

When Love Was Born

Inspired by the Nativity of Jesus

Maria was fortunate to grow up in a home of believers. Her family faithfully attended the Catholic Church of the Nativity, a beautiful worship space in the heart of the city. They attended Mass every weekend, and at least once during the week. Every Christmas Eve, Maria's parents would bring their six children to kneel quietly before the beautiful life-size creche and adore the precious Christ Child lying there in the Manger. "This birth of this baby changed the World," her Papa would tell the children as they gathered around. "He is Jesus, our Savior. Without Him, we are nothing. He is the One we cling to. He is the One we walk with. He is the One who forgives us and teaches us. He is the reason we have our family. He is the reason we help other families when they have troubles. He is the reason we smile. He exists in everything that is good and true and meaningful — including each of you."

Maria always felt a great desire to pick up the infant Jesus and hold Him. She pretended her baby doll was baby Jesus. Every night she would carefully wrap Him in a soft blanket, sing to Him a sweet lullaby, kiss His soft cheeks, and gently lay Him down to sleep. She felt great love for Jesus. And, that love continued to grow as she grew. Maria came to know Jesus as an adult, as her friend, as her Savior, as the One who forgives her sins, as the One who gave His life for her, as the source of all life and all good. He inspired her to be kind and loving and giving. But, the infant Jesus continued to hold a very special place in Maria's heart. She still longed to cradle Him in her arms.

Eventually, Maria met and married Joey, a kind and gentle Christian man. He was as loving and giving as Maria. They both shared a special fondness for the Christmas Season. The couple celebrated their wedding at the Church of the Nativity, where Maria had received all her Sacraments. One year later, they were expecting their first child. The day of his coming began with a flood of water and exhilaration over what that meant. Joey phoned the doctor to confirm they were in labor and ready to head to the hospital. When they arrived, Maria was already experiencing intense labor pains. The new parents were shocked to learn that the hospital had no available beds. So, they placed the couple in a hallway to await a space for them in Labor and Delivery. The contractions came more quickly and anxieties increased. Maria worried she may have the baby right there in the crowded hallway! She and Joey wanted this experience to be better. They had envisioned their child being born in a quiet space with soft music and dim lighting. Maria had practiced breathing and focusing so that she would have a beautiful experience of childbirth.

This was not it! Joey prayed for his wife and child, but otherwise stood by helplessly. Finally, a bed opened up and they rushed Maria into the delivery suite. A bright light shone

over her, hurting her eyes. Nurses were rushing around the room. She could barely make out the doctor's face under the glaring lights. How could she do this? It was too stressful, too painful. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. This was not what she had imagined or hoped for. "God please help me," she cried. Joey held Maria's hand tightly and wiped her forehead with a cool rag. He wished he could alleviate her worry, fear and stress. Leaning in close, he whispered in Maria's ear, "You can do this honey. You are strong and beautiful, and our child is so blessed that God made you his mother."

Maria looked into Joey's eyes and knew everything would be OK. She whispered a prayer of thanksgiving and protection, then she pushed with all her might as the doctor instructed. Suddenly, she heard her baby's first cry and it sounded like choirs of angels. The nurses wrapped her firstborn son in swaddling clothes and laid him on her chest. She instantly forgot all the pain. It no longer mattered that there wasn't room for them when they had arrived. It no longer mattered that this wasn't the ideal experience that she had imagined. All that mattered was the unfathomable love that washed over her replacing all the negative feelings. Her world was forever changed.

As she held her baby close, she whispered, "Do not be afraid little one. Today the Lord brought you to us. We give glory to God this day for the gift of your life. All is well now. God is with us, and He will be with you throughout your whole life." Maria felt a new connectedness to the Nativity of Jesus. Our Lady gave birth to a fragile, infant son, the Savior of the World, the Word made flesh, God incarnate. The Lord made His dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. What an awesome gift! Maria cradled her fragile, infant son, and Joey held the two of them in his arms. What a beautiful, blessed day!

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