

The Bencke Family in Japan

Volume 19, May 11th, 2009



Easter Sunday

It has been a long time since we've had a photo taken of the four of us. Our friends, Chuck and Julie, took this family photo on Easter Sunday at Murozono Church, where we celebrated the Resurrected Christ. Our daughter, Hannah, will be baptized next week on May 17th at Murozono Church.

Why is the Christian message important in Japan?

In the field of music, there are two ways to 'read' notes. One is what is commonly and formally referred to as the European method, which uses "do, re, mi" to refer to pitches (e.g. "C" = do, "D" = re, etc.), and the other is informally known as an American method, which uses the letters from A-G to refer to pitches. While I can't say one system is concretely better than the other, there are some huge benefits to using the American system of notation, namely that it allows a musician to more easily learn how to play chords and interpret music that only has melodies and chords and no accompaniment written out. The European system does not lend itself to that. It is an adequate system for learning basic pitches, but without knowing the other system, musicians miss out on many of the deeper fundamentals of making music.

In our work as missionaries, we are very often confronted with the question of why our work is important. Why is it important to bring the message of Christ to the Japanese people? After all, their systems of belief or philosophies for living – Buddhism and Shintoism – tend to reflect benevolence, compassion, and other behaviors that Christ encourages us to bestow on our neighbors.

However, like the European music education system, there is something fundamentally missing. In Buddhism or Shintoism, there is no connection of humans to God. Humans are believed to be eternally separate from the Creator, and in the afterlife, there are continued demands made on the spirit of humans (in Buddhism) to assist the living. (In Shintoism, there is no afterlife at all. Once dead, there is nothing remaining, even spiritually, of the human.) This juxtaposition of beliefs and philosophies is an incredibly complex road to navigate, even for a Japanese person who is born into it. Many Japanese, especially youth, perform perfunctory rituals as cultural icons more than as expressions of faith.

When Christ is accepted into the life of a Japanese person, however, there is forgiveness, freedom, faith, and the burden of the fragmented life of living according to multiple philosophies is no longer necessary. That doesn't mean that their lives are necessarily easier. Being a Christian never means this, and it is especially true in Japan. However, it does mean that a world formerly unknown to them – a world of confidence and hope in the significance of their existence to God – is opened. They are able to find in a fellowship of believers a life that doesn't require rituals or beliefs that contradict each other.

As missionaries, it is this message of hope, forgiveness, and faith that we bring. It is usually a message that is brought quietly and in the context of our relationships and work. I often find that bringing this Good News to those who have never heard it helps me to reaffirm my own faith. It is a journey, therefore, that our family walks together, alongside one another, and alongside the Japanese people.

Prayer requests:

Please join with us as we pray with praise and thanksgiving...

•April – we pray for the new students at Kyushu Lutheran College; May they find opportunities to examine or explore for the first time their relationship with God, and may God plant a yearning in them to foster a continuing relationship throughout the year

• April – For our English service congregation; May it continue to grow and may the fellowship remain strong and welcoming to visitors.

• April – for my cousin, who has been diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer, and his family who prepare for a difficult journey ahead, may God be a solid presence in each of their lives in the coming days.

• May – for our fellow missionaries in Kumamoto; May they continue to find meaning and hope in their work; May God bless them with the knowledge that their efforts are (or will) bear fruit in His time

• May – for our daughter, Hannah, as we prepare to have her baptized; May her baptism and life be a witness to the glory of God as she learns to walk along the path where Christ Jesus leads her.

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Missionary Sponsorship

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www.elca.org/missionsponsorship

Did we miss anyone?

If you know anyone who might like to receive our newsletters, please have them send us an e-mail requesting to be added to our mailing list.

ELCA— Global Mission

If you are interested in learning more about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's global mission, please visit:
www.elca.org/globalmission

JELC: Mission in India

If you wish to support the efforts of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project in Jamkhed, India, please send donations to Rev. Twila Schock (address above). **Please make sure to mark donations as "Level 2 funding (JELA): Helping Children in Need."** A gift of \$25 will buy materials for an artificial leg for someone who cannot afford that expense on his/her own.

NEIGHBORHOOD HAPPENINGS

Neighborhoods in Japan are often much more organized than neighborhoods in the States, at least where we came from. There are associations for special children's events, neighborhood parties, and activities that everyone can participate in, such as the 'rice pounding' event held around New Year's in the park next door.

One of the events that children are involved in is the recycling project. About four times a year, kids go around the neighborhood, door to door, and ask folks for their recyclables: newspapers, boxes, milk cartons, glass, cans, you name it... The materials are packed into a garbage truck and/or onto flatbeds, brought to a recycling center, and the kids earn money for a special event such as a bowling outing. In a year, kids can earn over \$1000 doing this. This picture was taken about a year ago on one of these recycling days. It is quite an intense and admirable endeavor. It is a great way to get kids actively involved in their local neighborhood in a practical way.



Missoula Theatre in Kumamoto

Perhaps you've heard of the Missoula Children's Theatre. It's a travelling performing group based in Missoula, Montana. They have troupes who travel throughout the U.S. and the world for a week at a time and put together dramas, using children from the communities they visit to play the roles. The Missoula Children's Theatre made their annual trip to one of the Lutheran high schools in Kumamoto this year and performed "Hansel and Gretel." The entire show was in English. Emilie made her theatre debut as one of the "Nasties" (a fierce creature of the forest who likes to run around eat vegetables during the night). She is pictured here. She enjoyed saying her one line ("...a green caterpillar!") as well as the fellowship of other children.

