

JAPANORAMA - CHRISTMAS IN JAPAN

In Japan, Christmas Day is not a national holiday, so it is often celebrated on Christmas Eve. Many reserve their Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Strawberry Shortcake weeks in advance. Poultry sales peak in December and sales at KFC comprise 20 percent of annual sales!

It is also considered the most romantic time of the year, where couples declare their love for one another, take in shows and dine out -- similar to Valentine's Day in the west.

In the west, Christmas is a time to gather with close friends and family. It is often a time of religious reflection on the greatest gift -- Jesus Christ. The New Year is often celebrated with friends and associates.

In Japan, Christmas is celebrated with family, friends and casual acquaintances. New Year's Day is reserved for family and close friends, and is a time for religious reflection. Tens of millions flock to the temples to pray for good luck. New Year's Day is considered the most important family holiday in Japan and it is common courtesy to *not* phone acquaintances on that day.

PRAISE & PRAYER

Christmas is a special time of year when Japanese people are most open to Christianity. JM workers become very busy, participating in evangelistic meetings, concerts and parties.

JM workers will be involved in over 100 evangelistic opportunities in many churches to help reach those in local communities who desire to learn more about the meaning of Christmas.

Pray that many will understand the true meaning of Christmas and turn their hearts to the Lord. **Pray** for blessing and strength for the workers.



SPECIAL THANKS

We want to thank each person who has faithfully prayed and supported the work of Japan Mission during 2015. You have played an important role in helping us further the Lord's work. We praise the Lord for changed lives, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and His faithful provision and protection.

INFORMATION & INQUIRIES

Website: www.japanmission.org
E-mail: jm@japanmission.org

JAPAN

Japan Mission
7-40 Monzen Cho
Ikoma, Nara, 630-0266
Tel: +(81) 743-73-1754
Fax: +(81) 743-73-1681

AUSTRALIA

For Gifts:
Payable to: *Japan Mission*
23 Carbine Court
Drouin VIC 3818
Tel: (03) 5625 4703



"Call unto Me, and I will answer thee" Jer. 33:3

JAPAN MISSION

Called to Serve

Nov / Dec 2015

THE GREATEST FRIEND

Yukio Takahara was born in February 1940 to a family of 8 children and was raised in Kobe, Japan. As a youth, he had no use for religion and never visited the temples. His earliest recollection of religion was that of a strange religious man in the neighborhood who seemed to cause a lot of trouble.

After graduating from middle school, Yukio's family moved to Osaka, where he started to work during the day and attend high school in the evenings. Overwork and irregular eating habits soon took their toll. At age 17, following a routine health exam, his parents were shocked to learn that he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. They speedily arranged to hospitalize Yukio for fear that his infection might spread to the rest of the family. His parents visited him often and agonized over his plight.

He passed the time in hospital by playing 'Shogi', a kind of Japanese chess. As much as he enjoyed playing, he could not bear to lose. He would get so furious at those who beat him that no one wanted to play with him. He felt very badly about his behavior, but could not bring himself to apologize. This left him with very few friends and feeling on edge.

Yukio was assigned to a bed next to a Christian middle school teacher. One day this teacher wrapped a big black book in a large cloth and invited him to attend a Christian meeting, which happened to be arranged by the Japan Mission (JM). Yukio was surprised to learn that such an accomplished teacher could believe in religion. He had come to think that all people who believed in religion were ignorant trouble-makers.



Yukio Takahara

UK

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Yukio was bored and lonely, so he decided to go with this teacher and found the meetings to be a decent way to pass the time. At the second meeting, he learned that Jesus Christ was the central figure in world history who stood between BC and AD. He was curious about this important historical figure and took a free Gideon Bible.

These people were very kind and befriended him. This hit a soft spot in Yukio's heart, because he was very lonely and longed for real friends. They would often come by and ask him if he had read his Bible. This was bothersome because Yukio was interested in making friends, but not so interested in learning about Christianity.

One day, a seriously ill man who was recovering from surgery was assigned to the same ward. Some of the Christians took turns to visit and encourage him.

Although unsaved, Yukio was asked to read the Bible to this man for 30 minutes each day. Yukio found it difficult to refuse their request because they were so kind to him, so he resigned himself to read the New Testament to this fellow.

As he read the Bible, he was struck by the following verse:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

As Yukio continued to read, he realized that he had to ask God to

forgive his past sins. This was too much for him to accept. How could he humiliate himself to apologize to man or to God? That would be like admitting weakness! This truth made him even more miserable.

One day, he felt so overwhelmed with conviction that he rushed out of the hospital to a nearby vineyard. There he tearfully poured out his heart to Jesus Christ, confessing his sins and pleaded for forgiveness!

God gave Yukio the assurance that He had answered his prayers and spoke to him through His Word: ***"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you"*** (Matthew 9:2b).

When Yukio returned, his teacher friend had been worried about his absence and was waiting for him. Together they rejoiced for the change that God had brought about in his life!

After 16 months, Yukio was well enough to leave the hospital and he became an active member of a local church. He started to work for a company that trained him to be an electrician. Yukio worked his way through the company ranks for 10 years to the position of manager in a factory that produced electric meters.

One day Neil Verwey asked to meet him for a meal and to discuss the possibility of working with JM. The Lord used this meeting, various circumstances and the Scriptures to clearly guide Yukio to start working full-time for the Lord.

Yukio joined JM and attended Kansai Bible College for 4 years. After graduating, he married Keiko who was a JM worker. Together

they managed the Audio Visual Department, training thousands of projector operators and setting up rental facilities for projectors and films in many cities. Millions of people viewed the Christian films they distributed.

Jesus was the greatest Friend Yukio Takahara ever made! Not only did He save him out of a life of misery and sin, but also transformed him into an effective instrument for His service!

Yukio Takahara is now 75 years old and continues to inspire many as he works full-time with JM. God has blessed him with 4 grown children and 6 grandchildren. Sadly, most of them have shown very little interest in spiritual matters. Please **pray** for their salvation.

Pray that Mr. and Mrs. Takahara would continue to be bold and faithful witnesses to members of their own family as well as to those in the surrounding community. ☐

UPDATE - AUDIO VISUAL MINISTRY

Yukio and Keiko Takahara have been serving the Japanese church for many years through the Audio Visual ministry of JM. They have been challenged to keep up as times changed from 16mm films to videos, and then to DVDs. Now trends are shifting to the internet and making content available online.

They have also been involved in consulting, organizing audio-visual training seminars and providing audio-visual support to evangelistic events. Mr. Takahara also coordinates the curriculum, speakers and teachers at Osaka Christian Center College, which trains lay people to become more effective Christian workers.

Over the past year, Mr. Takahara has built 3 scale models of Noah's Ark out of cardboard. He has given presentations about the ark and flood. Many listen with great interest as he explains about the fossil record, the waters of the deep and the rainbow. This endeavor has served to strengthen the faith of Christians as they learn how scientific discoveries and the Bible are in agreement.

Mr. Takahara has discovered that many Japanese, who have never read the Bible, know about the flood and the ark through secular magazines and movies. Many are surprised to learn that this story is described in the Bible in such detail. As a result, a lot of unsaved people have started to read the Bible! **Pray** that their eyes would be opened to the Truth.

Pray that we would be effective in meeting the needs of the church.



Yukio & Keiko Takahara