

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Luke 2:9

Epiphany represents the season in the church calendar when Christ was manifested to the Gentiles—the people who were not Jewish—and, later, all people who did not make Him their Lord and Savior. When the Magi visited Jesus at home in Bethlehem, they were among the first, if not *the* first, Gentiles who recognized Christ as the King of the Jews. When Christ was presented at the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after His birth, a righteous and devout man named Simeon, moved by the Holy Spirit, said it right as he cradled Jesus in his arms. He exclaimed, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation . . . a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2).

In my fall Bible study, we studied what “glory” means. We learned that God’s glory is not only manifested in a sparkling pyrotechnic display, as many of us assume, but also as we, His image bearers, extol His name, divine nature, and eternal majesty through Christ’s ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation to all the nations. As we are forgiven and reconciled in our hearts to God, we are free to unfurl the Lord’s glorious light to others— “the Gentiles” who do not know Him—like a ribbon rippling in the wind of His spirit.

It is this image and others that propelled me nineteen years ago to live and serve in Rwanda and then to serve there again, the second time in a completely different place and capacity at the Dufatanye Organization. One theologian, R. DeVries, has written that Christ’s glory, “goes hand in hand with [His] suffering on that hill outside Jerusalem.” He continues, “. . . if the full weight of God’s glory is to enter our lives, it will be as we walk alongside Jesus in the way of the cross.” As I have ministered in Rwanda, this has been true for me.

I believe many of you have also been juggling the dualism between glorious light-filled experiences versus murky plodding through months of darkness, ambiguity, and anguish. Our Hunger Relief Project in Rwanda, during the country’s stringent COVID-19 quarantine, proclaimed the glory of God’s faithfulness to thousands of hungry people there, regardless of their religious affiliation. Some of you participated in this, and we are grateful.



COVID has created difficulties in Rwanda as it has everywhere. But there is rejoicing over the generosity of those who have provided food during this time of crisis. Unmaskable smiles and joyful dancing erupt in response to God's provision of food!

Here at home, however, you or others you know have been sick, or you even know some who have died. The lack of opportunity to visit loved ones, including older friends and family, along with the inability for our children to attend schools, has left a terrible cognitive and affective toll on these more vulnerable individuals.

Similarly, in Rwanda, people suffered terribly as the country's twelve million people were locked down—not even allowed to go fishing or to work in any capacity to buy a scrap of bread or a bag of grain. Those of you who participated in our efforts to feed thousands of starving Rwandans enabled us to distribute over 350,000 pounds of corn flour and beans, along with a 12-inch bar of soap. We sought also to feed them with spiritual nourishment through prayer and Bible teaching as they waited to receive their goods. Mothers with babies bound to their backs showed up. Old men, using long sticks, walked gingerly along a path and arrived praising God for His provision. Worn-down grandmothers caring for family members stricken with AIDS departed with smiles on their faces. We even served one hundred prostitutes, and several of these women became Christians and have started digging in our fields to make a living. One such woman, Olive, proclaimed, "I am a new person in Christ and will no longer ever return to my past life!"

Despite so many challenges, I have marveled at how our nonprofit, the Dufatanye Organization (DO), and our director, Godfrey Karema, and his staff used their pittance of provisions to organize the entire food distribution project: interfacing with the government, receiving permission and then hauling weekly food supplies back and forth from the capital, tending the sick, keeping our nine DO workers on the payroll, and when the government allowed, building several new houses for widows, replanting many vegetables that died during the quarantine, overseeing our banana plantation, and tending our fish farms.

We also assisted more people nearby in the Village of Hope by giving them avocado trees, more banana tree suckers, chickens, and vegetable seeds to plant in their nearby kitchen gardens that we helped to construct for them. We've even begun serving a second "Village of Hope," more distantly situated. I told Godfrey that we should call the second "village" the "Village of Peace," to tell them apart. But he wants to call it "Hope," which, in the end, is really what it's all about.

As the Magi followed the star and when Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms, they were all filled with hope, a hope that in some mysterious way, would lead to salvation, "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to [God's] people Israel." For us here at St. Philip's and beyond, may we unselfishly offer our lives to Christ, continuing to walk under the weight of His glory, extolling His name, and spreading the light of His grace and glory—and hope—to our broken and fragile world here at home and in the world abroad.

~ Martha Vetter
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Our Second Village of Hope

Seeing the good work done at the Village of Hope, Rwandan government officials asked the DO to establish a second Village of Hope deep in the forest. The DO provided avocado trees, banana suckers and seeds for growing their own food, chickens to provide eggs and built durable cement kitchen gardens for them.



Fishing and Farming

Some COVID restrictions have been eased, and the government is allowing work to resume in our gardens, fields, and fish hatcheries. Thanks be to God for His provision!



Glorifying God **COVID-19 Feeding Program** *through*

As government restrictions due to COVID-19 in Rwanda closed all businesses and all means of food production, God used the Dufatanye Organization to sustain many families through provision of food supplies.



Saturday Bible and Breakfast Club

Pre-COVID Lockdown



CPR training prior to the outbreak of COVID, provided by visiting nurses



A nutritious breakfast!



Arts and Crafts related to Bible lesson

Post-COVID Lockdown



Saturday B&B Club has resumed with breakfast provided in an outdoor venue socially-distanced.



Work has begun on our new playground...



...which will include a rest area for adults to sit as the children play.