

Thankfulness

Joy

Hope

Praise God that these three concepts run so much deeper than our shallow pop culture use of them. As circumstances have been uncertain, anxiety at times has been high, and patience has worn thin in places, having a hope that transcends current situations or outcomes, a gratitude for family and good gifts in the face of hardship, and a joy that runs deep for the ways God (His nature, His promises, His love) remains unchanging, have helped make this year a deeply meaningful one.

Nathan (newly 3): What to even say in such a short space that encapsulates this little guy? He hit his highly verbal stage recently and it's a chatty household we live in these days. Paired with his creative, never-ending energy, his enjoyment of playing with words, and his love for stories, Nathan has been the bringer of laughter more than anything else this year. After his daycare closed permanently during the spring, he began attending a new home daycare in August with three other families and took to it like a duck to water (or as he would say, a Night Ninja to sticky splats). We are thankful for that tiny little community of same-age peers during a time when isolation is prevalent in much the rest of our lives.

Nick and **Amy** continue to navigate their ever-changing jobs largely via computer screen these days. Amy's school has changed their mode of educational delivery numerous times and she is grateful for a staff that is working tirelessly and creatively as a team to teach students with disabilities in a less-than ideal scenario. She continues to work 4 days a week and loves her extra time home with Nathan on Wednesdays. She also joined a new small group and took over the coaching role for their student leaders. Nick has continued to pastor Illini Life in a way that seeks continued connection and community even as modalities and methods change to respect safety guidelines and mandates. He is nearing the end of his seminary degree and enjoys shaping the preaching calendar for the church among his other roles as pastor. Nick was able to salvage a couple races during a largely canceled triathlon season and remains committed to training hard and coaching other athletes through a time when many are struggling with motivation and the cancelation of goal races. Both of us had the true honor this year of providing pre-marital counseling and officiating an intimate outdoor wedding of two dear friends and alumni of our church. Joy is tenacious and the ways we have experienced it this year gained an even greater power against the backdrop of "2020".

We hope your year comes to a close with moments to celebrate and see God's faithfulness amidst whatever the year threw your way.