given over and again at the altar in His body and blood. There is no mark that can be placed upon you because you are already marked. There is no death which can conquer the death that Christ died for you. That is the hope of our brothers and sisters who suffer and flee.

What's going on right now in Iraq is sad and scary. There is no doubt about that. But in Christ there is hope. There is the certainty that no death can overcome Jesus. And like the saints who suffered for the Gospel in days of old, the saints in Mosul shall bear witness to Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. With all the host of heaven we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, that they may be spared the hand of their oppressor and that through their suffering they may be comforted by the greatest of Comforters and His very precious body and blood.

*Lord Jesus Christ, before whom all in heaven and earth shall bow, grant courage that our brothers and sisters in Iraq may confess Your saving name in the face of any opposition from a world hostile to the Gospel. Help them to remember the long line of Your faithful witnesses who endured persecution and even faced death rather than dishonour You. By Your Spirit strengthen them to confess You before all, knowing that You will confess them before Your Father in heaven; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for persecuted Christians)*