

God's Gifts in 2022

Each year I try to have nearly all my Christmas shopping done by October. In addition to all the normal holiday festivities in this final quarter, we also celebrate five family birthdays, our anniversary, and a few additional Romanian holidays and ministry events. It's such a fun time of year; I always enjoy it. But by January, I'm exhausted and don't want to think about gifts for a long while! Yet, this year in particular, I'm keenly aware of the special gifts the Lord has given us in 2022.

First, we've finally been given the gift of stability. After 14 months in the same place, our apartment is now home, and I've even hung pictures on the wall. This stability has also led to the gift of better mental and spiritual health. Several of us have spent hours in counseling and traveled for therapy that was extremely helpful. Elin and Atticus are doing wonderfully in 3rd and 1st grade, and we get together regularly with other homeschool children whom we've befriended – a gift that is a direct answer to prayer. God has gifted us with an intern, Kim, to help us with ministry events and caring for Denton and Jemma several mornings a week. Our Father has allowed all our parents to visit us this year, and because of Derek's parents' brave babysitting, we were able to steal away for the gift of two nights alone for the first time since 2014! And we've been gifted with several trials and hardships – family struggles, helping to resettle Ukrainian refugees, caring for Romanians and their families, and enduring two hospital stays with Atticus and Jemma; it is in these times that we see God's goodness and faithfulness strengthen us to grow even more. I am so thankful for each of these gifts, but even as I celebrate finally calling some place "home," it pales in comparison to the gift of having an eternal home waiting for us.

I was reminded of this fact as I prepared to decorate my house for Christmas and, two days before Advent began, took Alexa (pseudonym) home one day from getting winter wear at a clothes closet. Alexa is a Roma with whom we've spent significant time and helped in a number of ways in the last five years; she is an outcast to Romanian society, other Roma in her community, and even her own family. Her mother abandoned her, leaving her to be raised by her grandmother, and then after inheriting the grandmother's shack, threw Alexa out of the house. After a while, the mother allowed a newly widowed Alexa to come back and pay rent to live in a small barn and raise her five children alone. After all these years, she finally allowed me to see her "home" as I dropped her off, and it was one of the dankest I've ever seen. She has dirty quilts covering the windows and doors to insulate the unheated concrete home. The small cook stove works, but with no wood or food to cook, it is worthless. She has a small entryway and a bedroom that is about the size of our bathroom. The lightbulb hanging from the entryway ceiling is the single light source for the whole space, and Alexa shares the double bed with her two adolescent children still at home. I could barely see into the room, where her sick daughter lay. The outside is just as abysmal: trash everywhere, random old furniture piled against the fence, a big dog on a chain, no bathroom anywhere. Everything is covered in mud.

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I asked her where she thinks her grandmother is, now that she has passed. Does she believe in eternal life? She didn't know. So I shared with her the greatest gift of hope we have: that despite the fact that we rejected God, He loved us enough to join us in the suffering here on earth. Like her, He was rejected by his community and family. Like her, he suffered the grief of death. Like her, he lived in poverty. Our King lived through all of that to give us a way back to Himself. This is what we celebrate at Christmas, not gifts and lights and trees - which she has no access to anyway. And we don't only look forward to a future, unseen hope; He gives us a loving and caring family of believers to help us in life *now*, one which has already done much to help ease her suffering. And at Christmas, we celebrate the birth of our Savior with this family; a loving community that is accessible to her *now*. What incomparable gifts we have been given and long to share with her more deeply! And once again, I invited her to join us at church, to come see the beauty that could be hers at Christmas time and all throughout the year. This is the crushing reality of working with people in poverty, who choose again and again to reject the tangible help offered them and choose a hopeless, hard life instead. But after knowing how much rejection she has experienced, I empathize with her unwillingness. As it is for everyone, the gift of salvation is available to her, and I have hope that one day she will come and behold her Savior, and experience a changed life here and now.

My time with Alexa was simultaneously a sad and beautiful way to begin the Advent season of meditating on our Wonderful Counselor. Our friendship with her is a palpable reminder of the earthly riches we have been given, along with our Almighty God's call on us to generously use our resources to provide for those in need; we are His hands and feet in a hurting world. Our conversations with her help us praise our Everlasting Father, as we share stories of His lovingkindness in our own need, along with the gift of hope we have been given, knowing that eternal life is secured; we are His witnesses in a dark world. Alexa lives in a stable. Jesus was born in a stable. And because of his humble birth, we have hope for an eternal home with this Prince of Peace, the majesty of which far surpasses that of even the best, most beautifully decorated homes overflowing with bounty.

Though I eventually feel the exhaustion from shopping for gifts, cooking for groups, and planning for events, I never tire of remembering all that my Savior has given to us. We hope that your Christmas will be filled with gifts and gratitude, as well. But most importantly, we pray that you, and Alexa, will join us in celebrating the Christ child, who brings light to the world and hope to us all because of the richness of His love. Merry Christmas!

With Love and Gratitude,

Derek, Catalina,

Flin ☺, Atticus ☺, Denton ☺ and Femma ☺

P.S. We love receiving mail, especially
Christmas cards in January or February! 😊
Familia Kreider
Strada Aluminului #17, Et 2
Brasov, 500158
Brasov, Romania



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