

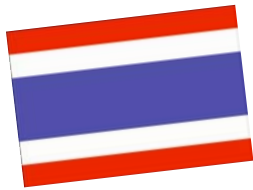


ALTERNativity

Just God, simply Christmas



FOCUS ON THAILAND



How do we celebrate Christmas in a way that remembers that God came for the whole world and that his concern today is still for every corner and every man, woman and child?

This leaflet is offered as a small way to answer that question.

We hope each year to focus on one country where the Board of World Mission is at work, both to learn about Christmas in that country and perhaps add their customs to our celebrations, as well as offer prayers, worship, stories and action.

This may be just one way of preparing for the birth of Christ in a way that gives Advent meaning.

Share this leaflet with your worship leader or house group and enjoy an Advent with an added dimension.

Advent in Thailand

Two ideas from the Karen Christian community in Thailand's which would add to our own Advent celebrations are:

“Sweet December” – a special service held leading

up to the midnight of November 30th, which recognises the importance of the beginning of Advent.

“Carol Singing Karen style” – each church organises two to three nights of carol singing. Think how this would impact on your local community if churches got together and arranged to cover the nights of Advent. We might find it difficult to copy them exactly as they sing between 9pm and 5am and people are expected to greet the singers and maybe even feed them, no matter what the hour!!

It is also a sobering reminder that the churches use the money raised from these events to help towards their Christmas celebrations. These last a whole day, taking place at the church and involving the whole community. There is no such thing as a private family Christmas.

Life in Thailand

Thailand is by no means the poorest country in the world yet 15% of its people live in extreme poverty; this means that they do not have enough to clothe feed and give shelter to their families.



Two main issues concern the country; the first is the

HIV/AIDS epidemic. Since the first diagnosis in 1984 over 1 million people have died of Aids and it is estimated that today about 3/4million are infected. The spread of AIDS in Thailand has been exacerbated by prostitution (a direct result of poverty) and the drugs culture. For more information on how the Church of Scotland HIV/AIDS Project is supporting the Thai Churches response contact Nigel Pounce Project Coordinator, hiv aids@world-mission.org.



The second is the care of refugees from the neighbouring country of Burma. At Christmas it is especially poignant to remember the situation of those forced to flee as it is the harsh reality of the original story which we often overlook. Use the story and the prayer of Tu Lar Paw in your worship as a reminder that the coming of Christ was not the cosy and pretty scene often portrayed.

Check the pray for Burma web-site, which focuses on the refugees in Thailand ; www.prayforburma.com or send a donation to Christian Aid PO Box 11 Edinburgh EH1 1EL for their continuing work there with the Church of Christ in Thailand who are part of the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC).

In a country with limited resources we are humbled by their generosity and welcome to their neighbours in need.

To relate these situations to the Christmas story gives authenticity and a reality to our worship You may find that it adds to the celebration.

Overleaf are some ideas for worship and home which all have a Thailand focus.

Hymn from Thailand (from Sound the Bamboo)

Words Anonymous, para Shirley Murray. Music NAAMPHI arr Solot Kuptarat Thailand. Sound the Bamboo © 2000 All rights reserved. All enquiries to Christian Conference of Asia: Tel: 852 2691 1068 or email: cca@pacific.net.hk

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

This Is the Day of Joy and Peace 303



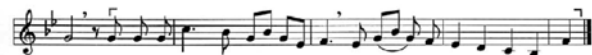
1. This is the day of joy and peace, when we may meet God's new - born
2. To - day God gives his on - ly Son, so all the world is gath - ered
3. He comes to save us and re - deem, and all at once, our sin is



Child, the name of Je - sus ech - oes far, and peo - ple gath - er in de - light.
in to lift their voic - es, full of joy, to praise the great Mes - si - ah's power.
gone, he gives his life up - on the Cross: its blood has washed all guilt a - way.



He is the Son, the Son of God, born here be - low to save us
For Christ has ev - er - last - ing power, his mer - cy is for ev - ery
Like an - gels, we are pur - i - fied, our life is freed from sin and



all. Lord Je - sus Christ, come from a - bove, a hum - ble sta - ble makes his home.
one. Lord Je - sus Christ, come from a - bove, a hum - ble sta - ble makes his home.
pain. Lord Je - sus Christ come from a - bove, a hum - ble sta - ble makes his home.

Remember Thailand in your Christmas Shopping

Traidcraft and Tearcraft have a range of goods from tableware, to cards to toys or stockings for the children.

Hang a Thai ornament on your tree – the elephant is an appropriate reminder of Desmond Tutu's words of encouragement. "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time"

Ask at World Mission about making a gift or donation to help those most in need in Thailand.

Cook a Thai meal in Advent.

If you are feeling really adventurous – invite some friends round and tell them about your added value celebrations over a dish of 'pha'nAAng (or buy a Thai dish from the supermarket!)

1 lb chicken cut into pieces
½ can coconut milk
1–2 tbsps 'pha'nAAng curry paste
1 tbsp fish sauce
1 tbsp kafir lime leaves finely cut
½ cup basil leaves
1 tbsp sugar



Quickly stir fry chicken in wok and remove to cool. Put 2 tbs coconut milk in wok and let it boil then add 1–2 tbsps of curry paste, depending on how hot you want dish, stir till it produces some oily red stuffs, add chicken, add rest of coconut milk, stir well. Add fish sauce and sugar if desired. Test for taste then add lime leaves and basil. Serve with jasmin rice and fresh vegetables.

(Ingredients available at Asian stores)

Say a prayer with Tu Lar Paw

Tu Lar Paw is a refugee. Her story is typical of many Karenni refugees from Burma who make the perilous journey across the border into Thailand in order to escape, torture, rape and forced labour by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Her home in Burma was burned down twice by the authorities

and she had to flee into the jungle. She has been in Thailand since 1989 and is the chair of the Karenni refugee committee based in one of the camps along the border.

Being a Christian in a country where Christianity is a minority faith, Tu Lar Paw is aware of the importance of being tolerant of all faiths. She says: 'in my work it is vital that I respect people regardless of their faith. As Christians, through the Lord's Prayer, we are charged to be forgiving or we will never move forward, but it is very difficult to do, especially when I remember how we suffered at the hands of the military. Right now my prayer is that all my fellow refugees will continue to have their daily bread – or rice in our case and for the deliverance of my people and for the leaders – for all those who are unable to cross the border in time. But I also pray for the SPDC that they may walk the path of compassion and peace – as Jesus said "thy will be done on earth as in heaven ... forgive us our sins as we forgive others.'

Prayer:

In the pain of the tortured and in the loneliness of the refugee. In the arrogance of the strong and in the security of the powerful. In the comfort of my life and in the material bounty which cannot satisfy You ask me Lord,

'Do you love me?'

'Do you love me?'

'Do you love me?'

Forgive me, heal me, that I might dare to say 'Yes'

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