

# Christmas 2025

## After a year of wondering...

Taking off from LAX at dusk, our plane flew West for a bit before turning East toward our far away destination of the Arab world. On that January 29, 2025, the skies were full of dust and smoke and embers and sadness. We had lived through almost a month of terror in Southern California, each morning bringing news of more flames and destruction, evacuations, power outages, winds and sleepless nights. In the plane we flipped on the live CNN news on the small screens in front of us, but only found further trauma as we watched the rescue efforts for those who had just died in the plane/helicopter crash in the Potomac. The familiar red, blue and white emergency lights reflected in the cold water. More loss and sadness. We knew we were also headed back to the Gaza conflict still raging. It was a long flight full of questions. Some years are wonderful; some years are full of wondering.

To wonder is a natural response to new, unexpected developments, good or bad. It shows that you care, that you are engaged, and that you want to know the truth of the matter. There were actually quite a few questions asked that very first Christmas. Zechariah, the soon to be father of John the Baptist, gripped with fear asked “How can I be sure of this?” And Mary, the soon to be mother of Jesus, was greatly troubled, wondering about the angel’s greeting, “How can this be?” Joseph who was engaged to Mary had to consider carefully how to navigate this new complex situation. The Magi, travelers from afar, came to inquire “where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?” The local King Herod, with some malice intended, asked the chief priests and teachers, “where is the Christ to be born?” Many significant wonderings, but in the end, out of it all, came great joy, stars, songs and a Savior!

It is sometimes difficult for us to be honest about the challenges we face in our specific ministry because it can be potentially dangerous for all involved. This year has been particularly difficult

for a whole group of people we have ministered to and with. Basically, they are scattered. Our dear Iraqi co-worker on the left in the picture received his resettlement visa for Australia after 9 long years in Jordan. He did wonderful, fruitful ministry while here and is deeply missed. The young man in the middle, another dear Iraqi who came to know Christ with his wife in our church had to take her body back to Iraq for burial when she died a hard, sad death from cancer. His whereabouts are now unknown; he may have been kidnapped for ransom. We pray and wonder daily. Another Jordanian follower of Jesus from the majority background had to flee to another country when his father determined to accuse him of a crime. A believer from a Palestinian background working with an honored NGO was taken to court for sharing his faith with another family. He has been cleared, but the accuser is determined to ruin his reputation. Some things break our hearts, some leave holes in our hearts. After 50 years, we know that we live in a hurting world, a world that hurts people. We long for freedom for those we love to be able to choose and live their faith in peace, to grow from strength to strength in Him. We wonder, “why does it have to be so hard for so many?”





Changes have come very quickly for the Kennedy family this year. When the policy of their PCUSA mission group changed, Darren and Elisabeth said a poignant farewell to their 25 years of fruitful ministry in Egypt at the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo and at the American University of Cairo. They began to wonder and consider what God might have next for them. Of three main possibilities before them, they chose the First Presbyterian Church of Nashville, where Darren has accepted a call to be the Associate Pastor of Discipleship, beginning in late January. Their oldest son Calvin continues his engineering work setting up new, large solar energy sites, beginning in Virginia and now working on a new site in Ohio. Sammy, their younger son, is in his senior year at Princeton, working on his Senior Thesis in the Near Eastern Studies Department. Perhaps journalism may be a part of his future? So, more adventures ahead for this energetic family!

Jessica and Dan navigated some changes this year also. Although they would have enjoyed another Foreign Service overseas assignment, they decided on a job at the State Department in DC, and are now based in Arlington VA. Emma graduated from the International School of Kenya in June, beginning her university studies at Princeton this Fall. Theo is a high school sophomore at one of the large Arlington High Schools. They have rented a house and are getting set up after moving all their goods from Nairobi. Having lived in this area before and having many friends and a church they are a part of make it easier for everyone in adjusting to this new situation. We all miss having them in Kenya which was such a delightful place to visit, drinking coffee at cafes in the woods with the animals!



Something you can be sure of in the Middle East is that there are rocks and stones everywhere; they are never tossed away, but rather set aside for the future. The Old Testament mentions several times when the people of God are told to stack up rocks to remember a special place where God had worked. In 1 Samuel 7:12, Samuel sets up a stone and calls it Ebenezer, "The Lord has helped us to this point." That stone became a stone of remembrance. A year ago, as our beloved roof fountain began separating into individual stones, I (Suzanne) chose two of them and made Ebenezer stones for my shared birthday with Susan, our friend and WV colleague here. We set them on the birthday table, very thankful that God had been with us to that point; it was good and important to remember. However, there are parts of this past year of 2025 that have been hard and sad for us and so many, parts that we don't really want to remember. But what we can say for sure is that God has indeed been with us through it all: Ebenezer!

Chad Bird, an Advent writer notes: "I have learned that tears and smiles can co-exist in a soul full of the hope of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do for us, through wounds and tears, in darkness and grief. I have learned that even the darkness will not be dark to you, oh God!" (Psalm 139)

*With wondering, hope and love,  
Bob and Suzanne*