

La Luz de Cristo para Perú

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The Nativity Scene

I have a fascination with nativity scenes. I love to look at the differences and similarities in how different artists portray the birth of Christ. In the past few years, I am particularly fascinated with what nativity scenes look like in different cultures and what the different traditions are surrounding them.

When we were working in missions on the Mexico border, I came upon one of my all-time favorite nativity scenes. The homemade stable was made of scrap lumber and cardboard. Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, the wise men and the shepherds were all portrayed by various baby dolls, Barbies, and action figures. The animals in the stable were a collection of dinosaurs, plastic farm animals, a stuffed elephant, and a ceramic piggy bank. I absolutely loved it! There was something so simple about it - it really touched me.

In Costa Rica, nativity scenes could be very elaborate. In much the same manner that North Americans decorate their yards and houses with Christmas lights and whimsical Santa scenes with music, the yards and patios in Costa Rica had intricately designed nativity scenes, complete with running water and music. I must add a small side note here… only the Catholic tradition had nativity scenes. The evangelical / Protestant tradition in Costa Rica was opposed to the use of the nativity scenes.

In Peru, nativity scenes are different in other ways. Depending on the culture and people group that you are with, the nativity scenes appears "different" I have seen nativities that appear very Spanish in origin (Peru was a Spanish-held country for a long time in history). Some nativities appear very Quechua, with llamas instead of sheep and people dressed in traditional Quechua clothing, chulo hats, and characters wrapped in *mantas* (blankets). I've even seen nativities in the jungle-style, with Mary and Joseph and other characters dressed in traditional Ashaninka clothing with feathered headdresses, parrots on their shoulders, and jungle animals in the hut-stable. The one thing that is traditional in Peru is the manner in which the nativity scene is staged… it is an "active-style" in that the scene is not set up completely at one time. It "grows"… sometimes the stable sits empty or only has a couple of animals in it for a couple of weeks. Then, Mary and Joseph appear in the scene. The manger sits empty until Christmas. It is a family event to place the baby Jesus into the manger on Christmas Eve at midnight. Then, the three kings appear in the scene in January (January 6th). Some in Peru celebrate a holiday called *La Bajada (The Taking Down)* or *Fiesta de los Reyes (Festival of the Kings)* which happens late in January or early in February—this is the traditional day to take down the nativity scene and put away the pieces until next Christmas.

We recently spent several days in Spain for a mission training course and were able to observe some nativity scenes and customs in Spain. This was of particular interest to us because of Spain's historical presence in Peru and their influence on Peruvian culture. We were interested to find out that the idea of the "active" nativity scene is also a part of the Spanish culture. The baby Jesus was absent from all nativity scenes when we were there in early December, as were the three kings. Churches and cathedrals had very elaborate, HUGE nativity scenes that actually depicted the entire city of Bethlehem and the surrounding desert. These scenes were also "active" in that each day or so, they changed a little… Mary and Joseph were en route to Bethlehem and the three kings were in the desert far away and watching the sky for the star. Interesting side note… in Spain, children receive Christmas gifts on January 6th. The gifts are brought by the three kings (not by Santa) as they search for the Christ child. Children leave out treats (fruits, nuts, small sweets) for the kings and their animals (camels and elephants) to help sustain them on their journey.

How much attention have you paid to your nativity scene? What are your traditions surrounding it? What does it say about your culture and your family? Take a closer look and remember the Christ story today.

REAL Southern Living... Our life in rural Peru

My Alien Left Hand

In Peru, most everyone knits or crochets. We have sheep and llamas and alpacas in abundance, so knitting is a skill that most people learn in childhood. In daily functions, it ranks right up there with walking, breathing, and eating. I have tried really hard to fit into the culture and learn to knit. I've really worked on being culturally appropriate and becoming one with the yarn and the people… but honestly, I can only knit one particular stitch (and it isn't very pretty). I can crochet an incredible "rope" for a Barbie, but that's where my talents end. I even had one Peruvian lady say to me, "If you can't knit, what good are you? Everyone can knit!" Sad day.

I knew I had found my Peruvian best friend when I finally met a woman who admitted that she couldn't knit or crochet. In fact, she said that she hates it! I can't tell you how much better this made me feel! Elva might not be able to knit, but she is the queen of embroidery. All of the women in our community admit that Elva is the best. She embroiders the most elaborate Peruvian traditional skirts you have ever seen. Embroidery is also something that most women on the mountain do, so I saw my chance to "fit in"… I would become an apprentice to Elva and learn to embroider from the master.





Well, I must say, the technique that Peruvians use is amazing and difficult and fascinating. These ladies know more about color and art than anyone I have ever met. And they are FAST! They can embroider entire flowers, birds, and butterflies before I can finish the petal of a daisy! And they embroider with both hands actively. I learned very quickly that, although I am much better at embroidery than I am at knitting or crocheting, I am still no expert. My right hand seems to understand the big picture and it works diligently. However, my left hand seems to have a mind of it's own. It's like it isn't attached to me. My brain tells it to go up and it goes down. My brain says "go a little left" and my hand inches further and further to the right. It has even gone so far as to attack my right hand with the needle and cause bodily injury! What is wrong with this crazy left hand? Why can't it obey what my brain is saying? My brain knows what my hand should do, what it needs to do, but my hand just doesn't seem to want to cooperate!

