

Update from Mutare  
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Newsletter of Larry and Jane Kies  
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Mary stored up all these things and pondered them in her heart.  
Luke 2:19

Dear friends and family,

It seems that no matter where we find ourselves in the world, Christmas comes at a busy time of year. Here in Zimbabwe, farmers are feverishly ploughing and planting as the rains allow. In Mutare, the town near where we live, shops and markets are overflowing with goods and people stocking up on food and gifts. At Africa University, students are cramming and writing exams while staff mark scripts; and in the Kies household, there is a combination of all the above ....and much more!

A careful reading of the Christmas story in Luke and Matthew's gospels reveals that the first "Christmas" and the time leading up to it was also a period of tremendous activity, both in the heavens and on earth. At the time of the census, Bethlehem – and every other affected town or city - must have been hopping. There would be temporary accommodation to arrange, food to be brought in, officials to be instructed and sent to their appropriate posts, and bewildered people standing in queues for hours or days (sounds a little like polling stations in Zim at the time of elections!)

Angels, too, were busy, carrying out specific tasks of announcing unbelievable messages to the priest Zacharias and a young girl, Mary, and (maybe????) attending choir practices to rehearse for a magnificent shower of praise for God before shepherds. The Almighty God was strategically putting into place His special plans and preparations for the miracle of the birth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit prompted poetry, songs and prophecies, dreams and warnings, revealing truth to the simple, and confounding the king and the skeptic. A wondrous star appeared in the East, bringing prominent visitors from other regions to the little town of Bethlehem.

Against a backdrop of activity – events inspiring amazement, hurt, joy, fury, confusion, fear and thankfulness - the birth of Jesus took place. For some, it was a marvel, for others an inconvenience or mere curiosity. Most may simply have been so caught up in the pressure of what needed to be done that the event simply slipped by, unnoticed.

This Christmas, I would like to take the example of Jesus' mother, Mary. She was not immune to the wonder of it all. Her challenges and discomfort were great, and there was much she simply did not know or understand, yet she watched, and waited, and acted, and "stored up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

*My prayer for us all, dear friends and family, is that we would joyfully do what needs to be done, but at*

*the same time, receive grace to watch and pray, wait and listen, share and worship, and store in our hearts the mystery of the wonderful gift given to us in Jesus, our Saviour.*

With thanksgiving in our hearts for your faithfulness in prayer and giving, we wish you a joy-filled, and Merry Christmas.

Jane and Larry Kies

U.M.C. Advance Special numbers:  
Africa University Farm Development: 3021027  
Africa University Scholarships: 3021028  
Salary support: 09572Z (Larry) 10739Z (Jane)

We look forward to being present with some of you in your homes and churches in 2012, from May through September when we visit the United States. We are sorry we are not yet finished juggling commitments and cannot include a schedule in this letter. If we do not already have your email address, please send it so we can keep you posted early in the year.

Prayer requests for:

- Thanksgiving for those who give generously to Africa University and other worthy causes
- Generosity and Wisdom in knowing how to share our blessings when so many are in need
- Guidance for us in drawing up our 2012 travelling schedule that we may best use our limited time
- Peace on Earth!