

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf:

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Be reconciled to God." – 2 Corinthians 5:20





If you haven't received our Christmas card by now, you're either not on our list or we have the wrong address for you. Please get in touch with us so we can update our list and get you our future cards and letters.

Ding Dong: Round 2

"*Jean Claude! *Fran!" I yelled through the cold, morning air. I was yelling

because my voice needed to travel through the haze from the still smoldering campfires and all the way through the slats in the small, wooden shanty to the seven occupants who resided inside. Without a door on the shack and with only blankets for windows, I didn't need to yell all that loudly for them to hear me. But my voice was the "doorbell" to make my presence known, and I wanted to ensure that I was heard. I didn't want any of my future visits to end up like my first, unannounced visit, when *Sam, Jean Claude's older brother, took me into the shack while the rest of the family were all still huddled in the same bed trying to keep warm.

If I were to summarize our first year here in Romania, I would say that it was a year of being on defense. Without knowing very much Romanian, without knowing many Romanians, and without knowing the needs of our community, we were largely reliant on others. In terms of ministry, it also meant we were reliant on the needy coming to us. We received many neighbors and passers by who constantly rang our doorbell to ask something of us - a ride, money, food, etc. But at the start of our second year here in Romania, things feel a little different. Instead of being on defense and having our doorbell rung, we're starting to ring the doorbells.

When we think back on all those who have sought our help over the past year, most were unlike us. That's not simply our assessment. Our community told us so. Whether it was our drunk neighbor or a Roma beggar, everyone knew who these needy people were. They were people not like us - not worthy of us. While we went beyond many in our community by acknowledging and entertaining these untouchables, we generally did so from our own world. We were usually warm, generous, and loving, but were such from a place of comfort. But when we think of how the Bible portrays those on the outside, rarely do we see their wellness and healing brought about through their own initiation. Almost always we see healing come upon the needy. We see this in the very beginning when God clothed Adam and Eve and made a provision for the salvation of humanity. We see with Abraham when God promised to make him great through a covenant God made with himself. Even when we think we see an example of initiation on the part of an individual towards God, as in the case of Naaman pursuing healing, we find that Naaman's pursuit began only after a lowly servant first brought news of God to him. And of course the greatest initiation in history is seen when God himself incarnated as one of us,

so that by his initiation of love, we would love him (I Jn). God works not only through initiation, but through the greatest form of initiation, incarnation. God incarnated to those who are far off in order to draw them near. He left his comfort to be with those unlike him - those unworthy of him. While we want to keep our arms open for those who seek us out, it seems only fitting that we would continually look to do more to move out incarnationally as well.

Being our Christmas newsletter, I think it is only fitting that its focus is incarnation. For us, such a thought is more meaningful this year than it has ever been. Each time we return to visit Jean Claude, Fran, Sam, and their children, I wonder if the ramshackled structure in which they live is at all similar to the stable in which my savior was born. How sad it is that I find it so difficult to enter the world of those on the outside of society, as I seek to build my own kingdom of comfort and convenience - a kingdom masquerading as God's Kingdom. Ironically, God has done the opposite. He has brought his Kingdom to us, the outsiders, and he has illumined His Kingdom in the form of a man. Jesus Christ left the splendor of heaven to live in the kind of place I find it difficult to enter for an hour. Perhaps that's one of the reasons he changed the world and I haven't. Perhaps that's how he has initiated a change within me when I couldn't.

As we move further away from Christmas, the season which is meant to remind us of incarnation, we challenge you to continue reflecting on what Christ's birth means for us as Christians, and what it means for all those who are hopeless. While the cross is important, the sacrifice of Jesus began well before the cross, in his willingness to incarnate. God's sacrifice should impact the way we live our lives. As we move into the new year, think about how the incarnation of God himself should impact your life. How can you live as Christ's hands and feet, God incarnate in the world? As you recognize God's transformative, initiating power in your own life - through the Holy Spirit who resides within you - embody the love that love itself embodied in Christ. Hear the words of the Apostle Paul (Philippians 2:5-8),

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature [\[a\]](#) God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own

