



December 2007

Dear Friends,

I will never forget our first holiday season in Ecuador...

For years, my friends and I had invested time and energy keeping the holidays Christ-centered and family- focused. We encouraged others to join us in our efforts to create meaningful traditions that would create family memories and focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

Then...we moved with MAF to Ecuador. For the first time, we were far from family and friends...special ingredients for holiday foods were not available...treasured decorations were packed away in Oakhurst...and worst of all, our boys were far away. This was not the way it was supposed to be. All the traditions became haunting memories. I felt miserable and depressed.

As I hunkered down under the covers hoping that if I didn't get up Christmas wouldn't come, God seemed to whisper in my ear, "What is this day all about?" The reality of Christmas dawned in my mind and heart. This day is about Jesus, and the incredible gift God gave humankind when He sent His Son to earth as a babe. He knew the path to the manger led to Calvary, but that didn't stop Him. He loved us that much. This is the day to celebrate God's great gift, and to be thankful for His amazing love and faithfulness. The fun family traditions left a void when left unsatisfied, but Jesus was still there urging me to look beyond the traditions (as wonderful as they are) to look into His face and to celebrate the peace and joy we have in Him. My perspective changed...I was able to get out of bed and savor the day.

Each year as the holidays approach, we are reminded of our first year and how God tenderly and gently turned our focus from how and with whom we celebrate, to what we celebrate. Is it easy to be away from family on the holidays? No. We wish we were with family, but each year God provides wonderful friends – who are also away from family – to share a meal and celebrate the Savior's birth with new traditions and in new ways. So, no matter how or where this day is spent, we have much to celebrate.

"Rejoice! For unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord!"

Our hearts are filled with thankfulness as we look forward to this year's celebrating. There is much to be thankful for: His great love, our great family, and each of you. God has used you to encourage and bless us. May His love and grace be poured over you in abundance this season and throughout the coming year as you celebrate His birth. Merry Christmas!

Rejoice!

Ron and Margie Grant

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