



# Merry Christmas December, 2008

*We want to wish you  
God's richest blessing  
as you celebrate the  
birth of our Savior  
and Lord.*

*- Esther and John*

*Do not be afraid. I bring you  
good news of great joy.*  
*- Luke 2:10*

**Canada:**  
CRWRC  
3475 Mainway  
PO Box 5070 STN LCD1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

**USA:**  
CRWRC  
2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

**Email:**  
Ngusha7@gmail.com

### *Prayer Request:*

Pray especially for our children and grandchildren as we leave them here in North America. Although we are excited to return to our work, we will miss our children and grandchildren very much.



**Esther and John Orkar**  
Jos, Nigeria

### *'Tis the Season!*

Once again, Christmas is around the corner. We are here in Grand Rapids, Michigan. When we go for a walk in the mall we can hear the traditional Christmas carol: "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way..." and others on the sound system.

### *A Christmas Celebration in Mbaagi*

Schools were closed for a break. In Nigeria we have never had a white Christmas. In contrast, by December most of the grass is dead. But you may find a few of flowers—many beautiful varieties of both cultivated and wild flowers—beaming in their full pride.

Some homes were decorated with palm branches. In a city not far away from Mbaagi, I saw a few small artificial Christmas trees and Christmas lights. I have never seen stockings for presents from Father Christmas or Santa Claus. In Mbaagi, people started preparing for Christmas very early: at least two months before the date. By Christmas, many people who work far away in major cities have returned home.

#### **Christmas Eve Worship**

The actual celebration started on Christmas Eve. At about 8 PM, we gathered at the worship place. Many people showed up. There were several passages in the Bible that were acted out. Hymns were sung and Nativity plays were presented. Then the story of the birth of Christ was presented. Since

Several people have asked how we celebrate Christmas in Nigeria. In general, celebrations vary from culture to culture in Nigeria. Each community celebrates in the way that suits them.

I decided to share with you how we celebrated Christmas last year in a small community called Mbaagi (em-bah—gee: rhymes with key).

they had practiced, the timing was just right. At midnight, the baby was born. We heard the baby cry as a sign that there was life. The church bell rang. There was merrymaking. Everyone was hugging and greeting each other. We then listened to a short sermon.

Next the congregation joined the choir which was accompanied by their drums. We all went walking through the villages, along the paths, stopping by houses. They carried bush lanterns, sang in the Tiv language the lovely carols known the world around. They also sang by heart many of the Christmas songs composed by church members. Often they woke people up with joyful songs. Some people donated money to the dancers. At some point, I left the group in order to sleep for a few minutes. To my surprise they converged on my house. I went out and danced with them. A five minute sermon was preached. They then moved on to another compound.

(~cont.~)

## *A Christmas Celebration in Mbaagi (cont.)*



*People gathered in a church for worship in Mbaagi*



*An Ate in the village*



*Woman pounds yam with mortar and pestle.*

### **Christmas Morning Worship**

At day break, the congregation members returned to their respective homes for final preparation concerning the clothes one must wear. To the children, the most exciting part of Christmas is the joy of dressing up in their beautiful Christmas clothes. Many of these clothes were new, others were not new. But everyone dressed well for the Birthday party—a Worship Service at 9:30 AM.

It was well attended, and several worshippers were nodding their heads in agreement, or sleeping because they did not sleep the previous night,

### *The festivities continue...*

#### **Christmas Dinner**

At the end of the service, people returned to their respective homes to prepare for Christmas dinner. Most people had rice and chicken as their traditional Christmas dinner.

Some homes that could not afford buying rice prepared substitutes such as ruam, fufu, pounded yam or akpu. Ruam is made from either guinea corn or maize. Other people made a cassava paste called fufu. Yams are peeled, boiled, and pounded to make **pounded yams**. Akpu is made from yam peels that are ground into white flour. All of these dishes are eaten with a stew such as egusi (melon seed) or okra soup and meats.

