



December 2011

MISSION GRANT STORY

STORY OF DECEMBER

\$1,825,000

Have you had your fill of canned holiday music, bright colored lights, television ads, holiday movies and decorations spilling everywhere from the retail world? Are you tired of baking even though you have not started? Are you wondering how in the world you will ever be able to pay for the list of gifts that keep popping up in your head? What will you do if you get one more invitation to a party? Are you going to have a good attitude at the Saturday morning Christmas program practices working with all the excitable Sunday school children? Oh, and remember to water all the poinsettias before you leave. And there are the extra choir practices, houseguests are coming, and so it goes again this year!

Now imagine the holiday season without family and friends, without children's programs and decorations, without music and parties, without a packed church. Depending on the location and the prevailing culture, this is typical for many of our missionaries in the field. I recently spoke to a missionary who has returned to the states, and she shared a few thoughts.

"There is absolutely no air of anticipation in many villages, towns and cities; why would there be? They do not grasp the joy of the birth of our Lord come to earth as a newborn. They do not know Him at all. There may be a few decorations, but often they do not make sense. One city in Africa

boasts a large Santa Claus that rotates while the 'Yellow Rose of Texas' is broadcast! There are no Christmas hams, turkey stuffing, plates of cookies, tape and wrapping paper littering the table or music filling the square."

Our missionary friend was devastated when their best friends moved away just before the holidays. There would be no one to share the comforting, favorite festivities. The recently acquired string of Christmas lights lay on the couch for two weeks before her husband finally said, "I love what you have done with the decorations!"

We can refocus in this Christmas season! We praise God for the devotion and sacrifice of our missionaries in the field, and we can give Him thanks for their examples of faith and perseverance. The Prince of Peace will meet our need to anticipate His coming without dreading the schedule. In our devotions we will marvel at His birth among us, rather than despair that our worldly preparations are incomplete. When we contemplate the lives of service that take our missionaries far from home, let us look at our sometimes annoying atmosphere with new eyes and a heart thankful in His grace and glad for traditions that do point to the best birthday celebration ever, the birth of Jesus our Savior! As we praise the Babe of Bethlehem, let us ask that our hearts will be made ready and our joy will be complete. Merry Christmas!