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*"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"
which means, "God is with us." Matthew 1:23 (NRSV)*

*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
John 1:3b-5, 14 (NRSV)*



Incarnation. It's a big word with profound meaning for our Christian faith, But at the heart of its meaning is simply the fact that **God is with us** and that is expressed most concretely in the person of Jesus. Matthew picks up on a prophecy of Isaiah who originally used the name, Emmanuel, meaning "God [is] with us." The baby, Emmanuel, was a sign of both assurance and judgment. It was a call to trust in God and not the political powers of the day for safety and ultimate salvation from the violence and

chaos which threatened them. May we heed that prophetic word for our day as well!

God has been with us throughout the past year. Last year around this time, I was still dealing with a variety of health issues and even had an appointment with a specialist in Indianapolis on Christmas Eve Day. Twila was recovering from cataract removal in both eyes. I'm glad no further interventions were needed for either of us and the year has been one of good health.

The holidays are different for us this year in Goshen since my sister, Cheryl, and her husband, Ron, moved to California early in the year. We are glad they come back occasionally to see their son, so we will get to see them too during Christmas weekend.

Our own travels have been among the highlights of the year. Twila made several trips on her own, both east and west to connect in significant ways with her children and grandchildren. Together, we have made trips within Indiana and to Pennsylvania to see her extended family. A highlight was connecting with her sister, Linda, and husband, Phil, who have been in North America for an extended time the latter half of this year. We saw them in Pennsylvania in July

and then had a few precious days in December in our home before they return to East Africa, to a different mission assignment, this time among an unreached people group in South Sudan.



Some travels have been work-related, particularly for Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship (MHF) which I direct. I had a display table at the Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City in late June and early July. Then, several weeks later, the two of us headed east again. We both attended MHF's big Annual Gathering held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and then I stayed on for the huge Mennonite World Conference Assembly while Twila spent more time with her sister. We reunited on Sunday morning at Agape Fellowship on July 26,

capturing a photo with Phil and Linda as we remembered our wedding day exactly seven years ago to the day.

Then, it was time for a vacation for the two of us to an area where neither of us had visited. We traveled north and stopped in the metro Boston area to visit Twila's nephew and family, including the latest great nephew. Then, it was on to Bar Harbor, Maine and Acadia National Park. From there, we crossed the border into Canada. We saw wonderful scenery and interesting sights from the shores of Fundy Bay in New Brunswick to the home of "Ann of Green Gables" on Prince Edward Island, and then across the bridge into Nova Scotia. There we spent the most time with the highlights being the wonderful scenery and whale watching along the Cabot Trail and a two-night stay in a cozy cabin along a gorgeous lake near Halifax. Our trip concluded with a stop in Lancaster to see Twila's aunt and uncle and her brother, Dwayne.



As for my children, **Renita** and her husband, Matthew, along with their cute and furry dog, Linc, are in Lombard, Illinois and still working at their same jobs. We look forward to seeing them the weekend after Christmas when they will visit Goshen.



Nathan has had a unique year after agreeing to take part in a trial for a possible new medication for fragile X syndrome. During the summer months, his mother and I took turns taking him to Rush Medical Center in Chicago where he was examined, went through various tests from blood drawing to computer games. He was very reluctant at first, but in the end thoroughly enjoyed it, especially the biweekly commuter train rides from South Bend to Chicago and back! He also grew quite fond of Dr. Elizabeth Berry-Kravis (a well-know clinical and research

physician in the fragile X community) and her young medical assistant, Jamie. We feel sure he was in a group that got the real medication and not the placebo since there were definite changes in his behavior and anxiety levels during the time he was on it which reverted back when the med ended. So it will be interesting to see if this drug comes on the market and whether it will help many people with fragile X. On the last visit, the doctor asked him what his favorite test was. Everyone in the room got quite a chuckle at his response. Since she was drawing blood at the time, he answered, “the blood test!”

Back in Goshen, I continue juggling two main jobs (for MHF and Mennonite.net) as well as trying to finish a website for the Congregational Accessibility Network (CAN). I continue to be involved in music at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship and this summer agreed to another 3-year term on Worship Commission after being off of it for a number of years. I also attend occasionally and every once in awhile help out with music at the church which Twila attends on Saturday, Bethany Chapel SDA.

Meanwhile, **Twila** continues her quiet and unique ministry in both congregations and among her far-ranging family and friends by phone, email, and occasional well-timed (arranged by the Holy Spirit, we are certain!) visits in person. She also is a regular weekly volunteer on Tuesday morning at the local Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Material Handling Center, a hub for putting together relief kits of various sorts.

Together, in the midst of joys and challenges, we feel blessed to experience the presence of Christ as we see God at work in people’s lives, including ours! We pray for our community, our nation, and our world, that we would be a part of a living, reconciling people in our fearful, troubled, and deeply divided world!

May you also experience Emmanuel in this Advent and Christmas season and throughout the new year to come!

Paul Twila

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