



ALTERNativity

Just God, simply Christmas



FOCUS ON THE PHILIPPINES

Written by Christian Aid Partner in the Philippines - Myrna Bajo



The Philippines is made up of three island groupings and there are over 7000 islands. The country's most famous leader Marcos' legacy was huge debts to the World Bank. Many live in absolute poverty trying to eke out a living, this contrasts sharply with the wealthy homes of the privileged in that city. Farmers suffer from competition for rice sales on the "free" market and indigenous tribes are driven from their land to make way for international logging concerns.

Christmas in the Philippines

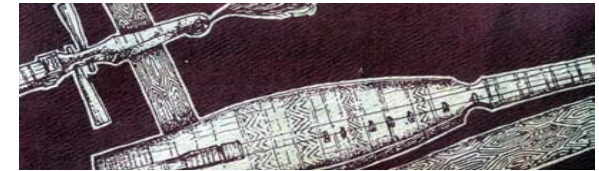
The Philippines has probably the longest Christmas season. As soon as a month ends with a 'ber', that is, starting September, one is sure to hear Christmas carols over the radio; superstores in big cities start to put up colourful Christmas lights and exotic decorations; and advertisements on television start to point to Christmas with a countdown of 100. The season is supposed to end on the Epiphany, or first Sunday after New Year



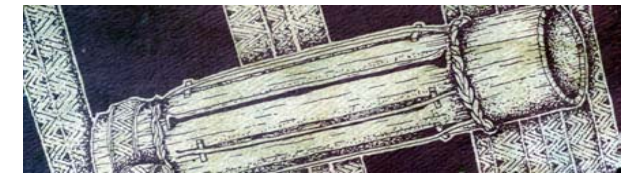
but some prolong it up to the 1st of February, to catch also the Chinese New Year. Around 70% of the 78 million populations belong to the Roman Catholic Church and follow their Advent calendar. A Mass known as the *Simbang Gabi* is offered at 0400hrs, beginning on the 16th of December and ending on the 24th.

Traditionally, the first day of *Simbang Gabi* also signals the start of carolling. Carolling is part of the Filipino Christmas tradition. People band together: friends, office mates, church groups, choirs, even street kids. Sometimes known as *cumbancheros*, they knock on the doors of many a home, singing carols, bringing good cheer and wishes for happy holidays. In return, kind souls give them coins or a few pesos, or even some Christmas treats. However Carolling is not just singing Christmas songs by small groups of people; it has become a means to earn money. Those with Christmas lights (Parols) hung outside their houses get the most carollers. This practice has passed on to the

indigenous people. For them, it does not matter whether or not the *Simbang Gabi* has begun to start their own carolling. Small groups come down from



the mountains, equipped with a *kudlong* (2-stringed guitar used by a man - above) and a *sawroy* (bamboo guitar used by a woman - below), which are played simultaneously while the group sing and dance. To the uninitiated, their carolling is looked upon as a form of begging; that is why they are not only



PAROL - PHILIPPINE LANTERNS

Parols are multicoloured star shaped lanterns that decorate Philippine homes during the holidays. It is a reminder of the wise men's journey on the first Christmas. Most range in size (diameter) from 3 to 5 feet, and can be lighted by dozens of light-bulbs, which are timed/sequenced so that the lights "dance". During festivals, parols can be as much as 12 feet in diameter, lighted by hundreds of light-bulbs. These "parols" are made from several layers of stars/snowflakes cut from coloured tissue paper on frames of bamboo. **Why not make your own Parol?**



sneered at but are often driven away. Pray for understanding for poor people as they seek to supplement their income at advent by carol singing. Why not sing with our brothers and sisters in the Philippines **'Blessed be God'**. Words and music from Many and Great (Wild Goose Publications).

For most Christian Filipinos, Christmas is capped with a *Noche Buena* (midnight meal) after lighting firecrackers and fireworks on 25 December. This is an opportunity for thanksgiving for blessings of the past year. The *Noche Buena* is a family affair, and no matter how poor a family may be, one could be certain that there is food on the dining table to be shared together.

Cook your Noche Buena

If you would like to try one of the Philippine delicacies, then **Caldereta** would be the easiest to cook for your own *Noche Buena*. Here's how:

Ingredients:

- 1 kg pierna corta (cubed beef),
- ½ cup vinegar,
- 4 cloves crushed garlic,
- 1 sliced onion,
- 100gms liver pate
- 1 can tomatoes (8 oz),
2 sliced sweet red and green pepper,
- 1 sachet hot sauce, crushed salt & peppercorns
- Bay leaves



Method:

1. Marinate beef in a mixture of vinegar, peppercorn, salt and garlic and bay leaf for 1 hour.
2. Fry beef pieces in oil until brown.
3. Add onion, tomatoes and hot water. Add the green and red pepper, and hot sauce.
4. Cover and simmer until meat is tender.
5. Blend in liver pate to make a thick gravy. continue cooking for 5 minutes.
6. Serve on a bed of rice. (Makes 5-8 servings).

Gift Giving

The tradition of giving is strong, Filipinos organize a 'Manito-Manito' or 'Gift Exchange'. This may be done among schoolmates, officemates, friends or even relatives. Mechanics or rules of exchanging vary. Some can be as simple as pooling gifts which are later on shared. Others start off several weeks ahead of gift-giving time, usually a Christmas party; participants pick out a name, and small, sometimes tricky, items are given to this person weekly according to agreed-upon themes (something small, something soft, etc.). The identity of the giver is known only at 'Revelation', when the more meaningful gift is also given



Why not buy some Fair Trade Philippines products for Christmas? Dried mangoes, jewellery boxes, shell and bead crafts, and Christmas cards made of cogon grass paper are among the products that have found their way to Scotland.

HIV/AIDS

The Philippines has an HIV/AIDS epidemic that has a huge explosion potential. Risky behavior is a major concern. A large sex industry exists throughout the country. Casual sex is prevalent among the youth. Regular and correct use of condoms is low. Many of the country's 7 million migrant workers are vulnerable. The country is still trying to recover from a serious economic crisis and much of its scarce resources have been committed to other more urgent social and development priorities.



There is a multi-sectoral effort to accelerate the national response ahead of the epidemic. Pilot projects involving local government units (LGUs), NGOs and the private sector have demonstrated success in HIV/AIDS education and counselling, condom promotion, STI prevention and management, and surveillance.

Prayer

Lord, we believe in the love within each of us.
We believe in liberty and the equality of all.
We believe in unity, the only way to achieve peace.
We believe that with your divine help, justice can be obtained.
We believe that you came so that your Kingdom may be established here on earth with us.
Amen.

Contact details: World Mission Church of Scotland 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN. www.world-mission.org
Christian Aid P.O Box 11, Edinburgh EH1 1EL.
ALTERnativity 759A Argyle Street, Glasgow G3 8DS.
www.christianaid.org or www.alternativity.org.uk