

Babe Haiti Update
December 2009

One really good thing about the computer is it allows me to keep a record and copy of all the ‘false starts’ I’ve made writing updates. I’ve never enjoyed writing. Being able to use the computer’s internal camera to Skype and talk to our children or keep up to date by reading friends’ posts on Facebook, the need to write now closely parallels the desire. But this is the time of year when census takers and soldiers, strange transportation and messengers, fear and a Baby all get bundled together to make the un-normal seem strangely normal.

The number crunchers say Haiti’s population is now solidly over 9 million. They also say agricultural production is down, mostly as a result of last year’s hurricanes. Forest cover has *decreased* 44% this past decade and is now at 2% of the country’s land surface. (Neighboring Cuba is 21.5% forest.) Haiti’s forest cover at 2% does compare favorably with the 1.5% seen in Palestine (Bethlehem), a country well known for some of its wood products a couple millenniums ago. Number crunchers also say violent crime rates are down and Episcopal University (UNEPH) enrollment is up.



Months ago, when the semester for the church university where I teach was opening, I began what became one of my ‘false starts’ at an Update. I was walking to the downtown, where the university occupies its three building quarter acre campus and saw a banner over the road *advertising* UNEPH. It was the first time I’d ever seen the message being taken outside of the church, shared with the community, and everyone invited to come and join. This year the number of students in my classes has nearly doubled.

With crime figures down, I’ve again taken to riding tap-taps to school. A couple years ago, I was in several very scary situations including one that could have become an attempted kidnapping. Because of that, I’ve mostly walked two miles to and from school each day of classes. Lately, though, I’m back to public transportation. The routes are not fixed and there are often major detours around traffic jams or political demonstrations. It always will fascinate me how with twenty people in the back of a pick-up, someone knows where I’m going and will direct or often escort me back to the area where I’m supposed to be. I’ve often wished visitors had the chance to travel among the people in

local transportation and see the city from that perspective. It can be bewildering, exhilarating, a bit frightening yet reassuring to become incarnate in a place you know but really will never know.

For the first time in many years, Haiti has had an un-normal fall. Many would prefer to say it was a 'normal' fall because there were no hurricanes or other major disruptions. Student demonstrations have been generally subdued or at least contained. Food prices increased and still consume the vast majority of the family budget but haven't soared this year. Increased labor costs and fuel prices caused threats of a transportation shutdown but that never materialized. A bloodless internal coup ousted the Prime Minister overnight but she was replaced seamlessly within a week. Foreign soldiers still patrol the streets and occupy the countryside. And with all the turmoil, misery, and needs, just as the world did a couple thousand years ago, Haiti today awaits the coming of the Christ.

There are some amazing similarities between this fall in Haiti and His-story in Palestine from many years ago. Take time to be awed, read Luke 2:1-20.

Merry Christmas!

Sharyn