

Amamas tru, Jisas I kam

King b'long yumi kamdaun.....

Joy to the world, the Lord is come.

Let earth receive her King.....

Grace and Peace to you from Papua New Guinea. We greet you in the name of Jesus, the One whom we await with joy, coming to be among us---the Word made flesh---the in-breaking of something new and wondrous into our turbulent times.

The national church offices closed on Friday, December 16 for two weeks. People now spread out across the mountains, islands, and coastal villages returning to their *asples* (birthplace) to celebrate Christmas with family. We leave on December 21 with our colleague, Pr. Greg Schiller, for a two-day drive to the village of Ialibu in the Southern Highlands. We will spend Christmas with his close friend and *brata*, Pr. Penga and family. We go, not knowing what our experience will be yet fully assured of wonderful hospitality PNG-style.

Oro, a young man who works with Rod in the Finance Office, will accompany us. His village is nearby. Rod has become Oro's *waspapa*, having helped him out after he lost most of his clothes and belongings during the civil unrest here in Lae. Oro has told Rod that his family will reward Rod's generosity. We neither want nor expect anything but know that we will receive abundance.

It feels a bit chaotic in Papua New Guinea these days before Christmas. We had an earthquake last Thursday, bigger and longer than we've felt before. It has left strange weather patterns in its stead. There have been abnormally high winds, followed by a stillness that is oppressive in the hot summer sun, and thunderstorms that seem more volatile than usual. The government in PNG is in disarray. A Supreme Court decision declaring the government of Prime Minister Peter O'Neill illegal and re-instating former Prime Minister Michael Somare has resulted in two Cabinets, two Governors General, and two leaders fighting to occupy the office and official residence. We have no choice at the moment to let both things---the weather and the government---work themselves out. In many ways, it helps us to focus on what is important at Christmas---family, friends, those in the world who are in need.

For us, our Christmas already began on December 13 when “our PNG family”---Manao, James, and their five children---came to Lae on their way to their *asples*, a mountain village beyond Bulolo. They had wanted to go back last year but remained in Buakop so we could bring our sons, Peter and Mark, to meet them and spend Christmas. We had first gone to Buakop Christmas 2009 when we were in the country only one month, still so green and uninitiated. Our two weeks together was the beginning of a dear relationship, and the roots have only grown deeper as Peter and Mark became as much *their* family as Enok, Elizabet, Emanuel, Gjemsao, and Simeon are *our* family. It is with great longing that Manao gives voice to her dream that we might go to her village one day. However, she quickly acknowledges that Rod and I could not make the strenuous trip over mountain and river. She is probably right. But then she says, “oh, but Peter and Mark, they could come to my village.” The longing shines in her eyes.

The family came for a Christmas meal on the evening of the 13th. We sat on our veranda, ate and talked, the universal gathering at a table. Our home is simple, yet for these children it is still a bit of a novelty. Not once but three times, I found Enok, age 15, standing and gazing in front of the map of PNG on our wall. I don't know what was going through his head, what wonder he held in the awesomeness of his country and its unknown place in the world. Gjemsao was content to sit on our laps; little Simeon hardly sat still like many a 3-year old. Elizabet, ever polite and helpful, cleared the table. Emanuel, always the goof-off, squirmed with mock embarrassment as his mother told of his recent graduation from second grade and the awards he received. Manao is passionate about their education and rightfully proud of their accomplishments.

As we celebrate the simple gifts of relationships and family, we long for harmony throughout the world, peace among the warring nations, comfort to the poor and hungry, healing to the broken spirits. Our prayer is that all may find joy in unexpected ways and unknown places. Our wish for you is Christmas Love made manifest in the Word made flesh, in the faces and smiles of those with whom you gather. *God I blesim yupela olgeta! Amamas tru, Jisas I kam...*

Nancy and Rod

