

December 12, 2020

To the Advisory Board of the Joshua & Sunnyo Buck Mission Fund:

Merry Christmas! I hope you are all safe and well. In a year that has been filled with so much bad news, what a timely reminder of the “good news” – for unto us a Savior is born, our Lord Jesus Christ! He is indeed the sunrise in our darkness.

I am glad to share another update with you. I would like to begin with a brief reflection. This Christmas season God led me to Luke’s account of the birth of Christ in which Mary figures prominently. In Mary’s song, she is in joyous wonder of what has happened in her life. From her humble estate she is now privileged to be, in the words of her relative Elizabeth, “the mother of the Lord.” She who was once an unknown young lady living in a quiet town has now become the mother of the Messiah. It’s something of a fairy tale, but it’s even better, and it’s true! She therefore exclaims, “God has done great things for me.”

Those reading this well-known story might think, “Oh, that’s nice for Mary. She gets to be the mother of Jesus. I’d be happy too if I was Mary...but I’m not.” And in that way, we can distance ourselves from her story and her joy. But we do well to remember that later on in Luke’s gospel someone said to Jesus how blessed his mother was to have given birth to him. And Jesus replied, “blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” By saying that, he raised all his disciples to the very same status as Mary. And when someone told him, “Jesus, your mother and brothers are looking for you.” Jesus looked around at his disciples and said, “These are my mother and brothers and sisters.” We learn that Mary’s story was not written to show us how special she was. Rather, it was to show how special we all are. We are all intimately related to the King! The King is our older brother and our older brother is the King! Mary’s better-than-a-fairy-tale story is ours. Mary’s joy is ours too. Christmas reminds us that indeed God has done great things for us!

In the last update I mentioned that a lockdown was looming and sure enough our church had to revert back to online services not long after. It was a discouraging transition after having had such initial excitement of returning to church. As the weeks and months dragged on, our leadership began wrestling with how long to continue online worship. We were thankful for the ability to do online worship services, but we also felt it was not a healthy, sustainable, long-term solution. Church is not like a concert. It is more like a family gathering. So as the hot Southern California summer faded into autumn, we moved our services outdoors to the church parking lot.

I never dreamed of holding worship services in our church parking lot. As you may know, our church setting is very urban. There are no trees. Sometimes it smells. But I can see God’s hand at work. It has been encouraging to see church members rally together in solidarity to help set up on Sundays. I see their love for God and His church. And by moving us outside, God has reminded us that we have been planted in a particular neighborhood. Outdoor services have made us more aware of our neighbors and our neighbors us. As a result, we decided to make our Christmas Sunday service a time to invite neighbors to our church. Please pray that God will use our outdoor services to bring the light of the gospel to our community.

Beginning January I will start the dissertation phase of my D.Min. program. All my coursework is finished and now the hard work begins of writing my paper. I definitely feel overwhelmed when I think about what is before me. I feel like I’m staring at an imposing mountain. Part of it is because I still have ministry on my plate, and another part is because writing has never come easy for me. Please pray for me. Again, I ask for prayer that God will give me clarity and conviction on my thesis. I want my topic to be something I feel called to write. Pray for diligence to meet deadlines. Pray also that ministry would not be adversely affected.

While COVID put everybody under lockdown and forced many families into some form of homeschooling, we were already doing it! In that way, there was no difficult transition for us. We thank God for that. The one

struggle for our children was that they missed their church. Even while on vacation my kids said, “Dad, to be honest, I’d rather be at the church outdoor services than on vacation.” I didn’t know whether to be encouraged or discouraged. Haha. Laura and I thank God our kids love church. Anderson is fifteen and almost as tall as Dad. He just needs one more inch! Liberty continues to be a diligent student and (still!) enjoys playing the piano. Nathaniel recently told us that he is ready to be confirmed and profess his faith before the church. He will be going through confirmation classes over the next two months, and Lord willing, he will be able to participate in communion next year. We are all excited for him. Please continue to pray for our family and the spiritual growth of our children.

We are always thankful for the ongoing support of the JSB Mission Fund. And knowing we have people praying for us is a constant source of strength and encouragement.

In Christ,

Andy

Clockwise (beginning with top left photo): 1) The behind-the-scenes of online worship – preaching in an empty sanctuary! 2) One of our recent outdoor services 3) Liberty and Anderson helping set up on Sunday 4) Enjoying our vacation on the beach

