

WAITING FOR FORTY YEARS

Elba Ramirez — January 2005 Prayer Letter

Beloved Financial and Prayerful Supporters—

“MY FIRST NINETEEN CHRISTMASSES”

Having been born in a pagan, very religious Mexican family, I celebrated my first nineteen Christmases with a very special supper on Christmas' eve, and on the morning of the 25th with the singing of hymns and the reading of Scripture before the opening of gifts, YET, ignoring the real meaning of Christmas. Our Protestant Church in México was filled with activities those days, and my family fully participated in ALL of them—we had our V.B.S. which I attended at first. Then from 12 years of age, I became a teacher in it. My Mom always directed the adults' drama and sometimes the children's play too. Her children, of course, always participated in them. We also had the Choir Christmas concert in which my three brothers and I would always sing. Ivané, one of my unsaved brothers, and his family are still singing in that choir. Since the Roman Catholic church celebrated nine dancing nights called “POSADAS” (tradition teaches that Mary and Joseph during nine nights looked for an inn in which to spend the night), our Methodist Episcopal system was not going to be behind on this and would celebrate nine nights of services which ended in the breaking of “piñatas” and “youth dances.” We were so very religious, yet so very lost! I have always believed we were in a worse situation than Roman Catholics, because they believe one cannot know if he is going to heaven. But the church I was raised in taught that if we behaved well, in time we would be saved, yet we could never be sure of our salvation because we could lose it at any time. My poor mother worked so very hard all of her life to make sure she would not lose her salvation—a salvation she did not have! After studying in a Bible college, I went back to my old Methodist Episcopal lost friends to witness to them. Some told me that they knew what salvation was, but they remained in that “system.” Please pray for the salvation of my brother Ivané, his wife Martha, daughter Martha and husband Alex; sons Ivan and Edgar. Also for my brother Edgar's salvation. All of them, just as I used to, believe they are saved!

MY FIRST CHRISTMAS IN CHRIST

Oh, glorious day, October 15, 1964, when my sins were washed away! Our church's bishop lived in the same apartment building where I lived, so immediately I asked him why he had not told me the Good News before. To all my excitement, he only answered: “I am glad you are happy, but salvation is a progressive thing. As you live this life, somewhere in time you are saved, but you will never know it until you arrive in heaven.” Since my New Father saw I was not going to grow spiritually in that church, He sent a missionary couple, Pepe and Judy Barrios, to disciple me. They encouraged me to participate in a Christmas Evangelistic Crusade at the border with the States, and I traveled for the first time with some American missionaries for 18 hours in a beaten van, filled with literature for the crusade. This would be my first Christmas away from home. I had resigned myself to spend it missing my family and crying. The great night of the 24th came and all the lady participants in this Crusade went to bed early. Pastor's wife brought us plenty of homemade cookies late at night, so I thought “the party is going to start now.” But, they ate them and went back to sleep. On the 25th we were challenged to spend the day fasting and praying. I thought to myself, “that does it, now I know I am going to cry and feel the absence of my family.” But, oh surprise, that was the first Christmas in which I actually experienced its true joy! By then, I was two months old in the Lord! Christmas is not a family; it is not all the celebrations, not the gifts. Christmas is The Lord!

A FEW OF MY NEXT CHRISTMASSES

While at Bible school, I would spend some Christmases with my family, but sometimes they would not even let me pray for our food. My three brothers had turned their back to anything that would remind them of the falsehood of the religion my parents inculcated in us and would make mockery of holy things. It was so hard for me to see them do this, so it was very sad to spend Christmas with them.

“And of some have compassion, making a difference” — Jude 22

CHRISTMAS IN THE MISSION FIELD

There was before me a giant size nativity scene with shepherds and sheep scattered throughout a small hill, when I said: "Wish I could come on Christmas day, sit with these shepherds and read the Luke account of our Lord's birth. At twelve o'clock on Christmas eve, a family came and took me out. Soon, they stopped the car exactly in front of that hill, and we all sat among the shepherds and read the Christmas story out of the Gospel. What a tremendous blessing that was to my life! I have no words to thank my Father for adopting me into His worldwide Family! Also, I remember so well my Christmas with some precious missionaries in Canada. They had three sons and a daughter. The sons were so much like my three brothers when they were growing up. I thoroughly enjoyed my Christmas with them!

CHRISTMAS IN AMERICA

There is in my heart a special place for the Christmas spirit in American Christians. The music, their joy, the giving of gifts, the sharing, the wishing, the inviting, needless to say, the eating! Many homes in America have been opened to me for Christmas celebrations. I remember the day I invited myself for Christmas into the home of one of my mentors, and he and his family, infinitely gracious, allowed me to do that. To all of you who have opened your homes to me in Christmas, I deeply thank you and remember you!

CHRISTMAS IN TIJUANA

My brother and I were invited to some of his friends' home my first Christmas in Tijuana. Then for a couple of years and for the sake of his two daughters, I accompanied my brother to the home of my sister-in-law (from which he has been divorced near 20 years). How hard and sad it was to try to celebrate my Lord's birthday without being able to say His Name nor pray or sing praises to Him freely, etc.

Soon, I found my own friends at this Church and would get together with three precious Christian families who loved to truly exalt the Name of the Lord during the whole celebration, not just during the few minutes of a devotional. I will always remember these Christmases as some of my best! Well, I was organizing this year's celebration with these beloved families when something unusual happened. . .

MY FIRST CHRISTMAS WITH MY CHRISTIAN RELATIVES !!!

My nephew Enrique, who recently graduated from Foundations Bible College in Dunn, North Carolina, told me that he and his wife Sylvia wanted to celebrate the Lord's birthday with my brother Hermann and me, instead of celebrating it with Sylvia's mother and sister—our unsaved relatives. We invited Dante, Sarita and her brother David to join us. During this year's celebration we could freely rejoice, pray and express our hearts filled with gratitude for the Lord's coming to this earth, for the Bible, for coming into our hearts, and for many people who were instrumental in our growth! I thanked the Lord publically for Dr. Bruce P. Lackey, my first Bible and piano mentor, for Dr. O.T. Spence's teachings and fatherly love, for Dr. H.T. Spence and the great blessing Foundations Bible College and Ministries is to me, to my family, to this ministry and to the Hispanic world. I wonder if my nephew Enrique had not been taught at Foundations Bible College, would he have preached to us and directed our family service that day the way he did. We sang "O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus" in English as our Christmas carol and ended up offering three gifts to our Savior! May the Lord give us more Christmases like this and save more of my relatives to add to our group. It was worth waiting forty years for this!

THE LORD WAS GLORIFIED !!!

The precious Word of God flowed through the spoken Word and the hymns interpreted by different groups in our Christmas concert. Several people prayed the sinner's prayer and God was glorified! He deserves our very best! A special word of thanks goes to Dr. Robert W. Wilson, chairman of the Fine Arts Department of Foundations Bible College. Without his choir, quartet and instrumental arrangements, this excellent concert would not have taken place.

LUPITA

A lady, who has the same name as my mom, prayed the sinner's prayer. She was like a child, so ready to repent from her sins. Her four-year-old granddaughter Stephanie was SO attentive. Please pray for LUPITA'S growth.

Thanking God for the gift each one of you is to me,

Elsa A. Ramirez

Your missionary to Tijuana, Mexico

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