

## The Christmas Celebrations

Dear Friends,

This article takes a break from our series on the Ghanaian School system, into how we in Ghana celebrate Christmas. I have talked about it previously, but this article is to share some of the *atmosphere* leading up till Christmas, and the roles played by friends and family, adults and children in the community.

As Christmas approaches, the atmosphere seems to change for everyone. In the days before December 25<sup>th</sup>, the weather in Ghana becomes very hot & humid/hazy, with average temperatures in the *high 80's* (Fahrenheit), & with very little rainfall in most areas. This change seems to affect people's temperaments and mood. It is a phenomenon that I have been observing and trying to understand. The weather affects people with very delicate skin; the skin becomes very dry, and the lips become parched and some feet even crack (on the side of the foot and in the heel areas), believed to be evidence of a dehydrated body & skin. The weather also causes visibility to drop and drivers are reminded to be extra careful on the roads.

When I was growing up, some 60 years ago, Christmas was the time when children would get to eat chicken and specially cooked rice. In those days it was the time when we may have expected to be given new pairs of footwear and dresses/clothes. The situation has not changed for most of the indigenous people, natives of Akrampa. The children of Akrampa are like the children we were years ago, when it comes to special days such as Christmas. The hopes and dreams of children at Christmas time are quite universal.

Sadly, in our current times, I am personally aware that almost seventy-five percent of Akrampa children will not receive new clothes for Christmas. Many of them wear their school uniforms almost every day, after school, because that is the only decent dress (outfit) that they own. Because of this, the uniforms don't last for the period of time that they are in school. It is a common sight to see the children in dirty uniforms that are torn and hanging on their body. In this situation, there is no outward sign that they are celebrating Christmas, or that they are even concerned whether it is Christmas at all.

I ask that you remember our less fortunate Akrampa children next Christmas. There are some of the children - very few of them - whose parents can afford to, or who have uncles and aunties, who also have the means, who would provide new clothes and footwear for their children. Some children get surprise packages of *used* clothing for Christmas, and some receive toffees and biscuits. This year, the Ghanaian schools are on Christmas Break from Thursday, December 21, 2023, and will reopen on Tuesday, January 9, 2024.

There was a time, years ago, when the period for celebrating Christmas was as long as about five weeks, but that has changed. It is now no longer than four weeks, or less. The Christmas **preparations / celebrations** for the community involve the children, who will organize among themselves dramas to stage the birth of Jesus in the manger. They will go and collect palm tree branches and build something to represent the place where Christ was born, & then they will sit around it to sing any/all songs (not necessarily always Christmas songs). Some will move from house to house knocking on doors to ask for treats - as American kids do on Halloween.

Early in the morning on Christmas Day, people in the community (friends and family) move from home to home - as many as they can visit - to say in the local dialect, this greeting: **"AFE HYIA PA OOOO"**. It means, **"Good Year To You"**. A number of them would sit down and talk about how the year has been for them on topics such as marriage, parenting, and job challenges, etc. The visits and conversation are mainly to raise optimism and encourage one another for the coming year.

As this year draws to a close, with the celebration of Christmas, I ask that the Lord bless every one of you. That the New Year, 2024, will be filled with the goodness and favor of God upon everyone. I pray for health and protection for every one of you and all of your loved ones.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.**

Pastor Ben