Little by little, my left hand is beginning to learn. It is, by no means, a "skilled worker" yet, but we are getting there. Occasionally, it still goes rouge and does something crazy. And occasionally, it still has a radical moment when it stabs my poor right hand. For the rest of my body, it is a practice in patience as we slowly learn and train the left hand.

This reminds me of Paul in his letter to the Romans (Rms. 7:14-20). In short, he says, *"I do not understand what I do." And, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot seem to carry it out. What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing."* Paul is talking about sin in his life and the constant struggle that it is to try to train himself to do what is right, but his flesh continues to go it's own way and do what is wrong. Much like my alien left hand who continues to do the opposite of what my brain is telling it to do! However, also like my left hand, with continual practice and patience and attention to the problem, slowly we learn and grow and begin to obey and do what we know is right.

Photos - (top) My best friend and embroidery expert, Elva. (below) Elva with an embroidery project—a floral border for a traditional skirt.

You Might live in Patarcocha if...

Once again, it is time for another round of exciting adventures from the missionaries in Patarcocha, Peru. You might live in Patarcocha if...

- If you have ever been awakened by a tiny Quechua woman banging on your door at 5:30 a.m. calling your name, only to find out that her "emergency" is that she would like you to help her carry bags of manure up the mountain to her potato fields.
- If a goat has ever knocked you down, run over you, busted through your back door, galloped through your courtyard, and jumped up on your table - and then you had to physically pick it up and carry it out of your home.
- If the same goat has ever jumped over a 12 foot wall after you spent a week constructing a "goat proof pen".
- If you have a pig that passes her time by submerging her entire head in her water bucket and blowing bubbles through her snout.
- If you have ever walked to the kitchen in the dark, half asleep, and stepped on a live chicken in front of your refrigerator.
- If your neighbor has ever come to your door in the morning to tell you that her bull fell and broke it's leg, so she is going to kill it and butcher it—would you like to buy a leg? So, you later go to choose which leg you would like. Then you get online and look up butcher cuts and attempt to make sense of this giant hunk of meat in front of you (P.S. - it looks NOTHING like the internet photo!).
- If you have ever heard cheering and clapping coming from the cemetery, only to find out that one of your teachers has been teaching a lesson to mourners about Jesus and the life that we will have after we die if we are believers - the clapping and cheering came from new knowledge, from knowing that there can be life after death and that life can be spent sitting with Jesus! You might live in Patarcocha if your life is being transformed with the love of Christ!

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Praises for new opportunities and new training / learning! We had a wonderful training experience in Spain earlier this month and look forward to using these new skills in the ministry in Peru, as well as around the world with other missionaries and friends.

Pray for our time away from Peru… we left Peru on Dec. 1 to attend a training in Spain. We then traveled to Texas to spend two weeks with family for Christmas. Then we will head to a Mission Society training in Florida for all missionaries in North & South America. We will return to Peru on January 12. **Pray** for our travel safety. **Pray** for our home in Peru to be safe and protected as we won't be there for 6 weeks. **Pray** for our training and continued learning during the two training workshops that we must attend.

Pray for our Kuyay Talpuy team (Johana, Rosio, Tania, Milagros) and for the communities of Iscos, Patarcocha and Tinyari.

Pray for our Mission Society Peru team (the Ivey family, the McEuen family, the Drum family, the Reeves family and Louise Reimer) as we work to minister to the people of Peru. **Pray** for the Goshorn family, Theresa Anderson, and The Weigert family as they train and prepare to become a part of the Mission Society Peru team.

TO THE MINES…

PART DOS (2)



We have an update for you regarding The Proclaimer that is being used by Miguel in the Yauricocha mines in Peru - He goes to the mine to work for 15 days, then he has a 7 day rest period and comes home. He is currently home and came to tell us how the Proclaimer is working. IT IS GREAT!!! They work 12 hour shifts in the mine. Miguel was taking the Proclaimer into the mine during his shift and his team was listening to the machine during their work shift. Well, this caused a slight problem because *the other shift (the opposite 12 hours) heard that the Proclaimer was really great and they wanted to hear it, too.* So Miguel made a deal with another miner on the opposite shift. When Miguel and his team come out of the mine at the end of their shift, they hand the Proclaimer off to the other shift team and they take it down into the mine with them to listen during their shift! So, the Proclaimer is literally being used 24 hours a day!!! And it is functioning down inside the earth! I'm sure that the enemy is REALLY irritated with this development - the miners have always lived in complete fear of demons that live inside the earth, to the point of making sacrifices to them constantly. To have the Word with them, speaking truth into their lives... just think of the changes this could have on the culture of the miners! Please pray for these men and for this project of Miguel's.

Another Proclaimer machine is being used by Miguel's wife and family (when he is in the mines and away from home)... they started 2 different listening groups that meet on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 5-7pm. They are listening and discussing together with others in the community. When Miguel is home, he is the leader of this group. When he is away, Medely (his wife) leads. Miguel told our team yesterday that he was so thankful that we had come to his community and that we had brought the Proclaimer machine... because of our work and this machine, he and his family are now Believers and he is working to spread the news and share the machines with as many people as possible!

For more info on the Proclaimer machine, go to www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/

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Photo header on page 1: The Huaytapallana Glacier range in Peru… the view from our front door!

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