



*December 2013*

## MISSION GRANT STORY

### DECEMBER STORY

(Excerpted with permission and with added story notes from Rachel Baker, a missionary wife and mother now in Mongolia, formerly in Kazakhstan.)

#### **COME, O LONG EXPECTED JESUS!**

In so many ways, from decorating our houses to baking special foods to buying gifts, we build up anticipation for the coming of Christmas. In America this time of year is special—it seems that just about everyone gets into the spirit of the “holiday season.” It is a time of expectation and joy.

During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Kazakhstan stands in sharp contrast to the USA. Decorations put up in Kazakhstan lack any Christian content and though on the outside some things do look similar, the preparations are for the coming of the New Year, not for the coming of the Savior.

Though it is a bit hard for us at times, in some ways the lack of Christmas preparation in Kazakhstan is a fitting reminder to our family. In America, amidst all the tinsel, Christmas music, and advertising hype, it can sometimes be easy to forget about the humble coming of the Christ Child. It was a multitude of angels, not a multitude of tinsel, which greeted the newborn King on that first Christmas. In theory, many Israelites were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, but in actual daily life it was far from what people envisioned. The Messiah’s arrival was unexpected by most people—there was not even room for Him in the inn on the night He was born. According to what we read in the Bible about the birth of Jesus, Kazakhstan probably reflects quite realistically the abundant lack of anticipation of the world our Savior entered 2,000 years ago.

Among the believers in Kazakhstan however, the church family gathers around a table piled high with good things to eat. We begin with prayer and fellowship over the feast. Towards the end of the meal, as we sit having tea, the children act out the Christmas story while it is read in Kazakh. A twelve-year-old girl is asked to be Mary. She comes forward with a shy smile, trying to hide the bandaged stub of her right arm in the folds of her dress. She reaches forward with determination as someone hands her the youngest church member, an infant. She cradles the baby in her arms. Thirteen-year-old “Joseph” stands grinning proudly in his school finery—a worn white shirt, black pants, and suit vest. Other children crowd around as shepherds, sheep, and angels, with sticky mouths and hands still clutching candies. The table behind the children is still covered with leftovers and looks almost untouched. It shows just how special the Christmas feast is to these Kazakhs—the more significant the feast, the more laden the table! As a two-stringed instrument is strummed, the members join in singing a song in Kazakh about the Christmas story... “Rejoice! All of you rejoice! This is the day our Savior came to earth! It is the day foretold by prophets, the longed-for day, the day that has been promised! Rejoice!”

Our prayer this Christmas season is that people in Kazakhstan and across the globe would make ready for the coming of the Savior. There was no room for Him in the inn. May there be room in our hearts!