

Tying Hallacas

"Why can't I have an important job like you or Mom?" Ivette asked.



"I'm right here!" Ivette ran to Abuela and hugged her. Then she looked up, bouncing on her toes with excitement. "What's my special job this year?"

"We'll get to that!" Abuela chuckled. "First, let me show you everyone else's jobs so you can see how hallacas are made."

Ivette followed Abuela to the table. The delicious smell of onions, meat, and spices filled the air. She couldn't wait to get started!

"First," Abuela said, "Aunt Carmen will prepare the *masa*."

Aunt Carmen put a ball of soft corn dough on a banana leaf. Then she squished it into a flat circle.

"Next, Ana will add the stuffing," Abuela said.

Ivette's older cousin, Ana, tipped a scoop of meat stew onto the dough. She added olives, peppers, raisins, and shredded chicken on top.

"Now your mom will fold the leaves."



Mom's fingers gently wrapped the leaves into a perfect rectangle.

"Our job is next, Ivette." Abuela passed the folded hallaca to Ivette. "We're going to tie it closed."

Abuela picked up a piece of cotton string. With careful hands, she crisscrossed the string around the hallaca. "Put your finger on top to keep it in place while I finish the knot."

Ivette's shoulders dropped. *They're making this job up, she thought. They don't actually need me.*

"Why can't I have an important job like you or Mom?" she asked, feeling frustrated.

"Your job is very important, Ivette." Abuela gently placed Ivette's finger on the string. "Without you here to keep the string in place, we couldn't tie the hallacas closed. Then they would fall apart while they cook. Everyone's hard work would be wasted. We all play a special part in making hallacas—just like we all play a special part in Heavenly Father's family."

A special part just for her? Ivette thought about that as Abuela tied the knot over her finger. She slipped her finger out of the knot so Abuela could pull it tight.

"We are all needed in this family," Mom added. "It's how we stay strong."

Ivette looked at her family gathered around the table. Everyone was different. Her aunt told the best jokes. Her mom gave amazing hugs. And Abuela

always knew what to say to make things better. Heavenly Father had given them all different gifts, but that was what made them special.

Abuela placed the hallaca in a basket with the rest. They were all perfectly stuffed, folded, and tied by Ivette's family members, each helping in different ways.

Ivette smiled. Each of her family members had a special place in Heavenly Father's family, just like they had a special part in making Christmas hallacas. Even Ivette!

She placed her finger on the next hallaca as Abuela tied the knot. ●



By Ashley Stark

(Based on a true story)

This story happened in Venezuela.

Ivette ran up the front steps to her *abuela's* (grandma's) house. Her parents came in behind her. It was Christmas, and they were going to celebrate with the whole family.

The house was crowded and noisy. All around her, Ivette's family members laughed and joked with one another. They loved gathering together to make *hallacas*, a Venezuelan holiday food. This year, Abuela had promised Ivette that she could help make them. Ivette weaved through the maze of uncles, aunts, and cousins, looking for Abuela.

"Ivette?" Abuela called. "Ivette, where are you?"

