

Dear Friends,

Friday, December 18, 2009

It is mid-December, and finally we have snowflakes resting gently on the red-tile roofs outside our apartment. The days before Christmas are always celebrated in Bratislava with the Christmas markets in the old city. We have decided this year to let the Slovaks describe the Christmas markets in their own version of English.* It captures so well the charming way in which Slovaks speak English so we are including it word for word. Included with the description is a picture of the market itself in the main square of the old city. You can find us there several evenings a week during the Christmas season.

CHRISTMAS IN THE CITY
November 27 - December 22, 2009
Main Square, Bratislava

"A month before Christmas on the Main Square in the centre of city will be



the Christmas tree lighten up and square will be filled by market stalls. Christmas markets in Bratislava have nonrecurring atmosphere and everyday come thousands of people to meet their friends and have some lokše pancakes. Hunger will be appeased by sausages and roast pork on the spit. Besides the stalls with refreshment you will find here also stalls with various presents, natural candles, sculptures and other objects d'art. Christmas atmosphere will be raised by Christmas music - both recorded and live music. Every evening you can enjoy live musical performances, choirs, beneficial concerts, theatrical performances and other events."

*From the website of the Bratislava Culture and Information Center

Because Arden is now serving as the interim pastor of the Bratislava International Church he is at home almost every Sunday, rather than traveling throughout Europe as he usually does. This year, we celebrated Santa Lucia and Vitali, Alexei and I provided music for one of the Swedish hymns.



The Sunday School Christmas program featuring Santa Lucia

Janna, Vitali and Alexei provide accompaniment for Swedish Christmas songs



In early December, Arden traveled to Bethlehem for a meeting with the ELCA's European and Middle East Desk Director. He attended morning worship services in the Church of the Nativity on Manger Square. The church is built over a grotto where tradition states that Jesus was born. The silver star on the floor below the altar is engraved with the words, "And the Word became Flesh." Many people kneel, touch and even kiss the floor. The early morning services are performed in Latin, Armenian, Old Slavonic and Italian. Arden also visited Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Ten years ago, he helped bring the 100 year-old church organ to Minnesota to be restored, and then returned to the church in Bethlehem.



Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (the church built at the site where Jesus was born)

The organ in Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

In 1865, Phillips Brooks, an American Episcopal clergyman, visited Bethlehem. He was inspired a year later to write his beloved hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Even today, there is a sense of awe and mystery about the city whose "dark streets shineth" and "where the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." It seems to fitting to draw this Christmas greeting to a close with the last lines of Brook's hymn.



O Holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray,
Cast out our sin and enter in, Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels, The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel.

Wishing you a joyous and peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year!

[Arden, Janna, Vitali and Alexei Haug](#)

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