

# The Center for Medical Mission's *e-Pistle* December 2011

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A little child  
A shining star  
A stable rude,  
The door ajar.  
Yet in that place  
So crude, forlorn,  
The Hope of all  
The world was born.  
*Anonymous*

**Christ's birth has changed everything.**

**May you be joyous as you celebrate this Christmas season!**

**Wishing you a blessed Christmas celebration - Susan, Daniel and David**

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*I do not normally include an article in our December e-Pistle, but Judy Palpant has shared some of her writing that is appropriate for this time of year. Please be sure to share it with your spouse and/or friends.*

## **Invitation to a Big Table**

by Judy Palpant

*[Dinner conversations enable family members to listen] "to that other voice, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. Standing back from all natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind."—C.S. Lewis*

"I'll be home for Christmas—if only in my dreams," croons Bing Crosby. But where is home? And even if we hope to be there for the holidays, our imagination mingles with reality.

Benjamin Weir, along with his wife Carol, served as missionaries in Lebanon for more than 30 years. In 1984, he was kidnapped off the streets of Beirut. Held for 16 months, his captors, an Islamist fundamentalist group, released him in return for U.S. anti-tank weapons as part of the Iran Contra Affair. I had the privilege of hearing Ben speak at Whitworth Institute of Ministry shortly after his release.

"When I was captured everything in a short space of time was taken away: family, friends, work, possessions and opportunities to engage in...creative activity with other people..." He described the small room of his captivity. In his mind he fashioned a calendar from the pock marks on the wall. Three nails represented the trinity. The gift of time he spent in prayer for Christians in 22 countries. "I lived in great danger and felt great boredom, but nobody could touch the core of who I was. I knew who I was—you are not your own—you are bought with a price."

He saved a piece of bread from his meager supper every Saturday night. Then, as Sunday morning dawned, he pictured the Lord's feast table in heaven. Seated around it, he envisioned believers in Jesus. His wife and loved ones. His ancestors. Old friends. New friends.

He pictured the Lord Jesus as host, taking the bread and the cup, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take. Eat." Ben realized, "I could partake. What a gift." He took his small bit of dry bread and ate it in the presence of his unseen, but very present, Lord. More than a day dream--these imaginings were rooted in the promises of Scripture. At the Last Supper, Jesus said he would not eat bread or drink the fruit of the vine until we all sit around His table in heaven where all our longings will finally be satisfied.

In April 2010, my husband and I traveled to France. In Waldersbach, a small alpine village in Alsace up near the German border, we visited James and Cheryl Cloyd, friends working with Alongside Ministries. On a Saturday morning, James and Sam joined a dozen other men in a community project doing spring clearing of some land. A bonfire blazed as they cut and hauled old limbs and debris to be burned. The entire morning was spent in the muck with saws and trimmers. They cut logs to stack on the community wood pile for the elderly and disabled to burn the following winter. After a morning of hard work, they all tromped up the road to a four-star restaurant.

"I can't join you in the fields," the owner told the community organizers, "but I'll fix you lunch." Smelling of smoke and sweat, the men took off muddy boots at the door, and stepped across the same threshold used by wealthy people from Strasbourg who had driven to Waldersbach for a fine meal. The owner and his staff lined up to shake their hands. Like honored guests, the maître d' ushered them into the middle of the dining room where a long table was set with lovely orchid centerpieces. Full paying guests sat at small tables around the perimeter.

With flare and courtesy, the waiters served the villagers. The setting and warm hospitality made for good camaraderie. Their labors temporarily forgotten, the men partook of the nine-course feast. Glasses clinked as toasts were spoken. Delicious flavors lingered on their taste buds as they conversed.

James and Sam returned home mid-afternoon. We all relished their descriptions of the welcome, the table, the beauty, the flavors, the joy. A lavish surprise. A foretaste of

heaven. A community building event from start to finish. A half-day's pleasant labor rewarded by a feast from the successful restaurateur.

Whether at home or faraway for the holidays, God promises that He is preparing a feast for us. If it can be so vivid in the mind of Ben Weir and so marvelous in real tastes and beauty for French village men, what will it be for us when the Master of Surprise spreads His table for us?

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