

## The Altar for God's Offering - Giving a Child To a Childless Family

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*Editor's note: This article is being printed about two families. Although many of you may know one or both of the couples, we all felt that the beauty of the interaction between these two families and the value of this blessed gift from God through these couples is purest without names. In addition, it is important for the child's future that he be able to make his identity with his family.*

Like a tree he'll stand  
With his head held high,  
And his feet planted firm  
On the ground.

These words are from a song in an old Rodgers and Hammerstein musical [Carousel]. They are the words of a father describing his son-to-be. They came to me one day when I was asking God what a man is and what a woman is. I felt them deeply and could see that a man is a mighty entity in his own right, firmly planted, straight, strong, grasping heaven and earth and uniting them.

"And what is a woman" I begged of God. Then I saw a river flowing and knew that woman is the instrument of the flow as well as the flow itself. She is that from which new life springs eternally, on and on and on, generation after generation, age after age; she is the transmitter of culture and heart as well as of life itself. In prayer, I wept.

Several years earlier, specialists had told me that I would probably not have children due to a chromosomal deformity. Year after year I wept over this thought. How could I ever fulfill the purpose of my being? A medium once told me I would have children. And once, when Father was boasting of the attributes of ginseng, he twinkled his eyes at me, saying that it could cause barren women to have children. But in my longing I was afraid to believe. I felt angry at my physical sisters who could have children but weren't choosing to; I ached whenever I saw parents mistreating their children. Why could they have children while I couldn't?

Soon after my husband and I started our married life together, a spiritual daughter told me of a world-renowned fertility specialist in Brooklyn. When I went to him, he confirmed what I had heard before and advised me to look into adoption. I begged him to at least try something. Unbelieving, he began a series of hormone shots. At the same time I went to an elder Korean member who administered ginseng directly into my ovaries through acupuncture. The doctor was shocked when I suddenly responded to the hormones, and, as it turned out, became pregnant with twins!

Several years later I joined a special sewing project under Mrs. Woo. Her husband was working with Il Hwa, so we always had an ample supply of ginseng. Imagine my surprise -- and that of the specialist -- when I returned to him four months later for more shots and found that I was already four months pregnant! As Sarah declared, "God has given me cause to laugh; all those who hear of it will laugh with me." And even amidst all the trials that children can bring, our laughter and gratitude to God grow as our relationships with our maturing children unfold.

However, along with this unexpected joy, I could not easily forget the despair that had filled my heart during those long years of "barrenness." The one comfort I had during those years was a rumor that a few

couples in Korea had offered their children to childless couples. And after God gave us our own children, I increasingly felt Him asking this of us.

One day in the World Mission Center lunch line, a good friend of ours admired our third child for the first time. My husband jokingly said, "You can have the next one." Laughingly, she responded, "I would be very much honored."

This was the first time that I had heard my husband mention such an idea. I had already told another sister that I was thinking of giving our next child to this very couple. Actually, when this idea first hit me, I had tried to sidestep it by speaking with this friend's spiritual daughter (who already had a son and daughter) about the possibility of giving a baby to her spiritual mother. And she did in fact offer. The idea caught her spiritual mother by surprise. Her immediate response was that she wouldn't want this sister to go through an additional caesarean birth (as she would have to) on her account.

When this sister told me the response, I knew that it was God gently chastising me for trying to "dump" his call to us. But I still hadn't mentioned any of this to my husband and so was surprised by his quip in the lunch line. As I heard our friend's "words of acceptance" unbeknownst to her, I stood outside of time and space for a moment.

Shortly thereafter I discussed the whole idea with my husband. It was as if he had already decided upon it. That probably was the case, in fact. It began to become much more real to me to have it out in the open, though, and sometimes I cried in sorrow of "losing" a child not yet even conceived.

My husband and I had just gone through a lovely birthing experience with our third child. There is nothing quite so special as giving birth to a child God has entrusted into one's hands. One poignant memory I have came the night after birth. I was the only one in my room nursing my baby. The nurse had brought her in at 2 a.m., drawing the curtain around us and turning on the nightlight. The baby was lying asleep on my chest when a doctor came into the ward, quietly calling the name of his patient, trying to figure out which bed she might be in. His businesslike steps came over to my area.

