

Balkh and Mazari Sharif

Cities in northern Afghanistan

Balkh province in northern Afghanistan has a population of 1.6 million. In the center of Mazari, the provincial capital, one can visit the famous Blue Mosque (Rawze-e-Sharif) that was built in the 14th century based on a dream that Ali bin Talib, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Mohammed, is actually buried here. (The vast majority of Muslims believe that he is buried in Najaf in Iraq). The city has become an important pilgrimage site for Shiite (Shi'a)



Afghans and also for many Sunni pilgrims.

Between May and July 1997 the Taliban unsuccessfully tried to take Mazari, and approximately 2,500 Taliban soldiers were massacred. In retaliation, the Taliban returned in August 1998, prompting a six-day killing frenzy of Hazaras and other local people before the city was occupied by the Taliban. Today Mazari Sharif is seeing the arrival of new streets, supermarkets and internet cafes. However, there are still only a very small numbers of Christians.

Only 20 minutes to the west of Mazari lies the famous town of Balkh. This city was part of the Persian Empire and was conquered by Alexander the Great. Later it became a center for Buddhism and finally the Arabs took control in the 8th century. In 1221 it was destroyed by Genghis Khan and lay in ruins until the beginning of the 16th century. From its former glory Balkh retains only its citadel and a few other ruins. The new city, called Wazirabad, has a population consisting mostly of ethnic Uzbeks. In Balkh today there is no known Christian witness.



Also pray for ...

► *The political and military situation in Afghanistan remains very unstable. National and local leaders need courage, diligence and wisdom to know how to govern well in the present circumstances.*

PRAYER REQUESTS

- *Pray that pilgrims to the Blue Mosque who are seeking freedom, healing and wisdom would meet Jesus personally.*
- *Pray for the people of Mazari Sharif, especially the Hazara, who continue to live with the consequences of the trauma of the late 1990s. May they find life in Christ who alone can bring inner peace and the ability to forgive.*
- *Pray for the few believers in the area to open doors for influence and witness. Pray especially that the city of Balkh (today Wazirabad) will have a Christian witness.*