



December 18, 2020

Dear Family and Friends,

In the midst of craziness there are moments of joy! Think of Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem. Mary was expecting her firstborn son; Joseph had the weight of taking on a new bride and family all in one, along with bringing them miles away from familiarity to a place that seemed unwelcoming. And yet, there was joy! Mary was carrying the Savior of the world! Joseph was taking on a divine task, and they were headed to a humble manger where all of humanity could be welcomed!

Our craziness of 2020 has been met with joy as well. Though we found ourselves in quarantine, we had the joy of family time: wrestling matches on the living room floor, baking opportunities that have yielded yummy delights, beach walks, and outdoor explorations! Through it all, we have grown and found new joys in the life we have been granted.

This was an especially crazy time for Tim since he had already purchased tickets for our return to the States in the middle of March. These flights were cancelled due to the pandemic, and over the next 3½ months, 4 more sets of tickets would be purchased which, in turn, were also cancelled. Each time our flight date came, we were informed we could not get to Manila. After each initial disappointment or shock, we had to regroup and simply wait. Month after month passed with a cancelled flight nearly every few weeks. During those times, however, Tim had opportunity to minister to the pastors in the Philippines through rice distributions he helped to coordinate. Our constant communication with the barangay captain also gave opportunity to leave a godly testimony. When we were able to return to the States, Tim had the chance to minister to the seminary students and many others through an online course on God's grace. If you are interested in taking this course as well, you can find it on our seminary website: <https://havenofgraceph.org/>

When the pandemic hit, our homeschooling had just finished, so the joy of summer break began, filling our days with family activity and much needed downtime for me (Sarah). Once we arrived in the States I found opportunities to minister at our sending church by helping to paint murals in the children's wing and starting up a much needed fellowship/Bible study for some of the young women in the church. When fall began, homeschooling brought us a regular schedule and the challenge of supervising four children in their studies while keeping a two year old occupied. Throughout the time back in the States I felt encouraged to be able to use my skills and have been blessed by the many folks with whom we have had opportunity to minister.

Micah has grown so much this year as he entered the teenage years. He is 13 and in the 8th grade and has nearly reached Mom's height. One of the blessings for him during time spent indoors has been meeting online to play games and share videos with missionary friends, his old church and school mates, and his cousins. Walking to the beach everyday gave him some outdoor fun while caring for his little sister, Emi, and having sand castle contests. His most exciting adventure earlier in the year was getting to ride a motorcycle (all by himself) for the first time! Here in the States, he has finally gotten his fill of bike riding, though not with a motor of any kind.

The upcoming trip to the States was what kept Kiersten going as she missed being on familiar ground. Though she had to learn the value of patience, she did well to fill the time with catching crabs at the beach, baking bread, and being a help in the kitchen. She loves to bake garlic bread and does so nearly every night for our Italian meals, soups, and meat meals (which she gladly would pass up). Being 12 years old in the 7th grade gave her a chance to join Micah for Youth Group when we came back to the States. It is surprising to see her grow up so quickly. Though she is entering the teenage years she still enjoys coming up with stories, drawing dragons and fantasy creatures, and entertaining her younger siblings with imaginative adventures of all sorts. She is a smart, deep thinker which makes our family devotional time quite interesting.

Of all the children, I believe Lydia is the one who misses the Philippines the most. She has a dog, Daisy, back on the island and many rescued kittens she took in. Keeping in contact with Filipino friends, she has kept up with how her pets are doing and shares with them the things she is doing here in the States. Here Lydia enjoys being with her cousins and visiting with friends she has made in our supporting churches. In the 4th grade this year, our 9 year old has improved so much in her understanding and reading. She is full of life and fun which is why her younger brother craves to spend more time with her. She has quite a gift with her younger siblings and makes us all smile and laugh.

Jonas enjoyed being in the Philippines with so much room to play. He is looking forward to returning (hopefully around August 2021, Lord willing) to enjoy more water fun. His favorite things were going to the beach, wrestling his siblings (and Mom and Dad), and playing video games. Jonas finished up the Kindergarten year with good grades and has moved on to 1st grade, having learned to read and write, spell, and calculate math problems. It has been a joy to watch him grow in his education as well as in his spiritual relationship. This year seems to have marked a change in his behavior along with a greater love for God and his family.

Noemi is now 2½ and has really grown in her personality. She enjoys Micah's teasing, Kiersten's cooking expertise, Lydi's adventures, and Jonas' efforts to entertain her. She is a little mommy at heart and stops to admire every baby we meet along the way. Her vocabulary has increased so much while in the States, though she loves to incorporate a few Hiligaynon words she has learned. One in particular is "pis pis" (sounds like peace-peace) which is the Hiligaynon word for "bird." Another one is "nummy," which is similar to the Hiligaynon word "namit" (sounds like nah-meet), which means "yummy!" She lights up our home and has filled it with a joy for the cute and snuggly!

Though this year has been challenging, unexpected—and a bit crazy—we have learned to rest in what God has planned. The story of Christmas has reminded us that we are not alone in experiencing the unexpected. God has a plan already in place and though it may not be our plan, He has the future already formulated and it will turn out perfectly according to His plan.

Love Tim, Sarah, Micah, Kiersten, Lydia, Jonas & Noemi Valiante