

Missing you

ISN'T it wonderful to receive a gift? Be it Christmas or another kind of anniversary, receiving a present makes us feel valued, loved and cherished.

At this time of the year, the thoughts of seafarers naturally turn to home and the merriment of family during the Christmas season. Many countries celebrate Christmas, but all faiths have occasions when gifts and customs are exchanged. In the Philippines, families gather after Midnight Mass for a late-night meal called "Nochebuena". Friends and neighbours light candles and celebrate the coming festivities with traditional dishes – some of which are reserved especially for the Yuletide season. In your own homelands and households, you may do a similar thing,

reserving certain items of food and drink for special events. As a youngster, I well remember that my mum and dad, who hardly ever drank, always opened a bottle of ginger wine at Christmas. In fact my mum would feel quite tipsy at the smell!

Being at sea on a special day is always difficult for seafarers. Christmas can be particularly painful as the ship docks in a port thousands of miles away from family and friends. Many crews decorate their mess room with a tree and tinsel or streamers. But none of these can take away the difficulties of being away from those we love. There are, however, a few things crews can do to make things easier.

Contacting home is obviously the most

important one. Having the chance to speak to family, especially children, can often make us feel better. Communication facilities, however, are not always readily available on board ship, so make sure you have a copy of the seafarers' centres directory. **www.missiontoseafarers.org** lists all of the centres The Mission to Seafarers operates around the world. For a detailed list of other providers, make sure you have **www.seafarerswelfare.org** saved in your internet favourites.

For Christians, Christmas celebrates Emmanuel, the birth of Jesus. The Bible tells us that God loved the world so much that he gave it the greatest of all gifts: his son. Emmanuel means "God is

with us" and for many people this reassurance of a constant presence helps and guides their daily lives. It means that there is a source of comfort and support during times of separation and heartache.

The Mission to Seafarers recognises that working at sea during Christmas can be tough. It's one of the reasons why some of our centres are open on Christmas Day and others provide presents for crews. In a very simple way they are a small reminder that people care about you and are appreciative of your hard work throughout the year. Wherever you find yourself this Christmas, may you know that you are loved and cared for. The presents may be small, but as St Francis of Assisi once wrote: "For it is in giving that we receive".