

Christmas, a time for joy, peace and ministry

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LAM News Service

Miami, FL (LAMNS)—“It’s the most glorious time of the year,” says the old Christmas Carol. And so it is for Christians around the world who celebrate the birthday of their savior, Jesus Christ.

For Christian missionaries, the season carries even more meaning because it is a time when people are more receptive to the Gospel message and doors are more open to presenting the timeless message of Jesus Christ than at any other time of the year.

“I visit a nearby elementary school and share the Christmas story,” says Rebekah Meyerend, a missionary with the Latin America Mission (LAM) in Chalco, a low-income suburb of Mexico City. “Last year I dressed up as a shepherd and told the story from the point of view of Simeon.” Rebekah, from Devon and Newtown, Pennsylvania, says that most teachers are receptive to her presentations. Rebekah also lived for a time in Kennett Square and is a graduate of Messiah College.

In Costa Rica, LAM missionary Bob Jeffery teaches workshops in folding and cutting stars, what North Americans know as paper snowflakes. “I use that as a means of possible future employment for people,” he says. “The basic idea is to develop a family activity to get away from the commercialism of Christmas,” says Bob who is from Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Food and parties are used by many missionaries as a way to present the Gospel. “I meet with five ladies once a month to bake,” says LAM missionary Nancy Mauger, a native of Bloomfield, Connecticut. “During that time I share a devotional with them that has something to do with the theme of what we have baked. At Christmas time, I have a party with lots of games and a meal. This year I talked about angels and how they came to announce the birth of the savior.”

Christmas cookies helped to open some doors in Seville, Spain where Carolyn Kerr is a missionary with LAM. “We live in a bedroom community where it is hard to get to know our neighbors,” she says. “In three years of living here, we have never been invited into any homes. That plate of cookies changed the whole thing. We were invited into every house we visited.” Carolyn, a native of Cedar Falls, Iowa, says that one family even invited her and her husband Edwin to Christmas Eve dinner, a private family time not normally open to outsiders. “Many of these contacts have developed into solid friendships and a real basis for evangelism,” she reports.

Helping the poor takes center stage in many Christmas celebrations. That is certainly true for LAM missionary Lillian Solt in San Jose, Costa Rica who says that several years ago her youth group came up with ways of raising money to purchase clothes and shoes for people in very poor communities. “Each child is supplied with a new outfit, shoes and a

small toys,” she says. “The mother, who is usually the head of a single-parent household, receives a breadbasket with some goodies that they never see—such as apples and grapes.

For many of these families, Christmas is just another day,” Lillian reflects. “But for these 15 families that our church has chosen, it is going to be a very special Christmas.”

Lillian says that one of the most gratifying aspects of the project is “to see a family come to know Jesus through this outreach.” She reports that one teenager was touched by the Christmas generosity and started to attend the church’s youth group. “He started bringing his brothers and sisters and finally his Mom came. And so the whole family worshiped with us and has come to know Jesus,” she explains.

On the streets of Mexico City, LAM missionary Sharleen Turner ministers daily to homeless children who live under viaducts and in open city parks. “Every year we have a Christmas party for the street kids,” Sharleen, a native of San Diego, California, reports. “We take them a special meal—sometimes it’s beef grilled on a barbecue and made into Tacos. We have a special time of games and a Christmas message.” Sharleen says that they provide a piñata filled with candy, and give each child a gift such as a shirt or other item of clothing.

Unfortunately, Sharleen says that her ministry will not be able to have the Christmas parties for the children this year because of a shortage of funds.

Missionaries find that Christmas is a time when people want to help others. Rebekah Meyerend attends a weekly Bible Study with English speaking expatriate businessmen’s wives, missionaries and a few Mexican women. For the past two years the women have sponsored an Angel Tree to support her work in the Chalco area. “On the tree they hang paper angels on which are the names and ages of some of the kids I work with,” she says. “The ladies each choose an angel and buy gifts for the child.” Rebekah distributes the gifts at a neighborhood party for the children and their parents. “We play games, sing Christmas songs and have a short evangelistic message based on the Christmas story,” she says.

The Latin America Mission currently has approximately 240 missionaries in 15 countries and is seeking to place 300 new missionaries in Latin America in the next three years. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami Springs, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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