



Birth Plans

by Hannah Heath

As America's birth rate wanes, our societal fixation on the gestational trimesters, infant milestones and childhood "firsts" increases exponentially. While pregnant with our first child in 2010, I became acutely aware of the emphasis we as a culture put on the picture-perfect pregnancy, birth and childhood of children who are deemed valuable enough to be kept alive in the womb. Although my husband and I didn't have a witty birth announcement, skipped the gender reveal party and scoffed at the idea of a push present, my efforts to not be influenced by the current "all about me (oh, and baby too)" culture did not prevent some of it from seeping into my mentality.

This became painfully clear when the birth of our first child, proclaimed a "textbook labor" by a pleased doctor at the hospital, did not go as planned. Birth plans—that's another thing right now. You can do aromatherapy, whirlpool baths, homebirths, drug free, all the drugs, some drugs, crawl under a fallen log to get back to your roots or set up a month long spa-resort recovery in a posh medically equipped setting. Birth plans are a big thing.

When I walked into the hospital, I stated I didn't have a birth plan, however, as the hours turned to days, it became clear that in fact I did. My plan seemed to mostly involve saying "no." No, I didn't want Pitocin, an epidural or a caesarian section . . . but all these things ended up happening. Being faced with the weakness of sinful flesh was devastating. God protected both myself and our daughter, but I, in my selfishness, resented the loss of control over the birth our child. It turns out I did want it to be about me and what I could achieve.

This insidious thorn pricked my spirit until the birth of our second child. Together my husband and I prayed fervently that this birth would be different. God answered our prayers. If you looked at the

medical charts, you wouldn't see the difference; physically both births show clearly that I am a fallen human with a fallen body incapable of giving birth. But God worked on my humbled heart to change my repetition of "no" into an echo of Ps. 31:5: "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."

Both my children were born sinful, as we all are, and my birth plans for them failed. But God then provided the perfect birth plan for me, for them and for you: Holy Baptism.

Even while I was broken in spirit and recovering after our first daughter's birth, God acted through our church to ensure our daughter received the most important birth. In the service of Holy Baptism, the pastor tells us, "The Word of God teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent His Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sin of the whole world, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (**LSB 268**).

In the end, it was never about me and what I could achieve for my children on my own, but about what Jesus has already done for us and the promise God has made to all His children who are brought to Him in the waters of Baptism. The baptismal dates of our children are milestones overlooked by our secular culture but precious to us. Those dates are the most important "firsts" of an eternal life. ✠

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