

Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) Congregations in Kumamoto Rev. Hitoshi and Satoko Adachi ELCA Missionary and Associate

Wishing You A Wonderful Epiphany from Cold Kumamoto:

Beginning in early December, the weather becomes much colder in Kumamoto. Like the temperature that changes up and down, missionaries' feelings sometimes change. They can be positive and other times not so much.... Hitoshi and Satoko would appreciate continuous thoughts, prayers, and support from individuals, congregations, synods, and ELCA.

Children Blessings and Thanksgiving in November: November 15th in Japan is called "Shichi-Go-San" meaning "Seven - Five - Three". Although it is not a national holiday, but it is a Japanese children's festival celebrating seven year old girls, five year old boys, and three year old girls. In times when medical help was primitive and not widely available and children's death rates was much higher, the ages of seven, five, and three years were considered milestones. There seems to be various reasons why only five year old boys and three and seven year old girls are celebrated, but in kindergarten/nursery schools where Kuwamizu Lutheran church is involved, all pupils (0 year to 6 year old children) receive an individual blessing with the pastor placing their hand wrapped in the stole on the child's head. Also, since November 23rd is a Japanese National Holiday



called Labor Thanksgiving Day in Japan, but in kindergarten/nursery schools that Kuwamizu Lutheran church is involved, they give thanks not only for labor but also to God for all the harvest they receive like in the United States. The Kuwamizu kindergarten has 200 pupils, Aiko Nursery School has 100 pupils, and Hikari Nursery School has 100 pupils. The total is 400 pupils. Even if the number of pastors is two (Pastor Sumimoto and Pastor Adachi), each pastor prays to the Lord for 200 pupils; they individually call each name with the help from teachers. By the way, unlike Thanksgiving Day in

the US, it is not customary for families to gather together and eat turkey. That custom is closer to those done during the New Year in Japan, although they do not eat a whole turkey. Instead, people enjoy many varieties of fish along with their roe (i.e. eggs).



Oguni Mission: Getting Cedar Branches for Christmas:

The Christmas preparation meetings at Kuwamizu church had already started in September. Almost all regular worship attendees are assigned a task for Christmas. Hitoshi and Satoko knew that they would not be able to attend from the second to fourth advent and Christmas Eve services at Kuwamizu due to their preaching and organist assignments at Matsubase Church for those days, therefore, they were involved in the preparatory stage. One of them was for Hitoshi to go to Oguni village on November 23rd in northern Kumamoto with other church members including Pastor Sumimoto to get bundles of cedar branches for Christmas decorations in the sanctuary.



The photograph below was taken on December 30th, the branches are used for decorating Jesus' birth place. The cedar branches were cut over a month ago, but miraculously are still a vibrant green color and are expected to stay the same until the Epiphany on January 6th.



Five Baptisms at Kuwamizu and One Baptism at Tokyo: In this newsletter, it is probably most important to report that five baptisms happened in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit on the Fourth Advent Sunday at Kuwamizu Church, on December 23rd. In addition on the same day, Satoko's high school friend was baptized at Tokyo Lutheran Church. Neither Hitoshi nor Satoko could attend those services due to their assignment to serve at Matsubase Church as their pastor and organist, they were so glad and thankful for God's gift of baptism six people received. Out of five people baptized at Kuwamizu, three of them are elementary school students: one is a Lutheran kindergarten staff's daughter who was just transferred to Kuwamizu: two are grandsons of a Kuwamizu member couple. The couple are both disabled and using wheelchairs faithfully praying and serving the Lord. Then, the remaining two are tenants in one of the senior homes in Jiaien where Kuwamizu church is located. Both pastors are enthusiastically and prayerfully presiding at Wednesday morning service at the senior home and two baptized elderly people were among many unbaptized attendees for the Wednesday morning service. Hitoshi and Satoko praise God's guidance to those who were baptized and are looking forward to and praying for God's continued blessings for each of them.

Many many Christmas Services (From the Lighting Service) : Both Kuwamizu Church and Kuwamizu Kindergarten are located in Jiaien that operates senior, disabled, and children facilities (homes). The first service for Advent season was held in the evening on December 1st, one day before the First Sunday of Advent. It started at a playground in Jiaien just before illuminating all lighting at each facility. There were more than 200 people including residents of each facility and Kuwamizu Kindergarten children and their parents. Pastor Hitoshi was in charge of the message and spoke about the world's first Christmas lit up by angels near Bethlehem 2018 years ago at the time of Jesus' birth. That led to the countdown for the lighting of all facilities. The Christmas ser-



vice of each facility, in Jiaien, was set according to each facility's schedule. The pastors of Kuwamizu Church served as preachers for all services. In Jiaien itself, there were 4 different Christmas services. In Kuwamizu Kindergarten, there were 6 services (5 classes and 1 for parents.) There are two other nursery school services. Kuwamizu Church pastors were also asked to deliver messages by the nearby YMCA institutions, kindergartens, and other nursery schools those that teach pupils based on Christian principles. Pastors could not respond to all requests, but they accommodated as much as they could. While writing this newsletter, Hitoshi looked back on the schedule and counted how many services he attended between December 1st and January 1st and found that there were 36 services. He was in charge of the messages for most of them.

In addition, probably due to sudden cold weather in Kumamoto, there were a total of four deaths in senior homes in Jiaien. Also on December 19th, one church member, 57 years old, passed away due to cancer. Hitoshi met many of their families and gave messages during three funeral services. Reflecting upon all services in December made Hitoshi exhausted, but he thinks that the exhaustion is proof that the seeds were sown and prays that those seeds sprout and become bountiful harvests in the future. The picture shows three organists at Kuwamizu church who helped, in various ways, during services including funerals.



A Potluck Party after Christmas : On December 26th, Pastors, Missionaries, and their family members in the Kumamoto area got together and shared the ministries in each church. During the potluck, it was shared that some young adults were baptized at other churches. Thanks be to God & may the Lord's blessings and guidance continue in 2019. Amen!



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