

Easter in Ghana, in Akrampa

Dear Friends,

Happy Easter! HE is Risen! HE is Risen Indeed!

At the time that you will be reading this, the date of our 2021 Easter will have passed, but I send you belated Easter wishes from my family and the people of Akrampa. This is meant to be one of the happiest times of the year as we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord! Sadly, for much of the world the shadow of the pandemic still hangs over our daily lives. I have written numerous articles about how COVID-19 has affected Ghana and I invite you to catch up with those in the *Ghana Archive*, found on First Lutheran's website. My articles starting with April 2020 through August 2020 describe what life has been like in Ghana during the pandemic.

The significance of Easter in Ghana:

Since I was a child, and as I grew into an adult, I had never before heard of the *cancelation* of the celebrations and activities that take place preceding and during the Passion Week. But in Ghana and all across the world churches were shut down, and cities were locked down for Easter of 2020. I guess 2020 was the first time for many things.

Easter is a time of the year in Ghana that both Christian and non-Christian members of the nation, (all across the nation) have reason to gather for many different kinds of events. Marriages are contracted in the homes and villages, communities gather to plan how to create opportunities for their members, and development plans are set up for the entire community.

It's an occasion where people go to their villages and towns for all kinds of family reunions. In actual fact some people take their annual leave from work during this time so they can visit and spend time with parents and other family members, and this didn't happen last year. At the transport terminals one could count on their fingertips the number of people that traveled home last year. This phenomenon, of not being able to travel was not there before the pandemic.

A new kind of Easter celebration for 2021:

One can thus imagine the joy and relief, particularly for Christians, that we were allowed to go to church and observe the Passion Week again this year - 2021.

For others who needed to gather with family members, or for community members to gather having *some* of the restrictions lifted was a relief. Of course, everywhere the observance of the strict protocol is now in place: washing of hands, wearing of face masks, and social distancing. Beginning in July 2020, churches in Ghana were allowed to re-open and have services, but with the strict observance of one meter spacing between people in the seating arrangements.

With all that is going on, celebrations were very much muted all across the nation. The government's directive, regarding church activities (marriages, funerals, church services) are to be strictly adhered to. No normal church service should go beyond two hours. And marriage and funeral services should not go beyond one and a half hours. Ghanaians, and most Africans, like to spend long hours at church services. Most ordinary funerals are done over three days - Fridays through Sundays - but are now severely restricted. Burials are now to be done as private, with no more than twenty-five persons. This is a real set back to most people, because many Ghanaians schedule final funeral rites during the Passion Week when they can travel home to visit family. During the COVID-19 restrictions most families will do the burial of the deceased and do the final funeral rites later.

Needless to say, COVID-19 has affected the cultural base of most Ghanaian communities but has also raised the value base of societal norms. The younger generation was tending to be reckless and disrespectful of the values of the society, but now they seem to be appreciating them.

Easter celebration 2021 in Akrampa was also very much subdued, because now they are beginning to understand that COVID-19 is real. There have been a few deaths in recent times, and even though people suspect that the deaths could be because of COVID-19, they have no real evidence. The people fall sick briefly and die and that's it. There are no autopsies done for many deaths in places like Akrampa so it is never known what the cause of the death is, but public education about the symptoms of COVID-19, which have raised awareness of the pandemic, makes them suspicious.

Easter is one of the occasions where demand for goods and services is high like Christmas time. For years it has been the moment the farmers of Akrampa and other traders look to with great expectation. This year's Easter was a disappointing time for many of them because they didn't make the same sales and profit as compared to 2019.

Even though some people (like in many places all over the world) seem not to be concerned about the risk of infection and possible death from the virus, and therefore will not socially distance, nor wear a mask... Many others are *very* concerned about their personal safety as well as for their families. So, the anxiety is there when they go out, and that ultimately affects the urge to go to the market to buy & sell. They approach me and lament the poor sales and loss of income as compared with previous times. This, they suggest, will ultimately affect their resources in taking care of their children at school.

We are praying with many all over the world that the Lord will have mercy on us all.

We hope that you had a blessed Easter.

Pastor Ben Wilson