

CHRISTMAS IN MALI

Judith couldn't wait to celebrate Jesus's birth with her branch.

By Jessica Larsen

(Based on a true story)

"Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains"
(Hymns, no. 203)

It was Christmas Day. Judith hummed as she walked to the church building. She and her siblings were going to their branch's Christmas party.

Her sister, Esther, smiled. "Is that 'Angels We Have Heard on High?'"

"Yes! It's my favorite. I hope we sing it today." Judith grinned.

"I love that song!" Désiré, her brother, added. He loudly sang, "Gl-o-o-o-ria!"

They all laughed. Judith couldn't wait to celebrate with their branch. Not many people in Mali celebrated Christmas. In this part of Africa, most people didn't know much about Jesus. To them, Christmas was just an ordinary day.

The streets were full of people. Vendors sold light green melons. People young and old carried jugs of water on their heads. A young boy led a donkey pulling a cart. Judith looked up at the tall, narrow tower of a mosque. It was a beautiful building where many of their Muslim neighbors worshipped.

Judith, Esther, and Désiré used to go to Papa's church. But last summer, they joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Now the three of them walked to church together

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every week. Judith loved learning about Jesus in Primary.

At last they got to the party. Most of the families in the branch were already there. A projector was showing Christmas videos on the chapel wall. Judith watched Joseph lead Mary through Bethlehem on a donkey. The busy, dusty streets reminded her of Mali!

After the video ended, a taxi pulled up. Sister Valerie, the Relief Society president, got out.

"I've brought the food!" she called.

Everyone helped bring dishes up to the balcony. It was a feast! Potato salad, carrots, green beans, bright yellow rice, fried chicken . . . it was all delicious!

"Thank you so much, Sister Valerie!" Judith said.

Then the youngest children each got a ball, doll, or toy car. There weren't enough gifts for Judith to get one, but she didn't mind. She loved seeing the little kids smile.

The party ended with singing. Judith smiled when they sang "Angels We Have Heard on High."

The whole branch sang together. It was so beautiful. Jesus really was born all those years ago! Judith was so grateful that she, Désiré, and Esther knew about Him.

And she was so happy to celebrate His birth. ●

The author lives in Texas, USA.

Esther, Judith, and Désiré in front of their church building.



"This Christmas season we celebrate the greatest gift of all . . . the birth of the babe of Bethlehem."

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Generous One" (First Presidency Christmas devotional, Dec. 6, 2015), broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.