

# Remembering our Advent journey 5 years ago: Our first flight with our son

We had just met our son in China a few days before we flew with him for the first time. We had to go from Changsha to Guangzhou to get his U.S. visa so we could travel home.



The trip didn't start well. Our flight was delayed. Everyone was hungry, but especially the children, who ate every snack we had packed before we even boarded the plane.

When we were finally in the air, our little boy started crying.

This was no snuffle or whimper. It was a piercing cry. The kind of cry you imagine can be heard miles and miles away. He shrieked as if in tremendous pain. We didn't know what to do.

We offered him a drink, but he wouldn't take it.

We rocked him and held him and sang to him and pleaded with him.

We changed positions, took turns holding him, and promised him anything in the world if he would just stop crying. Naturally he couldn't understand us. It didn't matter.

He just kept crying. And I am certain everyone on the plane could hear the screams.



Some of the people around us ignored us. Others turned to us and offered advice in English and Chinese. I remember one lady rubbing her ear lobes and saying words I couldn't understand. I just nodded, rubbed Leo's ears, and apologized over and over. I felt like a terrible mother. I was ready to start crying myself. I wished we could disappear.

The flight was probably less than an hour. In my memory, our son screamed for hours and hours—though John thinks it was closer to five minutes. I suspect it was somewhere in between. We laugh about it now, as we laugh about so many family stories. But at the time I

wasn't laughing.

When we finally touched down, Leo stopped crying. He settled back into his friendly, happy self as if nothing had happened.

I was still shaking as we climbed off the plane and boarded a tram. Fantastic. I had never wanted to see the people on that plane again—and I was sure they felt the same way—and here we were sharing intimate quarters.

I stepped on board with Leo and immediately people stood up to give me their seats. I was certain that that would not have happened if we were landing at our home airport.



On the tram a Chinese man in a suit started speaking to us in English. He readily acknowledged how loud Leo had been on the plane, but he was also polite and friendly and kind. He chatted with John about the United States while I sat there holding our son and marveling at how gracious people can be.

I imagine that no one on that plane—except maybe our fellow adoptive parents—recalls that flight. But I can still recall how it felt to be on that plane, unable to quiet our son, and feeling judged by everyone around us.

During this week of Advent we focus on rejoicing. I couldn't feel joy on the airplane that night. But as I think back on that time, I find myself realizing that sometimes in the darkest moments, there is nothing you can do but wait and pray and trust and believe that brighter days are ahead. Through it all, at least I knew the flight would end.

When we finally gathered our luggage, we climbed into a van and drove off to our hotel, the White Swan, the loveliest hotel we have ever stayed in, and on Shamian Island, one of the most charming places we have ever visited.



And, the next morning, we woke up to see our child sleeping peacefully on our hotel bed.



There was a waterfall in the hotel lobby. Christmas trees were everywhere. And we didn't have another flight to worry about for a few days. We could just enjoy our time together as a family in this beautiful city.

Joy.



*How are you finding joy this Advent season?*

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