

The Richness of the Season

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

It was a bright, sunny, cool day, typical of the Christmas mini-dry season in Quito. My Otavalan Indian friend Pablo and I were standing on the street just a few days before the holiday, discussing how we would celebrate the season.

“We’ll go to church on Christmas Eve, then again on Christmas morning,” he explained. “Then we’ll eat a big meal and play some futbol (soccer).”



“That’s all?” I asked incredulously. “You don’t exchange gifts, decorate your house or send cards?”

He smiled, very patiently humoring his gringo friend. “No, we just focus on The Lord’s birth.”

I should have known. We had attended worship at Pablo’s church several times and knew that for him and his family, belief in Jesus Christ, while very intense, was also very straightforward and simple.

We had helped them to haul water to mix with cement that they had poured to construct their new building. We had prayed with them as they sought to raise money to complete the second floor and finish the roof. We had encouraged them as they dreamed about how the building could be used not only for Sunday activities, but as a school and community center during the week as well.

Soon after it was inhabitable, we attended church on Christmas Sunday. While the unpainted walls were up and the roof in place, there were no windows. The cold wind blew off of the mountain and through the sanctuary. Bare bulbs hung from the ceiling, dimming and eventually flickering out as Ecuador’s famous power cuts came two hours before they were scheduled for that day.

Children, youth and adults came forward to sing using both Spanish and Quichua choruses and rhythms. Others read scripture and a group of young people presented a simple but moving drama. Several hundred members, wrapped in woolen parkas, kept children quiet and strained to listen as the service drew to a close.

The Christmas service would be much the same-few instruments, no hymnbooks, no overheads, no subdued lighting, no padded pews. Just praise, worship and the proclamation that in Jesus Christ, God has entered our world and offers us eternal life.

As someone told me recently about needing 45 minutes just to get out of the mall parking lot the due to the rush of Christmas shoppers, I thought back to my conversation with Pablo and his congregation's simple but sincere celebration of Christ's birth.

With all of my traditions coming out of a long heritage; with all of my rushing to and fro to get the cards and gifts sent in time; with all of the hectic busyness of the season, why should I have assumed that Pablo--coming from a community where knowing the blessings of Jesus Christ is only one generation old--would have all kinds of traditions he had to fulfill?

For Pablo and his family, Christmas was simply a time to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Would that we would celebrate that way.

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