

## Christmas 2016

Dear Family and Friends:

Each morning RV walks past the United States Capitol on way to his office. The dome of the Capitol is illuminated, standing out against the pre-dawn horizon. The nearly complete refurbishment of this multi-ton iron structure enhances its impressive impact. RV finds this daily scene a reassuring one. A little more than one hundred and fifty years ago, that massive canopy was nearing completion during another strident election conducted while we were amid a great civil war to determine “whether this nation or any other nation so conceived can long endure.” Endure it has, as the presence of the dome reaffirms each morning.

The annual celebration of Christmas is a similar, but much greater, solace. Each Yuletide, the anniversary of the true king’s appearance glides by unnoticed amidst the hubbub of commerce, custom, and a thousand ancillary distractions. Luke records the unassuming storyline—Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem to register in a Roman census, Jesus’ birth in a stable near the town, and the angels announcing his birth to a group of shepherds tending their flocks nearby. The shepherds are the first to see the child whose initial regal abode, a feeding trough for livestock, was less imposing than the Capitol dome. Luke stresses the humble circumstances of Jesus’ birth, and that the gospel comes first to the forgotten members of society. The shepherds are ordinary people who joyfully receive the good news and become in a curious way pastors to others. Luke makes much of the word first coming to the marginalized and inaugurates this emphasis with the birth of Messiah.

In the early part of this Christmas season, we will experience firsthand the gospel’s continuing impact on the marginalized. We will be traveling to Austria to visit with our kids, Jeremy and Stephanie, and get a close-up view of their work among destitute refugees. Jeremy and Stephanie went over last December and work with a group called International Teams, seeking to meet the needs of, and minister the gospel to, these forgotten people. We are excited about our opportunity to witness this in action. We have heard many encouraging stories of people, bereft of everything, who nonetheless joyfully receive the good news and in most amazing ways become pastors to others. It is a rewrite of the Lucan narrative two millennia later.

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We are doing well and earnestly hope that you are too. Whatever this year has held, may this Christmas be for you a time for solace, refreshment, and encouragement and for enjoying Him who is the wellspring of life. From our home to yours: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.