

Transformed by God's greatest gifts

John 3:16. We see it on T-shirts, bumper stickers, rubber band bracelets, and even across Tim Tebow's eyeblick. I always knew it's meaning, "For God so loved the world, he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life," on a literal level, but it wasn't until I became a parent, myself, that I became spiritually transformed by these words.

Though it had dimmed with the cynicism that tends to surface in adolescence and young adulthood, my faith returned in a full blaze on July 21, 2009 when I held my newborn son for the first time. At that moment, my spirit grew. In awe of his physical perfection, and immediately bound by his very presence before me, I thought of how Mary must have felt when she first held Jesus, who was not merely hers, but God's only son. My child brought with him original sin and would be flawed in his words and his deeds. He would be forgiven for those sins. Mary's child was born free of sin and would remain pure all the days of his life. He would give up his life so that sins may be forgiven.

As a new mother, I was captivated by Mary's strength. It's no wonder artists from every era, all over the world celebrate the Madonna and Child. This beautiful image of love in its most basic, most unconditional form is worthy of duplication, though no sculpture or painting could ever capture its every nuance. When we see Mary holding the baby Jesus, it's a joyful moment at first, until we recall the Christ child's inevitable fate. In honor of Mary's handing over of Jesus' life, I joined the Confraternity and began praying the rosary every day as I fed my son. I had no idea how to repay her for giving us eternal life through her son, until I realized it wasn't just Mary's loss.

The bonds fathers have with their children are seldom discussed to the same extent as motherly love. Perhaps it's because fathers do not carry or bear their children as mothers do. And yet, one of the most famous verses of the Bible, John 3:16, reveals the intense love that God the Father has for Jesus and for us. Because of God, Jesus, Joseph and Mary's sacrifice, families who must separate on earth, even my own, can be reunited in heaven. It was God's realization that he needed to send a messenger - himself in human form - that prompted Jim to have Mary bear and raise his son on

earth. Mary's answer – yes – is what all of us should respond to anything God should ask of us. And in return, we receive eternal life. Mary fulfilled God's most sacred request, one bountiful with spiritual rewards, yet fraught with earthly strife. God continues to call on us, just as he did Mary. Ask yourself what God wants from you and see that it is done so that you may reap the rewards he offers you at a great cost: the life of His only Son.

As for me, I feel God has given me this opportunity to write about parenthood so that I can become a better mother and teacher and so that I can learn from others. I am not perfect, I do not feign to know everything about being a good Catholic parent, but I can promise you the truth through my eyes and the eyes of others. God has blessed my husband and I with a far-from-terrible 2-year-old and by his grace, a new baby in May. Knowing firsthand what he sacrificed for us, it makes perfect sense that we are awed by John 3:16.