

A new perspective this Advent season

April Gutierrez | Dec. 2, 2011

My family had a wonderful but unusual Thanksgiving holiday as we all congregated in Arizona last week to watch my sister, who's in her mid-30s, complete the [Ironman](#) [1] with thousands of other athletes.

As we watched, my mom and I talked about a documentary she had seen on the Ironman, and as we were looking out at the athletes, she exclaimed, "Each one of the athletes has an incredible story that brought them to this day."

We saw a 74-year-old man finish, and a woman who was blind, as well as the proud moment when my sister crossed -- screaming, laughing and crying with excitement as my family heard, "Melissa McKelvey, you are an Ironman!"

These athletes are great teachers on the season of Advent, the season of preparation and waiting for the Lord's coming. Each athlete has a story of devotion, confidence and sacrifice. I know for my sister, more than a year of preparation went into this day, including sacrifices of her and her family, training with five others together regularly, and staying dedicated to the process, the sport and the goal.

Starting my 30s, I am surprised at how much more sure I am of myself -- being stronger and more confident than my 20s.

When I was pregnant with my son, a friend told me to train as if I was getting ready to run a marathon. This advice, coming from a professional West African dancer, was incredibly refreshing, as it was in stark contrast to the many who encouraged my pregnancy as an opportunity to indulge and pamper myself. Now, I have never run more than a 5K, but I understood her explanation of the intense athletic experience I was embarking on with my pregnancy. I practiced yoga until a week prior to giving birth.

Many images for the season of Advent are of babies and nurturing; however, pregnancy is a time of solitude, stretching and distance training. Now that I've given birth, the Advent season has taken on a greater depth of meaning and purpose. My husband went to birthing classes and we had a great doctor; however, only I gave birth. I had to be ready and well-trained. Similarly, the athlete has to spend countless hours with themselves, and to complete the race, you have to be comfortable being alone with God and self.

Pregnancy can be lonely and comes with a great humility that my body is no longer mine. In God asking Mary to carry and raise Jesus, God invites her into co-creating, an accompaniment worth meditating on during this beautiful and complex season.

When I was in my 20s, I tried to focus my Advent on Christ through resisting the consumer culture on Black Friday, buying Fair Trade items or adopting a family, keeping the needs of the world in the manger. I still carry this value, since I love having the opportunity to gift those I love during the season of celebrating the birth of my Savior; however, it has been enriched by the incredible gift of co-creating with God in the most powerful and humbling experience of preparing and delivering through birth.

As I begin this Advent season, I enter with the month of November at my back, culminating many opportunities to savor gratitude and grief. At 31, I am surprised and troubled remembering many friends who have lost parents. I am also surprised at the number of people who graduated from college about 10 years ago and are wondering where all the jobs are that we were promised with our expensive educations.

During this season of preparation, I wonder what the preparation means for a goal never achieved. The unemployed college graduate who was top of his class, the pregnancy lost in the seventh month or the engagement called off, all come during a season of preparation yet lack completion. The loss of the achievement is also a loss of expectation and identity, which can be overwhelming. What does the Advent season become in these moments of our life? Can the season of Advent offer healing?

The season of Advent can become one of resentment, but when we offer this resentment to God, it transforms into one of healing and hope. I am beginning my 30s realizing there are more blessings than I ever could have imagined. The losses and the joys are deeper and more meaningful than my 20s could have expected.

As we embrace the season of Advent, may we engage in active preparation rather than passive appreciation. May we tread gently as we reflect on the various seasons of our own lives, preparation with achievement and without. May our imaginations color and craft our story of Mother Mary -- pregnant, strong and empowering the doubtful.

As we make ready for Christ's birth, may this season be one of blessing -- in the excitement of expectation, as healing for the goal that never came to fruition and of rest for the marathon birth-ers and runners.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/27/2017 - 13:36): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/new-perspective-advent-season>

Links:

[1] <http://ironmanarizona.com/>