

Christmas in the Andes

Christmas has passed, we are well into the New Year. Epiphany, as epiphanies, continue to make the presence of our God very real to us. So, hopefully it is not too late to wish all of you our sisters and friends Peace and Hope in this Season that continues every day in our lives.

As you may have guessed, Christmas was very special for us this year. When we met with our people to plan the preparation time and the celebration, the idea of having the "Posadas" (the reenactment of the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem) was mentioned. After some explanation, the group accepted with enthusiasm.

But prior to that, Yuli had a workshop for children on the Sundays of Advent, reflecting with them and inviting them to make things to later take to their homes for decoration or gifts. The children responded enthusiastically, and because of these encounters, they participated in our Posadas and in the actual celebration of Christmas adding a lot of joy and charm to the experience.

Each night of the posada we visited a home of someone from the village who offered us hot chocolate and crackers or sweet bread. One night Mary and Joseph were members of the youth group, another night they were children, and another night they were an older couple with Mary mounted on a mule.

Walking the streets and singing attracted many people along the way. So **many of us experienced not only the journey but also the welcome of a family who invited us into their home.** And those who welcomed us felt that their homes had been blessed by our presence in prayer and song.

We learned that Christmas is not only a religious feast, but it is a celebration of the "pueblo". The village is organized into neighborhoods, each having an image of the child Jesus that they carry through the streets accompanied by a small orchestra and dancers.

We were surprised to learn that for several days there is dancing around the plaza as different groups present one of the typical dances. In other places, dancers are usually a group of about 8 or ten people. Not in Muquiyaayo! Here, everyone, old and young, men and women, children and youth dress in the typical vestments of the dance and take their dancing to the street.

They dance for hours. In the hot sun, and in the rain, they dance. They stopped only momentarily when the downpour of rain forced them off the street. But quickly they returned to finish.

Christmas was special in our home in Muquiyaayo as well. Some friends that Sue had met in Louisville and who are from Huancayo joined us for those days. Of course, Carol came from Lima, and our friend Rocio was there with us as well. We were family and we were community!

We remembered each of you with thanksgiving and prayer, because it is you who make it possible for us to be here. Your support, your love, your generosity allow us to witness the Christ incarnate even in this remote corner of Peru.

Yuli, Kathy, and Sue will join Carol in Lima for a few weeks. During that time we will be making our community retreat as well as the retreat with our associates. On the feast of Saint Angela the Associates and the young women from the Company of Angela will join us for our celebration and the renewal of commitments of the associates.

Again, all of you who are part of this charism and spirit will be present with us!

Blessings and Peace!

Yuli, Kathy, Sue