

Dear friends,

As the unforgettable year of 2020 nears its end, these words from Isaiah 9 have been on my heart:

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. For to us a child is born..." For most of us, there have been times in the past months when we seemed to be living in a land of deep darkness. The sadness of so much sickness and death, the devastation of fires and floods, the political and racial tension, the isolation from loved ones and the financial struggles that so many are going through have made this a dark and difficult year. For our family, we also experienced the personal sadness of losing David's father to cancer in late May. Like other families during these times, we were not able to all gather together in our grief, or to remember and celebrate Dad's life with his many friends the way that we had envisioned. Dad's birthday celebration on Christmas Eve has always been an important part of our Christmas traditions, so we know that we will feel his absence keenly in the weeks ahead. We're sad that Mom is going through this loss during the isolation of COVID.



And yet, this past Thanksgiving Day as our extended family gathered by video conference instead of around the table in one of our homes, our time of sharing was full of gratitude and hope. As we shared one by one, each of us marveled at God's goodness and faithfulness. Our hearts are full of gratitude – for the impact that Dad had on all of our lives, for Mom's loving care for him during his illness, for our love as a family that is not diminished by the physical distance between us, and above all for the light of Christ that has dawned in our lives. That light shines even brighter during times when we seem to be surrounded by darkness. Our prayer is that the light and hope of Christ are shining in your lives as well.

Family update: Laura and Jason have had many changes in their lives as a result of the pandemic. This spring and summer, Laura served as director of a Tier One COVID clinic at UTMB, while Jason was giving lots of time and energy to tech support, helping our church transition to streaming worship services and holding classes by Zoom. Meanwhile, they were balancing being parents AND teachers for Mika (age 11), Luke (9) and Jono (5). The kids are very happy to be attending their bilingual school in person again this fall. In August Laura accepted a full-time interim position as vice chair of the Family Medicine department at UTMB. Along with seeing her own patients and handling details related to her new administrative role, she has been involved in the vaccine trials for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and is lead investigator on a study for new treatments for COVID. Jason has taken on more of the load of family and household responsibilities along with continuing to work with technology at the church, and is trying to squeeze in writing time to finish up his book about the last week of Jesus' life. Although they live nearby, due to the virus we are being careful about how we spend time together, so we have had to stick to occasional backyard dinners at separate tables, or watching the kids from a distance as they play in the pool or playground.



Andrea and David live in Fort Worth with Christy (3) and Amy (1). David has loved his work as a software engineer at NamUs, a national information clearinghouse and resource center for missing and unidentified persons. It is fascinating and rewarding work, and since March he has been able to work mostly from home, which has been a great blessing to their family. The sad news is that the pandemic has affected government funding for NamUs. Layoffs began a few months ago, and David was recently informed that the entire department will close at the end of December, so he will need to find a different job. We are praying that he will be able to find one that is equally fulfilling and also allows for a good balance between work and family time. Andrea has been doing a homeschool preschool program with Christy, which both of them are enjoying. Andrea teaches in both English and Spanish, comes up with lots of great learning activities and uses her musical talents to compose songs to go with the various units. Christy is soaking up knowledge like a sponge. Amy is walking now and just celebrated her first birthday with a trip to the zoo. David and Andrea still lead one of the home groups in their church and recently accepted a shared position as deacons of missions.

Sara and Eric live in Columbus, Ohio with Elenore (5) and Elliott (2). Eric's work as staff attorney for one of the Franklin County common pleas court judges has changed a bit with COVID. Jury trials have been on hold for part of the time, and the various judges and attorneys rotate between working in the office and working at home to allow for more social distancing. Along with caring for the kids, Sara has found lots of creative ways to connect with and encourage their neighbors during the pandemic. She has given leadership to setting up things like outdoor scavenger hunts, a socially distanced 4th of July parade, chalk art words of encouragement on the sidewalks, a large Thanksgiving turkey where people could write messages of gratitude on the feathers, and now a "God with Us" Christmas display where neighbors are encouraged to write about ways that God has been present with them. Sara and Eric are also involved in several leadership and service roles at their church. Elenore and Elliott love being outdoors, so the family spends lots of time taking walks through the neighborhood or visiting area parks, often with their dog Hope in tow.



We (David and Joyce) continue in our long-time work roles – David as director of the Coalition for Hispanic Ministries and Joyce as administrator at Friendswood Friends Church. We have missed seeing family and friends as much as usual, but have enjoyed being together – playing tennis, exploring new bike trails or working on projects at home. We pray for God's blessings on you and your loved ones this Christmas season. Please get in touch when you have a chance and let us know how you are doing!

Love, David and Joyce Byrne