



W5 on Missions: Christmas Edition



How does one celebrate Christmas while living in another culture?

Here is what four CBM Global Field Staff had to say:

Jeff and Deann Carter (Czech Republic):

For Czech people Christmas is celebrated on the evening of the 24th with a feast. The carp, which was purchased prior to this day and which may have been kept alive in the bathtub until ready for cooking, is the featured dish. Yes fish, not turkey is the main course here. It is served with potato salad and many side dishes. We stick with turkey and also celebrate on the morning of the 25th.

The Christmas tree is decorated on Christmas Eve. Traditionally, the tree was decorated with apples and sweets, as well as traditional ornaments. Today, commercially purchased Christmas ornaments are used to decorate the tree.

It is Baby Jesus (Je•řšek) rather than Santa Claus who brings children presents on Christmas Eve. Children leave the room where the Christmas tree has been put up until they hear the tinkle of a bell (rung by parents) indicating that Baby Jesus has come with gifts.

St. Mikulas, or St. Nicholas, brings gifts on December 5. Children who have been good receive a gift and those who have been naughty, a lump of coal.

Dianne Friesen (Eskasoni, Cape Breton):

Here in Mi'kmaq country they have an early Christmas Eve service and then a late one. The choir often practices the Old Mi'kmaq Christmas hymns (I hope to join in the practices so I can learn to sing the old songs). When church is over, we go over to someone's house and have a feast which includes French tourtiere. Then we go to bed with a full stomach. On Christmas day I usually go to another feast of turkey dinner at my friend's place. Usually I get to make the pumpkin pies.

Darrell and Laura Lee Bustin (Indonesia & Rwanda):

In Indonesia we would attend church on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. On Christmas Day the service would be at 9 a.m. and would include a baptism and child dedication as a part of the service. Then afterwards the congregation would share a meal together before going home about 1:30 p.m. Gift-giving is NOT a part of their Christmas celebrations.

We have only had one Christmas here in Rwanda, but last year we went to church for 8 a.m. to see our colleague's daughter be baptised. It turns out the baptism takes place before the "normal" service and only family and friends come to witness it. So we were there from 8 until 1 p.m.!

I think many Baptists in Canada only attend church on Christmas Day when it falls on a Sunday. We have observed in both Indonesia and Rwanda that the focus of the Christmas celebrations is its spiritual meaning and the time to be together with church family.

One of the challenges we have had is to blend together the cultural traditions of our family in Canada with the traditions in the place where we have been serving. We usually open stockings before church and gifts afterwards as a way of incorporating both scenarios!

Dan and Melody Grove (Cameroon):

In the past, we went to the beach every year after Christmas for a week of camping. We were here in the village last year at Christmas, so we got to experience Christmas with our Cameroonian friends. We put up our Christmas tree (one Dan bought the first year we were here in Cameroon. I brought over our non-breakable ornaments so that we had something familiar from home for Christmas). Our friends enjoyed looking at it.

Those who attend church love Christmas. We all went to church Christmas eve. We helped the young people in the church act out the Christmas story. Those who could read Chrambo read Luke 1 and 2 while the youth group acted out what was happening in the passage. They also acted out several of the miracles that Jesus did, with the thought that things are different because Jesus came. We found the congregation's reaction to that very interesting. When Zechariah got his voice back, when the blind man was able to see, when the lame man who was brought down through the roof was able to walk, the place erupted with cheers. People were jumping up and down in excitement. People were really caught up in what they were seeing. The church was packed with mostly youth and children. I wondered where the women were, but discovered they were home cooking for the next day. There was plenty of singing and dancing, and some special music too. It was lively and celebratory.

On Christmas day we went to church in the morning. There was a sermon and singing. Then people went home and had a nice meal together in their family groups. They buy pop for themselves and their guests, and cook special dishes. For many, it is the only time of year that they eat meat. Christmas is the time of year that they may try to buy one new outfit for their children.

I had made an apple pie the day before from dried apple slices I'd brought from Canada. After church I cooked a chicken and our dinner. Just when it was ready, people came to visit so I kept everything on the stove. After people stopped coming, it was time for us to go out and visit. At the homes we visited, the people gave us drinks and something to eat. In the end we were stuffed and so didn't eat our dinner until the next day. We were really glad for the opportunity to be in Bambalang for Christmas and look forward to being here again this year.

Lisa Lohnes

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