



The Hamley Herald

January 2009



A Spanish Christmas

Often one of the most difficult times for persons living abroad is the Christmas holiday season. We get so accustomed to celebrating beloved times of the year with beloved people, often following customs so ingrained in us that we become unaware of them until we are forced to break with tradition because of our new circumstances. Christmas can be particularly difficult.

That said, however, we felt very blessed this Christmas season, in part because of a touch of home (Carrie's mom came to visit) and in part because of our new friends in Spain. Though still tinged with sadness at times (particularly because of our upcoming move to Portugal and the transition that would entail), we enjoyed God's presence and blessing as we celebrated the birth of Christ, Spanish-style.

On Christmas Eve (a.k.a. Nochebuena, or "good night"), we hosted friends from Spain, England, Honduras, New Zealand and the U.S. for dinner, dessert, fun, fellowship and opening presents. Carmen even got into the fun by playing "Santa Claws."



Carrie holding Santa "Claws"

On Christmas Day, we celebrated with friends and fellow missionaries, Tim and Amber, and their children in central Madrid. Again, we enjoyed food, fellowship and furriness (this time, their pet rabbit, Bella). The celebration even included a birthday cake for Jesus!

My Two Moms

For the last 15 years or so, I (Carrie) have had two families. I spent my junior year of high school as a Rotary Club exchange student and had the great blessing of being assigned to Alcoy, Spain, and, in particular, the household of Ximo Sanz and Lliris Silvestre and their four children. Make that five: they very soon adopted me as their own! In turn, I "adopted" them as my second family and Alcoy as my second home, returning there for a year of university studies as well as holidays, town festivals,

and whenever else I could get the chance. It was during that year that I learned quite a bit about what a diverse and fascinating country Spain is, but also how deeply the Spanish people needed Jesus. I began to sense God's missionary call on my life.

Late during that school year, my Spanish parents traveled to the U.S. and visited my American parents in Pennsylvania. But I was still in Spain then.

One of the blessings of my Mom's visit to Spain (which she had long wanted to do) was that we were able to visit my Spanish family for a couple of days between Christmas and New Year's while I was working on documentation issues. Mom got to enjoy the beauty and warmth of Alcoy, although in late December, the warmth is much more in the people than the weather! And mostly, she got to visit with my "other" family and see why I had fallen in love with these people and this place.



Lliris Silvestre and Carole Nedrow

Saying Goodbye

Soon, however, we had to head back to Madrid and say goodbye, not just to Carrie's mom, who returned to Pennsylvania on New Year's Day, but also to our friends and ministries in Madrid as we got ready to move to Portugal. Our last week was a flurry of activity: packing boxes, putting most of our items in storage (Peter, a friend who lives in Madrid when he's not off trotting the globe, lent us his garage), and buying and wrapping gifts for the children of the church for Reyes (the day most Spaniards celebrate like Christmas; it commemorates the coming of the Wise Men), and tying up other loose ends. We also got to enjoy a New Year's Eve bonfire and barbecue with friends from church who live out in the country.

It was difficult emotionally to say goodbye to a place and group of people who had become a big part of us over the last year and a half. But we sensed God's presence with us, especially in Comunidad Cristiana

Luz y Vida's special service for Reyes, on January 4. The church had a special time of prayer for us as they released us (for the time being) to serve in Portugal. Although we are saddened that we won't be with these brothers and sisters in Christ on a daily basis for a while at least, we know that we continue to share the fellowship of Christ's love with each of them. But we still miss them.

Staring Over Again

On January 5, we put the last of our items in the car and headed southwest to Charneca da Caparica, on the outskirts of Lisbon, Portugal. We were blessed with God's protection and care on the way and arrived safely. Even Carmen tolerated the seven-hour trip in her "Carmen carrier" on Carrie's lap and was rewarded with a delicious Portuguese carrot upon arrival. Thank you to all whose prayers carried us along the way on this trip.

As of this writing, we're still finding the right spot for various items and learning our way around. Our new apartment is (how should we say this?) quirky. Suffice it to say, it's the first time it's been rented out since being remodeled, and there are widely diverging notions of what constitutes a "furnished" apartment. But we're doing our best. It has heat (a rarity in Portugal, although much needed this time of year), but no closets or (so far) toilet seats. Also, our landlords insist that we keep the living room and main bedroom shutters closed to avoid break-ins. On the plus side, it's a five-minute walk from church. It's also a short drive from here to the ocean shore. (We'd say "beach," but that has certain connotations of the water being warm enough to swim in. Having collected some for the saltwater aquarium Carrie's setting up, we can tell you that most definitely it is not!)

Some of the ministries we'll be involved in here include helping out in the three local Free Methodist churches, including the one in Santa Marta do Pinhal, an immigrant community mostly made up of Africans and Haitians. We'll also be working with the food bank ministry of the churches and Carrie will be taking classes at the school of leaders, a kind of seminary for church leaders, future pastors and missionaries. When we were first introduced to the church as missionaries who would be offering English classes, we ran out of forms before half of the people interested could sign up! There will also be outreaches, evangelism, visitation and whatever else the leaders here find for us to do. We're here to serve and assist in any way we can.



Missionary Packing Tip #26: an aquarium makes a fine substitute suitcase.

An El Faro Christmas

One of the final projects we were blessed to work on in Spain was Comunidad Cristiana Luz y Vida's Christmas outreach. Four teams left the church: one to evangelize

around Rivas, and three to various areas around Madrid to reach out to the homeless by giving out kits of necessities: towels, soap, shampoo, toothbrush and toothpaste, socks, and a ticket for a free hot shower at a downtown bathhouse. At least 130 such kits were given out, usually to very enthusiastic recipients. This is just one of the ways the church in Spain is working to show Christ's love to all people.



Solana, Enzo, and Alina wish a Merry Christmas to a homeless woman (and her cats!)

Praises

- For a safe arrival in Portugal, getting settled and the blessing of support from leaders and staff here.
- For a blessed Christmas season and visit with Carrie's mother.
- For the chance to visit Alcoy and Carrie's family and friends there, if only briefly.
- For the blessing that our work in Spain has been to us; we hope it has blessed many there as well.

Prayer Requests

- For our continued transition into life in Portugal: finding new friends, ministries, integrating into church life, working out logistics, etc.
- For those who will be working in the ministries we left behind in Spain, particularly those who will be working with the children.
- For language acquisition/understanding, particularly for Michael. (Portuguese and Spanish are somewhat similar, some of the time. Except when they're not! ☺)
- For our missionary friends in Malawi, as they continue to grieve the death of Ryan Bartlett and make various difficult transitions.

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"Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."

—Romans 12:1