

Mary serves as model for mom-to-be

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As my husband, Joe, and I prepare this Advent season for the celebration of Christ's birth, we also are preparing for a special celebration of our own — the birth of our first child.

Becoming parents is something Joe and I have discussed many times over our nine years of marriage. We'd dream about all the fun things we would do with our children someday, such as taking them on camping trips and making homemade sauce and meatballs every Sunday after Mass, just like Joe's late grandmother did while he was growing up. We kept a close eye on the parenting techniques of family members and friends, filing away our observations for future use. And for the last two years, we've managed to love, nurture, train and keep alive a yellow Labrador retriever named Ben, which we figured was, in a very small way, a good test of our budding parenting skills!

With all of this "practice" under our belts, we began our journey toward parenthood at the beginning of 2004. I became pregnant in early March, and even though my doctor gave me a due date of Nov. 30, the reality that I was going to become a mother didn't truly hit me. It didn't even hit me when we began telling people that I was pregnant, when I had my first ultrasound in June or when Joe and I each felt the baby move for the first time. Nor did it sink in when I opened gifts of adorable outfits and other baby gear that generous family members, friends and coworkers bestowed on me.

The idea of becoming somebody's "Mom" didn't actually hit home until after I had a second ultrasound — this time a three-dimensional one — in late September. I could clearly see my baby's face and distinctly make out his or her features. I can't describe the feeling of joy and wonder at being able to see my unborn child, who looked like a "real" baby rather than the nearly unrecognizable form he or she had been in June. It was the most amazing feeling, finally catching a glimpse of the little one who's been wiggling around and kicking me for months!

As I write this, I'm two weeks from my due date. We've finished our childbirth-preparation classes, the crib is set up and my bag for the hospital is packed. Now, we're just waiting for nature to take its course, and we're both becoming more and more anxious for the big day to arrive.



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Jennifer Ficaglia.

During November, I found my thoughts turning to another couple who must have experienced a lot of anxiety over the birth of their first-born child. This birth may have happened on the other side of the world more than 2,000 years ago, but I'm sure modern parents-to-be — including my husband and me — can draw some correlations between their own experiences and those of Mary and Joseph as they awaited Jesus' birth.

My mind began to whirl with questions about Mary and her unique pregnancy: What did she do to prepare for Jesus' birth? How did she feel about her pregnancy, which was unexpected and probably a bit unnerving, especially since it nearly cost her marriage to Joseph and, on top of it all, was announced to her by an angel of God? Was she worried about being a good mother to the Messiah? Since Mary was favored among women, was she spared such things as morning sickness, swollen feet and labor pain? Did she despair over the fact that she had to travel to Bethlehem by donkey when she was so far along, and then was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stable? Did the fact that she was bearing God's son make her feel all alone in the world, like she was the only one going through such a thing?

I re-read the very familiar passages in Matthew and Luke that pertain to Mary, Joseph and the birth of Jesus. They don't offer a whole lot of detail about Mary's day-to-day experiences of pregnancy, but one thing is abundantly clear — she took the phrase "thy will be done" to heart. Whatever

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God had planned for her; she welcomed it with open arms. Mary's faith-filled attitude toward her pregnancy is an excellent lesson for expectant parents.

I've tried to emulate Mary's attitude during my pregnancy. And believe me, it's hard. Many of my supplications to God have beseeched him for a child who is emotionally, physically and mentally healthy. In the same breath, however, I would also ask for the strength to handle the situation if God has other plans.

We had a small test of faith this summer, when I received a test result indicating that our child could have a spinal-cord defect. After another blood test and a follow-up ultrasound, doctors determined that the initial result was a false positive. But before we received that joyous news, Joe and I wept and lamented and wondered what we had done for God to give us a child who could be wheelchair-bound and

have health problems for his or her entire life.

I wish I had at that very moment remembered Mary's example of faithfulness and her acceptance of anything God had planned for her. After feeling sorry for myself for a bit, I came back around to Mary's way of thinking. With that change in perspective came a sense of peace at the knowledge that everything happens according to God's plan. And the certainty that — with God's help — Joe and I could handle anything that life threw our way.

I reacted to my unexpected news in a very human and imperfect way. Mary, on the other hand, embraced the unexpected news that she would become the mother of God with a simple, all-consuming faith that never wavered, even during extraordinarily difficult times. Mary's faithfulness and willingness to accept God's plan is a model for all expectant parents. As a matter of fact, it should be a model for everyone.

Ficaglia is the Courier's assistant editor.

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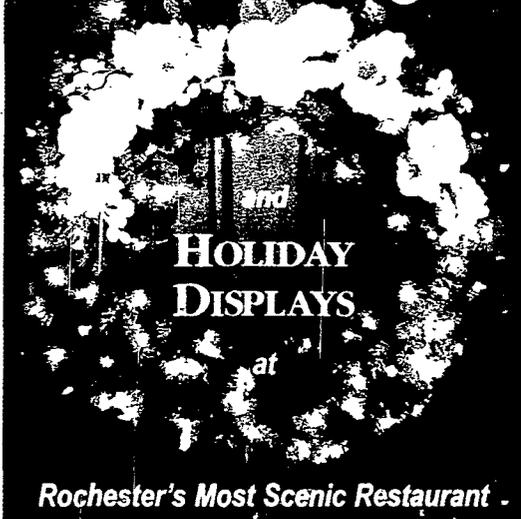
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