



Christmas in Liberia

Perhaps you are breathing a sigh of relief to have the busy holiday season over. I hope you enjoyed family, friends, good food and most of all the JOY of knowing we have a Savior who came into our world and is coming back again.

I recently came across some articles describing Christmas from a Liberian perspective. You can access the full articles with some colorful pictures of "Old Man Bayka" at these two sites:

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02uMz3363pXY3WeNGhWCv8ESjcPUYVYoCAzFirtnTVkF6KNGVrKmwrmJXxRfajf4x4l&id=100063745377134&mibextid=Nif5oz and

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/liberia-old-man-bayka-christmas>

Christmas time in Liberia is a big deal. I don't usually go to Liberia at all in December as people are busy getting ready. I have only spent a handful of Christmases in Liberia when we lived there years ago. We kept it mostly a family time, sometimes shared with missionaries in our compound. The civil war at the time kept many Liberian families apart. That is not the case today. Like here, Christmas is a time for families to gather. Many Liberians travel from abroad to be home. Decorations, gifts, and food are all part of the celebration.



Christmas in Liberia 1994 spent with friends next door

People start saving in January in order to make purchases in December. Those that can afford gifts will visit local markets. This is the one time of year many children get their only new set of clothes. Extra markets will spring up between houses and on the streets as people seek out a little additional funding from the increased demand. Vendors appreciate the increased business the season brings.

The holidays are celebrated from Dec 18-25 and center around the Christian faith and church. Churches are full on Christmas Eve as people celebrate with songs, dramas, and concerts.

"Christmas Day is spent with family. Attending church on Christmas Day is a priority. After the Mass or Sunday Service, people spill out onto the streets in their finest clothes, greeting friends, extending well wishes to each other, and, if need be, searching for a ride home! Later in the day, families go to the beaches or visit other friends. Children put on their new clothes and visit family seeking presents."
(Lister)

Some people will put up artificial trees. Others will just use lights or floral decorations on houses and fences. Some will paint their houses, inside and out. In Monrovia, it is actually the law to have the outside of your buildings painted by December 15. This is a good time to paint as it is dry season. Paint deteriorates quickly from the salt air. Everything looks fresh and clean again.

"In relation to the Christmas meal, people (often the mother) may begin as early as 3 in the morning, preparing the meal for the day. There is no 'special meal' at Christmas. Instead, the meal may be jollof rice, beef, collard greens, fried greens and biscuits. In some homes, goat soup and rice may be a key part of the meal. This meal reflects the poverty of the people. However, there is a sharing of food with neighbors to ensure all can join in the festivities.

"Children in rural areas receive candy for Christmas, while those in the city tend to get dolls and toy guns. Where the family can afford it, gifts are exchanged

between all family members. If the family has the means, they will give gifts to maids or servicemen. Gifts are also exchanged at some places of employment and there are parties in some companies with family members attending.



Luke's first Christmas in Liberia

"Drumming bands go around banging drums for money through the streets. Early Christmas morning they go house to house, wishing a Merry Christmas with drums. Masqueraders and traditional dancers also come out during the season, in all parts of the country – both in city and rural areas. There are outdoor concerts with local performers over the Christmas season as well." (Lister)



*The tree at our apartment.
We still hang it every year.*

Much of the Christmas holiday celebration is similar to our own as you can see. However, two traditions are unique to Liberia. While many still use the traditional "Merry Christmas," others will say "My Christmas is on you." This is a polite way of asking for something nice to be given them. The person who receives such a greeting is expected to produce a gift. One is advised to be the one to say it first!

The other tradition involves a character name "Old Man Bayka" or "Old Man Beggar" who is in many respects the opposite of Santa Claus. While he is not necessarily evil, he is associated with the "devils" connected to the secret societies common in much of West Africa. (Mafotsing) He often dresses in old rags and walks around expecting gifts of money or food. He may wear a mask, walk on stilts and/or be covered in raffia straw. He will perform dances, songs to the beat of traditional drums, and tell stories with themes of giving to the poor. His appearances can turn into quite a spectacle with children clamoring about hoping to pick up some of the change tossed his way. Some of the performers come from surrounding villages hoping to get gifts to take back to their villages to share.

Happy New Year!

Becky

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Charles Luogon, Maan translator, successfully underwent surgery to amputate his left foot. Pray for complete restoration so he can receive a prosthetic.
- Pray for January checking sessions to go smoothly and for smooth travel home the end of the month.
- Praise for Moses and Peter who have stepped up to help with the Maan work in Charles' absence.
- Pray for a peaceful election year in Liberia.

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References:

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<https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02uMz3363pXY3WeNGhWCv8ESjcPUYVYoCAzFirtnTVkF6KNGVrKmwrmJXxRfajf4x4l&id=100063745377134&mibextid=Nif5oz>.

Mafotsing, Line Sidonie Talla. "In Liberia, Christmas is the Time of the Dancing Devils." *Atlas Obscura*. 21 December 2022. 22 December 2022.
<<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/liberia-old-man-bayka-christmas>>.

Becky is YOUR HEART IN ACTION. She serves you as a consultant for translation teams in Liberia, West Africa by using your prayers and support to fulfill your desire to "PUT GOD'S WORD IN THEIR HANDS." Becky rejoices that she is part of your Lutheran Bible Translators team and values this special relationship.