

Becca Young News from Indonesia January 2008



January 15, 2008

A NEW SEMESTER

It's 2008 and a new semester has begun. Tomorrow I teach my first class, entitled Missiology, which is a fancy way of saying the theology of mission: God's mission and the church's missions. I am excited about it because I believe it is the crux of theology. It is what God is doing out of love for creation, and what we should be doing as people who know about God's love. I'm not talking about trying to convert people so they believe what we do, but letting people experience that divine love for themselves. Let's hope I can communicate that to the students! Apparently they were extremely bored by the first semester of missiology. Too much theory, they told me. So I am going to spice it up, asking them to present plays on the lives of famous missionaries from history and how those missionaries might act were they to come to Indonesia in the year 2008.

On Thursday, I will teach two classes. The first is Introduction to Theology, which I enjoy because I get to cover the basics: who is God, who are we, and what's the relationship between us? I was browsing the library and came across a book called "Doing Theology with Huck and Jim." I would love to hear the story of how it landed on the shelves of this Indonesian library – possibly a gift of a former Western professor. Obviously the title refers to Mark Twain's book, Huckleberry Finn, and it goes through basic theological ideas using quotes from the two main characters. I don't know if my Indonesian students will have read the book, but it has given me the idea to use stories that bring out points important to my subject matter for the day.

The second class on Thursday is a doozy. The dean has asked me to teach a class called "Reading Theological Texts" to the entire student body – 270 undergraduates and 50 graduate students. All in one classroom at the same time. I'm not kidding. Luckily I don't have to take roll call! I'm going to start with the Brief Statement of Faith by the PC(USA), and work from there. This might be a good time to ask for your prayers. If any of you have insomnia at about 1:30 am EST on Thursday mornings, please focus in my direction. I'll be teaching from 1:30 until 3:10 pm, and there's a twelve-hour time difference between here and the East coast of the USA. I repeat, I'm not kidding!



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

In December I wrote about some of the events leading up to Christmas, but I want to add a little about Christmas itself. I spent the holidays with an Indonesian Catholic family and had the pleasure of attending Catholic mass several times, and had some fascinating experiences.

Instead of exchanging presents on Christmas, Indonesian Christians gather with their families, share meals and go to church, usually twice a day from December 23rd until the 28th. On Christmas Eve, I went to the 11:00 pm mass. At the beginning of the service, when the liturgists processed forward carrying the Bible, they were accompanied by a husband and wife who carried the

baby Jesus (a doll), which they ceremoniously placed in the manger scene as they pledged their devotion to each other and to their own children. Later the youth did a liturgical dance during which they worked

their way to the manger scene. Beside the infant Jesus was a bare-branched tree, and each one of the young people was wearing a mask or a label that read “Snobby,” “Greedy,” “Rude,” etc. As they danced near the manger they removed the mask or label and hung it on the tree, then danced away linked arm in arm with their friends, celebrating their renewed lives. I did note one incongruous Western import: the acolytes (who happened to be girls) all wore red and white Santa caps along with their white liturgical robes.

On December 28th, we drove about an hour out of town to a small village surrounded by fruit orchards. The specialty of the area is called salak, usually translated “snakefruit” because of its scaly skin. We attended a mass at the Catholic church there, in which all the liturgists, the choir and the acolytes wore traditional Javanese clothing. Most of the hymns and the Lord’s Prayer were sung to Javanese tunes, accompanied by a gamelan band. After the sermon, a parade of brightly attired men and women processed in while carrying a huge mound of salak on bamboo poles. The congregation members who are orchard growers are allowed to tithe to the church using the (literal) fruits of their labors: their salak, or snakefruit. The church received two tons of fruit that day, and each guest was allowed to take a basket of it home as they departed. After the service, we enjoyed a lovely meal in the fellowship hall, which was a traditional Javanese pavilion where we all sat on mats on the floor. The priest passed through as we were eating, extending Christmas greetings. I asked him for a photograph so that you could see him in his Javanese clothing, particularly the Javanese hat. At the beginning of the sermon, he had complained about how tight it was, but luckily for me, he was still wearing it two hours later when the photo was taken. The young girl in the photo is Anastasia, a relative of my host family, with whom I played tic tac toe on the church bulletin as the service dragged on for nearly three hours.

GOD’S YES

As you can see, it is certainly never dull here, and I am constantly amazed by the ways God is at work in so many places through people of all ages and ethnic groups. Wherever your journey leads you in this new year, may you too experience the glorious variety of God’s love for us, God’s mission, and God’s dramatic exclamation of “Yes!” to the world.