

# Christmas in Thailand

*As a missionary, I learned valuable lessons at Christmastime about charity and service.*

By Brett Bartholomew

Christmas is often spent with family ornamenting the house with bells and tinsel, placing presents under the Christmas tree, enjoying a hearty (but usually not healthy) meal, and baking cookies for Santa Claus. My Christmas experience while serving as a missionary in the Thailand Bangkok Mission, however, was quite different. I was away from family, had no decorations, didn't set up a tree, ate rice instead of a traditional Christmas meal, and didn't have an oven to bake cookies for Santa Claus. But I learned more in Thailand about the true meaning of Christmas than I ever had before.

I'll never forget the charity of the Thai members, especially, as they spread the true spirit of Christmas by both inviting others to come to the church and giving of their time and talents to bless others.

Of the millions of people in Bangkok, the vast majority belong to the Buddhist religion. Their knowledge about Christmas mostly comes from what they see on American television: big trees, decorative gifts, and so on. So the members took Christmas as an opportunity to invite both less-active members and nonmembers to come to the church and learn more about Christ, the real reason for Christmas, and feel of His love. Deciding on a date in December, the members prepared to put on a Christmas

production by creating flyers, designing visuals, memorizing lines, building backdrops, and practicing speaking and singing parts. Each week, I witnessed the members give an enormous amount of time and effort to bring Christmas to Thailand.

Finally, the night arrived. As a missionary, I was excited by how many new people I got to meet and reach out to, but I was more impressed when I saw the wonderful Thai members reaching out to befriend the newcomers. I was nearing the end of my mission then, and seeing the members' examples made me want to be a better member missionary when I got home. As the night progressed, I got to watch the production the members put on, and I felt the Spirit strongly as I watched the pageant and was reminded of truths about eternal families, the scriptures, and the birth of our Savior.

Even after the Christmas program, the members kept on giving. They invited the missionaries to go caroling at less-active members' houses. Arriving in a caravan of cars, our young and old members approached those less-active members with a love hard to imagine. That night was one of my favorite nights in Thailand. I feel like I gained more than I gave because I saw those less-active members the way that Heavenly Father saw them—as



His children whom He loved very much, no doubt wanting them to know of His love for them. I was struck by the members' willingness to do as the prophets and apostles have asked and administer to those in need and seek out the lost sheep. As our little caravan was about to leave each place, we invited those less-active members to come back to church and partake of the Lord's goodness.

The two principles I learned during Christmastime in Thailand—inviting others to come unto Christ and unconditional giving—have changed my life. When I came home, I realized there are many things we can do to help

others draw nearer to Christ, such as inviting others to participate in family home evening, bringing friends or family members to church, and encouraging less-active members to participate in callings. And I hope to always choose to have an attitude of giving, especially as Christmastime approaches. By inviting others and truly giving, we, like the Saints in Thailand, can have the true spirit of Christmas with us during the Christmas season. ■

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