

17 ❁ David Masheke, Lele evangelist and teacher

A descendant of the Lele tribe, David Masheke was born at Ndimbu in the sector of Basonga in 1914. Around 1920, Masheke was required in spite of himself to leave his mother to begin his elementary school education. Young children like David often couldn't understand why they were being shut up in a room or forced to sit under a tree under the authority of a teacher instead of being allowed to go and play. But it was for their own good and that of the whole village. After a few years of schooling, they were usually happy to stay in school.

Still, in the regions like the one in which he was born, nature offered many opportunities to earn a living through agricultural production and hunting. The temptation was great to stay in the village and enjoy the products of nature rather than go to school.

But young David Masheke was happy to go through elementary school, then study for two more years at the evangelical school at Ndjoko Punda. At the end of the intensive training, he was hired by the mission as a secretary. He continued in this role for four years, from 1943 to 1947. Having acquired some experience in this work, he became a better typist and was much appreciated by the missionaries. In 1943 he married Mboyo Mashosho; they would have eight children.

At the end of 1947 he ceased working as a secretary-typist and gave himself over completely to the work of evangelization, travel-

ing from one village to another. It was a difficult pilgrimage, but it allowed the extension of the Mennonite mission among the Lele people. He is considered one of the pioneers who laid the first stone in the construction of the Banga mission. But David Masheke also played an important role in the awakening of the Lele people through his work.

He had a vision: to bring his people to recognize not only the marvels that nature offered but also the omnipotent God, creator of all things, who had put all things at the disposal of his people because of his great love for them. Even while preaching the good news of salvation, he encouraged young people to pursue an education for the well-being of the church and of the region.

Around 1958, teacher-evangelist David Masheke caught leprosy, an illness that is difficult to treat and that slowly eats away at the sufferer. Seven years later, he went to meet the Lord. Despite the brevity of his life, he had the honor of having opened the way to schooling and to salvation for many people from his community.

Vincent Ndandula