Regardless of whether or not people had food, or what kind they had, they still went around visiting as many

#### **Boxing Day**

Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, is also a proclaimed public holiday usually spent outside. It falls on December 26 and is a day of real relaxation. Although there was no worship service on that day,

as the message was delivered. Again we had an opportunity to wish one another a "Merry Christmas!" or as is commonly said in Nigeria, "Happy Christmas!"

The most important part of the Christmas worship service was when worshippers brought forward the birthday gift, an offering, in honor of King Jesus. Everyone who attended the service went forward to lay down their gift upon the raised platform.

If you've ever wondered what Christmas would be like without Santa, this story of our experiences in 2007 will give you a picture of what it could be like. Throughout the season, I never heard mention of Santa Claus.

friends, neighbors and relatives as possible. Wherever they went to greet, they were served food. Food is served in an "Ate," (gazebo). Many people had also invited many relatives and intimate friends to share the meal.

#### **Giving Gifts**

Some people also brought gifts like yams, chickens and a host of other assorted gifts. Presents such as cotton cloth, soap, sweets, pencils, and books were exchanged. Have you ever tried to wrap a live chicken in Christmas wrapping paper before giving it out as a gift?

The rest of the day was spent by visiting more people. Some families went out often to watch or play games. They returned home in the cool of the evening.

visitation and merrymaking continued. In December the temperature in Mbaagi is neither too hot nor too cold, and there is always lots of sunshine. 2007 was no exception, and the glorious days of sunshine were a blessing for the festivities.

*Though is it a bit cool for us here in Michigan, we continue to enjoy warm fellowship with our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. We pray that you may experience the true joy of Jesus' coming during this season. We sincerely wish you and your family a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year!*

*- John and Esther*

## Greetings from members of our team!



**The Abts Family**

"The Abts family (working with Urban Ministry initiative) warmly greet you all! Blessings this holiday season and prayers for continued fulfillment in the New Year."



**Bulus Ali**

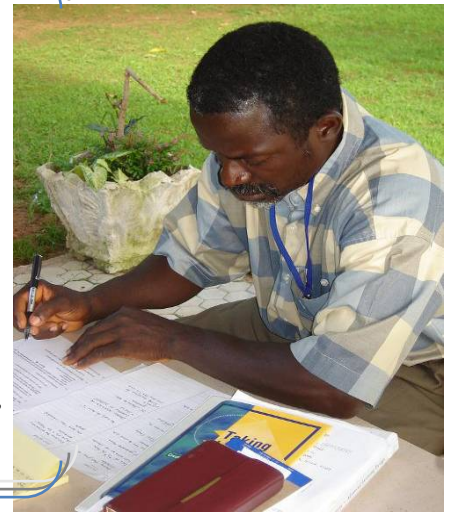
"We want to thank you all for supporting us here in Nigeria. We pray that you may experience the true joy of Jesus as we celebrate His birth."

"We are thankful to God for your support. We want to wish you God's richest blessing as we celebrate the birth of His son."



**David Tyokighir**

"At this time of the year, we want you to know that we appreciate the support you give us here in Nigeria. We ask for God's richest blessings for you and yours and may the Christ of Christmas keep you safe this season and in the coming year."



**Jeremiah Yongo**

"Blessings and Joy to all the people who are supporting our work. Thank you so much. May God reward you all."



**Deborah Gushem**

"Christmas in Nigeria is so wonderful. It's like Thanksgiving in North America. There's so much traveling across the country because of people trying to get home to their families to be together for the holiday. There is so much good food to go around your family and any visitor or stranger that stops by during the season!; Everyone uses that time to reflect on the happenings of the year and Christians especially go to church to give thanks to God for the whole year and all that has transpired. It is something wonderful to look forward to and I thank God it is approaching soon :)"



**Chinyere Nwachukwu**

**Melissa Dilworth**

"For me it is so humbling to even try to grasp that our Savior and Lord not only came to dwell among us, but that He came to those who were the 'most lowly'. In today's world I can only imagine that He might have chosen to be born in a slum or among the homeless. The angels would have perhaps appeared to those who are marginalized because of AIDS or displaced because of conflict. Immanuel! What a beautiful thing!"