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What a wonderful year! I was invited to share about our journey with Abe at a women’s event at church in February. I was grateful for the opportunity to proclaim God’s power and faithfulness. I also started doing some fill-in work in area nursing homes. Dropping Abe off at daycare that first time was tough, but I’m grateful for the opportunity to work a little bit. It’s good for me to get out of the house (and talk with adults!), and I love what I do. In March, Joel & I were able to get away for the day to celebrate his birthday in Brookings. About a week later, we dedicated Abraham to the Lord along with five other babies at our church. It was a blessing to have family here to support us. We went to North Dakota for Easter. Abe got to meet relatives from both the Wolitarsky and Heringer sides. In May, we celebrated Hunter’s high school graduation. We were back in ND for my Grandma Grace’s funeral in early July. She’d had Parkinson’s disease since my mom was in high school, and she was ready to go home to Heaven. We’re grateful for her legacy of faith.

After spending a few days in Hendricks with Joel’s parents, we went back to ND for our planned family vacation. It was fun to be Joel’s tour guide for the more-than-you-realize attractions in western ND. We toured the coal mine, took in the Medora Musical and Pitchfork Fondue (where they cook steaks on pitchforks in vats of oil), meandered through Theodore Roosevelt National Park, walked around the Knife River Indian Villages, visited the ND Capitol and Heritage Center, and stopped at Forts Mandan and Lincoln. Abe also got his first tube ride at Lake Sakakawea. He loved it! Joel & I had our first night away from Abe when we went to Medora, and all came out unscathed. We enjoyed another great weekend at Family Camp at Inspiration Point with Joel’s family. Joel and I celebrated our 3rd anniversary with a trip to Minneapolis where we caught our first Twins game together (they lost). Grandpa & Grandma Molascon took care of Abe for that trip. Joel’s brother Dave and his family visited from San Diego, and Abe had a great time playing with his cousins! We cherish our time with them because we don’t get to see them as often as we’d like. Joel was excited to attend a Five Iron Frenzy concert at LifeLight over Labor Day weekend, and my mom got another good report from Mayo!

Abe’s first birthday party in September was a blast! Following the tradition of both our families, I made and decorated Abe’s cake – a monkey. It’s been incredible to watch Abraham grow and change over this past year. He’s running all over the place! He loves books, redistributing my measuring cups and spoons throughout the house, and chasing Ibu (our cat, who tolerates it remarkably well). He eats pretty much anything except cottage cheese, and 3 of his 4 one-year molars have poked through his gums. He says three words (technically, they’re approximations): “ba” for ball, “nana” for banana, and “puh” for up. As a speech therapist, it’s been fun for me to observe his expressive and receptive language development. He uses several Baby Signs, the most popular of which are “please,” “dog,” and most recently “stars” (which is how he identifies snowflakes, too). We’re spoiled by his great sleeping…12 hours straight through the night since he was about 5 months old. He has a comedic personality in that he loves to be silly and tease – he’ll pretend to give us some food, and then when we lean in for it, he quickly pops it in his mouth. Between Abe and Ibu, we are quite entertained.

It was fun to show Abe off at his first NICU reunion where we saw several nurses who helped take care of him. Not a day goes by without our praising the Lord for Abe’s health! My birthday was spent painting the stairwell (walking on a plank set on ladders) at my parents’ new house. At least my dad took us out for supper afterwards. We took a quick trip to Michigan to visit my aunt, uncle, and cousin who live there and see *another* Five Iron Frenzy concert. Together we enjoyed good food, the Toledo Zoo, and a few movies in an impressive home theater. A few days later, we spent a relaxing Thanksgiving weekend in Hendricks.

Joel is finishing up his sixth year on the Leadership Council at church this year and will be termed out. He’s still a high school youth leader. He enjoyed several company events – a pheasant hunt, grill-outs, and a golf tournament. I continue to quilt with ladies at church – we celebrated our 100th quilt in May! I’ve also become an advocate for breast milk donation. It’s known as “liquid gold” in the NICU, and I was able to donate over six gallons. What an amazing gift to be able to give! Joel & Abe got some father-son bonding time while I attended a speech and hearing convention and went to a mom’s conference. Joel and I are both serving at church on the Missions Team and during the worship services doing sound and PowerPoint. We went on as many date nights as there were babysitters available. We’ve also designated one night a week as our “Date Night In.” Even if we can’t have a “real” date, it’s been good to spend intentional time together. We pray that your family enjoys intentional and intimate time with our Savior as we reflect on His birth this Christmas season.