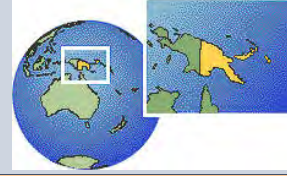




Ford Family Alotau, PNG



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Christmas and Culture

Every culture has them. We call them customs. Some customs are good. Some are bad. And others are neither good nor bad. This story is about a bad custom. A Christmas custom.

We (the North American breed of humanity) think of the silence of Christmas Eve where not a creature will stir, not even a mouse. We rest our heads on our pillows for a 'long winter's nap.'

This Christmas Eve I too had laid down my head. Not naively expecting a long winter's nap, but instead a long summer's nap. But, there did arise such a clatter. But, I would not rise to see what was the matter – for I already knew. The carolers had come. Yes, you might smile when you think of the pleasant sounds of benevolent carolers gracing your home with the Christmas spirit. But the

Merry Christmas!

Over the Christmas holidays many people travel back to their villages to see friends and families. As a result our church attendance was down over these last two months. However, for those of us who remained we carried on a church Christmas tradition. We traveled to the hospital IN THE AFTERNOON (See story to the left) to carol and hand out gifts and food to the patients. It is a wonderful way to remind ourselves that Christmas is indeed more about giving than receiving. Following the hospital visit a group of about 30 came to our house to watch "The Santa Clause." (Thank you to Bob and Sarah Logsdon who sent us the movie last year for Christmas).



Disappointment

In ministry we place ourselves in the midst of the events of human life. The wonderful blessing of this is that we find ourselves present with people at their times of greatest joys and blessings and even have the wonderful opportunity to rejoice with those who rejoice. On the other hand, this does mean at times we share in the darkest parts of peoples' lives, and as a result, are called to mourn with those who mourn.

We were saddened to hear that two of our unmarried young ladies in the church are pregnant. Both future fathers are also members of the church. Fortunately, everyone involved repented and thus were extended Christ's forgiveness by the church. (By the time you read this newsletter both couples will have already been married).

Formal marriage is not a common practice here (specifically in Milne Bay Province). The local marriage custom is to become involved until a girl gets pregnant and then everyone will call those two individuals married. We are actively educating and moving towards a Christian form of marriage, but cultures change slowly. Please pray that God will allow the local Christians to accept and to internalize the importance of marriage.

nasally harmony is quite different at 2:30 a.m. Add the consistent yelps of two angered Rottweiler's - and you have quite a melody.

"What should we do?" Jeri enquired. "Shhhhh. I'm sure they will just go away." I, the man of wisdom, assured. But, by the third song I knew the hopes of their disappearance was in vain.

"Merry Christmas" they shouted gleefully as I staggered down the step. "Yes, Merry Christmas to you too. I'm not from around here, so I don't know when you are going to leave, but this might be a good time." Finally, it was a Silent Night as they looked in shock (Now for you judgmental Christians remember it was 2:30 in the morning and manners have their limits ☺). But I did not dampen their spirits for down the driveway they sang looking for another house to share their Christmas ... Cheer?

At least it was a Christmas Eve I won't soon forget.

Baptisms:

Joel Siropodi is one of our more mature Christian men. Throughout most of 2008 Joel kept a young teenage boy, Alex, in his house. From the very beginning Joel wanted to teach Alex about the spiritual life. Alex was baptized by Joel in April of this year.

Over the last few months Joel has also been hosting Alex's father, Joe. With the same vision and purpose Joel said that he wanted to help Joe become a Christian. Through Joel's encouragement I was able to have a couple of studies with Joe. He accepted the words of Scripture and was baptized on Nov. 30th, 2008.



In addition to Joe's baptism there have been five people baptized outside of Alotau. Many of these have been the result of Marcus' work with new Christians on the west side of town. Marcus is currently working at trying to start some churches where these new Christians are.

Relaxation:

On November 25, 2008 my parents arrived and stayed in Alotau until December 11. I had planned to take the remainder of my vacation time while they were here. We found the first week was still quite busy – with the difference that Jeri was able to accompany me to some visits while my parents watched the kids. By the end of the first week we concluded that getting away would be necessary to have some uninterrupted family time. We spent three nights at a guest house out of town. It was a wonderful relaxing time with days at the beach, evenings around the card table, and as always, lots of time to play with the kids. But, I suspect that there will be more to come about our vacation in the family perspective ...



Kids with Grandma and Grandpa Ford



Treetops Guest House

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Prayer Requests:

- Joe as he begins his Christian life. Pray especially that he can be strong as he has moved out of town and is no longer able to attend services.
- Prayer of Thanksgiving for those who were recently baptized.
- Two newly married couples: Poni and Lorraine; John and Siggy.
- Those who are currently having Bible studies and considering becoming Christians.

We thank each one of you for your prayers and support.
May God Bless You!

CHECK IT OUT:

pngfords.blogspot.com
A blog detailing the life and times of the PNG Fords.
www.championschurch.org
Our previous newsletters have been archived on the Church of Christ in Champions website.



Hannah learns to kayak



Family Hike

Family Perspective, written by Jeri:

The highlight for our family through November and December was indeed the chance to host Craig's parents. We had a wonderful time. It was special for many reasons. The kids were reintroduced to their grandparents, and Grandpa and Grandma got to experience what the kids are like in real life instead of just pictures!

While they were here, Craig's Dad built Hannah and Caleb a little table and chair set. Hannah loved getting pushed on her swing while Grandpa worked. As she told me, "Grandpa cuts wood for a little bit, then he swings me, cuts, then swings me...." She used to love when I pushed her on the swing, but now I just don't do it quite right. "Grandpa always does *this*," I keep hearing. Caleb was thankful to always have Grandma or Grandpa around to read a book to him.

We celebrated an early Christmas with them before we left, complete with a seafood dinner. We had crab, shrimp, and fish. Getting splattered by crab juice made the meal much more interesting than the traditional turkey meal!

Craig and I enjoyed being able to have great babysitters so we could snorkel and kayak together. I also had extra help cooking, bathing kids, doing dishes, etc... I didn't know how I would cope after they left, but I think we're back into our routine again.

Our stay at the Treetops Guest House was just what we needed to get away. We had lots of time to spend together playing games, swimming, hiking, and playing in the rivers. Hannah received multiple mosquito bites on her face and legs during our stay, which turned into nasty sores. (Tropical climates cause such tiny things to become big infections if not treated properly.) But within a couple of weeks she didn't have to walk around covered in bandages anymore.

We had a wonderful end to 2008 and look forward to another great year. Our family is excited about the addition of a new baby in 2009. Thankfully I am having another 'easy' pregnancy. Hannah is excited for my tummy to get fat so we can go on furlough.

May God bless you with a Happy New Year.