



Newsletter of Jeff, Diane, Daniel & Alyssa ~ living and working in the Persian Gulf & Central Asia.

Christmas Picnic ~

Patty, Frieda (Diane), Lucy (Alyssa),
and Schroeder (Daniel) ~ L to R

You who are native Iowans will know about this, but the rest won't: the traditional Christmas Picnic.* We brought the tradition to Dubai this year, and our church had a picnic the day after Christmas in a park near our house. We had a weather scare, though. Rain! Jeff and Daniel had been in the nearby city of Sharjah to play basketball at 6:30am, and as soon as they finished playing there was a rare downpour. But when they got back to Dubai, they found it hadn't rained at all. So the picnic was still on! We had many guests planning to come: from our sister church, four Philipinos and an American couple; and, since Christmas is so famous now, we were able to invite people who might not normally come to our church gatherings: three Palestinians Muslims, a Philippino woman, an Afghan Muslim man, a Bangladeshi Muslim man, a British man, and seven Americans. But rain, of all things, in the desert on picnic day. As we finished loading up our car to take the picnic gear four blocks to the park, sheets of rain came down. Ugh! However, two minutes later when we got to the park, not a drop of rain had fallen! It remained dry all day. Thank YOU!



Our church – four families and two single guys – usually meets in one of our homes every Friday morning. But this week we had the Saturday picnic instead. We began by re-enacted a few scenes from A Charlie Brown Christmas: from where Charlie Brown and Linus pick out the scraggly tree to where Linus tells Charlie Brown what Christmas is really all about. Alyssa was Lucy and Daniel was Schroeder. "And presents for pretty girls!" Diane was Frieda (naturally curly hair girl) and Jeff was Charlie Brown. We used a palm branch for the little tree. It was fun, and it tells the true meaning of Christmas.



Charlie Brown (Jeff) holding
the pitiful Christmas tree
(palm branch)

Then we read the stories of the angel visitations, the shepherds, the birth, and the wise men, from Matthew and Luke, in an easy English version. We had a surprise during the singing time. Jeff had his guitar and Diane and Jeff led the 35 of us in singing three well-known Christmas carols. While we were singing, a man using the park went over to the park security guard and evidently complained about us. We weren't making enough noise to disrupt anybody's conversation or enjoyment of the park, but the guard came over and stood near Jeff, waited until Joy to the World was over, then firmly told us there is no music in the park. So we stopped. Ironically, ten minutes later the music of one of the five daily Muslim calls to prayer wafted over the park from a nearby mosque. Not all music is created equal. (We checked the park rules board, and nothing about music was listed.) With no more singing to do, we ate, put together Christmas gift bags for poor laborers, and played volleyball till dark.

Gift Bags ~

This Christmas, our church put together 40 gift bags for laborers. We enlisted two Muslim friends, an Afghan and a Pakistani, to select groups of workers from poor countries who are here earning low wages and trying to support families back in their countries, who could use these gifts. Each reusable shopping bag contained a blanket, a bag of rice, socks, soap, shampoo, a comb, toothpaste, a toothbrush, a glass, a washcloth, a mobile phone card, and a video pack with the *Life of the Messiah* movie, the *God's Story from Creation to Eternity* movie, and an audio New Testament CD.

Daniel and Jeff joined two other men from our church and our Afghan friend Sunday night after Christmas to a downtown Sharjah neighborhood where literally thousands of laborers live. At 11:00pm we took the bags to a seventh floor apartment in a rundown building. We found ten men living in a bedroom with five bunk beds taking up the entire room, save a six by four feet space in the middle where they eat on the floor. They were all from Chittagong, the second city of Bangladesh, and all work in retail shops. As we sat with them on the lower bunks, their first question after we finished greetings was, why are you here? Exactly what we wanted to talk about. Jeff explained that Christmas is when we celebrate that God gave us Jesus as a great gift, and so we also want to give gifts to others. After half an hour they led us out into the entryway, where there is a table and chairs, and gave us each a KFC box dinner and a Pepsi, which one of them had quickly gone to buy us. We had just eaten before coming, but we ate as much as we could, because it was such a kind gesture. Then we went into the other bedroom, with four bunk beds, where eight men, all from Kerala state in India, live. It was a night of making new friends.

Christmas Caroling ~

This was the first Christmas we went caroling in the UAE. Before this year, we lived in a neighborhood of south Asian men, shops, and apartment building. It would have been much like caroling on a commercial street in Manhattan. This winter we live in a neighborhood of families, houses, and residential streets. Along with most of our church, we walked around the ten buildings of our 70-home housing complex on Christmas Eve, stopping and ringing the doorbell where lights were on. Mostly Arab Muslims, everybody we sang for enjoyed it, and for most, it was their first encounter with carolers, other than in American movies. One Palestinian woman, our next door neighbor, said it made her very happy. A Phillipino family gave us 20 dirhams (about \$5.50); we learned later at the picnic from a Phillipino guest that it is their custom to give carolers money. Who knew?

Other Christmas Happenings ~

Diane has been teaching English at the Iranian Club. Three of the women from her previous class and their families joined us for a Christmas party at our house the Saturday before Christmas, along with three American families. The Americans sang a few Christmas carols for the Iranians. The Iranians sang a few songs in their old, traditional Persian style for us Americans. Jeff told the entire Christmas story – the story of why Jesus came to earth: The promise to Eve after their disobedience that one day One will come who will crush Satan's purposes; the promise to King David that One will come from his lineage whose kingdom will never end; the angels visits to Mary and Joseph, telling them that Mary's son will fulfill both these promises; and the birth of Jesus. Our Iranian friends were especially interested in how Jesus will crush Satan's purposes. Jeff explained some about it to them, but that is a story for another holiday: Easter.

Our family gave Christmas gift cakes and shopping gift certificates to the two men who keep up our housing complex and the twelve employees of the small market that delivers groceries to our house almost every day. Alyssa made Christmas cards for them, with a Christmas tree on the front and a short message connecting the gift to God's gift of Jesus to us that we celebrate at Christmas.

** The Iowa Christmas Picnic tradition is a fake.*

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News from Jeff & Diane

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