

Message 7- Christmas in Kenya and in Tanzania Dec 19-30,2019

I started celebrating Christmas with Elizabeth and Marian early. On the 19th, (the day that my home meeting had its candlelight carol sing service), all of those who were at Elizabeth's home spent the evening enthusiastically singing Christmas carols in Swahili, Luhya and English.

The day after Thanksgiving, Marian figured a way to make a Christmas tree- taping green plastic leis onto the wall of the sitting room. She then wrapped up some boxes to look like presents under the tree. Then in mid December, she planned a surprise birthday party for Elizabeth and managed to get many of her sisters to come- a complete surprise to Elizabeth. Then they wheeled Enock, her 100 year old grandfather into the room and he talked to all his children for a good half hour with far more vigor than they expected. Any presents brought her were put under the "tree". I then added a few more presents for each one living at the house and they will open them all on Christmas Day when they are all alone. On the 20th, I made a breakfast of granola and yogurt with fruit and nuts that Elizabeth and Marian enjoyed (the other young people all stuck to their boiled sweet potatoes and milky tea instead).

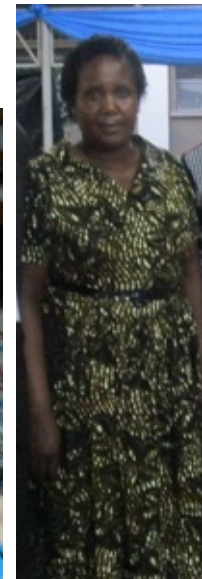
Then I went to Agneta's and celebrated with them the day before Christmas, since Christmas Day Agneta, James, and I would be travelling to Tanzania for the East African Pastors Conference held in Mwanza, (the better part of a two-day journey). Here, Christmas means the family gathering together, singing all the carols together and a good meal. The commercial buying of Christmas presents is not emphasized like it is in the United States. The day before Christmas I rested and recovered my bonnet by hand. The new kittens sent over from Elizabeth to Agneta jumped into the bonnet as though it was a nest!



Marian and "tree"



A bonnetful of kittens



Pamela, fellow worker in Tanzania

On Christmas Day, I travelled with Kevin, a woman leader from Uganda, Agneta, and husband James by piki to Kakamega and by Matatus down to Kisumu. There we met Margaret Musalia, Samwel Wefafwa, James Wakhata, and Joseph Nyongesa (the last three were Uganda delegates). We dropped off Agneta, Kevin, and Samwel at Simiti's home in Migori, and Margaret, Joseph, the two James and I travelled on to Tarime, Tanzania. On the 26th, I sent the four from Tarime via Batco bus to Mwanza for the East Africa Pastors Conference. I went back to meet Agneta, Kevin, Samwel, and Peter, the youth leader of Uganda. I spent from 8am to 2pm helping the bus loads of Kenyans who were coming to the conference. To our surprise, the three Ugandans were refused by Tanzania officials. They had all requested to buy temporary passports at the Uganda/Kenya border in order to travel to Tanzania. Instead of the passports, they were given East Africa passes that only permit travel between Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda. Since none had travelled outside Uganda before, how were they to know the difference between a temporary pass and a temporary passport? Sadly, we had to send them back on their 2-day journey to Uganda.

Agneta and I were grateful to get a ride in a pickup along with Pamela Ngoya (who has travelled a lot to Tanzania with me). We finally arrived at the conference in the dark, and welcomed by Katrina and Shawn.

The main speaker of the conference was Steve Pedigo from USA, who used to work in Chicago with gangs, getting them to compete amicably in basketball instead of fighting. Nicholas Otieno translated for him into Swahili. His wife, Dorcas, interpreted for another speaker. Robert Wafula challenged Kenyan Friends to quit fighting over leadership and unite. He also showed a fascinating video of Arthur Chilson and family from the 1933 (early missionaries in Kenya). A good portion of the conference (that had 800 Kenyans present) was spent talking in English dealing with how to stop the splitting of yearly meetings and leadership struggles, which was very important for the Kenyans, but not as helpful to the Tanzanian, Congolese, and Ugandan delegates.



Uganda delegates who made it to the conference (missing Alfred Wasike) Dorcas Otieno interpreting

Esther Mombo was the only woman to speak, even though the majority of the pastors at the conference were women. She received heavy applause. On Saturday, heavy rain caused a big rally in the local green to be postponed.

On Friday afternoon, I was surprised to be given a few minutes to share about the ministry I do with women here. I used part of the time to ask the Kenyan women who have travelled with me to stand, which was a big boost to them to be acknowledged as ministers. John Muhanji explained that my bonnet was like the kind used by all Quakers years ago (long before the Kenyan women started a uniform of white head scarves). Many women came up to me afterwards wanting to buy one from me!

On Sunday morning, when the talks were about Nairobi YM (the only yearly meeting that pays its pastors), Pamela Ngoya collected six other women and went to visit Buhongwa Friends Church in Mwanza, and a few others walked on foot to visit Kigereshi Friends. That afternoon, I understand the rest of the conference held a big rally in an open space nearby- reaching out to others to help Tanzanian Friends.

Meanwhile, because several of us needed to get back to Kenya to prepare to go to Uganda for our final Sunday School Teachers training that starts on 1st of January, we left the conference and travelled back to Migori, where we visited Dorcas and Fanuel Simiti. When I mentioned about starting an archives, Fanuel showed us a small book written about the history of Friends in Bware region (in Luragoli language). He will get a copy made and James Injairu is eager to translate it into English and then get it to the archives.

We finally arrived back in Kakamega this afternoon and are now resting, repacking, etc. in preparation for our journey to Uganda. Someone tried to steal my cellphone, but it was light blue (not a common color of phone here). Thankfully, the driver of the vehicle noticed it and managed to rescue it for me. I have been learning that black items can also easily be lost inside of dark bags, so I recovered my camera case, cell phone, and other things with lighter colors.

Thanks for all your prayers and support. May this new year be more peaceful for us all.

Marian

