

december

in Honduras

-- Janet Alcántara

Mark 1:2

I felt kind of like John the Baptist this month, crying: **Get ready! It's Advent!**

Many of the congregations are too new to have an Advent tradition, so this month I taught a lot about the season of reflection and preparation, explaining, too, the symbolism of Advent candles and chrismons.

Besides teaching in the churches, I did an Advent presentation for the international CILCA (Comunidad de iglesias Luteranas de Centroamérica—*Community of Lutheran Churches of Central America*) conference. Afterwards, one of our pastors encountered a group in the bus station, returning home to El Salvador. "They were all talking about... *Advent!*" he marveled.

Another presentation targeted our Pastoral Teams, on retreat high in the mountains at Cerro Azul Meámbar. Office staff complained that everyone came back from the retreat discussing Advent. "We missed out!" they clamored, "We want to know about Advent, too."

So I gave a presentation for staff before they closed the office for a month of vacation. It took a huge and stressful push to finish end-of-year work before closure (even though I, myself, continue to work and travel).

When you have little, how precious is every unexpected gift! I got *three* Christmas cards! My books—sent surface mail—arrived at last (I was *desperate* for my resources...) and nothing lost! Both of my daughters, Wendy and Keitlyn, join me for Christmas in Honduras!

This December, ask yourself the same questions we are asking here: "How can I prepare my heart so that God can live there?" "Does my life reflect God's light?" "What robs us of God's joy during this season?" "What things am I doing to prepare the way for the coming of Christ to the world, and how will I bring Christmas to those who know only suffering and pain?"

In faith and service in Christ, *--janet*

Deaconess Janet Russell Alcántara/Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras/ December, 2006

Ambiance

.An elderly gent gazed nostalgically at the Nativity scene in the main plaza in front of Tegus' downtown cathedral. Around the elevated and oversized Mary, Joseph, and empty manger, spread sandy deserts with camels and elaborate villages of clay houses and gaily decorated figures. The man commented to a bystander, "This is the way it always used to be: instead of Christmas trees, everybody would set up an elaborate *Nacimiento*."



Department stores sprouted forests of fake pines in September, with attendant canned Christmas music, and American-style decorations. But the public markets boast a street dedicated to booths hawking traditional decorations: Handmade stables and "*Misterio*" ("mystery" or Nativity) figurines of all sizes and styles—some elegant and sophisticated; others, riotous examples of fanciful folk art; heaps of *musgo* and *lama* (moss and lichen, redolent of the mountains) and tinted sawdust. There are armies of tiny, roughly-made incidental figures pinched in clay: women patting tortillas, carters, vendors, laundresses, musicians, sheep, ducks, chickens... things to enrich the Crèche year after year. My collection now includes a choir of angels clad in shimmering lime green, bright teal, red, and neon pink (who said angels can only wear white?) and dusted with glorious, silvery glitter.



The Advent view from my balcony: traversing the vista of palm and mango trees, blue mountains, and orange sunset, a scallop of colored mini-lights... How incongruous!



Yes, please do write to me. My E-mail is dcsjanet@hotmail.com. Snail mail, a more iffy proposition, takes about two weeks. Use the church office's P.O. box.

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(I love Christmas cards, hint, hint...)