

I've chosen to celebrate Christmas

Adapted from Bintou's blog at

<http://www.petersonfamily.info/2015/12/ive-chosen-to-celebrate-christmas/>

A Westerner reading the above statement might be puzzled, wondering why someone would have to choose to celebrate Christmas? Doesn't everybody celebrate Christmas?! I have not lived long enough in the USA to tell how much of the population celebrates Christmas, but the fact that people can get the lowest price on an airplane ticket and get on an almost empty airplane on Christmas day speaks loudly that nearly everybody in America celebrates Christmas!



Here in Africa, where I was born, it is not the same as America. I can say that about half of the population does celebrate and half of the population doesn't. The reasons people in Africa might not celebrate Christmas are wide, from lack of money and poverty to political ideologies. Others believe and argue that Christmas Day was invented by the capitalist to make us spend more money on their goodies. Others are simply afraid of witchcraft. It is commonly known in Africa that witches and adepts at "black magic" kill a lot more people during Christmas season. There is another group of people that don't celebrate Christmas and that group is found among Christians. You are saying "Christians, really!?" Yes really, and that was the group I grew up in!

Here I am talking about serious believers. They follow the Bible and seek to live according to the Bible, which is the reason why they do not celebrate Christmas. The bases of their Christmas denial is that there is no report of a Christmas celebration in the book of Acts of the Apostles. My parents joined a community church at one time in their lives where the leaders of that church were convinced Christmas was not a godly season, therefore should not be celebrated. I have cherished memories of that church. It was a church where I witnessed people of integrity, living pure and holy lives. It is there that I met Jesus for the first time in my life! An elder of the church preached at a youth camp and told us about God's judgment coming on earth. He was so passionate and I was pretty scared of going to hell!

I am thankful to say that as I grew in faith and understanding of Scripture, the gospel of terror slowly gave place to the gospel of love. While I know now that it was not the intention of my church to present God as only a judge, it took me time to discover the God that loves me. While in that process, I married Rob, a Westerner. I knew in his tradition, Christmas season was a great time of the year, but my beliefs and my knowledge about Christmas were still pretty strong. And all the warnings I've heard about Christmas celebration as I was growing up still resounded loudly in my ears. So our first Christmas together went like any other day of a daily routine.

Praise to the God Almighty who is love and compassion. My husband, who had an insight of my culture and background was very patient with me. He didn't criticize, he didn't say a word. He went to a Christmas service while I stayed home. Just as Jesus loves us, in spite of us always hurting him, his love for me didn't fail. My husband wanted some Christmas atmosphere in the house, he wanted me to go to church with him on Christmas day, but I didn't want to. He didn't force me or yell at me, he just understood and kept loving me.



Slowly, in His sovereignty, God began to open my eyes to His love, through my husband's love. I saw how my husband still loving me and showing me love in spite of my attitude and my criticisms of his culture. If this is the way God loves us, then His love has to be so majestic! God's love is romantic! The more I discover about His love, the more I want to know Him. And the more I want others to know this God who loves us so much!

This is the reason I am living here in this remote jungle village. His love is the reason I am not pursuing lucrative career in medicine. And this year, I chose to celebrate Christmas!

I know that Jesus wasn't born on December 25th. I know some people in the 4th century argued about and decided that Christmas should be celebrated. But as I realized how much God's love is big, and wide, and that He sent His only begotten Son to be live and die for us, I've chosen to celebrate His birth and reflect on His love story for the world and for me! So here I am in this little village of Africa, where we serve. It is Christmas season and I just finished hanging out some Christmas lights on the porch of our humble house. I love it!

And I love the colors of the Christmas in our house. I inherited those decorations from a friend who used to live here and was going back to the USA. I am sitting at my desk now and writing this and I am loving the Christmas season! I can't wait for all the things we have planned for Christmas!! We will have a gift donation to kids of the village one week before Christmas. I will decorate the church with the ladies of the village for the Christmas service. The village choir, which I joined, is practicing for the Christmas service.



With the ladies of the village, I will have the opportunity to learn more about the culture here and to just talk to them. It is through those moments with them that I've been accepted by the community here and that I am no more a stranger to them. With the choir, I will lead the practice and I will tell about the story of the greatest love humanity has ever known! I can't wait to attend the humble Christmas service we will have here at church for Christmas Eve. People that usually do not attend church, and sick people at the hospital will come to church for that service. At least, there, they will forget their loneliness for a time. And this is the part I like, they will hear about someone who is the best friend and who loves us like no one has ever done.

Last but not the least; I can't wait for Christmas morning, when my hubby will hand something to me and I will do the same for him and we will share both God's love and our love for one another!

I have encountered the God of Love and I have met a man that showed me what love is. I have to give back to others! This year I just can't just pass by Christmas. God's love compels me to celebrate Christmas!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you – my American and African family!

Bintou & Rob

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