

From the Editor

Matthew and Annette Cummings joined us as new workers this fall, along with their five children. But Matt has lived in Japan before. He shares in our article what Christmas has, and will, mean for him and for the Japanese. We hope his insights will aid your prayers this season.

News and Prayer Points

Six people have been joining Dean and Lillian Kim's cafe on Thursdays in Moriyama church. As they are not Christians, do pray for their salvation. Mr N. and Mr T. are studying the Bible on Wednesdays in the church; pray for their growing faith.

Richard Owens, former missionary here, is visiting in December and January. He'll minister in his former churches. Pray for people to be alert to the Holy Spirit's voice as he speaks.

Elaine and Shuichi Kitamura have been visiting many schools and families in the lead up to Christmas. Now they ask for prayer for strength and quiet hearts to do what still needs to be done for the harp concert on Dec 8th. Please also pray for the Lord's control over the snow in their town this year, as heavy snow proves very difficult to live with.

Pray for all our Christmas events across Nara, Kyoto and Shiga, that people would fall in love with Jesus Christ, Son of God.



A Japanese Christmas?

It's December, and shoppers bundled against the cold move among twinkling lights and shops vying for the Christmas...yen? Yes, this scene actually occurs in Japan, the world's largest non-Christian nation. How can this be? For one, thank globalization. The media and ease of travel have settled this cherished Western celebration among Tokyo skyscrapers. The close connection of Japan to America since World War 2, and of course the commercial allure of marketing and selling, has also contributed. But lastly, and most intangibly, one gets the feeling that the Japanese observe Christmas for a romantic reason, for what one might call a glimpse of hope.

I was born and raised in Japan as the son of missionaries. In my 15 years in Japan, I have seen many Christmases and loved them all. The covered streets in Sendai, crowds moving beneath softly falling snow – it is a strange

encounter with faith in a country that for the rest of the year can't tell a wise man from a chicken. Christmas provided, and still does, perhaps the best opportunity in the year to publish the Christian message to what for once is a listening nation. At Ritto Church, where my family and I now serve, we hope to take advantage of the Japanese love for Christmas. On the 14th there will be a Children's Christmas party. We will go caroling on the 20th. On Christmas Sunday we'll have a luncheon after the service and an outreach party that night. And, on December 24th, we will celebrate the birth of Jesus with a Candlelight Service for our non-Christian neighbors and friends.

Just as the star shone over the baby in the manger in the dark night, Christmas lights shine once a year in Japan. Please pray for our churches here, that Jesus would glow brightly this year. *By Matthew Cummings*