Once upon a time there was a man in the Serengeti District of western Tanzania called Marwa. In the sixth grade he studied the Christian religion. At Baptism he chose the name Emmanuel which means "God is with us." After finishing high school Emmanuel read magazines and books about God. He believed that God is truly present among us, but he asked: "What language does God speak?"

Emmanuel posed his special question to different church leaders in his village. The old catechist answered. "I think that God speaks Latin." The chairperson of the parish council guessed, "God speaks our local language Ngoreme." But the searching youth Emmanuel had doubts. "When I get the right answer," he said to himself, "I'll know immediately and feel great joy." So the young African set off on a journey. In the neighboring parish he asked again: "What language does God speak?" One Christian suggested Kuria, another local language.

Again Emmanuel had doubts. He began to travel across the whole of Tanzania visiting small towns and big cities. In one place the Christians were certain that God spoke Swahili. People in western Tanzania said Sukuma while residents in the northeast said Chagga. Emmanuel was not satisfied with these answers. Remembering the African saying -- "traveling is learning" -- he journeyed outside Tanzania. The Kenyans said Kikuyu and the people of Uganda answered, "God speaks Ganda." In West Africa he got different replies: Lingala in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Hausa in Nigeria and Arabic in Morocco.

He decided to travel the whole world if necessary. Passing through Europe he was told "French, German and Italian." The Christians of North America said "English" while South Americans replied, "Spanish." In his heart the young Tanzanian knew that these answers were inadequate. Determined to find the real truth he went to China where the local people insisted that God speaks Mandarin or Cantonese. Emmanuel was tired from his long travels but he resolutely pushed on. In India he was told Hindi. He reached Israel late in December. The local inhabitants said, "Surely God speaks Hebrew."

Exhausted by his long travels and the unsatisfactory answers, Emmanuel entered the town of Bethlehem. The local hotels were filled. He looked everywhere for a place to stay. Nothing was available. In the early morning hours he came to a cave where cows and sheep were sheltered. He was surprised to see a young woman with her newborn baby.
This young mother said to the traveling youth, "Welcome, Emmanuel, you are very welcome." Astonished to hear his name, the young African listened in awe as the woman called Mary continued: "For a very long time you have traveled around the world to find out what language God speaks. Your long journey is over. God speaks the language of love. God loved the world so much that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Overjoyed to hear these words of Mary the young Tanzanian understood God's language of love for all people, for all races, for all nations. Emmanuel exclaimed, "Truly, today God is with us.""

NOTE: Many stories just "happen." One Advent in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania we decided to create an original story for the Christmas homily. Congregations on big celebrations such as Christmas and Easter are very large, mixed groups. Many of these people only come to church on the biggest feasts of the year. A didactic homily or sermon may not communicate well, but a story always will. This particular parable came from asking Christians in Iramba Parish the provocative question: "What language does God speak?" Their answers and the accompanying discussions became the basis for creating this African Christmas parable. It uses different means of social communication such as African languages and African sayings.

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