He drew the curtain aside to glance in. His face lit up and filled with wonder. "Oh," he exclaimed, "how beautiful!" And without his realizing it, I think, he moved in closer and just stared. Suddenly he came to with an embarrassed jolt and rather stiffly withdrew. However, I had been feeling the wonder of the moment as well, and assume that it was the presence of rejoicing ancestors.

Many small moments like this made the thought of giving a baby away heavy, but it was now inevitable. We had made our decision and, regardless of my feelings or any circumstances that came up, we were on a track with a sealed destination.... Even these feelings of sadness began to comfort me with the thought that I had had these experiences and memories and could now make it possible for God to give such experiences to another couple who otherwise would never know such wonders.

"It's one thing to admire a friend's child," our friends much later told me. "But there is : : absolutely nothing that can give one the understanding that comes with having one's own. And to think that we came so close to missing it forever!" Friends who were so moved and encouraging when we shared the idea with them also comforted me.

When my husband officially presented the idea to our friends they were once again caught by surprise. He later reported that he wished that I had seen their faces when he asked them; they were so shocked and taken aback. They said that they would think about it for a while. When the "a while" began to go on, my husband assured them that we were going to give our next baby to a childless couple, either them or another. They accepted very soon after, and their central figure presented the offering to Father. A short time after, the mother-to-be excitedly called to say that Father had approved.

From that time this couple entered our family spirit. I often felt, their presence and sometimes dreamed about them or even saw them in visions. My husband and I joked that we no longer had a private life as a couple.

After almost a year of trying to conceive, we finally gave up and went to the doctor for hormones... I also secretly took ginseng, and conceived after two months. The doctor was so amazed, saying that normally these hormones work only after six to twelve months, or even two years. But then how much more shocked she was when I told her the destiny of this baby! I told her because, if at all possible, I wanted the other couple to be present at the birth. I assured her that if she would rather not handle such a case I could locate another doctor. She was visibly shaken, but exclaimed that if we were willing to give our baby away, she could deliver it! As for the details, she would discuss them later.

Driving home, I began to digest the fact that I was pregnant. Again I felt sad and thought, "Seven months from now, August, my daughter will be two... "such a perfect time to have another child." Immediately I heard a lovely, slightly chiding voice: "Now don't forget, this is their baby; afterwards, we'll think about

your family." Although that wasn't really the end of a troubled heart, it certainly jolted me onto the right road.

It was exciting to congratulate our friends and watch them go through all the things one does go through with one's first pregnancy. It was their excitement and growing anticipation that helped me most through the coming months. If I ever began to feel blue, there would be a letter or phone call with a new parent-to-be tale, and I was always lifted. Sometimes the other couple experienced the presence of excited ancestors preparing for the event.

I was glad to hear that. I sometimes wondered how the wife's ancestors related to this blood coming into their staunch Catholic line. My lineage was Protestant, with two families escaping religious persecution on the Mayflower. During the pregnancy, however, I learned of a French Huguenot line I had previously been unaware of. It turned out that the father-to-be has the same roots. Maybe we are even related somewhere along the line.

Probably the hardest moment came when I had an amniocentesis and was told the baby was a boy. Although several people, including the mother-to-be, had dreamed it would be a boy, I had it in my mind that it would be a girl. Things were somehow easier for me to adjust to with that thought, even though my husband (and intellectually me, too) was praying for a boy. When we heard the news, I was so happy to tell our friends... intellectually. It was a confusing time of hard prayer and strange dreams. In my heart, I had to get ahold of myself all over again, but again, the other couple's response got me beyond this.

When I was pregnant with my other children I had prayed for them and made conditions. I found it difficult to do this now out of fear of creating an attachment that would be so hard to break, especially at the time when we would be celebrating another couple's joy. So I asked them to do this (although no asking was needed) and I always felt the baby was embraced even though I couldn't really participate in the embracing. I felt that God was a bit disappointed in this, but it was the best I could do and He only gently pushed the issue.

My doctor didn't mention the situation again for several visits. Then she asked me if we were still planning to "go through with it." I told her that if we retracted now there would be a "death in the family" for our friends and from then she wholeheartedly united with the idea. The hospital had trouble with our desire to have the adopting couple in for the delivery. But the doctor by this time was caught up in the spirit of things and told me that she would do all she could to make it a good experience for the new parents.

