

Christmas Adventure

Told by three adolescents from villages near town

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Tedrick, Prosperi, and Davis, 13, 14, and 12 year old young men, *abalumendo*, from two local villages near the township are spirited since the page for the month November appeared on calendars this year. In fact this is true every year. It is time to scramble for opportunities and “save your money.”

Small disappointments abound when mothers, siblings, and grandparents express capricious longing for or grievous need for money, *indelama*. It is difficult to tell close family characters, “*nshikwata indalama*” (I have no money) when it is a lie, *bufi*.

When December comes into sight on calendars, the zealous adolescents have December 24 on their minds, whatever happens. Trying to earn money and to save money reaches almost a feverish pitch. Memories from years past and hopes for years to come mingle and create dreams of excitement.

“I got 500 kwacha (10cents) for carrying water from the well today.”

“I got 1000 kwacha (20 cents) for washing clothes for that man.”

“I got 500 kwacha for carrying the load of bananas from the market for her.”

And, so the money is earned and saved.

December 24 is the dominant day for Christmas activity. Throughout the day and into the night, children, youths, young adults, and older generations, boys and girls, men and women, all walk about the town, the market, and nearby areas. Everyone greets and sings, visits, buys food and fireworks. Local taverns and bars do a brisk business. In the evening and through the night, many people throw firecrackers, shoot Roman Candles and bottle rockets all about the area. Firecrackers are the preferred announcer for attention.

There is little age distinction. The country’s law specifies 18-years as the age of adulthood, but this is Christmas, so much is allowed to slip by this evening. But, various people find themselves at odds with the police. Stealing, drunk, and insulting others, are charges many people must answer following Christmas revelry on 24 December.

As the evening progresses, many friends and family break off and attend Christmas church services or mass. The preacher gives a sermon of the birth of Christ:

“It is the time for everybody to be happy.”

“Christmas is the birthday of Jesus.”

And the devoted sing and dance in gladness.

After church, some will return to visiting the bars and taverns, moving from one to another seeking friends and entertainment. Many will attend “Sundowners”, a carnival-like activity in a space defined by a fence of grass surrounding about ½ acre. A nominal fee will gain entrance for

all ages to song and dance, beer, and food for sale, into the night. At 24 hours (midnight) children and those under 18-years of age are “chased” out and told to go home, and most do.

Those who choose not to attend a “Sundowner” invariably go to a tavern and watch and visit people, sing and dance, then go to another tavern, or bar. This spirited round of conduct continues into the night. At 24 hours (midnight) the police tell the ‘small children’, those under 18-years “you can go home,” because “now it is underage.” Children are not allowed out after 24 hours and parents are responsible for behavior of the children.

Children and adults return home at 24 hours (midnight), or later, and crawl into bed for a much-needed sleep. The activity on 24 December exhausts even the most robust.

On 25 December, Christmas Day, the family arises to a small breakfast, prepared by the mother and grandmother. Extended families, including aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents, and children gather for a festive dinner at 12 hrs (noon). Economic circumstances of the family, of course, determine the deluge of food.

Children do not eat at a friend’s house, “the food might be bad or have poison.” Culture seems to forbid this, yet when visiting someone’s house and food is served, something is almost always prepared for guests, it is rude to not accept and eat.

“Christmas,” “Give me Christmas.” Familiar appeals, among friends and family, seeking gifts from loved ones. If a person has some food or money or clothes, one often shares when requested, or replies, “I don’t have Christmas.” Some families do secure minimal gifts to give.

Proserpi, Tedrick, and Davis live with confidence that Christmas is an exceptional time with valid and deserving conditions at hand for all the people.

THEN, in another week, the same activities repeated usher in a New Year!