

BriscoE-UPDATE

December 27, 2006

**The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. Isaiah 9:2**

Christmas in the Philippines: Filipinos love the commercial splendor of Christmas as much as westerners it seems. Malls are decked with lights, trees, and parols (a star lantern that is a traditional Filipino decoration, representing the Star of Bethlehem). Christmas music wafts through the stores - everything from "O Holy Night" to "Winter Wonderland" ("in the lane, snow is glistening" just seems a tad out of place here). We haven't seen Santa sitting on a throne with children waiting in line to talk to him about their Christmas wishes, but many store employees and guards wear Santa hats, or an entire Santa suit. (Check out our photo site, <http://JBriscoe1.photosite.com/>, for a Pizza Hut Santa). Everywhere we go we hear "Merry Christmas, po ("sir or ma'am")! When they see our white faces they don't say the Tagalog version, "Maligayang Pasko, po!"

One Philippine Christmas tradition is to sing carols at the gates of homes. Children will stop at the gates and sing and then expect a gift of coins or candy. Some of our carolers were quite curious about why we were living in Manila.

Simbang Gabi is a nine-day period of "night worship" before Christmas. Church bells begin ringing at 3-4 a.m. (yes, we can attest to that) and early masses are held. On Christmas Eve following midnight mass families gather for a time of feasting called Noche Buena. Protestant churches such as ours also hold Simbang Gabi services.

Christmas at Faith Academy: Faith Academy used the Christmas holidays to reach out to the community. At the weekly children's ministry, called A4J (All for Jesus), 400 children were given gifts, including New Testaments and little lanterns. A4J is run by teachers and high schoolers as an outreach to squatter village children around the school. The middle schoolers donated money and had fund raisers to buy food and Christmas gifts for dozens of families. The 8th graders visited a hospital to distribute the gifts. Then, they continued gift giving in a squatter village under a bridge. They sang songs, shared the Gospel, and prayed with both the hospital and village residents.

Faith Academy had special Christmas celebrations. The faculty and staff enjoyed a banquet complete with a ski lodge/snow theme on Dec. 9. Rosanne helped with the preparations for the banquet. We were treated to a Christmas breakfast by the administrators on Dec. 20. Concerts and other Christmas parties were part of the December festivities.

Christmas with our Church Family: Our small group celebrated Christmas together on Dec. 8. Our gracious hosts planned an evening of delicious food (ham and all the trimmings), carols, a Christmas devotion, games, and gifts.

The church choir presented a Christmas musicale, *Everlasting Light*, on December 16-17. The evening included an evangelistic message and 53 people prayed to receive Christ as their Savior. A repeat performance will be given on December 30th.

Christmas with our Missionary Family: We spent Christmas Eve with missionary friends and went to the Christmas Eve service at their church. On Christmas Day we traveled a little north of Manila to the province of Bulacan to be with 2 SEND families in the town of Baliwag. We enjoyed being with them and their young children. On Christmas evening we celebrated with a small group of people at the home of our SEND director here in Manila. Being away from our own family and friends in the States was difficult, but we are grateful that God has brought others alongside us to ease the transition.

Praises: Jesus, the Light of the World
New believers from Christmas outreaches
New home to live in

Prayers: Typhoon Reming victims in Bicol region south of Manila
SEND Annual Conference Dec. 29-Jan. 2

Preparations for second semester classes at Faith Academy