

November, 2008

## Christmas in Congo

Picture yourself as an average Congolese national waking up at our mission station of Nkara to Christmas morning. This is what you would look around to:

Your bedroom consists of one small wooden bed frame covered with a grass-filled "mattress" gathered by you on a dry, sunny day. No dresser or chest of drawers enhances your bedroom, just a small trunk with yours and your siblings' clothes locked inside; no comforters or soft sheets to cover up with, just maybe clothes or old rags. If you have visited Mama Jeanne's boutique lately, you may have been able to purchase a small lacey curtain to cover your screen-torn window.

The living room consists of a couple of unupholstered wooden chairs surrounding a small coffee table, and off to the side of the room is a somewhat larger table and 2 more chairs used for guests who drop by to visit and chat. The coffee table may boast a doily crocheted by the woman of the house after attending the Women's Literacy school where she has learned to sew, write her name, and read the Bible for the very first time. Some of the walls may be lined with Penney's catalogue pages with which children have been rewarded for memorizing Scripture in Sunday School. No Christmas tree will light up the room, and no decorations will give a festive mood.

There is no inside plumbing, no closets, no picture windows. The home will either be made of cement block, approximately 600 square feet with a tin roof, or it will be a mud/stick dwelling with a thatched grass roof, about 400 square feet. As many as 4 children will sleep in one bed. The average-sized family has 8 to 10 children because so many die in childbirth or from malaria, typhoid, measles, pneumonia, or who knows what. So your home may have 3 bedrooms with 4 or 5 kids in two of the bedrooms and a third "master bedroom" for the parents.

Your feet will not feel the comfort of rugs. There will be no pretty dishes, no wallpaper, no paint on the walls, few towels, no TV, and no kitchen cupboards. An outside kitchen, which is really more like a smokehouse, sits close by. That way, if the kitchen catches on fire, at least the whole house doesn't burn down. Meals are cooked over an open fire, no ovens, unless you have had one made out of mud brick. In either case, the aroma of Christmas cookies will not entice your senses.

Stark is the atmosphere, drab the surroundings, but you can make a big difference in the lives of these hard-working men and women of Laban and their precious families. Please take a minute to look at the Dream Package insert and pray about how you can make Christmas Day special. Your kindness will brighten up the dullness and flood their lives with holiday cheer and the love of Christ. Proverbs 19:17. Blessings!