



The “Bula Bulletin”

with bells on...



January 2011

‘Sing to the Lord a new song,
For he has done marvellous things;
His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.’

Psalms 98: 1-2 (NIV)

Contrasts at Christmas

A Christmas Carol Service at the beginning of November: The Pacific Theological College’s Christmas Carol Service was held on the first Sunday in November... beat that, if you can? Mid November marks the end of the academic year in the South Pacific and so it’s understandable that Christmas celebrations take place before students depart... Normal campus life resumes again in mid January.

A Children’s Advent Service with hundreds of children: Wesley Circuit City Mission Church held their Children’s Service on the first Sunday in Advent, and even the church stewards commented with delight at the overwhelming number of children present, accompanied, of course, by some very proud parents.

A tropical sun and carol singing: Every Saturday in December a Vodafone-sponsored choir competition was held in the centre of town. Most Saturdays competitors and onlookers sought the shade of voluminous ‘Vodafone’ umbrellas; the first Saturday even these didn’t offer sufficient shelter from the rain!

Brand-marketing of Christmas is very evident in Fiji. Everywhere Digicel and Vodafone, the two telecom giants, battled it out to convey their seasonal ‘best wishes’. Top spot must go to Digicel, as its ‘Digicel’ star topped the giant Christmas tree outside the Civic Centre.

A supermarket checkout with no queues: Christmas week and no queues, no excess and no madness around the shops. That was until Christmas Eve when everyone came out in force. Police in the town of Lautoka had to be brought in to control the spilling crowds and interacting traffic.

Apparently, in this year’s run-up to Christmas, local shops in the UK reported healthy sales as people chose to shop locally in the icy conditions rather than taking their cars to the supermarket.

A noticeable lack of Brussels sprouts: Most people in Fiji have chicken, lamb or fish for their Christmas meal, often prepared *lovo*-style, baked in an earth oven. An open pit is dug in the garden large enough to take a fire and all the food. A fire is lit in the centre of this pit, and once well established cooking stones are placed on the burning wood. When the stones are red hot the remaining wood and charcoal is removed and the stones turned.





Prayers & reflections:

- Give thanks and praise for the beloved gift of Jesus Christ to the world.
- Reflect on the importance of music in our Christmas worship, and give thanks for our ever-present Christmas Carols. Pray all who stop to listen also stop to hear.
- Pray for those who feel unable to celebrate openly the birth of Jesus, and for mediators around the world who seek to be a voice of peace and unity wherever differences and hostilities arise.
- Reflect on what each of us saw that was new and special this Christmas?

Food is then placed on young green sticks immediately above the stones, with further thin green sticks placed above, to aid the circulation of steam. The food is covered with banana or coconut leaves, and the removed earth piled back on top. The food is then left to cook. In a couple of hours it's usually ready to eat, served with a lemon juice and coconut-milk sauce.

All across the islands, Fiji TV reported that on Christmas Day people enjoyed gloriously sunshine and open-air gatherings; with wall-to-wall sunshine and deep blue skies, the smell of mass outdoor cooking gave the atmosphere in Suva a distinctive, earthy aroma.

Meanwhile, my description of Brussels sprouts as little cabbages on a stick probably hasn't won over too many converts here in Fiji, and certainly not enough to set up an import business in time for next Christmas.

A Prime Minister's Christmas address: Commodore Bainimarama extended his best wishes to the people of Fiji. "Jesus Christ taught us that we are all equal in humanity. It is these fundamental and enduring teachings of brotherhood and sisterhood that will shape the future of our beloved Fiji".

A Christmas Cantata: 'Good Christian men rejoice' and 'In a bleak mid winter' were among the renditions sung by the 50-strong combined Wesley Circuit choir at the Christmas Cantata. Held on the last Sunday evening before Christmas, the medley of music was drawn from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and the American Deep South. Fiji also featured in the offering with the delightful local carol 'Selo'...

In coastal areas of Fiji when someone spots a visiting ship approaching offshore, they shout 'Selo' to alert others of the imminent arrival...the Fijian carol translates as "Selo, Selo... God's ship has been spotted, God's ship is entering the harbour, God's ship has arrived..."

A military accompaniment to our shopping: The Fiji Police Band has a deserved international reputation, for instance, they have performed at the Edinburgh Tattoo, but two days before Christmas they were unexpectedly found playing among the vegetable stalls at Suva central market. This surprise appearance was a very welcome lift for stall holders and shoppers alike. All stopped what they were doing to listen.

A Christmas Day on a Saturday: The Christmas Day Public Holiday in Fiji, as elsewhere, was assigned to Monday (27th). Some in business here therefore chose to make Christmas Day a normal working Saturday and threatened to withhold pay for anyone who failed to turn up for work. Fei Tevi, the general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches said in a quickly-released press statement: "This is one day in the year that is so special in the Christian calendar, and it should not be overwhelmed and dictated by the blind pursuit of profit by businesses and the private sector".

How true ... but let's also apply this sentiment to our preparations as well as our celebrations next Christmas

God bless
Julia

