

December 2013

Our team's first Christmas in the village we spent with forty sober people and one drunk man. Most of the team arrived in Cana several days before Christmas, in time to settle after three weeks' absence and remind their friends that we were going to host a party at Ruth and Esther's house. Colin and I were delayed in Dar es Salaam by a serious transmission problem in one of the team Land Cruisers. On Christmas Eve the vehicle was finally repaired, and at 6:00 AM Christmas morning, we headed to Cana, carrying potatoes, tomatoes, and shiny wrapped candies to add to the feast. As we neared the village, we gave a ride to an old man and two women.

"Today is Christmas. Do you know what Christmas is?" Hmm...they had a vague idea. Good thing we, and all our team, had worked hard to memorize the recording of Luke 2 while we were on vacation. Between Colin and me we managed to recount the birth of Jesus to them. They seemed delighted and amazed. "That is our language! We can understand you!" I let them keep my handwritten copy of the story. They folded it carefully and put it in a bag as they got out.

We were so proud of our students. They had met to practice the program. They had strung a tarp up to hold the rain off the guests. They enlisted the help of several enthusiastic neighbor women to cook the meal. They were organized and prepared.

We served pilau rice and vegetables, but no meat, for fear people would not come if it was not butchered with Koranic prayers. And people did come. After the program with a few songs, prayer, the Christmas story, and a brief sermon, we all ate together. Then we handed out candy to each person as they left. "What? No meat?" they asked. "We didn't want to offend you," we explained. "Oh, no," they reassured us, "Next year do sing more songs, and make sure you hand out printed invitations. Then more of us will realize we are officially invited to come to your party."

Midway through the celebration, the smooth flow of chatter was disrupted by the arrival of a man who was drunk. We had seen him often, and he was always drunk. He had once picked up Mary's shoes off her front porch and walked away with them, and Joseph had had to run after him to retrieve them as he staggered down the lane. After that, our team thought of him as "the shoe man."

Colin kindly guided the man to a clear spot on the side, sat him down, and got him some food. After he had eaten heartily, drunk tea and had a piece of candy, Colin took him by the arm and helped him walk down the steep, slippery incline to the main road. "Time for you to go now; goodbye and merry Christmas." A lot of good our celebration had done him, I thought cynically.

By night we were all exhausted and happy. Friday we met for class. How sweet to be back together again after separation. Sunday we met for worship. Monday we had our team Christmas brunch. Yummy foods, carols, gifts, and a time for prayer. Although it was very different from Christmas in the USA, we were aware of the

privileges, both of opportunity and of sacrifice for Jesus' sake. Worshiping Him in a humble, rural village made the gift of His incarnation more vivid to us.

Would anyone else who came and heard His story be impressed by that gift? We listened and looked for signs of further interest.

