



« But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son... » Gal. 4 :4 (NRSV)

19 December 2008
Dakar, Senegal

Dear Friends and colleagues,

This afternoon I was driving back to Dakar from Yeumbeul, where we have been doing training for the new adolescent health peer educators. One of my passengers was Aliou, a programme supervisor. " You know, Wyva," he said, "I did most of my primary and secondary education at a Catholic school. I still know large portions of the Catechism by heart - in fact, I was at the top of my Catechism class. In those Catechism classes I studied so much of the Bible, and many of the passages come back to me in my daily life." Aliou is Muslim, and he and I have talked about faith many times. Our CRWRC Senegal team prays for him regularly. We are certain that when the fullness of time has come for Aliou, God will send the Spirit of his Son into his life in a way that will bring him to be able to cry "Abba, Father."

I am struck by the long periods of time that Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna referred to in their songs and prophecies. They were aware of God's promises handed down to them through generations of forbearers. More than a thousand years' worth of generations passed on those promises, even through the time when it seemed that the word of the Lord was no longer being heard in the land. Did Zechariah and Elizabeth think of Abraham and Sarah, who also waited until old age before having a child? Did that give them fortitude to go through this very unusual pregnancy? How was it that Mary, a young woman no older than the girls in our adolescent health groups, was so aware of the age-old promises of justice? Not only was she aware, but she was so firmly certain that those promises would be fulfilled that she expressed confidence and trust rather than the incredulity that could be expected from someone with so few years of life experience. Did the meaning of that song take on depth as the next 33 years unfolded?

During this Advent season, I look in Revelations to read once again the final promise of that book: "Surely I am coming soon." (Rev. 22:20) This promise is as fresh as the promise of justice about which Mary sang so confidently. Since the time when John wrote down that promise, about 2000 years have gone by. Each Advent, each Christmas, we remember with special poignancy this promise which has been and is being fulfilled in our everyday lives, and also is going to be fulfilled in the "fullness of time." No wonder this is a season of great gladness!

My Muslim friends and neighbours celebrate Christmas as a time of special happiness. Though they do not understand who Jesus is, they do know about Him and celebrate His birth. This Christmas, please pray with me that we all will celebrate together His coming again, in the fullness of time.

Merry Christmas!
Wyva



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