My husband's folks were ready to disown us for this unthinkable undertaking and no explanation could change their reaction. My folks were very surprised, actually blown-over, but supportive and encouraging. My mother wrote that she was so proud of us and impressed that we would do such a thing. She said that she never could have done it.. or was it just that such a thought had never occurred to her! She offered to come at the time of birth to help with the children, and came immediately for a week to get to know them before the rush.

During the visit she pushed me to "level" with the children. I had been in a quandary about what to tell them because I know that what I said could easily be blurted out to anyone we knew, including our home church contacts. Perhaps too, I was still in a bit of a quandary within myself about it all. I ended up telling them nothing, even as they became aware that I was pregnant. But my mother really pushed the point. So I explained to my children that our friends had no children because they were not able to have a baby, and they were so lonely and sad. So Daddy and I said we would hold their baby in my womb until it was big enough for them to take home. When it was ready to be born our friends would come down to get the baby.

From that time, I could share the excitement of the growing baby with them as one would normally do with one's children. They often talked of "Uncle and Auntie's baby." Something happened in my heart at that time as well, perhaps in the same way that the Divine Principle becomes real when one begins to teach and testify to it. From that day I was no longer troubled. It was like a cloud was lifted from my soul.

When the doctor said "this week" a week or two earlier than expected, my mother jumped on the plane and the parents-to-be jumped into their car. As we were swimming, the day after all had assembled, I went into labor. The father-to-be kept track of the contractions while we made and then ate dinner, and then went to the hospital.

By some miracle, I was the only patient in labor and delivery the entire night, giving the staff freedom to swing with our situation. The nurse assigned to us was deeply moved because she had been seriously considering giving a child to her best friend, who couldn't have any. (The next night she came to my room, and in tears, said how much the experience had meant to her.) The wife stayed with me through the night while our men wandered the halls. The doctor and staff secretly determined to allow the parents-to-be into the delivery, but the end came so quickly that our friends had no time to prepare. Instead, they

stood Just outside the door and When their son was born they got the first glimpse. As the doctor held him up, my immediate thought was, "What a beautiful baby they have!"

My husband and I congratulated, the mother wept, the father admired. Immediately the doctor prevailed upon the hesitant nurses to give their son to them to hold. Soon after, she got a room for them so they could spend some time with him. She came into the recovery room to tell my husband that they were both rocking their son and singing a lullaby midst tears. Later, when the father was telling us of this time, I saw that parenthood was suddenly a reality for him and that he would never be the same again.

When I began to get blue during the hours following the delivery I had only to think of my own children. Each time, I became so overwhelmed with love, gratitude and homesickness that the feeling would slip away.

The new family spent the week here before returning home and we often saw their baby. But he was not our child. My mother commented on how strange it was to see him but feel no attachment, and my husband and I had the same experience. At that time I felt the love and prayers of our friends so very much surrounding and protecting us. Later, when our friends sent pictures of their growing boy, he looked so beautiful, so happy, so well-taken-care-of, that we were further assured and comforted.

After our friends left, I told my home church contacts why I had become pregnant and what we had done. They were amazed; some were moved to tears. One deeply Christian woman's life of faith was dramatically affected by my testimony and another woman took a final step of commitment to Christ (something she had longed to do for the year and a half I had known her).

Whatever our reasons for allowing God to use us in such a way (our gratitude to Him for our own children we thought that we could never have, my sympathy for childless couples, etc.), the idea was not ours but was "laid upon us" fully formed. It was made in heaven with the assistance of ancestors, we feel.

I hope that more couples will be moved in a similar way. But I also feel that no couple should feel guilty if one or both feel that they are not able to go through with such an offering. It's not something you can push. God is so just and heaven so ruled by love that such an offering will come "freely" (with effort) from the hearts of those chosen. If the heart isn't there, I feel sure that heaven would be the last to insist on such a thing.

We continue to thank God that He chose us to be such an instrument of His love, to be the means by which He could bring to another couple and their lineage an object of eternal joy... a third messiah.

As time passes, our friend's son becomes more and more a reality in their lives and in the lives of their friends, and less and less of a reality in ours. Still the gratitude and even awe of being part of such an offering persists. Thank you, Heavenly Father!