

NO ANGELS NEEDED

On that Christmas morning in a hospital in Guatemala, we couldn't call on angels to sing. But we could call on ourselves.

By Jeniann Jensen Nielsen

Fireworks and firecrackers, brightly colored nativity scenes, and feasts featuring stuffed tamales—that's Christmas in Guatemala. As a full-time missionary I found the traditions very different from my own traditions in the United States. I was homesick and thought my Christmas would be miserable.

My companion, Sister Anaya, said we would find joy on Christmas by serving others. She suggested that we spend the morning singing at the hospital, and we invited other missionaries to join us.

As we approached the entrance, I watched the people waiting in line to see their loved ones. Their faces were sad, their sandal-clad feet dusty, their clothes faded. We waited with them. When we were finally allowed to enter the building, we walked down narrow halls with flaking green paint and cement floors. The smells of medicines and sickness overwhelmed me.

In the dim light I could see sick patients on beds in a large room with little ventilation or privacy. They lay there, some with bandages, some with IVs, some hooked up to machines to help them breathe. Some moaned quietly. Others slept. I wondered why we had come. Most in our small group of missionaries stood in the doorway, not knowing what to do.

But not Sister Anaya. She went to each bed, greeting those who were sick, asking them how they felt, and wishing them a merry Christmas. Her boldness reminded the rest of us why we had come, and we started to sing Christmas carols, softly at first but more confidently as we continued. Some of the patients smiled, some just lay there and didn't seem to notice, and some hummed along.

Sister Anaya, singing with a hymnbook in her hand, approached a woman who was wrapped in bandages. The woman began to cry quietly, and my companion lovingly stroked her hair. Through her tears the woman spoke, "You are angels. You are angels."

I will never forget Sister Anaya's response. "No, you are not hearing angels," she replied. "You are hearing Latter-day Saints."

When Jesus Christ was born, an angel announced His birth and a multitude of the heavenly host praised God (see Luke 2:8–14). I think of those angels every Christmas.

But I also think of Sister Anaya. I remember her encouraging us to sing at the hospital and how we found joy by spreading joy. I remember her stroking the hair of that sick woman. And I remember that I don't need to be an angel to serve others. I can serve them as a Latter-day Saint. ■

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