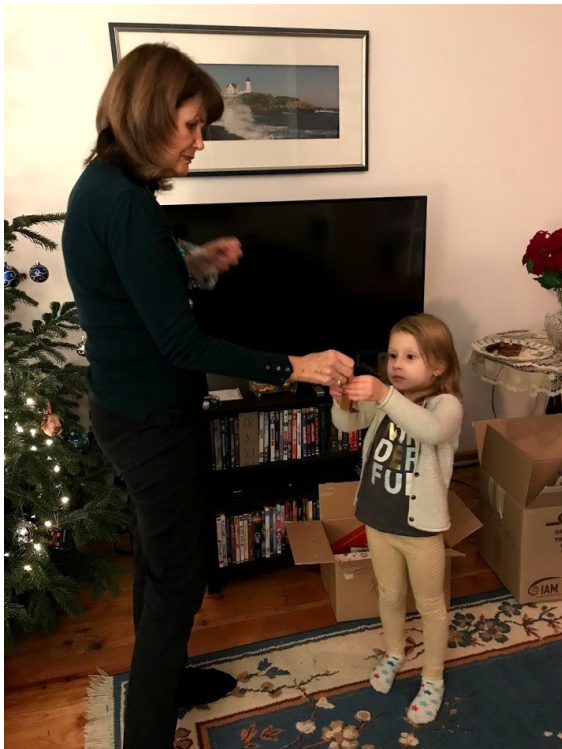
advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

PLEASE PRAY...

- Catalina has a new teaching opportunity starting in the new year. Once a week she will be doing English Puppet Theater at the kids' daycare for the older after-school kids. They'll be learning English through memorizing and performing Bible stories with their puppets and learning English songs that go along with the stories. Please pray for her and the kids in this new endeavor.
- That God would guide us into new relationships as well as strengthen the ones he's already given us. We know a number of people in need (needs of various sorts). We also know there are many more out there with needs who God may choose to send our way. In fact, we've had two new Roma contacts approach us in the past month. It can be a bit overwhelming as we attempt to figure out how to allocate our resources - to the church, to friends, to those who approach us in need, etc. Pray for wisdom as we figure out how to best use our time and resources to advance the gospel and edify the church. Pray that God would further the relationships and situations which would glorify him, and cut short those that aren't good for the Kingdom.
- Continue to pray that our church would find a Romanian pastor.
- Please pray for our church congregants, especially the elders, as there are many who are facing some very difficult circumstances. Please pray that God would give them wisdom and endurance, and that he would help them to lean into the body. Pray that we would have wisdom in reaching out to them and supporting them.



Top Left: Our neighbor, Tanza, came over one evening to teach us how to make Sarmale, a traditional stuffed cabbage roll meal.

Top Right: God has answered our prayers by bringing more people to participate in our worship team.

Bottom Left: Living abroad means making new Christmas traditions, like meeting with your teammates to decorate trees and read Scripture.

Bottom Right: Denton turned ONE on December 15th! Unfortunately for him in this crazy season, a simple sheetcake with some stickers was all mama could muster this year! :-)

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

12/22/18: [2018 Christmas Card](#) - by Catalina

12/17/18: [gods in the Flesh](#) - by Derek

12/7/18: [Joy Jail](#) - by Derek

Check us out on Facebook! We post on Catalina's ["From Dacula to Transylvania"](#) album so that you can stay up to date with us. You can also follow [our photos on instagram](#) or check out our [video archive](#). But best, of all, you should let us know if you want to join our secret Facebook Group to get more updates!

Reminders:

- Our teammates, Derek and Shannon Ebbers, have been faithful missionaries to Romania for 11 years now and are seriously the best team leaders God could have possibly provided for us! As is normal for all long-term missionaries, they have recently lost some financial supporters and are looking to make up the loss in their monthly account. Supporting our teammates is a direct way you can be in support of us; if they have to go back to the States for support-raising, that affects the team dynamic and ministry. We would love for you to consider joining our support team by literally supporting our whole team! If you would be interested in reaching out to them, supporting them, or passing their names along to individuals and churches who may have interest in what we're doing in Romania, we would greatly appreciate this. You can [find them here](#).
- If you're interested in one-time giving and would rather support projects, we have a project account for the Romanian church which goes towards things like the youth program, elder trainings, etc. The account is **#94978** for the Romania church plant.



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