LutheranBible Translators

Consulting for Christ

Enabling Bible Translation in Africa

December 2026



May God bless you with peace from the Prince of Peace!
May his light shine through you to a dark world around you!
Merry Christmas!
Jim & Susan

What Makes Christmas?

What is it that makes Christmas for you?

What is it that must be eaten or what is it that must be done in order for it to feel like Christmas to you? Living overseas, we found that Christmas wasn't the same as we had experienced growing up here in the US. Here, as you know, there are signs of Christmas everywhere, starting from Halloween! And once Thanksgiving passes, we have Advent services and many Christmas programs, making December very hectic.

When we were overseas, we found that we had to look harder for signs of Christmas. In the bigger cities, there would sometimes be decorations and music, but there was little other evidence. We couldn't depend on outer trappings to make it seem like Christmas. We had to make the effort ourselves. And so we did some simple decorating and played our own music to set the mood. An Advent wreath wasn't too hard to bring overseas, and making Christmas cookies was a good family activity. We grew used to a warm (rather than white) Christmas and very few planned activities.

When we lived in a small Kono village in **Sierra Leone**, the Christmas celebration was very simple. Christians there held a special service on Christmas Day followed by a picnic outing. They made a clearing at a suitable spot in the bush, and then the women cooked a huge amount of rice and soup in large pots over the fire. After the feast, people visited together for a few hours.

For Chaldean Christians in **Iraq**, Christmas is very much a family time. Instead of shopping for gifts like we do, no gifts are exchanged, although children are often given a set of new clothes or small gifts of money by their parents or grandparents. One special food is *kolecha*, a type of Christmas cookie with a filling. It is not a Chaldean Christmas without it. Each



woman has her own secret recipe that likely includes dates, walnuts, and aromatic spices. They work hard to make them ahead of time, but they must not be eaten until Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve, Chaldeans attend a two to three-hour midnight church service. After, they break their day's fast by eating *paska,* another secret recipe traditional food that has been cooking all day. For Chaldeans, the

most important part comes next - visiting relatives. The next days are filled with visiting grandparents, in-laws, aunts, uncles, even distant cousins, and then those relatives return the visits.

For Christians among the Zayse people in **Ethiopia**, the Christmas celebration starts on the evening of January 6. Like many other Ethiopians, they have a meal of *doro wat*. This is a spicy red sauce with



chicken and eggs that is eaten with *injera. Injera* is flat sour-dough bread that is made from *teff* flour and looks a little like a crepe or pancake. (*Teff* is a cereal grain with a very small seed that is mainly grown in this area of the world). First some of the *injera* is spread on a plate, then the sauce is put on top. Pieces of *injera* are then torn from a rolled up strip of *injera* and used to pick up some of the sauce and put it in your mouth. On Christmas morning (January 7), they attend church with their fellow believers. Everyone wears new clothes if possible. Afterwards, they prepare a big feast. Usually groups of 10-20 people go together in getting an ox and slaughtering it. The meat is divided among the group and cooked by the individual families. After the feast, the rest of the day is spent visiting with friends and family.

We all know that Jesus is what makes Christmas. We would not do all of our gift giving if he had not first given himself for us. But each culture has different ways of making that celebration of his birth a special one. Learning about and experiencing others' customs has helped us to rethink our own. How about you?

Giving Thanks

We hope that you had a blessed Thanksgiving with your family. We are thankful for your partnership with us in getting God's Word to so many who need it. Thank you for your prayers and gifts that make it possible for us to do what we do.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray for the Kono & Mende teams (Sierra Leone) and the Tsamakko team (Ethiopia) as they continue to work on their translations of the Old Testament and revision of the New Testament.
- Pray for the online checking sessions scheduled with the Mende team (Sierra Leone) November 30-December 2. Pray for good health, reliable electricity, good internet connection, wisdom, and guidance from the Holy Spirit for all involved.
- Pray for a safe trip to Ethiopia during the last part of January and early February to work with the South Gumuz team.

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