

Dear Friends,

Dec 2017

As we celebrate “Unto us a Child is born” who is “Emmanuel God with us”, I contemplate this promise at a time when bringing a child into the world is both a great celebration and potential heartache.

Visiting the fledgling hospital of Mulolo in November, we discovered twins – born three months earlier, and their mother, now honoured to be called “Mama Mapasa” – mother of twins. These twins live temporarily in a mud and thatch “ward” along with three proud siblings. This mother survived her twin birth because Dr. Alain and his team delivered her tiny babies by caesarean section. A “normal” delivery at a hospital or health center costs a rural Congolese family around \$7, or the equivalent price of a basin of cassava (the local staple crop), but a C-section costs much more, \$120 in Mulolo. Rural families struggle for months to pay a bill of this amount.



**Mama Mapasa and her children – one twin in arms, the other (far right) in the arms of her older sister.**

So, the practice in many hospitals is to have a mud and thatch “ward” where patients with un-paid bills voluntarily stay until they pay their bills. Everywhere these “wards” host mostly women who have had



**In that Mulolo hospital “ward”, a diabetic patient, her leg wrapped in clean White Cross rolled bandages, lived in the bed next to the twins.**

C-sections. Families subsist and pay bills by gardening. Women are the primary gardeners, so pregnancy; and especially a complicated delivery; hampers the gardening cycle and sets the family back. Mama Mapasa’s husband makes raffia mats to sell, a common trade practiced in the Mulolo area because of the abundance of raffia palms. Attractive, and with multiple uses, I always buy a few when I’m there. Once the fibre is prepared and dried, a mat takes about two days to weave, and is sold for 1000 francs (about 60 cents). Still owing \$70 on the twin’s delivery, “Papa Mapasa” knows it will take months to pay off this bill, *if* he can sell the mats he makes. He had eleven available which I bought, and I paid off the hospital bill. The nature of my ministry gives me rewarding opportunities like this where so little can impact the lives of others so much.

Merry Christmas! THANK YOU for the support you are to us in so many ways. Together, let’s radiate God’s glory and love into hopeless spots in this world.

*Katherine Niles*