

Celebrating Christmas in a kindergarten in the Southern Hemisphere

by Silvia Jensen

For a person living in the Southern Hemisphere who has been reading Steiner's lectures regarding the quality of the seasons and the festivals that are orientated to the northern hemisphere, one cannot just do the same as what is described in the books. How can one relate to Christmas time as the moment of the returning of the sun forces to the earth (in the north), if where one is living (in the south), this very day is so close to the longest day in the year, where the sun actually is at its height? I feel we have to make a big effort here to understand our own nature and see its relationship to the festivals.



Everywhere is light, warmth is all around and the big holidays are already on! Beaches, rivers, waterfalls, swimming pools, etc...anything that can cool down the heat is welcome!

Last year as the children in the kindergarten were performing the Nativity Play for the parents, at the moment the shepherds came to greet Baby Jesus, we were supposed to say together with Joseph: "here lies baby Jesus who was just born." It was 35° C outside and spontaneously Joseph said, "it is so hot here". Everyone started to laugh because of his innocence. What he said made total sense, it was really hot. It is so bright around this time of the year for us.

Is the pine tree suitable for a land where all the deciduous trees are at their apex of being green, with all the leaves there to provide shade for the people? Or a snowman decorating the front doors in a country where temperatures rarely go below zero degrees Centigrade, let alone in summer time? Or adding cotton balls to the branches to pretend that it has snowed?



All these examples one often finds in a Christmas celebration in the Southern Hemisphere, but do they really belong to us?

In our school we finish the school year at the end of November or beginning of December, and then we all go home to celebrate our big holidays, returning probably only after Carnival. Due to this, if we want to bring any Christmas atmosphere into the classes, it is somehow delicate because one has to start already nearly at the beginning of November to slowly build up the festival. The children immediately start asking: is Christmas coming soon? What shall we say? Well, not really, it will take some time yet! (actually a long time)



I live on an island, a beautiful one, by the way. At the season table, Mother Mary comes by boat and luckily we have such a nice song related to this situation that it fits like hand and glove. Every day we sing the song and a child pushes the boat a little bit forward. They love that.

Once she lands on a firm land she walks surrounded by shells; her pathway can be on sand, and eventually she reaches the stable where angels are singing (they like warm weather as well).

Through stories one can also build up a Christmas atmosphere. I like the ones that relate more to being kind, friendly, and knowing how to share things, rather than those attached to the physical environment (cold weather, darkness, as described in so many stories).

When possible we celebrate Saint Nicolas, (sometimes we finish the school year too early) and usually the children are asked to bring food (rice, sugar, kitchen oil, pasta, wheat flour, etc.) to give to Saint Nicolas so he can carry all these goods to poor families that live around us. This is a very nice approach I find, because without saying much, one creates an awareness that every bit I offer can help the ones who are in need, and at the same time they will get something from Saint Nicolas. Having in mind that our social life can be very uneven for most of the population, the thought of sharing something is positive.



I believe that under these circumstances lots of work has to be done with the parents, because they are the ones who will be with the children around the time Baby Jesus is born. The orientation of the parents needs to be done by the kindergarten teacher, in order not to spoil at home what was built up in the kindergarten.

It is a nice time of the year, children love it and very rarely, because of what we bring to them, do they ask about presents from Father Christmas. For me, this means that what we bring is good nourishment!

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