

# Holiday Greetings

from Peter, Sarah, Elijah and Simon Grow-Hanson

## Merry Christmas!

As we celebrate our sixth Christmas in Senegal, we think often of you, our friends and family throughout the world. The sights, sounds, and smells of the season are certainly different from those we knew in the US (though Simon has *never* known Christmas in the US). But the essentials are the same: the anticipation of a promised coming, gathering with loved ones, and sharing the story of Emmanuel, God-With-Us.

As world leaders don't always seem to know—or care—how to lead with wisdom and mercy, we follow the Wonderful Counselor. As people seem powerless to change their situations of inequity and injustice, we serve the One known as Mighty God. And as wars continue to rage throughout the world, we proclaim the coming of the Prince of Peace.



Simon, as Herod and Elijah as one of the Wise Men in the Dakar Parish's Christmas Program, Sunday, December 16

## Dëwënëti!

Tabaski, or *Eid el-Kibir*, is a Muslim festival celebrating Abraham's faithfulness and obedience, his willingness to sacrifice his son, and God's providing for him and all his descendents. More than a religious holiday, it is a time when families share a feast and ask one another for forgiveness for any past wrongs. They ask God to bless them in the coming year, saying *dëwënëti* or "until next year."



Our family (minus Simon, plus Elijah's classmate Roman) gathers with Aly Ndione's family at Tabaski, December 21

We were invited for Tabaski to the homes of two EELS colleagues, handyman Babacar Gassama and CCGN Director Aly Ndione. At Gassama's we greeted their new daughter, Aminata, ate grilled meat and potatoes (a sort of appetizer, since they knew we had another stop), and spoke at length about the "real meaning" of Tabaski, that is faithfulness, humility, and sharing with others, especially the poor. Unfortunately, these are all too often forgotten in the increasing consumerism of today's Dakar. At Aly's we shared a full meal of lamb, potatoes and *niebe* (cow peas) plus plenty of Mariama's homemade beignets and *bissap*. This was our sixth Tabaski with the Ndiones.

Despite differences in religious meaning, Tabaski often reminds us of Thanksgiving, when families gather for a feast and give thanks for one another. We give thanks for these friends and colleagues who continue to share their homes and their faith with us.

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*Check out Peter's blog!*  
*"A Lutheran in Senegal"*

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As we look back on the last year, we have several highlights worth noting:

We are thankful for the visits we had from family and friends, Peter's mother and Aunt LeeAnn in February, Sarah's mom in June, as well as Chris Scharen, Sonja Batalden, and Isaiah & Grace, who come after Christmas for 10 days.

With help from Global Mission, Peter was able to start a Doctorate at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA. Junes and Januaries for three years will be devoted to the pursuit of a degree in Global and Ecumenical Studies.

In August, we spent a fabulous three-week vacation in France. We started in Paris, visited our old haunts in Besançon, before discovering Burgundy, the Taizé community, and finally two weeks of pretending we lived in a little village in the Perigord. Words can't express...

On the threshold of a new year, we look forward to 2008 and all it will bring:

We'll ring in the New Year in Linguère with good old friends and good new ones.

Simon looks forward to playing basketball this year, and also likes reading, writing, taking piano lessons, science and drawing.

Elijah continues to like math, soccer, drawing, and guitar, although he wishes more people here played baseball!

Sarah will welcome 22 US students to Dakar as she begins her eighth semester at SIT study abroad—a job she still loves!

Peter will be the preacher at the Lutheran Church of Senegal's annual festival and will continue in Leadership Development.

We'll have the chance to see many of you during our third Global Mission home assignment this summer. Again we'll be based out of GM's St. Paul apartments.

## Happy New Year!

*"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

*Luke 2:10-11*

*Sarah, Elijah,  
Peter and Simon,  
in Burgundy, France,  
August 2007*



We wish you a very peaceful and joyous new year!