

### **MIDWAY IN LIFE'S JOURNEY: CARING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION**

The cycle of the liturgical year begins as all long journeys begin, with fear, dread and hope in the discoveries to come. It is the third week of Advent, and we are mid-way in our journey toward the joy of the birth of Jesus Christ, the realization that God came to dwell with us and share our lives. This week we reflect on the joyful and perilous journey of parenthood.

As Joan Chittister describes it, joy is “the deep-down awareness of what it means to live well, to live productively, to live righteously.” It comes from self-giving, simplicity and other-centeredness. A major step in the journey toward God is simply getting over ourselves. We have to become less fixated on ourselves in order to find our own true meaning. There are many ways to do this, but there is no better way than to become a parent. It is a time of life that requires courage, strength, knowledge, unselfishness and patience. It is a time to take the words of Isaiah to heart:

*Strengthen the hands that are feeble  
Make firm the knees that are weak,  
Say to those whose hearts are frightened:  
Be strong, fear not!*

In doctors' offices, hospitals and at home, health care providers have the great privilege of witnessing and assisting new parents to take on their new role. Young men learn what it means to be a father; young women get a whole new perspective on motherhood. They speak of sleep-deprivation and tiredness. They may lack confidence or have distorted expectations, yet, with help, they move from doubt and fear to becoming strong protectors of the young lives in their care.

When Joseph and Mary journeyed toward Bethlehem they knew that their lives would never be the same again. Whatever joys they anticipated, whatever the sorrows that were ahead of them, they acted in confidence that God would be their strength and foundation. They accepted the responsibility to love and protect the new child, the promised One, who was, and is, and always will be, the Light of the World.

As Christmas cards arrive in the mailbox, notice in particular how many contain photos of the children who are the light of their parents' lives. From infancy to maturity, every child is a treasure, a gift from God. Each parent's life unfolds, never to be the same again, as each child enters the world. May we do all we can to support them in their journey. May God be with each of us as we welcome the Prince of Peace into our hearts.